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A magazine of public affairs, the arts and theology

Volume 9 Number 10
December 1999

Eureka Street *wishes all our readers the peace and blessings of the 1999 Christmas season.*

Cover: Two millennia of images of Jesus Christ, from East and West, from ancient wall frescoes to modern African painting. Design by Siobhan Jackson.

Mosaic p4, Nativity with a disconsolate Joseph, from the Baptistery of S. Giovanni, Florence.

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EUREKA STREET

A magazine of public affairs, the arts and theology

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COMMENT: 1

PETER STEELE

Vinegar and song

Tumbled off to Rome recently, against expectation, I was abnormally alert to trifling detail. The police blew their whistles as though each hankered to be, for the day, James Galway or Childe Roland; the astrologers and the pliers of Tarot cards itched to get back to their cellular phones; the window of the immensely expensive menswear shop next to the rooms where Keats died was packed with shirts named after Byron, who despised Keats deeply and outlived him briefly. So it goes, when you leave your standard locale.

And they are, yet again, recycling the stones. Romans have been about this for well over a thousand years, switching odd bits of the Colosseum into a palace on the make, barrowing expendable memoranda of this or that god towards a later florid shrine, and in general obeying the sacred dictum of my wise father who commended 'what you do with what you've got'. At present, the Romans are plucking up some of the paving stones, giving them a brisk brush, and relodging them sleekly for the expected feet of the devout and the curious next year.

It is, as I say, an old habit. And of course the practice is not confined to the stones. A few minutes' walk from the Colosseum there is a statue of Julius Caesar, kitted out for war—well warranted in his case, since on the evidence he seems to have fought virtually in his sleep. This time, his plinth has an inscription which reminds us that he was 'Dictator for Life', and announces that the statue was erected 'in the tenth year since the Restoration of the Fasces'. It is as neat an instance as one is likely to see of ancient grandeurs' being invoked to warrant and adorn later aspirations. I did not notice any salute, nearby, to Mussolini, but perhaps that was the jetlag.

The empires rise, fall, or modulate, but the dream perdures. Waiting in Zurich airport for the long ride home, I watched a sizeable blood-red aircraft take its way upwards, and wondered idly who would own such a thing: until I noticed, high on the nacelle, those all-too-familiar Golden Arches. And I thought of the occasion, years ago, when,

driving south from Sydney, I heard on local radio a farmer reporting that he was exporting, by air to England, planeloads of lettuce, to be enclosed with other commodities within the celebrated buns. Perhaps, a couple of thousand years hence, some group will be making a fuss about the Restoration of the Arches.

If they do, I hope that someone will point out that the catenary arch is so named because of its allusion to the hang of chains—which might stimulate reflection on power's proneness to be its own enchainment. One of the things that comedy and tragedy, as artistic forms, have in common is their declining to be bluffed by the narcissistic enthralment of the powerful—which, accurately, the most penetrating imaginations of the Western tradition have always presented as derangement. The grotesque trick can be brought off for a while by seductive political monsters, and sometimes for much longer by domestic tyrants, of either gender. Whatever the milieu, though, we are looking at beings who are off the wall, and out of the world.

What kind of talk is this, you may wonder, at so grave and ceremonious a moment as the last Christmas of a flagging millennium? I suppose that it is brooding talk, and I wish that there were more of it. I wish that, partly because when one considers the vivid insignia of so many enterprises—the crooked crosses, those fasces, the stars and hammers and sickles and sundry eagles—it is understandable that our century could be seen as a saturnalia of serial killers: to ignore that would be like an islander's ignoring the ocean. But mere brooding, terminal brooding, is simply another form of narcissism; buckling in the face of the odious is not much more useful than truckling to it.

As a Christian, I turn back at this time not to the Dickensian fantasia of snow, holly and glut, but to the original story of the occasion, which has to do with imperial edicts, with the compulsory shifting of the poor and the vulnerable, with the burgeoning of unkillable new life against all the human odds, and with the heartening of those perilously close to being broken-hearted. Not with rage, but with a new-found realism, the story has to do with the trashing of the triumphalistic. And that warrants applause, even from the weary.

As a poet, and thus at war with the glib, I am reminded of one of Thomas Hardy's best poems, 'The Darkling Thrush', which is dated 'December 31, 1900'—a sufficiently evocative moment. There, Hardy acknowledges the great force, authority even, of a sense of waning all about him. His attention is caught by what he calls 'An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small,/ In blast-beruffled plume' which goes on singing, against the odds. Hardy is wary in the face of the moment, but is prepared to record in the battered creature 'Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew/ And I was unaware.' The thrush was not a caged bird but, God knows, our own hopes are all too frequently caged.

Still alive, though, and open to attestation. I am indebted, and perhaps you may be, to the spirit of the American poet Gerald Stern who, in 'Personal', from his book *This Time*, concludes by speculating on 'who/would wash whose feet and whether his name is Jesus/ or Joshua and if his hair was red and who/ gave whom the vinegar and what did I sing.' One hell of a lot at Christmas, and for some of us this time especially, comes down to who would wash whose feet, who gave whom the vinegar, and what did I sing. ■

Peter Steele SJ has a Personal Chair at the University of Melbourne.

Comment: 2

Geoffrey King

Room for debate on drugs

The recent intervention by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in the Australian drug debate came as a surprise to me. The Congregation intervened to forbid participation in a safe injecting room program in Sydney by the Sisters of Charity. I was surprised because the Sisters had researched the matter thoroughly and had prepared a rationale for their participation which seemed completely in line with very traditional principles of Catholic moral theology.

Central among the principles that they cited was that of co-operation. Some of the terminology that is used can be a bit daunting, but it actually articulates a good deal of common-sense wisdom. The tradition distinguishes between formal and material co-operation, and further distinguishes between immediate and mediate material co-operation. Formal co-operation in evil is always immoral. Immediate material co-operation is immoral, except in situations of duress. Mediate material co-operation can be moral when undertaken for a proportionately serious reason and when scandal (in the technical sense of leading another into morally wrong behaviour) can be avoided.

Formal co-operation means that the person co-operating intends, desires, or approves the wrongdoer's conduct. It seems obvious that the Sisters of Charity do not intend, desire or approve the continued abuse of drugs. They are trying to do what is best in a situation which everyone admits is disastrous but which we seem powerless to prevent. Their co-operation is material, not formal.

Is it mediate, not immediate, material co-operation? Co-operation is considered mediate if we can distinguish our activity from that of the wrongdoer. The tradition requires that we can distinguish two 'objects' (ours and the wrongdoer's) of the activity. The safe injecting room program has two such 'objects': the taking of drugs on the part of the user, the protection of health and life on the part of the Sisters. The proportionate reason requirement is also observed: the whole purpose of the program is the preservation of life,

which is about as proportionately serious as you can get.

The archaic terminology that I have been using is a clear indication that the Sisters were looking to put their rationale within a venerable tradition (the formal/material distinction comes from a medieval adaptation of Aristotelian philosophy which was further developed by the moral theologians of the 17th century). It would be difficult for anyone claiming to be in the Catholic tradition to object to the principles on which the Sisters were working. At the same time, it has to be admitted that the application of the principles of co-operation to particular cases has long been recognised as something of a minefield for moral theologians.

It is not surprising then that a very small (I'm tempted to say 'eccentric') minority of theologians would argue that participation in the safe injecting room program involves formal, or, more likely, immediate material co-operation.

At this point we can introduce a further element of the tradition, that of 'probabilism'. It is generally held that in disputed moral matters one may legitimately follow a 'probable opinion', that is, a view which is soundly based and/or soundly supported, even if there are strong arguments for the opposite view. In the present case, I think the Sisters' reasoning very sound, and in the closely parallel case of needle exchange for drug users it is supported by many respected theologians and by several European bishops. Thus the Sisters are following a probable opinion, in fact the far more probable opinion.

The theory of probable opinions was developed in the 17th century when morality was conceived in unduly legalistic terms—there are clear parallels between probable opinions and being deemed 'innocent until proved guilty beyond reasonable doubt'. Despite its legal trappings, however, probabilism was based on an enduringly sound instinct, namely that the Catholic moral tradition can combine consensus on basic moral principles with sharp differences on the practical implications of those principles. To take but one example: Catholic moralists have always been united in insisting on respect both for human life and for justice, but the tradition has come to see both pacifism and 'just war theory' as legitimate options for Catholics as they seek to respect both life and justice. When we are dealing with complex moral issues, it can sometimes be an impoverishment of our tradition, and perhaps a laying of undue burdens on people's shoulders, to rush to the judgment that there is only one appropriate Catholic response.

But what about the final condition for moral co-operation, namely the avoidance of 'scandal'? It seems that this was the nub of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's objection to the safe injecting room, and in the form of 'sending the wrong signal' or 'giving a green light to drug abuse' it has appeared in subsequent comments on the Congregation's decision.

First, we need to be clear on what we are talking about. We are not talking about scandal in the sense of something that merely causes shock or offence, but scandal in the technical sense of an action that leads others into immoral behaviour. The argument then is that safe injecting rooms give the impression of condoning drug abuse. They may diminish harm, even save some lives, in the short term, but in the long term they will make the drug problem worse. This is an argument that needs to be taken seriously, but ultimately I find it unconvincing. The Sisters of Charity have gone to considerable lengths to avoid scandal, by carefully explaining the nature of their proposed program and the rationale behind it. Even more telling for me is the thought, 'How could any person of good will even remotely imagine that the Sisters might be in favour of drug abuse?'

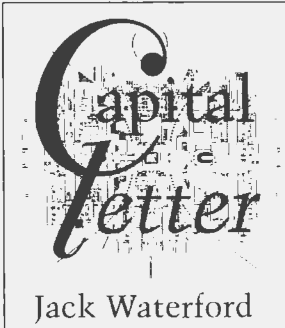
It would, moreover, be an ungenerous and poorly informed reading of the Sisters' proposal that would interpret them as signalling that drug-taking, while it is wrong, is something that can be easily or complacently tolerated. Nor is it fair to see them proposing safe injecting rooms as a 'quick fix': the rooms are proposed explicitly as one part of a more comprehensive strategy.

A final thought on scandal: it seems strange that a Congregation housed in Rome should think itself better placed than people 'on the ground' in Sydney to make a pragmatic judgment about the way in which safe injecting rooms will be perceived. The Congregation in fact seemed to recognise this in its reference to international perceptions. But the bare possibility that some people in other countries might misinterpret the situation seems to me a very thin argument for putting a stop to a program which does not contravene any teaching on faith or morals and which is widely accepted as having the potential to save lives.

While being interviewed on radio recently I was interested to encounter another argument, one not advanced by the Congregation. It was said that safe injecting rooms might be acceptable if conducted by a government agency, but that it was not appropriate for a Catholic order, especially (?) an order of sisters to be conducting such rooms. This argument of course flies in the face of such orders' history of pioneering work in health care, in particular health care for the destitute. But perhaps something deeper is at work here. In pointing to it I am entering into the hazardous business of ascribing motives, even unconscious motives. Hence, what follows is said with some hesitation.

In the early 1990s, I was in Switzerland, and a friend insisted on showing me what he called 'the other side of Swiss life' by taking me through the 'Needle Park', in effect a safe injecting area staffed by the Red Cross, near the Zurich railway station. It was all very clean and efficient, and I walked out of the park chilled to the bone. I think many people would share my instinctive revulsion at the sight of others' injecting drugs, but I realise that such an instinct cannot determine my judgment. Revulsion, and the attendant fear of contamination, can easily isolate us from reality. I have to wonder then whether some who oppose the involvement of the Sisters of Charity in Kings Cross feel that the Church, and especially an order of sisters, would somehow be contaminated by such an involvement. But surely it has often been the case that the Church and its religious orders have been at their best precisely in those situations where they have had to risk getting their hands dirty. ■

Geoffrey King SJ is Professor of Canon Law and Principal of Jesuit Theological College.



Jack Waterford

Mid-term report

THE FIRST six months of next year is shaping up as a pretty horrible time for John Howard and his government. The introduction of the goods and services tax is bound to cause Howard serious problems, particularly with small business and particularly in regional areas. Interest rates may well be on the way up, not only slowing any further improvement in the jobs market but damping some of the increase in disposable income which, more than tax cuts, has made most Australians feel better off in recent times. He is under pressure from hostile state governments, particularly on the health front. Even as things settle in East Timor, it is hard to see many triumphs on the international front, either close at home or abroad. His Cabinet is restless, and his deputy fairly openly mutinous. His Coalition partner rightly perceives continuing post-Hanson discontents out in the backblocks and wants interventionist government and spending plans.

A bit hard, too, to grasp the leadership reins, or do the vision things, after the republic referendum. His stalling and spoiling tactics won all the engagements, as they have since 1996, but whether his strategy will win any wars is still far from clear. The initiative has now passed from him; his very success with the referendum has now probably made the republic an issue which matters. The impression of stolidness and mean-mindedness is accentuated, even as he has demonstrated a capacity to trounce his own young turks. If John Howard looks backwards, it is not for fear of those who want his job.

If he can muddle on, however, it might all turn out well. It is only mid-term and there is no deep crisis. The government thinks it can stagger through the agonies of the new tax system to a point where tax cuts soften the pain. There's a war chest available for pork-barrelling. A turn of the century tends to create its own optimism. John Howard will not open the Olympic Games, but, if he is still there, he is best poised to benefit from any euphoria it creates. The centenary of federation in 2001 presents opportunities too.

Some scope too for some focused social spending to rebuild some constituencies. John Howard has appropriated most of the third way rhetoric of Blair and still has a better ear for battler views on welfare than does the Labor party. More confidence too, these days, in moving in quickly to throttle foolish proposals being floated by those of his ministers who still hold radical ideas. The engine room of government is no longer the Expenditure Review Committee of Cabinet. It is the Prime Minister's office.

The big trouble is that neither the leader, nor the office, has much in the way of an agenda, apart from soldiering on and getting re-elected. It can recognise bad ideas which stand in the way of that—almost anything which David Kemp comes up with, for example, or some of the rattier ideas of a Philip Ruddock, who has now almost entirely lost the plot on thwarting invasions from the east, the west and the north. Some projects—repairing relations with Indonesia and the United States, for example—have simply developed from events. Some others—a complete reform of defence service culture—flow from some of the horrible shocks of recent months when government was forced to contemplate what time, and rotation policies, had wrought. Still others involve little more than indulging some of the nutty ideas of personal friends of the Prime Minister or setting them loose on constituencies which he hates, particularly in the arts. Imagine, for example, the fun that his biographer, David Barnett, and his old speechwriter, Christopher Pearson—neither famous, to put it mildly, for their affinities with or sympathies for Aboriginal aspirations—are having with the Museum of Australia.

Peter Costello has his hands full with changes to the tax system. Peter Reith has slipped in estimation since the referendum campaign, though he may find himself propped up as a counter-candidate to Costello. Michael Wooldridge, whose faction will probably choose which of these is to be next Liberal leader, is in some serious strife because of the rortings of radiologists, and John Fahey, who thinks the baton might be in his pocket, is most focused on still having a seat in NSW when the redistribution music stops.

THE MOST INTERESTING politician to watch at the moment is Warren Truss, National Party chieftain of agriculture. He does not project well, and it is hard to see him taking the leadership from John Anderson, but some of his admirers see him as potentially in the Black Jack McEwan mould. The National Party commands key portfolios in agriculture, transport, regional development and trade. Truss is the man, some think, with the administrative and the political skills to get them operating in tandem and to do some repair work with rural constituencies and regional economies.

