

# EUREKA STREET

Vol. 3 No. 6 August 1993

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**Making myths about women priests**

Pamela Foulkes

**Making Mabo work**

Frank Brennan and Jack Waterford



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same bat basilica.  
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# 3-D visions

**A**T A RECENT UNIVERSITY MEETING, one member was carrying on about being at the cutting edge of something or other. A wicked friend leaned over to me and said, 'Do you know the expression, "At the cutting edge of the status quo"?' Talk about spirituality can be like that. It can suggest exercises in self-absorption, as in Linda Ronstadt's song about 'poor poor pitiful me', or a world-weariness that bows out into another world, as if, because all flesh is grass, all bets are off.

But even if a good deal of spirituality-talk mumbles and maunders around that same old cutting edge, as many poems are squeaky complaints and many paintings daubs, the real thing does come along. Sometimes it comes, with a leonine authority, out of the past. We read its words and recognise that both the human and the divine are being endorsed. At such times the arches of the years colonnade into the future. And sometimes it comes with vivacity, so that we sense that speech about a new creation is not after all self-indulgence. Either way, a worthwhile spirituality will have to address three sorts of things: desires, disciplines, and deeds.

We are all animated by desires. Some think us utterly coerced by them, though their saying so is unpersuasive because, by supposition, done under compulsion. But we are great wanters, even if, as Eliot implied in *The Waste Land*, sometimes we want to die. Spiritualities may capitalise on desire. The ethos of Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* is one in which the provoked heart is the key player, it being supposed that God is the one who both provokes yearnings and, in the right circumstances, sates them. Augustine, no friend to vices, said that to be unmoved was 'worse than any vice'. Such people are spiritual provocateurs. The other road is the way of tranquillity, where the accent is on the endorsement of all that deserves it, on the pursuit of that fugitive, peace, and on surrender to a pervasive good against which, unreasonably, we so often rebel. Whichever of these ways is given priority—the prophetic or the mystical—we are simply living in a daze if we ignore our desires.

And then there are disciplines. Desires, 'holy' or otherwise, are all very well, but unless they can entertain some styling, tempering, and orienting, they tend to become just a mode of narcissism, of psychic swagger. Tom Lehrer wrote, sardonically, of rocketry, 'I just send them up, /But where they come down/ "That's not my department"/ Said Werner Von Braun', and so it can go with desires. The fiercer forms of spirituality seem to work on the assumption that the body, or the entire person, is always on the verge of running berserk or amok. Only those crassly ignorant of history will feel no suasive force in such a view, but it is nothing like the whole story. Passionate humanity is also passionate for finesse—for the arts, for civilisation's countless deployments of energy, for the mesh of minds as certainly as of bodies. A spirituality which ignored disciplines would be like an anatomising which ignored the skeleton—evocative perhaps, but as implausible as it was

inconsequential. The alternative is likely to be both pragmatic and demanding. Francis de Sales is a good model: 'Half an hour's listening is essential except when you are very busy. Then a full hour is needed.'

After which, the deeds. 'Don't just do something, stand there' is good advice for many of us much of the time; when the Superior General of the Jesuits said that the hardest thing for them to do was nothing, he might have spoken of a wider constituency. But it is not just some pathology of 'westerners', or some quirk of one variety of Christianity, or the dysfunction of one gender, which makes us both hunger for action and discipline our ways of engaging in it. Deed and counter-deed, revolution and reaction, formation and transformation—all this is our metier, down to the food we eat, the clothes we wear, and the thoughts we think.

Any spirituality of much promise has to take account of all this. Jeremy Taylor wrote, 'Solitude is a good school, but the world is the best theatre': deeds are the flow-through of desires, to which they may never be adequate, but of which they are the imperative expression. Rousseau, at the beginning of his *Confessions*, boasts that, 'let the last trump sound when it may,' he will come forward and challenge others to a contest in sincerity. But the evidence of the gospels is that God will ask him, not about the high frankness of his self-display, but about what he ever did for anybody else.

Religious Rousseauism is likely to get the same brisk handling.

**T**HERE IS THIS MUCH TO BE SAID for Rousseau's vaunt, though: it alerts us to a prizing of authenticity. A spirituality can—should—be a form of access to the genuine. Sometimes this will involve pollarding. Christianity has always said that the way of the Lord was a way of the cross, and that to attempt other routes is not to improve on the master but to be at best his ape. The too-little-known, remarkable American poet Ben Belitt, writes in *The Orange Tree*, '... to diminish excess; to pare it/ as a child pares an orange, moving the knife through the peel/ in a spiral's unbroken descent, till only the orange's sweat,/ a head of acidulous essence, divides the rind from the steel:/ perhaps that is to live in the spirit.' Perhaps it is, though only if it is the flesh of the orange rather than the wield of the knife that is prized. There would not be much adult plausibility in a spirituality which did not ask us to let go of the superficial and the obsolescent. When Chesterton spoke of 'a strong desire to live taking the form of a readiness to die', he was not mystery-mongering: he was talking about that dynamic with which every ex-child, ex-adolescent, and ex-50-year-old is at least partially familiar.

An 18th-century aphorist wrote, 'There are some solitary wretches who have gone aside from mankind, as Eve left Adam, to meet the devil in private.' To our cost, we know that the gambit of retirement into solitude can have monstrous consequences, whether in private or in the public arena. What comes out of the desert may be a very questionable prophet indeed. By the same

token, all spiritualities have their distinctive inadequacies. Charismatic in their origins, partly bureaucratized in their histories, always liable to inflation at the hands of their enthusiasts, they are like all human things partly comical. The Zen Buddhist or the Hindu or the Catholic who cannot see the funny side of the enterprise had better not have many disciples. Idols are unhealthy things, first for their worshippers and then for their missionaries. A Christian, at least, commending any special spiritual path, should remember from time to time that the route ends not in closure but at the gaping doorway of the emptied tomb. ■

**Peter Steele SJ** is reader in English at the University of Melbourne.

## Getting it together

**I**N MELBOURNE WINTER Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop died, leaving behind him a story that mixes heroic achievement with day-by-day hard work. He also reminded Australia of the strength of its companionable vernacular: the name 'Weary' is in itself enough to lift your spirits.

About the same time, Princeton mathematician Andrew Wiles presented to an audience at the Isaac Newton Institute in Cambridge a proof of the 'last theorem' of Pierre de Fermat. Mathematicians claim that the proof may be as important as the discovery of the structure of DNA. The project has demanded years of Wiles' life, but when interviewed he was able to convey a fresh sense of the excitement and beauty of abstract research. What Wiles has in common with the Australian war hero is doggedness, a communicable spirit, and capacity to make observers wonder, and then turn to their own way of emulation.

People often ask what *Eureka Street* is 'about'. 'What line do you push?' There is no answer to such questions but the following might serve as a response. One of *Eureka Street's* writers, Margaret Simons, has made her reputation as an investigative journalist. Money trails and corruption enquiries have been her bread and butter, easy enough to define her 'market'. But is it really? Last month Margaret Simons was short-listed for the Angus and Robertson Book Award. Her novel was written while she was living in a South Australian river town, but it is no rural idyll. Simons is able to marry a journalist's yen for fact with a spiritual search. Born in England, she is locked into the task of understanding the Australian land. That is the kind of integration *Eureka Street* is after.

As we go to press, news comes of the death of Melbourne academic, writer and SBS television *Book Program* pioneer, Dinny O'Hearn. Dinny understood complex agendas. We are poorer for his loss but enriched by his gifts. ■

—Morag Fraser



## State of the republic: 1

From Chris Wallace-Crabbe

Both Susan Ryan and Julian Disney discuss issues bearing on the republic, which is going to come our way before 2001 (*Eureka Street*, June-July 1993). Few people I know doubt that this will occur. But what gives me pause is the prospect of nothing more than a placebo republic, a feel-good operator that generates nothing.

The point is taken that what Disney calls 'a short, sweet and simple referendum' is the easy way out. But was it for an easy way out that the federal government appointed a high-powered committee, and that acres of newsprint are being darkened with republic-talk?

As we approach the centenary of Federation, what is important is to look hard at how Australia was then constructed out of six free-standing colonies and at what relevance that structure still has for the complex nation we now live in.

Alan Davies once observed that Australians have a genius for bureaucracy. Some right-wing thinkers may associate our bureaucracy with centralism, but its real *fons et origo* lies in the monstrous proliferation of paper entailed by our triple-tiered maze of government. The ridiculous, archaic doctrine of "states' rights" needs to be swept away. The states may be useful for Sheffield Shield cricket, but they impose an intolerable burden of expense, waste and bumf upon a nation which is struggling to be efficient.

We can readily see why, as Ryan says, the Prime Minister would have told his committee to go for the simple solution, the quick fix. But now is the time when hard questions should be asked, and fought through to a conclusion. If the states are, in the process, obliged to give up many of their 'rights', no doubt their pride can be salvaged by that which normally heals wounded pride: financial compensation.

Let us see what states, or regions, actually mean and practically need in a more confident, efficient Australia,

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and try to reconstruct them accordingly.

Again, if we are a confident people, let us not use the politically soiled term, president, for the figure who is to replace the Governor-General. We certainly do not want a structure resembling that of the United States or France, to cite only the two best-known uses of the term. It would be nice if there were a dinkum Australian term for our national leader, but we can hardly say Head Narangy, or Chief Cook and Bottle-Washer. Might I suggest that we use either the simple noun, Regent, or the descriptive phrase, Head-of-State?

These, and many entailed issues, should be passing through our minds at present. Whatever happens, let us not settle weakly for the placebo republic. We are no longer the Little Boy from Manly, thumbing our collective nose at the pomp and ermine of the British monarch.

Chris Wallace-Crabbe  
North Carlton, VIC

## State of the republic: 2

From Fr David Cappo, national director, Australian Catholic Social Welfare Commission.

The republican debate has provided a

legitimate public forum for many ideas about our society to be discussed. As Susan Ryan has said (June-July 1993), the debate provides us with an opportunity to 'talk about who we are and what we like about ourselves and what we want to like about ourselves ...'

These ideas can be powerful influences on Australia's future only if the debate is allowed to go beyond a minimalist level. There are simply too many important issues confronting us as Australians to allow this 'window of opportunity' to pass by without deepening the republican debate to include issues that go to the core of our social identity.

A major issue crying out for a platform is that of the social rights of Australian citizens. Social rights, such as rights to a minimum income, health care, education, participation in society and social welfare, are particularly pertinent because we are failing to help and support nearly a half a million long-term unemployed Australians. Two questions that need to be asked are: Have we as Australians got any social rights? And are we truly an egalitarian society that upholds the principle of a fair go for every Australian?

In January the Australian Catholic Social Welfare Commission published *Advance Australia Welfare*, a document that argued for a major shift in attitudes to welfare policy. Such policies come from a contemporary model of charity that gives to the deserving only from the excess wealth of the country. Australia needs a constitution and a social policy based on social rights—the commission suggested that a bill of rights be discussed, or a change in the constitution to formally establish such social rights. And this was before the republican debate emerged!

In April the commission released a broad discussion paper that built on this argument, *Citizenship, Rights and Privileges—A Shift in Welfare Policy*. This document argued the importance of the concept of citizenship in the development of new welfare policies. It was suggested that we need to ask ourselves just what it means to be an Australian citizen, particularly since at present we do not formally possess any social rights. The document sug-

gested that social rights linked to citizenship could be the new language for social debate. Citizenship could then be an acceptable secular 'umbrella', incorporating in it the concepts of human dignity and social solidarity.

If we are to be people of love and justice who uphold the human dignity of every person, then change must occur. This is particularly relevant in the 1990s, with the dramatic increase in unemployment. The stark injustice caused by our social systems must be addressed, so that all Australians must have not only political and civil rights but also social rights—rights that are based in human dignity and reflected formally in their citizenship.

After delivering speeches on this matter, I am sometimes confronted by the comment that we have heard it before, and that it sounds so idealistic. I am told that no one would disagree with the need to address human dignity issues and human-solidarity positions for the common good but that the problem lies in the implementation of these ideals and principles.

My reply is that I do not hear much at all about human dignity principles in the corridors of political, economic and social power, where decisions that affect the lives of Australians are made. Unless our voice is loud, focused and carries conviction, silence and neglect on these very human issues will abound. People who care about these things can be very focused at making speeches, producing statements and documents and having discussions in safe and approving church circles. But more often than not we seem to be satisfied with leaving our responsibilities there, when in fact we should be engaging our political decision makers in the social debate.

The Christian churches have an opportunity to make an unprecedented impact on the social debate, through calling Australians into solidarity with one another and by urging them to respect, in many practical ways, the human dignity of every person. As with the notion of social rights, many more ways could be found to change and adapt a fundamental social structure, our constitution, so that it may more directly serve the good of the people of Australia.

**David Cappo**  
Curtin, ACT

## Orthodoxy in question

*From Ephraem Chifley OP*

Andrew Hamilton's comment on the 'Weakland Affair' gave me great hope by reason of its gentle and understated style of theological discourse, virtues typically lacking on both sides of this discussion.

It was especially inspiring of optimism to read his reflections on the alienation and perceived exile of those on the conservative wing of the church. Such sentiments are all too rare.

In common with many of those who would identify themselves as progressive, however, his assumptions about the characteristics of the 'they' who opposed Archbishop Weakland's visit are perhaps a trifle simplistic. There is no single institutional repository of political history of conservative Catholicism and certainly no single, or even typical, 'psychology of the right'. There is a whole constellation of conservative people and groups whose concerns and styles of discourse are quite disparate and driven by very different motivations.

To tar everyone who might disagree with Archbishop Weakland's visit with the same brush is to obscure the fact that there are many unresolved conflicts in the church whose theological roots need to be uncovered and untangled.

Orthodoxy is a noble word and a worthy, indeed essential, aspiration. If there are concerns that the Australian church is departing from the discipline of Gospel teaching, then we must address ourselves to such concerns if our community is to preserve its integrity and authenticity.

While ever the legitimate concerns of conservative Catholics about orthodoxy are brushed aside by appeals, ironically enough, to Episcopal authority or by mean-minded attempts to demonise the right, the hard-won theological developments of the Second Vatican Council will remain lofty sentiments espoused more and more by people who seem to believe them less and less.

The unhappy experience of liberal Protestantism under Nazism should

alert us to the fact that when we abandon as irrelevant the transcendental values of Christian orthodoxy we do not always correctly discern the true nature of what is most socially relevant. Such is the paradox of the cross.

**Ephraem Chifley OP**  
Armidale, NSW

*Andrew Hamilton replies:*

Ephraem Chifley's courteous and thoughtful letter offers the opportunity to reflect further on the gender issues raised by the Weakland visit.

Perhaps I should begin by gently disowning his characterisation of me as a progressive. I see myself as conservative, wanting to conserve and to draw upon the full riches of the Catholic tradition, against any partial rendering of it, whether liberal or sectarian. That concern for catholicity underlines these reflections.

The issue with which I was concerned in May was whether it is proper to have banned from your diocese bishops you don't approve of. I argued that if they are in communion with the bishop of Rome, it is not proper to ban them, whether they be a Weakland or an O'Connor. The reason is that the catholicity of the church is built on the mutual hospitality of bishops.

The second issue which I raised is whether it is proper to focus an attack on positions you disagree with by attacking personally those you associate with them. I argued that it is proper only if the identification is solidly made. Otherwise it is the equivalent of dropping the full-forward behind play. And I argued that Weakland does not espouse the issues which he is taken to represent, but is only a symbol of them.

That has made the public attacks on him counterproductive. His opponents' dossier on him, described by one wit as declaring that he doth celebrate for gays, doth listen to feminists, doth answer back the high priest, and hath shown inappropriate compassion to pederasts, sounds embarrassingly like the Pharisees' dossier on Jesus, so that they seem to commend the Pharisees' way rather than his.

The risk is that a proper sympathy for a man so abused will hinder reflec-

tion on the issues that he has come to symbolise. These positions themselves form the third issue which bears reflection. While Ephraem does not name them, his reference to the discipline of Gospel teaching and orthodoxy, and his reference to German Protestantism, suggest that they all have to do with the challenge to live faith in its integrity while living within one's culture.

His appeal to the experience of the churches under Hitler shows how complex this question is. For Hitler was welcomed by many Catholics, including bishops and theologians, as well as by Protestants, and indeed was initially opposed only by few church

leaders. The failure of the liberal Protestant church was due as much to its lack of catholicity—its identification with German culture—as to its liberalism. On the other hand, the most significant recent influence on German Catholic theology had been the reaction against modernity following the condemnation of modernism. Did this detachment from critical engagement with German culture, in itself expressing a failure in catholicity, not contribute to the weakness of the Catholic response to Hitler?

Be that as it may, these issues are important, and certainly not to be set aside solely by appeal to authority, episcopal or otherwise.

The final issue is how we address these concerns about orthodoxy and

church order. It is by no means clear that they should always be made the major priority. We have all had experience of institutions, secular and religious, where all concerns have been addressed meticulously, with the result that the members become more anxious, intolerant of divergence, prune-faced and introspective, identifying the cross or solidarity with the struggle with their own dyspepsia, so that those who do not feel a malaise coming on feel out of it. It is then proper to act on the basis that we are all responsible ultimately for dealing with our own concerns, and that trust and confidence are high virtues.

In any case I would argue that it is generally better to address concerns by commending the full catholic Gospel. And to do it in terms that would lead our fellow Australians to see it (not merely hear it described) as good news, for which they would be prepared to bear the cross for the joy of the discovery.

I have been privileged to find the Gospel welcomed in these terms by refugee communities, who have found God as a Father who has prepared a home for exiles through Jesus Christ, who died to gather exiles and lives in the church where these exiles have themselves found a welcome.

How, I wonder, would Ephraem preach the Gospel in such a way that ordinary Australians will see it as such great good news?

**Andrew Hamilton**  
Parkville, VIC

## Duelling canons

*From McKenzie Wark*

The following paragraph from Andrew Riemer's 'Canonically Speaking' (*Eureka Street* June 1993) made me laugh out loud:

'There is little need to rehearse the propositions that are, by now, familiar to anyone interested in the current state of literary theory. They reflect the profound scepticism, indeed near-nihilism, of contemporary orthodoxies derived, albeit often remotely, from French literary aesthetics of the '60s

and '70s. They insist that any notion of literary value is spurious, that all texts possess equal validity, that nothing is central, and therefore nothing is peripheral. Any notion of literary value, of traditions, of indispensable writers and texts is nothing but the imposition of the values of a particular class, group or cabal.'

There is obviously a great need to rehearse 'the current state of literary theory' for Andrew Riemer, who deigns to display no knowledge of it other than a few fourth-hand rumours picked up from the newspapers or around the staffroom coffee urn. I challenge him to actually name anybody in his own department or any other in the land who holds such fantastically silly beliefs.

It is a coy ploy to attack only dumb versions of a body of ideas. If it does not bespeak an ignorance of those ideas, as I claim, then it indicates something even more odious—a wilful distortion on Riemer's part of what 'French literary aesthetics' actually says. Hence I more charitably claim that Riemer is culpable only of speaking in ignorance. Or perhaps it is simply a particularly weak rhetorical gimmick aimed at hoodwinking the reader. To the extent that it may indeed be nothing more than a gimmick, all one can say is that it would have been more consistent and more fun for Riemer to balance his attack on cartoon poststructuralism by defending the canon by reference only to the *Reader's Digest* abridged editions.

As to why Riemer would let a piece of prose out into the public domain that does not live up all that talk about 'quality' and 'standards' is a mystery. As to why *Eureka Street* would want to put Riemer's received ideas into print without questioning this kind of smug self delusion or cartoon caricature is an even greater mystery. If we are to have poststructuralist theory attacked by someone who displays no evidence of ever having read it, then I look forward to *Eureka Street* righting the balance by publishing an attack on the canon by someone who hasn't read any literature.

Riemer seems so unquestionably certain in his non-knowledge of the alternatives and of the superiority of what he knows and knows well that





ignorance, real or pretended, does not hold him back from expressing an authoritative (not to say authoritarian) opinion. This is precisely the kind of self-satisfied, self-centred cultural arrogance that some new developments in literary teaching caution against. Perhaps Riemer might learn a thing or two from the new undergraduate program at the Sydney University English department after all. He might either learn some literary theory or a more convincing rhetoric. With a bit of rehearsal Riemer might manage a stand-up performance of some, dare I say, quality.

**McKenzie Wark**  
Broadway, NSW

*Andrew Riemer replies:*

Had McKenzie Wark's letter contained an argument—rather than abuse—I should have been happy to respond. In the circumstances, the only comment I am able to make is the familiar one: *Wovon man nicht reden kann, darüber muss man schweigen.*

*From the editor:*

It is not, as McKenzie Wark suggests, *Eureka Street's* policy to publish 'received ideas' or 'smug self-delusion'. Nor, in this instance, was it our practice. Andrew Riemer is demonstrably well versed in both literary theory and the languages in which it is written.

## The Christian Brothers' story

*From Br Barry Coldrey CFC*

In May this year two TV current affairs programs, *60 Minutes* and *Inside Edition*, carried reports on the alleged abuse of orphan boys in institutions conducted by the Christian Brothers in Western Australia. The reports featured interviews with six past students of the residential institutions, men in their 50s, who spoke of horrific sexual and physical abuse that had been inflicted on them by individual brothers. The alleged abuse happened about 40 years ago, though this was not stressed in the reports. Casual viewers may well have gained the impression that the events concerned were recent and easy to check.

There is a need to record some facts about the history of these controversial institutions, all of which have long been closed as residences. In 1897 the Christian Brothers took over responsibility for conducting a Catholic orphanage for boys in Perth, which they developed at Clontarf, a riverside site six kilometres from the city.

Between 1928 and 1936 three more homes were opened and the four orphanages, collectively known as 'the scheme', formed an integrated range of services for boys of different ages and aptitudes. Castledare orphanage, three kilometres further up the Canning River from Clontarf, was an institution for boys under the age of 10. And at Tardun, 500 kilometres north of Perth, a farm school was developed to cater for selected older boys from Clontarf who had, in the language of the times, 'good physique, at least average mental ability and impeccable character'.

The fourth institution was at Bindoon, 100 kilometres north of Perth, on a 17,000 acre property donated in 1936 by a wealthy Catholic widow, Mrs Catherine Musk. At first it was used to place boys from Clontarf who did not have the qualifications for admission to Tardun. Later, from 1941 to 1947, 'Bindoon Boys Town' was gazetted as a reformatory for teenagers, and after 1947 it was made available to child migrants.

In 1983, after almost 100 years of service to 4000 disadvantaged youth, Clontarf and Castledare boys' homes were closed. The farm schools at Bindoon and Tardun had been transformed during the 1960s into agricultural colleges for fee-paying students. They still operate in this role, but their child welfare function has ceased.

The term 'child migrant' should be explained. Britain was the only imperial power to send many of its abandoned and illegitimate children to its colonies and former colonies. This was child migration; it was felt that such children had no future in Britain, since illegitimacy was a slur on both mother and child, but might well carve out new lives for themselves elsewhere in the empire. After Canada closed its door to unaccompanied British children in the 1930s, some were sent to Australia. To church organisations such as the Salvation Army or Catholic religious orders, it appeared to be a work of great charity to take these unwanted British children and give them new lives in Australia.

Before World War II the Christian Brothers brought 114 boys to WA to be trained for life within one or other of the orphanages within the scheme. After the war ended British orphanages were overflowing, and it seemed a great idea to send children to Australia. In fact, not many came. The Ministry of Pensions forbade 'respectable war orphans' to leave the country, and only the children who seemed most abandoned were sent. About 3000 children came during the 20 years after 1947, and media reports of bigger numbers are nonsense. The Christian Brothers orphanages in WA took 450 male child migrants during those years from Britain, and about 250 from Malta. The main group, 334 from Britain, arrived during 1947 and it is from this group that most the recent critics of the orphanages have emerged.

These boys and young teenagers had been deserted during the 1930s and had spent the six years of war in Britain in hard, dangerous and insecure conditions. By the standards of sunny, healthy Australia they appeared to be physically emaciated and educationally backward. Many were scarred by childhood deprivation, and many more were bedwetters than was com-

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mon with Australian children in care.

None of these facts justify abuse, if and when it occurred—least of all if the abuse was perpetrated in Christian establishments or by church workers. But the TV reports and associated media comment have made wide-ranging and serious allegations with little sense of the historical context in which child migration was arranged. In addition, it is extremely difficult to corroborate allegations made 40 or 50 years after the events they concern. Witnesses may have died or disappeared, and memories may have faded and become increasingly selective.

Orphanage life before the 1970s was spartan in Australia and even more so in England. Middle-class decision makers in government provided only small maintenance subsidies to the Christian Brothers and other care organisations, which then had to battle for other funds from charitable members of the public. On the trip to Australia, the young child migrants enjoyed a grand standard of living—but this was not the standard of ordinary working people in the 1940s. After the six weeks' trip on the high seas, life in the Australian orphanages could be a rough landing.

Moreover, before the 1960s orphanage staff were usually untrained for child care. Some were teachers, others just willing helpers. They could only guess at the deprivation the children had suffered. They could abuse the children, of course—over-punish or even take advantage of them sexually. But how do we know what abuse took place when so many key people are dead? Surviving staff from the 1940s and 50s are old. Overall, the Christian Brothers have had no opportunity to present any sort of balanced assessment of the situation or the allegations in the mainstream media. An explanatory statement and apology authorised by the Brothers appeared in *The Australian* July 3-4, but the full story still needs to be told.

