

EUREKA STREET

Vol. 4 No. 4 May 1994

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Cast-offs of empire

How they line up at the National Portrait Gallery

Gerard Windsor

How Australia forgot an engineering genius

Margaret Simons

How to call on the Queen

Alex Miller

**Brian Toohy on
making budgets**

Declining

(for Bernard Muir)

*Sensible, as they used to say, of the honour
You do me, United Airlines, in providing
Eighty-four pages from Aladdin's Palace,
I must decline the offer. Heaven's my witness
They're brimming with temptation. Who'd have thought
To have seen in the latter years a vista open
On both the Gourmet Mickey Waffler and
The Great Abdomex Stomach Cruncher? Eyes
Declining into presbyopia shine
At the very thought of the Hundred Year Light Bulbs:
Beneath them, shovelling in Sundance Granola,
Fresh from the Fogless Shower Mirror, spruce
As never before, thanks to the Nose Hair Trimmer
(Designed with Excellent In-Hand Feel and Balance),
I'd take solicitations from the Spunky
6-Times Ms. Olympia Pumping Me Up
High to Hard-Driving, Strong-Stepping Music.
Transformed right through to Buns of Steel, I'd drape
Myself in the Butter-Smooth Lamb Suede
Shirt (Comfort without Pretense), a snip
At less than four hundred bucks, and check all systems—
The Blood-Pressure Recording Watch, the Barking
Dog Alarm, Voice-Changing Telephone,
The Electronic Letter Opener,
The Cowboy Spur Door Knocker and
The Solar-Powered Ventilated Golf Cap.
United Airlines, you're the one for me—
At least a better, worthier me: devoted,
Young and smart and unkillably voracious
For the Hot Diggity Dogger Griller, the World
Globe that Levitates, the Silent Insect
Eliminator, The Hanging Wine Rack, and
The Neuropsychology of Self-Discipline.*

Peter Steele



Bungaree, the subject of Augustus Earle's portrait, which features on this month's cover, was one of the identities of early Sydney. He is also the first Aborigine known—in white records at least—to have circumnavigated Australia.

He lived and slept in uniforms discarded by the governors and colonels he became adept at mimicking. Bungaree died in 1830 and is buried at Rose Bay. Earle's portrait of him is included in the inaugural exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery, Old Parliament House, Canberra.

Photograph from the Rex Nan Kivell Collection, NK118, National Library of Australia.

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CONTENTS

2

POETRY

Declining, by Peter Steele.

4

COMMENT

Brian Toohey on the May Budget.

7

CAPITAL LETTER

8

LETTERS

11

COUNTERPOINT

12

WAITING FOR ST JUDE

Tony Coady on why America wants the patron saint of lost causes.

16

THE HOLOCAUST ON FAST-FORWARD

Shane Maloney on L.A. museology.

18

NOBODY'S HERO

Margaret Simons profiles the Aboriginal inventor soon to grace the \$50 note.

21

THINGS SEEN AND UNSEEN

Gerard Windsor shows his face at the National Portrait Gallery.

24

WHY THE CENTRE DIDN'T HOLD

Max Teichmann and David de Carvalho anatomise the Liberal Party.

29

THE LIMITS OF DEMOCRACY

Alex Miller calls on the Queen.

33

QUIXOTE

34

INSIDE BURMA

Carmela Baranowska discovers Burma's civil war at first hand.

37

ARCHIMEDES

38

BOUGAINVILLE DEADLOCK

How long can it continue? Morag Fraser reports on problems with PNG policy.

39

THE ECUMENICAL ALTAR

Story by Amy Witting.

42

BOOKS

Bruce Williams is lyrical about Jim Davidson's *Lyrebird Rising*; James Griffin surveys *Victoria's Colonial Governors* (p44); Bridget Griffen-Foley reviews Patrick Buckridge's life of *The Scandalous Penton*, (p46); Ngaire Naffine looks at hard-boiled female detectives and Sara Paretsky's *Tunnel Vision* (p47); Andrew Hamilton reflects on John W.O'Malley's *The First Jesuits* (p49) and Michael McKernan reviews Ian Breward's *A History of the Australian Churches* (p51).

52

THE CHURCH

Chris McGillion and Veronica Brady at a national Catholic lay conference.

54

THEATRE

Geoffrey Milne goes looking for laughs.

56

FLASH IN THE PAN

Reviews of the films *Short Cuts*; *M Butterfly*; *Flight of the Innocent*; *Un Coeur en Hiver*; *Germinal* and *Le Samourai*.

58

ON SPEC

59

SPECIFIC LEVITY

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Budget season

FOR \$80 A HEAD (or \$750 for a corporate table of 10) you can hear Ralph Willis speak at a dinner at the Grand Hyatt in Melbourne, the night after he delivers the Federal Budget on 10 May. Your hosts will be the Lustig & Moar property group, the Grand Hyatt and *The Australian*. For \$130 a head (or \$1200 for a corporate table of 10) you can break bread with Ralph again on 16 May, this time with the *Australian Financial Review* acting as your host at the Sydney Hilton.

So what will you get for your money that you couldn't get for free by turning on the TV on 10 May and watching Willis actually deliver the Budget in Parliament? Very little, apart from the chance to hear how he attempts to defuse any adverse market reaction to the Budget.

Before you get to hear the Treasurer above the tinkle of hotel glassware, the Opposition will already have warned that it is a 'tax and spend' Budget. Various commentators will have denounced him as a 'wimp' for failing to slash the deficit well below the current target of around one per cent of gross domestic product by 1996-97.

As you nibble on your after-dinner mint, you will discover that Willis is not really talking to you, unless, of course, you can influence 'market sentiment'. The Budget, he will reassure the market, is 'responsible'. It meets the Government's 'medium-term deficit-reduction strategy'. It allows for a 'sustained recovery' to occur in a 'non-inflationary environment'. It 'makes room' for the private sector to invest. And please don't be nasty to him over the deficit target. Why not pick on the Americans or the Brits—theirs are much worse.

There was a time when budgets were seen as a statement of a government's spending priorities and how they should be funded. Looked at in this light, some broad trends stand out since Labor was elected in March 1983. The most obvious is that Labor is genuinely committed to cutting the share of national resources going to the public sector as well as cutting the share of taxes paid by the wealthiest segment of the population.

On current projections, by 1996-97 the public sector's share of national output will have shrunk by four percentage points since Labor's first year in office. For those who argue that Labor has shown insufficient zeal in slicing into the public sector, it is worth noting that spending would be roughly \$20 billion higher in 1996-97 if it accounted for the same proportion of GDP as during the first four years of the Hawke government.

On the other side of the ledger, taxes have already been cut to the lowest of any country in the Organisation for Eco-

conomic Cooperation and Development—a position unlikely to be altered as part of the deficit reduction process.

The choice of spending cuts puzzle those who consider investment as the key to job growth. A former adviser to the Hawke government, Colm Kearney, said in a recent article in the *Australian Financial Review* that Labor was in no position 'to preach from the high moral ground to the private sector about its poor investment performance. The public sector's own investment performance has been worse than—and has partly caused—the private sector's performance'. Kearney, who is professor of economics at the University of Western Sydney, added that the ACTU is in no position to complain either, as its insistence on tax cuts as part of the Accord has reduced the funds available for infrastructure investment.

Kearney echoes the views of many economists who see public investment as helping lift private sector productivity and employment. The argument is familiar enough. Upgrading an airport to take international jets can boost private investment in tourist facilities. Better roads or railways can make it easier for companies to service their customers and so on.

Despite its potential to create the sort of 'real jobs' we are so often told can never emerge from 'make work' schemes, this sort of investment has not been a Labor priority.

ACCORDING TO BUDGET PAPERS, the Commonwealth's capital spending fell from \$5 billion in 1982-83 to only \$1.8 billion in 1993-94 and is due to fall to less than \$700 million in the coming financial year. Although Treasury officials claim that adherence to various accounting conventions causes the budget papers to understate the actual outlays, overall public investment has undoubtedly been on a downward trend since the 1960s.

Infrastructure spending is not the only area to have rated poorly on Labor's list of priorities. In real terms, spending on transport and communications has been cut in half while spending on housing and community amenities has been cut by more than 30 per cent. The CSIRO has suffered cuts which have left it with barely half of what would have been needed to keep up with inflation.

When it comes to foreign aid, Malcolm Fraser has noted that as a nation we have become less generous as our wealth has grown. Aid has fallen in real terms to a point where it will amount to 0.33 per cent of gross domestic product in this year's Budget, compared to 0.5 per cent under Fraser. In contrast, our

overseas spies have enjoyed lavish increases with budget allocations growing at well over double the rate for government spending as a whole.

According to the budget papers, State and local governments have done particularly badly under both the Hawke and Keating governments. Although they are used to paying for many of the services that Labor likes to call the 'social wage', federal grants to state and local governments have increased at only one-quarter the rate applying to total federal spending since 1983.



DINNER WITH RALPH

TO AVOID DISAPPOINTMENT BOOK YOUR SEAT NOW!

The budget-making process has not been solely a matter of taking the axe to spending programs. Areas that have managed to win large allocations include health, social security and education. Much of this spending clearly justifies Labor's claims to look after those who can't fend for themselves, but billions of dollars also go to those who are well off.

Health has gobbled up the biggest slice of the increases. Unless costs, especially for medical and pharmaceutical services, are brought under control, other programs will continue to be squeezed. Now consuming over \$16 billion a year, health has expanded more than two and half

times as fast as overall spending. Although there are a number of offsetting changes in other parts of the budget, this figure presents a serious headache for those who feel there are other areas of need that are more worthy of consideration.

Much of the spending goes to people who could easily afford to cover more of the cost, yet the new Health Minister, Carmen Lawrence, shows little sign of being willing to make them do so. Until she does, funds will continue to be diverted from what many see as the more urgent task of reversing the growth in Australia's underclass.

The increases for education are more modest, running a little over a third ahead of the rate of increase for Federal Government spending as a whole. When growth in student numbers is taken into account, spending per student has actually fallen at the tertiary level.

Social security spending has risen by about 50 per cent above the average, but again, this has to be spread across an increased number of recipients. But costs are bedevilled by the extraordinarily generous tax concessions for superannuation. The concessions, which now cost about \$5 billion a year, are massively biased in favour of the well-off.

For some reason, the Labor government, with the strong backing of the ACTU, has decided that it makes sense to give a subsidy towards the retirement income

of someone on \$2500 a week that is more than three times the level of the one given to someone on \$300 a week. The subsidy amounts to \$550 a week for someone on four times average weekly earnings, compared to less than \$160 a week for the single age pension.

The tax concessions become even harder to justify as a higher level of contributions becomes compulsory. Why provide an incentive to do something that is compulsory? Why, for that matter, subsidise consumption by well-off retirees when the nation is supposed to be facing a savings problem? Although the scheme amounts to a massive welfare handout to

the rich, the government can be confident that pressure for change is unlikely to come from those who are usually so vocal in their opposition to the 'hand-out mentality'.

Superannuation is not the only bonanza Labor has provided to those least in need. An executive on \$300,000 a year has enjoyed a cut in income tax—after inflation is taken into account—of about \$32,000 a year since Labor came to power. For those with income from shares, the introduction of the dividends imputation scheme has meant the cuts have been far more spectacular. Largely because of imputation, people with an income of more than \$1 million a year now pay, on average, proportionally less tax than those on \$40,000 to \$50,000 a year.

Company tax rates have also fallen, and can be expected to fall further as governments around the globe compete to attract footloose international capital. This competition to 'make yourself nice for Mr Capital' is not confined to tax rates. It is leading to constant pressure to lower wages and working conditions for the unskilled and to cut environmental, health and safety standards that add to Australian production costs.

A number of commentators have suggested that it might be possible in these circumstances to improve the job prospects of the unskilled by lowering their wages while topping their incomes with payments from the social security or tax systems. The idea is to do something more than simply shift people from the ranks of the 'jobless poor' to the 'working poor'.

The government's preferred position is to spend more on labour market programs designed to make the unemployed more 'jobs ready'. Whether the labour market will be ready to give them a job is another matter. With luck, the strategy might get unemployment down to seven or eight per cent by the end of the decade.

One way or the other, the need for a social safety net does not look like going away. Labor's challenge lies in how to maintain it at a minimum standard of decency—a task that may not be achievable while it continues to lavish health and welfare dollars on the well-off at the same time as cutting their taxes.

Paul Keating's overriding vision is to integrate Australia into the economies of our Asian neighbours. Unless there is a change in budget priorities, Australia is likely to end up replicating the extremes of wealth and poverty that apply in many of those countries. So far, the policy choices leading in this direction have proved to be politically rewarding, attracting particular applause from the nation's opinion-forming élite. There is little reason to expect any change. ■

Brian Toohey is the author of a forthcoming book on economic policy, *Tumbling Dice*, to be published in October by Heinemann.

Talking Points

Mass for Rwanda

On Sunday, 8 May, at 3pm in St Ignatius Church, Richmond, Victoria, a Mass will be celebrated for those killed in Rwanda, including the three Jesuits who are known to have died. It will be an occasion to pray for peace with members of the African communities.

Feminist Theology Foundation (Inc.)

The Feminist Theology Foundation was founded after the *Woman Authoring Theology* conference held in Sydney in 1991. Its purpose is to 'improve the situation of women in church and society, by providing financial resources to develop feminist theology and practice'. Donations received have been invested, and applications from groups are being sought for loans to assist in planning an activity reflective of the aims of the Foundation.

Members of the interim board met in Sydney on 21 November and elected four directors:

Patricia Brennan (convenor)
Ann Wansbrough (secretary)
Bernice Moore (treasurer)
Camille Paul (public officer)

Application forms for loans are available from Bernice Moore, ph (02) 516 1065.

Composing Women's Festival

29 June-3 July 1994

CUB Malthouse, South Melbourne, Victoria

In 16 concerts of rock, country, jazz, orchestral, choral, chamber, piano and electronic music, more than 200 artists will pay tribute to Australian women who have shaped music composition. The festival also includes forums, workshops, papers, interviews and discussions focusing on composing women in Australia and New Zealand.

Contact: Miranda Brown Publicity
tel (03) 419 0931, fax (03) 417 4475.

Wandering in nowhere land

THE NEW-LOOK LIBERAL PARTY is going to attack the government, develop new policies and try to build bridges to groups that might support it. Well, one has to start somewhere, I suppose, not least when one has spent a decade going in the opposite direction, sometimes deliberately. John Hewson, the man who was going to resign rather than change a jot of *Fightback!*; who went out of his way to alienate welfare organisations, the churches, the environmental movement, women's lobbies, the arts community and the ethnic communities; the man who said that fixing the economy was all, and who projected himself as being above deals and being guided by polls, now says that he is going to listen, to be guided by polling and to focus his party as much on social policy as on the economy. Oh, and it won't be a neat package, either, carefully costed and presenting an integrated plan for the nation. It will be flexible and pragmatic.

The pathetic element of this lies not in the spectacle of Hewson in his sheep's clothing, but in a party that no longer has a clue about what it stands for. That is not a question of policy, or even of titular leadership. A party is supposed to convey an idea of the world and how it should be; it has to implant within the voter's mind a series of images, usually comforting ones. They can be slogans, like Menzies' 'forgotten people'—the middle class—which conjured up notions of careful stewardship, national security, and 'government off our backs ... but with a lifeline for those in trouble'. Even Hewson, in describing his inclusive, pragmatic and socially concerned agenda, spoke wistfully of hoping to 'recapture the subconscious, long-held view that we are a party which provides personal security and a sense of community'.

Yet nothing could be more certain than that it will not be John Hewson who carries this flag at the next election. No one even pretends to believe that he could credibly project any of it. In the short term, however, the curious thing is that Hewson's hold on the leadership is more secure than it has been for many months. His rivals have the problem that they are merely jostling for leadership of a faction in the party—a faction that, by itself, does not have the numbers. Those who do have the numbers may despise the man who leads them

but they would rather live with such a leader than pay lip-service to another right-winger who believes that he or she has the party's mandate. If Hewson goes before the end of the year it probably will not be because of a party-room coup, but because he realises things are hopeless and has lost interest.

A big part of the problem is the Government. Labor's trek away from its roots may bemuse some of its own faithful, but the party has been astonishingly successful at holding the middle ground. It can lay claim to many of the symbols of its opponents—could one imagine the 30-year slur against Labor, that it was 'soft' on national security, selling any more? Or suggestions that it does not stand for steady economic management? And Labor has been even more successful in forcing the away team on to the quagmire parts of the field. Almost without doing a thing, it can seem more 'caring' and socially aware: the instincts of the other side cannot be trusted. It still has the guts to do the decent thing—on Mabo for example—but does not seek to foist radical experiments, based on tendentious economic philosophies, upon the community. Or so it will say.

Of course, one must be careful with analogies. During the past decade, Labor has lost office in all of the states bar one, in many cases to confident Liberal leaders who were 'seen to stand for something'. But are the styles of Jeff Kennett, or Nick Greiner, or Dean Brown or Richard Court the ones to follow? In fact, each of the Liberal successes followed spectacular administrative debacles by the outgoing governments, and anyone ought to have been able to beat Labor Still, that was said about Hewson and his team in the last federal election too.

IF, INTERNATIONALLY, the hard economic line of a Thatcher or Reagan is now passé, the 'caring and sharing' models of John Major and George Bush, which succeeded them, can hardly be seen as triumphs either. How then, does one go for the middle ground? The best strategy might be to create a constituency among uncommitted interest groups, instead of continuing to contest the ground that Labor has already claimed. The Liberal Party was once an umbrella group for a wide range of middle-class aspirations and interests, and reflected a wide range

of right-of-centre opinion. But, to an even greater extent than Labor, it has let its local party structure and membership collapse. That risks putting the party in the hands of extremists—a risk realised in some areas—and means that not only do the Liberals lack an army, but that they have to train their officers—candidates—in combat conditions.

The party needs some crusades—causes in which the Liberals can project themselves as the party of virtue or common sense, on ground chosen to underline a philosophical difference with Labor. There are some openings. If the Liberal Party dropped some of its obsession with Big Government (leaving clear its distaste for it) and became more obsessive with Big Brother Government—the petty tyrannies of the modern state—it could strike a chord with the underclass as well as with those trying to avoid paying tax. That might mean less emphasis on searching out and punishing dole bludgers and some more attention to their rights.

The Liberals' best hope could be from quality-of-life issues. During the Brisbane City Council elections, the ALP began to panic when it learnt of Liberal research showing how vulnerable Labor was to a campaign based on showing voters a picture of a 'six-pack' block of flats, with a voiceover saying 'This is how Labor wants you to live', followed by a soothing picture of a family enjoying its barbecue in the back of the quarter-acre block, while the voiceover announced 'This is how the Liberals want you to live'. The imagery was too true to be comfortable. Even in leafy Canberra, a middle class that will not let anyone cut down a tree is riven apart by urban in-fill issues. Typically, however, the Liberals made no proper use of their research and Labor romped home.

So far the only quality-of-life issue the Liberals have focused on is law and order—an issue that always has the potential to backfire. But there are a host of other anxieties out in ordinary Australia waiting to be exploited. Creating the new coalitions might require of the party a more avowedly interventionist tack, and some adventurous leadership—it would certainly be beyond a Hewson. ■

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

See 'Why the centre didn't hold', p24.

Ecce homo

From Dr John Carroll

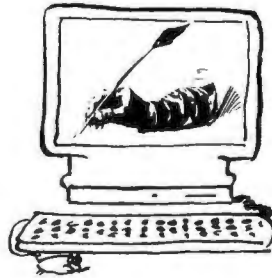
I reply to substantive points made by the two reviewers of my book, *Humanism* (Eureka Street, March 1994).

Stephen Gaukroger provides an alternative reading of Holbein's paintings, *The Ambassadors* and the *Christ Corpse*, suggesting they belong to the late medieval macabre tradition stressing the corruption of the flesh, the body as the source of evil.

It is certainly possible to read *The Ambassadors* in this way, as others have done—a *vanitas* painting focusing on the emptiness of earthly possessions. Indeed, Holbein may have drawn on this tradition, but for his own ends. The earthly possessions are not the traditional symbols of mortality—overturned vessel, coins, flowers, candle—but the emblems of humanist science and culture.

Furthermore, the painting was probably commissioned by the ambassador on the left, Jean de Dinteville, as a portrait. It makes much more sense to read Holbein's intention as being quite straightforward, on the surface, to celebrate de Dinteville and his friend, their wealth, status, position and their

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



ism to entrance the penitent. The problem with this reading is that there is no redemptive element whatsoever in the painting—it is completely profane. Recent Holbein scholarship has given up the earlier view that this work may have been part of a larger whole—allowing for a sacred pendant, subsequently lost. Furthermore, just to take two of the notable artistic precedents: Grünewald's gruesome *Crucifixion* in Colmar is accompanied by a radiant *Resurrection*, and Carpaccio's *Christ Corpse*, now in Berlin, has a serene body and the painting as a whole projects a redemptive order.

At the time of the *Christ Corpse*, Holbein was living in Basel, a humanist centre. Presumably he was friendly with the most eminent humanist of the day, Erasmus, whom he painted many times in these years, and warmly. He had illustrated *In Praise of Folly*. Thus in Holbein's case, neither the intellectual milieu in which he moved nor the sober realism of his artistic style was medieval.

Keith Campbell accuses me of caricaturing Humanism, identifying it with its pathological extremes. He counters with

an urbane sceptical view of life which seems to hang loosely on three hooks.

Firstly, much of human activity is intrinsically satisfying—dancing, farming,—and can well do without morbid intellectualisation. Professor Camp-

bell ties this incontrovertible observation to the 'naturalist' perspective, that as long as humans are provided with food, shelter and companionship they are free to achieve the good life. This is the old liberal progress assumption, shared by men as diverse as Marx and Keynes, that abundance is enough. The late 20th-century West is a categorical empirical falsification of this view, as Kant knew in advance, as Hannah Arendt has brilliantly theorised in her book, *The Human Condition*.

Secondly, there is a gesture in the direction of Stoicism. Professor Campbell lists Montaigne among the moderate humanists whom I neglect. His line comes out something like: accept what you are given, stop whingeing, and get on with your life. But Stoicism only works if there is faith in universal moral laws, in relation to which 'virtue' makes sense. No one is going to suffer the slings and arrows, doing what he has to, under the philosophy that virtue is its own reward, if the values guiding him are relativist whims. The mainstream of our High Culture, driven by the humanist tide, has for a century denied the existence of such universal laws. The case of Stoicism is addressed in my book in an extensive discussion of Shakespeare's *Brutus*. The master humanist was far less sanguine than Professor Campbell on this front.

Thirdly, the moderate position on free-will is pointed to, 'a freedom in our response to values antecedently valid'. In my account this is the reasonable humanism of Erasmus, positing a little bit of free-will. The counter argument is on two levels. In simple empirical terms, the history of the past 500 years has proved Luther right; start with a bit of free-will and you end with total freedom and the elimination of God. In other words the moderate position is inherently unstable.

The other argument is about the truth: how much free-will do we actually have? I have taken the view put most evocatively in our culture by the ancient Greeks, and later Luther and Calvin, that in important things fate rules. This, of course, may only be illustrated, not proven. What is hard to deny, however, is that the West's flirtation with uninhibited individual freedom is *hubris* in its perilous modern form.

John Carroll
Bundoora, VIC



MOORE

humanist learning. He then undercuts this with the floating skull.

Mr Gaukroger is also in accord with some modern opinion which has taken the *Christ Corpse* to be an orthodox meditative icon of the time, its real-

The duality thing

From Dr Paul Dignam

Howard Willis (*Eureka Street*, March 1994) writes an excellent essay about some aspects of pain, but his combining of science with experience makes it difficult to comment without seeming personal. This itself is a common enough experience in helping pain-patients, who have all too often had to develop methods to cope not only with their symptom but also with a community and a health profession that doesn't really want to hear that 'it' still hurts. This is where the greatest gains are often to be had, in regularly seeing the understanding 'other', GP or whatever, who remains interested in the patient and their experience even when unable to 'do' anything.

Descartes' understanding of pain pathways obviously missed half the picture, but Willis seems to share Descartes' other failing: an overly rigid separation of mind and brain. He refers to both aspects of the pain experience, but in very separate ways, and with a far greater emphasis on the physiological than on the emotional. Short of the lobotomy to which he refers, uncoupling of pain and suffering is far from easy. Pain is, after all, usually defined as an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience caused by or described in terms of tissue damage. You can't have the one without the other. I think what Willis resents is the traditional view that suffering is a 'good' thing, and should be tolerated.

Cartesian dualism occurs again when discussing medication: he argues, perhaps quite soundly, for greater access to opioids in long-term pain management, but worries about the use of anti-depressants (which saved his life) when their long-term safety and benefit in appropriate cases is well established. Is this a preference for supposedly brain-altering versus mind-altering medicine? The logic escapes me. In any case, the use of so-called 'anti-depressants' in chronic pain is usually directed at modifying pain pathways, whether clinical depression is present or not.

'My sense of self was eroded until things became almost as bleak as my original condition'. How often have I heard similar accounts! Whether the condition be diabetes, schizophrenia, pain or stroke, inevitably there will be a long dark night of the soul. Not

caused by, and rarely helped by, medication. A 'pain'-full battle to re-establish some equilibrium, and a process that involves mind and body.

I hope that the system will give greater recognition to pain, and that research will provide and governments will buy good pain-relievers. But, also, I hope that we will acknowledge that, like sadness, it must be—and that we will accept it in ourselves and in others, so that it doesn't have to be hidden.

Paul Dignam
Hampstead Gardens, SA

Mary the mauler

From Arthur Jordan

Geez, that Mary Daly sounds like a tough sheila (*Eureka Street*, March 1994). Reminds me of a bloke I met down the pub the other night—couldn't shut the bugger up.

Arthur E. Jordan
Hamilton, QLD

For F.K. Maher

From W. J. Byrt

I should like to add my tribute to Frank Maher to that of James Griffin. (*Eureka Street*, March 1994).

Frank taught me economics at St Kevin's; a clear and stimulating teacher. I followed his subsequent career and was particularly interested in his writings on workers' participation in management, or industrial democracy as it was called, somewhat naively. This was the subject of my MA thesis, of some articles published in Australia and overseas, and of research that I carried out at the International Institute for Labour Studies in Geneva.

I renewed contact with Frank when we were both academics at the University of Melbourne; he in the faculty of law and I in that of economics and commerce. He was still charming, erudite and humane. Recently, Gerard Henderson, in *The Age*, stated that Frank had been eased-out of his position in the national secretariat of Catholic Action, an accusation touched on by James Griffin. I am not in a position to comment on the matter. Bob Santamaria denied the charge in a strongly-worded letter to *The Age*.

Frank Maher was a leading member of the group of Catholic intellectuals, or at least educated persons, who,

in Australia, pioneered the study and dissemination of Catholic social principles. Those who did not join the anti-communist crusade seemed to have turned away from social/political intellectualism to concentrate on the furtherance of careers, particularly in law, teaching and government.

Machiavelli stated that 'all armed prophets conquered and unarmed ones failed'. The armed prophets of Catholic Action, the activists of the movement, were armed organisationally; the organisation of the Catholic Church, particularly in Victoria—from cathedral, through parishes, to sodalities, to schools, to informal networks—being harnessed in their support. They triumphed, although their triumph was more destructive than constructive. The unarmed prophets, such as Frank Maher, would appear to have failed.

And yet Keynes contended that the world is ruled by little else than ideas, those of economists, political philosophers and 'academic scribblers'. The struggle for the hearts and minds of Australian Catholics on social issues continues. Only history will reveal who has conquered, the armed or the unarmed prophets.

W.J. Byrt
Caulfield, VIC

Do it by the book

From J.R. Barich

At my first reading of Fr Minn's critique of the *French* version of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (*Eureka Street*, February 1994), I felt inclined to agree with his self-description of being a 'stick in the mud'. However, after further reading and some reflection I concluded that his bottom line is quite positive—'there is much of value in this catechism'.

For my part I have found the Catechism (read in the Italian version) most enlightening and truly the work of the Holy Spirit, despite the miniscule imperfections discovered by Fr Minns and others. Like the earlier church documents, including the Bible, the Holy Spirit necessarily has to work through imperfect men and women and therefore errors of fact, but certainly *not* teaching, will arise. The technique employed by Fr Minns—a detailed analysis of references—can be applied, also, of course to his critique. It is not right for him to say that the Catechism *relies* on an obscure Council of Toledo (par. 245) to justify the

doctrine of the Trinity. This is done in some detail in pars 253-256. Similarly, while the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption may have been 'discovered' in the Book of Revelation (par. 285.3) the authoritative teachings are found at pars 490 and 966 respectively.