Is there room for Aborigines in any of the grand planning? Oddly there could be. John Howard is still not much in sympathy with Aboriginal aspirations; he has marginalised them more and more in government priorities since his Wik legislation was bedded down. But he is getting more and more anxious to scratch them off the list of things to do. The failure of the preamble has undercut one of the few gestures he has made; I should not be in the least surprised if he gets personally involved in deliberations on a reconciliation document. With his track record, of course, that could be disastrous, both for success of the project, or for its adoption by either Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal Australians. Yet unless he gets involved, things seem likely to go nowhere. I cannot think of a year since 1966 in which Aboriginal issues have commanded less attention than they have done in 1999—and that is taking the preamble into account. It would be a sorry end of a century if the best prospect were some triumph inside and some embarrassment outside the Olympic stadiums. ■

Jack Waterford is editor of the *Canberra Times*.

Border questions

From Daniel Mandel, Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council

Anthony Ham's trip to Syria and speculations on the future of the Middle East peace process makes interesting reading ('The Long Road to Peace', *Eureka Street*, October 1999), but it is also flawed by heedless assumptions and signal omissions that are worth examining in some detail.

Whilst neither popular nor particularly skilled at negotiating with Arab leaders, the former Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, was scarcely the sole or primary impediment to hopes of progress that Ehud Barak's election have rekindled. Significant interim agreements were concluded and implemented under Netanyahu. What did change undeniably for the worse was the atmospherics between the parties. Like Netanyahu, Barak exhibits concern over unresolved matters of Israeli security under Oslo, which he queried as Chief of Staff and later as a member of the Rabin Cabinet. Peace-making has been previously disrupted by bouts of Palestinian terrorism.

But it is Ham's observations on the Syrian–Israeli aspect to peace-making that are fundamentally misconceived. First, Israeli withdrawal to the pre-5 June 1967 borders (meaning a complete Israeli evacuation of the Golan heights) is not enshrined in UN Security Council Resolution 242 or anywhere else. Acquaintance with the contents of that resolution, concluded in the wake of the 1967 war, would reveal that it calls for Arab–Israeli negotiations leading to Israeli withdrawal 'from territories occupied in the recent conflict' but deliberately refrains from requiring total Israeli withdrawal. As the US representative at the UN, who was principally involved in the drafting and passage of the resolution, stated then and later, 242 neither requires nor prohibits complete Israeli withdrawal, but rather remits the timing and extent of such withdrawal to negotiations between the parties.

Accordingly, Ham is mistaken in asserting that Barak's declared intention not to return to the 1967 borders is in contravention of 242 and an impediment to peace. It is certainly not the former and unlikely to be the latter.

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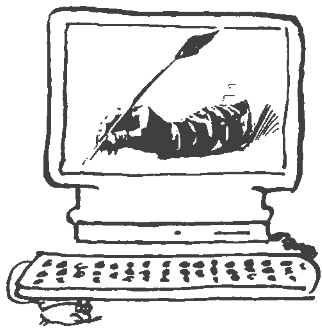

Second, Quneitra, a Syrian town bordering the Golan Heights, was heavily damaged in the 1973 fighting which, Ham must know, was commenced by Syria in a surprise attack on Israel co-ordinated with Egypt. It has been standard Syrian practice to allege wilful and gratuitous Israeli destruction of the city, a claim neither backed by evidence nor in accord with the circumstances of the fighting.

Third, considering the attention Ham devotes to the Golan Heights, he has not a syllable to say about the very pertinent fact that the Golan plateau, during the period 1948 to 1967, was routinely used by the Syrians to shell Israeli farms and urban centres in Israel's Galilee. This occurred despite the fact that the relevant sectors of Galilee were demilitarised by Israel in accordance with the 1949 armistice agreement. Syria nonetheless insisted on disrupting all peaceful activity, in violation of the cease-fire, under the cover of Soviet vetoes in the Security Council.

For this reason, an Israeli return to the situation as it existed before 1967 is unlikely. Furthermore, the pre-1967 lines do not conform with the accepted international border but in fact involve Syrian occupation of Israeli territory seized in the 1948 war, a further reason for Israel having never accepted Syria's claim for an exact restoration of the *status quo ante bellum*.

Lastly, a word of caution in assessing the *bona fides* as peace-maker of Hafez al-Assad. First and foremost, as Ham seems to have missed noticing, he is an extremely brutal dictator. His whole regime is testimony to this fact, although a single event such as the destruction of Hama is enough to confirm it. In 1982, Assad ordered his forces to level the entire city of Hama, where he was facing a revolt, which they did along with what Amnesty International estimated to be 10,000 to 25,000 of its inhabitants.

Assad has a long record of delaying implementation for years, if not even completely abrogating, commitments he has undertaken, as is evident from his record regarding the release of Syria's hostage Jewish community and a variety of international commitments pertaining to Lebanon. Such a record obliges us to treat the much-touted news of his ending of support for Palestinian terrorist factions with caution, not to say scepticism.

Daniel Mandel
Melbourne, VIC

No tax tricks

From Dr Philip Mendes, School of Public Policy and Social Work, Monash University

The recent call by the Taxation Commissioner, Michael Carmody, for a parliamentary inquiry into the ethics of paying tax is to be welcomed.

In recent years, there has been a significant erosion of public support for our taxation system due to a perception that the wealthy are not contributing their fair share. This perception has been actively fuelled by current government policies such as the introduction of a GST and proposed cuts to capital gains tax which appear to undermine the progressive nature of our system. Overall, tax revenue as a percentage of GDP has declined from 27 per cent to 25 per cent over the last decade—a loss of eight to ten billion dollars.

We urgently need a statement from our leading politicians (on both sides of the spectrum) which reinforces the moral purpose of taxation: that is to fund universalist community services such as health, housing, education and social security which are fundamental to the social cohesion of any democratic society; to promote greater equality of opportunity; and to redistribute income from those who have too much to those who have too little.

It may be true that there is a technical legal difference between tax avoidance and what Michael Carmody euphemistically calls 'tax minimisation', but there is certainly no moral or ethical difference. We urgently need a government campaign that promotes the civic duty of paying a fair share of tax.

The campaign should emphasise that individual citizens have obligations to others as well as rights. The principle should be espoused that governments have a right to intervene to limit the rights of powerful individuals (or groups of individuals) when this is deemed necessary to protect the rights of other less powerful individuals or groups.

Let's have an end to prominent corporate leaders boasting of their selfishness and greed in regards to their fellow citizens.

Philip Mendes
Clayton, VIC

Scandal?

From Mark Johnson

There can be no greater scandal to the faith of the Church than its realisation that the Vatican directive which prohibits the Sisters of Charity from working with the NSW Government in providing safe injecting rooms for heroin users has much to do with maintaining the appearance of respectability, and little to do with the exercise of moral authority.

How strange it is that over the past 21 long years we, the Church, have had to endure the reactionary anti-Western ramblings of a Vatican [and its covert supporters] supposedly much concerned with the intrinsic worth of human life, yet seemingly little concerned with the quality of human life as actually lived. The current figure positioned upon the Chair of Peter has in the past infamously labelled the West as a 'culture of death'. By this damning description can be inferred a perspective which has cast judgment on the callous disregard by which human life has been, and remains, little more than a resource to be exploited, its intrinsic dignity diminished. In such a culture, as perhaps correctly assessed by the present Pope, it can be of little surprise that some of us fall foul of this culture's sense of respectability, and turn to addictive means by which to endure it. Those among us addicted to a means such as heroin are constructed and thereby regarded as deviant, are judged as criminal, and from within this situation of exclusion face the very real possibility of death from overdose. Such people are the victims of the respectability of the 'culture of death'.

Yet it seems now that all is forgiven on the part of the Chair of Peter towards this errant 'culture of death', for now the Chair of Peter is (too) much concerned with respectability, with the appearance of right. However, by the Vatican's directive, the good has been sacrificed, and the ersatz morality of a culture formally castigated for its disregard for human life has become newly imbued with moral force.

How painfully ironic it is that as the Western world approaches the beginning of the Third Millennium, enters upon what has been for Christians declared as a year of Jubilee, the Vatican has chosen to reveal itself at one with the 'culture of death', has revealed itself as, in truth, respectable, but stripped of moral authority.

Mark Johnson
Katoomba, NSW

Curial manoeuvres

SUDDENLY, last December, after a dressing-down from Rome, Australian Catholics became aware of synods of bishops. The synod season continued in October with a three-week Synod for Europe. The next pope was probably in attendance.

It got off to a pessimistic start with the Synod *Relator* (Chairman), the John Paul-appointed Spanish Cardinal Maria Rouco Varela, denouncing Europe's loss of faith and 'immanent humanism'—the notion that we are saved by intra-worldly forces. This, he said, had infiltrated the Church as 'secular humanism', stripping it of its faith in the resurrection and transcendent values. It was a bleak picture.

It was not until Cardinal Godfried Danneels of Belgium spoke about the new challenges and questions raised by contemporary Western society that things began to brighten up. He said that religious pluralism had led the Church to dialogue with other faiths and that God was trying to teach the Church humility. This theme was taken up by the Englishman, Father Timothy Radcliffe, Master of the Dominican order, who went on to say that 'just asserting the authority of the Church ever more strongly is not the answer. People will either resist or take no notice'.

The Roman Curia came in for a lot of criticism even from very conservative cardinals such as Joachim Meisner of Cologne. This was expressed more positively by Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini SJ of Milan when he spoke of the need for greater collegiality in church government. He even seemed to call for a new general council, although he denied this.

Synod secrecy and 'management' of the media is par for the course in Rome. However, an unexpected break came when Archbishop Keith O'Brien of St Andrews and Edinburgh spoke his mind bluntly to English-speaking journalists. In view of what has happened in Australia regarding general absolution, it is interesting that he said that the Irish, English and Scottish hierarchies had unanimously petitioned Rome for permission to have a general absolution for Easter 2000. 'The proposal was ... that on the Saturday before Palm Sunday there would be general absolution in all our parishes.'

O'Brien said that the response from Rome was negative and that 'Medina would not budge'. The 'Medina' in question is the Chilean Cardinal Jorge Medina Estevez of the Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments. This was the same gentleman who, with the Secretary of State, Angelo Sodano, petitioned the British government to release the former dictator Augusto Pinochet. O'Brien's comments caused a considerable flurry in the curial dovecote.

At the end of the Synod there were few practical suggestions but a lot of hype about 'hope'. There had been debate about ordaining married men to solve the priest shortage (by next year 30 to 50 per cent of European parishes will have no resident priest), the re-admission to communion of remarried Catholic divorcees, a call for the appointment of women to head curial agencies, and a more generous approach to the use of general absolution. Hardly any of this got into the final synod document which was strong on theology, European unity, the growth of democracy and human rights and praise for the so-called 'new religious movements'. All fairly predictable.

However, the most interesting aspect of the Synod was the performance of the *papabile*, the cardinals on the papal shortlist. The odds on an older and transitional Italian or Western European strengthened. The cardinals will not be looking for a long papacy, but they will be seeking someone strong enough to rein in the Vatican and act in a more collegial way.

Despite his progressive credentials, the list is still headed by the 73-year-old Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, of Milan. Another strong possibility is the recently appointed 66-year-old Archbishop of Genoa, Dionigi Tettamanzi. He is a conservative moral theologian, close to Opus Dei and very much aligned with the preoccupations of the Wojtyla papacy. Despite his relative 'youth' he might well be the candidate of the conservatives.

Other Italians mentioned are Marco Ce, 74, the Patriarch of Venice, Salvatore de Giorgi, 69, Archbishop of Palermo and Silvano Piovanelli, Archbishop of Florence, who is probably too old at 76.

Godfried Danneels, Archbishop of Mechelen-Brussels, 67, emerged strongly at the Synod. He is a moderate and would be a strong contrast to John Paul II. Pierre Eyt, Archbishop of Bordeaux, 66, is a moderate conservative possibility. Another Belgian, Jan Pieter Schotte, 72, General Secretary of the Synod, has been mentioned, as has Jean-Marie Lustiger, 73, Archbishop of Paris, although I think both must be considered long shots.

Given the antagonism to the Curia, Vatican cardinals, such as Angelo Sodano, 72, and Camillo Ruini, 69, have fallen from favour, although the Colombian Prefect of the Congregation of the Clergy, Dario Castrillon Hoyos, 71, is mentioned by many.

One thing is certain: it is still a wide open race. **—Paul Collins**

In Memoriam
Jack Lynch
1917–99
(Taoiseach 1966–73, 1977–79)

TO THE IRISH PEOPLE he was Honest Jack. There was a famous occasion when he was found out in a lie and he apologised to the country with the words 'I forgot'. The people believed him and the incident became known more as a gentle joke than as a vindictive reminder of miscreance. The comedian Niall Toibin, a fellow Corkman—he plays the role of the parish priest in *Ballykissangel*—dined out for years on the punch line 'Even Jack forgets!'

Jack Lynch was an unlikely politician, and an even less likely member of the monolithic, Mafia-like family known as Fianna Fail. At the end of a hugely successful career as a hurler and footballer, and as he was beginning to make a name in the legal world, he was persuaded to use his popularity to win a seat for Fianna Fail in Cork. It was like one of the parties here picking up a marginal by running Tony Lockett or Mark Taylor.

He became Minister for Education and when Sean Lemass decided it was time to retire, he persuaded his son-in-law Charles Haughey to step aside in favour of Lynch in order to stop what would have been a bloodbath contest for the leadership. Lynch consulted with his wife Mairin and when she gave him the go-ahead, he became

the 'reluctant Taoiseach' (Prime Minister), a title he was quite happy to live with.

Softly spoken, modest, courteous, a man of simplicity and unassailable integrity, the people loved him. The country was so innocent in those days that they could whisper what a pity Jack and Mairin had no children, and a trimming might be added to the family rosary that, like the biblical Anna, some miracle would happen. When he was finally and humiliatingly pushed out in 1979, the leader of the Opposition, the dour and solemn Liam Cosgrave, not given to exaggeration or hyperbole, described him as 'the most popular politician in Ireland since O'Connell'. It was an assertion which was not challenged then and has not been challenged since.

But behind the soft voice and the pipe smoke, there was no shortage of steel. This was the man who as a centre halfback repelled Kilkenny hurlers and Kerry footballers with equal success. Surrounded in his political life by fiercely ambitious and ruthless men, he held on to the leadership of Fianna Fail for 13 years and served as Taoiseach for nine of those years.

In 1969, he took on the nationalist hawks within Fianna Fail by sacking the strongest ministers of his cabinet, Charles Haughey and Neil Blaney, and persuading two others to resign. He had Haughey brought before the courts on a charge of importing arms for the IRA and when that case failed, Haughey put down a firm marker that he would not forget. That part is sour and still festering history; the years of the late '70s were the bitterest since the Civil War as people like Sile de Valera, the late Dr Bill Loughnane and Haughey publicly questioned Lynch's credentials to lead a party which had been set up to achieve the unification of the country. It was a chorus which was taken up by Sinn Fein who called him 'Union Jack Lynch'.