**Barry Coldrey**  
Manning, WA

[Brother Barry Coldrey's research into the history of the four orphanages is published in the following reports, available from Tamanaraik Press, PO Box 106, Como, WA 6152: *Child Migration and the Western Australian Boys Homes* (\$14.95); *Pocket Money,*

*Wages, Slavery and Exploitation in the Western Australian Boys Homes* (\$9.95); *Francis Paul Keaney and Child Care in Western Australia, 1936-1966* (\$14.95); *The Apprenticeship Scheme at Bindoon and Clontarf Boys' Towns, 1936-1951* (\$9.95); *Child Migration, the Australian Government and the Catholic Church* (\$14.95); *St Joseph's Farm and Trade School: History Sources* (\$14.95). Prices include postage.]

## Judging judges

*From Senator Sid Spindler*

During the past six months or so several judges dealing with sexual assault cases have made statements which indicate that they are seriously out of step with community expectations on the treatment and protection women should get from the legal system. The recent statement by the federal Attorney-General that 'the judiciary cannot expect to be immune from examination' augurs well for the introduction of reforms in this area as does the current Senate inquiry into the judges' statements.

The failure of the legal system to function as a means of obtaining justice for all members of the community, regardless of gender, race, age and income, is not of course limited to a few members of the judiciary. Rising legal costs are increasingly excluding most Australians, with legal aid now rejecting more than 50 per cent of applicants. The prime responsibility here is with governments, state and federal, but the legal profession must accept its share of the blame for rising costs and the often high-handed treatment of clients by some of its members.

Simpler procedures and sympathetic rather than confrontationalist treatment of people before the courts are essential if our legal system is to become accessible to all and a means of promoting social justice. The necessary changes are in part cultural rather than merely procedural and here an independent complaints tribunal, with consumer representation, would be a useful avenue of redress for people who seek change in our legal system.

**Sid Spindler**  
East Melbourne, VIC

## An ally in Aunty's cause

*From Betty Tonks*

May I ask if Mike Ticher (*Eureka Street*, May 1993) speaks for himself or the magazine in his article on Radio National?

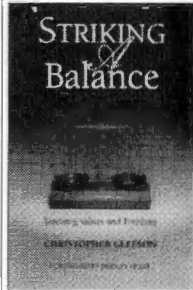
As a longtime listener to Radio National, I disagree with his criticism of the station. Out here in the listening public there are many of us who prefer to reject the commercial stations in favour of 'mind over chatter'. Most of us would prefer to listen to presenters of the calibre of Geraldine Doogue and Sandy McCutcheon than to the mindless chatter offered by rival stations.

Radio National may not be the ideal in some areas, but perhaps the blame could be placed on constraints of funding: making do with what the government hands out.

Perhaps another freelance journalist, who disagrees with Ticher, may be invited to defend the embattled station.

**Betty Tonks**  
Claremont, WA

*Mike Ticher's opinions are, of course, his own, but Eureka Street believes, with him, that Australia's great cultural asset, the ABC, can only benefit from informed criticism. —ed.*

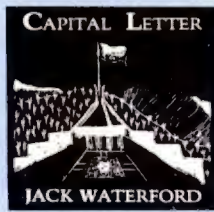


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# A solution is not just a deal

**Y**OU HAVE PERSUADED ME that I ought to do it,' Lyndon Johnson is said to have told a lobby group. 'Now go out and force me to do it'. The wily old scoundrel, probably the most complete politician since Machiavelli, knew his onions. The simple fact that something was right did not mean that he ought to do it. Politics is about splitting up the cake and there are winners and losers—usually in equal measure. At the end of the day, whether something can be done depends on public acceptance and there are few short cuts in this. Policies have to be *sold* to the public.

Paul Keating knows about working on public opinion. There are few better at getting a debate going, even in unlikely areas. Probably his greatest success was in making the electorate aware of economic issues in the 1980s—to the point where, as he once put it, every galah in every pet shop was talking about microeconomic reform. As Prime Minister, he has started a few fresh ones: opening the debate on the republic, making the *Mabo* decision the basis for a comprehensive settlement with the Aborigines. The nobility of the enterprise is not at issue here. What is noteworthy is that he is getting a bit lazy and seeking too many short cuts.

Keating put the republican issue squarely on the agenda. Some thought it a distraction from more mundane issues, but even they had to talk about it. It was smart politics because Keating could paint conservatives as old fuddy duddies—he realised that the number of passionate monarchists has been in constant decline. The 'minimalist' stance was calculated to smooth over some of the thornier issues of constitutional change.

But the push for a republic is losing momentum, and unless Keating seizes the initiative again soon he may lose it altogether. He might be playing the opposition skilfully, on the one hand wooing it (since even minor constitutional reform rarely gets adopted if there is organised political opposition) and on the other trying to make it look ridiculous or reactionary. But at the end of the day it is not the Liberal or the National parties that he must convince but the electorate at large. There are signs that opposition is building, not necessarily because of hostility to a republic as such, but out of hostility to the Keating style. The biggest obstacle to a referendum is not loyalty to the Queen or to British institutions but the perception that any change would be a grab for power by politicians.

Keating's tactics on *Mabo* have been far riskier. It took the government a long time to recognise the significance of *Mabo*, and even longer for Keating to decide to wrap it in a national flag. But the issue was not determined when he became morally convinced. The hard work of selling it to the various interest groups—the Aborigines, state premiers, mining and agricultural interests, the population at large—has still to be done. Yet at every stage Keating has treated *Mabo* as a problem that can be fixed by deals behind the scenes.

He has not consulted Aboriginal and Islander interests. The Aborigines and Islanders whom he appointed to advise him are able and sincere but do not have the authority to make deals. The opposition, though not at first opposed to a settlement, was provoked when Keating replied abusively to its criticism of government tactics. The mining lobbies—to whose panic about the High Court decision Aborigines probably owe a great deal—cannot lock in their constituents, as the reaction from miners such as Hugh Morgan has made clear. The premiers, whom Keating tried to spook into a deal by exaggerating *Mabo*'s potential impact, will be swayed by state interests rather than moral pressure. Yet good will from all but the WA Premier, Richard Court, has been sorely tested by federal strong-arming. The public has been frightened because the government, as well as interests hostile to Aborigines, allowed an impression to be created that the consequences of *Mabo* were potentially very wide indeed, and could throw established land titles into doubt.

The accusations of racism coming from the government whenever such fears have been expressed has hardly helped to sell the idea of a settlement. Frank Walker, the minister to whom Keating has entrusted the issue, acts as though it can be resolved by a few quick deals, and the secrecy of the process has alarmed people who were previously neutral. At no stage has the government offered its own assessment of the scope of the decision. Most people who have studied the *Mabo* judgment believe that only Aborigines in the most remote parts of Australia will be able to make successful land claims based on it. If that is so, there is a real question as to whether Keating's handling of the matter is in fact likely to have set the cause of reconciliation back a generation.

Political problems like *Mabo* cannot be 'fixed'. They require a public consensus. The primary people involved, the Aborigines, cannot be bought. And non-Aboriginal Australians have an interest in the outcome and their views have to be taken into account. Just as, a decade ago, Bob Hawke squandered overwhelming popular goodwill when he could have done something about national land rights, Paul Keating may be seeing the opportunity now fade away.

The essential nobility of the enterprise—of actually wanting, for once, to do the decent thing—is no excuse for being too lazy or too impatient to do the hard political work. Given that issues like the republic and a just settlement between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians are the big things with which Keating wants to make his mark in history, one is entitled to ask how he is going in more mundane matters. The answer is 'no better'. On the whole, however, the opposition is still so disorganised that it has not noticed. ■

Jack Waterford is deputy editor of *The Canberra Times*.



# The future *Mabo* makes

**N**OT SINCE THE yellow peril and reds under the beds have we had such an orchestrated fear campaign. 'No one's back yard is safe.' 'Land rights will divide the country.' '*Mabo* will undermine our national sovereignty.' 'Unelected judges are appropriating to themselves the role of Parliament.' The Western Mining Corporation creative thought unit has gone into overdrive. Arvi Parbo is suggesting a referendum on native title; Hugh

Morgan thinks High Court judges should be elected. All because Eddie Mabo and his fellow islanders established the common law's recognition of their traditional rights to land unless and until the state took away these rights. The High Court of Australia, like the courts in Canada, New Zealand and the United States, recognised that the privilege of British citizenship for indigenous persons did not automatically render them trespassers on their traditional lands. Comparing the approaches of Australian and New Zealand courts, Sir Anthony Mason, Chief Justice of Australia, told the 1993 New Zealand Law Conference that the High Court in *Mabo* made the great leap forward to 1847. This has not stopped Geoffrey Blainey from describing the decision as unhistorical.

The decision is inherently conservative for three reasons. Though recognising native title as at colonisation and affirming its survival beyond colonisation, the court has ruled that the sovereign as government or parliament can wipe out native title even without compensation. Wherever there is a conflict between native title and any title validly granted by the sovereign, native title always comes off second best, being wiped out or qualified to the extent needed for the granted title to be unimpeded. Aborigines cannot establish native title in 1993 unless they can prove an ongoing connection with the land since 1788 such that they and their ancestors have, as far as practicable, continued to

discharge their obligations to the land under traditional law.

The most cursory reading of the judgment reveals that Paul Coe's claim to one third of New South Wales has no basis. If he were not Aboriginal, his vexatious

and preposterous claim would not warrant any media attention. A senior partner in a large national law firm told the media that two of his Asian investment clients had decided not to invest in the Sydney CBD because of *Mabo*. Either his advice was negligent or misleading, or his clients were stupid or politically motivated.

Some critics of the High Court must have seen the Privy Council of an earlier generation as a group of judicial deities revealing the immutable common law as it had always been. Australia's ultimate court of appeal is now constituted by seven mere Australian mortals, whose reflections on contemporary values of equality and non-discrimination are said to be improper or improperly informed. Hugh Morgan was shocked to learn that one of the judges even enjoys a cleansing ale with at least one of his sons.

In *Mabo*, the High Court was required to develop further the jurisprudence of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975. That enactment of the sovereign Commonwealth Parliament prohibits state governments or parliaments from discriminating against Australian citizens on the basis of their race or ethnic origin. Where Aborigines enjoy rights to land recognised by the common law as declared by the High Court, state governments and state parliaments have to deal with them in the same way as with other property holders enjoying equivalent rights. All sovereign state parliaments provide compensation for compulsorily expropriated property; they must do the same for native title holders.

Before the March federal election, Morgan was hopeful that John Hewson would win and abolish the Racial Discrimination Act's equal protection of native title. But the newly mandated Paul Keating pledged to maintain the integrity of that legislation. Australia would have been the laughing stock of the international community, rendered mute in international discussions on human rights if our national parliament had infringed the principles of non-discrimination.

**P**RIOR TO *Mabo*, land-rights legislation providing for hearing and registration of claims was a social justice 'extra' for the states. Since *Mabo*, such legislation, providing an efficient, fair and certain tribunal system is an economic and administrative necessity. Miners with limited funds for exploration need access to a register of all land holdings. Western Australia is the only mainland state with no land-rights legislation. It is the only northern jurisdiction with no land-claims system. Having large areas of vacant crown land thought to be mineral-rich, and having significant Aboriginal communities

*The legitimacy of the indivisible Australian nation state requires a just implementation of Mabo so the real fears of separate development and social disruption can be put to rest.*

*... And your backyard is perfectly safe—the High Court said so, and our elected politicians have so promised. There is now every chance that the backyards of Aboriginal communities will be safe for the first time since 1788.*



in remote areas, Richard Court's Western Australia is the key to implementing *Mabo*. Court believes land tribunals are too wet and too black. Unless he sets them up, Keating will have to do it for him. Otherwise, every time a miner seeks access to land without a registered title, Aboriginal claimants will require legal aid to seek court declarations. The WA Supreme Court will become a branch of the Titles Office.

Court has sought to put off the inevitable by urging Keating to confine himself to a 'letter of the law' implementation of *Mabo*. Because of some slight doubts about the validity of mining and pastoral titles granted since the Racial Discrimination Act was passed, Keating has agreed to fix up the miners and the pastoralists, validating their titles and saving the states from compensating any affected native titleholders. After his Redfern Park address, and after having rubbed noses with Maori, Keating cannot and will not leave Aboriginal native title holders at the mercy of Richard Court and Hugh Morgan. But neither will he deliver any pot of gold at the end of the land rights rainbow to Cape York or Kimberleys Aborigines. He is prepared to recognise their title, but not to give them the same power over mining that traditional owners enjoy in the Northern Territory. That is why Marshall Perron is being co-operative. Once Keating has set the bottom line for Aboriginal veto rights, Perron will request that the Northern Territory land councils have their power trimmed.

The urban Aborigines enduring the taunts in supermarkets and schoolyards about *Mabo*-style land grabs will gain nothing material from *Mabo*. That is why there will be outstanding questions of compensation, land needs and affirmative action. But the symbolism of *Mabo* is important for us all. Recently a lawyer asked me 'If [there should be] special rights of self-determination within the sovereign nation state, why not for the Irish in Australia?' Having some sympathy for both groups, I suggest that the appropriate comparison is with the Irish in Ireland. Urban Aborigines, like Irish Australians, will take heart and live their cultural identity, certain that there are places where their own people can be themselves on their terms as they wish.

The legitimacy of the indivisible Australian nation state requires a just implementation of *Mabo* so the real fears of separate development and social disruption can be put to rest. Our sovereign parliaments and the High Court will be able to continue their functions under the constitution, developing our laws in accordance with international human rights standards so all citizens may enjoy their rights and opportunities without fear or favour. And incidentally, your backyard is perfectly safe—the High Court said so, and our elected politicians have so promised. There is now every chance that the backyards of Aboriginal communities will be safe for the first time since 1788. ■

**Frank Brennan SJ** is a research fellow in the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University.



## Rations and rationality

**A**RCHIMEDES DOESN'T HAVE ANYTHING on his plate at the moment. He's feeling a touch bored. He is also somewhat peeved at the typesetting gremlins who changed his report on Fibonacci ratios, so that the word 'ratio' occasionally appeared as 'ration'. But rations and boredom have combined to provide some of the great scientific discoveries. It's probably not true that Newton discovered gravity when, lackadaisical under a tree, he was hit on the head by his daily ration of apples. It is possibly only part of mythology that Einstein figured out the theory of special relativity while sitting in a cafe staring at the trams going by.

But on the other hand, our awareness of poisonous mercury levels in fishfood originated in boredom: one night an American chemist with nothing to do put some of his tuna sandwich through his atomic absorption spectrometer (an Australian invention, by the way) and noted alarmingly strong mercury lines. And physicist Richard Feynman tells us himself that, during a period of boredom and burnout, he had his Nobel Prize-winning insights while sitting in a cafeteria watching a plate being spun in the air: the wobble on the edge of the spinning plate moved at only half the pace at which the crest on the plate rotated. Feynman did not know what to do with this observation at the time, but he found it interesting and followed the mathematics through, with great repercussions for physics. Again, when Crick and Watson were trying to discover the structure of DNA—exactly 40 years ago—their every effort ended in frustration. Watson's own account of the discovery of the double helix includes mention of boredom, regular nights at dubious films, bad meals from cheap restaurants, and cold nights dreaming of various intertwinings.

Which makes one wonder about the virtues of intensely planned research. The problem with most science is that we carefully design experiments to prove what we think we already know. We only find what we are looking for, rather than discovering what might be 'there'. And yet leisure is remarkably salutary for freshness of thought. Heisenberg cracked the mysteries of the matrix theory of quantum mechanics only when he had been sent away on holidays. Is this a matter of the tired mind regathering its strength, or is some other factor at work?

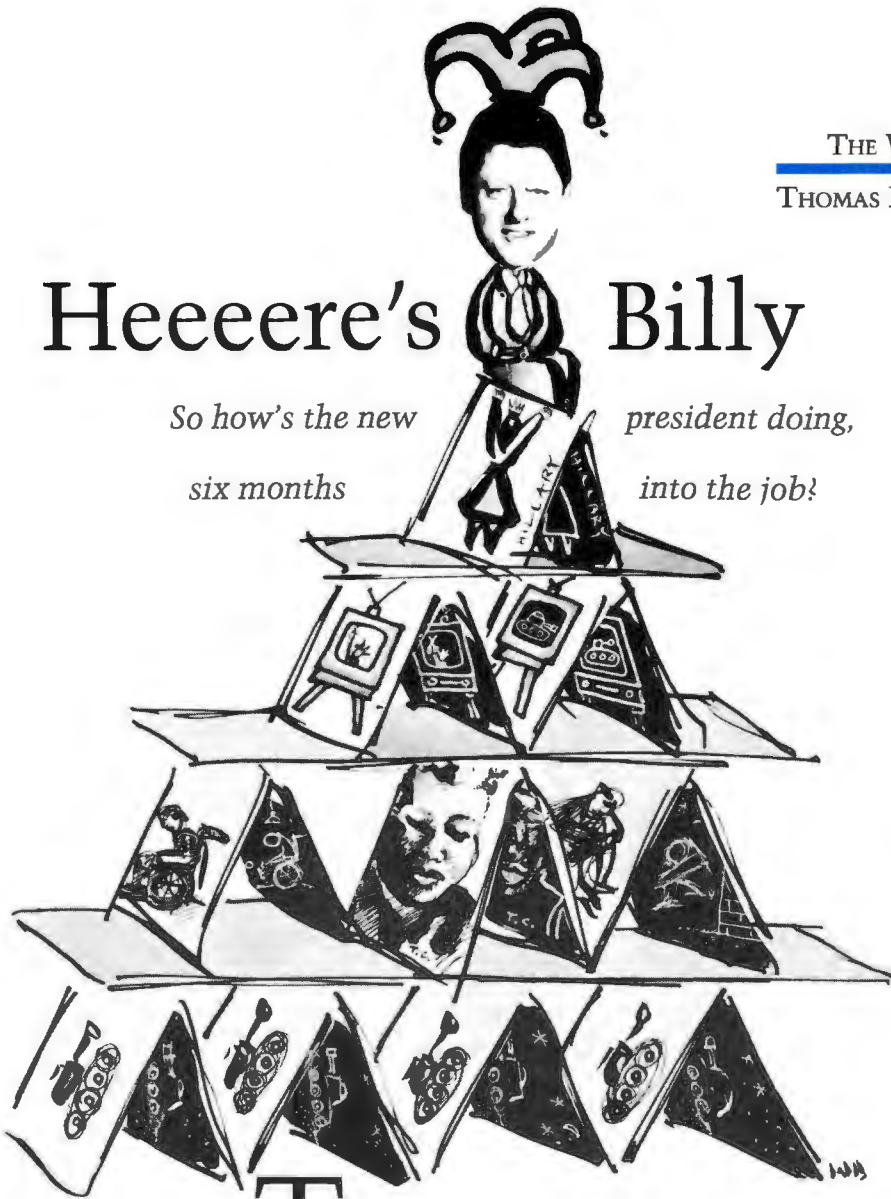
Our word for 'theory' comes from the Greek word for 'beholding' or 'contemplating'. Some of the Greek Fathers of the Church even suggested that God is called *Theos* because God keeps all things in existence by beholding them. As Einstein used to say, the art of physics is not to impose our own structure on reality but to imagine the world the way God sees it. Which might mean taking one day off each week. ■

—John Honner SJ



# Heeere's Billy

So how's the new president doing,  
six months into the job?



**T**ILL JOHNNY CARSON'S RETIREMENT from late-night television last year, he had been a comic institution in the US. At 11.30pm every weekday from 1962 to 1992, when his announcer brought him on stage with 'Heeere's Johnny', Carson began his show with seven minutes of comic monologue on the nation's political and cultural idiocies, of which there is never a dearth. Last month Johnny returned to New York's Plaza Hotel from Los Angeles to be feted by the 'industry', and during one of his *de rigueur* monologues he commented that TV comedians just pray for antics like Bill Clinton's.

Carson was speaking right after the famous haircut. President Clinton and 'security considerations' had kept passenger planes circling above Los Angeles International Airport for an hour and a half while Air Force One sat on the tarmac and the president got an onboard trim from an LA hair stylist named Christophe. Pilots and passengers left hanging in the air were not amused. Johnny Carson's comment: 'If you're going to try to impress the common man, you can't go from a barber with three names to a guy with one. You can't go from Billy Joe Jethro (a jab at Clinton's hick origins in the South) to Christophe.' The president protested that he didn't know all those people were circling, that he had

been told otherwise, etc. But he and his staff looked dumb.

Nickel and dime stuff. Unfortunately, that foolishness came piling on top of the major disaster at Waco, Texas, where federal agents botched the closing down of the Branch Davidian, giving the gun-toting sect's Rasputin an opportunity to offer up himself and his minions as a live holocaust.

Live holocausts do not play well on live TV. President Clinton and his newly named Attorney-General, Janet Reno, 'bravely' took responsibility—what else could they do?—but this failure hardly brightened the president's image.

But those aren't the president's real problems—even if they account in some measure for what his political opponents gleefully point out are his low 'public approval' ratings in the polls. No, he has more important things to worry about:

## *The military*

What problem? Did not the US military do their president's bidding on 27 June, when they fired cruise missiles at Baghdad's intelligence headquarters? Well, the military were quite willing in this case. First, they were eager to be seen punishing Iraq for its alleged bomb plot against George Bush, a 'real' commander-in-chief. Second, the missile strike was an easy matter of pushing buttons on warships out in the Persian Gulf and Red Sea, however hard it may have been on innocent Iraqis. But just let Bill Clinton require something different of his military ...

As commander-in-chief, Clinton is at a serious disadvantage. When he ran against two former naval officers (Bush and Perot) last November, Clinton received only 43 per cent of the general vote. It's a sage bet that fewer than 43 per cent of military officers voted for him. Let's be generous and say Clinton got half as many votes from the military as from the general population. That would mean he got approximately 20 per cent of military officers' votes. Yet this is the group that must now salute him and execute his orders as their commander-in-chief.

So what was the first thing he ordered upon taking office? An end to the ban against gays in the military. Now, on principle, Clinton is right, dead right. In this case, however, the old doggerel applies: 'Here lies the body of William Gray/who died defending his right of way./ He was right, dead right, as he rode along./But he's just as dead as if he'd been wrong.'

It was a frightful miscalculation. Too self-assured from his recent electoral victory, and confident he could



make good on a campaign promise to do away with the ban, the president's timing did nothing so much as give the military a chance to jump him. Which they did. And not just they, but also Senator Sam Nunn, the Georgia Democrat who is chairman of the Senate armed services committee and who is jealous of his prerogatives. Nunn held odious televised hearings at which the military chiefs shook in their boots at the very thought of gays subverting the morale of our boys—through ironically a colonel named Peck, who had commanded the marines who went into Somalia, admitted he had just learned his own son was gay. To be consistent, therefore, he would not want this boy of his to be a marine!

The best the president can hope for now is a sorry compromise called 'Don't ask, don't tell', by which the military proposes not to inquire about people's sexual orientation so long as they keep it to themselves. If gays were to come 'out', they could still be dishonourably discharged. If the president tries to get more than this, the Congress threatens to push through a law enforcing the present ban, which technically proscribes even the presence of gays in the military and allows the authorities to ferret them out of the closet.

Clinton is now being conciliatory. One wonders if a showdown with the military is not ahead of him, like the famous firing of Douglas MacArthur by Harry Truman. I rather hope so. For the moment, the recalcitrance of the military complicates another big problem.

### *Bosnia*

During the campaign, Clinton complained that Bush and his Secretary of State, Jim Baker, were not doing enough to stop the war. True enough. In fact, Baker seems to have encouraged Serbian bloody-mindedness by announcing a preference for Yugoslav unity when it was already too late to save it.

Clinton's big talk on the campaign trail—he swore that 'ethnic cleansing' would not be tolerated, threatened the Serbs with punishment, and insisted the arms embargo ought to be lifted—has turned to nothing now that he is president. This is partly because he cannot count on any decently spirited response from the military, who have announced themselves unwilling to get into any mess they cannot see their way out of. One might have thought that the military's job was to come up with plans for both getting in and getting out, but instead they publicly worry.

Of course, they are not the only ones who block vigorous action. The Europeans have balked, and most Americans therefore say: 'It's Europe's mess and if the Europeans won't go along with military steps, why should we get involved?'

Then, of course, there's Warren Christopher, Clinton's choice for Secretary of State. A Catholic archbishop in this country described Christopher to me as a 'wet noodle' after the secretary's futile trip to Europe, where he was unsuccessful in persuading European governments to mount any significant opposition to aggression and genocide.

In news conferences Clinton claims that he is not wishy-washy about Bosnia, that his views are clear and unchanged. It's just that he can't get anyone else to agree with him. One might have thought the president's job was to get people to agree with him. Naturally, polls now show a majority of Americans do not want the US to get involved militarily in former Yugoslavia. But that is partly because there is no leadership from Washington, despite earlier and now embarrassing rodomontade.

Clinton's shaky relations with the military is part of the reason he cannot follow through on Bosnia, but the more fundamental reason has to do with another problem:

### *The economy*

The motto of Bill Clinton's election campaign was: 'It's the economy, stupid!' The economy was by everyone's account the defining issue of his victory, and apparently he thinks so too—though, like most of us, he may secretly suspect his own magnetism had something to do with it. He cannot bank on the latter, however, since 57 per cent of the voters proved resistant to it. So he must concentrate on the economy. And he does. Scarcely anyone is cleverer than he in bandying about figures and percentages and ratios and reports to prove, well, to prove whatever suits him on any given day, and his mastery of detail in this department is impressive.