Fr Minns should be congratulated for having had a serious look at this important modern church document and his nit-picking will encourage others, no doubt, to read this detailed exposition of the church's doctrines as they apply to all people in the 21st century.

J.R. Barich
Ardross, WA

Conjugal acts 1

From John Kane

I took sufficient notice of two letters, from Bob Berghout (*Eureka Street*, March 1994) and Ross Sanders (*Eureka Street*, December 1993-January 1994), to see the unjust judgments used by each in his arguments against the encyclical *Casti Connubii* of Pope Pius XI (1930).

Don't You Sing

*Memories of a Catholic
boyhood from napkins
to long trousers*

BY DICK HUGHES

WITH A FOREWARD
BY EDMUND CAMPION

A faithful evocation of Hughes' life from his earliest memories until the end of his schooling at St Kilda and with the Christian Brothers at St Kevin's. Hughes, the author of *Daddy's Practising Again*, tells how his father, foreign correspondent Richard Hughes, worked for MI6 in the Far East—and he how returned to the Catholic Church after 60 years. There are also stories of his father's running battle with the 'scandalous' Brian Penton in wartime Sydney.

Contact: Kangaroo Press, tel (02) 654 1502, fax (02) 654 1338; or Rainbow Book Agencies, tel (03) 481 6611, fax (03) 481 2371.

Pope Pius XI declared that neither husband nor wife has any natural right to perform any act to prevent the natural result of conjugating *viz.* the pro-creation of offspring. That declaration does not put any fault on marriage partners who, having honestly conjugated without interference, are still unable to produce offspring. That is a gift which it is our Creator's privilege to grant or not.

When a married couple conjugate, which is primarily for pleasure, it requires one to 15 minutes, depending on selfishness or the desire for mutual pleasure and delight. Once they have accomplished this, God can create a new soul to accompany the new person whom the married couple have helped Him produce, if God wants to produce another creature at that time.

I say 'God can create a new soul', because, after the origin of our species, God, except once, did not create another of our species, except as a result of conjugation of a man and a woman. I say 'except once', but then he asked for, and received the willingness of Mary, before He created the man Jesus in her womb. *Be it done unto me according to thy word.*

The only prohibition stated in the encyclical is to prevent any interference, for example the use of condoms or pills, to prevent conception. The mutual self-sacrifice of refraining from conjugation at a time of the month when mutual pleasure and delight are most likely to be strongest is not interference, and is a method, still with no certainty, of preventing conception which is legitimate, because it does not interfere with God's design.

John Kane
Morwell, VIC

Conjugal acts 2

From Fr Patrick J. Sharpe MSC

I read Bob Berghout's letter (*Eureka Street*, March 1994) with much interest. I sincerely sympathise with Bob and his wife in their devastation about the state of their marriage and their search for 'The Conjugal Act'.

I feel sure that all their worries would disappear if they were fortunate enough to locate their 'Sexual Relations'. These people seem to hold the secret to carrying out 'The Conjugal Act'. As a Religious, with a vow of chastity, and a priest, bound by the law of celibacy, I know very little about

'The Conjugal Act', as, I believe, it may only be done in marriage.

I know the search for one's 'Sexual Relations' can be long, tedious and frustrating, but should they be successful I am sure the result of such a quest will be rewarding. My sister's son's daughter has a son and my brother's daughter's son has a daughter. I have lots and lots of cousins, some of them many times removed but, again, I keep wondering if they might be, by some strange miracle, my 'Sexual Relations'.

I extend to Bob and his wife every encouragement in trying to solve their problem with 'The Conjugal Act' but feel sure they will have success only when/if they eventually locate their 'Sexual Relations'.

Patrick J. Sharpe MSC
Randwick, NSW.

Conjugal acts 3

From I Langford

In response to the last paragraph of Bob Berghout's letter (*Eureka Street*, March 1994), please pass my letter on to him:

'Dear Mr Berghout,

'In response to your logical and witty letter, and to your plea in the last paragraph for helpful enlightenment, I am responding with pleasure as this subject is one of my fortes.

'You may know that before the atom was eventually split by the combined brain power of the world's top scientists, including that of Einstein's, combined with the unlimited finances of the USA, the splitting of the atom was the seemingly impossible dream of all scientists.

'Ever since I have been telling my friends, based on my practical knowledge of physical and psychological medicine, that to split the atom was but child's play compared to the creation of the successful matching and creating of a male-female relationship, *the physical and psychological complexity is so enormous!*

'Because of this I could only be of help and service to you, if I tried to compress this astronomically big subject into a few pages and send it to you at your address in Lambton.

'Should you be interested, please let me know your full address and I will respond.'

I. Langford
Sofala NSW



I All roads lead to, er, convergence

SOLEMNLY PROMISE NOT to use the term 'information superhighway'. Not just because it is a grating cliché, but because it conjures images of massive infrastructure to be left to governments and large corporations. We begin too easily to talk of toll gates and traffic regulations, and the analogy lulls us into an acceptance of limousines and pedestrians. Worst, the image is linear.

This need not be our first popular vision of the extraordinary potential of communications technologies. If it becomes so, wonderful opportunities to enrich individuals and society may be missed. I have no alternative shorthand term—beautiful, succinct and apt, as it must surely be—but I hope that when it emerges it will help us think of these technologies, collectively, as an organism requiring careful cultivation by everyone and able to benefit all. (One American suggestion, 'a slime mould, it grows rapidly in unpredictable ways', fails the beauty test.)

It is time, in Australia, to challenge the dominance of financial analysts in the debate about these technologies, as when Kerry Packer, owner of the Nine television network and most major magazines, recently bought 15 per cent of the second telecommunications carrier, Optus. This was the third tangible step by the media and communications industries towards convergence. The other two: Rupert Murdoch, owner of most of Australia's newspapers, and Telecom together invested in the Seven television network; and Packer, Murdoch and Telecom combined for the purposes of exploring Pay TV into an outfit popularly called PMT.

Convergence is a term of art that Rupert Murdoch has usefully defined: 'The traditional distinctions are breaking down. Five of the world's biggest industries—computing, communications, consumer electronics, publishing and entertainment—are converging into one large dynamic whole. Just how far this process will go we do not know: it is important to distinguish between technological possibilities, commercial feasibility and public demand.'

How can I make this seem real to you? The following is a composite of applications drawn from the recent literature:

- Imagine that your daily newspaper appears on a screen at home. It arrives in your personal computer-television through the phone line. You are particularly interested in the report about some new research in the current edition of *Nature*. Your own knowledge makes you think the reporter might have got it wrong. With your computer's mouse or TV remote control, you click on that report and the original *Nature* article appears. It cites earlier work in another journal, so you call that up too. The paper is wrong, so you send a quick electronic note to the newspaper and, 15 minutes later, you are pleasantly surprised to find that they have corrected the article.
- Returning to your newspaper, you scroll to the TV page and the critic's description of a program on the SBS piques your interest. You call up a preview of the actual program and decide it is worth a look. That evening you might watch it and pay-per-view, unless you subscribe to the SBS Pay TV channel. In the classifieds you see an ad for exactly the secondhand car you've been looking for. You click on that ad to see a video of the car and a description of its history. You cross-check with an insurer and the government's motor registration database.

Deciding to enquire further, you call the owner, who happens to be home to answer his phone-screen. You negotiate literally face-to-face.

- The paper's arts page reports that your favorite opera will be performed in town next month so immediately you book seats and pay by credit card. The tickets appear in the printer on top of the computer-TV.
- Being a sports fan, you check the score in the England-West Indies test. Finding that Brian Lara has played a record innings of 375, you call up from the Sports Channel a video of the final 20 runs together with a selection of his best strokes. Now you are late for work and you haven't savoured this magnificent feat by reading the description by your favorite cricket writer. Never mind, print it out and read it on the train.
- At work you have a novel problem so you ask for help from users of the Internet, a global 'electronic conversation' (15 million users as at November 1993, reported the *New York Times*). A useful suggestion appears from a gentleman in Stockholm.
- At lunchtime you have to see the doctor about your eyes. She calls up on her computer your complete medical history. (She checks your creditworthiness, too.) She prescribes a particular drug which will not cause the adverse reaction you had last time.
- That night at home you cannot participate in your favorite quiz show because another member of the household is receiving a lecture on *TV Uni*.

This is not the place to explain how technology and money are encouraging this convergence. (A lucid, accessible explanation is 'Where is the Digital Highway Really Heading?—the case for a Jeffersonian Information Policy', by Mitchell Kapor, *Wired*, July-August 1993.)

Techno-talk discomfits many who enjoy the portability of, say, this magazine, the flip-flap of its pages, the elegant type on crisp sheets, the mystery of its appearance in the letterbox and the comfort of seeing it lying around waiting for when you return with more time to read.

But lovers of words and ideas need to understand the enormous significance of the choices being made. The Australian Government, like the Clinton administration, has established committees of experts to advise it. Vested interests are lobbying it. Media, owned by those vested interests, are watching it. But the decisions require contributions from all disciplines, for their effects will pervade all aspects of life in the so-called Knowledge Era.

This column is the first of several intended to inform those who are concerned that something big is happening but feel inadequate to participate in the debate because of lack of specialist knowledge. I hope to raise questions that tend to be neglected by media coverage of the 'gee whiz, can it really do that?' and 'Packer's Optus play boosts Nine share price' varieties. Three issues stand out: Will access be universal and opportunities equitable, or will we create greater information poverty? What of privacy in this brave new world? And how to reconcile the tension between existing ideas of information as property with hopes of spreading the benefits of the technology?

Of which more later. ■

Paul Chadwick is Victorian co-ordinator of the Communications Law Centre.

Waiting for St Jude

A letter from America

RECENTLY *The New York Times* reported, at its usual extravagant length, on a great national upsurge in devotion to St Jude, the patron saint of lost causes.

St Jude, one of the less famous apostles and said to have been a relative of Jesus, became fashionable in the United States during the Great Depression. In contemporary America, the increased resort to this saint should really come as no surprise, for there is once more a growing sense that the country's social problems are beyond the help of merely human capacities. The major problem is violent crime, but also high on the list—and, many believe, closely linked with violence by a variety of causal chains—are homelessness, chronic poverty amid spectacular wealth, drug addiction, and family breakdown. And then there is AIDS.

On crime, the rampage of killings and maimings, in which guns figure overwhelmingly, has at last begun to make ordinary Americans wonder about their culture of violence and their obsession with gun ownership. In 1992, 33 people were murdered with handguns in Britain, 13 in Australia, and 13,220 in the USA. If Australia had the same population as the US then the Australian figure would increase to about 200, meaning that the US rate of murder by handgun is about 65 times the Australian. An average of 14 children and teenagers are killed with guns in the US every day. The lead-

ing cause of death, for both black and white teenage boys, is gunshot wounds. In 1992, more than 1000 people were shot to death at work.

The recent passage through Congress of the so-called Brady bill, feeble enough as its preventive provisions are, was a major setback to the powerful gun lobby. The bill insists on a five-day waiting period before a gun can be delivered to a customer, and makes it a federal offence to steal a firearm from a licensed dealer. This means that penalties for such offences will be much greater, an important step because many of the guns used in crime are stolen from dealers.

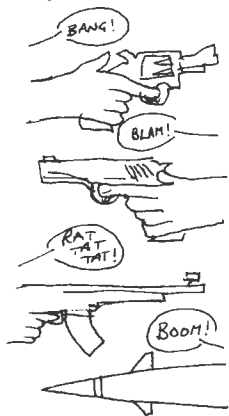
SHORTLY BEFORE PASSAGE of the Brady bill, a resentful and disturbed black man, with a legally-obtained weapon, went on a shooting rampage in a New York commuter train and killed six passengers. This 'last straw' on crime gave a push to the anti-gun lobby, which wants to move beyond the Brady bill to such measures as a requirement that dealers or private owners be required to notify the authorities of lost or stolen guns, that licensed gun-dealers be properly screened, and that licensing fees for gun-dealers be increased tenfold. This last measure might cut down on the number of 'kitchen-table dealers', who operate from home or the boot of a car, and are plausibly believed to be responsible for buying and selling the majority of guns used in crimes. Nationwide, there are 264,000 kitchen-table dealers as against only 20,000 gun stores.

Another worry for the gun lobby is the increasing number of townships and suburbs that have placed total bans on the possession of handguns. In November, the city of Mil-

waukee will hold a referendum on the question, and the pundits believe that it will be the first major US city to endorse such a ban. But the friends of the gun are bouncing back, and in Florida recently legislation banning the sale of assault weapons and prohibiting the sale of firearms to people under 21 was defeated in committee. It is seriously argued that a factor in this decision was the intervention of a Florida Republican member of the House of Representatives, James P. Kerrigan, who is an advocate of public hangings. Kerrigan reported having experienced a vision from beyond of John Wayne, who told him to fight any ban on assault weapons. The Duke's present address was not revealed.

The Three Strikes Epidemic

The Manhattan killings also gave a boost to the US government's proposed crime bill, which includes a vast amount of spending on increased law enforcement and a toughening of penalties for violent crime. Prominent among these is the notorious (or famous, depending on your perspective) provision for 'three strikes and you're out' mandatory sentencing. This sporting battlecry, perhaps better put as 'three strikes and you're in—for ever', requires the permanent, unparolable incarceration of those convicted of a third felony offence. It is partially retrospective, so if, a day after such legislation is

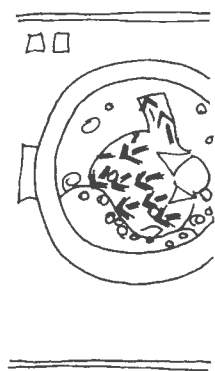


enacted, you are convicted of a felony to add to two previous such convictions, then that is your third strike.

The idea is tremendously popular, and is supported by both left and right, but the experience of the state of Washington, where such legislation has been on the books for two years, suggests that it has certain drawbacks. A major one is that by removing important areas of judgment and discretion from the judiciary, such legislation ensures that teenagers who are convicted of three stupid, intimidating but basically non-violent crimes (such as stealing \$60 by pretending that a hand in the coatpocket is a gun) will go to jail for life. The policy also ignores considerable evidence that the resort to crime, even violent crime, is something that many offenders grow out of. So a large number of prisoners will be incarcerated for a very long period of time during which they are no longer a threat to society.

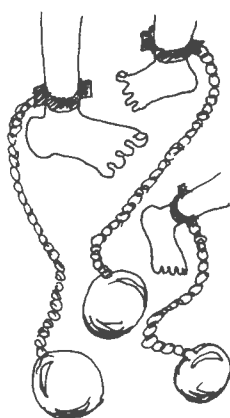
Another curiosity of the policy is that it disregards the fact that America already houses far more prisoners, per head of population, than other countries (455 per 100,000 compared to 46 per 100,000 in Japan, for instance), and prison populations are rapidly increasing even without the three-strike laws. The number of Americans in prison has trebled since 1980 (the year that the Reagan-Bush era began) and much of the increase is related to the practice of fighting the drug epidemic by jailing small-time offenders. About 20 per cent of federal prisoners, for instance, are drug offenders who have no prior record and no history of violence.

Then there is the financial side of the crime bill. It is estimated that, in



its present form, it will cost \$US22 billion (\$A33 billion), which many believe could be better spent on crime prevention programs, less punitive drug policies, some positive attempt to deal with the misery

of homelessness, and improved educational and other opportunities for the vast underclass who are mostly black or Hispanic. Implementation of the measure is estimated to be likely to require 20 new prisons in California alone. One critic of the 'get tough' policy has ironically described it as 'a remarkable new social program' that aims 'to house,



feed and provide geriatric support services for elderly Americans who have led worthless, harmful lives.'

Crime is certainly a massive problem in the US, particularly in the cities. In Britain, there is a great debate about arming ordinary police officers because of an increase in murders and assaults on police. But only 10 police officers have been killed in criminal attacks in Britain in the past five years, and, although this is an alarming figure, it is dwarfed by the statistics from the USA where 328 have been killed in the same period. Allowing for population differences, that is still roughly seven times as many.

In New York City alone, more than 40 taxi drivers were murdered last year, mostly by gunshot, and schoolchildren routinely carry guns or knives to school, many of them as a means of protection. (One of the proposals seriously mooted for dealing with crime is the mandatory jailing of first-offending schoolchildren convicted of carrying weapons, and Florida is considering the death penalty for 14 year-olds convicted of murder.) The killing or wounding of children who are caught in the cross-fire of shootouts between drug-gang members is now a routine occurrence in cities like New York and Chicago. Often, the gang members are no more than children themselves.

And, in spite of all the talk of 'safe sex' and condoms, the AIDS scourge continues to kill and ravage. It can no longer be pretended that it is only a major problem for gay males.

AIDS is now the primary cause of death among American women aged between 25 and 44 in nine of America's largest cities, and the fourth leading cause nation-wide for women in that age range. Yet in a recent survey of American women, 84 per cent of respondents, asked about sexually transmitted diseases, agreed with the sentence: 'It won't happen to me.'

Of course, no one in America wants anything to happen to them that requires serious health care. What is humorously called the 'healthcare system' is now at breaking point; everyone realises that some reform is needed, but no one can agree on what should be done. Even the insurance companies, who are at the heart of the problem, think that some change is needed, if only for cosmetic purposes, but their primary response is to spend huge sums on a lavish television campaign against President Clinton's proposed health-care reforms. One of these has two exemplary (very healthy) middle-Americans worrying away about the Clinton plan's alleged defects and its threat to their 'freedom of choice', and admitting that the present situation isn't the best, but finally looking pleadingly at the screen as they say: 'There's got to be a better way.'



A Better Way with Health?

The Clintons, with the style that endears them to so many

American intellectuals, have done their own filmed send-up of this advertisement. Staring earnestly at each other they dialogue roughly as follows:

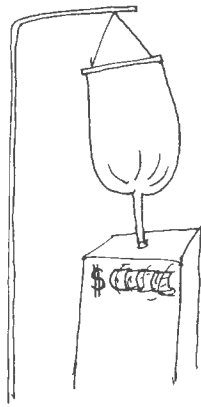
She: 'I've been reading this complicated Clinton health plan, and you know what, there's nothing in here that says that under the president's so-called reforms you won't get sick anymore!'

He: 'My gosh! But that's not all. I've read it right through, and even though it's supposed to give you universal cover, you are still going to die!'

Both: 'There's got to be a better way.'

But style alone won't get the Clinton legislation through, and part of the problem is that there *is* a better way, a way that the Clintons ruled out at the start as politically unfeasible. Their plan is palpably an improvement on the present chaos, dominated as it is by rapacious and irresponsible insurance companies and generating insanely high costs for treatment and for cover.

As illustration of some of the problems, a friend of mine has to



have a fairly serious operation shortly in New York and she will pay \$1400 (\$A2000) a day just for her hospital bed. Her insurance company says that it will pay reasonable hospital and medical costs, but it refuses to specify what costs in this case it will treat as reasonable. They will only tell her this when she submits her claim. The doctor says she should be in hospital for at least three days, but the insurance company currently insists that she should only be there for one day and that one day is all they will pay. As a young (untenured) philosophy lecturer she is better placed than many to withstand these uncertainties, but to say that this is a grotesque way to handle health problems is to engage in understatement.

Unfortunately, the Clinton response is insufficiently wholehearted. The president's complex scheme puts the onus for providing health care predominantly upon employers, and continues the major role (with some restrictions) of the insurance companies. Small employers are rightly complaining that, for them, it is a heavy tax on jobs. In my view, the Clintons made a serious misjudgment in not going all out for what they privately admit (so I am reliably informed) to be 'the better way', namely, a taxation-funded 'single-payer' scheme, like the Australian, Canadian or British. The

Clintons thought that the obsessional anti-government, anti-taxation attitudes of the American public would make this politically impossible, but their own plan is facing massive objections anyway, some of which arise from genuine flaws in it. In any case, the public are so fed up with the existing arrangements that they might just have bought a radical alternative.

And then there are the homeless, the hopelessly unbalanced, and the beggars—three groups that often overlap, and which are such unavoidable sights in the major cities across the country. Rudi Giuliani, the newly installed conservative mayor of New York, hopes to deal with this and other problems by cutting welfare and public spending while increasing police power and presence on the streets. Given the findings of a recent inquiry into the NYPD ('New York Police Department', for those who haven't caught up with the modish TV show *NYPD Blue*), which found massive areas of serious corruption and abuse of power, one may be pardoned some scepticism about this response.

THE FAMILY IS A TOPIC of constant discussion: its decline, the importance of reviving it in order to solve all the nation's ills, the supposed disasters of the single-parent family, gay families and, especially, gay families who want to raise children. Perhaps the greatest hullabaloo has been raised by the one-parent family, since the vast majority of single parents are black women: fixing on this as the country's major social problem is bound to raise hackles of racism. But although there is some plausibility in the idea that, other things being equal, a child is better off with two parents, the 'other things' are seldom equal in the chaos of modern American cities, especially for black Americans.

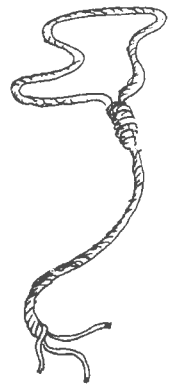
There seem to be two principal problems for the black community: drugs, and the apparent decline of religious influence. Religion, especially Baptist Christianity, is still a potent force among older blacks but it seems to have lost much of its grip upon the urban young. In the recent

past, religion was not only a consolation against the temptations to rage or despair and a direct barrier to crime, but it provided an incentive to non-violent political and social activism. Without it, young blacks are drawn into the glamour and prospects of instant wealth that the criminal drug culture offers.

Light amid the Gloom:

Yet in spite of the gloom, some things are working, and some signs are encouraging. First of all the US economy is actually strong and seems to be getting stronger. Growth is up, unemployment down, and the American worker is apparently more industrious than ever. The social problems are enormous, and the scandals spectacular, but the restless energy and imagination so characteristic of America fuels an incessant public exchange of ideas that often produces impressive results. Recently, Justice Harry Blackmun, at 85 the oldest member of the Supreme Court and shortly to retire, gave a lucid and passionate dissenting judgment on the issue of capital punishment.

Previously an adherent of the Supreme Court's endorsement of the death penalty as not being 'a cruel and unusual punishment', and hence constitutional, Blackmun has declared that 'from this day forward, I no longer shall tinker with the machinery of death'. His conversion is not shared by his fellow justices, but it may serve to reopen the debate on this issue. Essentially Blackmun believes that the court's allowal of capital punishment is based on a confusion, since it requires that the death penalty be administered with consistency and fairness, but that it also allows for discretion and concern for the particularities of each case. Blackmun thinks that in practice these two requirements have proved incompatible so that 'the death penalty remains fraught with arbitrariness, discrimination, caprice and



mistake.' In 1983 there were five executions in the USA and in 1993 there were 38. There are about 2800 inmates on death row.

Again, in spite of the babbling mediocrity of most popular television, the quality media are still immensely impressive. With all due respect to *Eureka Street*, there is nothing in Australia or Britain to match *The New Yorker* (flowering under its new woman editor), and *The New York Times* is not only several New York avenues ahead of

such deteriorating papers as *The Age*, but is clearly the best newspaper in the English-speaking world and probably the best anywhere. Nor (though this is a more contestable opinion) are the great universities of the USA

outranked anywhere else in the world. This is partly because a huge population and staggering wealth make for excellent educational conditions in the best universities, and very good conditions in many others.

And for all the foolish, sentimental religiosity of American life—Virgin Mary statues as garden gnomes, American flags on the altars, palpably insincere politicians mouthing Godtalk—there is a more serious and often impressively rigorous public concern for religion and theological issues. Stephen Carter, a black academic lawyer of liberal leanings, has recently written a passionate and learned plea for the place of religion in American politics in his book, *The Culture of Disbelief*. Part of Carter's thesis is that a legitimate role for religion in public life in the USA is obscured or denied by dubious interpretations of the constitution and a general hostility to religion in the intellectual culture.

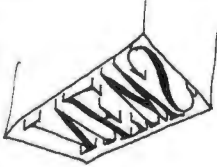
One of his most telling points is that there seems to be a certain double standard about the dominant attitudes to religion in public life, since secular liberal intellectuals are happy to have religious passion and com-

mitment harnessed to respectable liberal causes such as civil rights, but cry 'foul' whenever religious convictions point in conservative directions. In any case, for good or ill, religion is still a power to be reckoned with in American public affairs, in ways that are far less common in other advanced secular democracies, and in this fact there may be some hope for the battered, yet also menacing, black underclass. Certainly, the people who are pressing hardest for the black community to take responsibility for its own problems, and for a renewal of black pride and moral control, are black leaders who take Christianity, or sometimes Islam (or a version of it), as their inspiration.

The other night, two Jewish philosopher friends drove my wife and me from Princeton into Manhattan, to attend a philosophy talk on abortion at New York University. In the company of these dedicated New Yorkers (one born in Brooklyn and the other in the Bronx) we ate Cuban-Chinese food in an authentic period diner in Chelsea; snatched an egg-cream each from Gem Spa, an indescribable shop in St Mark's Place which displays every magazine you could ever hope, or hate, to buy; attended the high-quality talk and argued at length with the speaker; and supped on blintzes and (again!) egg cream (which, incidentally, is made with neither egg nor cream, but chocolate syrup, seltzer and milk) in Vselkas, a Ukrainian coffee shop in the East Village.

Naturally, when we parked and left the car on the street for any length of time, we had to remove the car radio and other valuables to take with us, lest the street people show too close an interest. Finally at midnight, we stopped to take in the spectacularly beautiful waterside sights of the late-night city from beneath the handsome Brooklyn Bridge. Light in the dark, indeed. Perhaps turning to St Jude is premature, after all. Or maybe the good saint is already hard at work. ■

Tony Coady is Boyce Gibson Professor of Philosophy in the University of Melbourne and currently visiting fellow at the University Center for Human Values, Princeton.



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The Holocaust on fast-forward

WE WERE STANDING at the counter in the Elite Cafeteria trying to decide on popsicles when the Richters came up through the soles of my feet and started shaking the salad display. There weren't many of them—a puny 3.7, according to the television news later—and at first I didn't recognise them as an earthquake. The floor just sort of rumbled quietly and the columns supporting the ceiling swayed a little. My first thought was that somewhere below, on one of the lower floors of the Museum of Tolerance, a particularly interactive exhibit had swung into action. What could it be, I wondered? A cattle car, perhaps?

Then this woman jumped up from her coffee and rushed to the nearest door frame. 'You do this, don't you?' she asked the room in general. 'In an earthquake, I mean ...' Her words trailed off in embarrassment. The trembler had already come and gone, leaving her lack of cool hanging in mid-air. Her companions chuckled indulgently and stirred their cappuccinos in an understanding sort of way. 'This is Los Angeles,' one of them said. 'What did you expect?'

We had arrived the day before from Las Vegas—man, woman and 11-year-old boy—on a plane alongside bone-weary Korean businessmen and off-duty discipline mistresses in rhinestone-studded leather. We had three days in LA and we knew just how to fill them. Tomorrow, Universal Studios. Tuesday, Disneyland. Today, Dad's choice, the Simon Wiesenthal Centre Museum of Tolerance. Not the big \$US168 million Holocaust Museum in Washington, mind you. But a small-

er, more modest attempt at the same objective—the application of American imagination and technology to the representation of genocide. Imagining the unimaginable. Schindler's theme park.

So far, my companions were sceptical, but appropriately tolerant. We bought our popsicles, went downstairs and handed over our tickets to a pretty girl in a floral dress. 'Hi,' she said. 'I'm Mitzi, your guide for today.' She skipped ahead of us down a spiral ramp. 'Welcome to the Tolerancenter™, a unique workshop featuring hands-on exhibits spotlighting the major issues of intolerance that are part of our daily life.' This will be our orientation area. Here we will be provided with the framework with which to understand what follows, the Holocaust Section.

Interactive devices are scattered through a large display area. 'The current theme of the Tolerancenter™ is "Understanding the Los Angeles Riots", explains Mitzi. 'Although you may prefer the word "Uprising".' I touch the screen of a video monitor and a timeline scrolls by—Watts 1965 becomes South Central 1992, National Guard troops with M16s become Korean appliance store proprietors with automatic pistols. Touch me, the screen invites, for suburb-by-suburb demographics, response polls, media reaction, police views, eyewitness reports. Break the statistics down by race, income, profession. What percentage of Latinos



considered the looting justified? Touch screen to select.