He finally succumbed to the constant sniping and resigned. In the ensuing contest for leadership, Haughey's backbench dragoons won him the leadership of the Party. For his remaining years in the Dail, Lynch was always referred to as 'the real Taoiseach'. He was rarely heard from in retirement—there is no tradition of former Irish leaders making nuisances of themselves like they do in this country—and we only knew that he was a director of Irish Distillers and we did not begrudge him the occasional free whiskey of which he was said to have a connoisseur's fondness.

There was no dinner in his honour after he left politics; the party which he had led

Séamus O'Shaughnessy

Fear and loathing

I asked a new District Court Judge recently how he was finding his job. He said, 'I'm just taking it quietly, trying to keep off the front page of the *Telegraph*.' (The Sydney *Daily Telegraph*, for those who don't know, is a crusading tabloid with the largest circulation of daily newspapers in NSW.)

In my experience, the general reaction of judges and magistrates to the media is one of fear and loathing. There are few things that tabloid journalists, TV crime reporters and redneck radio jocks like more than a juicy legal controversy, and judges and magistrates have no immunity from their blitzes. Many have suffered silently but bitterly.

One magistrate, whom I admire, was criticised by talkback radio kings to such an extent that he angrily rang up the station and sought to put his point of view. I think he now regrets having done so for two reasons. First, the rationale for his decision had been given in court on the public record, and that should have been left at that. But, in any event, the shock jocks will always have the last word—they, not their victims, control the medium.

Before I went to the country I had two unwanted appearances in the tabloids. In the first case, I cautioned an 18-year-old kid, a first offender who, drunk, had foolishly grabbed a bike from outside a bike shop and ridden it for about 200 metres before abandoning it. In the second case, the brother of a famous murderer was hounded by reporters relentlessly prior to and during his brother's trial. Infuriated, he lashed out, punched a photojournalist and smashed a camera. He hadn't been in trouble for 30 years. I made him pay for the camera but otherwise let him off. I was excoriated in each case—I had 'condoned' bicycle theft and given an imprimatur to violence.

I had expected everyone to see how obvious were the arguments for leniency and to report them. I didn't spell these things out; I assumed that all decent people who heard what I heard in court would react as I did. I was shocked and hurt by the reaction.

The most usual complaint by judges and magistrates about the media is that they report decisions inaccurately or simplistically. While I wouldn't claim to have mastered the art of making judicial decision-making media-friendly, a case I handled about a year ago showed me what can be achieved if you take account of how the media works.

A woman school principal had been charged with defrauding her employer of $10,000. Her QC asked me to deal with her as a mentally ill person, rather than applying the criminal law. She knew what she had done was wrong. The argument was that she was a person of impeccable character whose conduct was an aberration resulting from extraordinary stress. Psychiatric evidence that she was profoundly depressed was incontestable, and, significantly, she had repaid most of the money. As a matter of law, I had to balance both the private, subjective concerns of this woman and the public interest. Mercy or deterrence.

At the hearing, to my horror, the court's press box was chock-a-block. Having been badly burned twice before, I decided this time to spoon-feed the journalists, emphasising and repeating what I particularly wanted them to understand. I had accepted the woman's application. Rather than leave them to attempt to cast the decision in their own words, I tried to seize the agenda, to give them words and phrases they could quote. They accepted the offering and the reports of the case were astonishingly accurate—I could have written them myself.

It is easy to dismiss journalists as lightweights or rednecks and to sneer or complain from the ivory tower, but they are the *vox populi*. Law is for the people, so the law must talk to the media. Given accurate, digestible information on complex issues, journalists are capable of serious thinking and good reporting, even in stories of 600 words and audio-visual grabs of one minute. Some might be beyond redemption, but the honest hack is worth her salt. ■

Séamus O'Shaughnessy is a NSW magistrate.

Have some respect

A SUCKER FOR *EUREKA STREET* in any of its manifestations, I decided to watch the telly version of it (reviewed in *Eureka Street*, November 1999). In the first episode, one of the characters who started a political argument in a pub got a beating to teach him 'respect'. An odd form of teaching, I thought but, as I worked through this month's journals, it did set me thinking about respect.

Introducing a lively conversation in the *Feminist Studies in Religion* (Spring 1999), Emily Neill touches on issues of respect. She argues that feminist scholars of religion have often presented the history of their discipline as a story of progress from theoretically incoherent beginnings to theoretical sophistication. Neill argues that from this perspective early feminists can easily be seen as primitive, with the result that the agenda of equality and freedom from discrimination which they pursued with passion can implicitly be dismissed. Her interlocutors take up this point, acknowledging that desire for acceptance by a substantially male academy can distract scholars from the feminist concerns that first led them to scholarship. The conversation illuminates what is at stake in respect. If those who have gone before us are not respected, the project which defined their lives will be trivialised and lost. That insight, however obscurely sensed, lay behind the beating administered by the thugs of the Belfast pub.

One of the historian's gifts is to offer respect to forgotten people and projects. In this spirit, Graham Neville writes on Dorothy Sayers (*Theology*, October 1999). As a child I listened each Lent to her radio series, *The Man Born to Be King*; as a teenager I graduated to (and soon moved on from) her detective, Lord Peter Wimsey. Sayers was also a theologian in an Anglican tradition which has valued the lay contribution. She was concerned that in the post-war search for relevance, the depth of Christian theology not be lost. Her contribution encourages renewed respect for the place of lay theology in the churches.

Many Christian theologians professionally pay respect to earlier texts and projects. In this spirit, Tina Beattie writes about the Magnificat (*New Blackfriars*, October 1999). More recently, Mary's song of exultation has been studied for its revolutionary implications: kings are to be put down, and the poor to be raised. Beattie explores the place in a comprehensive account of salvation which the Early Church gave to Mary. She then turns to the thoroughly modern question, 'Can women be saved by a male Saviour?' She argues that for the early Church, the answer would be, 'Not by a male saviour in isolation' On these grounds, she would endorse the description of Mary as co-redemptrix, normally seen as an index of conservative, not to say reactionary views. But in her account, the phrase seems to have radical implications. It suggests that gender-based exclusion from power and office belongs to the fallen world and has no place in the Church.

Finally, a proper respect restores lost complexity. Nowhere is this more needed than in discussion of religion and science. Michael Roberts (*Expository Times*, October 1999) looks at the attitudes of 19th-century Anglican clergy to the literal interpretation of scripture, and in particular at their response to Darwin. He argues that before Darwin few clergy interpreted the priestly creation story literally. Indeed they were responsible for much of the geological research that demanded long processes of development.

Equally, most had little difficulty with the general theory of evolution proposed by Darwin. They disagreed, however, with Darwin's philosophical judgment that evolution could be based only on chance, and that it excluded any belief in God's providence. They also insisted that human beings had a special status within the created world. The view that Christian thinkers generally saw the conflict between science and religion as irresoluble is fictitious. It is embodied in Huxley's highly coloured account of his debate with Bishop Wilberforce. It has led scientific theorists to accept too easily the assumption that science demands a materialist philosophy based on chance, and some Christians to believe that creationism is not a novelty, but can appeal to a broad Christian tradition.■

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for 13 years effectively wrote him out of its history. There was no golden handshake, not even the alarm clock which one of the humblest of his followers could expect; his picture does not appear in the Hall of Fame at party headquarters; members of parliament were left in no doubt that public friendship with him was not a way to promotion.

It was a small revenge, but a pointed one, when the funeral oration was not given by a present or former Fianna Fail notable, not even by a member of the party, but by Des O'Malley, a renegade who had been kicked out of Fianna Fail and founded his own political movement.

Jack Lynch will be remembered as the leader who, in 1972, brought Ireland into Europe. His gentle persuasion on people like Ted Heath and Margaret Thatcher would result in later initiatives like Sunningdale, the Anglo-Irish Agreement and the hope of Good Friday. He was the first leader to go to America to persuade the people there not to send help to paramilitaries in the North. The pragmatic and active co-operation with all sides which is the core of today's Irish policy on Ulster owes its genesis to Jack Lynch.

Although poor economic results may adversely affect how history judges his terms as Taoiseach, the Irish people will always remember him as a politician who was genuinely loved, the kind of person for whom politics was public service in the sense that Plato wrote of it, his integrity and simple lifestyle cast into greater relief by what has happened since.

—Frank O'Shea

Public reproof

ON SUNDAY 24 SEPTEMBER, Anglican Primate Dr Keith Rayner called a media conference at Bishopscourt in Melbourne to make public Church disciplinary measures against the Bishop of Canberra and Goulburn, George Browning, who had confessed to adultery with a former parishioner 15 years before. Not much of a story in media terms, but Sunday is a slow news day and it got national coverage that night on the airwaves and for several days afterwards in the print media.

What made the story news at all was that the bishop had tendered his resignation over the affair. In the days that followed, an air of puzzlement permeated reports, editorials, letters to the editor—general

opinion mooted that the punishment rather outweighed the crime. There were calls to reinstate the bishop. The bishop himself wrote emotively to his flock that, under the circumstances, he had chosen to go to the cross rather than continue as their shepherd. Outrage at the tragic ending of a brilliant career was more-or-less universal. Decent, God-fearing people, committed to forgiveness and reconciliation, were appalled at such rough justice.

But the Anglican Church had not intended to crucify the bishop. The option of removing him from office had been open to the Special Tribunal. It chose instead the lesser sentence of 'monition', or reproof. Explaining the decision, Dr Rayner wrote in *The Age* that the tribunal had judged private reproof to be too slight a penalty. 'In effect it would have been no more than a slap on the wrist for what had been, at the time, a serious breach of priestly responsibility.' The tribunal opted therefore to reveal the matter in the mass media. 'The rest is now public knowledge,' according to Dr Rayner.

As so often occurs when people are at cross-purposes, public knowledge soon exceeded the facts. Conspiracy theories grew like mushrooms, forcing the Primate to write another open letter to quash rumours that sectarian enmities had conspired to unseat the bishop of Canberra and Goulburn. 'I have no doubt that the Church will review its legislation in the light of this experience,' the Primate wrote. It seems however that much of the *Sturm und Drang* evolved from the tribunal's interpretation of 'public' reproof and its decision to use the public media as a channel for applying the penalty. News editors are often tolerant towards the Church, but a routine response to organisations seeking free publicity is more likely to be 'Why don't they pay for an ad?' *The Australian*'s Monday headline, 'Bishop Quits in Sex Scandal' was followed up with an editorial a few days later censuring the bizarre spectacle of a church failing to practise what it preached.

For in spite of the promising headlines, the Fourth Estate had been sold a pup. There was simply no way to translate into the public domain the notion that a 15-year-old single act of 'adultery' was either newsworthy or worthy of 'monition'—even if a bishop did it. For the tribunal the whole exercise backfired. There was predictably a certain amount of satisfaction that Church leadership shared the foibles of 'ordinary' people. Anglicans watching the news break that Sunday night were shocked to see one of their bishops so brutally exposed to the public gaze. The sexual mores of the Church appeared rather silly when revealed in the marketplace.

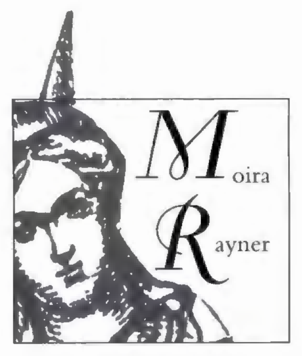
Before his resignation became public the bishop had confessed to veteran *Canberra Times* journalist Graham Downie that he should have taken legal measures to protect himself. The bishop expressed disappointment that the Church as an hierarchical institution had been unable to respond with the creative, redemptive love of God. 'In this due process, appropriate care of myself and my family hasn't been as obvious as I would like,' the bishop told Downie in an exclusive interview. T-shirts appeared in Goulburn Cathedral emblazoned with the words 'Bring back +George'. Positions were taken, polemic raged, hands were wrung, the media shrugged. No doubt the Anglican Church will blame the Fourth Estate for much of the damage to its reputation and its flock: the media (Church leadership will decide) simply cannot get the story right.

But the problem is that Church culture is no longer formative in mainstream public culture. Codes, concepts, language used in the life of the Church are often incomprehensible in the public domain. To translate its message these days for mass media consumption the Church needs a particular ministry of proclamation that uses radically different methods from those taught in theological college. In the past, 'public' in Church teaching meant 'from the pulpit'—within the fellowship of the Church. In the days when cathedrals were hubs of communication, no doubt a reproof from the pulpit would find its way into society's headlines as a matter of course. But it is highly questionable whether it is appropriate for the Church today to co-opt the mass media to administer the penalty of public reproof on one of its members.

If the Church wants a mandate to address society at large through the public media, it needs to learn the appropriate language.

—**Maggie Helass**

This month's contributors: **Paul Collins** MSC is a priest, writer and broadcaster; **Frank O'Shea** teaches maths at Marist College, Canberra; **Maggie Helass** is a journalist who has worked on assignments for the Anglican Church in the UK, South Africa and Australia.



The republic of conscience

BEFORE THE VICTORIAN electorate voted out the Kennett Government—or, more accurately, let the Bracks Labor team, giggling with delight and surprise, in—I was trying to keep the faith alive.

In July, RMIT University gave me an honorary appointment and invited me to help set up and to chair a three-day Winter School on Advocacy and Social Action. The University, the Stegley Foundation (a philanthropic trust based in Melbourne) and the Victorian Trades Hall Council co-operated in designing, funding and delivering it. It was meant to give grass-roots advocates survival skills. They needed them.

For people who have not lived in Victoria, it is difficult to understand how disheartened community groups have become, after seven years of a government dismissive of the very concept of consultation, a government which dismantled the most fundamental policy feedback mechanisms, deliberately froze out advocacy groups, tied non-government sector funding to contracts which committed the recipients to service standards and confidentiality and threatened or exacted revenge on those who spoke out publicly. The Victorian government had made an art-form of marginalising its critics as 'disloyal', 'partisan' or self-interested lobbyists.

It did not seem possible, in July, that there would be any change in the way Victorian government was conducted.

Since the election, there has been a curious phenomenon. The heat seems to have gone out of the advocacy movement. Community groups are hoping for more funding, greater access to ministers, and a sea change in the quality of their community lives. But it is now difficult to get a meeting together, to plan a telephone tree. The Federation of Community Legal Centres, long a hotbed of activism, was even said to be considering pulling their representatives from the government review of their centres 'because they had a Labor government now'.

THE NEED for independent advocacy has never been greater. A Labor government is still a government, not a protest movement, and the Victorian one is especially hog-tied, with a hostile upper house and an Opposition convinced that it was cheated of office. Surprised by joy the ALP ministers might be, but they are far from what Seamus Heaney foresaw in his 'From the Republic of Conscience', in which

> At their inauguration, public leaders
> must swear to uphold unwritten law
> and weep
> to atone for their presumption to hold
> office—

This kind of modesty is a fleeting phenomenon.

Advocacy and activism are just some of the voluntary activities that keep us involved with our community, and this feeling of connection is crucial to good government. There are no long-term gains to be had in 'special relationships' and a real danger in coming to rely on governments to speak out. Advocates of social change need, as Virginia Woolf said, both a room and a sufficiency of their own.

The RMIT Winter School on Social Action and Advocacy was a good example. Perhaps there wasn't a great deal that was novel in the presentations. We put Australian social activism in its global context—economically and geographically, because we know that activism knows no boundaries. Lawyers talked about how to structure advocacy groups and avoid liability for defamation and other intimidatory litigation. This was just before Tim Costello, anti-gambling advocate, was threatened with defamation action by a government agency that he accused of supinely complying with the desires of the (then) Premier.