But Clinton has been consistent in at least one asseveration: that the economy cannot be fixed without reforming health care, which consumes more and more of the country's wealth, and proportionately much more of its wealth than that of any other developed nation. There is no national plan, and 37 million Americans are without health insurance, a statistic unthinkable in any other civilised nation except the land of the free and the home of the brave. The president has put his wife, Hillary Rodham Clinton, in charge of coming up with a solution. Bill, for all his intelligence and charm, comes across as something of a conscienceless rogue, the sort of Baptist who would go to a Jesuit university (which he did) because he thought it might enhance his political career (which it did). Hillary seems made of sterner, Methodist stuff. She is working with her panel of 500 advisers night and day, and in any case the Clinton economic package will not be complete until a health-care plan, too, has been announced.

The president had been advised to hold off on health-care reform until his budget got through Congress, and this he decided to do. But here the going has

*A Catholic archbishop described Warren Christopher as a 'wet noodle' after the Secretary of State's futile trip to Europe, where he was unable to persuade European governments to mount any significant opposition to genocide.*

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the brave.

been tough. The budget, which Clinton proudly claims will cut the national deficit by \$500 billion in five years, made it through the House of Representatives more or less intact, including a proposal for a broad energy tax based on the BTU (British Thermal Unit, stupid!). When it got to the Senate, however, several of the president's fellow Democrats proved devilish. Specifically, David Boren of Oklahoma, an energy state, who had a controlling vote in the Senate finance committee. It was impossible for the budget to get onto the floor of the Senate until it had passed the committee, and Boren refused to go along with it unless the BTU-based energy tax was dropped.

Clinton's presidency hung in the balance. He had retreated on almost everything else of significance from among his campaign pledges—on Bosnia, on Haitian refugees, on several appointments he had fruitlessly proposed, on full civil rights for gays in the military. The economy was his last and most important redoubt. To the rescue came a New York Democrat, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who is chairman of the Senate finance committee. By concocting an elaborate compromise that sacrificed the BTU tax but substituted for it a lesser energy tax, Moynihan won the grudging vote of Senator Boren, and the president's battered budget made an ignominious entrance onto the Senate floor. After a scrappy debate came the climactic vote: 49 to 49. Albert Gore, who as vice-president is *ex officio* chairman of the Senate, exercised his casting vote to make the result 50 to 49.

So Clinton's budget lives. It now goes to a conference committee composed of House and Senate members, who must reconcile their differences, so the battle will continue. But the president owes Daniel Moynihan—oh, how he owes him. (The details of Moynihan's rescue have been neatly reported by Sidney Blumenthal in the new, livelier *New Yorker*, now edited by Tina Brown.) The senator took advantage of his new stature to make another crucial suggestion to the president, and this concerns another of Clinton's problem areas.

### *Appointments*

The president has been tardy in nominating Cabinet members and lesser officials of his administration. Those he has named have too often been rejected. The first two women he nominated as attorney-general, it was embarrassingly shown, had paid insufficient heed to laws protecting immigrant workers when they had hired such workers as domestics. His third nominee, Janet Reno, had no sooner been confirmed by the Senate when she had to take the blame for Waco.

Then the president tried to name Lani Guinier as chief of the civil rights division of the Justice Department. She is a law professor who is of African-American

and Jewish parentage. In her, the President had three minorities rolled into one, an untouchable trinity, it might have been thought, except for Guinier's writings, which in some respects appeared quite radical. Republicans and right-wing Democrats howled with rage. Moderate Democrats grumbled, 'Mr. President, sir, uh, you'd better reconsider.' The president, informed that the Guinier nomination was doomed, went on national television to explain that that if he had only read Guinier's writing beforehand, he would never have nominated her. African Americans howled with rage.

There followed an unseemly hesitation in naming a new Supreme Court justice. Justice Byron White, named to the court by John F. Kennedy, had said months ago he would resign at the end of June. First the president assayed the name of Bruce Babbitt, already confirmed as Secretary of the Interior. Babbitt was asked on television if he would accept, and he demurely allowed that he would bow to the president's wishes. The environmentalists were having none of it. After finally getting a decent interior secretary, they screamed at the prospect of losing him. The president had to drop Babbitt, who must feel somewhat bruised, to come up with another name: Judge Stephen Breyer. But this judge also had to admit to a certain disregard of legal niceties in hiring immigrant workers, and Clinton could not name him, lest the president be accused of letting a man get away with something that had nailed two women candidates for attorney-general.

To the rescue once again came Senator Moynihan, who evidently picked just the right moment to insinuate the difficulties with the Breyer nomination and to suggest in his place Judge Ruth Bader Ginsburg. When she is confirmed by the Senate (as in all probability she will be, unless some damaging revelation comes to light), she will be the first Jew to sit on the court since Lyndon Johnson's time and the second woman ever.

Summary judgement: Although the president has made awful mistakes in his first six months and has paid for them, his budget is still alive as a possible matrix for economic revival, and if his wife can manage to bring home a national health plan—and if that combined package can get through Congress—he still has a shot at being re-elected in 1996. It is, after all, 'the economy, stupid'. He still has to deal with his military, and on the resolution of that contest, in some measure, depends his foreign policy—though it is the national economy that will be determinative. He is changing his staff, which should make for a more efficient appointment process and smoother relations with the media.

He's never claimed to be perfect, or anything other than the compleat politician. Just when the nation was beginning to doubt whether he was such a good politician after all, he's got a little help from his friends. Part of the first six months is finding out who those friends are. He's still in the game. ■

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# Feuds and fugues

**S**HAKESPEARE DEPRIVED Richard III of more than a horse. He filched the King's reputation and made him a hunch-backed malefactor—a villain for eternity. If you took seriously much of the reaction to Philip Chubb's extraordinary ABC TV series, *Labor in Power*, you might think that Chubb had done similar service for the ALP's princes and pretenders of the last decade.

Commentary has focused principally on the power struggle between Hawke and Keating. Seasoned journalists, media commentators, business leaders and the public confess themselves appalled by its fierceness. This is more than ironical in a media climate that thrives—*feeds* is not too strong a term—on the crudities of personality conflict. For years we have had a political and financial press that has lionised political and business entrepreneurs and given scant attention to alternative, deeper ways of examining and interpreting the country. We still have it. Witness the way in which the Liberal Party is currently reported. *Mabo* might be the central issue of the moment, an issue on which bi-partisan understanding and some measure of agreement is crucial. But if John Howard, Bronwyn Bishop or Peter Reith so much as twitch an eyebrow in the direction of leadership they command the airwaves and front pages for the day. Forget about resolving difficult issues of native title.

In *Labor in Power* Chubb has done justice to the force of individual personality and the psychology of leadership, but he and his production team always do so in context. One of the great strengths of the series is the way in which it integrates its hundreds of interview grabs (taken from 450 hours of interviewing) with the events of the day, national and international. The feat of intercutting is one of the finest technical achievements we have seen on Australian television. You switch from Paul Keating and Treasury officials bunkered down in a training room, their children parked under tables, hell-bent on getting ready for the tax summit, to Bob Hawke in statesman mode in the US. The MX missile issue causes a crisis in Caucus—cut to Graham Richardson on the phone telling Hawke to back off—cut to George Bush and George Schulz, giving uncharacteristically straightforward accounts of realpolitik arms policy coupled with personal accounts of Bob Hawke. 'I liked him. I think he liked me,' remarks Schulz.

In consequence it becomes possible to understand

why certain decisions were taken, what pressures in government, personal and political, force premature action. And while not making a superficial fetish of power play, the series does demonstrate, with a frankness rare in



any media, the degree to which friendship, trust, lack of trust, ambition, courage, fear, pride, shrewdness and passion help shape national life. Instead of reinforcing cynicism about politicians the revelations of the series serve rather to deepen understanding. *Labor in Power* is not a pretty picture, but it is instructive.

Chubb's account is not, of course definitive. He would hardly claim so himself. In five hours it is not possible to document the events of a decade. But his necessary selectiveness is intelligent and scrupulous, and it gives ample space to dissenting voices. The Cassandras of the series, John Button, Michael Duffy, Peter Walsh and Bob Hogg, point all too clearly to the flaw of the Hawke-Keating years: government was deaf to the consequences of its economic policies, and its Treasury advisors were not equal to their task.

The question that beats like a drum through *Labor in Power* is this: will the very powerful Paul Keating and his advisors in the bureaucracy now learn to listen?

*Labor in Power* is a delight in other ways. It turns Senator Stephen Loosley into a gothic dramatist. Fog-bound Canberra was 'A set for *The Hound of the Baskervilles*' on the morning of the leadership ballot, he tells us. The music for the series is splendid—intricate and fugal, as befits the politics. And in a feat of inspired nerve the series goes out with Keating striding to the strains of Holst's Jupiter section from *The Planets* suite, and the unsung words "I vow to thee, my country..." But the cadence is unresolved.

—Morag Fraser



# Why can't Catholic women be priests?

**W**HY CAN'T CATHOLIC WOMEN BE PRIESTS?' is the title of a document published in Melbourne by Mr B.A. Santamaria's Thomas More Centre. Written by Bishop George Pell, Anna Krohn and Mary Helen Woods, it claims to provide the official Catholic point of view on the question of women's ordination, and is being widely circulated among parishes and Catholic schools.

The document uses a deceptively straightforward question-and-answer technique. Although many of the questions—'What is a Catholic priest?', 'How does the Catholic Church reach its conclusions?'—are important ones, they are used only as pegs on which to hang a dogmatic polemic. Simplistic and literalist in its approach, the document disguises its lack of scholarship behind sweeping generalisations with no supporting evidence. For example: 'most Catholic women throughout the world support the church's teaching' on ordination.

The authors are correct in stressing the need to base Christian practice on the teaching and life of Jesus, but are highly selective in their use of the gospel traditions. 'All Christians are bound by Scripture. We are not free to reject those bits we do not like', they warn, but then proceed to ignore their own warning. Quite apart from such basic errors as attributing to Paul documents widely

accepted as post-Pauline (*Ephesians* and *1 Timothy*), their use of scripture is naively literalist. No account is taken of the many layers of community tradition and theology behind the Gospel texts, or of the historical and social context of the New Testament traditions. The past 30 years of Catholic biblical scholarship might never have happened.

The document argues chiefly from what Jesus did not do. It declares dogmatically that Jesus and the apostles 'did not ordain [women] to celebrate the Eucharist and did not authorise their successors to do so either.' This is true. It is equally true that Jesus did not 'ordain' anyone, male or female, to celebrate the Eucharist. Jesus' command to his friends to repeat his last meal in his memory was addressed to *all* of his followers. He gave no instructions for the future leadership of this ceremony. Nor do the Gospels contain any references to the apostles authorising Eucharistic leadership. (The use of the term 'apostle' in the document seems to refer only to the Twelve, excluding Paul. It certainly excludes the woman church leader, Junia, whom Paul greets with the apostolic title in *Romans*.) On the other hand, the strong tradition of women church leaders that is evident in Paul's letters indicates at least the possibility of their sacramental leadership also.

Although the New Testament includes missionary instructions addressed to various groups of disciples,



*The assertion that the Eucharistic leader, as icon of Christ, must be male, falls into an error common to many opponents of women's ordination. It confuses the historical Jesus with 'the Christ', who is that man resurrected and glorified, transcending all earthly boundaries of race, social status and gender.*

including the command to Mary Magdalen to preach the good news of the Risen Lord, there is no evidence that Jesus had any intention of establishing an hierarchical priesthood. To argue that he had 'clear ideas' on 'women and priesthood' is nonsense. If he did, they are nowhere expressed, except in the inclusive character of all his actions. To argue further that, if Jesus had wanted women priests his mother would have been made an apostle, is a naive misunderstanding of the missionary character of the apostolic role.

The other major strand of argument in this document is that of gender. Its assertion that the Eucharistic leader, as icon of Christ, must be male, falls into an error common to many opponents of women's ordination. It confuses the historical Jesus with 'the Christ', who is that man resurrected and glorified, transcending all earthly boundaries of race, social status and gender. It is as appropriate for a woman to represent the one into whose body both male and female have been incorporated through baptism, as it is for a man.

Although paying lip service to the 'special place' of Mary and the women disciples, the authors' basic assumption is that women are of a lower order in the church and should be content to be so. They assert that 'gender is important in understanding God's love for us', but use this to claim a divine preference for the male sex. Surely the opposite is true. The existence of gender

is a vital demonstration that our God includes both male and female. To believe otherwise is to deny the Genesis statement that humankind, both 'male and female', was created in God's image. If the point of the incarnation was to demonstrate that God is male, then Christianity has no place for women, and is perpetrating a farce by baptising them.

The perceived enemies in this document are 'feminists'. A distinction is made between different groups of feminists, but the message is clear. One can only be a good Catholic feminist if one is opposed to the ordination of women. There is no mention of the growing number of men, including some prominent Catholic scholars, who are now beginning to question an exclusively male priesthood.

Statistics are used in a totally unscientific way. The ordination of women in the American Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of New Zealand is presented as the obvious cause of a decline in church membership in those countries. There is no evidence for this allegation. The decline in Mass attendance in the Catholic Church in Australia has been so marked that it was a subject for discussion during the Australian bishops' recent meeting with the Pope. Using the spurious reasoning of this document, one could blame this decline on the fact that the Catholic Church only ordains men.

What is most disturbing about this document is not its total opposition to women's ordination, but its lack of theological and biblical expertise. As the church faces a grave threat to its continued sacramental life because of the shortage of priests, the question of women's ordination is a serious one. It deserves to be debated at a level which uses all of the theological and exegetical resources the church can command. No one is helped by a document such as this, with its mire of distortions, poor theology and faulty exegesis. The people of God deserve better. ■

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*Photos taken in St Peter's Square by Luigi Bussolati*



# Return to Sandown

I FIRST WENT TO SANDOWN on the day that Ruben Olivares knocked out Lionel Rose. The course broadcaster churlishly complained how Lionel had 'let down all his friends'. The next trip was for the Liston Stakes in the early spring of 1971, won for the second time by Tauto, who beat Tolerance and Eleazar. Twenty-two years later, on a bleak day, grey and white storm clouds followed us across the city and we turned right at the Springvale Crematorium with more apprehension than exuberance. It was an occasion for desperates only. Complementing those employed-to-be at Sandown was a handful of wizened, mad-eyed punters who gathered in the gloom: curdled cream of that dwindling clerisy of the Australian turf.

Yet it ought to have been an auspicious occasion. This was the 28th anniversary of the opening of Sandown—the only metropolitan course built this century—and the program featured two of the best jumps races on the calendar: the 112th runnings of the Australian Hurdle and the Australian Steeple. Roomy, well-banked, with decent facilities everywhere under cover, Sandown has never become popular. Racing journalist Ray ('The Preserver') Benson, who had walked the track, tipped us Lucky n' Green and Microshare. Both ran 12th, and the latter pulled up sore in the steeple.

Benson was more accurate with his crowd estimate of 6148: 6021 came. Australian racing, troubled by the decline in thoroughbred numbers and the looming extinction of the bookmaker, risks becoming a sport made only for television and gambling.

We had a table in the Samson Room, with a fine view of the track and little incentive to go outside. There were tote facilities and a carvery with a reassuringly gross offer of three roast meats. Suffering from a gastric complaint that

the food did little to assist, my companion opened the first bottle of Abbotsford Invalid Stout with which I had ever shared a table. The Samson Room is named for a galloper who won on Sandown's opening day and did so five times more before becoming a police troop horse. The policeman who'd ridden him donated a rug for the winner of the Samson Handicap and Roy Higgins, the

champion jockey cum commentator who'd also ridden Samson, put the rug on Mister Elegant.

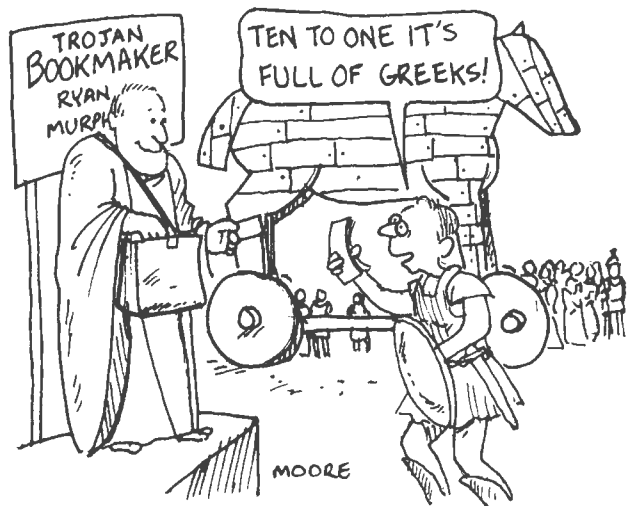
Before then, the meeting began with dramas that mocked my supercilious expectations. Alias Comberbache (a pseudonym of Coleridge's) was first past the post in the Anniversary Handicap but lost the race when for the first time in Melbourne racing history the stewards, rather than the jockey, protested. A horse called Disrepute was the beneficiary. In the Australian Hurdle, Fun Verdict—who had stumbled through the flattened brush of the last hurdle—protested without avail against Best Endeavours, who won in course-record time. The presentation table sat forlornly in the wind as the hearing continued and had to be removed so as not to delay the Proud Miss Handicap. After Bo Bardot lost a jockey at the start, Barbadian at 16/1 (incongruously named for mid-winter) and Cliko at 12/1 dead-heated in the race. It was a result to reconcile me to Sandown forever, since I'd backed them both and taken the quinella.

In 1933 and 1934 Redditch won the Australian Steeple with the now-unimaginable weight of 82kg. The death of this great jumper in a fall at Flemington caused an outcry that led to the abandonment of post-and-rail fences in steeple-chases. Quicker horses who are less gifted jumpers win now. King Taros, carrying 64.5 kg, gave Jamie Evans the jumps double when he cut 6.4 seconds off the track record to beat the plugging Trilowe (another nice quinella). Evans had suffered a very bad fall at Sandown that nearly ended his career. Now he was back in triumph, to hear himself called 'the Jim Pike of jumping jockeys' and to receive a trophy of peculiar conformation that he passed over the fence to his girlfriend.

More typical Sandown winter fare followed. Rising eight-year-old Tersilver, who had never won in town and had last saluted at Penshurst, took the mediocre distance race that pocks each program at this time of the year. That punters' bane, a mares' race over the odd distance of 1300 metres, was won by Framed, who—against the pattern of the day's racing—had led.

A gale now whipped up Sandown's ornamental lake. At nearby Waverley Park the lights were turned on. It was time to turn gladly home. On cue, rain began to fall heavily during the dash to the car park. In 22 more years Evans may be training, rather than riding winners; Sandown may have become a multi-function sports polis; there will be plaques to bookmakers as well as horses and ageing punters will shuffle by still, moved by unquenchable delusions. ■

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# Who's afraid of the big bad deficit?

**A**UGUST IS A BLEAK MONTH. One's sporting teams are inevitably well down the ladder, there are unsettling winds, and then there is Canberra. It's all embodied in the funereal pallor of the Treasurer, John Dawkins.

The government will go into the next financial year constrained by an unexpected \$16 billion deficit, only three years after achieving an \$8 billion surplus. That surplus was in turn an outcome of six tortuous years of cutting from the budget everything that moved, while simultaneously hacking away at all the old Labor shibboleths. All that work and yet the deficit is now twice what Labor started with 10 years ago.

Yet the financial commentators still bay for blood without a semblance of embarrassment. They have missed the moral of the story—that all this pursuit of pennies has let pounds go down the gurgler. And there are a million unemployed: apart from the personal suffering, this means a potential loss of five per cent in national output and a loss of at least \$10 billion a year in government revenue.

Canberra is edging away from the shrill deficit fetishism of the media, but the shift is driven by pragmatism rather than by a philosophical change of heart. One can't eradicate a \$16 billion deficit overnight, especially given the 1980s cost-cutting exercise.

The change has been reflected in an unheralded pursuit of electoral promises in social policy. Social Security, for example, is pushing ahead with proposals for an institutional child-care rebate and a home child-care allowance (albeit built on the demise of the dependent spouse rebate). And there are labour-force and capital-works programs that build on previous initiatives in these areas.

The shift is also an unofficial acknowledgement that there is no close link between a 'robust' economy and the monetary aggregates resulting from the budgetary process. Good 'macroeconomic policy' can support a robust economy (and bad macroeconomic policy can cripple an economy) but it cannot create one.

The deficit is important, then, but down the track. In the short term, the focus has moved to the *structure* of

the economy. This is reflected in the greater importance of off-budget statements like the *One Nation* statement in February last year, and in Dawkins' attempts to broaden the brief of the Treasury and its satellite, the Industry Commission.

Senior MPs know that their government has stuffed it, but they can't admit the extent of their failure and have no alternative philosophy anyway. In the meantime, a pragmatic new agenda is being pursued through a Caesarist centralisation of power in the Prime Minister's office. There has been a quiet revolution in manners, with Keating's arrogant blustering as Treasurer being replaced by behind-closed-doors uncertainty.

The lack of an alternative philosophy is entirely predictable. The Senior Executive Service has been stacked with peas in a pod, the only distinguishing feature being that between zealots and opportunists. The same bureaucratic structure remains and no heads have rolled.

Yet the bureaucratic structure in Canberra is not God-given but part of the British inheritance—a structure centred on Treasury dominance, supported by a powerful imperial bureaucracy. This suited a country that ruled an empire whose industry ruled the world, and which came to possess a special character as a global mediator of commerce and finance. In short, Australia's derivative federal bureaucracy is manifestly unsuited to Australian conditions.

This legacy is not understood among the Canberra cognoscenti. The anomalies, however, have been dimly perceived by Dawkins in his recent attempt to broaden the Treasury brief. Although this move has terrified the financial press, its real weakness is that it can't be done.

Dawkins has imagined that he can import philosophies from a range of 'active' departments and build a comprehensive economic policy unit. But one can't turn a mule into a thoroughbred, and one certainly can't turn a mule into a tiger. It is much easier to breed a tiger from scratch (and you don't get your gene stock from the IMF, the OECD or the London School of Economics).

We are regularly subjected to homilies on the irresponsibility of the deficit, with anonymous editorials in the *Australian Financial Review* proclaiming that the government can slash another \$5 billion or so from the budget without any trouble at all. It is supposedly just a matter of getting various rorts and 'vested interests' off the public purse.

Devoting resources to cleaning up the environment or to subsidising rural communities is labelled 'political', whereas slashing spending in the abstract is presumed to be 'apolitical'. Yet if the commentators were forced to talk more concretely—about the TAFE budget, for example, or sewerage infrastructure—their politics would be transparent.

'Political' is bad, even though governments are elected to be political; 'apolitical' is rational and beneficial. Catering to the whim of the anonymous finance markets is apolitical, rational and desirable. This is the daily fare of respectable commentary, and it dictates public consciousness on the budgetary process.

The isolation of 'governments' as culprits can only be deemed pathological, and one is left speculating on whether the finance media generate this persistent nonsense through ignorance or venality. Are not these expectations of governments themselves the rorts of vested interests? In part, they are indeed. Governments sink capital into failing businesses, racing circuits and privately owned freeways; they overpay visiting medical officers, senior executives and private consultants.

Yet the generalised attack on government 'profligacy' doesn't hit these worthy targets. Its language is general but its impact is specific. Schools get closed and skills get dissipated while privileged constituencies continue to rake it off the top. The annual budget is not merely an occasion for closer scrutiny of the details of the government's reigning social priorities; it is also time for closer scrutiny of 'apolitical' politics of the respectable economic/financial media. ■

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# Surrendering critique

*Fashionable theory has effectively justified a retreat from the field by some who might once have been regarded as defenders of universities and their activities.*

**I**N THE WELTER OF DISCUSSION about recent changes in contemporary Australian universities, both forced and self-imposed, there is an interesting issue that is seldom addressed. People argue about the extent of the federal government's interventionism in university processes, about the supposed inevitability of the changes, about the philistine erosion of support for pure research and the tradition of genuine teaching, and about the opportunism of some university administrators and 'executive officers' who seized the hour to increase their power and importance.

Significant though these issues are, I am more concerned with the depressing fact that the debate about such matters within the academy has been notable for the curious role played by some influential left intellectuals in the humanities. Where one would have expected a principled engagement with the issues, and a passionate commitment to central intellectual values, one finds instead a curiously abstracted disengagement, masquerading as involvement, and a smug nihilism about values that has the effect of giving aid and comfort to the philistines. What alarms me most is the influence of a mood that is not fully endorsed by all who are affected by it, but which afflicts them nonetheless and has a sti-

fling effect upon the will, especially the will to criticise and resist bureaucratic power.

The mood is prevalent in circles

commonly referred to as 'postmodernist' or as 'the new humanities', but there are people who would accept these labels yet resist the mood, and something similar is true of those implicated in the related phenomenon of 'cultural studies'. I want to discuss this mood, but to minimise question-begging generalisations I shall concentrate upon the specific claims made in Ian Hunter's article, 'Personality as a Vocation', which appeared in the book *Accounting for the Humanities*. This is a product of the Cultural Policy Studies unit at Griffith University, and is often quoted by the officers and soldiers of the cultural studies army when they lay siege to the problems of the modern Australian university. I shall also advert to the claims made by Hunter's colleague, Geoff Stokes, in his article in the same book, 'Instrumentalism and Tradition in the Humanities'.

There are important differences between Hunter and Stokes but they share the common mood or attitude, so that what we are looking at has a significance beyond the merits or defects of their particular presentation. I find it sad that any group on the left should lock themselves into a position of cultural and intellectual subservience to the powerful, even—or especially—where those in power represent themselves as leftwing. I need a label for those who hold the common attitude on this debate about universities; 'Hunterite' would clearly be too specific, and 'postmodernist' would be too wide, so I shall call them 'debunkers'. This registers the fact that they are anxious to undermine defences of the university that are based upon 'traditional' or 'liberal' understandings of its value.