There is a tug at my sleeve. My son leads me into a darkened tunnel. 'Greasy spic', someone whispers in my ear. 'Dirty kike, asshole.' The walls are talking, their voices triggered by our passing. 'Bull dyke bitch,' they hiss. 'Fatso.' 'Fatso?' says the kid. Piss weak. We emerge beside a large map of the US covered with flashing lights—a push-button, state-by-state breakdown of current neo-Nazi activity. The boy sidles back into the tunnel, charmed.

Our tour group is hustled onward, 25 whites, two blacks, past a wall of screens. 'I have a dream,' proclaim a dozen simultaneous Martin Luther Kings. On we move, our guides polite but firm. We must maintain the schedule. We are sat before a flickering silent movie. Watch this. Model-T Fords. Daredevil biplane antics. Neck-to-knee bathing beauties. The Roaring Twenties. Above us a digital clock counts down the minutes we must wait. Charlie Chaplin. Clemenceau. The Charleston. Five minutes to go.

The Thirties approach in flickering monochrome.

DOORS SWING WIDE and we are ushered forward to be issued with an ID card. Mary Steinhauer, mine says. A blurred picture shows a but-

ABOVE: The best museum experience still requires reactions, not interaction: the railway leading to the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp in Poland.

Photo: Emmanuel Santos



ton-nosed little girl of about three staring out from under a pixie hat. No other information. For the remainder of the tour, this will be my identity.

Before we can proceed, however, there is one more essential step. Lest we have come this far without realising it, we are to be reminded of what it is we will see today. In a diorama of a modern design studio, three animated mechanical mannequins discuss the problems inherent, from a museum point of view, in constructing an accessible Holocaust. Sources are discussed, the difficulties of authentic simulation, curatorial and technical issues, the nature of representation. Politics are not mentioned.

We are led down the reproduction of a Berlin streetscape, *circa* 1933. Posters proclaim Hitler's imminent victory. At an outdoor cafe complete with Kurt Weill muzak, spot-lit dummies in period costume discuss the future. 'Ve vill haff to liff viz zees Nazis' is the consensus. Some see career prospects. Ze vord 'fascism' *iss nicht gesprochen*.

Further up the street, we are fast-forwarded through a room full of Nuremberg rallies and invited to insert our ID cards into video machines. I, Mary Steinhäuser, daughter of Jakob and Jenny, was born in Vienna two months after the

Anschluss. Aged one, I embarked for Shanghai. No further information is provided. At the machine beside me, my real-life son's card shows that in 1939 his alter ego had just begun high school in Romania. My wife is a teenage Berliner called Ulrich Arnheim.

Through a plate-glass window we see a reconstruction of the Wannsee conference. A boardroom table with agenda papers and carafes of water, a sound track heavy with more terrible accents. On-

wards, past air-conditioned, back-lit rubble, the Warsaw Ghetto told in slides.

Suddenly the floor changes, carpet becomes rough-rendered concrete and we are standing in a bricked-in yard lined with barbed wire observing a map of the Greater Reich, an ominous black blob veined with railway routes and sprinkled with death camp sites picked out in lights. Above arched portals signs read 'Able Bodied' and 'Children and Others'. I am not sure which to take. My ID card persona is safe in Shanghai by now, isn't she? My son is surer, he moves towards the 'Able Bodied' door. My wife takes his arm and leads him under the Other sign. The *Sophie's Choice* scenario.

In any case, both pathways converge. We have entered a vaulted concrete chamber and the door has closed behind us. I look up and examine the ceiling, half-expecting the clunk of a dropping canister. Is such a thought unfair to the good intentions of the people who have made this place, I wonder? We sit on hard benches and listen to a tape. In this setting, however contrived and grotesque, my pen and notebook seem out of place, a profanity. I put them away.

We sit in wincing, self-conscious silence and listen. The story we hear is poignant and horrible and con-

cerns the means of selection for murder of a group of young boys. The detail that sticks in my mind is Josef Mengele's mode of transport. The Angel of Death rode around Auschwitz on a black two-wheeler. The tape ends, but the silence does not. Then the door swings out onto a well-lit beige-toned dénouement. We file out and read the names of the righteous (not many) and what became of the guilty (not much).

AMACHINE CONSUMES OUR ID cards and replaces them with full-page biographies. At the end of the war, I read, unlike a million and a half other Jewish children, I was still alive. For all I know I still am. Perhaps I live here in Los Angeles. Maybe that was me I passed coming out of that Chinese restaurant outside of Pico Boulevard. My son's surrogate had fared less well. His high school student survived deportation and forced labour only to die five days after liberation. Ulrich Arnheim was murdered before his 15th birthday. But their identities live on, endlessly recycled by the interactive processes of modern museology.

Standing in line to sign the visitors' book, I feel it is again OK to take out my notebook. I copy these remarks from the comments column beside the day's signatures: 'Should be similar displays for other ethnic groups'; 'I wish there was more on the repression of women'. Even in victimisation there is competition. In several places words have failed entirely, or may have never been there in the first place. Three separate visitors had simply made their marks—a circle, two dots and a curve.



As we spill, subdued, into the street, my son hands me his biography to look after. 'What did you learn from that?' I ask. He shrugs. 'Well, it wasn't Disneyland, that's for sure.' Realising I expect more, he gathers his thoughts. 'The tunnel was good, but,' he offers. 'Fatso.' ■

Shane Maloney's novel *Stiff* will be published by Text in July.

Nobody's hero



IN THE MODERN WORLD, movies are the chief means of communicating ideas to mass audiences. So believes the Reverend Fred Wandmaker, which is why this Anglican priest with no knowledge of cinema has struggled for a decade and a half to get a feature film made about David Unaipon.

Unaipon's story would make a good movie, but the film would make everyone feel uncomfortable. Once one of Australia's best-known Aborigines, David Unaipon doesn't fit either the racist stereotypes or those of the politically correct. For the modern viewer, his life could be made to encapsulate the contradictions, the alienation and the difficulties inherent in the concept of reconciliation.

Unaipon was born 1873, in a bark wurly on the banks of the lower Murray. The term 'tribe'

is inappropriate for Murray River Aborigines, but the loose name for the groups that roamed this part of the continent was the Ngarrindjeri.

Unaipon's parents remembered the coming of the white man. His father was the first convert to Christianity among the lower Murray blacks, and taught both himself and his son to read, and Unaipon grew up to master white man's knowledge. He was also one of the first Ngarrindjeri youths not to be initiated. It was always intended that he should be a model of integration—a smart black.

HE WAS VERY SMART INDEED. Unaipon was a brilliant inventor. During his lifetime, he was described by one newspaper as Australia's answer to Leonardo da Vinci. At an early age, Unaipon read two books that were to form the rest of his life. One was the

Bible. The other was Isaac Newton's *Laws of Physics*.

Adopting Newton's ideas about curvilinear motion, in 1907 Unaipon succeeded in converting curvilinear motion into a straight-line movement and invented the hinge that drives the modern sheep shears. His device converted the formally circular motion of the cutting blade into a more efficient horizontal motion. He patented the idea, but never managed to get the funds to develop it, and eventually it was stolen from him and widely adopted, without any money or credit coming his way.

As well, Unaipon described the principle of the helicopter before this type of aircraft was invented. In 1914 he wrote: 'An aeroplane can be manufactured that will rise straight into the air from the ground by application of the boomerang principle ... the boomerang is shaped to rise in the air according to the velocity with which it is propelled, and so can an aeroplane. This class of flying machine can also be carried on board ship, the immense advantages of which are obvious.' Unbeknown to Unaipon, several experiments in vertical take-off had already been made, but the first helicopter did not fly until 1930. It used exactly the principle Unaipon had foreseen.

In other writings Unaipon predicted the development of lasers, and in his later years, after moving back to a stone cottage on the Mission where he was raised, he threw himself into attempting to solve the age-old problem of perpetual motion. He made numerous models and machines, including a 'hoax' perpetual motion machine with which he toured around fair grounds in an attempt to raise money for his research.

Unaipon was one of the first Aboriginal writers, putting together booklets of Aboriginal legends and giving public addresses on the advancement of Aborigines to various churches, schools and tertiary institutions. He died in 1967, at the age of 95.

Wandmaker, now an Anglican priest in the Melbourne suburb of East Malvern, was for some years secretary for Aboriginal Affairs to the Australian Board of Missions. Since first hearing Unaipon's story in the late 1970s, he has approached almost every film-

'Racists are not the only people discomfited by Unaipon's story.'

'Unaipon was a coconut.' Wandmaker says. "You know what that means? White on the inside. Today's activists don't see him as someone to celebrate".'

—David Unaipon will be commemorated on the new \$50 bill.

funding body trying to stir up interest in a film. Several professionals have been fired by the idea: the documentary maker Anne Deveson was interested, journalist Iain Gillespie wrote an outline and scriptwriter Tony Morphett was going to prepare a treatment; but nothing has come of it.

In the surge of interest in Aboriginal history during the bicentenary year, Wandmaker hoped the project would at last be picked up, but racists are not the only people discomfited by Unaipon's story. 'Unaipon was a coconut,' Wandmaker says. 'You know what that means? White on the inside. Today's activists don't see him as someone to celebrate.'

Unaipon was the sort of Aborigine whose life story was used by the National Missionary Council in 1955 as an example of 'Aborigines who have made good'.

'Aborigines do not lack intelligence and are not unattractive in personality or appearance,' said a 1955 *Ministers' Bulletin* containing Unaipon's biography. The bulletin was intended for the use of ministers 'on the first convenient Sunday following the observance of Australia Day'.

Unaipon himself, writing his life story, said: 'As a native lad I found there was no information available about the past history of the human race except that which came down through the traditions of the old men of the tribes. In listening to the old men's stories I could not find any record of worthy achievements by the members of my own race, but what a contrast I found when I opened the Bible. There I found thrilling stories of adventure and achievement which spurred me to action.'

'In various places of the Bible I found the black-fellow playing a part in life's program. I found it was a blackfellow that befriended the prophet Jeremiah when he was unjustly cast into prison. It was a blackfellow who was there at the right moment to relieve Jesus by bearing the cross when the Saviour fell beneath its weight. It was in this book I learned that God made all nations of one blood and that in Christ Jesus colour and racial distinctions disappeared. This helped me many times when I was refused accommodation because of my color and race.'

'I have often been asked the best method of dealing with the Aboriginal problem. I have carefully studied the plans adopted for the advancement of Aborigines, and I see no way out but in co-operation between white and black races.'

UNAIPON, WHO WAS BROUGHT UP at the Point McLeay Mission near Tailem Bend and Lake Alexandrina, witnessed the disruption caused by the coming of the white man. He wrote: 'Through the want of understanding each other, white and black came into conflict. Spears were thrown and the white man's superior weapons were used upon the natives with deadly effect. All this came about because the blackfellow did not understand the white man's aims, and neither side

had a grasp of the language necessary for a proper understanding between them.'

But, Unaipon wrote, the first missionary to the lower Murray tribes made all the difference. George Taplin converted David's father, and became superintendent of the Port McLeay Mission, on behalf of an interdenominational group called the Aboriginal Friends Association.

'Mr Taplin did not expect to change the lives of the older people,' wrote Unaipon, 'but centred his activities on the younger generation. He established a school which I attended and there entered a new mental world. He associated with this a dormitory so that the boys and girls might be trained in civilised ways, and it was there I learned to use a knife and fork, say grace and adopt table manners.'

THUS THE UNINITIATED YOUTH began his life as a model of reconciliation and integration, as those terms were then understood. The Unaipon story could be told as a tale about the bridges built and destroyed by two fathers and their sons—the Unaipons and the Taplins.

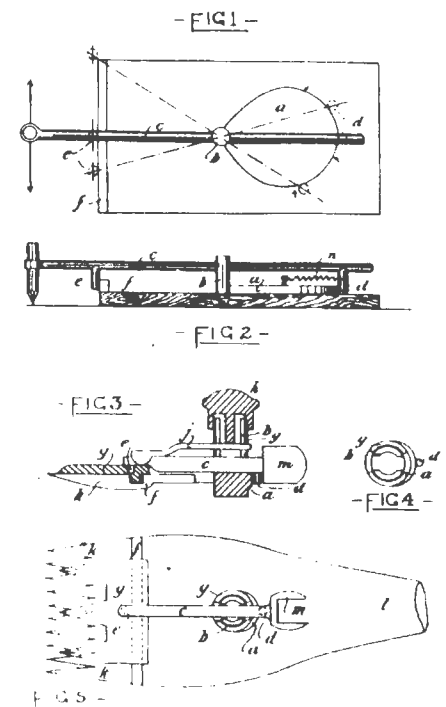
George Taplin, whom David Unaipon was to credit with the growth of understanding between black and white, died largely from the stress associated with allegations that his son, Frederick, had raped an Aboriginal girl on the mission. The story, which Unaipon never told, has been documented by the historian Graham Jenkin.

After Taplin's death, the leading members of the Ngarrindjeri tried to persuade the Aboriginal Friends Association committee not to allow Frederick to replace his father. Their wishes, and the allegations they made against Frederick, were ignored.

Frederick took over. He was not a spiritual man, and on one occasion, the AFA committee was obliged to point out to him that his report had neglected to mention anything about the spiritual life of the Port McLeay community. As well, there were continuing and regular allegations that he was harassing

Wandmaker first became aware of Unaipon when he was contacted by researchers looking for information about Aboriginal inventors. 'My first thought was that this wasn't possible. That Aborigines made good botanists, good natural scientists, but not inventors. That was a racist assumption. I was very startled that, after years of fighting against racism, I was still a racist. I am an all-or-nothing person. I couldn't let that realisation go.'

3 Sept. 1909. AUSTRALIA No. 18, 826/10
DAVID UNAIPON Mechanical Motion



'Mechanical Motion' by David Unaipon, 1909

and sexually assaulting Aboriginal women. This culminated in March 1889, when a deputation of all the senior Ngarrindjeri churchmen made a trip to Adelaide to speak to the committee and to petition them for Taplin's removal.

It is probably a measure of how seriously they were taken that, although notes of their allegations were made, they were not entered into the minute book. The notes were probably destroyed. The hearing was adjourned for a day, but chance—or providence—changed the course of events.

Frederick Taplin died that night, when his usual lodging house, the Hindley Street Coffee Palace, burnt down mysteriously. Taplin was the only person to

die in the blaze, although his bed and other articles in his room were untouched by smoke or flame. There was a flat roof outside his window that would have made escape easy.

Other lodgers suggested he had died trying to save others, but none reported having been saved by him. Nevertheless, three years later the heroic account of his death had been accepted, and an article in the *Christian Colonist* painted him as a hero, stating that he had 'gone up to Heaven in a chariot of fire'. The reason he had been in Adelaide—to face allegations of sexual misconduct—had been entirely forgotten or glossed over.

AT THIS TIME, David Unaipon would have been 17, already able to read Greek and Latin, and well aware of what was going on in his community. His father was almost certainly one of the leading churchmen who made the trip to Adelaide, and also the main person who kept Christianity alive at Port McLeay during Frederick Taplin's time. Yet David Unaipon never made any adverse comments on the Frederick Taplin case in any of his writings.

During Fred Wandmaker's attempts to get the Unaipon story made into a film, two possible opening scenes have been suggested. One, put forward by Tony Morphett in his sketch, shows the mission in the 1960s, with drunken youths, car

wrecks, and, in a stone hut, Unaipon surrounded by learned books and the whirring cogs of his perpetual-motion machine. He speaks, and takes us back to the first appearance of the white man in the Coorong. It is like science fiction: death comes down the river

silently, with fever and sores. Decades later appear strangers whom the Ngarrindjeri call Grinkari, that being the name for corpse. The Ngarrindjeri custom is to smoke their dead over fires and remove their outer skin. The resulting body is pink. The Grinkari look like that.

The rest of the story is about how the Grinkari cease to be like creatures from science fiction. It is about the way Unaipon moves from his own world into that of the Grinkari, and begins his own, science fiction-like and never-ending, search for the perpetual-motion machine.

The other possible opening, suggested by the Reverend Fred Wandmaker, concerns an earlier incident—the shipwreck of the *Maria* when David Unaipon was a boy. Members of the Ngarrindjeri rescued the crew, fed them, and guided them almost all the way back to Adelaide, but at the last minute there was a falling out and the Aborigines murdered the whites. The reprisals for this were indiscriminate, bloody and remorseless.

Wandmaker envisaged the violent scene then cutting sharply to a 12-year-old Unaipon reading Newton's *Laws of Physics*, with the Bible beside him on the sand dune, and his father, showing initiation marks on his chest, acting as tutor.

Wandmaker first became aware of Unaipon when he was contacted by researchers looking for information about Aboriginal inventors. 'My first thought was that this wasn't possible. That Aborigines made good botanists, good natural scientists, but not inventors. That was a racist assumption. I was very startled that after years of fighting against racism, I was still a racist. I am an all-or-nothing person. I couldn't let that realisation go.'

Wandmaker was himself once a marine engineer. Having found out about Unaipon's story, he was determined to bring it to the attention of more Australians.

But Unaipon, so much a man of his times, personifying the conflicts, lies and imperfect attempts at reconciliation, is today a man about whom no one can feel comfortable. As well, Unaipon had a shadowy side. Little is known about his marriage, but there are reports that he abused his wife and locked her up.

'You can't seriously say he wasn't interested in the advancement of his people,' Wandmaker says, but Unaipon's acceptance of missionary life and apparently easy surrender of his own traditions mean he is not seen as someone to celebrate.

Unaipon was brought up to be a bridge between cultures, but when the bridge was built, the shores remained far apart. Today, very few Australians have heard Unaipon's name. ■

Margaret Simons is a freelance journalist. Her novel *The Ruthless Garden* describes the impact of European settlement on the lower Murray.

Adopting Newton's ideas about curvilinear motion, in 1907 Unaipon succeeded in converting curvilinear motion into a straight-line movement and invented the hinge that drives the modern sheep shears. His device converted the formally circular motion of the cutting blade into a more efficient horizontal motion. He patented the idea, but never managed to get the funds to develop it, and eventually it was stolen from him and widely adopted.



THE NATION: 2

GERARD WINDSOR

Things seen and unseen

THE ONLY MAN STANDING HIGHER than Paul Keating when he opened the National Portrait Gallery was George V, *Rex Imperator*. This particularly colourless monarch still dominates Kings Hall in the Old Parliament House, the site of the new gallery; George is the first icon any visitor has to take into account when assessing the portraits of the nation. This is not what the curator intended, but for the present the King Emperor exacts a glance before you pass through. He is an Australian portrait, representative of a vast number we have; the elements of his composition have to be added to any we see later on that we would prefer to think of as authentically Australian. George is plinthed, described in Latin, larger than life, flourishing a nice bit of male leg, and wears the robes of the Order of the Garter (a curious hybrid, even in its country of origin, of Tudor undergarment and Louis Quatorze capery).

Ironically, George V's demand for inclusion is evidence of the success of the curator, Anne Loxley, in assembling the Portrait Gallery's inaugural exhibition (the gallery is a space not a collection), *About Face: Aspects of Australian Portraiture c. 1770-1993*. The modesty of the title can only briefly conceal the mul-

About Face: Aspects of Australian Portraiture c. 1770-1993
the inaugural exhibition of the National Portrait Gallery,
Old Parliament House, Canberra, until 14 August 1994.

tiple claims Loxley is playing with in her choice of 79 images from a potential pool of literally millions. The selection might be low-key but it's hardly non-committal. Loxley is watching p's and q's, her own and others', very carefully.

Past the late monarch there are two alternative points of entry to the exhibition. On opening night visitors moved into a corridor off Kings Hall and queued for what was presumably seen as the desired start. But in the waiting room the eye fell first to the readerly left and lit on Jon Lewis's 1985 photograph *Retired beach inspector, Bondi*. Sitting on the sand in his togs, in the lee of a canvas windbreak, the subject sports a crescent of fat across the tub of his belly, but the suggestion of the ugly Australian, while there, is only mild. In fact he is another monarch, but more in the Old King Cole tradition. Essentially this is a sunny work, rather recalling the primary school carol that begins, 'If Santa were an Aussie, he would surely wear a cossie ...' But its shadows of an older, decadent Australia darken when the eye turns right and

The movie star (portrait of David Gulpilil)
by Tracey Moffat (b. 1960)

sees, opposite, Tracey Moffatt's 1986 photograph *Some lads, 1*, an image of no ambiguity at all. Loxley's own catalogue description notes 'the buoyant energy of these young virile male dancers'. I would have thought such comment comes dangerously close to the 'noble savage'. But this initial contrast illustrates Loxley's emphatically stated aim of subversion (a word surely nudging retirement age; 'subversion' is simply a synonym for 'perfectly orthodox now but unheard of and outrageous a generation ago'). What can be said is that the exhibition as a whole is remarkably value-laden, but not subversive at all.



Sir George Houston Reid (1845-1919), painted door stop, cast iron, 12.2 high. Example from a private collection.

Portrait of Bungaree, a native of New South Wales, with Fort Macquarie, Sydney Harbour in background (d.1830) circa 1826, by Augustus Earle (1793-1838). Rex Nan Kivell Collection NK118 National Library of Australia T305.



Yet there is an element of surprise in the first portrait encountered by following the usher's directions: a Byronic Isaac Nathan, a Jewish composer, painted in England about 1820 before he came near Australia. Facing him is Augustus Earle's grandly titled 1826 *Portrait of Bungaree, a native of New South Wales, with Fort Macquarie, Sydney Harbour, in background*. Bungaree is barefoot and wears what was his usual garb, a scarlet and gold military coat and black trousers, and he holds a distinctively boomerang-shaped officer's hat in his raised hand (in salute? playfully?), but the portrait is sympathetic and unpatronising. Bungaree faces the viewer with an intent gaze, he stands on an eminence high above the shipping and fort behind him. The catalogue (but not the exhibition) juxtaposes him with Tracey Moffatt's 1985 colour photograph, *The movie star* (portrait of David Gulpilil). Gulpilil reclines on the bonnet of a car parked above the beach at South Bondi. He wears a pair of floral board shorts, he lies behind a ghetto-blaster, and he holds a can of Foster's. His Aboriginality (or is it his acting profession?) is signified by his plaited hair and a line of paint dots across his nose and cheek bones.

I find this a puzzling image. Anne Loxley says that it 'takes issue with such paintings as Earle's *Bungaree*', and she adds that Gulpilil 'wears a serious expression: the message is not a simple one of beach-side relaxation but a defiance of pigeon-holing and an

assertion of the complexity of contemporary Aboriginal life'. This seems to me jejune and an avoidance of the issue. Gulpilil looks no more relaxed or insouciant than Bungaree, and his pose is far more contrived. To entitle the work *The movie star* warns that there's a tongue-in-cheek here. Further, the depiction of the wages of success undercuts the achievement by concentrating on its material by-blows—and, for a 'movie star', rather pathetic ones. There is no indication that Gulpilil is entering into some ironic joke about his status. He seems at least as happy with the loud consumerables of Western



culture as Bungaree does. To contend that the decisive difference from Bungaree lies in one empowered Aboriginal person portraying another is a presumption of authorial intent of the crudest and most outdated kind. What of the viewers who don't see Tracey Moffatt's name or to whom the name means nothing? And why couldn't the portrait be primarily a woman's mocking of peculiarly masculinist pretensions? I admit that any ambivalent interpretation of *The movie star* runs counter to the Whiggish tenor of Loxley's 12-image visual history of Aboriginal people. Her most recent images—photographs of Lois O'Donoghue, Mandawuy Yunupingu, Oodgeroo Noonuccal, and a pyrographic image of Eddie Mabo—all evoke such descriptions as dignified, noble, heroic, triumphant.

SO IS THIS THE TONE OF THE EXHIBITION AS A WHOLE? Largely—although by no means totally—it is celebratory. There is a predictable, but finally not necessary, number of images of persons of achievement—James Cook, Joseph Banks, W.C. Wentworth, the Right Hon. R.G. Menzies, and this canon of achievers is brought up-to-date to include Fred Hollows and Mary MacKillop. Many (though not most) of these are simply boring images—certainly Meskenas's *Fred Hollows* and Raffaele Gagliardi's *Mary MacKillop* (after a photograph—and what was wrong with a good Australian photograph?) but also portraits like Judy

Cassab's *Sir John Eccles* (Loxley says that portraits of scientists were thin on the ground).

Before Anne Loxley could start being subversive, it seems, she felt constrained to include a ballast of notables, even if in non-notable form. That the portraits were painted in the first place signified a celebration, but the result is not always a celebratory image. Occasionally these formal commissioned works do celebrate their own art, but at the expense of the subject. Brian Dunlop's *The Rt Hon. Sir Zelman Cowen* has Cowen at his desk (and so only the top—the thinking half?—of his body visible), but directly

many less reverential images of women, but Loxley has chosen not to use them.

This kind of choice is as subversive as any cosy tea party. I understand the pressures that must have constrained a curator, and the initial decision to go right beyond antiquarian notions of portraiture, i.e. famous people in oils, and use virtually any sort of image of any person, seems unarguably correct. But a further set of decisions is much more political. In the tension between Australia's cultural institutions, the libraries lay claim to large numbers of portraits on the ground that their value is primarily documentary



behind him hangs a nameless, faceless portrait—perhaps the rest of himself, perhaps a warning of the ephemerality of such a tribute—and in spite of the accoutrements of his desk, the elegant inkstand, and writing pads, Cowen in fact holds a mere biro and all the paper is blank. The painting is sharp and tidy, but the jurist and bureaucrat is presenting himself as remarkably empty-handed.

To my mind Bryan Westwood's full-length study of Paul Keating is the dominating painting in the exhibition. Westwood's photo-realist style surprises the viewer with how much of a caricature (or how specifically a part of the personality) it finally realises, and as a painting it is mesmerising and also a little embarrassing. The subject could hardly see it as a celebration of himself.

Loxley has decided just where and how far mockery or buffoonery or satire can go. Her exhibition is Australia as she thinks it should be, not quite as it is. The male politician can take the form of Westwood's Keating, or a wonderful painted cast iron doorstop of Sir George Reid, or a Toby jug of S.M. Bruce as a sphinx, or a Spooner pen and ink cartoon of John Dawkins. But as Loxley's selection of female politicians we have a studio photograph of Enid Lyons displaying, says Loxley, 'relaxed femininity and glamour', and a gleaming, colour publicity shot of Carmen Lawrence about which therefore nothing more needs to be said. I don't doubt the existence out there of

not aesthetic. On these grounds the National Portrait Gallery has been put in the care of the National Library, not the National Gallery. The argument seems a fair one, but there's a problem when it comes to mounting exhibitions. A lot of portraits of merely documentary value do not add up to a tolerable display. In fact mere pictures of people do not constitute portraits, and a few mere pictures have crept into *About Face*. Any half-way decent portrait is something of a visual biography and there are items in *About Face* that tell us less of a subject's (or an artist's) personality or life than would a police mug shot. The strain of this balancing act shows in the catalogue where some images provoke aesthetic analysis and others are treated as illustrations to a good story which is then recounted. In some cases, such as Richard Read's 1814 portrait of the child Betsy Broughton, the survivor of a Maori massacre, much more could be made of the image itself.

When documentary and historical significance combine with richness in the portrait, the result can be wonderful. So the image in *About Face* that bowled me over more than any other was Russell McPhe-dran's 1981 press photograph labelled *Lindy* (b. 1948) and *Michael Chamberlain*. The couple are descending the steps of Alice Springs Court House, Michael withdrawn to Lindy's right, but gazing sideways at her intently. Lindy is displaying (and cradling?) a blown-up photograph of herself cradling the baby

Halifax crew, Driffield 1945
oil on canvas by
Stella Bowen,
Australian War
Memorial 26268.

David Unaipon
(1872-1967) 1930s
by Leslie Wilkie,
South Australian
Museum A62582.



Azaria. Lindy invokes herself as Madonna, Lindy invokes herself as Pieta: the press, the public, wants it big: Michael stage-manages, tries it out for effect. This shot is the only wholly post-modernist image in the exhibition, although Stella Bowen's grim but lyrical 1945 *Halifax Crew, Driffield* also plays with artistic and specifically religious traditions.

Not that such self-reflexive images begin to exhaust the list of captivating or exciting works; not least of all for the argument it provokes *About Face* is a thoroughgoing delight, imparting all the pleasures of recognition and surprise and hares starting up everywhere across the brain.

I can't resist some final miscellaneous comments. R.G. Menzies, and Bob'n'Hazel Hawke double up, and even more appropriately, so does Nellie Melba. There are no clergymen, but then there are also no racing connections and no footballers; there are six musicians but only one cricketer; seven writers but only one swimmer; 14 politicians but nothing by Max Dupain or Harold Cazneaux; two dancers but not David Pott's *The Rabbit Trapper*; two Bondis, two Sydney Harbours, one other miscellaneous beach, but no outbacks. Is this the Australia the poets have sung of, or at least the one we thought we had all come to know and more or less love? To ask this is not to criticise Anne Loxley's initial anthology, but to suggest that Australianness has a chimerical quality.