We had practical demonstrations of how to manage conflict within advocacy groups; workshops on how to plan and monitor campaigns; how to use the internet, film, comedy and the media. This was just before it was revealed how entirely the media had misread the electorate and the outcome of the recent state election.

We shared information on how to fundraise and why and how we should measure social capital. This was just three months before the Federal Government's full range of attacks on voluntary community agencies, particularly women's groups, became evident, and we were reminded yet again how dangerous it is to rely on the government shilling. And we shared success stories of activist and advocacy campaigns, and there were many of them—albeit 'successful' in a range of ways. Activists with very

2001 Churchill Fellowships for overseas study

The Churchill Trust invites applications from Australians, of 18 years and over from all walks of life who wish to be considered for a Churchill Fellowship to undertake, during 2001, an overseas study project that will enhance their usefulness to the Australian community.

No prescribed qualifications are required, merit being the primary test, whether based on past achievements or demonstrated ability for future achievement.

Fellowships are awarded annually to those who have already established themselves in their calling. They are not awarded for the purpose of obtaining higher academic or formal qualifications.

Details may be obtained by sending a self addressed stamped envelope (12x24cms) to:

The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust 218 Northbourne Avenue, Braddon, ACT 2612 or from: http://sunsite.anu.edu.au/churchill_fellowships

Completed application forms and reports from three referees must be submitted by Tuesday 29 February, 2000.

different views—Gary Foley and Frank Brennan, for example—spoke, differed, but did not attack one another.

The Winter school was an effective use of public physical space—the Trades Hall Council chamber. It was an effective use of metaphysical public space, with film, electronic and interactive presentations as well as printed papers and resources. It was an extraordinary example of collaboration, without competition, for the public good. The degree of trust, co-operation and involvement of individual activists, and institutions such as RMIT University, the philanthropic community and the Union movement who jointly funded and organised it, was unprecedented. There

were many powerful egos and pet projects to be promoted, but no fights. And there came out of those three days a proposal for a permanent advocacy project, co-operatively funded by the philanthropic community and the university. We built goodwill and connections. We had invested in social capital. And we needed to: there is reconstruction to be done.

As Heaney wrote, there is an errand for those who come from the republic of conscience:

> He therefore desired me when I got home
> to consider myself a representative
> and to speak on their behalf in my own
> tongue.
>
> Their embassies, he said, were everywhere
> but operated independently
> and no ambassador would ever be
> relieved.

Moira Rayner is a lawyer and freelance journalist.

Engineering results

The Snowy Mountains Scheme and the Sydney Harbour Bridge aside, when we think about Australia, we don't normally think about engineering. Perhaps it's time to take another look.

Hong Kong's new air terminal at Chek Lap Kok—at 1.3 kilometres long, the world's largest airport building—has been built on a land reclamation site in a demanding tropical climate. It handles 35 million passengers a year. And it was a Melbourne company, Connell Wagner, that oversaw all the structural, mechanical, electrical, fire protection, communications, hydraulics and transportation engineering.

Earlier this year, another Australian company, Air International, won a $500-million contract from General Motors (GM) in the US to supply the air conditioning system in a new model of sports utility designed for the American market. Air International won the contract, against companies up to 100 times its size, by being clever, flexible, and employing the latest engineering design technology.

During the six-month tender-bidding period, the specifications for the new vehicle—including its internal shape and dimensions—changed four times. Air International was able to respond rapidly because in the past five years it has invested in a virtual laboratory equipped with the latest hardware and software that does computer-aided design, engineering and three-dimensional testing before manufacturing.

Another company, Varian Australia Ltd, took advantage of a recent advance in light detection technology to design a new spectrometer which has leapt to the forefront of the $250-million market for chemical analysers. The product has doubled Varian's market share within 15 months, and a significant sales agreement has just been concluded with the Japanese manufacturer Seiko. The company's US parent is so impressed that it is moving other R&D and product development to Australia, creating a centre for skills in this field.

These examples of Australian expertise were all honoured at the recent Engineering Excellence awards of the Victorian Division of the Institution of Engineers, Australia. They were three of many success stories in a glittering night at Melbourne's Crown Casino. If the engineers don't laud their own achievements, who else in Australia will do it?

The engineers have much to be proud of. Take the Australian Concept Car: this is a tangible demonstration of the automotive skills of 130 Australian companies in a highly competitive industry which has won the nation technological respect, and between $500 million and $1 billion of new export business. The car has a revolutionary new lightweight carbon fibre body frame, lights and wipers which turn on automatically when required, voice activation of 40 interior functions, and a supercharged six-cylinder orbital engine.

Bonlac's new milk factory at Darnum in West Gippsland recycles almost everything bar the aroma of the dairy shed. For example, all the process water it uses is extracted from the milk it turns into powder. Surplus milk solids are used for stock feed or compost, the fat for tallow. No solid or liquid waste is discharged into the environment outside of the 270-hectare property. It's a working example of a growing synthesis between the environment and engineering.

Why don't we know these things? Partly because engineers are poor salesmen, and partly because the media is badly informed. In a recent article in the Australian media journal, *The Walkley Magazine*, CSIRO public relations chief Julian Cribb, a former science journalist with *The Australian*, points to five surveys in the past eight years that have placed science, technology, health and the environment at the head of what Australians want to read, 'yet news editors apparently disagree. News coverage of sport continues to overshadow reporting of science by a ratio of nearly 100 to one.'

The consequences, he predicts, are dire. 'Human knowledge is doubling every 10 years,' he writes. 'The winners in the coming century will be those societies most able to discover, develop, capture and profitably trade in new knowledge. The losers will be those who fail to do so. Their fate will be to fall under the economic suzerainty of the others.'

Tim Thwaites is a freelance science writer.

Wearing handcuffs as jewellery

While Australia was musing over the antics of its commentator–entertainers, Laws and Jones, ***Anthony Ham*** *recalled a visit to Robert Fisk, a journalist from another school altogether.*

THE FIRST TIME I spoke to Robert Fisk, I was in Damascus and he was at his Beirut home, a short distance away across the mountains. After weeks of trying to pin him down, there he was, finally, on the other end of the phone, and I wasn't letting go. When would it be possible to meet? I asked.

'Next Tuesday will be fine.' He paused. 'Of course, next Tuesday I could be anywhere from Algeria to Afghanistan. If I'm not here, ring my editor at *The Independent*; she'll know where to find me.'

For years I had been an admirer of this respected Middle East correspondent. As an undergraduate struggling with the minefield of vested interests and fiercely defended subjectivities that is Middle Eastern politics, I admired his ruthlessly fair-minded approach, meticulous attention to detail, and placement of ordinary people with names at the centre of every story. His refusal to operate within the Allied 'pool' system of journalism during the Gulf War singled him out as a truly independent voice, enabling him to circumvent the Allied war machine's propaganda and image manipulation. And while those of his friends and colleagues who had not been taken hostage in Beirut were moving on to report from safer capitals, Robert Fisk stayed because he believed the world should know what was happening to the people of Beirut.

Such credentials are rare in modern journalism. If there was any possibility of meeting him, I knew I must take it. As much as I admired his work, however, I drew the line at the prospect of following him to Kabul. I took my chance, and headed across the border in a battered Valiant Charger bound for Beirut.

For the uninitiated like myself, Lebanon is a bewildering array of images and associations.

The Beka'a Valley, a wide smooth flatland separating the mountains of Lebanon from the hills of Syria, saw some of the heaviest fighting of the war

in Lebanon, and continues to see sporadic outbreaks of violence. It is also where many Western hostages were held. It flashed past my window at dizzying speed.

Further in towards Beirut, along the steeply winding roads of central Lebanon, there was barely a structure not showing signs of war. Many existed only as battered walls with the tell-tale signs of bullet and shell-holes framed charcoal black. Graceful and no doubt once very exclusive hillside villas were now as uninhabitable as the humble stone bungalows which stood close by.

In Bhamdoun, I was reminded of Robert Fisk's report during the Israeli siege of Beirut in June–July 1982. He described how 'Syrian transport lorries had been crushed on the pavements, some gutted, others abandoned even as their occupants were loading blankets and supplies in a vain attempt to retreat in good order'. In September 1983, he returned with the soon-to-be-kidnapped Terry Anderson, and reported that:

> Much of it was in ruins and at least six fires were burning out of control. It was filled with gaunt young men, Palestinian guerrillas from a PLO faction opposing Arafat, Shi'a militiamen with green headbands, Lebanese Communist party gunmen. They were dirty, exultant, high on danger, laughing when artillery rounds crashed into the roofs of houses. With militia banners above them, the gunmen had set up checkpoints on the broken streets. They lounged on the smashed pavements, many of them smoking large Cuban cigars. 'This was a great victory,' one of them said, leaping to his feet and pointing excitedly through the heat haze to the distant outline of Beirut below us. 'We shall be in Beirut in two days.'

When I passed through, an advertising billboard on the outskirts of town for a mobile phone company read 'The United Callers of Lebanon'.

In nearby Aley and further afield, thousands of civilian lives were lost as armies of Israelis, Druze, Palestinians, Syrians, Christian Phalangists, and Lebanese Shi'a, all fought to the death with 'liberation' on their lips. In the words of Fisk, '[i]f ever ignorant armies clashed by night, they did so on this mountain ridge'.

Beirut itself was no less confronting, its contradictions no less breathtaking. Whole avenues of once-elegant buildings remained only as facades riddled with bullet holes. Entire suburbs had been shattered and the wind blew diesel fumes through the caverns left behind. Above them towered gleaming, newly built skyscrapers. On the waterfront Corniche promenade, women in miniskirts and on roller blades flirted with men in convertible black BMWs, all in full view of both the Hard Rock Café and a multitude of typically stern posters of the late Ayatollah Khomeini. And, in the neglected southern suburbs of the city, the squalor of the Sabra and Chatila Palestinian refugee camps stood in sharp and shameful contrast to the shiny new sports stadium on the camps' perimeter.

By the time I met Robert Fisk, Beirut had unsettled me profoundly. Fisk strode into the hotel foyer in which we had arranged to meet. He was smoking his pipe, and, as he greeted me warmly, I began to feel more secure. After all, this man is a survivor, I thought. It couldn't hurt to be seen with him.

As we walked along to his apartment, the man who has survived the bombs, sieges, and hostage-taking of Beirut said, with no apparent sense of irony, that he feared one day soon he'd be finished off by one of the large earth-movers digging up the street in front of his building.

SAFELY IN HIS APARTMENT overlooking the Corniche, Fisk proved to be a highly accessible, not to mention generous and urbane host. In the short time we spent together, he fielded a radio interview from Europe and spoke about the prospects for peace in Northern Ireland with a UN commander based in southern Lebanon. He had just flown in from Belfast and was jetting off to sunny Kosovo the following day, but had still made time to see me. He told me that when he was starting out as a journalist some of the big names at the time were too arrogant to talk with him. He promised himself that he would always make time where possible.

Photographs taken in Beirut by Anthony Ham.

On one occasion, Fisk agreed to meet a young Australian Lebanese man who had written asking to speak with him. When they met, Fisk asked the young man what it was that he wished to speak about. Was it the current state of Middle East peace? Or the process of reconstructing Lebanon? Neither. The young man had read Fisk's seminal account of the Lebanese War, *Pity the Nation*, and simply wanted to sit on the balcony overlooking the Corniche, the same balcony where Fisk had sheltered as the shells rained down upon the city. Fisk was happy to oblige and went about his work while the man soaked up his surroundings.

In between telling me the restaurants where I absolutely must eat, trying to arrange for me to attend a UN wreath-laying ceremony in southern Lebanon the next day, and expressing heartfelt

concern for the fragility of Lebanon's reconstruction, he spoke engagingly of his years as a journalist.

His recounting was as entertaining as it was sobering. From his early years writing a gossip column for a northern English newspaper in which he spent his time 'chasing vicars around the countryside', he moved to reporting from the streets of Belfast, before Beirut beckoned in 1975. He has been there ever since.

On the waterfront Corniche promenade, women in miniskirts and on roller blades flirted with men in convertible black BMWs, all in full view of both the Hard Rock Café and a multitude of typically stern posters of the late Ayatollah Khomeini.

He spoke of his job as a passion, a calling, one which required a particular mind-set to live with the danger 24 hours a day. His excitement, the adrenalin rush he gets from reporting in war zones, was obvious. He learned his Arabic by spending three months in a burnt-out building in southern Lebanon with Hezbollah fighters returning each evening from raids against Israeli and other enemy positions. Beirut may be quieter now, the dangers of earth-movers notwithstanding, but parts of Lebanon remain highly volatile, as do many of the other places from where Fisk files his reports.

Fisk has been the unwelcome witness to some of this century's most disturbing crimes, and countless individual human tragedies that have resulted. In the midst of the massacres in Sabra and Chatila, he wrote:

> They were everywhere, in the road, in laneways, in back yards and broken rooms, beneath crumpled masonry and across the garbage tips. The murderers—the Christian militiamen whom Israel had let into the camps to 'flush out terrorists'—had only just left. In some cases, the blood was still wet on the ground. When we had seen a hundred bodies, we stopped counting. Down every alleyway, there were corpses—women, young men, babies and grandparents—lying together in lazy and terrible profusion where they had been knifed or machine-gunned to death. Each corridor through the rubble produced more bodies. The patients at a Palestinian hospital had disappeared after gunmen ordered the doctors to leave. Everywhere, we found signs of hastily dug mass graves. Perhaps a thousand people were butchered; probably half that number again.

And yet, within this context of danger and the worst humanity has to offer, the Robert Fisk I found was not the cynical, world-weary correspondent, the 'danger junkie' that I expected. Instead, he astounded me with his affability, his relentless pursuit of justice, his humanity.

He spoke of asylum cases around the world with which he assists, using his skills in the service of people seeking protection from persecution. He has also instigated campaigns to raise money for the children of Iraq who suffer from malnutrition, disease, and skyrocketing mortality rates.

Where other correspondents describe events and trends, in the process merging individual people into an undifferentiated mass, articles by Fisk tell the story of the great events by identifying their effects upon ordinary, named individuals. It is easier to turn away and do nothing when hundreds of anonymous people are being killed than it is when confronted with a name, with an individual face.

PERHAPS MOST REMARKABLE of all in this era of globalisation and instantaneous international communications, Fisk, wherever possible, has his stories translated and sent to the people described. Where they are illiterate, the story is often read to them. Too often, reporters, however well-meaning, move on to the next story without ever allowing the subjects of their stories to comment on the way they have been represented, to own their stories. When I expressed surprise at Fisk's practice, he shrugged it off. Clearly he thought it an integral part of his job.

This is responsible journalism. Alongside it, much that currently masquerades as journalism is exposed as little more than crude populism which mistakes on-the-spot reporting for informed analysis.

Journalists like Fisk shame sensationalist and celebrity journalism—Richard Carleton's escapades in East Timor during the referendum process and Ellen Fanning's misguided interventions on behalf of a Chinese asylum seeker recently removed from Australia being two examples among many.

We could do with more journalists like Fisk. Journalists who are committed not just to the story, but to the people behind the story. Who provide informed counterpoint to prevailing wisdom, who are aware of the power of words and images. And who can see their profession's propensity for what Fisk describes as the 'careless depreciation of meaning'.