Hunter's article is 60 pages long, and covers some staggeringly ambitious ground—the nature of the self, the nature of ethics, the nature of government—so I shall not attempt in

these brief comments to discuss all its themes or even the connection between them. What I shall try to do is to extract an argumentative structure from what the debunkers say, and raise certain difficulties for it, especially as it bears upon my own view of what is principally valuable in a university education, particularly an education in certain humanities disciplines. I shall take my own published views as a paradigm of the liberal defence of universities against the Dawkins people because I know them better than other people's similar defences and because they represent a position that is consistently misunderstood by Hunter and Co. Incidentally, the reference to 'liberal' here has of course nothing essentially to do with the political movement of liberalism; it refers to the idea of liberal studies, i.e., those that are said to be capable of being justified in non-utilitarian terms. The vision I want to defend might equally be called 'humanist'.

The first thing to say about the 'liberal' defence is that it presents a normative thesis about university education; it is a thesis concerning what is or isn't valuable about certain activities and goals claimed, on the basis of experience, to be present in some of what goes on in universities. My version emphasises the value of what I call the reflective attitudes. These I characterise as: '... the spirit of inquiry; the sense of involvement in a problem because of its inherent complexity, whatever the payoff; the desire for comprehensive understanding; the critical attitude, which always approaches a problem with a sense of scepticism or caution about the received opinions in the field; the disinterested or objective spirit which respects data and follows the logic of the issues where they lead.' ('The Academy and the State', *Australian Universities Review*, no. 1, 1988.)

*At the end of the day, if you are considering government policies, vice-chancellors' dictates, trade union demands, the requirements of 'governmentality', you have to come clean about what you value and why. This is where the debunkers are most elusive, uneasy and, I hate to say, supine.*



Mine is not essentially an historical claim, though Hunter mistakenly treats me as offering an historical and/or philosophic-historical claim and as, somehow illicitly, moving from history to 'apology'. Nonetheless, I am quite certain that the reflective attitudes are valuable in themselves, have existed, and been fostered, in university communities for a long time, and nothing I have read by the debunkers remotely disturbs that conviction. But it wouldn't matter for my normative position if the reflective attitudes magically sprang into existence seven years ago (to be discovered by some future Foucault as 'the birth of reflexivity' no less!).

The space devoted by the debunkers to the supposed historical mistakes of the liberal defence is, however, instructive. One thing that the debunkers are anxious to point out is that the universities have always taught various courses, such as medicine and law, that have social utility, and have often been established to serve the community by training and otherwise equipping the young. (See, for instance, Stokes, in Hunter *et al*, p200.) No doubt. But this could only be a problem for the liberal defence if it maintained that all courses in universities were to be justified solely in terms of the reflective attitudes, or that studies justified as intrinsically valuable could not also be justified in terms of other purposes they served.

This second point is crucial. The valuable in itself may also be valuable for other ends. The issue about intrinsic and extrinsic goods may seem mysterious but it is not. Some reasons scream out for other reasons and some do not. In any but the most abnormal contexts, a course of action is amply justified by citing the fact that it makes for health. By contrast, the reply: 'I am doing it to get dirty' normally screams out for an answer to why she wants to get dirty (maybe it is to disguise herself and so avoid danger.) Health is an intrinsic good and dirt is at best an extrinsic one. But none of this means that there cannot be other reasons for pursuing health as well as its intrinsic value, for example, so that you can get a particular job, or impress your lover.

Another debunking claim concerning history is that institutions other than universities have been the home

for the reflective attitudes. I have never denied this, indeed I explicitly adverted to it. (I don't actually think the valuable attitudes are restricted to the humanities, as I have repeatedly made clear. Indeed, on the basis of my reading of the debunkers I suspect the values are more present in mathematics departments than in some cultural studies departments.) That such attitudes flourished in the past in salon society, in convents, in learned societies, in the homes of aristocrats is just beaut by me (and something of the sort was acknowledged by Newman).

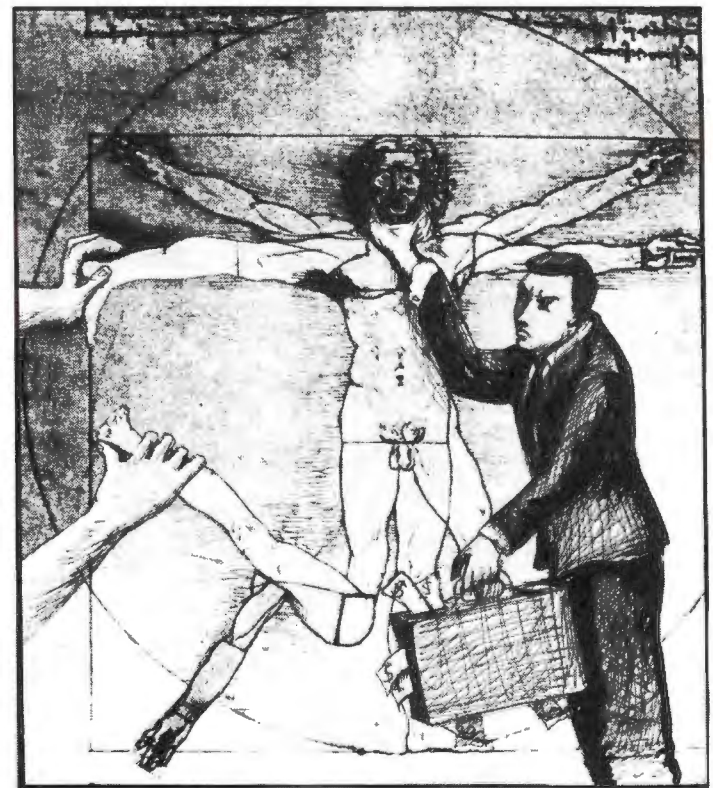
These days, however, there is, I believe, less and less room in the wider society for the cultivation of the reflective attitudes, and universities have for some time provided a focus for such activities as encourage their development. Sneering at their significance for universities is a poor response to these changing circumstances.

Yet another central debunking move that draws upon history is one that claims to show the futility of value claims such as are central to the liberal defence. This is an old move and it has many forms. The basic idea is that the observed divergence of values, or ethical ideals, or moral concepts throughout history, somehow shows the futility of some current value claim or ethical recommendation. Although it is couched in the language of ethical relativism, usually of a cultural variety, the futility thesis should be distinguished from relativism as a meta-ethical position, since sophisticated philosophical versions of relativism disavow the sceptical or nihilistic conclusions often thought to flow from the theory. A good deal of argument is required to show that relativism has any consequences at all for substantive normative thought, and it would help to distinguish between vulgar and sophisticated versions of relativism. There is a great deal of hard philosophy to be done (and indeed a lot of it is already being done) around these points and this is not the place to engage in it, but I will simply assert that historical variability by itself shows nothing about the logical status of value judgements; it leaves open the central questions of whether some of the isolable moral outlooks are better or worse than oth-

ers; of whether, in spite of surface dissimilarities, they embody substantially similar ethical judgements; of whether the variability is in principles or in expression or in circumstances, and so on.

The crucial point here is that ethical commitment, discussion and argument are not suspect oddities or luxuries but are the essence of the debate about universities, just as they are crucial to the discussion of economics or politics. You can't avoid them by talking (as Stokes does) about difficulties in establishing deontological positions. Of course, there are difficulties in establishing deontic views (i.e. those that are concerned to give a fundamental place in ethics to duties, rights or virtues), just as there are difficulties in establishing utilitarian or cynical or Foucauldian views. So what? No one said ethics had to be easy, though in fact some of it is rather

*The crucial question is: where do these guys stand? And the sad answer, I am afraid, is that they stand with the powerful.*



easier than the debunkers imagine. In any case, at the end of the day, if you are considering government policies, vice-chancellors' dictates, trade union demands, the requirements of 'governmentality', you have to come clean



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about what you value and why.

This is where the debunkers are most elusive, uneasy and, I hate to say, supine. After all the dated Weberian carry-on about values as non-rational (not irrational, I might add, even on his own account), the crucial question is: where do these guys stand? And the sad answer, I am afraid, is that they stand with the powerful; because the powerful are dominant, are moving things, are successful, are non-ideal, are 'non-essential', are real.

This is the only conclusion to be drawn from the final sections of Hunter's paper. There he tells us that 'governmentality' is a fact of university life today, that it is 'unpredictable', that 'administrative and managerial techniques' abound as a result of the historical processes that Foucault charts, and so on. He also claims that it is 'futile' to appeal to 'absolute ethical and intellectual principle', but apart from the standard relativist argument and the standard distortion of it, he gives us no reason to think it impossible to develop an evaluative critique of 'governmentality' etc.

The real questions concern whether the dramatic changes in university life we have experienced since Dawkins are good or bad; whether the removal of power and responsibility from academics to bureaucrats and managerial 'leaders' is good or bad; whether the creation of huge universities with poorer research facilities and significant numbers of poorly-educated, incomprehending students who cannot cope with what they are offered is good or bad; whether the marketing of university 'products' in order to sustain serious research and teaching is good or bad.

All of these are important questions and the answers are complex and urgently need discussion, but the Foucault effect, at least in the hands of the debunkers, is out to avoid all this. Not, of course, that they can really avoid value judgments; it's just that they unwittingly assert them and give no arguments for them. So, Hunter tells us that some government programs, 'such as the improvement of national economic efficiency and productivity, can no doubt be subjected to the usual denunciations; others—expanding the number of university places, increasing the participation of

women, intervening in irrational employment and promotions procedures, equalising per-student funding—cannot' (p64). Perhaps this is sociology, but it sounds awfully like ultimate values, and pretty absolutist ones at that. Moreover, the crude relativism characteristic of the debunkers' writings gets much of its purchase from grotesque parodies of the positions it opposes. I cannot think of anyone who propounds the liberal defence and holds, as Hunter absurdly supposes, that the humanities academy 'is the custodian of a goal whose completeness and universality identifies it with the absolute end of humanity as such—the culture of the whole person and the disinterested pursuit of knowledge' (p9).

Along with this distortion goes his assertion that, for the humanities academy, 'culture and knowledge are "ends in themselves" and this makes them final for all other ends, including national needs' (p9). In fact, something can be an end in itself but nonetheless practically subordinate to purposes that are also other ends in themselves. This may seem strange if one has not studied the matter seriously, but it should be clear that the disinterested pursuit of significant truth remains intrinsically valuable even if you ought not to pursue it right now because you need to save someone's life or to recover your health by having a holiday.

Another confusion may be found in Stokes, who follows Max Weber in holding that all ultimate values are matters of faith (supposedly in contrast to the ultimate commitments of science), and who worries that any ethic of 'conviction' so founded may lead to fanaticism. But *anything* may lead to fanaticism, even relativism, even science. The point about relativism is worth remembering since its advocates often think that relativism entails tolerance about others' values. But all relativism entails here is that all values are epistemically on a par, including the values of intolerance and tolerance, brutality and kindness, as is well brought out by a comment of the late, and generally unlamented, Benito Mussolini: 'if relativism signifies contempt for fixed categories and men who claim to be the bearers of an objective, immortal truth ... then there is nothing more relativistic than Fas-



cist attitudes and activities ... From the fact that all ideologies are mere fictions, the modern relativist infers that everybody has the right to create for himself his own ideology and to attempt to enforce it with all the energy of which he is capable.' In any case there is no avoiding an ethic of 'conviction' because that is what every ethic or value rests upon.

I do not want to be too disrespectful about Weber. I think he wrote some excellent and stimulating stuff. But his account of ethics and his associated picture of rationality are among his less important contributions. The idea that science is somehow the sole repository of 'rationality' and that values and ethics are to be strikingly contrasted with the scientific area of the rational, embodies so many confusions about science and ordinary life that it is amazing to see it peddled as some contemporary revelation.

The activity of science is riddled with valuations, and is unintelligible without ultimate commitments—to experiment, to logic, to mathematical truth, to truth rather than convenience, and so on. And this is not to mention the false values that disfigure much activity that passes as scientific. And the idea that it is impossible to reason about value or ethical matters is refuted by the experience of everyone who has ever tried to think hard about what to do in difficult situations and has bothered to seek the advice of others. Of course, ultimate values and ideals and visions of the good life need to be discussed and reasoned about in more subtle, complex and imaginative ways than a debate about whether to get rid of troublesome rodents by buying a mouse trap or poison, but whoever thought it would be otherwise?

A final point about the currently pervasive influence of certain versions of philosophy in literary studies, history, cultural studies and sociology. Far be it from me to denigrate my own subject, for I believe that philosophy has much to contribute to the study of culture, literature, and society. Nonetheless, the relation between deep and complex philosophical analyses of concepts like value, cause, self, time, knowledge, truth and reality, on the one hand, and literary, cultural and historical studies on the other is far

less simple than much writing in these areas assumes. It is a matter of amazement to me that people think that calling something 'constructed' is supposed to show that we can't draw objective evaluative conclusions using the concept, or that it is somehow fragile or bogus. Of course, there is a sense in which the concept of 'person' is socially constructed and so is the concept of an 'individual' and so, most palpably, are the concepts beloved of the debunkers and frequently used quite uncritically by them; for example, 'society' and 'culture' and 'history'. Hunter tells us that 'liberal education is only one among several historically available cultivations of personhood' (p31). No doubt. But the question is whether it is a better cultivation than, for example, the historically very influential Nazi 'cultivation of personhood' or the late, unlamented communist version.

The pre-Socratic philosopher Thales, the founder of Western philosophy, began Western metaphysics and Western science with the bold speculation that reality was fundamentally constituted by water. Much of the presently fashionable employment of historicist and amateurish metaphysics strikes me as akin to some latter-day Thales who has discovered that basically everything is water and who rushes around concluding that all thoughts are sloppy and only soggy values are acceptable. Or like a latter day idealist philosopher who proclaims that time is unreal and thereby concludes that it is false that he had breakfast before he had lunch. Metaphysics is itself difficult and its relation to other orders of thought is an equally difficult matter. The half-baked deployment of metaphysical categories in a good deal of contemporary cultural, social and literary studies is highly problematic, and often disfigures their positive achievements.

It also conspires too often with other tendencies in the contemporary academy to erode confidence in the power or validity of central intellectual values, and to belittle the significance of a reasoned critique and evaluation of the processes of institutional change. ■

**Tony Coady** is Boyce Gibson professor of philosophy in the University of Melbourne.

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## What has happened to the Cambodian boat people

**I**N EARLIER ISSUES OF *Eureka Street* I described the plight of the Cambodian boat people. Today, most of them are still imprisoned. It is sufficient to say that they continue to suffer all the depression, diminishment, anger and uncertainty that those unfairly imprisoned feel. But controversy about their detention and their fate has continued. This is the current state of play.

Most of the boat people who appealed against the decision to deny them refugee status have now had their cases heard. Some, especially the ethnic Vietnamese among them, have been awarded refugee status. Some of those whose claims were rejected have appealed to the Federal Court against the decision.

One of these cases has been decided in Sydney. The appeal was rejected. But the judge ruled that, contrary to the Immigration Minister's previous declarations, he was able to consider their case on humanitarian grounds. The minister, Nick Bolkus, decided not to decide whether to do so. A decision not to decide in this case cannot be appealed!

At the time of writing, another case is proceeding in Melbourne. Counsel for the refugees have alleged that the Immigration Department has embodied an institutional bias against asylum seekers. In the course of the proceedings, the department asked the Federal Police to investigate the disappearance of documents, relating to the case. There have been, moreover, internal changes at senior level within the department itself.

Appeals have also been made to the High Court for damages due to illegal imprisonment. And lawyers representing the asylum seekers have also begun proceedings before the International Committee for Human

Rights against their continuing detention. They argue that detention contravenes the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, to which Australia is a signatory.

The Cambodians, however, have won considerable public support, much of it directed against detention. Refugee Week formed a focus for this support. The Australian bishops have insisted on the harm done by detention, and demanded the Cambodians' release, and the length of the detention suffered by the Cambodians was criticised by the United Nations. Arthur Helton, a United States authority on refugee law procedures claimed that detention was neither ethical, necessary nor useful.

Perhaps most significantly, bipartisan support for detention has apparently ended. Peter Baume, a former Liberal minister, attacked it vehemently in a conference on the Holocaust and Jim Short, the opposition spokesman on immigration, has denounced it as damaging to Australia's interests.

Despite this criticism, however, the government has so far maintained its position. This was recently summarised by Laurie Oakes in an article in *The Bulletin*, in which he provides the policy context of the remarks made by the Minister, in recent months. Both men claim that the Australian procedures of refugee determination are fair and efficient, that on-shore asylum seekers must be detained to deter others from coming in that way, that the conditions of detention are satisfactory, and that the long detention of the asylum seekers has been due largely to their lawyers. The case is asserted rather than argued.

In the face of this determination it looks likely that the boat people who have not been accepted as refugees

will remain imprisoned until they are returned. It is also likely, however, that the Cambodian government will accept back into Cambodia only those who return voluntarily. Thus controversy will continue.

In my previous articles I asserted that the Australian policy was neither fair nor efficient. I pointed particularly to the unethical use of detention as a deterrent, and to the dominant part played by the Immigration Department in assessing claims for refugee status. In recent months changes in procedures have taken place, and a review of detention has been foreshadowed.

The primary determination of application for refugee status continues to be made within the department, but a Refugee Review Tribunal, consisting of single member panels from outside the department, has been established to hear appeals. This change is promising, particularly because the tribunal has the right to hear asylum seekers in person.

At the same time, the use of detention is to be reviewed by the joint standing committee on migration. Detention breeds unfairness in Australia's refugee policy, and underlies the vehement criticism of it within the Australian community. While any change in policy will come too late to benefit the Cambodians, it would be of inestimable benefit to Australia.

The detention and refusal to give residence on humanitarian grounds to the boat-people have been defended by the government on the grounds that they are essential if Australian policy is to be consistent and impartial. ■

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# Rubber stamp, paper deals

ON 21 JULY, just after this edition of *Eureka Street* went to press, the Trade Practices Commission was expected to endorse a new arrangement for the distribution of daily newspapers and magazines in Victoria. Such a decision would approve the continuation of a deal between newsagents, major magazine and newspaper publishers that leaves consumers and small magazines like this one right out of the picture.

The commission supports a modified version of a retail agreement that has provided newsagents with exclusive territories for the distribution and delivery of newspapers and magazines for almost 50 years. The commission first accepted the arrangement back in 1980, when it buckled under pressure from the Fraser government arguing for the endorsement of the newsagency system in the name of democracy.

Thirteen years later, however, despite both sides of politics now venerating the market as the saviours of our way of life, the commission seems prepared to ignore not only the federal government's rhetoric but its own. Most states have variations of the Victorian newsagency system; all of them involve agreements between newspapers and publishers that would be illegal were it not for the power of the Trade Practices Commission to approve anti-competitive practices in certain circumstances.

If your local newsagent reliably delivers your newspapers and accurately bills you, this will be of no particular significance. If you happen to be a newsagent, your licence to print money will be preserved for the time being. However, if you are one of those who cannot rely on your local newsagent to deliver your morning paper, bill you accurately, or stock your favourite small magazine, you are certain to be irritated by the arrangement that will leave you without a choice of newsagents for up to another five years.

Your lack of choice gives newspaper publishers (who else these days, but Murdoch and Fairfax?) and newsagents the right to maintain exclusive supply and distribution networks. For the time being, it even allows authorised newsagents to continue the lucrative practice of taking a cut on the

supply of newspapers and magazines they don't even touch. Some subagencies and 'unauthorised' newsagents (called 'look alike' in the trade) have a big enough turnover to be supplied directly by publishers. Nevertheless, they will still have to pay their local authorised newsagent half the markup on the papers they sell. For this, the newsagent handles the publisher's bill. Easy money? The Trade Practices Commission is prepared to endorse this arrangement for another two years, while authorised newsagents get used to the idea of more competition.

However, newsagents have been on notice of the challenge to their cosy deal with publishers since 1987, when the commission first announced an investigation into the system. For at least as long, the newspapers they sell have all been vocal supporters of the contention that competition is the answer to Australia's economic woes. Yet both publishers and retailers were slow to respond to the commission's review. It took encouragement, threat and uncharacteristic patience on the part of the commission to move the industry.

The new arrangements recognise that a less restrictive distribution and sales market is desirable and will, perhaps, emerge. It will eventually be easier to set up new retail newspaper and magazine outlets, while the perks that authorised newsagents derive from the present system will be gradually phased out. The problem is that consumers—the long-suffering newspaper and magazine buyers—have been neglected. After a decade in which consumer rights figured prominently in debates about retailing and the economy, the commission's newsagents inquiry has been overlooked by the consumer groups, while assertions that a newsagency system guarantees the most effective, widespread and efficient distribution of the printed word have gone unchallenged by media interest and lobby groups. The Trade

Practices Commission is prepared to allow the newspaper home delivery service to remain a territorial monopoly, accepting arguments from the industry that this ensures the cheapest and most reliable service. The commission neither sought nor received any evidence to back this claim, despite past comments that home delivery was a common source of complaints against authorised newsagents.

And what are 'authorised' newsagents? They happen to be very profitable retail businesses, exclusively authorised by the industry regulator to distribute newspapers and magazines in your neighbourhood. In Victoria the industry regulator is the Newsagency Council of Victoria Limited, a company run by the local Murdoch and Fairfax newspaper interests and the Victorian Authorised Newsagents Association. An industry regulator run by the industry! It does not publish reports (annual company financial returns are the limit of its openness), releases no information about how it deals with complaints, provides no avenue for consumer appeal against its rulings and has not even considered the question of consumer representation on its board. The Newsagency Council has never withdrawn a newsagent's authorisation. So much for self-regulation.

The Trade Practices Commission can authorise restrictive retail and marketing arrangements if the public benefit of such arrangements outweighs the anti-competitive impact of the deal. As far as the Victorian newsagency system goes, the commission has yet to prove its case.

There will, no doubt, be ample opportunity to do so, for while Victorian newsagents and publishers have given ground, their counterparts in New South Wales and Queensland are digging in for a tough battle to preserve their cosy little arrangements. ■

David Lane is an ABC producer.

## Nixon

*For some reason  
he reminds me  
of Lee Harvey Oswald,  
the poor pinched features,  
that wrong-side-of-the-fence look,  
that same determination  
to force matters, redeem, twist,  
attack.*



## Franco

*Strange that Spain,  
the land of flamenco, Lorca, Goya,  
Picasso, toreadors, Cervantes,  
Queen Isabella the First,  
should extrude a leader  
entirely without personality.*

## Menzies

*His secret was sacerdotal,  
the avuncular primate,  
urbane, shrewd, anecdotal,  
blessing flocks from Jeparit to Highgate.*



## Churchill

*The personification of John Bull,  
all dog from the outside,  
quintessential bull inside,  
superlative when at war,  
slaughtering or cornered in a pit;  
with peace, the fire lit,  
abdomen full,  
fleas contained by pesticides,  
he lay down and snored.*

## Stalin

*If he had graduated as a seminarian,  
then converted to Roman Catholicism,  
he would have been Vicar of Christ, Pope,  
beatific exemplar of the Church Militant.*

DRAWINGS BY LES TANNER



## Hitler

*Mother Austria, the bitch,  
whelped a rabid dog,  
who, reincarnate, megalomaniac,  
was worshipped like a God of the Bog.*



## De Gaulle

*Monsieur Anvil on stilts,  
who when he sniffed  
raised women's skirts,  
who when he snorted  
chopped up the English Channel,  
no mere mortal—  
even a King's crown tilts.  
Popes kiss the dirt—  
for him foreigners, anti-Gaullists,  
were like sand to a camel  
no mere mortal,  
de Gaulle was France.*

## Mrs Thatcher

For Paddy Morgan

*A daughter of Imperial Rome,  
neither plebeian nor patrician,  
able to thrust and shear to the bone,  
a Boadicea turned female centurion  
who was strangely desperate to rule the waves  
while forging a nation of pit-managers and slaves.*



## Machiavelli

*Much studied in heaven and hell  
by Chamberlain, Roosevelt, et al.*

## Kennedy

*A target for assassination from the start,  
wealthy, handsome, silver-tongued, conceited,  
only a generation away from the rackets, mobs,  
his skin veneered with education and the arts,  
less interested in legislation than gash and boobs,  
Kennedy denied the Great Gatsby in his head.*

## Mao Tse-tung

*China's mock-Buddha,  
who when he swam  
the Yangtze River  
looked like a giant udder.*

*Behind all that milk  
and poetry  
lurked yet one more warlord  
seeking to sire a dynasty.*

## Billy Hughes

*The first Labour Rat  
of many,  
Australia's Jack Sprat,  
who practised Tammany  
as Schnabel  
practised the piano.  
The English crowed  
about him, a marvel,  
at first delivering so many lads,  
so many Big Diggers,  
to the trenches, suicide squads  
protecting Great Britain's purse.*



## Waldheim

*Descended from foresters  
and timbercutters  
who axed, sawed, split,  
for a living,  
who rarely ventured  
out into light,  
eaters of pork and deer  
who looked half-fox, half-wolf,  
who supplied the towns' wood  
for stock, scaffold,  
coffin, pew, crucifix,  
yet still worshipped Gods  
such as Woden and Thor,  
and feared, loathed,  
demons such as dwarves  
with their distorted bodies,  
gibbous backs, large heads,  
and long beards.*

## Mussolini

*Straight out of Verdi's operas,  
Don Carlos, Falstaff, Othello,  
he fandangoed across Italy's stage  
from Etna to the Dolomites.  
Purple baritone his tenor,  
resembling a cannonball on a bass drum,  
Pope Benito the First,  
Caesar in a Lamborghini,  
he fomented supplicant crowds,  
an animated uniform  
which troops trooped murderously to obey.  
Yet more than pomp and circumstance,  
magicianship, oratory, delusion, farce,  
Il Duce  
at that time expressed to a nicety  
deeply held European ideas.*





# The comfort of strangers

**A** PARK BENCH is as good a place as any on which to meet a hitherto unknown ancestor. But, as anyone who has tried will know, it is not as good a place as any on which to spend a night. I run these thoughts together because I have experimental confirmation of both of them. The ancestor, one René Cassin, is the eponymous guardian of Place René Cassin, an undistinguished bit of pavement in the Paris park where I have just slept.