I ADMIT THAT MY NATIONALISTIC EMOTIONS are underdeveloped, but I don't think there's much to be gained from approaching the National Portrait Gallery in the portentous hope of seeing and learning what it is to be an Australian. Loxley opens her catalogue with the claim that her exhibition is 'a dual study of national achievement and national identity'. When one reflects that she herself has made the choice that all images, from any source, of any persons who have had Australian connection (George V *Rex Imperator* ruled over us for 25 years) are fair game for her hanging, Australianness seems to me to have become so broad a concept as to be horizonless. Why not just say this is a visual essay on humanity? After all, as the *Rex Imperator* himself might remark, there's always Terence's chestnut of a motto to remind us that it's probably healthier to see ourselves as part of the whole rather than wholly this part. *Homo sum; nihil humanum alienum a me puto* defines as egalitarian and tolerant an outlook as any Australian could aspire to. Take a squiz at this, says Terry, aren't we an extraordinary lot! ■

Gerard Windsor is a Sydney contributing editor to *Eureka Street*.

• Illustrative material courtesy of John Thompson and Michael Richards, National Library of Australia.

ALAN MISSEN WAS A LIBERAL—one of that permanently endangered small-'l' species—who took 25 years to get into Parliament. But he served in the Senate from 1974-86, and his sudden death at the age of 60 produced virtually unanimous affirmations of respect from his fellow politicians. The regrets of his Liberal colleagues must surely have been tinged with remorse that they had never put this man's talents to proper use, while some Labor luminaries might have nursed guilts of another kind.

In his early life, Missen had seemed the very model of a Liberal politician. He was lower-middle class, a scholarship boy, and leader of the Melbourne University Conservative Club at a time of left-wing student dominance; a champion debater, and in later life an eloquent and intelligent orator; a Christian of conventional tastes; a lawyer. Missen was strongly anti-communist and averse to socialism—and he was in at the beginning of the Liberal Party in 1944, when

DURING THE FEDERAL LIBERAL PARTY'S weekend retreat near Canberra last month, John Hewson wore one of those checked flannelette shirts that are so popular among unemployed youth in the outer suburbs of Australia's cities. Of course, Hewson wore his buttoned-up and tucked-in, contrary to teenage fashion, but his choice of shirt seemed to be in deliberate contrast to the striped business shirts with different-coloured collars that he wore during the 1993 election campaign.

Could this change of image signal a new solidarity with the nation's disadvantaged? Maybe, but changing a party platform is not as easy as changing one's shirt. Since the defeat of *Fight-back!* at the 1993 election, the Liberals have been struggling to overcome an absence of direction in policy-making. Bronwyn Bishop's poor showing in the MacKellar by-election has not only put her leadership ambitions on hold; it also indicates that New Right ideology and free-market



re didn't hold

Alan Missen: Liberal Pilgrim: A Political Biography Anton Hermann, The Poplar Press, ACT 1993.
ISBN 0 646 14919 9 RRP \$19.95

Robert Menzies was his idol. What more could the Liberals ask from a parliamentary candidate?

They could ask that he exhibit the qualities most prized by those who led the party, and by the machine that ran it: loyalty, predictability, not rocking the boat, following the party line, and the leader. He should have principles, of course, but should produce them only when requested. Australian conservatives were, and to some extent still are, conformist, authoritarian and tribal.

BUT MISSEN DISCOVERED THAT HE WAS A LIBERAL, not a conservative—and that maintaining one's principles was more important than following and regurgitating the party line, no matter what it might be. So he was born to trouble.

economics are no longer a winning combination.

What the Liberals need desperately is an intellectual framework which allows them to integrate individual freedom and traditional communitarian values into a coherent philosophy. Too often the individual and the community are considered as opposites, so that making individual freedom the focus of policy seems to undermine a genuine commitment to justice and equity.

Rather than listening to ideologues such as Bronwyn Bishop's mentor, Friedrich von Hayek, the Liberals would be well-advised to pay attention to the most subtle political theorist of conservatism in the 20th century, Michael Oakeshott. Oakeshott eschewed any kind of 'rationalism' in politics, by which he meant any attempt to subsume policy-making within a scientific formula or process. Human behaviour, being influenced by myriad cultural and histori-

cal forces, is not easily made into an object of inquiry for predictive science, so to use a pseudo-scientific model of the economy, as neoclassical economists (aka 'economic rationalists') do, as the basis for a political platform, is to ask rationalism to do something of which it is not capable. Linked to Oakeshott's warnings on the limits of rationalism is his attack on ideology, that is, on principles and doctrines that are not grounded in the historical and cultural context in which they are articulated. What counts, what makes policies both attractive and workable, is the extent to which they reflect a community's social traditions and cultural mythology.

Just before young Missen nominated for the state seat of Kew—his home electorate—he opposed Kew Council's refusal to allow the Communist Eureka Youth League to use the council's meeting rooms. (These were Cold War days.) He clashed with the mayor, the Liberal branch president, and the president of the local RSL. So the preselection went to Arthur Rylah, and later nominations for the Victorian state seats of Ivanhoe and Evelyn met with similar fates. Missen said he had had no hope anyway—he was too young, another disqualification.

On 27 April 1950, his former idol Robert Menzies introduced the Communist Party Dissolution Bill. Missen, who disliked the Cold War frenzy and McCarthyist leanings that had characterised his party since its federal election victory in 1949, opposed the bill and the calculations behind it. Told to keep his misgivings to himself, he went public instead and expressed his opposition in the newspapers. For this, Alan Missen was suspended from party office, and went very near to expulsion. Friends such as Ivor Greenwood probably saved him; but thereafter many saw him as an apostate.

The first real chance Missen and the left Liberals had was during the Vietnam War, and the chaos, the public discredit, and the leadership quarrels that beset the Liberals during that period. Snedden, a progressive, gained the party leadership and the class of '74—Missen, Fred Chaney, Peter Baume and Ian Macphree—took their places in Parliament. It seemed as though the day of the progressive reformers had come, and that the Liberal Party was about to shed its conservative past.

Within a year, however, Fraser had seized the leadership, returned the Liberals to power, and the old gang was back in charge. Missen's desire to pass

In Australia we not only have a tradition of 'rugged individualism', but also of the 'fair go' and 'sticking by your mates'. At the last federal election the Liberals paid the price for ignoring these latter elements of the Australian tradition. And then there is the Liberal Party's own found-

Man in the middle: in 1982 Alan Missen (centre) was chairman of the Senate Standing Committee for the Scrutiny of Bills, whose members included the ALP's Gareth Evans, Susan Ryan and Michael Tate (left) and the Liberals' Noel Crichton-Browne and Robert Hill (right). The other two smiling faces were recorded only as 'committee staffers'.

*As early as 1968,
Missen wrote in an
unpublished manuscript:
'I now see, and have
long suspected,
that the Liberal Party
is a myth and a delusion.
A conservative party,
wrapped in liberal
garments, has long passed
itself off as genuinely
liberal and progressive.'*

Labor's 1975 budget, and his public opposition to the way Fraser resolved the constitutional crisis, meant that he was out of the running for the ministry or for the front bench when the Liberals went into opposition in '83. Missen's formal political ambitions were over: Liberals have long memories when it comes to nonconformity.

Unexpectedly, however, Missen proceeded to pile up more lasting achievements as a backbencher than he ever could have as a minister bound by Cabinet solidarity. A 10-year campaign to have the office of Ombudsman incorporated into Australian political life was rewarded when Rupert Hamer introduced the office into Victoria. The Family Law Act, a legal and social transformation long that Missen had long desired, was guided through Parliament by his partnership with Lionel Murphy. A Freedom of Information Act was put on the books, and Senate committees, especially the Senate Standing Committee for the Scrutiny of Bills, were introduced or refurbished.

Alan Missen saw the Senate as essentially a house of review—a fine mesh or sieve to ensure that nothing gets through by default, as Peter Bowers described it—rather than as a states' house, or a device for interdicting supply. The House of Representatives, Missen be-

lieved, would never adequately scrutinise legislation.

lieved, would never adequately scrutinise legislation. The placing of human rights at the centre of the political agenda also owes much to Alan Missen, who was a driving force in Amnesty International. For him, the desirability of any proposed law or policy must be gauged by how it affects the civil liberties of individuals—he had no time for race vilification legislation, for example.

But then came the moment of truth, for Alan Missen and for many Australians. Pages 147-52 of Hermann's book are mandatory reading for those of us who have forgotten, or would like to forget, this episode. Probably the greatest disillusionment Missen ever suffered resulted from political responses to the Costigan Royal Commission. That inquiry had initially been aimed at the Ship Painters and Dockers Union, but expanded via grants of wider powers into a full investigation of widespread institutionalised corruption. Fraser put through the National Crimes Commission Act in 1982 to replace the commission with a permanent body, of equal power but with wider terms of referral.

Before the act could be set to work, however, the Hawke government came to power in the 1983 election. Hawke and Gareth Evans immediately gutted the Fraser legislation, proposing instead a supervisory committee of state and federal ministers, any one of whom could veto an investigation. The Crimes

Commission's powers and freedom of actions were to be greatly diminished.

AS HERMANN WRITES, the Costigan commission had already discovered too much. Missen, with Liberal and Democrat support, forced the government to submit its bill to the Senate standing committee on constitutional and legal affairs. The committee—including

ing myth—Menzies' 'Forgotten People'—which it seems to have forgotten.

What the Liberals have forgotten is that they were established for the sake of the individual, not for individualism. That is, for the promotion of the interests of real people in the real world rather than the propagation of an ideology that undermines the importance of communal relationships and social responsibilities. Their problem is that they have come to be identified as the party of 'business', whereas they were founded to be the party of Everyman.

But Labor, originally the representative of sectional interest, has stolen that mantle from them. The Liberals need to wrest middle Australia—their traditional support base—back from Labor, but they won't succeed in that as long as they continue to advocate policies likely to exacerbate the social inequalities created by 10 years of Labor homage to economic rationalism.

Before they can propose alternative policies, however, they need to be standing on solid philosophical ground. For that they need to do more than invoke the spirit of Menzies, as John Hewson has been doing recently. They need an intellectual framework that overcomes the false dichotomy between the individual and the community, and in this endeavour I believe they could do a lot worse than study the way the tradition of Catholic social thought conceptualises the 'common good'.

The term is often misunderstood, being taken to refer to what is of benefit to the community as a whole as opposed to what is of benefit to a particular individual or group. Taken this way, the 'common good' becomes a plank supporting crude Benthamite utilitarianism—the greatest good for the greatest number—in which the rights of the individual are lost, and of which state socialism is one manifestation. Ironically, econom-

the Labor members—recommended considerable changes to The Hawke-Evans model, and included a minority report by Missen calling for stronger investigative powers to be given to a body that would be independent of the government.

Missen had been briefed extensively by Costigan's officers, and this changed his mind on many things. Labor cited the dangers to civil liberties posed by an investigating authority such as the one he proposed but Missen, a strong libertarian, was not impressed by such arguments. He stressed that 'our basic liberties are to go about our daily lives, to know that we are not corrupted or enforced to take particular actions, not intimidated in our business affairs, and to know also that our governmental organisation and the judiciary are not corrupted.'

'We know there is corruption—we (can) see to what extent there has already been corruption within administration in this country. We may have to forego some privileges in the interests of the basic civil liberties of this country.'

But Hawke and Evans insisted on their bill, which would establish what Missen called a 'ramshackle, ineffective body'. Chipp's Democrats supported the government, and Missen's own party, who had incorporated his minority report into their policy, backed down at the last moment, citing party unity. Missen was alone.

In 1984 Andrew Peacock said that the Costigan commission had been silenced just as it was getting near the really big fish. Too true, and the fish who escaped then became whales—killer whales—in Australian corporate and political life.

Missen accused Gareth Evans of having made an 'abject surrender to the demands of certain state government and civil liberties organisations'—specifically,

ly, the NSW Labor government, which was attempting to 'noble' the legislation. He criticised Chipp and the Democrats, who had supported Fraser's anti-crime legislation but now had 'lost a lot of interest in the fight against organised crime'. Evans accused Missen of 'senile paranoia'; Chipp of 'an absolute lie'. History will have little trouble in grading these three.

Missen now became totally disillusioned with his party and with the system. He knew that the criminal political and corporate culture flourishing in NSW would now be disseminated throughout Australia, as indeed it has been.

Progressive liberalism had peaked in 1974, in Missen's opinion, and been in steady decline thereafter. That decline has continued, with all the present contenders for the Liberal leadership, for example, coming from the right of the party. As early as 1968, Missen wrote in an unpublished manuscript: 'I now see, and have long suspected, that the Liberal Party is a myth and a delusion. A conservative party, wrapped in liberal garments, has long passed itself off as genuinely liberal and progressive.'

Why have small-l Liberals never got the better of the conservatives in the party? Their more recent

Missen stressed that 'our basic liberties are to go about our daily lives, to know that we are not corrupted or enforced to take particular actions, not intimidated in our business affairs, and to know also that our governmental organisation and the judiciary are not corrupted.'

ic rationalism is another since it privileges some individuals *at the expense of others*.

Understood properly, 'the common good' is a means rather than an end, and the end to which it is the means *is* individual freedom or liberation. It refers to the *good of every single individual* in a community. The common good is to be pursued not because 'the community' takes precedence over 'the individual', but because the measures that enhance the common good are measures which, by definition, will enhance the life of each individual—and each individual needs to be free to choose his or her own path of development.

Creating a social environment in which each and every individual has this freedom must be the goal of government—not certain classes of individuals, but all individuals. What the Liberals must do, then, is to develop policies that enhance the freedom of all individuals in society,

so that they can have genuine hope of realising their potential, if not their dreams.

It is a profound irony that the Liberals, the avowed champions of economic freedom, seem blind to the fact that many Australians have no freedom to act as economic agents, other than in making very basic choices from a very narrow range of options about how to dispose of a very low income. The poverty that two million Australians are experiencing means that they have no real opportunity to develop their potential.

This lack of economic freedom and its opportunities suffered by so many individuals and their families, ought to be an affront to the Liberal Party, and policies likely to exacerbate their plight should be anathema to it. But, sadly, the economic libertarianism which underpins its policies—and which privileges theoretical notions of efficiency over the problems of real people—has done just that.

struggles might be separated into two stages. The first, during Vietnam and just after, saw them pressing a whole series of innovative ideas on the family, multiculturalism, Aborigines, penal and legal reform, feminism, the environment etc—ideas which were readily accepted by a great many in the electorate, but successfully resisted by conservatives in the party.

THE SECOND STAGE is taking place now. Voters who support the causes mentioned above have a variety of options: there are the Greens or the Democrats, and Labor itself has incorporated and institutionalised many of these groups in place of its own discarded moral vision. So why vote for a small-l Liberal when, in the end, he or she will toe the party line? (Or leave altogether, as many have). So, the support base of the small-l Liberals is weak and fluctuating—and the conservatives know it. But what the conservatives

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In other words, the freedom of many individuals is being sacrificed on the altar of rationalism and ideology. Such a situation is clearly detrimental to the 'common good', properly understood, but it is also detrimental to the community as a whole because of the social disharmony it engenders. Once the traditional and cultural limits to individual freedom are breached, social solidarity becomes increasingly difficult to maintain, and we head towards the Thatcherite nightmare: 'There is no such thing as society.' For the party of the individual to find itself again it must focus on restoring real freedom and real choices to those who have been marginalised by the application of free-market theory.

Today's forgotten people are the unemployed and the working poor. Keeping them that way does not force them to become resourceful and enterprising and independent, as the more perverse propagandists of the right would have it. Indeed, it has the opposite effect. Poverty means

won't face is that they need the liberals if they are to win or hold office. Missen pointed this out very early on. Another flaw in the small-l Liberal agenda is its concentration on individual rights and legalistic solutions. As Hermann says, Missen was not very interested in economics, nor were his friends. But Labor is, the conservatives are, and so, most of the time, is the electorate.

These liberals believe in welfare, of course, and in the rights of workers and consumers, and know that the modern state must play a substantial role, but they do not want to tamper with the beloved market economy. Theirs is classic 19th century liberalism, with all its glories and its limitations. In Australia, such liberals tend to be middle class, and are very often professionals, with lawyers much in evidence. Few of them have ever found their hands dirty, or empty. (This is not a criticism, just a categorisation.)

Missen's health steadily declined—to asthma he added diabetes, until one night, this sea-green incorruptible was borne away by a heart attack. As Lawrence said, the cold-blooded will always beat the warm-blooded in the end.

Young Anton Hermann, (he is 28) has given us an interesting, informative and affectionate book. In his preface he writes, 'More than any other individual, Alan Missen offered a warm hand of friendship. His sudden death in March 1986 came just days before a function which he had organised to welcome me to the ranks of the Liberal Party.' This might serve as a bitter-sweet token of Allen Missen's life and career. ■

Max Teichmann is a Melbourne writer and reviewer.

that they have no resources, nothing to be independent with, and no room to exercise their enterprise. The Liberal Party must do more than pay lip service to the freedom and aspirations of the poor by promising that one day microeconomic reform and economic growth will absorb them all into a high-wage economy. Such promises are arrant nonsense, and honest Liberals know it.

Unfortunately, that weekend retreat in April seemed to have produced little that encourages hope of better things from the party. John Hewson, for example, declared that the 'solution' to the problem of rising crime (something related to poverty) lies in tougher prison sentences. When he made this announcement to the media, he had discarded the checked flannel, and was wearing a business shirt. ■

David de Carvalho is a social policy officer with the Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service in Collingwood, Victoria.

The limits of democracy

WHEN I GOT HOME TO MELBOURNE FROM LONDON I had the feeling something important had been settled for me. My private audience with the Queen, which was part of the Commonwealth Writers Prize, had been more significant for me than I'd thought it could possibly be. I grew up on a south London Council estate. My accent of birth is the accent of the lackeys who work in London's clubland, around St James and Pall Mall. My father was once a hall porter. The hall porter at the Royal Overseas League, where the Commonwealth Foundation put me up, and which is in Park Place St James, had my old accent. The particular accent I'm speaking of (which is not Cockney) extends, mysteriously for outsiders to the system, to include certain Scots and Irish. I was having afternoon tea with Alistair Niven, who heads the literature unit of the Arts Council in the UK, and he was telling me that things had changed since I was a boy. When I dropped my Australian accent, however, and slipped into the accent of my birth to ask Alistair if it were not still inconceivable that a tutor at Oxford would speak with such an accent, he was taken aback. He was silent for a moment. Then he agreed. In that respect nothing has changed.

GOING TO SEE THE QUEEN WAS A BIT OF A JOKE. It was a good excuse to meet my English agent and to talk to publishers and to make other interesting contacts in London, as well as to give a lecture at the University of Aarhus in Denmark, where Professor Anna Rutherford is teaching *The Ancestor Game* in her course on the new literatures in English—a discipline which understands that England is no longer the cultural centre for literatures in English. And then to spend a few precious days with my mother, who is eighty-five and lives alone in Dorset.

Louis Joseph, chauffeur to Dr Humayun Khan, the director of the Commonwealth Foundation and my host on this occasion, called for me at the Royal Overseas League at ten past twelve and we drove to Buckingham Palace. As *The Times* expressed it next day in its court circular, Dr Khan was 'in attendance'. In the car on the way he asked me if I was nervous. I said I wasn't. Which was true. We drove slowly. We were early. There was the usual crowd of tourists looking through the railings at that empty parade ground in front of the palace. As our car drew up to the front gate and it became clear that we were going to be admitted, the people at the railings rushed towards us, trying to see who was inside. The policeman saluted and we drove in.

The enormous size and silence of the place. The unusual amount of space around the building isolating it. Not a soul in sight, except the long grey overcoats of the guards swaying a bit in the shadows. A vast building. Dr Khan, who has been a diplomat all his working life, was concerned that we were a little early. Louis reassured him. Once across the parade ground we drove through an arched entrance and emerged onto an empty courtyard. Two acres of gravel, raked like a Chinese garden. No ornament or tree or pot plant. Nothing. Louis drove slowly along the side of the building to our left and turned right at the end. There was a covered porch with a red carpet. A lackey in dark blue livery (royal blue?) came down the steps. A motion of his white gloved hand drew us on, overcoming Dr Khan's fear of being ten minutes early. Detail had suddenly become significant to me. I was still thinking about—I was still experiencing the unexpected elation of—passing through the gates. But I wasn't nervous. It was still a bit of a joke. It was still something odd that I was doing once in a lifetime that was related to nothing else I had ever done or would ever do again. It was still a funny thing for an ordinary person like me to be doing on Tuesday. It was still something I'd feel a need to make a joke of to my friends when

The equerry was training for the London Marathon. 'Do you have marathons in Australia?' The duchess wishes to know. I told her we have an epidemic of them. We all laughed again. It was easy to talk and to laugh now. We were among friends. I felt sorry to see her go when the duchess took her leave of us. Apart from pressing the wrong button she had waited well.

I got back—back out there on the other side of those gates into the real world. I wasn't doing something serious. I wasn't nervous.

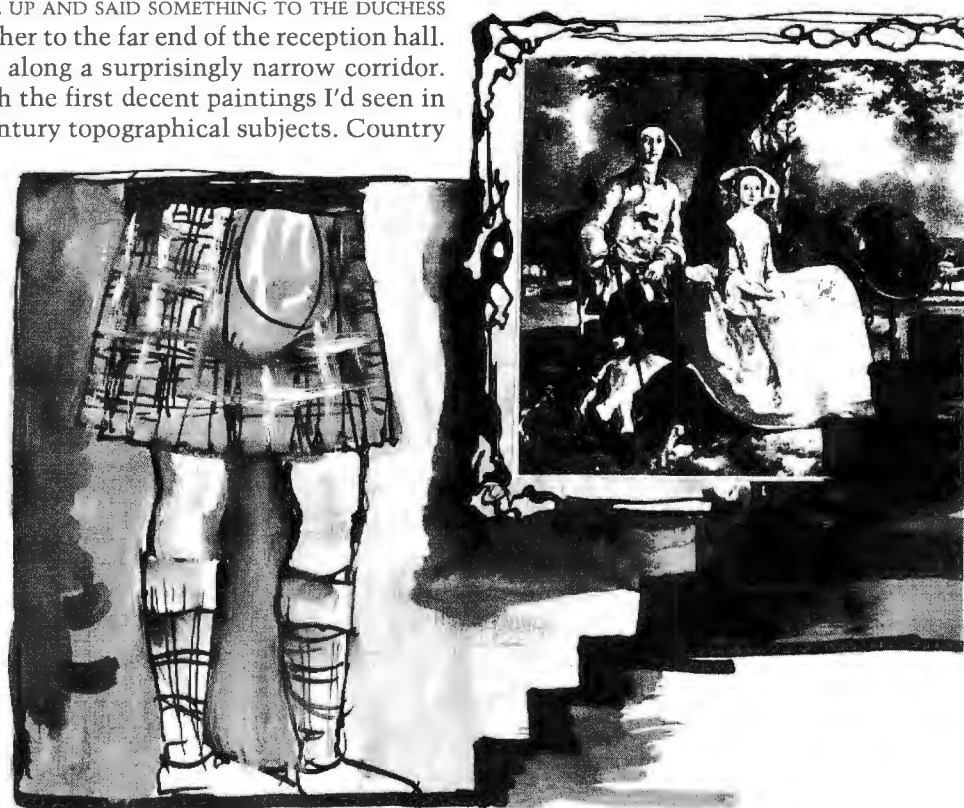
There were three lackeys in dark blue uniforms with red chevrons and white gloves attending our car in the covered porch. Somewhere an enormous industry of uniforms and preparations was going on. A tall woman of around sixty-five or so, wearing a flowered dress and carrying a handbag on her arm, waited for us at the top step. She was introduced as the Duchess of Somewhere, I think. I immediately thought 'Malfi' and forgot her name. The three of us, Dr Khan and the duchess and me, went into the palace and waited. We sat together on a pink satin couch. The reception hall extended across almost the entire width of the enormous building. It was big enough to hold a thousand people. One or two people came and went. The Queen's private secretary came by. He was introduced. We said something. I forgot his name too. A sergeant-major in a Highland regiment was taking care of arrangements at the door. He was in full-dress uniform. The duchess left us for a little. She would return, she said, soon. Dr Khan and I examined things and talked. The duchess returned. You're very lucky, she said. She's receiving you in her sitting room upstairs. You'll see a lot of the palace. 'Are you nervous?' she asked me. I said I was a little as it didn't seem right not to be. But I wasn't. The duchess said she always felt nervous herself whenever she was recalled to waiting. For a day or two anyway. We understood that we were both understandably a little nervous.

We waited and did a little more small talk. Dr Khan was good at it. I envied him. I admired him.

SOMEONE (A LACKEY) CAME UP AND SAID SOMETHING TO THE DUCHESS and we rose and went with her to the far end of the reception hall. We turned left and walked along a surprisingly narrow corridor. The corridor was lined with the first decent paintings I'd seen in the palace. English 18th century topographical subjects. Country seats and significant views of inhabited landscape. Small. George Lambert and Samuel Scot maybe, there wasn't time for precise identification. But that sort of thing. We went up in a tiny lift, ornamented like a ballroom, to the first floor. The duchess pressed '2' by mistake and nearly swore. 'It's okay,' I said. 'You've pressed "1" and we'll stop at "1" before we get to "2".' 'You can never be sure in this place,' she said. When the doors opened we were on the second floor. There was an empty hall, a tall window and a view over a park. 'You see,' she said, just a little flustered by her mistake. We returned to the first floor.

When the lift doors opened three lackeys welcomed us, smiling and moving their white gloved hands encouragingly—a little chorus of silent minstrels.

We walked along another narrow corridor and went into a small, comfortably furnished sitting room and sat on straight-backed chairs and we waited. While we waited we stared at the rug. It was a yellow and green rug. Chinese rather than Islamic. The duchess said she thought it was a little too yellow. Dr Khan agreed with her. 'It's new,' the duchess said, not entirely approving. I stared at the rug. I felt it might not last there very long. I could think of nothing to say about it but I couldn't bring myself to stop looking at it. Some comment seemed to be called for from me. I wondered if the duchess really thought the rug was too yellow or whether she, as I was, was simply having difficulty thinking of something to say—the cause of her anxiety whenever she was recalled to waiting, a lack of things to say to fill the waiting. Being silent with each other didn't offer itself as a comfortable



option. I felt it was my duty to think of something to say. It was my turn to make a contribution. I looked up. Dr Khan and the duchess were at once expectant. They waited for me to speak. I rejected the possibility of agreeing with the duchess about the rug. The time for that had passed. Dr Khan had already used that. A new topic, perhaps obliquely related to the rug, would be a good idea. The palace was quiet. The absence of street noise and neighbour noise and noises from other parts of the house, such as the bathroom or the kitchen. There was not even the distant sound of a radio. It felt as though no one was moving anywhere in the palace. Everyone waiting. Even churches echo a bit and

admit noise from outside. We waited and said nothing. I'd missed my turn. Then the door opened and a beautiful young man came into the room and stood in the middle of the green and yellow rug and smiled brilliantly at us. The duchess introduced him, and Dr Khan and I stood up and shook hands with him.

I've called this young man the Queen's equerry. That's what he seemed to me to be. Maybe he was a military ADC. But equerry seemed to me the word that fitted him best. Equestrian. He reminded me of another young man I once knew when I had the farm at Araluen on the South Coast of New South Wales. That young man, the one in New South Wales, when I

knew him, was Lord Casey's military ADC when Lord Casey was the Governor-General at Yarralumla. He, too, Lord Casey's military ADC, had been tall and fit and strong and happy and always pleased to see you and able to make you feel that you were really important to him. He'd had the gift of friendship. Well that young man died tragically climbing a mountain in New Guinea. This young man, the one in Buckingham Palace, reminded me of him and of the tragedy and of his beauty and death. He had left a young widow and two small children, and parents who never recovered from their loss. He had been their only child. They had been poor immigrants to Australia from somewhere in Eastern Europe and had made good through hard work. Their boy had done well at the military academy. He had done brilliantly. He was like a prince when I knew him. He was generous and open and, even when he was himself disappointed by something, he seemed able to make the rest of us feel good. We always felt his absence keenly whenever we did things together and he was not with us. I didn't know him for very long. For a year or two at the most. But I still think of him from time to time and about how his death must have been unbearable for his wife and his parents. How it must have changed everything for them.