From Robert Fisk's balcony overlooking the Mediterranean, I watched the Shi'a families drawn on to the Corniche by the late afternoon breeze. With the palm trees swaying, it was easy to be deceived into seeing the scene as idyllic.

Fisk, however, was ever-vigilant. He spoke critically about much of Western public opinion, its easy acceptance of black-and-whites, its child-like attention span, and its support for military intervention based on ignorance. He has suffered vilification for reporting the crimes of *all* sides in Lebanon, and in conflicts from Algeria to Afghanistan. 'Clearly some people don't want to know the truth, and instead want to wear handcuffs as jewellery.' ■

Anthony Ham is a Melbourne-based writer specialising in the culture and politics of the Middle East.

THE WORLD

JIM DAVIDSON

South Africa: time for the Griqua prayer

WHEN THE SOUTH African parliament begins a new session in Cape Town, there is considerable pomp and ceremony. After the arrival by motorcade, the president advances from his limousine to the podium saluted by a cannon fired on Signal Hill; then, standing between the lordly pair of columns where P.W. Botha once reviewed the same regiments, he raises his hand to his heart as the band strikes up the national anthem. Sweet and heavy it rolls, the *Nkosi Sikelele* that has come to signify the aspirations of a third of Africa; but that is only half of it. For then the new anthem modulates into *Die Stem*, the old Afrikaner hymn, its up-beat end providing a perfect symmetry.

South Africa is full of such hard-won compromises. This can be seen in the flag, in the existence of 11 official languages, and no doubt will again be evident in the new coat of arms now in preparation. It is a country where tolerance has not come easy, and where formality is functional, an agreed way of negotiating public space. Men are still often addressed as 'Mr', African women referred to as 'ladies'. Respect has to be made evident, a signalling by whites that the new dispensation is accepted. The changes have nonetheless been seismic, and the harmonisation propounded in state symbolism—or the constitution—can sometimes seem but an aspiration.

This has become uncomfortably clear in Cape Town. Traditionally the city—having relatively few blacks, though many Coloureds—could pride itself on its liberalism, and on the fact that in the old Cape Colony people from these groups might qualify for the vote: apartheid could be represented as an imposition from the north, by *backveld* Nationalist MPs who returned each year to the Mother City to pass further repugnant laws. But history is full of ironies, and the one Cape Town has collected is that the Western Cape, rather than being the most advanced province, is now the only one to be ruled by a (New) Nationalist-dominated government. Even more surprisingly, it is kept in place by the vote of the Coloureds—those same people whom the old Nats did all they could to jettison, despite ties of blood and language. Now their vote keeps in place the only rump of the old regime, while the Afrikaans they are once again prepared to speak in public is reliant on them for its undoubted strength in the region.

Yet Cape Town is not a happy place. The old boast that it is safer than brash, exciting Johannesburg is no longer true: the Western Cape rates for murder and housebreaking exceed those for Gauteng (the Johannesburg–Pretoria region), while the violence associated with taxi wars and with PAGAD (the Muslim organisation which began as People Against Gangsters and Drugs) still persists. Coloured distrust of blacks remains strong, though more are now prepared to vote for the ANC; at the same time, although Cape Town now has an articulate, magisterial black woman as mayor, the old divisions remain. White people come down from Johannesburg and ask, where are the black brothers in the restaurants? The recent festival, 'One City, Many Cultures', unwittingly demonstrated its second proposition more convincingly than the first. Whites largely stayed away from the carnival on the Parade, while few blacks (and few people, period) came to the discussions of contemporary issues. For those who

did, there was quite a lot of self-congratulation to be heard along the lines that at last people were talking to each other across traditional barriers.

Coloureds and blacks are still often simply not seen by hegemonic whites. In the countryside, the lot of the Coloured peasantry has not improved; wine farmers can prevent them from attending election meetings. Meanwhile the resort suburb of Hout Bay, just over the mountain, still playfully calls itself a republic (detached from all the country's problems) and carries on as if the Coloured fishermen and the relatively new black squatters did not comprise half of its population. Last New Year's Eve, when millionaire Sol Kerzner put on a fireworks display, the blacks responded by firing AK47s into the air.

Many of those blacks would be Christian: although you and I might scarcely recognise some of the varieties of the faith, fully 77 per cent of South Africa's population claims allegiance. It is one of the things that persistently gives the country its old-fashioned feel. When the town of Mooi River lost its only textile factory recently, anxious townsfolk held prayer meetings to call for divine intervention to secure employment. Conversely, when the historical museum in Grahamstown discovered with relief that it was not to be closed after all, the whole staff processed from room to room behind nine clergymen. But then there was also the thief who, when asked by his tied-up victims whether he went to church, told them, 'Yes. But I don't want to talk about that now.'

If the country's religion—complete with the rise of charismatics—carries shades of the Deep South, then the roads are the province of cowboys. For South African drivers, double lines are a waste of paint, speed limits an interesting suggestion. Nothing will make them slow down; rather, they tailgate, expecting you to pull over to the emergency lane—which has a nasty habit of withering away from time to time or else being already occupied by blacks or joggers. Small wonder then that 9000 die every year on the roads, particularly as traffic police are few and far between. Kombie vans serving as (black) taxis figure prominently in accidents, as do—famously, now—buses. At the time of the disaster which killed 27 British tourists, there was a 12-day stretch in September which saw 76 people killed and a further 234 injured in bus accidents. Mechanical failure (i.e. poor maintenance) has been given as the main cause.

It was a shock to see an ad on television enjoining the public to report copper-wire theft direct to Telkom rather than to the police, but corporations as well as everybody else in South Africa have to take crime into their calculations. (I speak as somebody who has been mugged, burgled, had washing taken from the line, glasses stolen in a library, and encountered an intruder in the house.) Today we hear more about crime because in the old days, 80 per cent of the police used to be stationed in white areas; suppression of violence was so built into official reckoning that the current ID booklet still contains provision for the holder to own five firearms. But now, with police reallocation, crime appears everywhere and can affect anyone. Foreign diplomats have been shot dead; the Canadian High Commissioner, in Cape Town for the opening of parliament, was assaulted in his hotel. One ANC MP recently sustained six bullet wounds in a battle with car hijackers; muggings have occurred even at police headquarters in Pretoria. No-one is safe. Murders run to 25,000 a year. Rape has become so endemic in Cape Town that its Archbishop calls it 'Rape Town'; nationally, on current figures a woman is raped every 83 seconds. The problem is that the crime feeds off traditional male attitudes: a recent survey of boys in Gauteng found that only one in ten opposed sexual violence. In that province alone, once every six days a woman is murdered by her male partner. And most rapists are either married or have a steady girlfriend.

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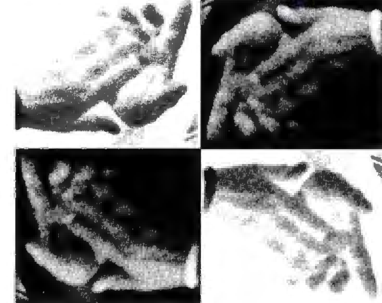


Crime has continued to rise, most notably robberies and burglaries. This led the leader of the Pan African Congress to suggest that judicial mutilation, Islamic style, should be imposed as a deterrent. But the legal system itself is under strain: even when offences are successfully followed up with prosecutions, criminals can go free because inexperienced prosecutors are out of their depth. Other prisoners, no doubt emboldened by truly appalling jail conditions, simply escape—often by squaring off police. Meanwhile the South African Police Services have been leached and demoralised by massive retirements, the morale of new recruits—let alone the old guard—further battered by police mortality rates. This year, 105 police were murdered in the six months to June 30. Equipment, including vans, is often scarce; at least one police station in Cape Town is now protected by a private security firm. Small wonder then that justice is also being privatised. Recently a man on a murder charge had his bail paid, only to find that his liberators were members of the enraged community, who promptly convened a people's court, 'tried' him, then killed him by necklacing. Vigilante groups have increased by leaps and bounds.

Then there is corruption. Army officers have supplied classified information to crime syndicates; not long ago the anti-corruption unit was investigating 3000 cases in the police force. In government departments, lack of paper work has often been deliberate, shielding misappropriation of funds; in addition, there have been a large number of 'ghost' employees drawing salaries. Recently the Eastern Cape education department insisted that all people on its books come and collect their salaries personally—'We just want to see you.'

And while the government has been justly proud of its drive to build basic housing for the poor, much of the effectiveness of the scheme has been

Nelson Mandela sings and claps with Thabo Mbeki following Mbeki's acceptance speech in parliament, 14 June 1999, after being elected as Mandela's successor. (Photo: Associated Press AP)

eroded by shonky deals and shortchanging by contractors. In March, more than half of the 600,000 dwellings then built were declared by the housing minister to be 'substandard'. Moreover, fraud—that is, understating income or assets—was suspected in as many as 90 per cent of the applications.

With some justice, Thabo Mbeki blames this alarming erosion of public morality on apartheid: when the prevailing system was 'morally and politically illegitimate', people decided to set their 'own norms of social behaviour'. So 30 per cent of all companies—thanks to white buccaneering—are still unregistered for tax purposes. The legacy can also be seen in the persistence of black non-payment of council rates, sometimes rising to as high as one-half of moneys due. What began as a form of resistance has now become habitual.

This, combined with a tardiness of provincial governments to pay their bills, has meant that about a third of the country's municipalities are in serious financial trouble. At a time when they can scarcely afford to pay their town clerks or staff, further responsibilities are being imposed upon them—water supplies, sanitation systems, housing schemes and electrical installations, which they cannot afford to maintain. At the same time, the government has—understandably—decided to prioritise the provision of basic services in poorer areas. Existing services elsewhere, now open to all, were often originally designed only for the white sliver of the population. But since wage bills consume just over half of the national budget (after interest payments), there is not enough money to run them properly as well, and precious little to maintain infrastructure in general. In the Eastern Cape, Public Works receives only 4.5 per cent of the budget, and that includes salaries.

The results can be seen everywhere. That people now have to take their own linen to public hospitals is the least of it. The Chris Hani Baragwanath in Gauteng had, at mid-year, a shortage of 100 doctors and over 2000 other staff, since budgetary constraints had imposed a freeze; 24-hour

service was removed, and there was talk of closing the ante-natal clinic, which would mean hundreds of infant deaths. In February, the ANC in the Free State formally apologised to the nation for deaths which might have occurred as a result of the collapse of the provincial health system, a move prompted by children dying in a country town from lack of medicine. Elsewhere there are horror stories of bodies in mortuaries that have lain there for as long as four years.

Schools present a comparable picture. There are frequent reports of their being closed because water or electricity is no longer being supplied by municipalities, annoyed with education departments for not paying their bills. (Half of the country's schools don't have electricity, anyway.) Desk and textbook shortages are common, and absenteeism among teachers rife. Recently the Education Minister, Kader Asmal, said there was a public perception that teachers—one-third of whom are not properly qualified—are not worth their money. The kids have quite often drawn the same conclusion: at least a couple of school principals have been badly beaten up by their pupils this year. In a climate of despair, schools are trashed. Often: one in East London was attacked nearly 30 times in just over a year. But then another, in Port Elizabeth, simply disappeared: neighbouring squatters literally took it apart one night and spirited the materials away.

By mid-September Thabo Mbeki had been president for 100 days. Already, instead of Mandela's benign avuncularity, a more managerial style had become evident. A foretaste of what lay in store occurred in April, when Mbeki announced he was sacking two ANC provincial premiers. Since then, he has built up the Office of the Presidency to the point where its staff now numbers more than 300. The declared aim has been to co-ordinate policy across the ministries, given the need to do something about the country's long collapse into crisis. Indeed a new sense of purpose is already apparent, particularly in the fight against crime. But with both a deputy president and a cabinet minister with no other duties than to do his bidding, the president's personal control of the government has become markedly more pronounced. Mbeki now appoints the directors-general, the key public servants; the role of parliament, where the ANC stands just a little short of a two-thirds majority, has also been eclipsed, if not diminished. The truculent Tony Leon and the Democratic Party, the official opposition, soon found that the government would prefer to grant the chairmanship of a key parliamentary committee to the conservative loose cannon Louis Luyt. Meanwhile, for the first three months of the new session, parliament all but atrophied, passing only two new bills; Mbeki—who attends few debates—prefers less legislation and more action by the executive, with the responsible minister empowered to issue proclamations. There has been some concern expressed about these developments, particularly as Mbeki has defended his men in dubious circumstances, sought to sanitise the image of the ANC as presented in the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and been complicit in cooping up the highly effective Heath anti-corruption unit in its base of operations, the remote city of East London. The relative ineffectiveness of the provincial governments, shortly to be weakened further by the creation of megacity units, means there is now no counterweight to this surge of centralised authority. Mbeki, declared one commentator, 'sits at the centre of a web of power not experienced in this country since the paranoid heyday of apartheid'.

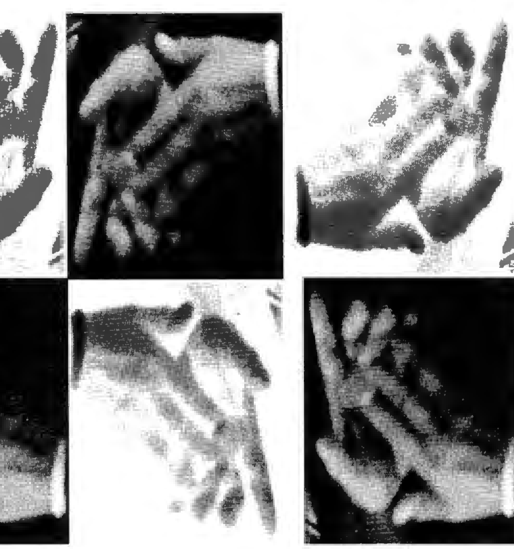
The challenges ahead will tax his considerable skills to the utmost. Mbeki has been able to tame Buthelezi, so there is now no talk of Zulu secessionism; and he has also won over most Afrikaners, to the degree that he drew the sneer from the right-wing leader Constand Viljoen that he has 'a charming bedside manner'. But the central task of government seems terribly like trying to square the circle.

First there is the crying need for transformation, delivery and empowerment. The buppies (the emerging black professional class) are doing well—very well sometimes, to judge by the reports of rorts that periodically hit the press. Affirmative action in its various forms, regarded by some whites as 'apartheid in reverse', is partly responsible for the impressive growth rate of black companies listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. But elsewhere transformation proceeds bumpily—even allowing for some necessary gradualism. In the country as a whole, 89 per cent of senior management remains white and male. The ratio among top civil servants is much better, as would be expected, but in the police, despite the retirements, middle and top ranks still have seven whites to every three blacks. In the army the racial divide is still often replicated by that between officers and other ranks: at Tempe army base in the traditionally conservative Free State, the only blacks seen in the officers' mess are waiters. The belts of their superiors are still emblazoned in the old South African colours.

Meanwhile the South African Police Services have been leached and demoralised by massive retirements, the morale of new recruits—let alone the old guard—further battered by police mortality rates. This year, 105 police were murdered in the six months to June 30. Equipment, including vans, is often scarce; at least one police station in Cape Town is now protected by a private security firm.