Well, spent the night. I didn't sleep much. Since I have only recently made René's acquaintance I don't know too much about his habits when alive. But as the dead guardian of a bit of pavement he is certainly a hospitable soul, for itinerant impecunious Australians are not the least bizarre people you can meet in Place René Cassin. This tolerance is to René's credit, of course, but I hope he will not be too offended if I add that it also makes his hospitality a little threatening. Sensible people sleep with both eyes open in Place René Cassin. Since I have never mastered this skill, I decide that I must seek more secure quarters for the two nights remaining to me in Paris.

(Later I will learn that René, a French politician of the '40s and '50s, won a Nobel Peace Prize for doing something magnanimous. He forgave the Germans for the war, I think. Or did he forgive the English for the Hundred Years War? Maybe he only ordered a moratorium on telling jokes about Belgians. Whatever it was, my experience of his bit of pavement suggests that he belonged to a particularly trusting branch of the family).

So it is a time to break family ties, even recently forged ones, and make a straightforward appeal to strangers instead. To beg. A browse through my *Plan de Paris* suggests that a good place to try might be St Joseph's Church, where the priests speak English. I find this establishment and tell my story to a young Irishman who says, 'Ah, that was very unwise' when I mention my previous choice of sleeping arrangements. Since being affronted on behalf of a recently-met dead ancestor is a ridiculous form of pride in a beggar, or anyone, I am not in the least offended. Besides, the man is right. It was very unwise.

It was not the first unwise thing I have done in this town. Placing a wallet full of cash and traveller's cheques down on a counter in a railway station, so that I might have both hands free to take a note of departure times, was also pretty stupid. It is why I am begging now.

I tell this story to the priest, and add that I am not asking for more money, or food, merely for a secure place to throw a sleeping bag. He is sympathetic but explains that St Joseph's Church does not offer such facilities. 'There's really only one way I can help you,' he says. And he reaches into his pocket, takes out 500 francs and hands it to me: 'You should be able to get a hotel for two nights with this.'

I am embarrassed, overwhelmed. I try to repeat my speech about not wanting money but the words come out as 'Thank you'. Mainly, of course, because the prospect of spending two nights in a hotel is several thousand times more appealing than the prospect of returning to my ancestor's park bench. But also because kindness deserves gratitude, not excuses.

So I sleep easy for two nights and catch a plane to Kuala Lumpur, where there will be a connection to Melbourne. In ordinary disasters-that-happened-on-my-trip stories, this would be the same as saying 'Everything's all right now'. But since this is a story about someone too stupid to keep a firm grip on his own wallet, things are not *quite* all right. In Kuala Lumpur I have to wait 14 hours for the connection, so the airline books me into a hotel for the day. Which means that I have to pass through customs, and enter the country officially. Which in turn means that I have to pay airport tax to get back out again. Which, when you have virtually no cash and are too quixotic to carry credit cards, is a problem.

Virtually no cash. Actually I still have 20 francs, 20 dinars and four Australian dollars. I pocket the dollars and change the rest into Malaysian currency. It comes to \$M17.95, and the airport tax is \$20. Deciding that the only way to cope with officialdom anywhere is to front it, I return to the airport. It's probably not true that fronting officialdom is the best way to cope with it, but what would I know anyway.

At the airport information desk I explain my predicament to a serious-looking woman who twitches when I say I am Australian. Later I will find out that an Australian was hanged in Kuala Lumpur jail on the same day. I am glad I do not know this when I am speaking to her, because her next move is to send me to the security desk.

The woman has told me to ask for the head of security, who, when he shows up, looks less serious than she but very busy nonetheless. He is wearing three mobile phones and appears to be conducting separate conversations on each of them. I am not keen on starting a fourth conversation but do so anyway. When I explain the problem he looks startled: 'So what, you want a tax exemption?' No, I say, but I am two dollars and five cents short of the required amount. He grins, telling me that the problem is easy to fix. And he reaches into his pocket, takes out \$3 and hands it to me.

Being handed three Malaysian dollars can be as overwhelming as being handed 500 French francs. And I suspect that security guards in Malaysia are less likely than priests in France to be well disposed to indigent Australians. But to Mr Peter Lo, and to Fr Paul Francis CP, I am, simply, grateful. ■

Ray Cassin is the production editor of *Eureka Street*.

# The poet scientist

*'Miroslav Holub is 70 but he looks about 55. When we met in the immunology institute where he works in Prague, he stood before me strong, energetic, dressed entirely in white: he looks like a man who gets things done. But on closer inspection you notice something about his eyes, or the muscles around them. He looks baffled. Maybe that's why he is so good a poet and so good a scientist—he is too intelligent to be certain of anything.'*

**Miroslav Holub will visit the Melbourne Writers' Festival in September.**

**Rod Beecham:** *Your latest book (Vanishing Lung Syndrome) seems to be very anti-rationalist.*

**Miroslav Holub:** I am never anti-rationalistic or anti-scientific. Actually, it may be due to the feeling that the great wave of Czech literature in the past four or five years is getting into more deeply personal positions, more personal involvement, more emotional standpoints, and maybe—not willingly—I tried to imitate, to catch this trend. But it was definitely not my intention. The intention of the book was to be my last comment on the former regime.

*But, for example, in '1751' you seem to associate the Encyclopaedists with institutionalised insanity.*

No, I never felt misgivings about the Encyclopaedists. The point in this prose poem is that at the same time as [they were making] the greatest spiritual effort to classify, to explain the human world, in the era of this most sane project you get the first definition of insanity, or the practical treatment of insanity. The second reference to Diderot [in *Vanishing Lung Syndrome*] is actually a reference to Kundera's use of Diderot. I had, in a way, Kundera's attitude to the Encyclopaedists, and to Dostoevsky.

*Which is?*

When he was invited to make a dramatisation of, I think, *The Idiot*, for a Prague theatre in 1969 he commented: 'I couldn't do it, because although I knew Dostoevsky didn't send the tanks, he was still a Russian.'

*Do you share his anti-Russian feeling?*

Very much. Actually, right now, I'm submitting a comment on an article about the disenchantment of the population with the new freedom. My comment is that

you can't compare the two situations. We are no longer a colony in the crude, Orwellian sense. You can't compare situations when you get out of Animal Farm. In a way, you're missing Animal Farm because you've been used to it—not only for 30 years but maybe for 300 years. So we are trying to make our own Animal Farm, which is very sad, but there is a new situation, and the national aspect of the situation is very important to me.

*I've read a US military history of the First World War which argues that it was a mistake to dismantle the Austro-Hungarian Empire.*

There is the same feeling in some heads here, that it shouldn't have been broken up, and even in early 1990 there were hints that we would make some sort of close association with former Austro-Hungarian Empire nations.

I think you may say, by the same token, that if it had stayed together it would be broken up by now. Because if it had stayed it would have been under heavy German pressure ... It would have disappeared. You can't compare history, of course.

*The suggestion is that a large state would have been harder for Nazi Germany to gobble up in the 1930s.*

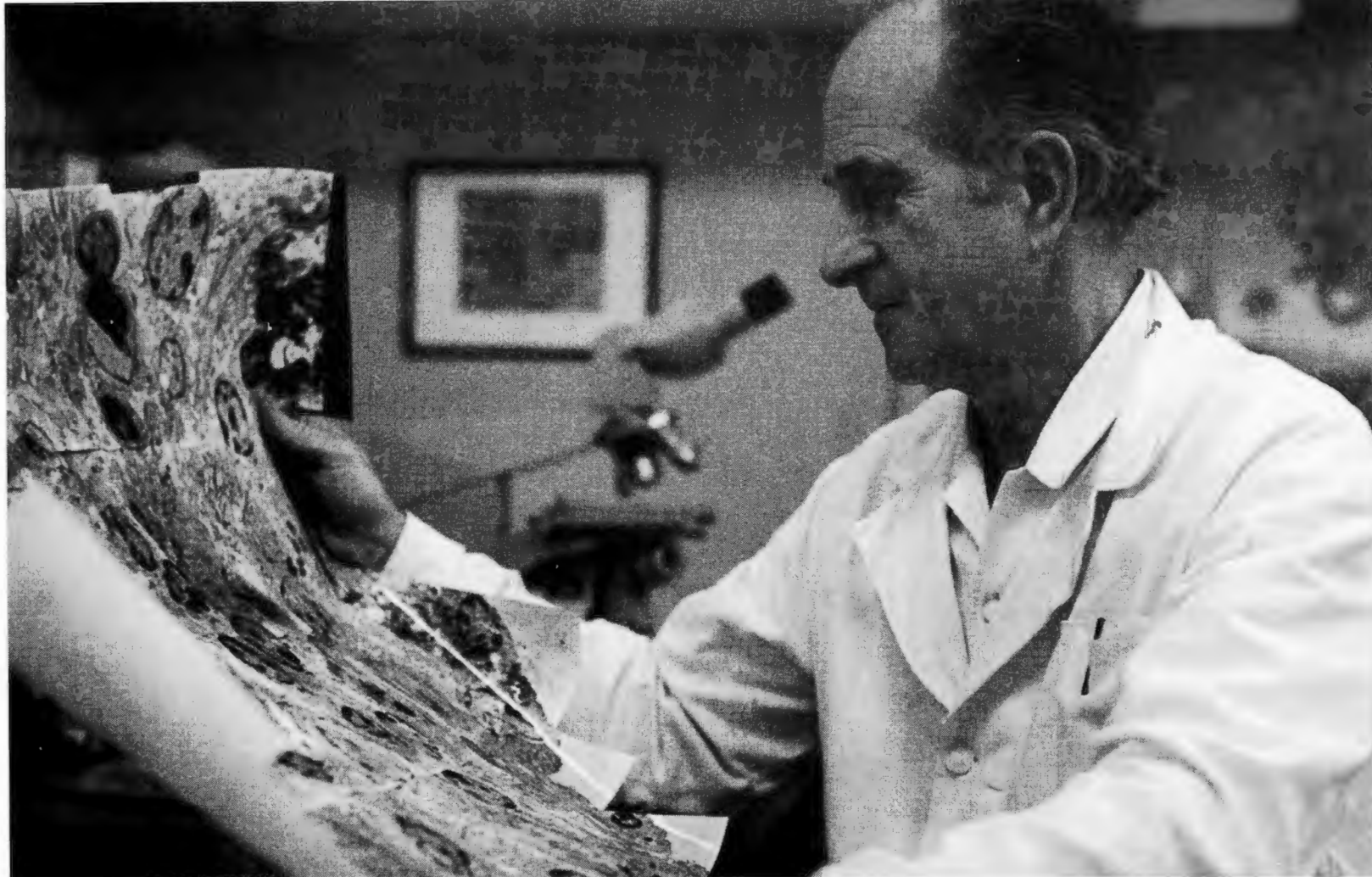
If you are a shark you can find other ways to tear things to pieces. It's very hard to speculate. I think that the proper answer is it would have broken up.

*Another concern of your book is the separation of words from things.*

You are quite right, but the author shouldn't say to the reader, 'You are right,' because it's your reading. But it was my intention: 'Skinning' is a key poem.







*It seems to warn of the way words, when subsumed by utopian ideology, become mere ideological counters. Yes, that would be a more broad meaning of the poem, or of the book.*

*And that, as Havel writes in 'Anatomy of a Reticence', utopianism in practice always means totalitarianism. Yes, because with euphemism you get out of the controls, out of all the feedback mechanisms of reality. You get loose, simply, and it is a human tendency to get into the absolute—in a way, into an individual totalitarianism. I quite approve. One of the blessings of the scientific position in the world is that you don't get loose ... you don't aspire to too much global or abstract thinking because you feel you are in a process of collective global thinking. In this sense it's almost like a church, but not bad.*

*When did you start writing poetry?*

I started, like everybody else, when I was 18 or 19, to be more interesting for the other sex and so on. I published about two or three poems, that's all. Then came the '50s, and it was total science, for everybody. Except for the party hacks, the party poets, you had to shut up, and so I was waiting until I was 35. Maybe it was good, because when I now look back on the poems I wrote before I don't understand them, I don't like them. I'm happy I was obliged to shut up.

I finally restructured my poetry, not because my soul or my spirit changed, but I simply came across other examples I didn't know before. In the late '40s and

early '50s I came across Jacques Prévert, I came across the young Poles, and then the Beats, the San Francisco poets. And this was something. I thought, 'Well! That's the way. That's the way I really like.'

When I had my first opportunity to put together a book, Mr Grossman, who was later the theatre director of Havel, became editor of a publishing house and he figured out what is my style. He did it for me, and maybe without him I wouldn't have gone in this direction. I always feel I am built in a network, even in literature. So my style and my poetry are, in a way, not so personal. It's as if you are using the wrong shoes for walking, and somebody says, 'That's all wrong: you have to have real jogging shoes.'

*You use a lot of medical terms in your poems, and you've divided the book into sections with clinical titles.*

I think this whole division of the book was rather mechanistic. Nowadays, if I had a year to go, I would have skipped it. 'Syncope', 'Symptom', 'Syndrome'—it was a little childish to make such a division.

*It seemed to me that there was an internal affinity between the poems of the various groups. In the first section, for example, there seems to be a theme of ideology removing us from the truth rather than bringing us closer to it. The poem 'Parasite', for example, I took as an attack on the doctrine of historical necessity.*

I didn't have this in mind. It is basically an image of a parasite with political implications for me. The metaphors are constructed on the notion of a parasite.

*Miroslav Holub in the laboratory.*

*Photo: Vojtech Pisarik.*

*Another poem I liked very much was 'Fish'. Again, it seemed strongly political: the corrupt edifice that sustains an absolutism which has become leaderless and inert, as symbolized by the dead emperor sitting on his throne.*

Actually, this is a legend, but it's an historical possibility. He had 20 identical palaces because in his later years he was always afraid of assassination. I was always intrigued by this position of the absolutist leader of the nation and how he defends himself. My whole question was always: 'How many Brezhnevs are there around? How many Gaddafis are around? Is it just one? Or is it a double? Or a double of a double?' And this emperor, Qin Shi-Huang-ti, may have had not only identical palaces but identical personalities around him. I always comment when I read this poem, 'This is about an old Chinese emperor,' but when you read it in Czechoslovakia everyone knows this is a Russian emperor.

*Was any reason given for the ban placed on your writings in the '70s?*

Signing the *2000 Words Manifesto*. The Russians, or the Czech Politburo, published a White Book on the events in '68, and whoever was mentioned in the book was banned. It was automatic, it was the bulk of Czech literature, and most people had to be expelled from the party, but I couldn't be expelled from the party because I was never in the party. So I was transferred from the Academy here. I became a non-person, which was a very nice period because there was no television, no broadcasts, no interviews, no questions. I was a non-person but I did write a lot because it would be published without my name, which was a typical totalitarian or communist hypocrisy, because I have a very peculiar style, even in prose. The censor was not so stupid that he wouldn't know, but he didn't care: his responsibility was from one or zero to 10, and the arithmetic was OK.

*Can you recall what you were doing and how you felt during the events of 1989?*

My wife had developed appendicitis. She was here in the hospital, and I was running from the city, back to the laboratory, back to her bed. They gave her an infusion, and she passed away. [It was a reaction to the antibiotics.]

Practically, I was not able to go anywhere for a long time because of this condition. I couldn't take part in an opportunistic way in all that happiness. But I felt something when the first meeting between the Prime Minister and Havel happened—actually, when the attempt to have army intervention failed on the third day. We felt maybe we were entering a new period in our lives, in our history.

*Did you think you would live to see it?*

No, never. There was some hope since Gorbachev, since '86, but for something like '68. We didn't understand that Big Brother had such rotten boots already, and was dilapidating anyway.

*Something I hadn't realised before talking to people here is how mediocrity and incompetence were actually fostered by the regime after 1968 in the interests of political peace.*

The regime, in a way, supported incompetence, and now we are suffering for it, because still we are unable to get rid of the incompetent people. A real free-market or capitalist psychology wouldn't tolerate them, but we still tolerate something in the middle which is very bureaucratic or bureaucratically-minded and basically very inefficient, and this is a heavy burden on the regime.

*Returning to the subject of words and skin, it's not just in the poem 'Skinning' that you associate the two. I took 'Crush Syndrome' to be on that theme as well. The skin of the hand that is crushed is like words, which connect us with the world and with ourselves.*

Yes. Suddenly the whole definition, the sense of the personality gets not just into the skin: it was the fingers that were really crushed, it was bones. Probably, in a broad sense, it's close to the same—in the same direction.

*Does the machine in which the hand is crushed have any symbolic significance?*

It just happened. The machine is not essential. But, exactly as in this poem, I had a very funny experience just recently. Robert Ward, an English critic who reviewed this book, wrote to me just a month ago that he had an accident which broke his wrist bones, and he was very gloomy and very melancholy about the possibilities—he couldn't write with the hand, and so on. Then he remembered the book and came back to the 'Crush Syndrome' poem, and with the lines, 'In that moment/I realized I had a soul,' he started, he said, to smile and giggle, and it was at that moment, he said, he realized his condition was not so great. That's the best thing that can happen to a poem, that it really helped somebody. Otherwise, I would say, poetry is like yoghurt: you read it, it's good for your health, but you can't do anything with it.

*Why did you choose science as a young man? Was it simply to fit in with the prevailing mood of the time?*

No. It may be some family influence, because the family life was always going out, having walks in a forest, always outside in so-called 'nature', in the middle of nature, and my mother educated me in knowing plants, knowing stones, knowing rocks and birds and so on. So I was already in a sort of naturalist's curriculum when I was 15 or 16. And then I decided to write poetry and, consequently, as with most things, went on and on. I just never stopped.

*Personally, I don't see any conflict between science and poetry, but a lot of people do. Has that been your experience?*

Yes, yes. Always you feel like somebody with two heads, something very strange.



*Do you think it stems from a post-romantic view of poetry and what a poet should be?*

Partly, but partly it's in a way a consequence of professionalisation, specialisation. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the specialisation in university studies was not [so extensive] as it is nowadays. Especially in American and English universities, you form in communities, already for 18 and 20-year-old people. You are living in communities and, by definition, rejecting the attitudes of the other communities. So we are not, basically, so different, but we are simply friends of one or the other camp.

*Do you think poetry has been impoverished, by the view—held, indeed, by some poets and critics—that it is a specialist activity, removed from the workaday world?*

If you take poetry as a wall, my answer would be yes, because all my life I have followed the dual axis of basic imagery and of forming it and always there is not enough to take the metaphors from. So you are reusing what Robert Burns called 'the old leaps' again and again, because you are referring to the same visible or feasible reality, and my obsession, even with the scientific terms, is just to get out of this feasible reality.

*To make it new.*

To make it new, yes. Sometimes I even use hermetic words to indicate there is another reality. A typical poem is 'Vanishing Lung Syndrome', where it says, 'Inside there may be growing / A sea monster within a sea monster,' 'the wood-block baby,' 'a black, talking bird,' which is quite acceptable, and then I say, 'a disappearance of perfusion, and angiography,' and it is the same thing. My God, what is a wood-block baby that would swallow father, mother, horses and so on? Can you visualise it? It's a fairy tale, simply.

People would accept any wood-block baby, but they wouldn't accept in a poem 'scintigraphy'. But I like 'scintigraphy'. I know it's a [difficult] word for the reader, but from the whole content he must know it's something happening in the lung when you have emphysema, that's all.

*Your closing stanza—'lost in the landscape/where only surgeons/write poems'—is quite ironic in view of what we've just been talking about.*

Yes, yes. It is one of the key places in the whole book, 'surgeons/write poems.' This is one of the small hints in the possibility that if you really know something about the body, or about physiology, or about anatomy, or about pathology, then it can help your imagery. I'm a pathologist—when you open the lung up, when you see a giant emphysema, it's really like an empty room. The metaphor seems to be slightly surreal but, basically, it gets in your mind.

*You delve into history and geography as well—'The Stem Car', references to the Aztecs and to contempo-*

*rary New York. I find that a lot of contemporary writing refers only to other works of art. It's a meta-art. If you like, one that is parasitic on other art. Do you find this?*

I feel it with many persons. Because, knowingly or not knowingly, so many persons try to get out of the closed circle of 'me and my parents', 'me and my house', 'me and my city', 'me and my loves' and so on. With the zoological and botanical possibility to make comparisons, to make metaphors, you include all the possible areas of visual knowledge of mankind. Otherwise, it's more detached, and so many people try to get out by using this meta-art: poems or pictures. There are a lot of books which are just more pictures.

*Given the diminishing audience for poetry, why write it? Who needs it?*

Well, I think it's very human to do something which is very senseless. One of the possible definitions of man, as a planetary phenomenon, is that he is an entity which can afford to act senselessly, aimlessly. In a way, that's poetry. Poetry has some ritual connotations from olden times but otherwise it's a beautiful or funny form of senseless behaviour, and that's most human. And still it has something in connection with the world, because almost everybody has had a period in his life where he wanted to write a poem, or did write a poem.

So I think it's much more general than we accept, poetry; you play golf or you write a poem—there's nothing wrong with golf, there's nothing wrong with poetry. Maybe playing golf is more human, because you don't press other human beings to watch you, whereas with poetry you are obliging at least 200 or 500 or 2000 people to watch you. Maybe it's good for them, maybe not. I think it has lots of meaning because it's meaningless.

*The associated problem is, as Leavis said back in the '30s, that 'very little of contemporary intelligence concerns itself with poetry.' Only specialists—literary critics and fellow-practitioners—can read poetry properly.* This is the other trouble: you can't simply take a book and read it. You have to, both as a writer and as a reader, have your history of reading or writing, otherwise you are lost. You have always the story of serious music and pop music. My point, or my concern, is that you can't expect to get such a big crowd to a Mahler symphony. But at least you get some people there. And, in the long run, even the Mahler symphonies, or T.S. Eliot's poetry, would influence even the pop culture. Finally it gets through somewhere. ■

**Rod Beecham** is a Melbourne writer and reviewer. He visited Miroslav Holub in Prague.

## Urania's godson

**W**HEN THE AUTHORITIES in the now-defunct Soviet Union discovered that Joseph Brodsky was merely being the best poet of his generation, they gave him a sentence of five years in exile with hard labour for being a 'social parasite'. The time he served brought no change of heart, and after a while the Moscow realists expelled him from the country altogether. For the past 21 years he has been making the best of his relocation, chiefly by writing the works which have brought him, in 1987, the Nobel Prize for Literature, and, last year, the Légion d'honneur. He is 53, and he has forgotten nothing.

For a poet of his character, memory is of the greatest importance—not so much functional memory, which replicates, as creative memory, which initiates. Memory becomes the lyricism of time, as if experience had chosen to sing rather than to stammer. Whether Brodsky is working in verse or in prose, he is obviously trying to re-live what has happened to him, rather than to re-tread it, or even to reappropriate it. In his volume, *A Part of Speech* (1980), the first poem is 'Six Years Later'; in *To Urania* (1988), 'May 24, 1980', the date of his 40th birthday. In both his prime concern is not to keep track but to find a path.

Yet he often stresses that his first debt is not to time but to place. Urania is the muse of geography, and it is she, not Clio, who gets a poem and a book dedicated to her. In his prose collection *Less Than One* (1986), Brodsky writes, 'I'm not a historian, or a journalist, or an ethnographer. At best, I'm a traveller, a victim of geography. Not of history, be it noted, but of geogra-



Joseph Brodsky

Photo: Willem Diepraam

phy. This is what still links me with the country where it was my fate to be born, with our famed Third Rome.' His collections of poetry are strewn with titles that point to locale: 'North Baltic', 'Dutch Mistress', 'Allenby Road', 'Café Trieste: San Francisco', 'Near Alexandria', 'In Italy', and so on. If, for him, 'dust is the flesh of time', it is time made flesh in particular places.

The same sensibility is at work in his remarkably original prose. In the title piece of *Less Than One*, remembering what it was like to be growing up in Leningrad, he writes:

'The wide river lay white and frozen like a continent's tongue lapsed into silence, and the big bridge arched against the dark blue sky like an iron palate. If the little boy had two extra

minutes, he would slide down on the ice and take twenty or thirty steps to the middle. All this time he would be thinking about what the fish were doing under such heavy ice. Then he would stop, turn 180 degrees, and run back, nonstop, right up to the entrance of the school. He would burst into the hall, throw his hat and coat off onto a hook, and fly up the staircase and into his classroom.

'It is a big room with three rows of desks, a portrait of the Leader on the wall behind the teacher's chair, a map with two hemispheres, of which only one is legal. The little boy takes his seat, opens his briefcase, puts his pen and notebook on the desk, lifts his face, and prepares himself to hear drivel.'