THE EQUERRY WAS WEARING A BLACK UNIFORM. A strangely elaborate coat with frogs, I suppose you'd call them, down the front, and tight trousers with a red stripe and boots and spurs. Again I thought of the enormous hidden industry of people making and looking after these uniforms—lackeys behind the scenes. A different set of clothes for the men for each occasion. The duchess was wearing her flowered dress. It looked normal. It didn't make you wonder. The equerry's uniform was strange and it made you wonder. It concealed a mystery. There were things you couldn't know about it if you were an outsider. With his boots and spurs he was ready to leap on a horse and ride for help, or to carry a message to someone. He was the active male presence. The duchess was the lady in-waiting. If anything went wrong he'd take charge and set it right. He'd issue an order to the sergeant-major down at the front door and an efficient redress of the situation would be put in train at once. The sergeant-major (in his swirling kilt) was a man of 50, but you knew he'd willingly do the bidding of this young man of 23. They'd work together these two. They'd understand each other. There'd be that disciplined intensity between them that outsiders to the military establishment sneer at but are impressed by, and are even a little afraid of. For it represents, that disciplined intensity does, the point at which democracy stops in a democracy.

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point at which democracy stops in a democracy. Ordinary people don't have any bearing on things beyond that point. There's no discussion. Beyond that point there's something implacable that directs events. That's what the black uniform and the spurs signified, and the kilt by the front door. Then of course there were the police out there, waving Louis through the gate.

'It's a Wellington,' the duchess informed Dr Khan and me, referring to the equerry's black frock coat, which I'd wondered about aloud. 'The Duke of Wellington designed it. I prefer it to tails. It's much more comfortable. And it looks a bit military don't you think?' We looked, and the splendid young man smiled and permitted himself to be looked at. 'It's all right this weather,' he said, patting the thickly woven chest piece. 'But in the summer it's uncomfortable.' We laughed. We knew he could take it. Discomfort—even wounds. He would bear all that. He would give his life. We were liberated by his presence. We all wanted to talk at once. It was impossible not to be this young man's friend. 'My son,' the duchess said, 'worked as a jackeroo in Australia. You did that too, didn't you?' Yes, I'd done that, I said. 'Have you been to Australia?' I asked the equerry. No, but he'd love to go, he said. 'Where's your son now?' I asked the duchess. 'He's in the City. He's a country boy at heart but decided he'd make his million before going down to the farm.' We laughed some more. It was wonderful to think of all this, millions in the City and places waiting in the country, and us sitting here chatting in Buckingham Palace, which in a way was probably the best address in the world. And the equerry was training for the London Marathon. 'Do you have marathons in Australia?' The duchess wishes to know. I told her we have an epidemic of them. We all laughed again. It was easy to talk and to laugh now. We were among friends. I felt sorry to see her go when the duchess took her leave of us. Apart from pressing the wrong button she had waited well.

ONCE WE WERE ALONE, we three men in the comfortable sitting room, the equerry turned to me. 'It's very simple really,' he said. 'Just think of two in and two out. The rest is up to you.' I found myself listening carefully to his instructions. I might have been the sergeant major. I wanted to get it right. He stood by the door and showed me what he meant. 'I'll precede you down the passage. Her room is at the end on the right. It's a fairly narrow doorway, so I'll go in ahead of you and dress to the right.' I was keen for him to see that I'd understood his use of this military term. 'Yes,' I said, watching him and listening. 'You follow me in and I'll announce you. She'll be standing some way in the room in front of you. Just a nod of the head from you and I'll withdraw. You go forward and shake her hand and another nod of the head. After that it's up to you. When you leave, the same procedure. A nod of the head as you shake hands, then turn round when you reach the door and again, a nod of the head. Two in two out. Just remember that.'

A lackey came to the door and said something to the equerry. The equerry turned to me, 'It's time to go,' he said, serious but sympathetic. Two in two out, I said to myself. Dr Khan and I stood and followed him—just as we would have followed him into battle. The situation had reached a point where nothing could be done except go forward and face it. Nervous was not quite the word for the way I felt. I was to be tested in some way that I had not been tested in before. I wanted very much to get it right. The equerry, I knew—for my sake and not for his own sake—but generously, decently, as part of his elaborate values about people, wanted me to get it right. Dr Khan, my companion on this occasion, the career diplomat who had once been Pakistan's high commissioner in London and who knew all about these things, wanted me to get it right. For my own sake they wanted me to get it right. We walked down the long narrow corridor together and it seemed a good time to be silent with each other. It was my test. It would be up to me how things would go. I could decide. They would leave it up to me. No one would interfere. I was being invited to be myself.

This isn't finished. I mean I haven't said yet what had been settled for me by this visit. But it had something to do with that business that Steven Muir—the thinly fictionalised me—talks about at the beginning of *The Ancestor Game*, when he says he hopes there might be a reconciliation for him with the country of his birth in the publication of his book in England. I feel as though I'll never need to go back to England again. Or need to expend good psychic energy dealing with my childhood experience of rejection and humiliation. The English are proficient at invalidating their own people, and themselves. I feel I've overcome that hidden treachery in myself at last. Is that a good thing though, I wonder? For an artist to feel? The resolution of some deep old conflict that he's been too ashamed to talk about openly before? ■

Alex Miller is a visiting fellow in the English department at La Trobe University. His most recent novel, *The Ancestor Game*, won both the Miles Franklin Award and the Commonwealth Writers Prize.



What's left of the tribe

WHY DON'T YOU ORGANISE a game of crown and anchor or something like that?' She grimaces. 'Be serious. A lot of these people were brought up as strict Methodists, and I can get the raised-eyebrow treatment just by suggesting that they have a sweep on Cup day. If I mentioned crown and anchor they probably wouldn't know what it was. And if they did know, they might start to wonder whether I really ought to be a minister. What is crown and anchor, anyway?'

'It's sort of like roulette, except it uses symbols—crowns and anchors and things—instead of numbers. It's simpler, so it's harder to rig the wheel. And I was serious. At school the brothers used to organise a gambling day for the year 12s when they needed to buy more sports equipment or some books for the library. The crown-and-anchor table always drew the biggest crowd. And the biggest losers. Or the biggest winners, so far as the brothers were concerned.'

Now she is giving me the raised-eyebrow treatment. 'But that was actively encouraging small boys to gamble!'

'Well, yes. But Catholics have never had much of a problem with that. Especially Irish Catholics, and when I was at school the church still had an Irish flavour in this country. But that's mostly gone now. So has the need for gambling days, I expect. I've not kept up contact with the school I went to, and it's a long time ago now ...'

'Oh yes, you're a decrepit old man.'

'As I was saying, it's a long time ago now. But last year when I was in Perth I drove past the place. It's much bigger, huge in fact, and it's got all sorts of things that were only rudimentary when I was there. Like playing fields.'

'Don't tell me the brothers organised field-planting days, too?'

'Sneer if you wish, but in fact that's just what they did. I hope whoever plays football on them now is grateful for my sweated labour. But if they haven't been raised in the rough-and-tumble of gambling days and field-planting days, they probably wouldn't know what gratitude is. These days, their lavish playing fields and laboratories are probably endowed by a foundation, or some other servant of Mammon, which indulges in more recondite forms of gambling on the stock exchange.'

She groans. 'The most tediously Irish Catholic thing about you is the way you make up myths about your hard-done by past. No, on second thoughts it's the way you use those stupid myths to pretend that you're *still* hard done-by. But your lot run the country now. You've got the Prime Minister, and almost half the cabinet, and more than half the High Court ...'

'Yeah, well that's my point. I mean, look what all those gambling days and field-planting days did

for Paul Keating. I'm not sure whether the High Court justices would have had quite the same rigorous training, because they probably didn't all go to brothers' schools. Or at least not the sort of brothers' schools that Paul and I went to. But maybe they picked up a few hints from clients they defended when they were still young barristers. We form a disproportionately high part of the jail population, too, you know.'

'I know, I was a prison chaplain. And I'm not surprised that so many of you are in there, if the things you tell me are true.'

She is silent for a moment. 'Was it really rough-and-tumble? I mean, you know all the things that keep being reported about Catholic schools.'

'I only went to one. But I suspect it was fairly typical of Catholic schools at the time, except perhaps for the wealthier ones that some of the High Court justices went to. And even they would have been more like other Catholic schools than like rich Protestant schools.'

'So, was it rough-and-tumble? Were you used and abused?'

'Of the three charges commonly made about those schools—that they harboured paedophiles, that they indoctrinated their pupils on behalf of the DLP, and their methods of discipline were brutal, only the third seems to me to be a fair accusation. There were teachers who favoured the DLP, but theirs wasn't the only political voice we heard. And as for sexual abuse by teachers, I doubt that it was more common in Catholic schools than in other institutions which brought adults and children together. It never happened to me, and I wasn't aware of it happening to anyone else at the school.'

'Victims often repress it.'

'Yes, but I think we would have known. Kids do. But the violence was there, all right. The brothers were good men, and we were never doubted that they cared about the kids they were teaching. But sometimes they would just flare up, explode. It wasn't just the cane or the blackboard ruler, either; often enough we would get a back-hand or a fist. The sort of thing that would get teachers charged with assault these days. And I suppose some people would say that the violence had more than a little to do with sexual repression. Perhaps the brothers might agree with them—most of the ones who taught me eventually left and got married.'

'Or perhaps they noticed that one of their pupils had an Irish temper, too.'

I stood up and put on my jacket.

'Where are you going?'

'To the All Nations. I've got to get my football tips in before six o'clock. There's money on it, y'know. ■'

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

Inside Burma

lowed with our baggage, cooking utensils, food and medicine.

In the darkness of the truck, a man spoke in Burmese. Everyone laughed.

'What did he say?'

'We are like smuggled goods,' Ko Zaw Tun confided. 'Human contraband'.

The journey began. After 20 minutes of struggling with the tarpaulin, the cargo was left exposed to the night air. The passengers curved into the crevices left by each other's bodies. Ko Zaw Tun's head rested on the stomach of another medic.

Death Highway, the pundits called this stretch of Thai road, and as the truck lurched and swayed around tight corners we began to understand why: forest above, cliffs below, the road precariously in the middle.

The dawn woke us. At the border, a tattered Thai flag and sign greeted the convoy. The sign was in three languages: Thai, Burmese and English; Thai for the drivers, Burmese for the Karen villagers and English for the aid workers. In Australia, where there are no land borders, we are a nation of swimmers confined to our own waters. But here, a border is like a change of scenery. It is like seeing the ocean for the first time, and discovering what it is like to push your feet through sand.

In Sekaunthit, the Burmese border town, we ate beans and bread, and drank tea overdosed with condensed milk. After paying for our breakfast in Thai baht, we waited.

Three of the men were medics who worked in the civil clinics of the Karen 'liberated' areas: Ko Zaw Tun, 21, Ko Maung Maung, 23, and Ko Myint Soe, 31, had escaped government controlled areas after the bloody coup of 18 September 1988. 'Our country', Ko Myint Soe told me, 'is like a blind man'. 'In Northern Burma, people are very poor. They eat oats (instead of rice) and wear clothes made from sacks.'

The few tourists who holiday in Burma often remember a land of golden pagodas and smiling people: the stereotype displaces images of poverty, repression, torture, forced labour and rape. Since Ne Win came



Buddhist monks dig an air-raid shelter in the village of Kyeik Don, in Burma's Duplaya district.

Photo: Martin West

THE FIRST TIME I TRAVELLED to Burma's civil war, a tropical storm in Thailand had broken two months of drought. At the suburban end of the Thai border town, a Muslim businesswoman sheltered a nightly haul of transients. It was always the same ritual: the travellers would arrive, settle down to watch a soap opera about marital infidelity, drink cup after cup of weak Burmese tea, and gossip. They could have been waiting to go to bed; but they were travelling to another country.

This time, an hour before midnight, 11 people boarded a truck. Overhead there was a tarpaulin, and, underneath, bed mats destined for the Burmese black market cushioned tired bodies. Another truck fol-

to power in 1962, corruption and cronyism have squandered Burma's wealth and natural resources. Ko Myint Soe, who supports the Karens in their fight against the country's Burman majority, spends much of his time on the road, seeing what the government prefers to ignore.

He was waiting to travel to Chogoli, an isolated animist village, where a clinic treats villagers for respiratory infections, dysentery and malaria. There is also a high incidence of 'general weakness'. On one of my visits I asked the head medic, Saw Chit Win, what this meant. 'It is due to the poor diet', he said. 'The civil war forces villagers to leave their cultivated lands. They have to do slash-and-burn agriculture.'

On the outskirts of Chogoli, Saw Chit Win took me to a steep hill where villagers had cleared the land. I was exhausted when I reached the top, and Saw Chit Win laughed. 'The work is very hard,' he said.

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DAWNA RANGE, the truck bumped along dirt roads, past jungle and betel nut forests. At a checkpoint, we were offered monkey to eat. Kyeik Don, our destination, had no postal service, nor even a single postcard.

But Kyeik Don is a front-line trading village, with the Handro River its lifeline to central Burma. The river was where villagers bathed, drew water, and washed their clothes, oxen and trucks. The river was where boats would arrive, bringing salted fish and other delicacies from Moulmein. The river was where Burmese New Year was celebrated, with children and adults bucketing each other with water. The river was

where information and rumours circulated, and on its banks soldiers laid mines. One moment the 'enemy' was elusive, the next he was everywhere and people couldn't stop talking about him. The Burmese army would arrive next month, next week; no, tomorrow.

On both sides of the civil war, the soldiers are becoming younger. During Burmese New Year, in a small village near Kyeik Don, two middle-aged women with *thanakha* on their faces led me away by the elbow. They daubed my cheeks with pink powder and sat me at a long table laden with rice in water and very salty mashed beans. The soldiers there were in their early teens. A female soldier, wearing a pink shirt and green *longyi*, carried an M16. Her gaze was vacant and the weapon seemed almost like a fashion accessory; it was the same colour as her long, black, tied-back hair.

Kyaw Win Soe and Win Bo, both 17, came from very poor families. They were Burmans. Win Bo had been a soldier with the Burmese army but deserted during his first major battle, and was captured by the Karen. 'We were told that Karen and other ethnic groups were destructive elements', he told me. 'I didn't know any Karen people.' Kyaw Win Soe was the youngest soldier in his regiment of the All Burma Students Democratic Front. His widowed mother was jailed after being involved in the pro-democracy movement in 1988. 'When the civil war ends I want to go to school,' he said.

During the army's last dry season offensive in the countryside around Kyeik Don, in 1992, the monasteries were looted, the pagoda used as an artillery



Kyaw Win Soe,
in a village near
Kyeik Don.

Photo: Martin West

base and the mosque was attacked. Worshippers at the Baptist church in nearby Pu Ye refused to adorn their walls with religious images—they feared Burmese army vandalism.

'To be Burmese is to be Buddhist,' goes the cliché. There are three monasteries within walking distance of Kyeik Don. The monks were cautious when talking about Burma's turbulent political history, acknowledging that there were different strands of opinion within Burmese Buddhism. They are in a precarious position. They travel widely, worshipping in Rangoon and Moulmein, and sometimes they are questioned and searched. Recently, their travel has been curtailed. Despite their avowals of political neutrality, they conceded that yes, it would be easier to

Burma Dateline

1948 Britain recognises Burmese independence but the future is uncertain. Aung San, hero of the independence movement, and his cabinet have been assassinated the previous year. The Karen take up arms against the Burman majority, demanding an independent state.

1962 Ne Win comes to power after a military coup. He pursues an isolationist foreign policy and the 'Burmese Road to Socialism'. He has ruled continuously, but is rumoured to have cancer.

1974 Student demonstrations and a general strike.

1987 Banknotes are demonetised and 80 per cent of the country's money supply is wiped out. The UN approves Least Developed Country Status for Burma. Student cells organise secret meetings.

18 March 1988 'Bloody Friday': troops and riot police kill unarmed protesters, mainly students, in Rangoon. Unrest spreads.

August 1988 General strike in major cities and towns. There are daily demonstrations and more bloodshed. Aung San's daughter, Aung San Suu Kyi, emerges as key opposition leader.

18 September 1988 A military junta, the State Law and Order Restoration Council ('SLORC'), takes control of Ne Win's government. Dissident students and unionists flee across the Thai border.

20 July 1989 Aung San Suu Kyi is placed under house arrest.

May 1990 The National League for Democracy, led by Aung San Suu Kyi, wins more than 80 per cent of the primary vote in national elections. SLORC refuses to hand over power.

December 1991 Aung San Suu Kyi wins Nobel Peace Prize.

January-April 1992 The Burmese army begins a dry season offensive in Karen areas.

January 1993 A national constitutional convention begins in Rangoon. Delegates are hand-picked by the government, and the military will continue to play prominent role.

November 1993 The Kachin Independence Organisation holds talks with the SLORC, agreeing to a ceasefire.

travel if the leader of Burma's democratic opposition, Aung San Suu Kyi, came to power.

Isamaing, the imam at the local mosque, was supervising the construction of a new building. His 'nationality' was Muslim—and he supported an independent Karen state. The Muslim population is in a difficult position; Burmese racial laws discriminate

against them, and the military government restricts the publication of Islamic literature.

At Pu Ye Baptist Church, the newest bibles and hymnals had been printed in 1962, the year that Ne Win staged a military coup; he had ruled continuously since then. Ana Ho, a former Karen preacher, answered my questions in perfect English. She was 78.

Judson, the famed Baptist missionary, converted the Karen in the 19th century. He had been an abysmal failure in central Burma. Some claim that the educated Karen were mobilised to organise politically, embracing nationalism. Others argue that the Americans—and later the British—further divided Burma's ethnic groups. The debate is controversial; not all the Karen are Christian, but since the national uprising in 1988 new pressures and divisions have occurred between the Burman and Karen.

BACK IN MAE SOT, Thailand, we heard that Kyeik Don had been evacuated. Having spent three weeks in this Burmese/Karen trading town, we were anxious to return, and curious; it is strange to have lived on a firing range without seeing gunsmoke. Maung Maung and another medic, Saw Tu, were surprised but agreed to accompany us to Kyeik Don. Maung Maung calmly tells me that Burmese jet fighters flew over yesterday. 'They do this to frighten us', he says.

In Kyeik Don, the main street is empty: the evacuees have even taken house timbers with them. But the monks have remained. They are building an air-raid shelter where they will hide when the Burmese army arrives. They do not have weapons. They are sawing logs, carrying them across the grounds of the monastery and depositing them near the bunker. The utensils are versatile: an old wok serves as a container.

Everybody works, and 13-year-old novices help the ordained monks. Some of the novices are bored and they pass the time by performing cartwheels on the mound. In the afternoon a stern, older monk does the gardening: life as usual. We stand by the well and bucket ourselves with water. The young monks point to our white skins and run away when we wave. I ask a monk in his 30s if he is afraid and he tells me that no, last year the same thing happened, and they only fled when the Burmese launched an air attack.

Near the river, a Burmese family are sitting inside their split bamboo house. The father is in his 50s; he is a widower with three children, having fled Rangoon in 1967. One of his daughters is 23. She asks whether we have eaten. We can hear mortar shells in the distance and howling dogs on the hill side. The battle is three hours away. We guess that their food supplies are low, and think it tactful to decline. They insist.

Every night they sleep in the jungle and return to their house during the day. How will they know when the army is coming? 'When we see somebody running, we will run too. We are afraid and want to run away, but we don't have a bullock cart.'



Spelling it out

IT WAS ONE OF THOSE UNIVERSITY COCKTAIL PARTIES at the beginning of the year, where the academic community and its partners are getting to know each other. During the course of the evening, Archimedes confessed to a senior member of the university council that he was a writer who lectured science students. 'How wonderful that someone is attempting to make them more literate,' she replied. It wasn't worth telling her that he was not trying to humanise feral students but merely to teach them how to communicate science more clearly.

The wrong-headed assumption that scientists are illiterate, unread and uncultured is perhaps understandable after listening to some of them try to talk to a general audience. But what really is annoying is the associated belief that to be truly cultivated, one need only have a knowledge of literature, philosophy and the humanities in general—that an understanding of science does not contribute to one's general level of wisdom.

Recently, Archimedes heard a widely-published feminist interviewed on the radio. She put forward her views with gusto, and despite their radical nature, Archimedes was forced to agree ruefully with many of them. That is, until she and her interviewer tried to put her ideas into an evolutionary context. Whatever else she might have studied, evolutionary theory she had not. The elementary errors she made and the confused nature of her argument threw everything else she had said into doubt.

It's not only science-based knowledge that is misunderstood and misinterpreted, but the very process of science itself. And that lack of understanding extends to scientists themselves. Science is an organised body of knowledge. This knowledge has been built up from observing what is around us, making certain deductions on the basis of any patterns we detect, and then testing to see if our theory can be used to predict what will happen elsewhere.

In this way science gives us better and better models of reality as seen from a human point of view, models which are essentially practical, which work. From that perspective, the cry of the non-scientist that evolution or continental drift or the Big Bang are 'only theories'—as if that somehow damages their credibility—is an absurdity. It is like saying that a red train is red.

Equally silly is the assumption of many scientists that they have revealed truth or reality in some absolute or objective sense. What they have discovered is a model that works, a better mousetrap. But, living in a country and on an Earth whose limits are becoming all too apparent, we are going to need all the better mousetraps we can get in the immediate future. And those who lack the knowledge of how to use them will go the way of the dinosaur. The cultured survivor of the next century will have to be literate in both arts and sciences. ■

Tim Thwaites is a freelance science journalist.

The army did not come, and after a few weeks the villagers returned and continued their lives. Some argued that the Burmese Army was being cautious: they had sustained heavy losses the previous year when they had occupied Kyeik Don for six months. The local dogs fed on the bodies of the soldiers, and those who were still alive starved. In Burma, everybody we met was a potential target. But people were fatalistic: 'Never mind,' they said, 'nothing will happen.'

Postscript

'Things in Burma are very predictable,' says Aung Zaw, a Burmese student and journalist who lives in exile in Thailand. In November 1993, the Kachin Independence Organisation, based in Burma's north, agreed to hold peace talks with the military government, the 'State Law and Order Restoration Council'. (SLORC)

The Kachin decision effectively ended the ethnically aligned Democratic Alliance of Burma and brought pressure to bear on the country's largest ethnic minority, the Karen. In January this year, General Bo Mya, president of the Karen National Union (KNU), said: 'We will certainly hold talks with SLORC, but the KNU will bring up the human rights issue.'

The Burmese army, however, continues massive relocation of villages and towns in government-controlled areas. There are still fears of sporadic fighting in the ethnic areas, but their isolation will make such outbreaks difficult to document.

Burmese MPs elected in 1990 are supposed to face the polls again this year. Government officials have hinted that the country's most famous dissident, Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi, could be released in July. If this occurs, she will almost certainly be denied any real power. Aung San Suu Kyi has been under house arrest since 1989.

In December last year, the United Nations General Assembly condemned Burma's failure to restore democracy, and what Amnesty International calls the country's 'climate of fear' continues. At the same time, Australia and the ASEAN countries are busily investing in Burma's economy.

Although the Burmese army has not mounted a dry-season offensive this year, it has not withdrawn its troops from Karen-contested areas. Thai border authorities have confiscated medical supplies destined for the Karen area, and continue to harass Burmese and Karen refugees. ■

Carmela Baranowska and **Martin West** are collaborating on a book and documentary video about Burma.

- The Australia-Burma Council is urgently seeking individuals or groups to sponsor Burmese refugees in Thailand to come to Australia. Contact: Amanda Zapfia of the Australia-Burma Council on: (06) 281 6553.

H Bougainville deadlock

HOW LONG WILL THE AGONY OF BOUGAINVILLE, now in its sixth year, continue? More to the point, how long should it be allowed to continue? An Australian parliamentary delegation has just visited Bougainville and accepted some responsibility for the tragedy. Their observations ought to issue in some diplomatic initiative that will help to break the deadlock.

In spite of continuing bombast from Port Moresby that the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) will be defeated by the end of next month (every month!), the Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF) clearly cannot do it. The PNGDF is incompetently led, understaffed and poorly provisioned. (Recent newspaper reports have troops without full uniforms, adequate rations and ammunition.) Perhaps a quarter of the village population are in 'care centres'. If it were not for the Bougainville anti-rebels or 'Resistance' aiding the troops, the PNGDF would never have progressed to their foothold on the eastern coast at Arawa or established their insecure positions in the south. Yet, during his visit here in January, Prime Minister Wingti claimed control of 90 per cent of the province, and briefly Bougainville copper shares rose accordingly.

The Bougainville Revolutionary Army cannot win either. Because of its disorganisation and repeated violence when it controlled the province in 1990, and because its uncoordinated gangs continue the violence, the BRA cannot hope to win the support of the majority of Bougainvilleans. However deeply Bougainvilleans share secessionist feelings, they will not submit to BRA leadership confused as it is by local cultic aspirations. The majority were not consulted when the grievances of the minesite landowners in Central Bougainville precipitated the revolt. What was the PNG's most prosperous and best-governed province is now a desolation. And if the PNGDF withdrew from Bougainville again, as it did in March 1990, there would be an internecine war greater than at present, with the comparatively well-armed BRA avenging itself on those who failed to support it, and payback being exacted on all sides.

The Wingti government does not appear to be making any move to break this deadlock, other than looking for more support for its operational battalions. Unlike former prime ministers, Somare and Namaliu, who honoured agreements maintaining provincial government, Prime Minister Wingti and his Highlander associates are pursuing a centralist policy which will never be accepted by the BRA or anti-BRA in Bougainville. Moreover, urged on by advisers with little experience in Papua New Guinea, his immediate objective is the capture of the CRA-owned copper mine at Panguna which, before 1989, provid-

ed 17 per cent of government revenue and 36 per cent of export earnings. Wingti is being advised that the mine can be restored to production within a year of capture. Even with local cooperation, this would be unrealistic. Wingti's belief is that, with a better deal for local landowners and the killing of BRA leaders, the revolt will end and Bougainville will settle into integration according to his centralist model.

More seasoned observers of Bougainville believe this could not happen even if the PNGDF were able to double its strength. The only hope for a settlement lies in convening a pan-Bougainville conference at which provincial leaders will be encouraged to settle their differences within a framework of PNG sovereignty. At a meeting of over 100 chiefs last April, a call for such a conference was made. It was clear that the minimum demand would be for the restoration of provincial government and the right to determine the future of the Panguna mine that had caused such havoc to the entire province. In other words, that right could no longer be claimed by local landowners alone.

IN THE SHORT AND MEDIUM TERMS, it seems that the question of secession must be put aside—that is, if Wingti has not already forestalled this by trying to abolish provincial government in other Islands' provinces and provoking them to threaten to secede. However, leaving that mischance aside, the approach to secession favoured by pro-BRA sympathisers—i.e. Bougainvilleans have an inalienable right to self-determination—takes no account of how Bougainville will subsequently be governed or the impact on the rest of PNG or on the fragile Solomon Islands and other Pacific communities. Secession is also a matter of concern to Southeast Asian governments. It would be ironic if the BRA were to be allowed to procure secession by reducing their provincial infrastructure to rubble and killing their compatriots.

So the questions remain and the answer seems to be that the Bougainville agony will continue unless Bougainvilleans can settle their internal differences and persuade Wingti to change his policies.

There is a major role for the churches, especially the Catholic church, in encouraging reconciliation, but it must avoid the trap of blaming the presence of the PNGDF for the tragedy, as Pacific church movements have done. PNG is a sovereign state, obliged to protect its subjects and interests against subversive and facile solutions—such as secession—to its problems. Nevertheless, Wingti's unworkable policies become less and less tolerable. There is a need for an Australian initiative to help change them. ■

—Morag Fraser

The Ecumenical Altar



‘THEY CERTAINLY MADE US WELCOME,’ said Yvonne as she started the car and drove away, leaving the two young women laughing and waving on the footpath in front of the small, crowded house.

‘Of course they made us welcome,’ Jo answered, turning away from the last farewelling wave. ‘We’re the missing generation, the grandmothers. Haven’t you noticed that? Stand-ins for the two old ladies far away in Portugal. It’s the saddest part of a migrant’s life, I think. How Lucia’s mother would have loved to be there and see little Isobel in that beautiful white dress. Oh, dear. I have had one glass too many of Francesco’s homemade wine and it is making me sentimental.’

‘She’ll see photographs enough.’ Yvonne added with oblique reference to the wine, of which, being the driver, she had drunk little, ‘It certainly was a festive occasion, not what I expected for a first communion party. Though I didn’t know what to expect.’