Tempe was the place where a disturbed black soldier pushed other Africans out of the way as he took aim and killed seven whites. For there is still a good deal of anger beneath the surface: on a lesser scale it erupted again at the soldier's funeral. This may partly explain the brutal nature of much South African crime, where, in the words of the new police commissioner, 'People no longer steal. They steal and kill.' And it is certainly evident in farm attacks—usually on elderly whites. These seem to come in waves, and may be in part fuelled by the persistent mistreatment and even assault of black workers that still occurs. Slowness in implementing land reform is probably also a factor.

Mbeki often speaks with a note of urgency, as though there is not much time to put things right. This may be correct, for while accelerated transformation may satisfy the buppies, they at most comprise only 10 per cent of the population; the major problem remains delivery to the masses. Poverty remains endemic. After Brazil and Guatemala, South Africa has the world's most unequal distribution of income: almost half of South Africans (95 per cent of them blacks) live in poverty. As a consequence, one quarter of all South African children between six months and six years of age suffer from some form of malnutrition. Spending by blacks may be increasing, but it still stands at only 14 per cent of that of white households, and in some rural areas has dropped back sharply. In the Eastern Cape, the squeeze has been put on disability grants, since money is short. Meanwhile child maintenance grants have been reduced, as a preliminary to their being eliminated.



Little is heard now from the government of the Reconstruction and Development Plan, except when Mbeki, taking up Mandela's catch-cry, calls for 'an RDP of the soul'. Instead, the strategy now is GEAR—growth, employment and redistribution. Although Mbeki attacks the Democratic Party for being proponents of a 'soulless secular theology'—as indeed they are—the government itself has adopted much of the mantra of economic rationalism. Some of this was essential: as a result of its isolation and paying blacks poor wages, the South African economy was distinctly uncompetitive. But downsizing continues—with fresh announcements in the mining industry even after the recovery of the gold price—and the expectation is that, in addition to the half million jobs that have vanished since 1994, even more will have gone by 2005. On the other hand, the rand is relatively stable, inflation the lowest it has been for 31 years, and South Africa has finally signed a free trade agreement with the European Union. Growth next year is expected to be 3.7 per cent. Moreover, great hopes are pinned on the rapidly expanding tourist industry—but for all the hyperventilation, most museums remain closed on Sundays.

There are those who say that redistribution should figure higher in the government's priorities, not come last as it seems to do in GEAR. Recently there have been serious public service strikes, and elements in the trade union organisation COSATU and the South African Communist party—partners in the government with the ANC—have been unhappy about the general direction of policy. A projected summit to discuss these matters keeps getting postponed, while some SACP members who are cabinet ministers are involved in selling off state assets. Such privatisation may be an effective form of black empowerment, but the result might be, as one observer put it, 'a capitalism that will kick the SACP out of business'.

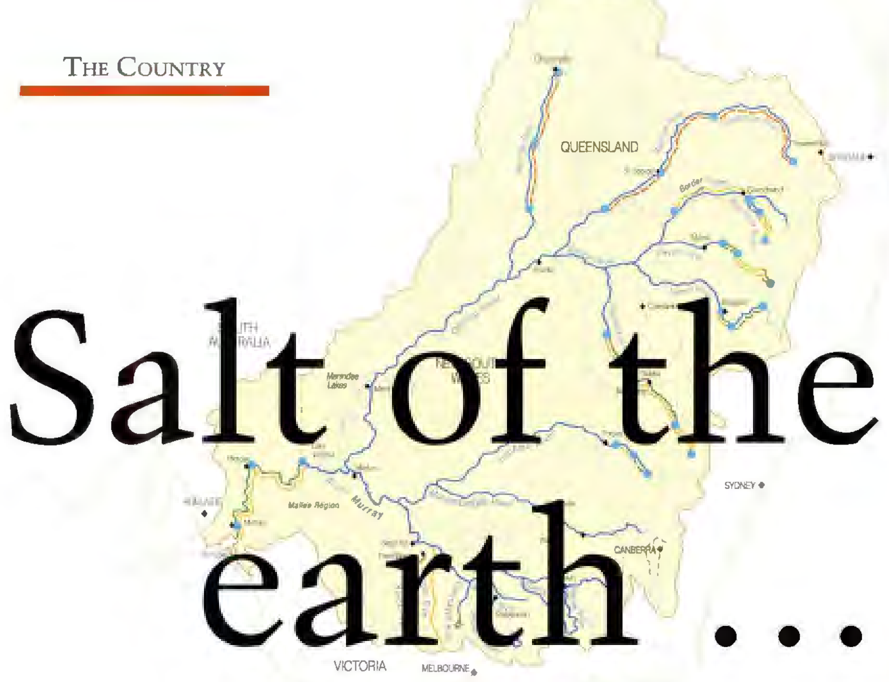
The most unpredictable element, and one which could yet skew South African politics, is the alarming growth of AIDS in the country. More than 17 per cent of the population are said to be HIV positive, as are one-third of the pregnant women turning up at ante-natal clinics in KwaZulu-Natal.

Although both Mandela, and even more Mbeki, have spoken up about the seriousness of the epidemic, traditional attitudes and practices remain entrenched. One reason the disease has spread so fast is the penchant for dry sex, sometimes using ash, which causes abrasions; another is the great shame associated with it, so that those who announce their condition to increase public awareness run the risk of being killed for their pains. Meanwhile the epidemic fuels the rape of young girls, since there is a pathetic belief in the 'virgin cure'. Already half of the patients in Durban's King Edward VII hospital are said to be HIV positive, as are an increasing number of the 180,000 new cases of TB in South Africa each year. The two conditions are rapidly becoming inseparable. But government attempts to cope with the crisis have so far been lamentable. The Department of Health began distributing condoms, *stapled* to their packets; and, because of the cost, has generally refused to distribute AZT. Already the country faces a situation where 20 per cent of the workforce may be HIV positive by 2005, while the number of orphans will also rise dramatically, many of them in desperation probably turning to crime. 'Get out of Africa!' urges a prominent AIDS activist at dinner parties. For a variety of reasons, many whites already have.

BRAVELY, IN HIS FIRST address to parliament after becoming president, Mbeki made no explicit reference to apartheid; for as Winnie Madikizela-Mandela has put it, 'The time for blaming our past is over.' As the earlier prime minister Jan Smuts would have sighed—when also confronting intractable problems—'It's time for the Griqua prayer.' He was referring to an old chief who got down on his knees and said, 'Lord, save thy people ... But this is no work for children. It is not enough this time to send Thy Son ... Lord, Thou must come Thyself.' Indeed.

But the country's material difficulties, the legacies of apartheid, together with its basic multicultural complexities, can also be taken by Desmond Tutu to mean that South Africa's peaceful transition might become a force for hope in a divided world: 'God does have a sense of humour. Who in their right mind could ever have imagined South Africa to be an example of anything but awfulness; of how not to order a nation's race relations and its governance? We South Africans were the unlikeliest lot, and that is precisely why God has chosen us.' Yet something else remains to be said. It is this. If South Africa does not succeed, then the whole human experiment might have to be considered a failure. ■

Jim Davidson, who teaches a course at Victoria University of Technology on the Rise and Fall of Apartheid, has just returned from a year spent in South Africa.



Salt of the earth ...

... and it is rising fast. ***Margaret Simons*** *investigates the environmental fragility of Australia's breadbasket, the Murray–Darling Basin.*

IN JUNE NEXT YEAR a report will land on the desks of Australia's state and federal agriculture ministers. The thud it makes will likely rock us all.

The report will be written by some of the best scientists in the country, employed by that unique instrument of pragmatic environmentalism, the Murray–Darling Basin Commission. It will present our farmers with what will be, ironically, the biggest challenge since the pioneers crossed the Great Dividing Range and were faced with a landscape full of stubborn, thirsty trees and shrubs that had to be cleared to allow crops and communities to grow.

The report will likely recommend a comprehensive change to the way we use the land, particularly in those areas previously most profitable.

Put bluntly, the Commission's draft salinity management strategy is likely to recommend measures designed to encourage—and perhaps even force—much of the central west of New South Wales and northern Victoria, presently big earners in sheep, wheat and dairying, to be up to 80 per cent planted with trees and woody shrubs.

The recommendation will come with some force behind it. Its claim, quite simply, is that any less drastic action will see much of the breadbasket area of Australia become poisonous to humans and crops. And yet nobody really knows whether it will be possible to bring about the huge changes to land use required. Even if it is possible, how is it to be done without sending thousands of communities—and possibly the country with them—broke?

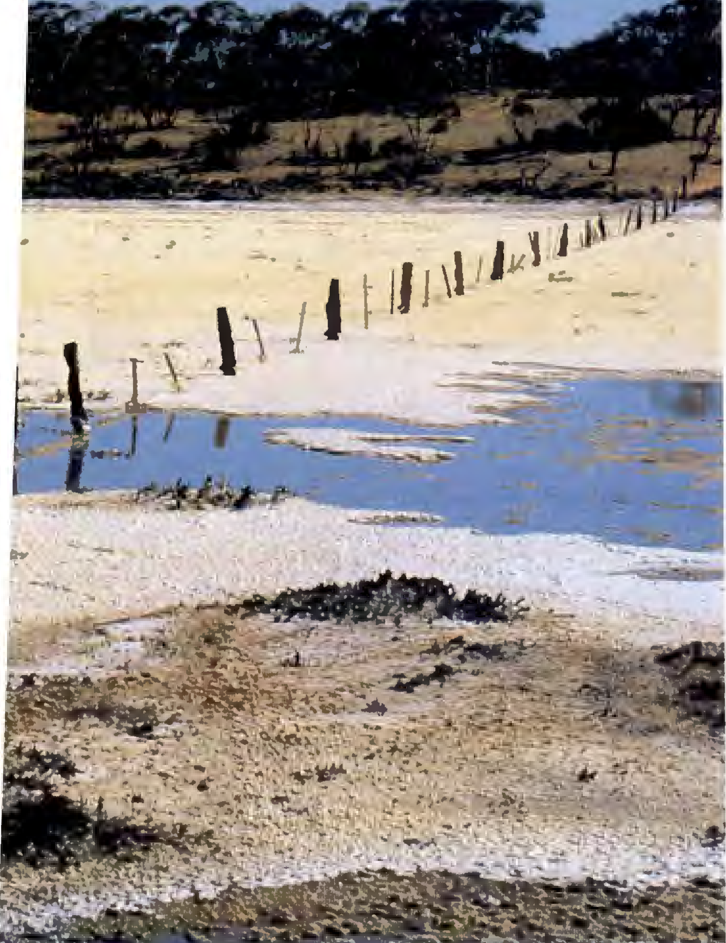
The Murray–Darling Basin Commission started the softening-up process for next year's hard task in October when it released a Salinity Audit reassessing the extent of the salinity problem in the basin, and the effectiveness of strategies presently in place. As well, the Commission launched a document co-authored with the CSIRO examining the effectiveness—or rather, the lack of effectiveness—of current farming systems in controlling salinity.

Like all such documents, these had been through the spin-doctors, and the negative messages were carefully interwoven with upbeat statements about our ability to handle the problem. But once past the executive summary and the press release, the message was surely one of the hardest ever delivered by a statutory body in the history of Australia.

The documents said that in spite of intense effort and investment over the last ten years, all that had been bought was a 20-year reprieve for the Murray River. Salinity in many of the river valleys of the system was at disastrous levels and likely to get worse quickly. Water in many rivers was expected to be undrinkable within 20 years. The cotton industry faced ruin by 2020. Likewise, cash crops like citrus and grapes in many areas. Even with drastic change to land use, the problem could be expected to get worse for some centuries because of the cumulative effect of 200 years of land clearing.

This is a problem not only for farmers and their communities. The Murray–Darling Basin produces 41 per cent of the nation's agricultural wealth. As a nation still dependent on agriculture (and much of the rest of agricultural Australia is also facing salinity problems) we are talking about the economic future of the nation.

One of the tragedies of the ongoing battle for salinity control is that the story of the fight so far,



largely unreported by city-based media, is one of the most impressive examples of community-based action and government co-operation in Australia's history. And yet it clearly hasn't been enough.

The Murray–Darling Basin Commission is itself an immense achievement, being financed and supported by state and federal government, and largely successful in constructively juggling the competing interests of politically opposed governments.

But that is just the macro level. At catchments and farm level, individual landholders, local governments and communities have been involved in an extraordinarily co-ordinated process of changing cropping and tilling methods, tree-planting and farm and catchment management—all in an attempt to control salinity. It is estimated that almost 70 per cent of farmers are involved in some way with Landcare groups, making farmers Australia's most environmentally active group. This has been done at a time when the agricultural sector is struggling. There is plenty that is inspiring about the fight against salinity.

For the last ten years the Commission has administered a Salinity and Drainage strategy with the aim of improving water quality in the River Murray against a background trend of increased salinity, while allowing irrigators up river to continue putting salty water into the river. All this has been balanced by a system of 'salinity credits'—or licences to pollute—in which irrigators buy the right to dispose of saline drainage by paying for salinity mitigation works further downstream. These initiatives have been required to reduce salinity by at least twice as much as the disposal 'rights' increases it.

One of the biggest examples was the Woolpunda Groundwater Interception scheme, a massive engineering works near Waikerie in the Riverland of South Australia, financed by three state governments, in which the landscape was literally plumbed. Bores were dug and pumps fitted along the riverbank to intercept ancient deep flows of saline groundwater to the River Murray. This water was then pumped to a big evaporation basin kilometres away on the plain. The interception of this natural saline flow offsets the flows of saline drainage from irrigation further upstream. There have been many other smaller schemes.

All these initiatives have worked, to different extents in different areas, but the hard message is that they are nowhere near enough. Buried towards the end of the recently released Commission documents comes the bald statement: 'Despite major investment in the development of improved farming systems and in catchment management programs, for some rainfall zones there are currently no farming systems capable of controlling salinity. The scale of land use change needed ... is beyond current resources.' In other words, what is needed is a complete recasting of the relationship between money, land and water.

SALINITY IS CAUSED by rising groundwater. The centre of Australia is naturally salty, but before settlement most of the salt was locked away underground. Native vegetation used almost all the rainfall, meaning that very little water seeped through. With clearing, an imbalance was created. More rainfall seeped through

to the groundwater, which began to rise; bringing with it dissolved salts. In many areas, groundwater is as salty or saltier than the sea. When it comes within two metres of the soil surface, crops and vegetation begin to suffer. This is long before the dramatic 'salt scalding' so visible in areas of the Australian bush and so dramatically represented in photographs. There are many towns in inland Australia where pub cellars

The evidence is increasingly hard to ignore: photos of country and town salinity provided by the Murray–Darling Basin Commission.

One of the tragedies of the ongoing battle for salinity control is that the story of the fight so far, largely unreported by city-based media, is one of the most impressive examples of community-based action and government co-operation in Australia's history. And yet it clearly hasn't been enough.

are flooded with groundwater, where mechanics have to pump out the pits they use to work underneath cars, and where even the digging of a grave is accompanied by pumping to remove groundwater.

Irrigation intensifies the effect. Most irrigation areas have underneath them groundwater 'mounds' created by run off. These mounds not only threaten the crops with waterlogging but also displace deeper, far more saline water to the rivers.

Engineering can provide solutions for high-value crops. Water can be pumped out of the landscape under irrigation areas. This is now being done in many irrigation areas in the Murray–Darling basin. It is expensive, and creates a disposal problem—where to put the pumped water? The salinity credit system allows much of it to be discharged to rivers.