**T**HERE IS A TEMPORAL VIVIDNESS everywhere in this, as there has been in the long piece which it concludes; but the reader who has never set foot in Brodsky's patial city knows, if only by analogy with his own experience, that a particular river and a particular room have found a tongue for themselves. The procedure is standard for Brodsky—which is not the same, of course, as saying that it comes automatically. Whether he is going to a place on the map or to a place in the mind, he goes with his eyes open, prepared for novelty. It is as if he is as surprised to find himself in the historic present of the last paragraph as the reader is surprised by its last word.

There is a moment in *The Voyage of The Beagle* when the young Charles Darwin, inspecting with disconcertment the ravages of an earthquake in



a South American city, muses on what it would be like if London were subject to such events. It is a contribution, perhaps not small, to Darwin's gradual revision of his sense of the whole human predicament and its context. Brodsky is a writer whose imagination itself provides the earthquake. He is a recaster, a reinterpreter. He identifies everything as able to present itself in a different light, not for the solacing of restlessness, but because it is pluriform.

**R**EALITY BEING TO HIS EYE SO FLUID, it is not surprising that he sees place as wedded to water. In 'A Guide to a Renamed City', he says:

'In the final analysis, the rapid growth of the city and of its splendour should be attributed first of all to the ubiquitous presence of water. The 12-mile-long Neva branching right in the centre of the town, with its 25 large and small coiling canals, provides this city with such a quantity of mirrors that narcissism becomes inevitable. Reflected every second by thousands of square feet of running silver amalgam, it's as if the city were constantly being filmed by its river, which discharges its footage into the Gulf of Finland, which, on a sunny day, looks like a depository of these blinding images. No wonder that sometimes this city gives the impression of an utter egoist preoccupied solely with its own appearance. It is true that in such places you pay more attention to façades than to faces; but the stone is incapable of self-procreation. The inexhaustible, maddening multiplication of all these pilasters, colonnades, porticoes hints at the nature of this urban narcissism, hints at the possibility that at least in the inanimate world water may be regarded as a condensed form of time.'

A passage like this—there are many such in Brodsky's prose pieces—both registers and invites fluidity of attention to a fluid world. Every sentence contains promptings towards a view of things as protean. 'Growth', 'branching', 'reflected', 'appearance', 'procreation', 'multiplication': what we have here is a bent of the mind that salutes a bent of the world. Handel's *Water Music* was not the best Handel could do, let alone what some others could

do: but the tag is apt for other forms of writing than Handel's. Some poets or prosaists write, like Bacon, architecturally, glorifying stability: some, like Shakespeare, write aquatically, glorying in mutation. Brodsky belongs in the second group. He is a dolphin of the imagination.

So, given that he has visited Venice many times, it was probably inevitable that we should eventually have from him something like *Watermark*. This is a prose book—short, handsomely presented, immoderately priced—prompted by that incorrigibly theatrical city. My first reaction on reading it was one of some disappointment; but then I reflected that it is the greedy who are most liable to disappointment, and Brodsky's sheer opulence of imaginative attention in other writings is prone to induce greed. Not that the opulence is lacking here, either. Of a vaporetto ride, he says,

'The boat's slow progress through the night was like the passage of a coherent thought through the subconscious. On both sides, knee-deep in pitch-black water, stood the enormous carved chests of dark palazzi filled with unfathomable treasures—most likely gold, judging from the low-intensity yellow electric glow emerging now and then from cracks in the shutters. The overall feeling was mythological, cyclopic, to be precise: I'd entered that infinity I beheld on the steps of the *stazione* and now was moving among its inhabitants, along the bevy of dormant cyclopes reclining in black water, now and then raising and lowering an eyelid.'

**A**S USUAL WE HAVE the baroque generosity of envisaging, the immediate access to zones of the mind as zones of the world go on display. If Venice is a living museum, then in order to see it adeptly the visitor may need the help of one or another muse. Brodsky writes as if his watching were itself a form of invocation of Urania.

The tinge of disappointment came from my looking for an outcome from all this, a resolution. Reading a book, we are all tempted to suppose that we have a rendezvous with closure. Whatever he does in poetry, Brodsky gives no such undertaking in prose. Describing his discovery when young of

a novel about Venice, he says,

'However, what mattered for me most at the impressionable stage at which I came across this novel was that it taught me the most crucial lesson in composition; namely, that what makes a narrative good is not the story itself but what follows what. Unwittingly, I came to associate this principle with Venice. If the reader now suffers, that's why.'

'What follows what' is the presiding principle even in his designing of whole books, as it was for Yeats. In *Less Than One*, the last words of 'A Guide to a Renamed City' are, 'Where a man doesn't cast a shadow, like water': the title of the piece that follows is, 'In the Shadow of Dante'. If the shape-shifting is labile, it is also cadential: there is something purposive about the pursuit.

There are 48 short 'stills' of Venice in *Watermark*, each of them in its own mood, and therefore its own mode. Dr Johnson claimed that to be tired of London was to be tired of life, which is not to say that he was not sometimes appallingly unhappy there. Brodsky's book gives the impression that he would echo Johnson on Venice's behalf. God knows how the two men would have got on together, though I suspect that Brodsky would have taken to Boswell, the world champion of journal-keeping. For the purposes of *Watermark*, Brodsky emerges as an ironic, loving, and restless inhabitant of the city.

He knows his place in it. His poem 'Venetian Stanzas II' concludes:

*I am writing these lines sitting  
outdoors, in winter,  
on a white iron chair, in my  
shirtsleeves, a little drunk;  
the lips move slowly enough to  
hinder  
the vowels of the mother tongue,  
and the coffee grows cold. And  
the blinding lagoon is lapping  
at the shore as the dim human  
pupil's bright penalty  
for its wish to arrest a landscape  
quite happy  
here without me.*

The spirit of *Watermark* is much the same. Happy or not, though, the landscape is lucky to have an attendant to write of it like this:



"Why, then, do you go there at such a season?" my editor asked me once, sitting in a Chinese restaurant in New York with his gay English charges. "Yes, why do you?" they echoed their prospective benefactor. "What is it like there in winter?" I thought of telling them about *acqua alta*; about the various shades of gray in the window as one sits at breakfast in one's hotel, enveloped by silence

and the mealy morning pall of newly-wed's faces; about pigeons accentuating every curve and cornice of the local Baroque in their dormant affinity for architecture; about a lonely monument to Francesco Querini and his two huskies carved out of Istrian stone similar, I think, in its hue, to what he saw last, dying, on his ill-fated journey to the North Pole, now listening to the Giardini's rustle of evergreens in the company of Wagner and Carducci; about a brave sparrow perching on the bobbing blade of a gondola against the backdrop of a sirocco-roiled damp infinity. No, I thought, looking at their effete but eager faces; no, that won't do. "Well," I said, "it's like Greta Garbo swimming." ■

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# Menzies

Robert Menzies' *Forgotten People*, Judith Brett, Sun paperback, Pan MacMillan, Sydney, 1993. ISBN 0 725107219 RRP \$14.95

Robert Menzies, *A Life vol.1 1894-1943*, A.W. Martin, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1993. ISBN 0 522 84442 1 RRP \$39.95

THE DOMAIN OF BIOGRAPHY MUST become ours', Freud wrote to Jung in 1909, which, I think, was about the time he began destroying evidence about himself. The master was boasting that he had just solved 'the riddle of Leonardo da Vinci's character'. His ingenious 30,000-wordsquib, subtitled 'A Psychosexual Study of an Infantile Reminiscence', was to be 'the first step' in this new art of biography (P. Gay, *Freud*, 1988, p268). Yet the thesis of *Leonardo da Vinci* (trans. A.A. Brill, 1948), elegant and vibrant though it was, lacked at least two basics of sound scholarship: adequate evidence and a sense of historical context.

Not that Freud worried too much about that. True, he made some disclaimers: a 'half-fictional production', he once said, but only to put off his critics. Even when a vital word in the singular Leonardo reminiscence was shown to be seriously mistranslated, he did not acknowledge it.

Nor did he have any training in iconography. In his interpretation of the *Virgin and Child with St Anne* he explains that the two women are of similar age because the illegitimate Leonardo enjoyed two nurturing mothers: his natural dam and his noble father's wife (pp 90-91). Perhaps; but it would have been simpler had Freud known that St Anne was usually depicted as a young woman. As for those *gioconda* smiles 'which conjured up in ... [Leonardo] the memory of his mother (p87), I daresay Freud could

not have been expected to know that in 1896 a contemporary had observed that secret smiling, as with the left side of Mona Lisa's mouth, was enjoined on Italian ladies of fashion in the 16th century e.g. in Agnolo Firenzuola's *Della Perfetta Bellezza d'una Donna* 1541 (quoted in L. Goldscheider, *Leonardo da Vinci*, 1948, p26).

In effect, *Leonardo* is as much about Freud as Leonardo, just as Freud's theories of the Oedipus complex and penis envy tell us more about him than about poor, quivering humanity, waiting to be trick-cycled by unself-critical psychologists and psychobiographers. Not that all psychobiographers have laboured in vain. Erikson's *Young Man Luther* (1959) needs no apology because its insights rest securely not just on theory but on the voluminous writings and self-revelations of its subject as well as the records of contemporaries. And, although, no sensible historian believes that complete objectivity in biography and history is possible, there are qualities to be aimed for, such as even-handedness and respect for both evidence and subject. They should be too basic to mention. Any biographer, but especially a psychobiographer, might well begin (and/or end) her work with a declaration of bias.

We have had no such luck with the latest in the recent string of psychobiographies about Australian political leaders (e.g. James Walter on Whitlam Stan Anson on Hawke). In the

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important respects mentioned above Judith Brett's *Robert Menzies' Forgotten People* has not progressed beyond the master's jejune but vivid archetype: the theory is discredited, the evidence is flimsy and the historical context, though not remote in time, dimly perceived. Though unlike Freud, who admires his subject, she dislikes hers. Social science indeed!

I find it astonishing that Brett believes uncritically in the Oedipus complex. (Does she also believe in penis envy? If not, why not? Gender bias?) Believe this nonsense and you might, like Menzies' *bêtes-noires*, even believe in the dictatorship of the proletariat or the withering away of the state. But Brett does believe in Oedipus. So, on the flimsiest of evidence, she thinks that Menzies' mother doted on him at the expense of his siblings, and that his father was regarded as a disapproving rival for her affection.

The supposed upshot of this 'desire to vanquish the father and possess the mother' is his idealisation of England and fervour for the Queen—anodynes for his own 'inner emptiness'. It seems that Brett has never spoken to members of the Menzies family, yet she does not scruple to wonder how Menzies' own sons fared, implying that it would be surprising if they were not scarred by the flair for ridicule that Menzies derived from his Oedipal nurture. In fact, the little testimony there is about Menzies as a father suggests that he was benign, playful and, unlike many politicians, coped extremely well in spite of his long absences from home.

We can certainly afford to ask whether Menzies was a hollow man but Brett neither demonstrates that he was nor explains it. It is hardly profitable to document the too-frequent sillinesses in her book but I shall risk being politically incorrect by instancing her allegation that, as some obverse of his adulation of the Queen, Menzies was a 'misogynist', associating women with 'deceit and duplicity'. What is the evidence? Well, in 1935 when steaming towards his beloved England across the Great Australian Bight, he was reading *Macbeth*, pencil in hand, marking choice phrases. 'Fitting reading', says Brett ominously, for a man wanting to

assassinate politically his prime minister. (Was he plotting it even then, just a year after entering Parliament, not even like Keating, waiting his turn? Evidence, please?)

But Brett has found Menzies' 1935 Dent edition of *Macbeth* and studied the passages he marked, and a number of them 'refer to the treachery [not the felicity] of language in the mouths of women' (viz. the three witches, Lady Macbeth). Then again, later, in the early 1940s, when Menzies suspected Percy Spender of plotting against him,

he found himself queueing for coffee behind Spender's wife at Albury station. She recalled how Menzies 'beetled his heavy eyebrows and declaimed, not too pleasantly, 'Give me the dagger, Lady Macbeth'. I suspect Jean Spender would have been a trifle more startled if Menzies had called her 'Thane of Cawdor'.

Another instance of Menzies' 'misogyny' occurred during a 'witty and light' lunchtime talk on *The Merchant of Venice*, in which he held 'against the received interpretation'

*Ming Dynasty: In front is Robert Gordon Menzies, aged eight. Behind are his brothers Frank (left) and James and his sister, Isabel.*

*Photo: courtesy of The Age.*



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that Portia argued dishonestly in the trial scene. (The talk was ultimately dressed up for *Southerly* magazine in 1956.) So Portia and Lady Macbeth were 'linked in Menzies' imagination with the illegitimate, covert forms of aggression he attributed to the communists'. This certainly lets communists off the hooks of both subversion and superstition. Brett is nothing if not credulous. Of course, there are quite simple explanations for Menzies' references to (might one say, 'love of') *Macbeth* and *The Merchant of Venice*: He had to read them at school, memorise parts for exams, they resonated in his mind for evermore, he liked re-reading them, showing off his 'culture', etc.

It is futile to make an issue of one man's alleged misogyny if the application of the term is so slack as to include virtually all males of the period. Brett has no evidence that Menzies mistreated or despised women. She could read with profit Diane Langmore's unpretentious *Prime Minister's Wives* (1992), where the author, as an historian/biographer should, sticks to the evidence and, though herself the wife of a Labor MHR, finds no cause to denigrate Menzies. But, not being overtly a theoretician, Langmore actually interviewed Dame Patie. In the same book Brett would also read that Dame Enid Lyons, whom she quotes on matters prejudicial to Menzies, became, in his time, Australia's first female cabinet minister. True, she did not get a portfolio, perhaps because he knew she disliked him, but by the standards of his time Menzies hardly shows up as a misogynist, whether in his family life or in his dealings with women generally.

Brett, like many psychobiographers, is omniscient. She thinks Menzies resolved his filial conflict with his father differently from his brother Frank, but still could not escape 'his childhood awe of his father'. It 'lived on in his lifelong preoccupation with great men'. So he loved Fitchett's *Deeds that Won the Empire* and Scott's *Ivanhoe* and could recite by heart Porter's *The Scottish Chiefs*. But note well: 'there was no Scottish blood in his mother's family, the Cornish Sampsons.' Perhaps fortunately, Cornwall is better known for pasties than patriarchs. I do not know any litera-

ture on Cornish chiefs, but maybe, if the radiogram had been invented, Menzies would have moved about the house bellowing *Tristan and Isolde*.

By contrast with Brett, the first volume of Allan Martin's long-awaited biography of Menzies is a model of restraint and careful documentation. Not that Martin does not, inevitably, have a bias. He prefers to think well of Menzies and leaves a few important questions unanswered. Perhaps they will be dealt with in volume two which, sensibly, will begin after the UAP debacle in the 1943 election when Menzies regained the non-Labor leadership and founded the Liberal Party, the obvious pivot of his career.

**T**HE MAN WHO EMERGES from the book is arrogant, highly intelligent rather than intellectual, of a legalistic rather than creative mind, eloquent, decent in the most conventional sense, dedicated to public service, without a whiff of corruption (in the Victoria of Albert Dunstan and Tom Tunnecliffe), indifferent to personal wealth and, of course, British to the bootstraps. More than that, Martin might have mentioned Menzies was not blighted by sectarianism, an important factor in his release of state aid in 1963. Martin also takes up controversial allegations such as David Day's—that Menzies aspired to replace Churchill as Prime Minister of Britain. If the evidence is not there, Martin dumps them.

Yet something is missing because of the lack of conjecture. For such an articulate family, it is surprising how thin the material is on Menzies' childhood and youth. Then his relations with women seem wooden. In 1918 he was engaged to the sister of Brian Lewis (*Our War*, 1980); Menzies was lordly, she flippant; the engagement was soon off, but how did it happen? *Melbourne University Magazine* 1916 refers jokingly to Menzies' 'amazing amatory adventures' (quoted C. Hazelhurst, *Menzies Observed*, 1979: p33), yet Martin does not mention it. The courtship of Pattie Leckie seems mechanical but it worked; no problems, it seems.

But a rumour persisted through the years that Menzies had an affair with a Fairfax lady (on a slow boat to Britain, it seemed). That was supposed

to be the reason for the *Sydney Morning Herald's* contumely, which helped bring him down in 1941-3. Martin clearly does not believe that anything indecorous happened and we are left with this explanation: 'Pettier issues may have been unrecorded fallings-out over personal matters or government regulation of newsprint imports.' I would have preferred him to say the affair did not happen, if that is what he believes. Repute is part of a life history.

Mockers of Menzies have revelled in the accounts of his pompous patriotism during World War I and his Georgian literary aspirations when a student. Similarly with his surprisingly hard-hearted insistence in the trough of the Great Depression (1931) that 'it would be better for Australia that every citizen within her boundaries should die of starvation during the next six months' than violate, in his much-loved phrase, 'the sanctity of contracts'. And there is the banal Menzies, so inchoately lampooned by Adrian Lawler in *Arquebus* (1937), who wanted to dictate taste in art by founding an academy that would sideline 'cross-eyed' modern painting.

Martin manages to accommodate such embarrassments, flesh out the rise of the young barrister and the tyro politician, refute charges that Menzies lacked a sense of urgency about mobilisation in 1939-40 and 'grovelled' before his British patrons, and to show that the eloquent broadcast 'The Forgotten People' (1942), which Brett sees as a watershed in Menzies' career, is 'an elegant formulation of the liberal conservatism for which ... [he] had always stood' (p401).

**W**HERE BRETT FANTASISES about the psychic significance of Menzies' British heritage, before his first visit to England at the age of 41, as 'the fulsome emptiness of his deep love for an imagined place, and the aggression and envy this deep love keeps in place', Martin sees nothing untoward in the mother country's grip on a European outpost. Australia could not have been culturally self-sufficient in the 1930s.

Martin shows that Menzies was a man of broader perception than usually believed. After visiting exasperating, neutral Ireland in 1941, Menzies wrote a memorandum described by



Garvin of *The Times* as 'the most penetrating account of the Irish question he had ever read'. Warming to De Valera, in spite of the Irish leader's historical blinkers, and deploring the refusal of Churchill even to parley with him, Menzies wrote to Pattie: 'But the greatest difficulty is the prevailing lunacy. They are mad in Dublin, madder still in Belfast, and on this question perhaps maddest of all at Downing Street.' (p344).

Visiting Singapore in 1941, he described Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham as having 'borne the white man's burden in many places from Kenya to Canada, and it has left his shoulders a little stooped' (p318). In spite of his later idyll with the Queen and the Cinque Ports, Menzies was authentically Australian.

Martin concludes this volume with a discussion of the reasons for Menzies' failure during 1939-43. The root causes are seen as his arrogance, his inability to unbend and show his innate warmth, and his zest for wounding both supporters and rivals. He was a fine mimic. Are these all the reasons? After always being referred to as 'towering over' his contemporaries and as the logical successor to Lyons, he won the prime ministership from—wait for it—Billy Hughes, 78 years old, 'who was finding it difficult to concentrate for more than short periods' (L. Fitzhardinge, *The Little Digger*, 1979, p652). Hughes went on to lead the UAP until 1943. That, of course, is a reflection on Menzies' colleagues.

But is something else missing? Ambassador Sir Walter Crocker praised Menzies 'towering' gifts, got on well with him, but said, 'Unfortunately, even Indians could not excel him in double talk—one thing to men's faces, another to their backs' (*The Bulletin*, 21/4/81, p.53).

Martin could have enlivened his conclusion by examining Warwick Fairfax's caustic portrait 'The Bewildering Mr Menzies' in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (17/8/43), four days before the election debacle (Hazelhurst, pp266-76). Fairfax arraigns Menzies for indecision, declamatory posturing and poor judgment in international affairs (e.g. in 1935 Mussolini, not Hitler, was the greatest danger to peace; Chamberlain, not Churchill,

was deserving of support in 1938).

Fairfax also castigated Menzies for his love of ease and comfort, both physical and mental, for being 'an unbelievably self-centred person', and for grudging admiration to his peers and preferring associates of less ability. Fairfax did note that he was 'free from vindictive prejudice' against Labor MPs whom, however, Menzies described to the US consul in Melbourne as 'scum-positive scum' (Hazelhurst, p257), Martin may not agree with much of this but it could help disarm his inevitable critics.

**F** AIRFAX CONCLUDED with the pious hope that Menzies would 'assuredly emerge a greater man' from his defeat. One can assume that in vol. 2, Martin's final judgements will be something to look forward to. Menzies contested 10 federal elections as Leader (or virtual leader in 1943) of the Opposition and Prime Minister. Only in 1949, 1951, 1955 (after the Labor split) and 1963 can it be said that he had the clear support of the Australian people, and from 1954-63 the ALP leaders, Evatt and Calwell, were hardly vote-pullers. He had a dream run during his last 17 years in office.

If my memory is correct, he gave an interview on retirement in which he claimed his greatest achievements were keeping the coalition with the Country (National) Party together, the ANZUS Treaty, developing Canberra and extending access to education. Asked if he had made a mistake in trying to ban the Communist Party in 1951, he said no, that was the Australian people's greatest error (although the CP was shattered and moribund).

Martin's judgment of Menzies' self-assessment will be interesting and no doubt as sympathetically and meticulously researched as this first volume. In reality, and symbolically, Menzies wanted to transform the pound into the 'royal'. We got the American 'dollar' instead. But how apt it would be today to have, say, John Howard vow 'to put value back into the royal', as Menzies so falsely swore in 1949-51. ■

**James Griffin** is an historian and reviewer. He lives in Canberra.

## Talking Points

Ross Fitzgerald would appreciate it if any *Eureka Street* readers could provide him with information, including photographs and reminiscences, concerning Australia's only elected Communist member of parliament, Fred Paterson, who was MLA for Bowen from 1944-1950.

*F.W. (Fred) Paterson*, Townsville city councillor 1938-45, and MLA for Bowen 1944-50. Paterson is significant to Australian history as he was, and still remains, the only elected representative of the Communist Party in an Australian Parliament. It was said of Paterson, at the time, that only one man was less likely ever to become Premier of Queensland—Joh Bjelke-Petersen.

Paterson was a Rhodes scholar, an ARU official and prominent radical lawyer. He was an active defender of the rights of Australian immigrants, working for Italian cane cutters in North Queensland.

No scholarly biography has been undertaken of this unique Australian, nor has any extensive research been conducted into the location and identification of picture and sound footage pertaining to his life and times.

Information should be sent to: Ross Fitzgerald, (associate professor in politics and history), Faculty of Humanities, Griffith University, QLD 4111

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# Yes, minister

**I** *Are All Christians Ministers?*, John N. Collins, E.J. Dwyer/David Lovell, Sydney, 1992. ISBN 0 85574 125 2 RRP \$16.95

IT IS EASY TO GET ANNOYED when someone challenges a prevailing expression of theological 'political correctness', especially if—like me—you have publicly embraced the 'correct' view yourself. So I suppose it is inevitable that some church people and theologians will say that John N. Collins' views about ministry are 'reactionary' and out of touch with contemporary ecclesiology. In my view, however, John Collins' two recent books, *Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources* (Oxford, 1990) and *Are All Christians Ministers?* constitute probably the most significant historico-theological work done in Australia in the past 20 years.

*Diakonia*, the major study, is adapted from Collins' doctoral thesis, written a decade ago at the University of London. *Are All Christians Ministers?* is a popularisation of his views. These books are unpopular with some precisely because they question the post-Vatican II notion that ministry is the prerogative of *all* baptised Christians. This widespread view of ministry has been important in breaking down the hierarchical clericalism that characterised all of the major churches (especially the Catholic Church) and it has strengthened the notion that all Christians have a role to play in the work of the church.

This emphasis on the ministry of all believers has become extremely important because it has threatened, and in some areas brought about, a shift of power from

clergy to laity. Profound shifts in self-understanding are usually signified by changes in rhetoric, and the post-Vatican II lay revolution in Catholicism is no exception to this. The American Jesuit sociologist, John A. Coleman, noted back in 1981 that the term 'ministry' had come to dominate the vocabulary of Catholic professionals: 'Today it seems that everyone has or does ministry. It is worth noting that people within Catholic circles of religious professionals often rarely bother to define the term; so sure are they that everyone knows what ministry means. This taken-for-granted use of the term ministry is of enormous sociological importance. What we do not need to define itself defines our world and charts our view of reality. It is our prevailing ideology, our map of expectations.' ('The Future of Ministry', *America* 144/12, p243).

Coleman goes on to point out that a major shift in the use of language usually masks a much deeper change, for 'language defines our world'. He continues: 'new language focuses our attention in different places and frees our imagination to see reality in a new light' (Coleman, *art. cit.*, p244).

The post-Vatican II consensus has been that all Christians are ministers; it has been assumed that baptism actually preordains the believer for a ministry in the church. This view involves a shift of emphasis from the ordained ministry of bishops and priests to a situation where lay ministry has become the norm in the church, at least in theory. Ironically, John Collins argues that this theological development of the notion of ministry is actually based on a lexicographic misunderstanding and his two books are important precisely because they

challenge contemporary assumptions about the scope of ministry. But the interesting result of Collins' view is that it does not lead him to a reactionary standpoint but to an ecumenical openness about the ministry of all the Christian churches.

Part of the unfair theological criticism of Collins is that people often immediately identify his denial of the ministry of all believers with a pre-Vatican II notion of ordination, whereas he means no such thing. For instance, in a recent review in the *National Catholic Reporter*, Ronald Nuzzi says: 'Half way through the book, all I wanted to know was why. Why can't all Christians be ministers? ... Returning ministry to those officially appointed or designated, confining it to those with sanctioned authority, is reactionary.'