‘Do I sense disapproval? I thought it was a wonderful party.’

‘It’s no use, Jo.’ Yvonne spoke with the force of indignation. ‘I think too much is asked of them. They shouldn’t have to do it. When you think how poor they are and how hard they have to work—that cake looked as if it came from a first class shop. At least it was professionally iced and I know how expensive that is.’

‘They aren’t on Welfare, you know. They don’t ask for anything for free except our English lessons, and I don’t know about you but I’m always dodging return favours. I love them. They rejoice. They celebrate.’

‘So do I love Florinda, and she had to make those three dresses. It took her ten days, all that tucking and frilling and rolled hems. To be worn once. As if she didn’t spend long enough at that wretched sewing machine.’

‘They’re packed away like wedding dresses for the next comer. The other women did all the cooking and Emilia helped with the quota for the factory.’

‘I can see we’ll never agree on this, so I’ll drop the subject.’

This resolve held for thirty seconds, then she added, as a last word, ‘Those crosses the little girls were wearing. They were gold.’

‘All things bright and beautiful.’

Jo’s voice as she quoted the line was soft, and tinged with a private emotion.

SINCE THEY WERE APPROACHING THE MAIN HIGHWAY, Yvonne did not pursue the subject, needing her attention for the heavy traffic. When they had reached the quieter road to the north, she said, ‘Come on, Jo. Give.’

‘Oh, really, it’s nothing.’

‘It can’t be nothing, to keep you quiet for 10 minutes.’

‘Well, nothing you’d find interesting, I’m sure.’

‘Then you shouldn’t be thinking private thoughts in company. It’s rude.’

Jo gave way.

'It's a childhood memory, my lapse into heresy. I was trying to think how it began, and it was Father Donovan's birthday. Sister Alicia got me to learn all the verses of "The Harp That Once Through Tara's Hall" for Father Donovan's birthday. I recited it with great success, and Father Donovan gave me two shillings. He said not to worry about making him cry, as crying was sometimes quite enjoyable. I was too wrapped in my own glory to notice that he was crying, but I thought that was an odd thing to say. I had never found crying enjoyable. Often necessary,' she said sadly, 'but never enjoyable. And Sister Alicia gave me a holy picture. The nuns used to mount holy pictures on plaques of plaster of paris, with a little loop of ribbon set in plaster to hang them by. They were small rewards for good conduct and prizes for good work and I'd won one or two of them, but this one was different. It was a picture of the Virgin Mary with the infant Jesus and it had had the plaster of paris treatment, but it was like no holy picture I had ever seen and it had me spellbound. I found out later when I did get to art school that it was a reproduction of Raphael's Madonna with Child—one of those postcard-sized reproductions they sell at the gallery door. I think Sister Alicia had guessed what my religion was to be.' Her voice was shaken by a gust of happy laughter. 'My mother didn't like the picture at all. I think she sensed that the enemy was within the gates. "A funny sort of holy picture that is," she grumbled, but it was undeniably a picture of the Virgin Mary, so she had to hold her peace. But the effect it had on me!' Jo shook her head in wonder. 'The excitement of knowing that there's a world belongs to you, where you belong, and then the misery of not knowing how to find it - I think the conflict must have addled my wits. And then there was the hymn.'

'All things bright and beautiful.'

Jo nodded.

'For me, the trouble with religion was that it was so sad. There was a huge crucifix at the back of the church which simply appalled me—the great iron nails driven through the hands and feet—and the stations of the Cross were a misery, following that dreadful journey and knowing all the time that nobody would come to save him. It wasn't like the movies, where somebody always turned up in time to save the hero. I didn't want to be a child martyr, either. And then this hymn turned up in a book I was reading. I used to love the old-fashioned books, Elsie Dinsmore and such and in this one the children were in church singing a hymn.

All things bright and beautiful,

All creatures great and small,

All things wise and wonderful,

The Lord God made them all.

'Are you sure you want to hear all this?'

'I'm fascinated,' said Yvonne implacably.

'Well, I knew it was a Protestant hymn. I knew those children weren't Catholics. I couldn't help loving the words, just the same. I wondered why we couldn't have hymns like that instead of

Faith of our fathers, living still

In spite of dungeon, fire and sword

'I felt guilty, but I didn't want my share of dungeon, fire and sword.

'And somehow the words seemed to tie in with my other feelings, Protestant as they were.

'The gulf between Catholic and Protestant had to be experienced to be believed. The odd little woman who met us on the way home from school and asked if we came from the convent school. When we said yes, she nodded and said with a sleek little smile, "I thought so. I could tell by the dirt on your knees." Odd pastimes some adults have. I don't think we did have dirty knees, but we were walking on the Catholic side of the street. Don't believe me if you don't want to, but it's true. And even when I was teaching and the school got caught up in a patriotic flag display, forming the Union Jack with red, white and blue flags, you know, and the headmistress gave me the job of training our squad. "No trouble," I said. "I'm quite accustomed to forming the Harp of Erin on St Patrick's Day." Do you know, she went white? An educated woman,' Jo added in fresh amazement. 'And in spite of all that, I couldn't give up on that hymn. It seemed to belong to me. The end of it was that I set up an altar and ... I don't know ... I invented a private religion, I suppose. I got together everything I had that seemed worthy, a chocolate box I thought well of, a lace handkerchief an aunt had given me for Christmas, and of course I propped up my lovely Madonna, though I fear the wicked truth was that she was there for her looks, not for her religious significance. I owned a miniature brass vase which I polished up to bright and beautiful standard. The flowers I put in it were probably weeds but I took great pleasure in my floral arrangements. Then I knelt in front of it and applied myself to my very private devotions. You're sure this is interesting you?'

'Profoundly.'

Did it never occur to dear old Jo that she was a quite important artist, and therefore her first encounter with great art, even such a remote one, must be interesting?

Jo was grinning.

'It drove my sister Monica nearly mad. She bounced about chanting "Holy Jo ... holy Jo ... holy Jo, Jo, Josephine", little knowing that I was a closet Protestant, putting my immortal soul in jeopardy by repeating the words of a Protestant hymn.'

'Charming child.'

'Bad homes don't rear nice children, my dear. Besides, think how annoying, a little prig kneeling at her devotions brazenly, in broad daylight. I was probably gloating at being able to infuriate Monica with the appearance of perfect virtue. She tried. I had a very handsome shell which I put on my altar to represent all things wise and wonderful. I thought a lot of wisdom must have gone into making a shell. Monica picked on that. She said, "You can go to Hell for putting ordinary things on altars." Monica grew up to be a devoted wife and mother. But just at this time she had a private god who lived in her pocket and sent people to Hell for quite eccentric reasons. I didn't worry about that. I figured that any god prepared to live in Monica's pocket wouldn't have much influence over human fate. "Shells are sacred," I said. "Shells are a well-known religious symbol." I had no evidence for that, but I read more books than Monica and I could have picked it up somewhere. I was so deep in sin that an extra lie wouldn't matter much. Aren't you rather tired of all this?'

'No. Go on. I want to know how it ended.'

'All creatures great and small. That was the line that undid me. I saw a china cat in a shop window, a miniature. Miniatures were all the go in those days and I still think it must have been a decorative piece. It was just the thing for my altar. I lusted after it, watched every day to see it was still there while I saved my money and bought it and brought it home in triumph. I was so pleased with myself that I didn't see any danger, didn't realise that I couldn't pass off a china cat as a sacred object. Monica pounced at once. "That's wicked. You can't put a cat on an altar, cats don't have souls. It's an insult to God. It's probably a mortal sin. I'm going to tell..."'

I'm going to tell Mum on you and I bet she'll tell Dad.

Sixty years had not blunted the terror of that moment. She glanced at Yvonne, hoping she had not noticed the indrawn breath and the sudden rigidity and was glad to see her absorbed in her own thoughts.

How easy it had been for Jo to slip and tumble into that scalding pool of pain and humiliation which she skirted so warily every day. Perhaps putting a cat on an altar was a capital offence. The Virgin Mary had regained her true status as Jo addressed her with a frantic prayer for mercy and for intercession.

'What did you do?' asked Yvonne, who seemed after all to be losing interest in the matter. It had been too long a story; they were about to stop in front of Jo's house.

The dread words had not been spoken. Her mother had said only, "Sometimes, Josephine, I think you're not right in the head. You clear that stuff away and hang that picture back where it belongs."

'Oh, I lied, of course. I told you I wasn't made for martyrdom. I said I'd only put it there for a minute, I didn't mean to leave it there. Besides, I woke up.' Jo was speaking for herself now. 'I wondered what I was doing, kneeling saying the words of a Protestant hymn to a china cat. I was born-again Catholic, could even cope with the sad bits. It was the sorrows of Ireland we were rehearsing and I grew to understand those. It was so much part of one's identity, Irish Catholic ... Catholic because you were Irish, Irish because you were Catholic. It's odd to think of—four generations and still strangers in a strange land. I suppose that's one reason I feel so close to Lucia. Hey, where are we going?'

'Sorry.' Yvonne brought the car to a sudden stop. 'How can they say cats don't have souls? How can they know that? My Toby has more soul than some people I know. I wouldn't want to go to a heaven where there were no cats.'

'There shall be cats in Heaven and peace in Northern Ireland and Protestants and Catholics shall walk down the street together—not arm in arm, of course. No sense in expecting too much.' She opened the car door. 'Thanks for the lift, love. See you Thursday.' ■

Amy Witting's new novel, *A Change in the Lighting*, will be published by Viking in May. It is the story of Ella Ferguson, a woman whose husband leaves her after their family has grown up. *Eureka Street* asked Amy Witting to write a story for the International Year of the Family. In 'The Ecumenical Altar', the now-76-year-old author revisits the religious milieu of her childhood.

The lyrebird of Paris

Lyrebird Rising: Louise Hanson-Dyer of L'Oiseau-Lyre 1884-1962, Jim Davidson, Melbourne University Press at the Miegunyah Press, 1994. ISBN 0 522 84539 8 RRP \$49.95

'All dressed up and nowhere to go: Louise in England, 1927'
(The captions are a special pleasure in the book.)

SHE IS QUITE AN extraordinary woman' wrote W.G. Whittaker in 1923, 'brimful of enthusiasm and energy, wrapped up in art, music, poetry, president of the French alliance here ... secretary of the B[ritish] M[usic] S[ociety], interested in all sorts of things. They are wealthy, she is a real Lady Bountiful...' (p64)

Louise Hanson Dyer could afford to be; her father, Louis Lawrence Smith, Minister without Portfolio in Marvellous Melbourne, was known to *The Bulletin* as ££Smith. Her first husband, 25 years older than Louise, made his pile in linoleum and was disposed to give it away.

The figure of the society patroness, despite distinguished examples like Peggy Guggenheim, always tends to the comic. Louise Hanson Dyer did her best to conform. In the matter of clothing, she was inclined to flamboyance, progressing from mauves and greens with long sleeves to 'the kind of hats the Easter Bunny wore'. Her voice had a curious swoop. She was given to highly public enthusiasms and to lavish displays in aid of all sorts of causes. Her round of

committees certainly kept her busy: besides those things that Whittaker mentions, she was president of the PLC Old Collegians' Association. Had that been all, however, it would hardly be enough to separate her from the best-known patroness of the arts, Margaret Dumont, she to whom Groucho says: 'Why, this bill is ridiculous: if I were you, I wouldn't pay it.'

It is perhaps the greatest merit of *Lyrebird Rising*, Jim Davidson's new book about her, that while there is plenty of amusing detail, his subject appears, by the end, to be a formidably creative person. She was someone who could not only encourage and support others, but also create the means by which their work could be shown, heard and published, a midwife to creative labour. She started a press; she founded a record company; she kept them both running, not only on the proceeds of linoleum, but on years of hard work, determination and imaginative entrepreneurship.

Davidson provides a lengthy checklist of what he fairly describes as 'The Work of Louise Hanson-Dyer': the music published by Editions de L'Oiseau-Lyre, a specialised press devoted to early music, and the records produced by the company of the same name which (together with such labels as DGG's *Archiv*) converted a generation of gramophiles to a new repertoire. Oiseau-Lyre, the press, published important scholarly editions of composers from the

neglected periods, including the monumental *Polyphonic Music of the Fourteenth Century*. For the most part, Louise, after a bumpy beginning, managed to find editors of genuine authority.

The Oiseau-Lyre recordings provided opportunities for a rising generation of artists such as Janet Baker, Colin Davis, Thurston Dart and the Academy of St Martin in the Fields. Then, as now, people who liked early music tended also to like the new, turning the 19th century into a kind of excluded middle. Louise herself liked French woodwind music, she liked *Les Six*, and so among the lists we find Ibert and Auric, Milhaud and Poulenc, together with the Australians, Margaret Sutherland and Peggy Glanville-Hicks. She judged for herself, using a good pair of ears, and a sure sense for what was lively. It's only to be expected that among the lists there are some names now of merely period interest, but they are fewer than one might expect.

JUNG LAYS IT DOWN SOMEWHERE that life has three phases: in childhood, we explore the world; in adolescence (which can last well into middle life) we find ourselves; having done that, we are ready for the task of maturity, which is to learn how to die. Louise and Jimmy Dyer left Australia in 1927. She was 43, her childhood and adolescence were behind her, she was sick of the provincial capital that was Melbourne and ready to

spread her wings in another of her three homelands. The Dyers settled in Paris—there were rather romantic family connections with France—and it was there that Louise came into her own; there, Jung might say, that intimations of mortality shaped her purposes.

Lyrebird Rising is several different kinds of book. It is at heart an old-fashioned life-and-works, appropriately so, where life and work are so closely intertwined. It is a biography of a remarkable woman; a contribution to the cultural history of Melbourne in the first quarter of this century; a history of a publishing house and a record company and, intertwined with those, an account of that whole massive shift of taste whereby 'early music' became, as Davidson says, a substitute avant-garde. The ideal reader of *Lyrebird Rising* would be interested in all these things, and prepared for a long sit (475 pages, not including the checklist). For others, it may be that a cleaner separation of topics would have worked better. The reader who has been charmed by a lively portrait of a social evening in the Dyers' Toorak mansion has to bend, in the later pages, to the scholarly details of an edition of Couperin.

Yet perhaps Davidson was right to resist what I feel sure must have been pressures to separate the two. For there is another pattern, and one I found particularly engrossing. Without the details of everyday decision-making, and what those decisions involved, we should not understand nearly so well how this big-eyed socialite fulfils herself by becoming the director of L'Oiseau-Lyre.

She neither rebelled nor conformed: she did something more interesting—she found a way, guided by a sure sense for the creative possibilities of the moment. It happens slowly, piece by piece: the conventional piano-and-French girlhood prepares the way for the discovery of Lully—*Lully!*—in the Melbourne of the 1920s. Gradually, over many years, she does what Rémy de Gourmont said was the task of the critic, *ériger ses impressions en lois générales*. In her Melbourne years, she stages opulent cultural occasions in Toorak. In France, she is willing to

pay sober attention to the problem of paper supply. We can explain this by saying, dully, that she grew up.

But what the book shows is how well she could work each successive stage, manage the constraints of class and period, stay in the thick of things without being trampled underfoot. Here, of course, the money helped quite as much as it hindered. In her younger married years what was called for was gesture, and this Louise could do, celebrating, for example, the tercentenary of the birth of Molière in the Masonic Hall, which she transformed for the occasion into a fantasy of orange trees, with grass clippings and a sundial.

On came Lillian Gay, in flowing white robes with laurels in her hair, incipiently monumental; she had been chosen on account of her classical features to be the Spirit of France. With lyre in hand she declaimed verses specially written in praise of Lully, Rameau, Grétry, Berlioz and the recently deceased Saint-Saens ... If at this point, confronted by a good deal of foreign and unfamiliar music, eyes in the audience began to wander, then a glance at the ceiling, where even silk shades had taken the shape and colouring of oranges, served to remind them of the exceptional nature of the entertainment; some would have thus been encouraged to persevere (p79-80)

Later, what her calling exacts of her is a directed will. She is always, underneath the peacock parasols, an intensely practical person; exiled in Oxford in the petrol-starved war years, she contrives a sort of 'car' for her and her husband to pedal about in. A shrewd sense of an audience appears early: knowing

that if the Old Collegians were to be induced to part with cash for a new pipe organ, she cuts the stuff about 'our glorious musical heritage' and talks instead about weddings and christenings. In America to shop for her beautiful and extremely expensive limited editions of Couperin and Lully, she emphasises the amount of industrious sweat that went to the making of them.

THE EDITIONS WERE NOT ALWAYS quite on time—but that's not unusual. (Some current American scholarly editions are clearly meant for the civilisation that will follow ours.)



On the whole, she was very good about deadlines and contracts and even, since the money wasn't endless, the bottom line. As a record

'Thurston Dart at his organ'.

producer, she tightly controlled rehearsal time, and sat at recording sessions, stopwatch in hand.

Jim Davidson makes it clear that in many ways Louise behaved, as her father had done, like the ruler of a tiny court. She could be imperious, and those, like Thurston Dart, who spotted that she was not a woman to be crossed were those likely to procure advancement. But if there was an ego to be fed, there was also a clear sense of mission which extended to more than simply concentrating on the performers, periods and composers she herself favoured.

IN 1932, LOUISE SPENT SOME TIME back in Australia, acting as Lady Mayoress for her brother. That year, the Melbourne *Herald* printed the music of William Byrd's *Cradle Song*, with a caption reporting the Acting Lady Mayoress' 'fervent hope...' that this lovely melody, which comes from the golden period, when Britain led the world in music, should be sung in every Melbourne home'. (p211)

What does one make of that, in 1994? Jim Davidson sees Louise as an Australian democrat. He writes:

If one distinctive principle can be discerned in the Oiseau-Lyre project, it is less the élitist insistence on quality than an Australian democratic concern about access. (p470)

Perhaps: what emerges from his account—the Byrd in the *Herald* epitomises it—is a woman whose vision of culture, though less gloomy by far, is akin to Matthew Arnold's; she would have agreed that the duty of the discerning minority was to combat Philistinism, and to spread enlightenment. She was high-minded. The beautiful limited editions she produced were intended only for

libraries and universities, to be used by scholars; she refused to sell to individuals she regarded as outside the loop, in particular, to book collectors. Yet she would not pass now, among cultural theorists, as a democrat; a curious (but one suspects, temporary) fate for a woman who, on a late visit to Sydney, stayed in a boarding house to save money for 'la musique'.

Between Louise's birthplace and Editions de L'Oiseau Lyre there are still connections. It was an agreement between the Press and the University of Melbourne that enabled the completion of *Polyphonic Music of the Fourteenth Century*, in 1992. It is also here that musicologists John Stinson (at La Trobe University) and John Griffiths (at Melbourne) have been engaged, for over a decade, in the gigantic project of tracking down every extant 14th century manuscript, re-editing all the works, and recording the lot on CD. This, and in particular the nexus between scholarship and performance, would surely have delighted the founder of Oiseau-Lyre.

So would Davidson's book, meticulously researched, tidily, at times eloquently written and generously appreciative both of his subject and of the music. Davidson writes about music with an informed love, and it is this, plus his obvious inwardness with the trials of an editor, that takes the less-than-scholarly reader through the detailed accounts of presses and editions. Melbourne University Press have produced a handsome volume, replete with plates, on decent paper. But then, they could hardly do less, given that the series 'was made possible by bequests under the wills of Sir Russell and Lady Grimwade'. The tradition continues. ■

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Did well in the colonies, y' know

Victoria's Colonial Governors, Davis McCaughey, Naomi Perkins, Angus Trumble, MUP at the Miegunyah Press, 1993. ISBN 0 522 84509 6 RRP \$49.95

*We had intended you to be
The next Prime Minister but
three ...*

*But as it is ... My language
fails!*

*Go out and govern New South
Wales!*

—Hilaire Belloc, 'Lord Lundy'

MY ONLY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE of a Victorian governor was with the one who, on departing the magniloquent lodge set in Baron von Mueller's Botanical Gardens—its ballroom audaciously ampler than the one at Buckingham Palace—left yellow stains on the walls which, long previously, had been covered with pictures. They later turned up at Christie's in London (or was it Sotheby's?).

This vice-regal was a genial sportsman who captained a scratch cricket team which played social games with various institutions during the summer weeks. One year it was the turn of Xavier College and the game went amiably. So did refreshments in the parlour. A week later our Rector received a thankyou note from the Governor's imported secretary. It was addressed to Very Rev and Mrs James Boylan SJ. The magisterial Boylan dined *in* on that for some time.

Of course, one cannot infer from such incidents alone that the change-over to Australian-born governors has, contrary to the expectations of monarchists, resulted in less crass appointees. Or more popular ones;



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the vice-regal entrepreneur mentioned above having been exceedingly popular. (He also acted as Governor-General, apparently without loss to Yarralumla.)

Give or take an air ticket or two, however, recent appointments in Victoria have been, it would appear, executively appropriate and socially salutary. One can believe that when they chose to exercise their remaining rights ('to be informed, to encourage and to warn') these governors have been credible. None more so than Davis McCaughey (1986-92), former master of Ormond College, Melbourne, of whom, with two young former aides, who did wide-ranging research for this book, there is a jolly levelling photograph on the dust jacket. The three are billed as 'co-authors', the sort of equitable acknowledgement that might, one suspects, be made more frequently to collaborators in other histories.

Victorian Colonial Governors virtually justifies its existence by its handsome production (spacious typesetting, multiple fonts, superb illustrations) alone. But it is not a lavish work of only antiquarian interest about upper-class, gubernatorial snots, who set spurious social standards and patronised the raw workings of responsible government in what was, in the second half of the 19th century, England's most flourishing colony. (And it paid its governor as much as the president of the USA.)

Belloc's chinless wonder is the wrong caricature. There were tangled constitutional issues to solve that could defy the sagacity of very able men, as well as ceremonial and social roles to uphold. The two latter functions have not been a concern of our egalitarian tribe of historians any more than were the 'gentlemen' of Victoria until Paul de Serville (*Port Phillip Gentlemen*, 1980; *Pounds and Pedigrees*, 1991) eloquently reminded us that they had existed outside the novels of Martin Boyd and that they were not inconsequential.

If La Trobe's superintendency (1839-51) and two lieutenant-governorships (1851-55) are included, there were ten vice-regals before Federation. Four had had experience in the House of Commons; only one (Ho-

petoun, the least able) in the Lords. They could be Liberals as well as Conservatives. Only one (Hotham, of Eureka Rising infamy) had had a career in the armed forces. Three were the sons of clergy, one was even the son of a merchant.

Three had been to Oxbridge but 'the two with the keenest scientific interest in the country' had not even been to 'traditional English schools'. Which will entrench some prejudices, but so much for stereotypes. By and large the Victorian governors were skilled servants of empire, even though one (Darling) was recalled in disgrace and another (Bowen) was 'rusticated' to Mauritius, instead of being transferred to New South Wales, or Canada, as he had hoped.

Governors in Victoria needed to be skilled, having to contend with 29 separate local administrations and 19 changes in Secretary of State for Colonies (Westminster) between the onset of responsible government (1855) and 1901. Not only did they have two masters to serve but they had to contend with the constitutional baulk conservatively engineered into the Victorian constitution: the ability of the Legislative Council to veto its own reform.

It was the two chambers that were ideologically divided, rather than the lower house itself. Plutocracy could thus stymie democracy—and it retained the power to do so until 1950. Far from restraining 'mobocracy', the effect was probably, as Geoffrey Serle pointed out (*Historical Studies*, 1954), 'to greatly lower the standards of Victorian public life in that the tendencies to cynicism, time-serving and opportunism ... may have been strengthened.' So, in the notorious constitutional struggles of the 1860s and 1870s Sir Charles Darling (1863-66) was undone, although popular persistence finally got him a pension, and Bowen (1873-79) came close to grief.

These issues are dealt with sympathetically but even-handedly. For myself, one particular gain was an appreciation of the talents of Sir

Henry Barkly (1856-63) in nurturing responsible government. Hotham's early demise (1855) in office—he thought Victoria 'a vile hole'—seems to have been a godsend, and his elaborate monument in Melbourne Cemetery (well-photographed here) a consolation prize. From Sir Henry Loch (1884-89) onwards the governors had



an easy run, with more settled relations between the houses. More emphasis is placed in the last chapters on ceremonious and social roles.

In all, this is a beguiling book, but how did the proof-readers miss 'SACRICES' for 'SACRIFICES' in the opening line of the 'Epilogue'? In upper case, too! And why are we not told that Sir John Manners-Sutton (1866-73), later 3rd Viscount Canterbury, was unseated from the House of Commons in 1839 for bribery? (See the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 3). Did contemporary journalists cock a snook at this blot on the escutcheon? McCaughey *et al* have shunned that source but it is more than compensated for by 103 pages of archival and bibliographical references for anyone with patrician aspirations to pursue. Even Admiral Horthy's *Memoirs* were consulted, because of the future Hungarian regent's visit to Government House in 1890. ■

James Griffin is an historian and critic.

The Three Governors (Sir George Bowen, Sir Hercules Robinson and Sir Anthony Musgrave): A Sketch on the Lawn on Cup Day, 1876. Wood engraving by an unknown engraver, published in the Australasian Sketcher, 25 November 1876. 'Bowen's successor Lord Normanby would write to Sir Henry Loch: "It would be a kind of High Treason for a Governor not to attend the Flemington Races."'

Scandal! Read all about it!

The Scandalous Penton, Patrick Buckridge, University of Queensland Press, 1994 ISBN 0 7022 2602 5 RRP \$34.95

THE DAY AFTER obtaining my copy of *The Scandalous Penton*, I interviewed the veteran journalist and editor, Dorothy Drain, about her years with *The Australian Women's Weekly*. I asked for her impressions of Brian Penton, who edited the *Weekly's* stablemate *The Daily Telegraph* from 1941 to 1951. Recalling that he had spoken to her only once, she added: 'Personally, I didn't—I wouldn't have—liked him. But ... you know, I think that he was a very clever man.' Why wouldn't she have liked him? 'Oh, just something about him. Hard to tell, you know. It was a case of "I do not like thee Dr Fell, the reason why I cannot tell".'

Impressions such as these, coupled with colourful anecdotes about Penton that continue to circulate among elderly journalists, and with Penton's complex self-construction in his own life and writings, were bound to have made the biographer's task a difficult one. But it may still seem surprising that a novelist and publisher who was deeply embroiled in the movements and controversies central to 20th century Australian culture, and who, some believe, was the most brilliant journalist and editor of his generation, has been ignored for so long by Australian scholars.

Patrick Buckridge, who has almost single-handedly resurrected the career of this Australian intellectual, comes up with some intriguing reasons for this neglect. Penton's posthumous invisibility, Buckridge writes, was not just the result of his premature death (in 1951, aged 47), or of the ephemeral nature of journalism, or the verdict of history on the quality of his work, or even the fact that he was born outside the

Sydney/Melbourne networks of influence. It was a matter of Australian society, struggling for conformity and respectability in the early years of the Cold War, consigning to oblivion a man regarded as immoral, unmanly and unprincipled—a smart-alec intellectual and a gossip-mongering press hound.

The opening chapters of the biography are a fascinating account of Penton's childhood and adolescence in Queensland. Buckridge, working



with few sources, provides the reader with an intelligently speculative portrait of young Brian: a child raised in an unorthodox environment, possibly illegitimate and haunted by the presence of a dead elder brother, the splitting of whose emotionally important relationships may help account for his later psychological complexity, and for his views on a variety of matters.

And yet, although obviously interested in the psychological dimensions and implications of Penton's childhood, Buckridge has avoided the crudity of the psycho-biographical

approach that is all-too-apparent in Peter Crockett's *Evatt: A Life*. For Penton did, as Buckridge notes, fabricate details about his family background; deliberately create an image of artiness, intensity and promiscuity; constantly use self-justifying arguments; and choose to write about himself in a newspaper column, *Sydney Spy*, where he was unconstrained by the conventions of truth and accuracy that operate in letters, diaries and memoirs.

Early in *The Scandalous Penton*, the reader becomes aware that Buckridge has approached Penton's autobiographical fragments with appropriate caution. Penton's claim that his mother 'hated' him, for example, is assessed rather than accepted at face value. This will be a relief to many Australian women, who have seen their sisters credited with responsibility for the psychological 'maladjustments' of H.V. Evatt, R. G.

Menzies, Percy Grainger and Barry Humphries. (Perhaps somebody prepared to assess the impact that Australian fathers have had on creative women such as Christina Stead, Germaine Greer and Sarah Newton will eventually emerge.)