But engineering solutions are not usually viable for non-irrigated, dryland crops. Here different crops and cropping methods, laser ploughing—trying to ensure a level surface without potholes and dips which collect water and allow it to seep through—and planting trees particularly over the 'recharge' areas where most groundwater seeps though, have been tried, with varying success.

The recently released Commission reports shift the emphasis away from irrigation to dryland salinity as the biggest and least controllable problem. Dryland salinity processes are much slower than those under irrigated land, and much bigger areas are involved.

The really hard message is that even best-practice farming using conventional crops and methods is not enough. To have any hope of long-term sustainability, 'leakage' of rainfall to groundwater must be reduced so that it is close to the same as it would have been before clearing of the native vegetation. And even the best of our present farming methods are very leaky.

In the most productive grazing regions of the basin—those with rainfalls of more than 600ml a year, the Salinity Audit states: 'A high proportion of trees is the only option for salinity control.' This has massive implications for the dairying, lamb and beef industries over huge areas of our most productive farming land. As well, if trees are planted, run-off to rivers will be greatly reduced, which will have implications both for the amount of water available to towns, cities and irrigators, and for the environment.

In lower rainfall grazing and cropping zones, perennial pastures like lucerne can reduce or even nearly eliminate leakage. In irrigation zones the engineering solutions, together with an increasingly refined salinity credit system, can achieve a measure of control.

But how is this massive change in land use to be achieved? There are income opportunities from timber production, but any yield would be years or even decades into the future. To support farming communities in the meantime would take billions of dollars of taxpayers' money

Tim Fisher, of the Australian Conservation Foundation, says that other options include tree and shrub crops, such as flowers, olives, nuts, and even honey production. But he also says that large areas of land may simply have to be retired from agricultural production.

Asked whether he thinks the political will is there, Fisher replies, 'We don't know. Truss [Federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry] is saying that do nothing is not an option, but we haven't seen the colour of their money, and we are talking tens of billions of dollars … personally I don't think we'll see the comfort zone change too much.'

On the other hand, the ageing of the farming population does create opportunities for changes in land use—as well as risks that fewer, bigger landholders will have less time for environmental management. Fisher also points out that the recent demonstrations that the bush cannot be relied on to go on voting conservative means that rural communities now have real power to push for incentive and compensation packages to help with land use change.

It will take a lot of money—far more than the present Federal Government has committed from the sale of Telstra, and as Fisher says, 'There are no more Telstras.'

The Minister for Agriculture, Mr Warren Truss, launched the Salinity Audit report with a speech in which he said that 'do nothing' was not an option, and that Australia would have to become a clever farming nation to tackle environmental problems. But his speech was short on specifics, and later, in an interview with *Eureka Street*, he would not be drawn on how and whether change would be achieved.

He said to *Eureka Street* that he did not think legislation and regulation were the answer. Farmers should not, and could not, be forced. He was also keen to emphasise that constitutionally, land use issues were the preserve of state governments, rather than the Commonwealth.

Management plans were the answer, he said: 'There is a place for incentives, and also for compensation in those cases where one landholder might be forced to bear a disproportionate share of the burden.'

According to Tim Fisher, there is a debate within the salinity bureaucracy about how to communicate the problem. 'Do you give people the hard message, or soften it a bit? The feeling is that the hard message is too scary, and people won't take it in. Personally I think we have to tell people the situation as it is. The thing is, we almost have to start planting trees and worry about how to make money from it later.'

But that, he agrees, is an impossible message to sell politically, or to farmers. And, he agrees, the 'hard message', the 'telling it like it is' adds up to an apocalyptic vision. ■

Margaret Simons is a freelance journalist.

THE REGION

Perfect one day?

***Jon Greenaway** reports on the complexities of building a new nation in East Timor.*

MERDEKA *MAKAN BATU* is a slogan in Indonesian that adorns the charred remnants of Dili's homes and shops. Roughly translated, it suggests to the reader that voting for independence means eating stones. Another piece of graffiti even more common—it seems to be the militias' preferred signature—is *Akibat Salah Pilih*: 'This is the consequence of making the wrong choice.'

In a poetic touch—which as a jailed guerrilla-leader now become statesman he has the liberty to employ—Xanana Gusmao has said in reply that the stones shall become flowers.

Metaphors resonate in East Timor now—something has to. There is no civil administration or infrastructure; people need materials to build more permanent shelter from the wet; few villagers were home during the all-too-short planting time before the rains and those who were did not have seed, tools or animals to work the soil. Of the estimated 200–250,000 people who fled or were deported to West Timor in September, only 50,000 had returned six weeks after Interfet arrived.

There is help now. The UN and major NGO agencies have, in the weeks since September 20, managed to distribute food, basic items and medical care to Dili, Bacau and the outlying regions. But this is emergency aid given to satisfy immediate needs. Much more difficult, and sensitive, is the process of laying the foundations of a modern democratic nation-state. It needs to be done in such a way that the East Timorese themselves can and will build on the foundation when the United Nations Transitional Authority in East Timor (UNTAET) hands over control in January 2001. Many of the internationals who have landed here have referred to the Cambodian experience: they hope that the lessons from that will have been learned and that billions of dollars will not be spent only to leave behind a power vacuum and an addiction to hard currency.

Elements in Gusmao's National Council of Timorese Resistance (CNRT) have already made it known that they are unhappy with the unwillingness of key UN agencies and instruments to regard them as a government-in-waiting. At a meeting in late October, Joao Carascalao, a prominent CNRT leader, lectured representatives from aid groups about not listening to CNRT advice. He singled out the World Food Program for being too slow in the distribution of food aid. (He also loudly declared that Portuguese would be the official language and the escudo would be the operating currency within a week.)

When Gusmao returned to the territory in October, he decided to base himself, with seven close advisers, in the mountain town of Aileu, one hour's drive south from Dili. The main reason for this decision, according to an

Australian-based representative of CNRT, was to place the group close to their heartland and away from the co-opting influence of the international 'circus' in Dili and Bacau. He was urging the wisdom of this to me when we met by chance at Dili's port, both of us there to meet the HMAS Jervis Bay, the enormous sea-going catamaran that dwarfs the pier and its low-slung warehouse. Also there was CARE's goodwill ambassador, Jacqueline Gillespie, who unwittingly corroborated his 'circus' claim by charming a small, hand-wringing man from a Portuguese NGO into videoing her as she welcomed disembarking colleagues with theatrical hugs and kisses.

UNTAET IS AN adolescent, though quickly maturing, creature, faced with the problem of how to deal with CNRT, an organisation whose networks it needs for the success of its mission but to which it cannot get too close because it can't risk embroiling itself in nationalist politics. Some parts of UNTAET—the civil affairs section for example—are happy to include CNRT. Others are wary. The commissioner of the Civpol section is Alan Mills, a slow-talking mountain of a man from the Australian Federal Police. Charged with creating a police force, he wants to select people who are neutral rather than offering a sinecure to former Falintil guerrillas. As it happens, Falintil already has custody of at least 23 suspected militia members.

The police force and the judiciary are both sites for potential disagreement between UNTAET and CNRT. The UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, gave particular priority to the speedy establishment of a police force and a judiciary when he set the terms for UNTAET. Questions of what legal system will be used, who will enforce it and who will preside over it, are already creating friction. CNRT was pushing for the adoption of the Portuguese system, but all Timorese lawyers available had been trained under the Indonesian system.

In the meantime, Interfet has established a body to determine whether people should be held in custody longer than the mandatory four days. Currently, if people are accused of anything—from stealing a bicycle to committing atrocities—they can be held for this length of time. If they are held longer, it is under an interpretation of the Indonesian criminal code which gives consideration to the seriousness of the alleged offence. But there is no court system operating to try them and no certainty about when one will be established.

Above: East Timorese church, damaged but still standing. *Left:* View from wrecked Governor's house on the road to Dare.
Page 27: View towards the harbour in Dili with Christ the King monument to the right.

Education policy is also highly political. The key point in contention at the moment is what language of instruction should be used. Tetun is the lingua franca, but is almost exclusively a spoken language. Indonesian is most widely understood, particularly in the under-25 age group, but it is the occupier's tongue. Portuguese is the sentimental favourite, but children hardly speak a word of it; English is practical, but again few people speak it.

In November, schooling started up again in some places through initiatives taken mostly by Church educators. But the efforts are spasmodic: some Portuguese literacy classes conducted by teachers from pre-Indonesian times; some English-language curricula taught with the appropriate translation. UNTAET, in conjunction with Church, CNRT and local community groups, will decide on curricula and the language of instruction in order to form the basis of a nation-wide education system.

The push to adopt Portuguese and dump Indonesian as quickly as possible is very strong from CNRT and its backers. At a meeting in Dili, a representative of UNICEF (the UN agency supporting education) described how schools in Bacau were teaching the pre-poll Indonesian curricula. Through oversight, she failed to mention Portuguese as a possible language of instruction. Afterwards, delegates from the Portuguese Mission harangued her for half an hour.

RESERVATIONS ABOUT working alongside CNRT stem from recognition that the grouping will split up in the coming year and that there are many small political organisations that are not under its umbrella. The fear is that these groups will act to undermine UNTAET if it is seen to be legitimising CNRT at their expense. The problem here, as a Timorese colleague pointed out, is that trying to avoid political association is next to impossible, as every East Timorese with the skills to work with UNTAET has some affiliation.

A real danger is that CNRT, out of hubris, could set up a parallel administration to UNTAET. Its top echelon, drawn from Fretilin and the conservative UDT party, is sprinkled through with the expatriate Portu-elite, who are more than happy to take advantage of the generous offers of assistance coming from Lisbon. If pro-autonomy

political and militia activity returns to East Timor itself the reaction might not be that of an organisation assured of the direction in which the country is headed but one that must continue to fight as it has for the preceding 24 years.

In the meantime, the manoeuvring in East Timor has drawn the attention of the territory's political leaders away from the pressing concern of returning deportees from militia-controlled camps in West Timor. The slow pace of repatriations organised by UNHCR, and the human rights abuses which led to the exodus, are the concern of a handful of poorly resourced local NGOs and committed international organisations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.

THERE IS ENOUGH evidence emerging to fuel the UN commission of inquiry due to begin deliberating at the end of November. People returning from camps in the Atambua and North Central Timor areas refer continually to the organised way they were taken to military command posts before being escorted across the border.

Added to these testimonies are documents recovered from the Dili military command, including notes and memos that show the link between military and militia. One proposal, dated 5 May, the day UNAMET was formed, outlined the response that should be taken if East Timor voted to reject the offer of autonomy. It suggested the implementation of a terror campaign to force people into West Timor. The proposal was circulated to five top military officials, including the second in command to then TNI chief, General Wiranto.

There is a story being told and retold in East Timor about a fisherman in Liquica, the site of some of the militias' worst violence. As he gutted the fish from his haul netted along the shoreline, a wedding ring fell on to the stones at his feet. He picked it up and cleaned it, slipped it on his finger and went on with his work.

The legacy of Indonesia's departure from East Timor will be a part of East Timor life—as much a part as coffee and Sunday mass—for quite some time. ■

Jon Greenaway is *Eureka Street*'s South East Asia correspondent.

PROFILE

JON GREENAWAY

Natalia's story

'WE HAVE ALREADY shed so much blood for independence, why should we leave now?'

This is the way Natalia explains her family's decision to remain in East Timor when most were packing the few belongings they could take on the trucks and boats bound for West Timor. A kind matriarch of a typically extended Timorese family, Natalia shares the experience of many other East Timorese whose lives have been lived on the fringes of politics. And there are so many like her in this emerging nation with its labyrinthine politics and extended family networks.

A local human rights NGO salvaged a document from the Dili military command that included Natalia's name under the heading of government employees suspected of being CNRT. For many years she worked in the Governor's office in Dili. She is a nationalist, she says, so she ignored the directive of the last Governor, Abilio Soares, that all Government employees vote for the autonomy package.

'This was a God-given opportunity,' she says with a sudden lift of the head, 'and live or die, we were going to take this opportunity.'

She saw and named the seven militia groups she believes were most responsible for the violence. She witnessed the anger of some militias when they found out that the money given them by TNI was counterfeit. She heard of collusion between the Indonesian military and the militias from a friend who was taking notes in the relevant meetings.

Natalia has had close experience of Indonesian occupation for many years. Her brother-in-law is Fernando Arujao, a former political prisoner in Jakarta's Cipinang jail. Released last year, he had been imprisoned for his involvement in East Timorese student politics. Natalia visited him in 1992. When she returned she did not receive her salary for 10 months. When she tried to get some of her savings out of the bank she was told that she couldn't have the money because she would give it to Fernando.

In 1994, Fernando won the Reebok award for human rights. Several times Natalia and her husband were visited by TNI, asking where the money was. She said she was angry with Fernando then, because her family was suffering while he was getting recognition.

'We scraped and saved so we could send him to college. I even pawned my jewellery. It's not that I don't agree with it, but it is hard because we were tainted.'

When Fernando suddenly returned to East Timor in July, she and all her family were terrified of what would happen. Yet she hid his mobile phone and laptop in her house. On 4 September, the day the poll result was announced, Fernando was advised by a colleague to get out of the country. Four days later, militias burnt Natalia's house and they told her, as she watched, that it was because of Fernando's activity.

She is back in her home now and looking forward to what she says will be a huge Christmas celebration leading up to the first New Year of independence. She is also looking forward to Fernando's returning to East Timor for good.

Another who knows him well was not sure when this would be: Fernando's partner has been appointed to a teaching position at a university in Melbourne.

—Jon Greenaway

From struggle to reconstruction

José Alexandre 'Xanana' Gusmao visited Melbourne in October, just prior to his triumphant return to East Timor. At Melbourne Park the East Timorese resistance leader addressed a crowd of 3000, and afterwards he recorded this exclusive interview with **Dewi Anggraeni**.

Dewi Anggraeni: *Are there any plans in place for an independent East Timor?*
Xanana Gusmao: We don't have any ready-to-use plans at the moment. Remember, East Timor has just emerged from a devastating time in which all infrastructure we had ever had was eliminated. We did have a strategic development plan, a precursor to a general consultation. But that was before the last bash of destruction.

Now we are planning to go to East Timor to see and assess what the most pressing needs are, to sort out the highest priorities from the short-term to long-term plans.

Dili woman rolling up her sleeves for reconstruction.

Will you be the first president of East Timor?
No. It will be up to the people to elect a president. We are going to experience the transition process. Our struggle is not over. We have to work on it until we are completely independent. Until then I am willing to lead. But after that I prefer to see someone more capable to lead the country's reconstruction.

What if the East Timorese people elect you as president?
I have been leader for 25 years. We need to educate our people that there is a need to draw a dividing screen between the past and the present. Struggle is one thing and reconstruction is another. At the end of the struggle we cannot look back. We have seen in several countries where the so-called heroes of the struggle became over-confident and transcended the dividing line. They didn't see their own limitations and wanted to lead the reconstruction. It usually ended up in a mess.

So you are going to refuse even if the people elect you?
During the two to three years of transition, we will keep our eyes out for the most capable and suitable person to be our president.

Why is the transition period so important?
It is important because it is the continuation of struggle, monitored by the UN. The end of this period is the day before we are officially independent.

What is now the role of Indonesia in an independent East Timor?
I don't think we have any quarrel with the people of Indonesia. They are in fact our brothers and sisters. Sometimes we see that the government and their generals also hurt them, as much as they've hurt the East Timorese.