It is easy for reviewers like Nuzzi to tag Collins as a reactionary, but this is grossly unfair. For instance, he made quite clear in an interview on the ABC Radio National program *Insights* (20 June 1993) that he actually eschews the word 'ordination' altogether and he argues that both men and women can exercise the ministry. Also he makes the point that his views really open up the ecumenical possibility of the mutual recognition of the ministries of all of the mainstream churches.

So what precisely is Collins saying? He argues that the contemporary extension of the notion of ministry to all Christians is based on mistranslations of key New Testament texts. In *Diakonia* he reviews the history and development in pre-Christian, biblical and Christian sources of the Greek root *diakon* (from which the New Testament words *diakonos*, *diakonia* and *diakonein* are derived and which we translate into English as either 'deacon' or 'ministry'). He finds that in the New Testament the word does not refer to humble, caring, social-service oriented action, but rather to the building up of the church community by the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the mediation of Christ. The minister is one who is commissioned for the job of representing God or the church.

Collins examines the role of the 'seven men of good repute' in *Acts* 6 and the key text in *Ephesians* 4:11-13

*Part of the unfair theological criticism of John Collins is that people often identify his denial of the ministry of all believers with a pre-Vatican II notion of ordination, whereas he means no such thing.*



and concludes that ministry was the work and responsibility of a select number of preachers and teachers. Such a work supposed a profoundly religious engagement with the Christian mystery (*Are All Christians Ministers?*, p115).

By this Collins means that the role of the ministry—which is passed on by the laying on of hands—is to build up the body of Christ. Specific Christians are called to the ministry by the mandate of Christ.

Although ministry is one gift among the many that are shared out among all of the faithful, Collins sees it as a specific type of gift that makes ministers both part of and, at the same time, over and against, the general group of believers. It is in the *First Letter to the Corinthians* (12:4-6) that St Paul develops his theology of *charismata* (gifts). Collins makes it clear that Paul calls some of these gifts *diakonai* (ministries) and others *energumata* (activities). He says: 'The activities are activated in every (believer) whereas the ministries are reserved for the few whom the Lord has committed them to (*Are All Christians Ministers?* p 127).'

Collins admits that this seemingly hierarchical notion of ministry in the New Testament (especially in *Ephesians*) is quite repugnant to the democratic ethos of our own time. But he also makes it clear that there is an important and real distinction between *Ephesians'* notion of hierarchy and that which the later church borrowed from the political hegemonies of the ancient world.

'What we need to recognise, however, is that the hierarchies that many of today's Christians find repugnant are not so much structured on the model of political hegemonies of the ancient world. .. The author of the *Ephesians* ... is speaking of another sphere altogether, unconnected with worldly power and rule, but imbued with authority of an exclusively religious kind.' (*Are All Christians Ministers?*, p116).

The *Diakonia* book is basically divided into two parts, the first dealing with the non-Christian sources of the word *diakonia* and its cognates, and the second applying this range of words to the Bible and early Christian sources. In this book he is cautious

about leaping into current theological debates; in fact, only two chapters (2 and 14) focus on theological issues. In an afterword to the book he self-deprecatingly says 'Because this study has aimed to work toward a more accurate view of what the first practitioners of Christian ministry meant when when they spoke of *diakonia*, and has attempted to correct what it has presented as misconceptions in this area

for the past 50 years, its implications need to be worked through in more detail than is appropriate at the end of an early long book and with a finesse beyond the capacity of one writer.' (p253)

Collins shows that the lexicographical problem that underlies the inexact translations of *diakonia* became part of theological mainstream through the 1935 article of H.W. Beyer

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on the word in Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Beyer had been influenced by ideas of ministry then current among a small group in the German Lutheran Church. These notions of ministry were soon picked up via Kittel's *Dictionary* by the World Council of Churches and by most of the influential writers of Protestant ecclesiology.

It was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s that Roman Catholics took up the word 'ministry' with a vengeance. Prior to Vatican II the biblical terms 'ministry' and 'minister' were regarded by Catholics as having a very 'Protestant' flavour. The main word used by Catholics was 'apostolate'—and the apostolate was under the control of the bishop and exercised primarily by priests, and secondarily by the religious brothers and sisters who carried most of the work of the church. The term 'lay apostolate' (or 'Catholic Action') only really became current in the 1930s, as a result of the teaching of Pope Pius XI, who defined Catholic Action as 'the participation of the Catholic laity in the hierarchical apostolate'.

But all of that changed at Vatican II, which stressed the dignity, role and function of the laity in the church. The word 'ministry' quickly became the focus of this new-found lay role and it soon replaced the word apostolate and swept aside all attempts by the Roman curia and more conservative Catholics to limit the word 'ministry' to the work of the ordained. The net result of this has been an enhancement of the role of the laity and the diminishment of the role of the clergy.

Collins is certainly suggesting that this paradigm shift needs to be questioned in the light of the New Testament evidence. So, if he argues that all Christians are *not* ministers, who then does get a guernsey? Collins does not answer this question specifically in terms of the contemporary church. But what he does do is to take the discussion beyond the arid and over-worked question of the *ordained* ministry and to suggest the possibility of a new approach to the more basic ecclesiological question of ministry. ■

**Paul Collins** is Specialist Editor for Religion at the ABC.



**I**N MARCH THIS YEAR I received news of Dom Bede Griffiths from a Swiss friend staying at the Saccidananda ashram in south India. Griffiths was in a clinic in Kerala, physically paralysed and mentally confused after a severe stroke in January. Despite this, my friend wrote, those with him described him as 'sort of emanating light and an enormous tenderness and love'. He died six weeks later, aged 86.

Born Alan Richard Griffiths, the youngest of four children in a middle-class Church of England family, Griffiths was early impressed by his parents' strong faith. By the time he left school, however, he had become both pacifist and socialist in conviction, strongly reacting against Christianity as an outdated and morally legalistic belief. He turned to the Romantic poets and, like Wordsworth and Blake, saw glimpses of divinity in the mysterious power of nature. Entering Oxford in 1925, Oscar Wilde's stories and Walter Pater's interrogation of taste continued to nurture Griffiths' sensitivity to the romantic qualities of 'feeling' and 'emotion'.

On leaving Oxford in 1929, Griffiths and two friends undertook an 'experiment in common life', living in a Cotswolds cottage, as close to nature and as far from modernity as possible. Here, the habits of Bible reading and prayer slowly entered Griffiths' life, along with an often compulsive desire for fasting and asceticism. When the community broke up, Griffiths, considered taking orders in the Church of England but was shocked to discover, through Bede's *History of the English Church and People* and St Thomas' *Summa Theologiae*, that the English church, Dante and St Thomas were all of the same Roman stock. The discovery suggested that the Catholic Church, marginalised in England and abhorred by his mother, was, as his reading of Newman later affirmed, 'the living church which could show a continuous evolution from the day of Pentecost'.

This and a compelling, irrational desire for 'repentance' pulled Griffiths into a terrifying struggle described in his autobiography *The Golden String* (1954): 'I was being called to surrender the very citadel of myself', the 'independence' of 'will and reason' by 'something in the depths of my own nature which my reason was powerless to control'. After a short time of retreat and recovery, Griffiths joyfully entered the Catholic Church at Prinknash Abbey on Christmas Eve 1931 and within weeks joined the Benedictines as a postulant, taking the name Bede. In 1936 he took vows of stability, conversion of life and obedience and in 1940 was ordained a priest. At Oxford, Griffiths had encountered the celebration of profound and instinctual sexuality in the work



of D.H. Lawrence, and he recognised that the burgeoning of his own intellect had come about through suppression of the instinctual aspects of life. This sense of a split in himself, asserted again by the tremendous struggle of conversion, was to draw him as a Benedictine monk to India in 1955, 'to discover the other half of my soul'. In *The Marriage of East and West* (1982) and *Return to the Centre* (1976), books grounded in his long Indian experience, Jung's *animus/anima* theory and a profound knowledge of the Sanskrit Hindu texts, Griffiths developed and refined his earlier insights.

He pleaded for a 'marriage' of the intuitive and the rational, the feminine and masculine, nature and mankind, East and West. In Griffiths' view, only the integration and transformation of these dimensions, so often set in opposition, could free us personally and globally from the destructive power of masculine, western rationalism that exists in man and woman alike. For Griffiths, the power of receptivity to God was feminine and intuitive. In this he saw not only the source of his own conversion and salvation, but that of the world.

Bede Griffiths' monastic life expressed his deep, loving commitment to integration and transformation of the self and the world. After pursuing Hindu/Christian dialogue in Bangalore for two years, Griffiths joined in founding a monastic ashram, Kurisumala, in Kerala in 1957. The small community adopted the saffron *Sannyasi's* robes, symbolic of renunciation, and lived in simple poverty by manual labour, study and prayer. With his companions, Griffiths believed that a genuine meeting of East and West could only happen at the deepest level of spiritual experience and that the shared culture of monastic life offered the best hope. In 1968 Griffiths moved alone to the Saccidananda ashram in Tamil Nadu to continue the encounter. Despite opposition from more traditional Catholics, including the local bishop, he was soon joined by two Indian brothers, and the ashram, with its interweaving of Benedictine and Hindu spirituality, is now flooded with European and Indian visitors. Clearly the split felt by Griffiths and his vision of unity has found resonance in the West.

For Griffiths, notions of masculine and feminine, East and West were at best only words to intimate a journey. At the close of *Return to the Centre* he describes 'our destiny' as 'to be one with God in a unity which transcends all distinctions, and yet in which each individual being is found in his integral wholeness.' For those of us who met him, it seemed that even before death he had reached the journey's end. ■

—Jane Buckingham

# Minds of martyrs

**T**HE DEATH last year from cardiovascular disease of Athol Gill, 54, founder of an inner-city community called House of the Gentle Bunyip and New Testament professor at the Melbourne Baptist Theological College, deprived Australia of one of its few practising liberation theologians. In an obituary in *The Age*, Bill Pheasant noted that Gill's 'commitment to justice and the poor took him in 1984 to El Salvador in the midst of civil war to safeguard the life of a friend under threat from death squads for choosing to work with the poor'. Gill learned a lot from the base communities of El Salvador and, in turn, shared some of his vast knowledge of the Bible with them.

If Gill died from a typically First World cause, the six murdered Jesuit professors of El Salvador died from a typically Third World one. In the early morning darkness of 16 November 1989, members of an élite, US-trained Salvadoran battalion shot the six priests and two women co-workers at the University of Central America. Those killed were Celina Ramos, Elba Julia Ramos, Ignacio Ellacuria, Amando Lopez, Joaquin Lopez, Ignacio Martin-Baro, Segundo Montes and Juan Ramon Moreno.

'The Jesuits of the University of Central America were murdered because of the role they played as intellectuals, researchers, writers and teachers in expressing their solidarity with the poor', Hassett and Lacey argue. Thus they have edited a book, not about the details of the deaths of the six Jesuit professors, but about their intellectual contribution, making available in English for the first time a substantial selection of the writings of three of them, Ellacuria, Martin-Baro and Montes.

The film *Romero*, directed by John Duigan, has made many Australians familiar with the five million people

**Towards a Society that Serves its People: the Intellectual Contribution of El Salvador's Murdered Jesuits**, John Hassett and Hugh Lacey (eds), Georgetown University Press, Washington, 1991. ISBN 0 87840 523 2

of a small nation on the other coast of the Pacific Ocean where wealthy coffee-growing families have formed a power élite while the majority of poor farmers and labourers suffer poverty and misery. For more than a decade repression and war ravaged El Salvador, producing 75,000 deaths, 8000 people disappeared and more than a million became refugees, some to Australia.

During that offensive, Ignacio Ellacuria, Jesuit and founding rector of the University of Central America (UCA), with many others, pointed out the opportunity that existed for a negotiated settlement of the conflict. Such talk sounded like treason to the military, who accused the Jesuits of being the brains behind the FMLN. Thus they were shot.

Since then, the guerillas and the government have signed a peace treaty that offers prospects for a negotiated settlement. While the struggles of millions of Salvadorans have contributed to making this development possible, the deaths of the six Jesuits had a marked impact on US public opinion and contributed to the US Congress putting limits on aid to the military. Their martyrdom was not in vain.

**O**NE OF THE MOST ORIGINAL thinkers in the Jesuit group, according to the editors, was Ignacio Martin-Baro, a psychologist who taught clinical practitioners to assume the perspective of the poor and strengthen the virtues of 'solidarity and cooperation, sobriety and persistence, sensitivity

and capacity to sacrifice' they found among them. He insisted that it was not enough to treat the psychological effects of torture, murder and disappearances. Genuine treatment meant participation in the struggle to end terror.

Segundo Montes, director of UCA's human rights institute, was a sociologist working from a neo-Marxist analysis common among theologians of liberation. He described capitalism in El Salvador as historically a cancer brought in from outside and growing parasitically on another, more traditional economy. Readers of the book can sample his detailed studies of society.

Ignacio Ellacuria was the principal author of the vision of a different kind of university that UCA aimed to become. Among liberation theologians, he was exceptional for having a formal training as a philosopher. His vision for the university was derived from Christian base communities (some of the Jesuits did pastoral work among them), from the growing social service which students did, and from the 1970s policy decision of the Jesuits to take up a worldwide commitment to the poor. Students at UCA were expected to spend about a fifth of their time working with poor communities.

'The criterion for measuring the ultimate significance of a university' according to Ellacuria, is 'its impact on the historic reality within which it exists and which it serves'. This is a political criterion. UCA tried to avoid either reinforcing the status quo or challenging the system, or the state, head on.

For Ellacuria the latter was the role of political parties and popular movements geared to taking state power. The university, in contrast, he saw as ethical and rational, and not to be reduced to taking the side of any given political system indiscrimin-



ately. He believed in working for a new society within the shell of the old; he accepted funding from capitalist agencies and support from the institutional church.

His central insight was that 'the poor majority are the horizon of university activity'. The poor majority is 'that vast bulk of humanity whose standard of living is such that they can scarcely satisfy their most basic needs', who do not have access to enough resources to change their situation and whose dispossession is not due to historical laws or personal or group laziness, but rather to historic social arrangements that have relegated them to misery.

He wanted the needs and hopes of the poor majority 'to determine the order of research priorities, what should be taught, the size of the university and how many students should be accepted, what majors should be given priority and how they should be studied, what values and professional training should be imparted, and what the structure of the university itself should be'.

**E**LLACURIA DID NOT EXPECT, however, that the students would come from the poor majority, at least not at the time at which he wrote. In El Salvador tertiary education was for the more affluent, and indeed he did not believe that the poor majority should be transformed into professionals. But UCA sought to train professionals who would pursue truth and serve the common good, not the interests of the privileged elite.

Ellacuria's critique of capitalism became more urgent in his writings after the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe. His studies convinced him that the gap between rich and poor was widening and becoming harsher, both in El Salvador and elsewhere. He concluded that capitalism as a system cannot be made available to all humans. This insight remains crucial to millions of Salvadorans and other Third World people.

Despite some unclear passages and unresolved contradictions, *Towards a Society that Serves its People* shows that in an urgent and horrific situation, these three thinkers maintained high intellectual standards. Hassett and Lacey's promised second volume

will be welcome. In the 1950s, Lacey who now teaches religion and philosophy of science at Swarthmore College, Philadelphia, was a younger member of the Newman Society at Melbourne University when the Jesuit chaplain Jerry Golden and the poet Vincent Buckley were among its senior figures. His introduction to this volume offers both a fascinating reincarnation of, and dramatic contrast with, key ideas from *Incarnation in the University*, a 1955 book edited by Buckley about 'the intellectual apostolate'. The main concern of that book was to take both Christ and the world seriously.

The voices of these Salvadoran Jesuits on the role of the university are new, and stronger than anything found in the '50s Newman Society. They challenge lecturers, researchers and managers to ask: does the work of the university contribute to widening the gap between the rich and the poor or does it contribute to closing that gap? Second, do the analyses of society offered at the university clarify or cloud the reality of life among the poor majority? Third, do studies at the university contribute to reversing the ecological breakdown of the planet? Fourth, are critical questions treated in a few subjects but not dealt with in the overall curriculum and is it possible to choose one's course in such a way that the well-being of the poor majority is ignored?

**M**INDFUL OF First World readers, Ellacuria asked: what does the university do about 'the conspicuous dehumanisation of those who, pressured by the nervous and harassed productivism of having or amassing wealth, power, honour, and the ever-changing gamut of consumer goods, opt to give up the difficult task of gradually achieving their own being'?

As Athol Gill did, we need to analyse our own Australian history of affluence and poverty and to shun any unthinking application of Latin American analyses in a foreign setting. We can listen with profit, however, to the voices of these martyred Salvadoran Jesuit teachers. ■

**Val Noone** teaches social and cultural studies at Victoria University of Technology.



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# Bishop out on a limb

*The Meddlesome Priest, A Life of Ernest Burgmann*, Peter Hempenstall, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards NSW, 1993. ISBN 1 863 73 352 3 RRP \$29.95

he worked during the Depression years. And it resonates too in the files of ABC radio archives: there is a lot of Bishop Burgmann there and virtually nothing of Archbishop Mannix—in inverse proportion to what appears to be held in the public memory.

Yet it was in the public memory Bishop Burgmann sought space and one of the fascinating—and unanswered—questions raised by Hempenstall's biography is why neither Burgmann nor Burgmann's ambitions for Anglicanism found a niche there.

Ernest Burgmann was an unusual Anglican bishop for his times. His name betrays his father's German origins while his mother came from an Irish Catholic background. Not that that kind of union was unusual in the 19th century bush melting-pot, just that Anglican bishops did not commonly proceed from them. Burgmann's parents were selectors in the upper Lansdowne area, north of the Hunter valley in NSW. After limited schooling—he started late and finished at fourteen—Ernest turned log-feller in partnership with his cousin.

Five years later he decided to return to study. For me it remains a puzzle why he turned to the Anglican ministry. In Burgmann's own account there was no exemplary figure and neither was there any great religious enthusiasm in his family. Hempenstall describes him as experiencing Anglicanism as a 'liberating, non-regimenting religion fitting the spaciousness of bush life'. It also offered a career, and in an era slightly ahead of the great age of self-improvers Ernest Burgmann set about acquiring the education to equip himself for the ministry.

In 1913 he was on a ship sailing to England to spend a ritual year in a London parish, and the comfortable view of British civilisation that he chose to take from this experience underwrote all his later thinking. Rather than, Hempenstall points out, the experience of war shared by so many

of his generation. In other ways Burgmann was indubitably of his times: bowled over by Freud, taken up with the 1920s crisis in western civilisation and confronted by the failure of capitalism in the Great Depression. By the time he was appointed Bishop of Goulburn in 1934 Burgmann had acquired a reputation as a radical. He was involved in social and economic reform movements, airing his views on the public platform, in the pages of newspapers and in the *Morpeth Review*. He had developed a critique of the way in which churches had allied themselves with conservative state elements 'thus losing their way in the world'. 'Lovers of justice have ceased to look at the church as a champion, and lovers of truth feel that every question is already pre-judged in religious circles. The result is that a tragic divorce has taken place between the church and those who are standing at the growing points of the world's life. Inevitably Burgmann was labelled a Bolshevik, a label that stuck to him through the '40s and '50s as he defended the 'mighty material and cultural achievements' of the USSR and argued the 'no' case against the Menzies government's attempt to outlaw the Communist Party.

For all Burgmann's ventures outside the traditional concerns of churchmen he is not a household historical name. Peter Hempenstall says the Church of England has actually 'disinherited' Burgmann. Ironically, at his consecration Bishop Burgmann declaimed a Church of England standing for the soul of the Australian nation-in-the-making, a meeting-place for the best religious forces of the nation. He never could understand why Anglican strengths did not grip the country like those of other faiths, most particularly, Catholicism. He aimed to persuade the government in Canberra that the Anglican Church was the great church of the Australian people, but all the time, he observed, the Catholics were making the running. For my taste,

As for Bishop Burgmann, [right in photo] I have nothing to say except that he is at least a most meddlesome priest.

—H.B. 'Jo' Gullett, Government Whip, House of Representatives, Canberra, 8 April 1954.

**W**HEN REPUBLICANISM began to dominate the news earlier this year the Anglican Archbishop of Melbourne had to assure his flock through the pages of the diocesan newspaper that they could espouse the republican cause without compromising their Anglicanism. They were not obliged by their confession to acknowledge the British monarch as their temporal as well as spiritual leader. Possibly there are Anglicans still coming to terms with that instruction. As late as 1954 an Anglican bishop noted for his Australian nationalism and left-wing sympathies could preach sermons on the virtues of British kingship and initiate conversations on the divine kingship. Admittedly, 1954 was a feverishly monarchial year.

I confess that until recently I had never heard of that nationalist bishop, the 'red' bishop whose name was Ernest Burgmann. In his foreword to Peter Hempenstall's biography of Burgmann, Archbishop Peter Hollingworth of Brisbane proffers him as a forerunner to a new Australian legend, a man whose 'prophetic insight could help this generation in the quest for an authentically Australian identity and spirituality'. In my own defence, though, even Burgmann's biographer had not long heard of him. Hempenstall, an historian who teaches at the University of Newcastle, was introduced to him by students undertaking oral history research. Clearly Burgmann's name resonates among Anglicans whom he influenced, in the diocese of Canberra-Goulburn, which he led, and in the Hunter valley, where





## Habit of haitches

Hempenstall is altogether too discreet in his dealings with Burgmann's anti-Catholicism. If someone is being set up as an inspiration for the development of a new national identity then we need to understand clearly the constraints of that inspiration—its connections with the unstated, with fear, prejudice, and ascendancy.

Hempenstall has this knack of rather drawing a veil: he does so over Burgmann's dying/declining years ('Of his spiritual comportment nary a direct trace remains.') But mortality is a bit rude, so we do find out that at least twice the dying ecclesiastic asked other women to marry him, once in the presence of his wife. ' "Why should this happen to a good man?" she cried'. There is not much other useful information about the life of a married cleric: Mrs Burgmann is there incidentally but there is no great insight into the dynamic of priestly marriage and fatherhood. Perhaps Hempenstall is at the polite end of the biographers' spectrum. Be wary. He calls you 'Dear reader'.

Margaret Coffey is an ABC broadcaster and producer.

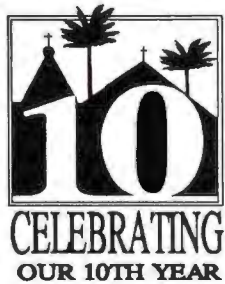
AS MARY MACKILLOP is just another miracle away from sainthood, can we please now say 'haitch'. Those of us who went through a Brown Joey primary education followed up by, say, a good measure of Christian Brothers secondary in a less-than-flash suburb, know all about discrimination. The constant hounding we receive from present-day pronunciation police for the way we aspirate our 'haitches' is grounds for a case before the office of Brian Burdekin.

It's not that I'm so concerned for my personal safety or equality of opportunity. It's just that this sort of prejudice is singularly unfair to the founder of that great order of educational disciplinarians, the Josephite Sisters. Mary MacKillop went through hell to ensure we learnt to say 'H' with the right degree of non-obstructed breath exhalation. Establishing an order of nuns while still in her twenties meant significant responsibility quite early in life. Setting up the first order of anything religious in Australia was

the stuff of a real pioneer. After experiencing the wrath of bishops, it's little wonder she turned to habits more appropriate for a stint at Mawson base than a summer in Mitcham. Excommunication? Well, that was like doing time in a religious sense, even if the sentence was only six months before parole. And living in South Australia before Don Dunstan was elected premier? That was true hardship.

Mary MacKillop went out of her way to make sure we got a good start at the alphabet. So why not celebrate her linguistic legacy to us as tribute to a truly significant Australian historical figure? Although the taste of the stiff leather belt and the sting of those jumbo-size rosaries may fade with the passage of time, the same can't be said for 'haitch'. Mary needs one more miracle. Acceptance by modern-day Professor Doolittles that there is more than one way to say 'H' may just be the sort of thing she's looking for. Anyone for a 'Haitch' Day?

—David Lane



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# Seeing and believing

**P**LATO, I SUSPECT, would have hated the cinema. His myth of the cave, of which we read in *The Republic*, compares human knowing to a kind of shadow play watched by prisoners chained to the wall of a cave. Behind and above them roars a blazing fire, the sun, in front of which the actual constituents of the world pass back and forth. The shapes of these things are reflected on to the wall in front of the prisoners as distorted, shadowy images, and the prisoners, since they cannot turn around, mistake the images for reality.

This myth of the cave is at the root of Plato's distrust of the arts, for if ordinary human experience of the world rests on a kind of illusion then what is experienced in any visual art form, composed as it is of images fabricated from other images, must be doubly illusory. In his essay *The Apparatus*, Jean-Louis Baudry interprets the myth of the cave as a kind of anticipatory theory of the cinema, that dark cavern in which we sit with eyes fixed on fanciful images projected over our heads on to the screen in front of us. The comparison cannot be pushed as far as Baudry would like; for one thing, Plato's 'sun' (the Form of the Good) has no precise analogue in the cinema, either human (writer, director) or mechanical (camera, projector). And neither the myth of the cave nor the actual experience of watching movies will sustain, point for point, the rest of Baudry's theory, which appeals to Freud. In being cave-like the cinema is supposedly also womb-like, a haven in which we become absorbed in our infantile fantasies.