The intellectual influences on Penton's literary development, including Rabelais, Sterne, Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, Lawrence, Einstein and Freud, are noted and assessed with a comfortable assurance. But although Buckridge's skills as a literary critic emerge in his analysis of Penton's novels, *Landtakers* (1934) and *Inheritors* (1936), and of his unpublished works, the complexities of the literary milieu in the 1920s and '30s are rarely illuminated. Penton's relationship with the famous Lindsay family deserves detailed exploration, but in *The Scandalous Penton* 'Lindsayism' and 'anti-Lindsay' cults are alluded to rather than analysed.

Norman Lindsay and his family, so crucial to the book and to an understanding of Penton's worldview, emerge as shadowy, elusive figures. Describing 'Lindsayism' as anti-modern, anti-Semitic and misogynous does not help one to delineate Penton's place in the cultural

Editor at work:
Brian Penton, 1942

politics of his day. Similarly, an exploration of the background to the daring antipodean experiment, Francoflico Press, with which Penton was involved, is all but missing, and the reader unfamiliar with Craig Munro's *Wild Man Of Letters: The Story of P. R. Stephensen* will be at a loss to understand the cultural significance of Penton's Queensland contemporary.

After his political 'Notes from the Gallery' had introduced a new style of acerbity, irony and sensationalism to *The Sydney Morning Herald*, and after two trips overseas and with the publication of his second novel pending, Penton returned to Sydney in 1936 to work for Consolidated Press Ltd's new *Daily Telegraph*. That Buckridge is essentially the first academic to study the *Telegraph* in any detail perhaps reflects a belief among historians that Australia's oldest surviving broad sheet, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, is the only organ of the Sydney press which deserves sustained analysis.

YET IT BECOMES CLEAR from Buckridge's narrative that the *Telegraph* during Penton's ascendancy and under his editorship was a markedly more interesting, complex and provocative publication than its rival. Penton's *Telegraph* was a vital, imaginative, crudit and flamboyant newspaper quite unique to the popular press in Australia. Buckridge's discussion of Penton's puzzlingly close relationship with Frank Packer, and exposition of his subject's liberalism, belies the popular belief that the *Telegraph* was always an organ of political conservatism.

But, although Buckridge notes that the *Telegraph* co-sponsored the exhibition of modern British and French art in Australia in 1939 (which Melburnians such as Geoffrey Serle have referred to as a Melbourne *Herald* enterprise), and discusses Penton's role in the sensational William Dobell of 1944, he fails to capture the fervour and vehemence which was such a characteristic of the rival forces in the artistic and literary world of the day. And a few pedantic points must, inevitably, be made: a number of important

assertions cannot be sourced as they have not been footnoted; no page numbers are included for the hundreds of newspaper articles that Buckridge has cited; and the number of typographical errors in the book is truly appalling.

The index is also idiosyncratic: more than a dozen references are listed under 'Australian Consolidated Press' (the word 'Australian' did not appear in the title until after Penton's death) and one reference, of no particular significance, under 'Consolidated Press Limited'. Overall, however, one has to applaud the author for creating a scholarly, readable and at times delightfully amusing biography of an enigmatic subject. Penton would no doubt be pleased that his biographer has continually assessed his views on issues such as Australia's place within Asia in the light of contemporary preoccupations, and raised a number of questions—about liberalism in the Sydney press, and the lives of female bohemians, for example—to be taken up by subsequent researchers.

I doubt that Buckridge's arguments about Penton's 'scandalous' life can fully explain Penton's subsequent neglect by historians. Consol-

idated Press refuses to grant researchers access to corporate records; in part, this can be attributed to a lack of concern with history, and to an obsession with privacy. It would be instructive to compare Penton's career with that of George Warnecke, the first editor of *The Women's Weekly* and editor-in-chief of Consolidated Press, who died in exile in Dublin in 1981, believing that he was entitled to a share in the company that he helped to create. That both men have been allowed to be forgotten by most Australians suggests that the wider community, and the company headed by Frank Packer's son, have absorbed the rhetoric that left-wing critics began to espouse about the 'Packer Press' in the 1950s.

It is up to scholars such as Buckridge to dispel the myth that the formation, nature and success of the publishing activities of a corporate octopus such as Consolidated Press were the result of one man's initiative, views and capabilities. ■

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BOOKS: 4

NGAIRE NAFFINE

In a tunnel darkly

Tunnel Vision, Sara Paretsky, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1994,
ISBN 0 241 13372 6. RRP \$19.95

SARA PARETSKY WAS A VISITOR to Writers Week during the 1994 Adelaide Festival of Arts. She was one of the prominent international authors we were given a chance 'to meet', to hear about the writer's life. The meet-the-author sessions at the festival can be highly personal. The writer may decide to tell us what gets her up in the morning, what pen she uses, what impels and sustains her as a writer, about her muse, about her sense of her self. At an earlier festival, for example, Peter Carey spoke of the identity crisis that can

beset the writer between books. When the last one's finished and the next one's not yet begun, is the writer still a writer?

Paretsky was a particularly intimate and affecting speaker. With sad-eyed eloquence, she spoke of the men in her life and their failure to treat her as the capable woman that she so manifestly is. There was her father, who put her brothers through university while she was obliged to pay for herself. There were her male colleagues in the insurance business before she became a writer, who

found pleasure in reducing their female associates to tears. And she spoke of her decision to reply to these indignities by an act of creation: by giving life to her gutsy, outspoken, American, feminist detective, V.I. Warshawski. For Paretsky, fiction is a means of coping with what she sees as the despair and loneliness of the modern female condition.

She turned to the detective genre as the one she knew best but found herself with a problem. For the heroes and anti-heroes of this medium were men who did, while their women were done to. Paretsky's leading lady, therefore, did not begin life in her current guise. Paretsky's first thoughts for the character had her as a sort of 'Philip Marlow in drag': a hard-boiled, wise-cracking woman of the world.

Paretsky found it hard to see a real woman running the detective agency until she thought about her-



self and her friends and how they might behave in such a role: they would stick together and they would question male authority, but they would also be vulnerable at times and unnerved by a world hostile and violent to the independent woman with opinions. They would not always be in charge of the situation.

Humphrey Bogart they were not, because Bogart never had to inhabit the world in which women are obliged to live.

With these disclosures about the birth of her subject, Paretsky plunged us into the dilemmas of feminism and crime fiction. And one of her first questions from the audience plunged us deeper still. He asked, 'Could one be a feminist and write violent fiction? Wasn't the perpetuation of violent fiction antithetical to the aims of feminism?'

Similar questions have been posed by Delys Bird and Brenda Walker in a new book on women writing detective fiction entitled *Killing Women* (edited by Bird and published by Angus and Robertson, 1993). They ask us to consider whether women as feminists can create and manipulate violence and not end up as collaborators in a genre that, until recently, has always had women as its objects and men as its subjects. They ask us to think about 'whether violence does rub off on women', about whether it is possible 'to write crime fiction that satisfies the necessities of the genre for suspense and fear ... yet remains subversive or at least questioning of the genre's typical positioning of women' (p15).

A danger for the feminist detective writer is that her concerns about assimilation into a genre with such an unsatisfactory pedigree will kill the story (and not just the murder victim) stone dead. She is not allowed to depict women as sex objects and her leading character must be both tough and caring. In short, she must be true to women and yet entertain. Can this be done?

Sara Paretsky has shown us in the course of her first seven novels that it can. She has created a feminist detective with courage, humour and foibles who is also convincing as a woman. Paretsky makes her women readers believe in Warshawski and then to believe more in themselves. Her latest novel, however, begins to show the wear and tear of getting it all right.

In *Tunnel Vision*, V.I. suffers and we suffer with her. She takes on corporate corruption on an international scale, she takes on the violence of men to their wives and the

abuse of girls by their fathers, and she takes on the squalor and horror of homelessness and poverty. All this then takes its toll on V.I. who, in her efforts to keep fighting the good fight, falls out with her feminist friends and with her black policeman lover. As a feminist friend and devotee of Paretsky put it to me after reading *Tunnel Vision*, 'Warshawski fights with everybody around her' and so 'in a way she's not that much fun to be with'.

I found it difficult to finish this long book. I wanted more leavening, more satire and less improvement. I even began to think of the illicit pleasures of Doris Day movies. As V.I. tired of, yet valiantly persisted with, her struggle against the forces of evil, I was tiring of her and losing my interest in the story—in fact, losing the plot altogether. My stamina was also weakened by the spread of characters and the superficiality of their characterisation. Because I was looking for entertainment in a detective novel (the genre keeps imposing its constraints, and for me providing a good, fast read is one of them), I didn't want to have to struggle with a cast of dozens and a convoluted story.

As a feminist reviewer, however, I am having my own ethical quandaries as I write. There is the demand to support a sister feminist, to recognise her achievements and to do her justice. There is also the demand to keep pushing for high standards in feminist writing. I am greatly impressed by the achievements of Dr Sara Paretsky. I believe that she has helped to change women's lives for the better and has entertained us at the same time. Writing in a male world and a male genre is crowded with difficulties which Paretsky has generally overcome with imagination and flair. She has helped to turn the genre around a little, to let it serve women's purposes as well as men's. Given the enormity of this task it is understandable that both Paretsky and V.I. should flag a little in their efforts. The feminist dilemma is what to do and say about the fatigue of such spirited fighters. ■

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Keeping company

The First Jesuits, by J.W. O'Malley, Harvard University Press, 1993.
ISBN 0 764 30312 1 RRP \$52.95

IT IS A COMMONPLACE that the past is a foreign country. Travellers' tales enable you to recognise its features, but the closer you come to entering it, the stranger it appears. It is the mark of good historical works to confirm both the familiarity and the opacity of the past.

By that standard, John O'Malley's study of the early years of the Society of Jesus is a splendid guide. To a living Jesuit, at least, some of the strangeness of the story he tells lies in its quirky detail. When sending a group of Jesuits to Messina, for example, Ignatius tells them to elect a superior and to get on with their business. José de Acosta, who wrote one of the earliest of the Jesuit school plays, was then 15 years old, having spent three years as a Jesuit. In Jesuit churches, as part of a policy of encouraging the laity to minister to the laity, it was common for children of 12 to preach to the congregation. Among a surprisingly broad range of social ministries of the early Jesuits, work with prostitutes held a high place. And so the list of the unexpected goes on.

The outline of O'Malley's map, however, is familiar for, like most historians of the Jesuits, he addresses the myths that have gathered around them. The myths, too, are familiar: that the Jesuits were founded as a military order whose central virtue was obedience and which was based on unquestioning loyalty to the Pope; that they were founded as the shock-troops of the Counter-Reformation to oppose the Protestants; that from the beginning they set out to be the schoolmasters of Europe.

In part, too, O'Malley's response to these myths reinforces received wisdom. He argues, for example, that military metaphors played only a small role in the way Ignatius and his companions conceived the church and their new company; nor did military strategies have any place

in their style of government. Nor was military obedience among the virtues they habitually commended. In his early years, Ignatius emphasised radical poverty much more than radical obedience, and his treatment of obedience was shaped by his secretary, Juan Polanco. It was provoked by a crisis in Portugal, in which not only obedience but a radically divergent understanding of the Society of Jesus was at stake.

Furthermore, while respect for and fidelity to the Pope were central within Ignatius' understanding of the church, the relationships of Ignatius and the early Jesuits to the Popes of the day were anything but subservient. The vow which Ignatius and other Jesuits took to accept missions given by the Pope was critical for the freedom of Jesuits to undertake ministries which crossed national and church boundaries, but it did not prevent constant conflict with Popes and curial cardinals. In those conflicts, Ignatius and his companions were not passive.

Jerome Nadal, who was almost as influential as Ignatius in giving shape to the early Society of Jesus, might have been describing Ignatius' practice when describing the proper response to Popes who wished to make Jesuits bishops: 'Only the Supreme Pontiff can compel the Society in this regard. In such instances every manner and means of resisting and impeding such an intention of the Pontiff are to be expended and exercised, every stone (as they say) to be turned lest such a dignity be imposed. We are not to cease working toward this end or give up our efforts until we have exhausted every possibility. This will not be verified until the Apostolic See expressly obliges us under pain of mortal sin and will obviously brook no further resistance.'

Among the manner and means that Ignatius used to this particular end was to concert pressure from the

rulers of Europe. He was unquestionably loyal and obedient, but hardly unquestioning.

O'Malley also dispels the myth that the Jesuits were founded as an arm of the Counter-Reformation. Ignatius himself held conventional views of the Reformers, but gave little priority either to opposing them or to the public reform of the church. His interests and those of the early Jesuits lay elsewhere, and he had little time for religious polemic, believing it to be ineffective.

When O'Malley discusses the Jesuit commitment to education, he makes it clear that nothing was further from Ignatius' mind than running schools. When he and his companions decided to remain together as a religious congregation, they conceived the heart of their ministry to lie in short-term missions. For these, scholarship and writing were peripheral. To ensure the necessary mobility, he insisted that the Jesuits be free from the obligation to recite choir in common, and required most Jesuit communities to live from alms. The only houses which could have foundations were those for Jesuit students, and they were normally to study in established universities. Education then was prized for effective ministry, but the kind of ministry envisaged excluded any large involvement in it.

In 1547, however, Ignatius agreed to found a college in Messina, and sent there a particularly talented group of Jesuits. The venture was successful, and immediately led to further requests, so that within a decade the Jesuits had founded more than 30 colleges. They were already a favoured Jesuit ministry, and Ignatius now was reluctant to open any Jesuit house unsupported by a foundation.

Clearly, the early Jesuits changed their minds about education. But the commitment to education inevitably also changed the minds of the Jesuits. They entered and were influenced by the culture and the learning of the day. They became committed to writing and scholarship. As a consequence the flexibility and availability for short-term ministry that Ignatius had valued came under



Priest hearing a man's confession in Germany before the introduction of enclosed confessionals in the late 16th century.

Woodcut by an unknown artist.

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increasing strain. The Society of Jesus had become something other than what Ignatius first envisaged.

As he tells his story, O'Malley confronts the great myth that lies behind these particular myths: namely, the myth that Ignatius saw clearly from the beginning what the Jesuits would be, where they would go, and how they should get there. This is the classical myth. It becomes clear in O'Malley's account that Ignatius and the early Jesuits picked up the ball on the bounce and ran with it. That is to say, Ignatius entrusted his subordinates with considerable initiative, and he responded to circumstances, changing his mind about quite central issues. By his death the very fluid early Society had gained more definition, and the definition was furthered by the myths which had already grown around it.

What appears radically strange about the early Jesuits, then, was their charismatic quality. They responded freely to circumstance, and saw themselves as available for short-term and dangerous missions. They were never more than a step away from chaos as they worked out on the run what form the Society should take. In their education, preaching and teaching, many of the great initiatives and much of the energy came largely from their students. These are qualities of young and enthusiastic groups.

Yet even in this strange world, what Ignatius stood centrally for—and what the Jesuits did when they were at their best—remains hauntingly familiar. The quality of their vision and their ministry forms a theme that has been played in all its variations at any period of Jesuit history. O'Malley identifies its roots in the firm conviction that God

works within the human heart and that the shape of God's work can be discerned. When Ignatius instructs the director of the *Spiritual Exercises* not to be directive, his advice betrays a radically optimistic view of the world and of religious experience: 'While one is engaged in the *Spiritual Exercises*, it is much better that the Creator and Lord in person communicate Himself to the devout soul in quest of the divine will, that he inflame it with his love and praise, and dispose it for the way in which it could better serve God in the future.'

This confidence that God worked directly within the human heart had many practical consequences. In all their ministries the early Jesuits emphasised the aspects of dialogue and conversation. The proclamation of the Gospel was more like midwifery than artificial insemination, and had to identify the way God was already working in human lives.

THE STRENGTH OF THIS CONVICTION, too, guided the Jesuits in their choice of ministry. They put priority on conversational ministries: on giving the *Exercises*, on teaching and styles of teaching, on missions to non-Christians, and on sharing confessions. To make confession an occasion when people could hear the consoling voice of God in their lives, they developed a detailed casuistry—a systematic reflection on the circumstances in which people make their moral decisions.

In giving shape to their ministries the early Jesuits were affected by the Renaissance rediscovery of the riches of classical rhetoric, finely described by O'Malley as 'the discipline that taught how to touch the human heart'. Their rhetorical vision made them learn the languages and study the religious beliefs of the people among whom they went. It led them to seek a theology that spoke to the heart as well as to the critical intellect, and ways of teaching that commended the truth by its attractiveness as well as by its logical coherence. It led them to emphasise the place of music and theatre in their education. It led them at their most typical, rather than to condemn their society, to search for the

places where peoples' lives and culture were open to hear the word of God.

Their optimism about the world and its relative transparency to God earned the Jesuits many enemies. They were opposed by many groups who drew a sharp distinction between human culture and experience on the one hand, and God, faith and the church on the other hand. Among the early critics of Ignatius, the Dominican theologian Melchior Cano, one of the leading scholastic theologians of the day, was the most acute. He condemned the Jesuit emphasis on subjectivity and the freedom which they took with the traditional bases of religious life—choir in common, segregated religious houses and bodily penances. Melchior could not understand how God could be found in this program, so strongly did he identify the way of faith objectivity and the detailed observance of rules.

These lines of criticism have recurred so regularly throughout Jesuit history, including our day, that the contrast drawn between the Jesuits of yesterday and those of the present day seems unjustified. The Jesuits who have been icons of the attitude which O'Malley precisely identifies as centrally Ignatian—men like Ricci in China, Teilhard and Karl Rahner among recent Jesuits, and Michael Amaladoss, Jon Sobrino and Robert Drinan among living Jesuits, to name only a few—have consistently been accused in similar terms of selling out the faith to indifference, secularism, liberalism, Marxism or whatever is seen as the vice of the prevailing culture.

The critics, of course, have a point, as Cano once had a point. But its validity depends on the plausibility of sharply opposing God to the world, human experience to divine faith, and the building of culture to grace.

The early Jesuits did not believe that they were opposed. Their optimism about the world, however, did not rest on an optimistic secular ideology, but on the passion for God and the conviction that God was to be sought by following the way of Jesus Christ within the church. Indeed it was the power of the passion

for God and for the following of Jesus that underlay what critics saw as their worldliness and their scepticism about attempts to locate and limit the presence of God in particular forms of church life. If God is God and the Gospel is true, then to build fortresses and to launch crusades against the enemies of faith are faintly ridiculous enterprises.

In showing that the key to early Jesuit history is to be sought in rhetoric, O'Malley shows himself a good locksmith. His early work was on Renaissance preaching, and he has an attentive ear for the telling story, an eye for the audience that receives texts, and a feel for the gap between declaration and reception and for the perplexities and passions that lie between the lines of all texts.

His book describes as far as anyone can the life and world of the ordinary Jesuits many of whom then, as now, temperamentally had more in common with Cano than Ignatius, were more ready to speak than to listen, and distrusted creation. This ability to touch the lives of ordinary, limited human beings who have half-caught a vision of God's presence in the world, and have tried clumsily to share it and shape it into what they build, ultimately makes the world which O'Malley describes familiar to a Jesuit of a later age. It perhaps also makes his work of wider interest. ■

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BOOKS: 6

MICHAEL MCKERNAN

A short history

A History of the Australian Churches, Ian Breward, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1993, ISBN 186 373 4465 RRP \$24.95

IF I KNEW WHAT READERS Ian Breward or his publishers had in mind for *A History of the Australian Churches*, I might find it easier to review. Perhaps there is a school market or readers in church discussion groups who might use this book with profit. Perhaps. But the general reader, the one we are all aiming at, or dreaming about, is bound to be disappointed.

In fairness, I would not like the challenge of writing a general history of the churches in Australia. Like a general history of Australian sport, there is just too much to cover. Perhaps more daunting for the general church historian, however, is the knowledge of just how well those who have written in a more restricted field have done. I would not like to have to fight in the same division as Patrick O'Farrell or Edmund Campion, who have written so well about Catholicism, or to pad up against T.J. Boland or Peter Hempenstall, the recent outstanding biographers of church leaders. To distil all the information and to write with the zest and flair of these writers would

lead even the foolhardy to weigh up the possibilities very carefully indeed.

Enough of the excuses, and I am sure that Breward doesn't want my sympathy. This book doesn't work because, although there was too much to cover, Breward has written it in such an episodic and disjointed way that the development of ideas gives place to epigrams and snatches of notes, and because ill-defined suggestions substitute for reasoned argument. Some of it, frankly, is just plain embarrassing. To begin with, the structure imposes an impossible burden. Chapters are short enough, but they are then broken into impossibly short sections, headlined so that we know where we are.

Take, for example, the section 'Anzac Religion' in the chapter 'Challenges of Nationhood'. Most readers would concede, I think, that 'Anzac religion' is a pretty tricky area for discussion. Breward may have had in mind the religious ideas and practices of the soldiers themselves, or he might have been thinking about

the celebration and commemoration of loss and triumph in war. Plenty of reasonable historians and sociologists have chanced their arms in both directions; none that I am aware of has tried to do so in less than half a page—or, to be completely brutal, in 17 lines or 176 words. A word count alone raises unsettling questions, but it is more disturbing that within this paragraph Breward has attempted to discuss the influence of commemoration on national identity, the Christian meaning of commemoration, the construction of war memorials and their possible Christian influences, the extent of Australian loss in war and the influenza pandemic of 1919. The attempt is either breathtakingly naïve or aimed at an audience the nature of which I am unable to penetrate. It didn't satisfy me, and I doubt that it will satisfy too many others.

If you are thinking that perhaps I was only looking for my field of special interest and had the natural disinclination to accept any general comments in a specialised field, let's try another short entry. Breward deals with political change in the 1950s—in the chapter titled 'The Great Migrations'—in a three-paragraph section headed 'The Split'. Here we have 39 lines, perhaps verging on 500 words. Arthur Calwell, B.A. Santamaria and Eric Butler are mentioned by name and topics covered include religious influence on Australian politics in the 20th century, the remaining Catholic presence in the Labor Party and the 'Sydney line', the role of the National Civic Council, judgments about Santamaria's place in history (Mannix's suggestion that he was the 'saviour of Australia' is rejected as 'too fulsome') and the influence of the fear of communism in national politics. My taste takes me elsewhere.

Perhaps this book may offer insights to those who know no Australian history and have little feeling for the churches or religion. Again, to my taste, it needed some strong themes, some organising characters, and writing that could be sustained over more than a few dozen lines. ■

Michael McKernan is deputy director of the Australian War Memorial.

On the road

The National Catholic Conference

WE ARE A GENTLE, ANGRY PEOPLE', sang the participants at the first 'people's' National Catholic Conference held in Sydney last month and they proved it throughout the three-day gathering (see keynote speech below). Even the Catholic bishops, who were invited to come along but were busy with their own official National Episcopal Conference across town, could not have taken too much offence at the irreverence directed towards them. But nor could they have mistaken the anger. In the same week that the Vatican gave its formal blessing to women altar servers, the 250 conference participants from around the country decried the entire Catholic clerical culture and condemned the direction in which the institutional church was heading. It was a heady experience.

The organising principle of the people's conference was that all the participants should have as much opportunity as possible to be heard. (This is itself a novel idea to many Catholics.) And, generally, what each of the participants had to say was enthusiastically endorsed on the conference floor. Participants passed a resolution demanding an end to the church's exemption from all state and federal anti-discrimination laws. They embraced a proposal to encourage lay Catholics to stop contributing financially to church coffers if the bishops continue to divert scarce resources from the poor and marginalised to projects such as the completion of the spires on Sydney's St Mary's Cathedral.

There was a cheer from the gathering when one issue-group demanded, in the interests of accountability and participatory decision-making, that the bishops end their practice of conducting their own conference behind closed doors. There was a roar of approval when another group demanded equal rights for, and equal

respect towards, women at all levels of the church. And there was a repeated insistence which may have crossed the boundary to rebellion for a rethink not only of priestly formation but of ordination itself.

By contrast, there was no conflict and little argument. Some will say this reflected the spirit of inclusion and acceptance. That may be true. But it also reflects the nature of gatherings such as this. For Catholics who want fundamental change these days the obstacles are easily

identifiable and the possibilities are limitless. One is reminded of the early utopian socialists, designing a new world on black pages over tea and cakes—and one is cautioned when one recalls the number-crunchers, tacticians, and grey apparatchiks who succeeded them.

But for all the talk of the new, the old hung in the air like incense. It could be discerned from the pranks that were played, the concerns that were raised, even the imagery and the language that was used. The notion of a people betwixt and between what is and what can be summed up the mood of the conference if not its theme or its ideals. Catholics may be on a journey of faith, but they seem to move with one eye on the past. ■

Chris McGillion writes for the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

SPEECH

VERONICA BRADY

B Between towns

BEING A NON-ABORIGINAL Australian has always meant living in a kind of in-between. We live a long way from where we came from but also from where we want to be. Christopher Brennan's called such a person the 'wanderer on the way to self.' Our unofficial anthem is *Waltzing Matilda*.

As Christians, too, we know ourselves to be a pilgrim people. Our upbringing pointed in the opposite direction, to fixity 'Full in the panting heart of Rome'. Cradle Catholics were brought up in a clear and coherent world, where bells rang for the consecration, the blessing at Benediction, for the Angelus and to call the priests, nuns and brothers to prayer. Fridays were special and we were proud of being different, eating fish. But we are a long way from there now, in a time as well as place. We are between 'the God who was and the God who is yet to come'. It is as if we were in a tunnel, ambiguous, without fixed points of classification, passing through a domain which has few of the attributes of the past or of what we are looking for ahead—and this is true for the men among us

as well as the women, perhaps even more so.

That may sound negative. It also sounds individualistic. But of course it is not. In the first place, to be Catholic is to be part of a community, or better, a communion which stretches across time as well as place. Our situation throws new light on the idea of Purgatory on which most of us were brought up.

There is, inevitably, a tension between the church as an institution and as an occasion of grace. For some people, the church has become a counter-sign, more concerned, it seems, with property and narrow propriety respectful of the interests of the rich and powerful, than with prayer and the needs of the 'little ones'.

More temperately, you could say that we need and want to relate to the promise of Vatican II. The church is God's gracious gift, at the heart of 'the joys and the hopes, the griefs and anxieties of [people] of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted'. But the promise remains: God is still alive. We are on the way to Vatican III.

That brings us to the crux of the problem, to the three key questions we need to reflect on; first, what do we mean by 'church'? Second, what is the nature of its authority? and third, what are we called to do?

First, the meaning of 'church'? Vatican II, is clear: The church is the central mystery of God's love for this world, communal not merely individual. It is the community of those called by his grace to live by faith, in hope and with love for all people and all of creation..

But it is not merely an inner mystery. Since none of us is merely an individual but exists in relation to others and to the rest of creation our worship of God also involves obligation to others. As Karl Rahner notes, 'the doctrine of the church is not the central truth of Christianity' though listening to some Catholics, and to some of the moral trumpeting of Catholic officials especially, you would think it was. Rahner writes: 'Jesus Christ, faith and love, entrusting oneself to the darkness of existence and into the incomprehensibility of God in trust and in the company of Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen one, those are the central realities for a Christian.'

I have a feeling that lay people have always known this, obliged as you are to live what you believe without the defence of the institution or of religious labels, titles, language and pronouncements. But that brings us to the next question, that of authority. What authority constrains us as Catholic Christians? We know, of course, what conservatives say, that it is the authority of the Pope. That alone, however, intensifies the problem—as well as being bad theology. The Pope, too, stands under the authority of God and of her/his revelation in Scripture.

So often the question becomes rather 'why stay?'. Why not cut all official and visible ties with the institution? But that only intensifies the question, as many of you will know, since it means cutting off from the sacramental life and from the visible community of faith. This may be possible, of course, since God does not work only in, through and by the church. But it's difficult for us in our faith, our sense of God's logic.

It also poses profound problems when it comes to passing on that faith to the new generation. As Catholics, we do not believe in Scripture alone. Tradition matters, and tradition involves the dead who still speak in the language of the liturgy, in which they also worshipped, suffered and found their meaning. The church belongs to them, to all of us. To leave may mean denying the prophetic grace given to us here in this community. Authority is ultimately God's.

The best image is the one most profoundly scriptural. The church is the people of God. Indeed, I would like to argue that the crisis of the church is most intense among the 'professional guardians of the sacred', who find this inclusive and non-hierarchical vision difficult. But, if the church's centre of gravity is the majesty of God's love for this world, then to be worried by changes in political, social and economic structures is to miss the point. What Schillebeeckx calls 'God's essential reserve' remains: 'God can never be reduced to one of the forms in which she/he is manifested.'

So, in our time the surprise may be that the church is the people, not just the clergy. Indeed, the maturation of the people of God, their realisation of their prophet role, may be the great unfinished task of the church. We need to put an end to exclusion, denial and hierarchy, and move to the inclusiveness and community and love of life of the Gospel. God, after all, does not live in any one 'holy' place but everywhere. Nor does she/he only share her/his gifts and power with the rich, powerful and educated. Indeed, as scripture insists, his deepest concern is for those who are victims of power.

The beginnings of Vatican III in Australia at least, may be here where we are on the vulnerable edge between belief and unbelief, truth and error. What, then, might be some of the appeals being made to us here by the Spirit of God, the God whose being is in her coming? What should we do? The awareness we spoke about initially of being in between, on the margins, I think, forces us to the kind of openness, to a proper humility and thus to the beginnings

of grace. Humility means knowing our place before God. The great danger of Christianity today, J.B. Metz observes, is probably banality rather than naïveté, a lack of humility and a readiness to duplicate what has become the social, political and economic consensus.

It may be then that in God's plan we in this country, already one of the most mixed in terms of the cultural origins of its people, will become a model of a truly universal church drawn together in the spirit. From these others, too, we may learn about simplicity and joy, both of which are the basis of worship, reverence and a sense of stewardship of our bodies, the earth and all living



creatures which lie at the heart of the gospel of Jesus.

To conclude, then, we are making for a town, for the heavenly city. But it is not out there but in here, among us, in the most unexpected places, especially in our pain; need in grace. The City of the Merely Human, as St Augustine said, is built on love of self at the expense of the other. But the City of God, the true church, is built on love of the others/ Other at the expense of self. ■

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Getting laughs is hard work

Melbourne's International Comedy Festival

WHATEVER SOUTH AUSTRALIAN car-licence plates might say, Melbourne is *the* Festival City in Australia. In the latter half of the 1980s, five arts festivals were added to Melbourne's cultural calendar. One of them is the three-week International Comedy Festival, which opens annually on April Fool's Day.

The city's eighth Comedy Festival was arguably the most international to date. Twenty per cent of the program was international, with

Venues were spread far and wide—many of the stand-up comics were to be found in inner-suburban pubs, for example—but the epicentre of festival activity lay somewhere between the Athenaeum Theatre in the city, and the Universal Theatres in Fitzroy; these have long been Melbourne's most interesting venues for alternative commercial theatre and the annual April comedy binge is no exception.

Elston, Hocking & Woods hosted

Marchetto (Italy), the Del Rubio Triplets (USA), the British stand-up Jack Dee and the Tokyo Shock Boys, for which the Universal's newish owners Terry O'Connell and Mark Ford were promoters.

Garçon, un Kir! was one of the most straightforwardly comic shows in the international line-up. In it, five incompetent waiters spent the hour before their restaurant's dinner-time alternately setting up their equipment and avoiding trouble from their severe and somewhat obsessed chef. Everything they did became an opportunity for inspired clowning, in styles blending le Coq and Chaplin mime with more surreal elements reminiscent of Jacques Tati or John Cleese. The chef, for example, seemed obsessed with the idea of flying; his dream came true as he directed dinner service in the style of an air traffic controller, with pots and pans in his hands and a battery-operated fan in his cap.

SIMPLE GAGS WERE ALSO the stock-in-trade of Venice-bred Ennio Marchetto, whose one-hour show in the Universal 2 was based on a drag-act with a difference. He caricatured three dozen cult-figures by dressing up in elaborately and skilfully-made paper costumes and wigs while 'miming' their signature tunes. Marchetto gave us effigies of Elvis, Marilyn Monroe, Madonna, Piaf, Michael Jackson and, in a remarkable cameo, Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong together. There were also Brünnhilde, Madame Butterfly and Pavarotti from the world of opera, and a marvellously realised Mona Lisa, trying desperately to break out of her constricting frame.

Marchetto's entertainment depended on instant recognition; once



Tokyo Shock Boys: Death before dishonour! Well, death did seem imminent, even if dishonour had little to do with it.

acts from the USA, Britain, France, Japan and Italy. Many had been plucked from the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and from Montreal's Just for Laughs Festival, with which Melbourne's Comedy Festival is now affiliated. The festival reportedly cost \$1 million, \$200,000 of which came from the State Government's tourism budget.

Compagnie Fiat Lux's *Garçon, un Kir!* (from France), Steven Berkoff's *One Man* (from Britain) and the Amazing Johnathan in the Athenaeum 1, and a good local triple bill upstairs in the Athenaeum 2. They also had Penny Arcade's *Bitch! Dyke! Fag! Whore!* (from the USA) at the Universal, which was also the venue for headline acts like Ennio

that happened, the effect wore off and one began to tire. But he had a second string to his bow: transformation. Thus the costume for James Bond metamorphosed (with a tug of a string here or a reversal of a panel there) into a gold lamé-clad Shirley Bassey belting out *Goldfinger*, and Queen Elizabeth II turned into Freddy Mercury (from Queen). An hour of this was about enough, however, for even that trick to wear thin.

An hour was also more than enough to spend with California's Del Rubio Triplets (resplendent in platinum-blond bouffant hairdos, miniskirts and white 'go-go' boots). This bizarre trio sang *Fever*, *These Boots are Made for Walking* and *Like a Virgin* (they have more than 1000 songs in their repertoire) in ways you have never heard. In between, they rattled on with pleasant patter about their Hollywood childhood spent next door to Judy Garland, their gig at the Melbourne Chevron 34 years ago, about their gay and elderly convalescent-home fans and their 'young legs'.

Awful though this act was, the triplets were curiously engaging. What made them 'comic', however, was problematic: did we laugh *at* their awfulness or *with* their sheer chutzpah?

The Del Rubios were followed in Universal 1 by a New Yorker named Penny Arcade, whose *Bitch! Dyke! Fag! Whore!* also posed questions about the nature of comedy. Her show began promisingly enough, with a mixed group of erotic dancers bumping and grinding their way around the auditorium (why is it that male erotic dancers nowadays seem more erotic than females?), and the star of the show then did a witty monologue as a brothel receptionist.

Later on, however, there was a marked slippage from character-monologue to plain personal diatribe in which Ms Arcade bitterly attacked—at considerable length—political correctness, intolerance, lesbians, censorship and the new right, and the left. She embraced the cause of gay men (with whom she grew up), prostitutes and other underdogs, including non-lesbian women.

Towards the end of her show

Arcade stylishly stripped down to an American flag and a pair of high heels and bemoaned the fact that Melbourne audiences missed out on the extra hour Adelaide and Sydney audiences got. I'm afraid this didn't bother me at all: 110 minutes was quite sufficient.

What followed was an attack not only on political correctness but on pretty well all forms of sense and sensibility. The Tokyo Shock Boys' press release entreated us to 'Please laugh: we're risking our lives' and, although their bizarre variety act is 'berry dangerous', I'm afraid it is not very funny. In the manner of a magician's or illusionist's show, minus beautiful assistant, the boys showed us the bottle of Palmolive detergent one of them would drink, and the sword one of them would wield upon a watermelon atop a colleague's stomach.

Even in the hideous finale—in which two shock-boys sought to prove their machismo in a tug-of-war with a towel attached to the head of one and the testicles of another—the compere took great delight in showing his colleagues' agony. I gather all of this has something to do with the Samurai 'death before dishonour' ethic, but I suspect that if four Australian boys had got up a show as numbingly shocking as this, they would have been booted off the stage.

THERE WERE ANTIDOTES to this mayhem, including a splendid piece from the local performance art group The Men Who Knew Too Much. This group has been seen in the street theatre component of the Melbourne International Festival of the Arts, and their one-hour late show in the Athenaeum 2 offered a potted 'best-of' their street work. It included a screamingly funny Japanese 'kyogen' comedy (in English, but with Japanese intonations) and an extended sketch called 'Zen Cowboys', which sent up just about everything from



The Del Rubio Triplets: it had something to do with growing up next door to Judy Garland.

the Chinese revolution to B-movie westerns.

Also in the Athenaeum 2 were a zany duo called Lano And Woodley and another called Shaken And Suspicious, whose mini-musical *Dead Set* was a delightful tale about two people trying to write the great Australian Musical. This they couldn't manage (who has?) but they did fall in love, which is pretty much what musicals are all about anyway.

Finally, there was Australia's Circus Oz, playing under the Big Top in the City Square. The show had mixed reviews, but I warmed enormously to their engaging blend of acrobatics, excellent music and sheer good fun.

I'd like to return in depth to Circus Oz next month, but in the meantime, if there is a prize for audacious programming for 1994, the Universal Theatres would win it hands down at this stage of the year. Regardless of how one feels about the individual shows, putting the Del Rubios, Penny Arcade and the Shock Boys together in one venue on one night is an amazing feat. ■

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Sliced just right

Short Cuts, dir. Robert Altman (Village). Tantalising title! Slices of life? Quick routes? Glimpses of characters and interactions?

This is definitely a Robert Altman film, a panorama of Los Angeles' ordinary and quirky suburban life, a gallery of characters whose lives knowingly and unknowingly intersect, stories interwoven to make a moving tapestry of images. As a reviewer who considers *Nashville* one of the top movies ever made, I was pleased to see Altman still handling a large cast and complex narrative with deft direction aided by appropriately smooth editing.

Altman has transplanted to Los Angeles, and interconnected, Raymond Carver's short stories of the US north-west. They are not the most profound of tales, and many of the characters are not the most sympathetic, but Altman finds the humanity (good and evil) in them and takes us by way of short cuts into the drama of the human spirit.

The cast was awarded a special ensemble prize at last year's Venice Film Festival (where *Short Cuts* shared the Golden Lion with *Three Colours: Blue*). This was repeated at the Golden Globe awards. The 22 stars relish the acting opportunity to create quickly some significant as well as some memorable characters.

Jennifer Jason Leigh stands out as the housewife doing her chores while talking graphic sex with phone clients; Jack Lemmon makes a confession to the son he has not seen for 30 years (Bruce Davison); Annie Ross provides a chorus of blues songs but is oblivious of her cello-playing daughter, Lori Singer; and Lily Tomlin and Tom Waites prove how effective they are in middle-aged roles.

Short Cuts is 189 minutes of clever film-making, from spraying helicopters to an LA quake, with the Panavision screen often presenting characters in lengthy close-ups when their lives are generally medium shots or even long shots; these are thoughtful, funny, sad slices of life.

—Peter Malone

Old 'n' gold

Le Samourai, dir Jean-Pierre Melville (independent cinemas). Edward Dmytryk, the American director whose 1940s thrillers are often cited as the high point of *film noir*, was once introduced by a French film critic as the founder of that genre. Dmytryk rushed off to look up 'noir' and said: 'Noir? Hell, it was just after the war and I couldn't get enough wiring to light the set properly, that's all. So we experimented with light-

stands the techniques being used can do well.

All the conventions of the Hollywood gangster movie are employed, and not a few from that other American genre beloved of Melville and the French New Wave theorists, the Western. Jef Costello (Alain Delon), the trenchcoat-and-fedora-wearing killer who is the film's enigmatic hero, always just beats his victims to the draw; we are surprised and relieved that the gun has miraculously appeared in his hand—and then realise that Melville is teasing us again. And, if we compare these scenes from *Le Samourai* with the heavy-handed parody of a shoot-out with which Quentin Tarantino concludes *Reservoir Dogs*, we can savour the difference between the wit of a master and the buffoonery of a latter-day disciple.

Melville, like the tediously fashionable Tarantino, makes his jokes by concentrating on form and convention rather than character: each challenges the viewer to ask what remains of character when form and convention are eliminated. If Melville's characters appear credible nonetheless, unlike the dreary cardboard cutouts of *Reservoir Dogs*, it is perhaps because he worked without the benefit of dreary post-modernist film theory.

—Ray Cassin

Eureka Street Film Competition

Is that a bemused tourist in Paris? No, it's Alain Delon in *Le Samourai*. Caption this still with a line pithy enough to be from the movie, 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. The winner of March's competition was Chanel Keane, of Northcote, VIC, who thought that Daniel Day Lewis would have had no problems playing Dorothy in a remake of *The Wizard of Oz*.



and-shade effects and it worked.'

I think Jean-Pierre Melville would have enjoyed that story as much as he clearly enjoyed the work of Dmytryk and the other *film noir* directors. His 1967 film *Le Samourai*, now able to be seen in Australia in its entirety, is *noir* at its best; but Melville pays his models the praise of high satire, the sort of satire that only someone who really under-

Poor Jeremy

M. Butterfly, dir. David Cronenberg (Village and selected cinemas). 'Not another gender-bender, Mummie, please!'

'Sshh, darling. It's all poor dear Mr Irons can do these days since he got the Curse.'

'What Curse, Mummie?'

'The Curse of Typecasting, darling. He played a very silly gentleman in *Damage*, but you see, he wasn't quite silly enough to be believable as a British Tory MP in love, so the Typecasting committee thought he'd better do things all over again, but this time as a very silly French gentleman.'

'And is he very silly, Mummie?'

'Unbelievably so, darling. So silly in fact, that he's getting a lot of

Important Things wrong.'

'What things, Mummie?'

'Oh, things like thinking America is going to win the Vietnam War and China isn't going to have a Cultural Revolution.'

'That would be pretty silly for someone working in the French embassy in China, wouldn't it, Mummie?'

'Yes. He also thinks his girlfriend is a lady soprano, when she's actually a male secret agent who talks like Darth Vader.'

'I bet he's going to be rather fed up when he finds out.'

'I think so. It's hard to tell.'

'What's he doing now, Mummie?'

'He's in jail for spying so he's dressing up as a Japanese lady and getting ready to kill himself in front of lots of other prisoners.'

'Why is he playing *One Fine Day* on the cassette, then?'

'I suppose because the film-maker thought people wouldn't recognise the right piece of music from the opera.'

'Why aren't they trying to stop him?'

'I don't know, darling. Perhaps silliness is catching.'

'Do you think they'll let poor Mr Irons off being silly now, Mummie?'

'I hope so, darling. I do hope so.'

—Juliette Hughes

Kids rule, OK?

Flight of the Innocent, dir. Carlo Carlei (independent cinemas) is a kids-can-save-the-world saga that mostly manages to avoid the sentimentality which can suffocate this kind of story. Its ostensible theme is the contrast between Italy's affluent north and crime-ridden, impoverished south, but Carlei and his co-screenwriter, Gualtiero Rosella, also evoke their country's literary past (images from Dante abound) and indulge in some gleeful satire of its latterday cultural exchange with the United States (exporting the Mafia, and getting Hollywood gangster movies in return).

The film's saviour child, Vito (Manuel Colao), lives on a Calabrian farm with his family, who supplement their income by kidnapping

children from the north and holding them for ransom. When the rest of his family and their latest kidnap victim are slaughtered by a rival gang intent on stealing the ransom money, Vito sets off for Siena to find the boy's parents.

This quest for reconciliation is begun in resonantly Dantean style: Vito wanders alone through a dark wood, and descends into a cave to find the body of the kidnapped Siennese boy. Death-and-resurrection images recur several times in *Flight of the Innocent*: To escape pursuing *mafiosi* Vito spends a night in a crypt, emerging to relative safety in the light of a new day, and later he sleeps in a fairground Haunted House.

But Italian Catholicism is only one source of allusiveness in the film. In frame after frame Carlei doffs his cap (or is he thumbing his nose?) at the Mafia films of *I Signori* Coppola, de Palma and Scorsese, and the thrillers of *Il Maestro* Hitchcock. A stairwell sequence inverts the tower sequence in *Vertigo* and the film's extremely violent opening recalls more the mass executions of the *Godfather* trilogy.

Somehow it all hangs together, not least because Manuel Colao overcomes the hurdle that defeats so many Hollywood child actors—he is credible without being cute. Carlei has found the right ingredients for those who like a good chase movie, and added a leaven for those who want something more.

—Ray Cassin

Winter chills

Un Coeur en Hiver, dir. Claude Sautet (independent cinemas) Sautet deservedly won a César award—the French equivalent of an Oscar—for his direction of this delicate and subtle film. On the surface, it appears to be nothing more than a stylish tale of *menage à trois*, but Sautet creates and sustains dramatic tension so adroitly that at times, while watching this film, I had to remind myself to breathe.

Maxime (Andre Dussolier) and Stephane (Daniel Auteuil) run an exclusive music shop in Paris and share what appears to be a unique friend-

ship. Their relationship is comfortable and stable; they lunch at the local bistro, play racquetball—which Stephane always loses—and share the same love of music and devotion to their artists. Maxime handles the business side, while Stephane meticulously tunes and repairs the delicate instruments in his workshop.

Into their comfortable world comes Camille Kessler (Emmanuelle Beart), a promising young violinist, a new client and Maxime's lover. Despite his close friendship with Maxime, Stephane pursues Camille. At first he enjoys discomfiting her, then, at the point where she is completely drawn in by his distant and cynical manner, he rejects her.

The acting in this film is superbly understated, with looks and gestures often taking the place of dialogue. But the real star attraction is Ravel. For those who, like me, thought Ravel only wrote *Bolero*, his *Sonatas and Trio* are an enchanting and haunting addition to a beautiful film.

—Tim Stoney

French pitstop

Germinal, dir. Claude Berri (independent cinemas). Berri's reverential adaptation of Zola's epic account of the lives of 19th century French miners and their overlords lends some weight to the French protectionist case for its national cinema. *Germinal* wouldn't be made in a Hollywood geared up to service 'the market'. It's too grim, too long, and most of its stars get blown up, choked, drowned or murdered. Even Gerard Depardieu, as Maheu, the heroic, dumb-ox miner, dies ingloriously in the mud, well short of victory, political awareness, or the film's end. *Germinal* is relentless but often splendid.

So you have to be glad that it has been made. But I will admit to the ungallic wish that Berri had been less of a Zola disciple and more of a political savant. The film is slavish in its recreation of the domestic and industrial conditions of its characters. It is also faithfully titillating. But when it comes to the larger political picture, Berri simply ducks.

—Morag Fraser



A Reflections in a sitting-room eye

A NEW SORT OF PROGRAM has begun to appear on TV in the past few years: the sort that 'goes behind the cameras'. One recent example is Two's *The Making of 'Police Rescue'*, featuring on-location interviews with cast members being honeyed about each other and lots of shots of Gary Sweet abseiling down cliffs. Another is Nine's

most recent station promo, which features the announcement 'Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the studios of Channel Nine,' while a little boy takes snapshots of various Nine personalities against a behind-the-scenes-at-the-studio backdrop.

Does the popularity of this sort of thing indicate an increasing need on the part of viewers to have the screen's carefully crafted illusions destroyed? And if it does, is that need about knowledge, power, pleasure or fear? What sort of desire is being satisfied when the cameras go behind the cameras?

In their wildly differing ways, *Media Watch* (Two), *Murphy Brown* (Nine), *TVT* (Two) and *Australia's Funniest Home Videos* (Nine) all address this desire. All four are forms of meta-television, addressing the mechanics by which that apparently seamless finished product, the TV program, is assembled.

Each show does this a different way. On *Media Watch*, a current-affairs program segment about a Malaysian shirt factory is revealed to have featured by way of illustration a handy piece of footage from a previous show, depicting what is in fact an Indonesian shoe factory, close-up shots of shoes having been carefully excised. On *Murphy Brown*, TV journalist Murphy, screaming like a banshee at her anchorman three seconds before the news team goes to air, throws to him on-camera a moment later in a voice like a stream of golden syrup. On *TVT*, producers, directors, writers and actors are interviewed about how it's all done, while classes of children are shown learning practical skills in TV and video production. And *Funniest Home Videos* consists largely of 'bloopertype accidents and mistakes: a child dances out from behind the curtain and falls off the stage, a puppet-manipulating parent is tipped off the ladder by the family dog, pairs of bridal waltzers trip inevitably over each other's new shoes and fall into the cake.

There's obviously some kind of connection between this 'revelatory' aspect of meta-TV and the fact that all four programs address themselves to questions of good/bad, right/wrong, correct/incorrect, real/fake or nasty/nice; to questions of the disorderly, the irruptive, the illegal, the transgressive and the chaotic. *Funniest Home Videos* actually celebrates the eruption of chaos and disorder through the surface of careful plans—as best illustrated by the memorable video of a hapless bridegroom, overcome by a badly timed collision of bucks' night aftermath with nuptial nerves, attempting to remain inconspicuous while vomiting into the bushes (I had always wondered whether the word 'bloopertype' was somehow onomatopoeic, and now I know why) in the middle of his own wedding ceremony.

In *Murphy Brown*, much of the narrative drive and all of the character interest is generated by the

tensions and contrasts between the way the characters appear in their work—that is, as a news team on the screen—and the way they are in 'real life'; TV, it's implied, is at its most fake precisely when it's supposed to be telling you the truth. The show's moral centre is Eldon the painter/nanny, significantly the one character who has nothing to do with the TV station for which Murphy works.

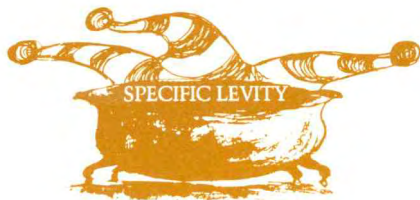
TVT is partly a review program and therefore offers evaluations of various TV shows, but the criteria for evaluation are not always spelled out: showered with terms like brilliant, deplorable, derivative, corny and bad for you, the viewer is left to sort out whether the judgements are about aesthetics, intelligence, moral standards or good taste.

And although *Media Watch* concentrates exclusively on the 'bad' in the news media, the same kinds of elisions occur: 'bad' can refer to offences against ethics, aesthetics, the law, or the rules of grammar, and in *Media Watch* all of these offences are treated as though they exist on the same plane of seriousness: racism (usually in the *Illawarra Mercury*) gets a merciless pasting, but so does tacky set design. This homogenising treatment parallels the tacit universalising of the show's determining values, which are organised around notions of rectitude, high culture, common sense and good taste. All viewers, of course, share these values—*don't* you, as *Media Watch's* presenter, Stuart Littlemore, would say with that timbre of thick mock-innocence which carries with it its own negation.

LITTLEMORE'S ON-CAMERA MIEN and manner construct the viewer as a creature almost as witty and tasteful as himself, and there is so much pleasure to be gained from this close identification with him in all his intelligence and right-thinkingness that it's difficult to distance oneself sufficiently to analyse the analyst; his manner, oddly intimate for one so acid, is in its self-protective effect a much more subtle version of Nine's 'behind-the-scenes' promo jingle: 'You're one of us.' It's us and Stuart versus the deceptions and illusions of the media, for the name *Media Watch* posits the program and its subject matter as separate entities; the program, or so its name implies, is the thing that 'watches' the media and must therefore be separate from and superior to it.

The name *TVT*, by contrast, cleverly acknowledges that the program itself belongs to the same species as all of its own material, and is subject to the same kinds of analysis. An American talk-show host was recently described on *TVT* as someone who maintains 'that the only thing worth talking about on television is television itself'; presenter Sueyan Cox, having said this, visibly abandoned the autocue and, looking straight into the camera with a collusively raised eyebrow, made a parenthetical remark indicating a degree of self-awareness about her own program's practices that is surprisingly seldom seen in Stuart Littlemore. 'Sounds fair enough,' she said. ■

Kerryn Goldsworthy is a Melbourne writer and teacher.



Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 23, May 1994

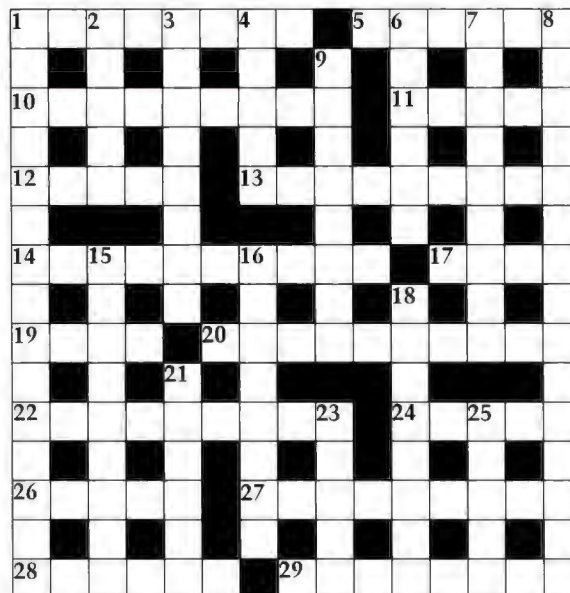
Devised by Joan Nowotny IBVM

ACROSS

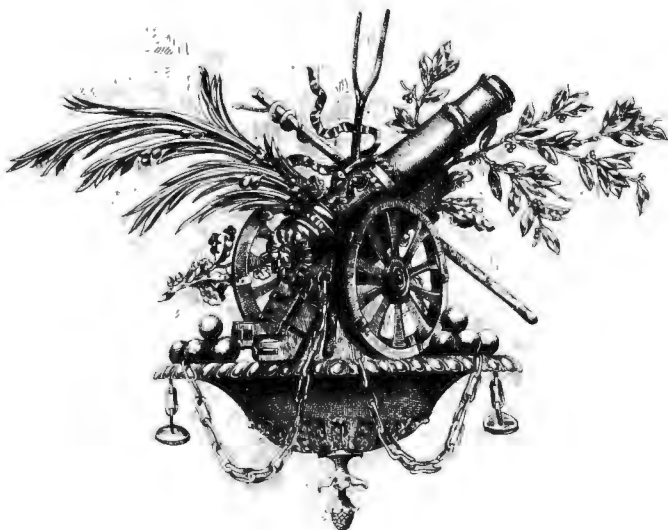
- 1 Will the Spanish road do as a way to the golden city? (2, 6)
- 5 The first of this month can spell disaster perhaps! (3, 3)
- 10 Spies confused in front of the fog! No wonder he has a gloomy outlook! (9)
- 11 Hindu God who possibly has four within his embrace. (5)
- 12 Has he got up? Yes, he's gone back northeast, Sir. (5)
- 13 Unit of heredity mingled with tar or something is what produces energy. (9)
- 14 In Italian cookery class, spend month on mixed Siena dressing. (10).
- 17 Cure characters with greyish-yellow colour. (4)
- 19 Sounds like votes against your flair for detection. (4)
- 20 Using drawn-back nets first, conservative leader and sick journalist produced perforated plate to make coloured letters. (10)
- 22 Can a berry possibly cause such waywardness? (9)
- 24 Puts back about the end of June the prepared arrangement. (3, 2)
- 26 The country mentioned in a certain dialect atlas. (5)
- 27 Pilgrim vessel for 5-across's a bloomer? (9)
- 28 Initially must a yahoo harass every maiden, thus creating disorder and confusion? (6)
- 29 Sees spar broken and sprinkles it with water. (8)

DOWN

- 1 In the laboratory, teen mixes primal constituents, showing a reliance on empirical theory. (15)
- 2 Does Science initially, perhaps, produce these medicinal portions? (5)
- 3 It sounds as if it's pouring when the queen is holding sway. (8)
- 4 Colour is unusually dingy—fading! (5)
- 6 Declare a lock-up. (6)
- 7 That form of belief about the existence of God—is it laced somehow with argument relying on reason alone? (9)
- 8 Athletic activities that can occur from January to December—the period to circle cheerful losers! (4-5, 6)
- 9 Continues to remain upright, and endure male offspring. (6, 2)
- 15 From the point of view of 5-across, this is April 30th. (9)
- 16 Cleopatra's lover has manuscript—thus giving opposite meanings. (8)
- 18 Princess's love changed enough for the marriage to terminate. (8)
- 21 Make a fuss to bring something into existence. (6)
- 23 At classes in Banyo, Yosemite National Park is discussed as a place where one can find these toys. (5)
- 25 You will find cities to west, north and south. (5)



Solution to Crossword no.22, April 1994



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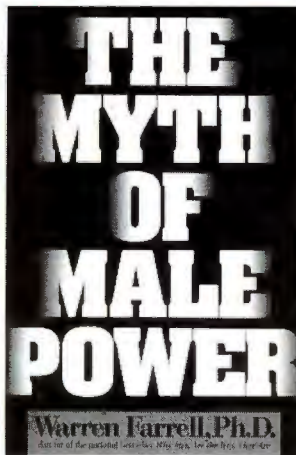
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Jesus

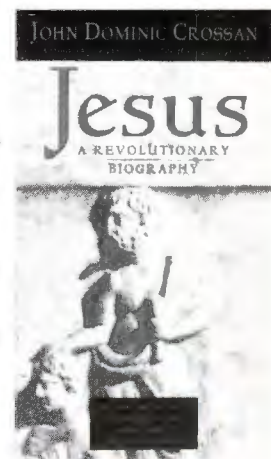
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