But even flimsy theories sometimes make a useful ladder by which we can haul ourselves up to survey the surrounding terrain. And when that terrain is the work of the directors who are the subjects of the first titles released in the Cambridge Film Classics series—Alfred Hitchcock, Woody Allen and Wim Wenders—Baudry's conflation of Plato and Freud is not such a bad ladder. It may not explain the cinema itself but it goes some way

*The Films of Alfred Hitchcock*, David Sterrit, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1993.

ISBN 0 521 39814 2 RRP \$25.00

*The Films of Woody Allen*, Sam B. Girgus, Cambridge University Press, New York 1993. ISBN 0 521 38999 2 RRP \$25.00

*The Films of Wim Wenders*, Robert Phillip Kolker and Peter Beicken, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1993. ISBN 0 52138976 3 RRP \$27.50

to explaining the assumptions of filmmakers such as Hitchcock and Allen—men steeped in Freud, whose theory of instinctual drives was in turn steeped in the various metaphors of vision and desire to be found in *The Republic*, *The Symposium* and *The Phaedrus*.

David Sterrit's book on Hitchcock is much the best of the three, its chief defect being not in the text itself but in the regrettably small number of still photographs from the films discussed. This may have been a matter of the publisher wanting to keep costs down—the Wenders' volume, slightly more expensive than the other two, has no such lack—but in talking about movies there is no substitute for the image itself.

This quibble aside, the book is as instructive and as entertaining an introduction to Hitchcock's work as one could wish for. A comprehensive guide to the work of a director with 57 films to his credit would be beyond the scope of the short volumes intended for the Cambridge series, and Sterrit has made a virtue of the need for selectivity. The films he discusses in detail include three generally acknowledged to be among the master's greatest (*Vertigo*, *Psycho* and *The Birds*), a favourite among the early works (*Shadow of Doubt*), and two that are now rarely seen (*Blackmail*, the director's first talkie, and *The Wrong Man*). Yet admirers of *Rope*, *Rear Window* and *North by Northwest* will not be disappointed; these and other films rate mentions by comparison with the chosen subjects, and all are discussed with reference to the classic Hitchcock themes: the interplay of illusion

and reality (the cave has its uses, after all) and the allure of evil (the Augustinianism of Hitchcock's Catholic boyhood flowing over into the Freudianism of his adult life).

Sterrit draws all these together with great verve and erudition, a combination missing from Sam Girgus' book on Woody Allen. Erudition it has, but the lugubrious Girgus does not carry it lightly. Sterrit manages to convey his familiarity with both Freud and recent critical theory without lapsing into the jargon of the film-school lecturer, whereas Girgus seems to know no other form of speech. He is relentless in pouring out more post-modernist pabulum than many of his readers would wish to hear, and in the process comes to resemble the kind of intellectual that Allen has spent much of his career lampooning. One of the chapter headings, '*The Purple Rose of Cairo*: Poststructuralist Anxiety Comes to New Jersey', could be a title for a Woody Allen monologue; but I do not think that Girgus is much given to self-parody.

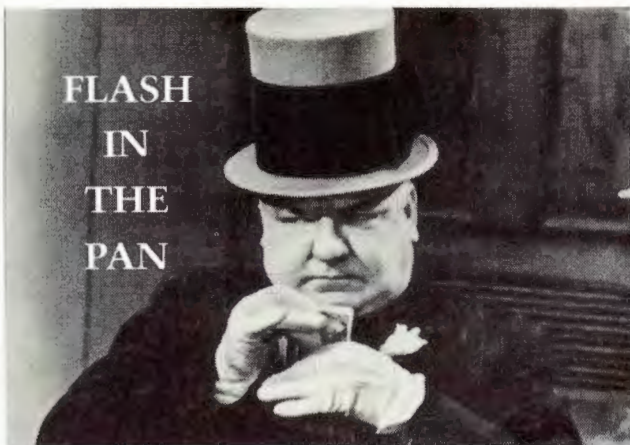
All three books, however, succeed in conveying how each of their subjects has mastered the dynamics of the cave. Whether it be Sterrit on how Hitchcock conveys the *feel* of vertigo (the camera zooming into a stairwell while simultaneously tracking away from it), or Girgus explaining how *Hannah and Her Sisters* integrates the stand-up comic of Allen's early films (static face-to-camera shots) with the mood of films such as *Interiors* (the actors' mental states conveyed by the jerkiness of a hand-held camera), the mechanics of vision and desire are spelt out.

'Vision and Desire' is the subtitle of Kolker and Beicken's book on Wenders, a director whose most famous film, *Paris, Texas*, concludes with a scene that amounts to a kind of mutilated extension of the metaphor of the cave. The scene depicts a meeting between a man and his estranged wife—in a pornographic peep-show booth, where she is the 'show' and he the client. A kind of cave within a cave within a cave: I think Plato would have enjoyed the idea of moviemakers and moviegoers being trapped in his metaphor. ■

Ray Cassin is *Eureka Street's* film reviews editor.



## FLASH IN THE PAN



### Genie ingenious

*Aladdin*, Disney Studios (Hoyts and Village). It's a sobering thought that in the early '80s Disney executive hard-noses were mooting the liquidation of the studio's animation department. A final risk was taken, with more creative licence being given to the script-writers, and *The Little Mermaid* saved the day.

Encouraged by last year's happy experience with *Beauty and the Beast*, we arranged a posse of the kids and their friends to do the full number on *Aladdin*. There was an abundance of popcorn, choc-tops and giant paper buckets of the kind of soft drink that could rip the veneer off a piano at ten paces. The place was full of similar parties, festive, expectant, optimistic. This felt different from your usual parents' purgatory, riding shotgun with a ticket to dutiful boredom. The grown-ups were expecting a good time too—and we got it.

The art direction was what you expect from Disney—showy 3D effects, lovely colour depth and gee-whizzery for things like marble floors and night skies. But the real achievement was in the sound-track—not the silly songs, but the way the directors had decided to dance the animation to the tune of Robin Williams' rapid-fire stream of consciousness. As a result, *Aladdin* is one of those rare films that can be enjoyed by everyone.

—Juliette Hughes

### Decline and fall

*Falling Down*, dir. Joel Schumacher (Village). This is a good film, pacy, sad, and often very funny. The public fuss about its 'incorrectness' consists of misunderstanding by both the left and the right. It is not a vigilante film, and

those on the right who rejoice in the hero's attitudes, and those on the left who denounce them, have (once more) all missed the point.

The hero (Michael Douglas), mostly known as 'D-Fens' for his car's number plates, is a recently retrenched, confused and deeply

disturbed middle-class white American who abandons his car in a diabolical Los Angeles traffic snarl-up in order to walk across the city to his daughter's birthday party. When questioned, he tells people he is 'going home', but his ex-wife has a court order restraining him from seeing her or the child because of his violent tendencies.

On his journey, his personal rage and disintegration reflect the social

owner, and a patrician white golfer on his private course.

Through his adventures he is tracked by a gentle cop (Robert Duval) who is about to take early retirement. The finale is clever and suspenseful, and D-Fens' much-quoted remark to the cop, 'You mean, I'm the bad guy?' is not a defiant challenge but, at least in part, the expression of a dawning understanding.

The one serious flaw in the film is its treatment of the women involved, especially the cop's nagging wife and his devoted subordinate. The sub-plot involving them is the one point at which *Falling Down* descends into cliché and stereotype.

—Tony Coady

### Strains of Emily

*The Piano*, dir. Jane Campion (Village). This Palme d'Or winner, for which Campion also wrote the screenplay, was described by a reviewer for *Libération* as the sort of story Emily Bronte might have written if she had lived in colonial New Zealand instead of provincial Yorkshire. Well, up to a point. The characters do have an affinity with the *Wuthering Heights* crowd—Ms Jane acknowledges Miss Emily's work as her inspiration—and the fern forests in which the action is set eerily echo the gloom of the Yorkshire moors. But, although Campion's telling of the tale demonstrates a mastery of her own medium, she does not rival the second Bronte sister as a yarn spinner.

Like *Wuthering Heights*, *The Piano* is a tour of some of the murkier depths of mid-Victorian sexuality. The tourists are Ada (Holly Hunter), Stewart (Sam Neill), whom she travels to New Zealand to marry, and Baines (Harvey Keitel), the Heathcliff in the triangle. Ada does not speak; she has a 'past', a young daughter as evidence thereof, and a grand piano that rather clumsily symbolises her complex, sublimated eroticism.

All these elements come together in one of the film's early scenes. Ada, daughter and piano have disembarked on to a bleak, windswept beach where they wait for Stewart to collect them. He arrives with Baines and some Maoris, and Baines' Heathcliff-like pro-

#### Eureka Street Film Competition

Yes, yes, the man who was always looking for loopholes, Mr W.C. Fields himself. Has he been dealt a good hand or a bad one? Tell us, and tell us why, and we'll award two tickets to the film of your choice for the answer we like best. Send entries to: *Eureka Street* Film Competition, PO Box 553, Richmond, VIC 3121. May's winner was Samantha Alcock, of Proserpine, Qld, who thought that Sinatra was wondering whether *I Did It My Way* would make an appropriate divorce-court recessionary.



hostility and disintegration around him. His outbursts of contempt, anger or violence, are directed at an unpleasant Korean shopkeeper, some dangerous young Hispanic gang members, the officious, but ever smiling, white management of a McDonald's-type cafe where beautiful pictures of food contrast amazingly with what is actually served, a white neo-Nazi store



pensities are immediately apparent: his face is tattooed, Maori-fashion. The Maoris in the group, with their top hats and frock coats, may be turning 'European' but Baines has gone native.

Visually the scene is wonderfully composed, but it gives too much away too quickly. Stewart and Ada quarrel about the practicality of lugging a grand piano through the forest to her new home, and we see at once that the stiffly polite colonist is really a cad and a philistine, that wild-man Baines is really a sensitive romantic like Ada, and that—yep, you guessed it—music will soothe the soul (though not the body) of the savage beast. And that's *The Piano*.

—Ray Cassin

## Pier's parting shot

*Salo*, dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini (independent cinemas). It is tempting to think that the shade of Pasolini would be pleased by the *furor* surrounding *Salo*, 17 years after its first release in Italy. In a French television interview



a week before his murder—a death highly convenient to the Italian government of the time—he said, not entirely mischievously, that 'to deny oneself the pleasure of being scandalised makes one a moralist'.

John Gatt-Rutter, professor of Italian studies at La Trobe University, pointed out in a paper given after the screening I saw that Pasolini well

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knew that the corruption which permeated Italian politics and business had the capacity to absorb many challenges from subversive forces; the director saw himself as locked in a constant struggle to remain on the fringe, and thus able to comment and to undermine without being subsumed into the system.

Given that, watching this last movie of Pasolini's is a powerful experience. There is no attempt to accommodate, to compromise, to soften the confrontation he forces us to make

with the personal mechanics of evil. *This*, he says, is what evil people do. *This* is how they hijack all that is most vulnerable and sacred in the human body and soul, and *this* is how they destroy it. It is shallow and misleading to interpret, as some critics have, Pasolini's use of de Sade's novel *The 120 Days of Sodom* only as a metaphor for fascism. The director's vision cannot be confined to a past event—other layers of meaning are there: the Salo regime of Mussolini's

last days in 1944 functions as a metaphor for any abuse of power.

So it is important to distinguish clearly between the emotions engendered by deeds portrayed in the film and the whole experience of the film itself. Confusing the two is common among detractors of the film—particularly those numerous and vocal opponents who have not seen it.

Any recitation of the film's catalogue of horrors is sure to excite outrage, and many are abandoning morality for the pleasures of scandal. Indeed, to take the deeds out of Pasolini's impeccable stylistic and moral context and blurt them out on prime-time TV and early morning radio seems to be the order of the day. If the blinding of Gloucester ('Out, vile jelly!') is seen as acceptable within the context of *King Lear*, then why should we accept the reasoning of those who seem unable to contemplate the context of *Salo*? Or does the appreciation of *King Lear* make one a supporter of Goneril and Regan?

Images of the horrors depicted in *Salo* may well haunt one, if one has a heart, but the sum of the experience is importantly greater. For me, the triumph of Pasolini's last film is that he managed to subvert de Sade himself by breaking beyond the confines of story and metaphor to reclaim a sense of wounded sacredness. Not for nothing does he put into the mouth of one victim the words: 'My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?'

—Juliette Hughes

## It's all in the wrist

*Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story*, dir. Rob Cohen (Greater Union). I must confess that when I saw *Dragon* I had never seen a Bruce Lee film, and that my attitude to martial-arts adventures was that if *Kung Fu* was the only thing on TV, then there was nothing on. I knew only that Bruce Lee was the first of the martial-arts action heroes, a precursor to Chuck Norris and John Claude Van Damme, who was made more famous by his premature death than by the events of his life.

Although this is probably true of both Lee and his films, *Dragon* does reveal a deep side to its hero—despite suffering from some of the oversimplifications common to film biographies. Jason Scott Lee—no relation to Bruce—gives an enjoyable and convincing performance in the lead role, as does Lauren Holly, who plays Lee's strong-willed American wife.

*Dragon* sticks to a formula. There's enough brawling to keep the action fans interested, with expertly choreographed, convincing fight scenes. And



we see Lee achieve fame, after a series of setbacks, just before his untimely death—about which the film fortunately avoids the temptation to speculate.

*Dragon* is not a 'must see' film, but I found it an enjoyable and engaging biography of a man who has become a cult figure since his death.

—Tim Stoney

## Pomp and politics

*Orlando*, dir. Sally Potter (independent cinemas). The flagship of this year's film festivals, *Orlando* opens with pageantry and one strong performance. The film has been much lauded for its sexual politics: I found them vapid and preachy. But Potter does score a coup in casting the aged Quentin Crisp as the aged Elizabeth I. Crisp is good *not* because he does what actors have done since Aeschylus—act across gender—but because he manages to blend into his parchment old queen an autocratic wit, considerable dignity and more than a whiff of taxidermy. It is a reeking, black-fingernailed Elizabeth who lays upon the youthful, aristocratic Orlando (Tilda Swinton) the stern injunction that he/she must never wither. Orlando is dutifully obedient. So begins a romp through centuries, landscapes and genders.

Potter's source is Virginia Woolf's

1928 novel, written for her sometime lover and lifelong friend, Vita Sackville-West. *Orlando* is a riddling tilt at the conventions of biography. But it is also an English ironist's exploration of self, identity, nature, love and work—in this case the mostly thankless work of writing. Sally Potter's *Orlando* is a much simpler affair, thin textured, for all its vaunted lavishness. With Elizabeth dead and buried, the camera lingers on Tilda Swinton in a kind of complicit narcissism. Swinton has an extraordinary face, but she and her face do not compose a complex narrative, and as an Elizabethan adventurer, even a sensitive one, she is not convincing. Around her Potter contrives spectacular scenes, on ice, in the deserts of Asia, but they function a little like high class sets behind tepid opera sung by the second string cast.

The 18th century yields some waspish substance, mostly in the couplets of Alexander Pope (Peter Eyre). After that the film runs downhill into farce. Billy Zane smirks his way through his brief (thank God it is brief) role as the Romantic lover who leaves. Romantic Orlando suffers. But not for long. Come the 20th century, she is miraculously whole, realised, a mother, and beautiful on a motor bike.

If only it were so easy!

—Morag Fraser

## Mr Electric sparkles at film fest

*Mr Electric* is an unlikely title for a movie. In fact, this is a short film (28 minutes), written and directed by a young film-maker, Stuart McDonald, and funded by Film Victoria. It received its premiere at the 1993 Melbourne International Film Festival, pleasing the festival audience.

Set in a remote Victorian country town in 1956, it stars Ernie Dingo as a man who returns home as a qualified electrician offering to wire the house of his friends. But beneath the surface is a story of racial bigotry. A family has adopted an Aboriginal boy, but as he grew older, they rejected him, especially because of his relationship with their daughter.

The scenes of hostility are telling, but the film has images of hope—literally of 'enlightenment' and of

'making contact'. The audience is entertained and absorbs the message by story rather than preaching.

*Mr Electric* was awarded the Ecumenical Prize of the Australia-Pacific region of OCIC (International Catholic Office for Cinema and Audio-Visuals), for the best Australian short film portraying human values. The jury comprised Fr Fred Chamberlin, (Australian Catholic Film Office); Jan Epstein, (*The Melburnian*, ABC radio); Peter Luby, (film-maker) and Fr Peter Malone MSC, president of OCIC Pacific.

Though not specifically looking for a film with an aboriginal theme, the jury was pleased to be able to make its award to *Mr Electric* in the Year of Indigenous People.

—Peter Malone MSC

## Widen the network ...



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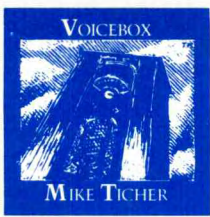
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# A Bridgette too far

**T**HERE WAS A TV STATION in South Carolina that for 14 hours a day broadcast images of tropical fish swimming in a small tank. When the show was dropped there were so many complaints that another channel immediately adopted it. Clearly, this is the sort of innovative programming that Australia's viewing public will demand from pay TV when it arrives. But since that event seems to be no more imminent than another Swans' victory, for the present we shall have to rely on radio to fill up our days with edifying material of this kind.

By my calculations there are about 2500 hours of radio broadcast each week in Sydney and perhaps slightly more in Melbourne. Roughly half of that time is dedicated primarily to music, which still leaves an awful lot of hours to be filled by talk. Not all of that talk is as indispensable as the broadcasters would have us believe. In fact, listening to a lot of it is rather like watching tropical fish.

I thought I had discovered the equivalent of the fish show in the outer reaches of the radio galaxy, but after a moment's consideration was forced to conclude that I had been misled by a name. The program in question is *Dogwatch*, which goes out from Sydney's student station, 2SER, at 2am on Sundays. Unfortunately I (and four-and-a-half million other people) haven't yet managed to tune in. Presumably, the name refers to the time of day rather than to a nocturnal look at the world of dogs, but since even more hours of radio are on the way it's probably only a matter of time before titles like *Dogwatch* literally mean what they say.

I don't simply endorse the argument that in broadcasting 'more means worse'—it's usually put forward by people who identify 'quality' with classical music (sorry, 'fine music') and the ABC. But it is true that the urge to pump out something at all times of the day and night, multiplied by the number of stations available, does not necessarily produce a diversity of listening options. In theory, with so many stations already on the air, there

should always be something worth listening to for everyone. But is this really the case? I'm a fairly frequent listener to SBS radio, the home of the absurdly optimistic handover ('You have been listening to the Cantonese show on 2EA—please stay tuned for our next program, which is in German'). Admittedly there's a limit to how much enjoyment you can get from political discussions in Czech, but it doesn't say much for the other dozen or so stations that often this is the most entertaining radio on offer.

In contrast with other media, radio's problem is that it often has too much time to fill, rather than not enough. With those long, scary hours of potential silence always in mind, there is almost unlimited scope for improvisation, discursiveness and, not to put too fine a point on it, mindless drivel. As a predominantly live medium, radio encourages its presenters to think out loud. So when John Singleton characterised Phillip Adams as 'a million words in search of an editor', he was really describing Adams' aptness for radio rather than for print journalism. But Adams is by no means the worst offender when it comes to using 10 words where one would have done.

Since Clive Robertson's departure from Channel Nine he has found a niche on Sydney's 2GB. Drivetime seems to be a particularly inappropriate timeslot for his brand of inconsequential rambling. Late at night, when most people's thought processes are becoming woollier anyway, Robertson used to be a passable, if mildly irritating companion. But I can't believe that people really want to hear him stretch out feeble jokes about condoms and condominiums for minutes on end while their jangling nerves are trying to cope with rush-hour traffic. Maybe it helps calm them down.

Certainly Clive's counterpart on 2BL, Frank Crook, isn't averse to telling longwinded stories about how he sets off smoke-detectors with his pipe. He also shares a talent with fellow ABC presenters for developing a banal interview that really only deserves a

couple of questions into a 10-minute feature. 3LO's Ranald Macdonald is notorious for his roundabout approach to interviewees, but in that respect he doesn't suffer by comparison with his Sydney counterpart, Andrew Olle.

The ABC also makes excellent use of opportunities to go into little-known subjects at some length—*Background Briefing* is a good example but not the only one. Lately I have learned, courtesy of Ramona Koval, far more than I ever cared to about the possibilities of milking sheep. (Offbeat stories about farmers coping with the rural depression seem to be particularly in vogue at the moment.)

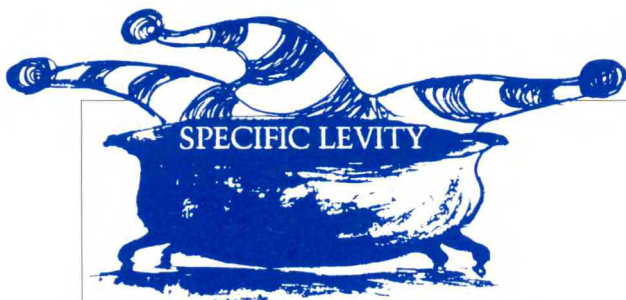
The ABC is not in the same league as some of the commercial stations when it comes to out and out time-wasting, but like them it remains pathetically devoted to the cheapest and most popular way of dribbling away the hours with idle chit-chat—the phone-in. Among the riveting subjects I've heard canvassed recently have been: what listeners were planning to do on the long weekend; what books they've been reading lately; and what interesting species of wildlife have been hanging around their backyards. Enriching or what?

But for utterly inane and superfluous radio, one show stands alone. This is the magnificent *Bridgette's Cosmic Connections*, which can be heard on 2UE at 9pm on Sundays. Bridgette is a medium who dispenses invaluable information to callers about the progress of their relatives on 'the other side' ('I think perhaps your mum used to have very cold hands'). Perhaps not surprisingly, Bridgette's judgments are hilariously inaccurate. 'I would say [your son] could be a reincarnated soul from one of your family,' she reveals. 'Very good with animals too, is he?' Caller: 'Actually Bridgette, it's a she.'

With talent like that available on Australia's radio waves, surely we can look forward to pay TV with full confidence in our ability to match any level of banality already achieved in America. Bring on the fish. ■

**Mike Ticher** is a Sydney journalist.





## Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no.15, August 1993

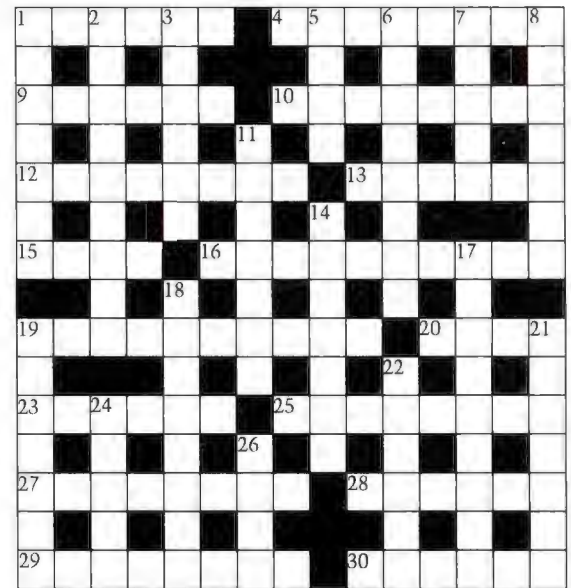
Devised by Joan Nowotny IBVM

### ACROSS

- 1 Pope's licence to put fancy lid on nut concoction. (6)
- 4 False incentive attracts some debts. (8)
- 9 Almost have an aromatic head for a capital cigar. (6)
- 10 Skipping no religious outpost while travelling. (8)
- 12 Decided she loves red confection. (8)
- 13 I hear you say 'stop running round the room.' (6)
- 15 Transport for going back to the market. (4)
- 16 Having different opinions about a vain trace remaining. (2,8)
- 19 Though I'm sometimes roughed up, I love soccer, being advanced for my age. (10)
- 20 Crazy guy left plain. (4)
- 23 Rebut the umpire with the small utility. (6)
- 25 Learner in sight of the queen looks more delicate. (8)
- 27 Somehow knew Ed joined A.A., having been alerted to the problem. (8)
- 28 Going East, this is all that is left of old England. (6)
- 29 Left outside, perhaps, the state of 3 down. (8)
- 30 Three bishops, distributing beer, talk nonsense. (6)

### DOWN

- 1 If perhaps I inter him first, I will probably succeed. (7)
- 2 Should Eva state part of what she knows, it would bring destruction. (9)
- 3 Isolated half of London cathedral city. (6)
- 5 Am up the tree backwards, having encountered mountain lion! (4)
- 6 Take a nap before the downpour? Don't indulge yourself! (8)
- 7 Vice ring repelled girl. (5)
- 8 Genuine ingredients I screen. (7)
- 11 Be relevant though saucy in a rearrangement of the material. (7)
- 14 Uncertainly, ugly Eva wavered. (7)
- 17 After dark, stick with the group for entertainment. (9)
- 18 It's the craziest test! Do it nevertheless. (8)
- 19 Phrase on page, maybe. (7)
- 21 Measure of area over time. (7)
- 22 Long time and queer business at the meeting. (6)
- 24 Still fragile though shorter. (5)
- 26 Sounds as if he'd take notice. (4)



### Solution to Crossword no.14, June-July 1993



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# Spirit at large

*At a recent university meeting, one member was carrying on about being at the cutting edge of something or other. A wicked friend leaned over to me and said, 'Do you know the expression, "At the cutting edge of the status quo"?'*

*Talk about spirituality can be like that. It can suggest exercises in self-absorption, as in Linda Ronstadt's song about 'poor poor pitiful me', or a world-weariness that bows out into another world, as if, because all flesh is grass, all bets are off.*

**—Peter Steele SJ**

(*'3-D Visions'*, p4)