Though we have been oppressed by the Indonesian Government and their generals, with the people we remain friends. The people-to-people relationships are on a different plane. [*Gusmao, during his seven years of imprisonment in Jakarta, forged friendships with a number of Indonesian political prisoners.*] As for the relations between Indonesia and an independent East Timor, it will very much depend on the Indonesian Government. If it is a democratic and transparent government, then there will be no problems. Hopefully, with Amien Rais as the speaker of the Consultative Council, the government will abide by democratic principles and be mindful of human rights and justice. They will prevent further disregard of human lives, such as happened in East Timor.

We hope that when Indonesia has a democratic government, we will have good and co-operative relationships.

Do you think the next president of Indonesia will co-operate with East Timor?
I believe so. Indonesia's economic situation will encourage this. They cannot afford to alienate the international community. And the international community continues to monitor Indonesia in relation to East Timor, just as they watch how Indonesia handles corruption and human rights.

They will also continue to monitor what is happening in West Timor. Obviously they don't want anything to destabilise the region. I believe the next president of Indonesia will see that it would be advantageous to stop the violence that is still occurring across the border. Lack of security and stability would not help economic regrowth.

What do you think of the factions in the body of CNRT? Do they bother you?
They don't unduly bother me. We have to see it this way: every faction is a potential political party. In an independent East Timor, we have to welcome the emergence of new parties, to complement the existing ones. We want a wide democracy. So if one party forms a government, there should be another who will be the opposition.

Do you agree with Mary Robinson's idea of setting up a war crimes tribunal on East Timor?
I do, but not for our own sake alone. I believe that, with the UN's help, we will soon be free from residual repression from the Kopassus [*Indonesian elite command force*].

But I see that the Indonesian people themselves are still vulnerable to the influence of Kopassus. So if we support the idea of the tribunal, it is not for revenge. The Kopassus have committed a lot of atrocities in various places in Indonesia. They shouldn't go unpunished.

So, if I may say this, I support the idea of the tribunal as an expression of solidarity for our brothers and sisters in Indonesia. ■

Dewi Anggraeni is the Australia correspondent for *Tempo* news magazine.

Martin Krygier

The many-faceted McAuley

The Devil and James McAuley, Cassandra Pybus, University of Queensland Press, 1999. ISBN 0 7022 3111 8, RRP $34.95

James McAuley was a multi-talented poet, writer and public figure. He was also a complex man, a compelling presence, not a bad pianist and a remarkable drinker.

Through his life, and at any one time, he played many public roles: member, with a team of unusually but disparately talented and later prominent Sydney University mates, of Alf Conlon's bizarre wartime Directorate of Research and Civil Affairs (in connection with which he went to New Guinea, source of several encounters which changed his life); co-progenitor of Ern Malley; influential member of the Australian School of Pacific Administration which sought to develop policy and train officials for post-war Papua New Guinea; Roman Catholic convert and political activist; founding editor of *Quadrant*; Professor of English, poet and writer; political organiser; uneasy participant in modernity. He was notable and controversial in many of these roles.

Cassandra Pybus didn't know McAuley, and acknowledges that there were many aspects to his protean personality, attested to by those who did, which she 'cannot find ... on the printed page'. Nevertheless her book, *The Devil and James McAuley*, is the most detailed chronicle of the life so far. It is also an attempt to explain the course it took. As chronicle, it has several virtues. It contains a lot of information, usually delivered lightly, brightly and at times engagingly and wittily. Even cheekily.

The book is rarely dull. The man is more than commonly interesting and so his story is interesting to tell. Pybus is a gifted story-teller and chronicles it well.

Since she seems tantalised by the young McAuley, he emerges from her telling as a person one would very much want to meet. As her distaste grows, which it does pretty soon—towards the end of the War and increasingly afterwards—she can't resist a derisive, condescending tone when he offends her sensibilities, which he often does. Here one feels (more precisely, I feel, for reasons that will emerge below) that one is learning more about the author than her subject. The story comes to be driven more and more obviously by her prejudices (in the classical and not necessarily pejorative sense of unthought prejudgments) and less and less by what drives him. And the prose flags, too. It leans increasingly and repetitively on stock epithets: 'intemperate', 'strident', 'dogmatic', 'crude', 'rabid', 'virulent'; so much so that they become superfluous. We *know* that the next anti-communist we meet must be one or the other, or one and the other, without being told. But we are always told. Still, even here her difficulties with McAuley and his ilk (among them my father, I should here declare) do not always, though they do commonly, swamp her capacity to record some things that speak well of him, particularly the calm and courageous way he faced death.

Pybus is not infrequently careless with facts and her interpretations are often tendentious. But if you are curious about details of McAuley's life and interested in a sometimes shrewd dissection of a complex and not easily penetrated personality, you will find the book informative. Particularly if you aren't interested in poetry. But if you are after a perceptive and nuanced report of the causes which animated him, the reasons he might have had for adopting them or the character of the period in which he lived, Cassandra Pybus' book will disappoint. It might even annoy, as it has me.

Pybus clearly is intrigued by McAuley, and, as far as I can tell, she tries within her lights to be fair. She doesn't always find it easy though, as her taste for him dwindles noticeably and fast. For he confronts her with a problem that her whole book is a struggle to resolve. How did the awesomely gifted, irreverent pre-War poet and piano player, of aesthet-icising and anarchist leanings, whom she describes with some affection, change so? How did he come to emerge from New Guinea and the War so *plus catholique que ...*, so combatively (a.k.a. 'stridently', 'rabidly', etc.) anti-communist and at the end so passionately, if ambivalently, anti-counter-cultural? Prince to frog.

I have praised the book as an interesting chronicle of an interesting life. But as a source of understanding and explanation, the work is merit-free. This is not because Pybus entertains the hypotheses she does about McAuley's psyche ... The problem is, rather, that she seems to have no idea how to establish the significance of the psychological factors upon which she lights, in what she wants so desperately to explain: the public life, in a particular epoch, of a complex and strenuously thoughtful man.

Her answer, hinted at throughout the text, but only fully revealed in the book's last chapter, has the following three steps. They appear consecutively in the work, each less weighed down by evidence, more buoyed up by what might gently be called imagination, than the preceding one. And as the evidence dims, a somewhat desperate assertiveness glows.

The first step, for which Pybus adduces ample evidence, is that McAuley was, or often was, deeply tormented by what we might metaphorically call inner demons, and he might have non-metaphorically called the same. In particular he suffered, she surmises, from deep inner conflicts, self-disgust and guilt.

The second step owes more to the *Zeitgeist* of the analyst than to the evidence at her disposal: the source of the torment, in case you need it spelt out, is sex. What else could screw you up so, so to speak?

The third emerges from a welter of speculation, several strategically placed 'coulds' and 'may have beens', acknowledgment of the central importance of women—particularly his wife—in his life and the candid confession that 'I simply don't know, nor will I ever know'. Undaunted by these rather heavy-duty qualifiers, Pybus builds to her climax: 'my supposition that McAuley's terrors are related to guilt about homosexual desire is not wildly speculative'. Given the flimsiness of her evidence on this point, that is a matter on which judgment and perhaps taste might differ.

But Pybus' reluctance to give up on her speculations is understandable, since so much of the explanatory offering of the book depends upon them. For they are, we learn, the key to McAuley's Catholicism, anti-communism, editorship of *Quadrant*, support for the Vietnam War, opposition to student sit-ins, ability to drink anyone else under the table, and much else. Everything really.

Let me mention three examples: religion, drink and anti-communism, without which, it is pretty clear, the mature McAuley would have been someone else. First is religion, a central element in his post-War life and in Pybus' account: '[i]n my reading McAuley's way of dealing with what he hated and feared in himself—the suppurating wound that would never heal—was to externalise his guilt on to the malevolent, preternatural force [the Devil]'. And so his Catholicism and its stringently—astringently—orthodox character: 'this faith enabled him to externalise his fear and give it a name'.

Second, though there is no suggestion that he was an alcoholic, McAuley was a serious drinker. According to Pybus, his 'frenetic alcohol consumption would seem to me to be an indication of the chaos and terror that lingered at the edges of his rigid self-control'. But only at the edges, because he almost never appears to get drunk, though all around him drop about. That too is grist for Pybus'

accommodating mill: McAuley always needed to be so in control of his rampaging netherworld that '[t]he mask rarely slipped'. It's this terror-concealing *mask* and not his apparently heroic liver that is the key. Oh for such a mask. Oh for such a liver.

Pivotal to the story, however, is McAuley's anti-communism, and it is in relation to this that Pybus delivers her psychobiographical *pièce de resistance*:

> Having said that McAuley was a contradictory and complex man, it is not my intention to try to render him simple and transparent. My thesis is only that McAuley was troubled by—terrified by—his sexual urges, especially the homoerotic, which he displaced onto the Devil and his communist agents. He was not alone in this. The Cold War provides some outstanding examples of the mechanism: J. Edgar Hoover, long-time Bureau chief of the FBI, was one; Roy Cohn, the over-zealous counsel for the House of Un-American Activities, was another.

Had Hoover and Cohn also written poetry and fathered six children, the case would have been clinched. As things stand it is not completely clear from Pybus' account whether suppressed homoerotic urges are sufficient or merely necessary conditions for anti-communism. Perhaps that will be sorted out in a second edition.

I HAVE PRAISED the book as an interesting chronicle of an interesting life. But as a source of understanding and explanation, the work is merit-free. This is not because Pybus entertains the hypotheses she does about McAuley's psyche. For all I know, all three of them might be true, though on the evidence provided I would only consider betting on the first. Nor is it simply because I—who didn't know McAuley well (though my father, who founded *Quadrant*, knew him very well)—find the analysis unpersuasive. That is of no importance to anyone but me. Anyway, Pybus, expert in psychological cliché, would expect it. The problem is, rather, that she seems to have no idea how to establish the significance of the psychological factors upon which she lights, in what she wants so desperately to explain: the public life, in a particular epoch, of a complex and strenuously thoughtful man.

A great deal of discussion of communism in this country never had anything to do with communism at all, but only with one's attitude to the social and political order here ... What mattered was where you lined up in the Australian debate, and who your friends would turn out to be, as a result of what you were prepared to say about this strange phenomenon of which you knew nothing.

Among McAuley's many parts and roles, Pybus explicitly chooses to focus on him as 'political intellectual'. He certainly was one, and the phrase deserves to be taken seriously. Let us treat it so, starting with the noun. McAuley was a man of ideas, an erudite and driven *thinker*; not only but also. Pybus recognises that he has *conclusions*, for it is those that she wants to explain and debunk. But she shows no acknowledgment that this deeply intellectual man might also have had *reasons*—that is, thoughts, arguments, considerations—that on reflection he took to point one way and not another. Her McAuley comes to conclusions simply as a result of drives, just like Bill Clinton I guess, or rather as an attempt to stop up drives, unlike Bill. It is a bit like those familiar and crude understandings of judicial decisions, that they are just 'the result of' the judges' personalities, socio-economic status, religions, etc. All of these things are potentially relevant, as is McAuley's psychic playground, but judges also deliver reasons and many of them, the best of them, take seriously the reasons they give. McAuley also published many of his reasonings. Automatically to see through them is not always the best way of seeing what these are, where they might lead and where they might have led him. These reasons might be good or bad, we might accept them or not, but it is arrogant to assume they count for nothing and philistine to imagine that it is enough simply to tune in to the 'bottom line'.

Apart from this political intellectual's ideas, what of his politics? If a thinker is anti-communist, for example, how much should his biographer understand communism? Or, more precisely, how much should she enter into how communism, and what he knew and understood of it, affected his thinking about it?

You can't write about everything, of course. In one of several increasingly shrill sallies (strident even) against reviewers who displeased her, Pybus reminds us that it matters what the book was intended to do. Robert Manne had suggested that her work was 'both a political–spiritual biography of [McAuley's] movement towards anti-communism and a cultural interpretation of the Australian Cold War'. He goes on: '[b]ecause Pybus is such an intelligent and attractive writer her portrait of McAuley is likely to prove persuasive. Because she appears to know so little about the nature of communism her portrait of the Australian Cold War is likely to perpetuate our current misunderstanding as to what was most seriously at stake' (*Australian Book Review*, August 1999). In her angry response, Pybus claims that her book was no more than a 'study of the preoccupations of a very singular man and more than half of the book is in no way concerned with the Cold War'. She 'resent[s] being called to account for deficiencies in a book I did not write' (*Australian Book Review*, September 1999).

Yet it is pretty obvious that she has both less and more than this singular individual in mind. I have already mentioned her lack of discussion of his ideas. Moreover, though he was above all else a poet, she is not concerned with his poetry. It appears only as a psycho-diagnostic aid. Rather, as she explains in her introduction, on the one occasion that she saw McAuley, when he came to

speak at a political function at Sydney University, '[i]t was not the poet I went to hear all those years ago. Then, as now, it was the political ideologist and cold war warrior who compelled my attention.' Her book is an attempt to 'make sense of [McAuley's] ideology and its political impulse, rather than a conventional biography'. But if she is interested in less than the whole McAuley, she is at the same time confident that he stands for something larger. Her aim is 'to foreground the political intellectual whose spirited engagement with public affairs in the three decades between the Second World War and the Vietnam War provides some insight into that unique time of turmoil and change'. So Manne might be forgiven for thinking that it was not just McAuley's singularity which so concerned Pybus.

And in any event, the point surely is not whether she should have written a history of the period as well as a biography of the man. Rather it is that one can't understand a man so immersed in the period unless one understands some aspects of it, important in themselves and important to him. One such aspect is communism.

AT THE BEGINNING of the 19th century, Joseph de Maistre made a profound observation about the French Revolution: 'we must have the courage to acknowledge ... that for a long time we completely misunderstood the revolution, of which we were witnesses; we took it to be an *event*. We were mistaken: it is an *epoch*.' (Chou en Lai might have had a somewhat similar point in mind when, in response to a request for assessment of the consequences of the French Revolution, he is said to have remarked, 'It's too soon to tell.') The communist revolution inaugurated an even more far-reaching epoch and much of the world is only beginning—with great difficulty and no assurance of success—to recover from it.

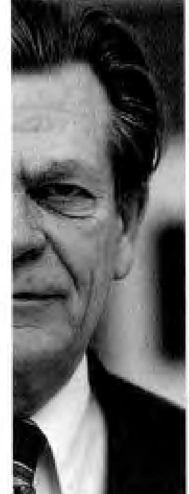
Whether one dates the end of what Hobsbawm calls 'the short 20th century' at the collapse of European communism in 1989, or as he does at the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, communism was—in Hegel's phrase—a world-historical phenomenon pivotal to the development of that century. Its significance spanned the world, as Marx knew it would. It bore on hopes and on dreams, since it claimed to incarnate and fulfil the most influential secular prophecy of modern times. It bore on our understandings and evaluations of the societies in which we lived and on what we imagined alternatives to them might be, since globally communism represented just such alternatives: alternative ideals and alternative forms and models of social, economic and political organisation, all available, as it were, in 'real time'. And it bore on foreign policy everywhere, since communism was an export industry of vast scale.

For almost the whole of the epoch, communism was never what it has become now, in those few places where aged Communist Parties still maintain their dictatorships, such as China, North Korea, Vietnam and Cuba: local and absurd anachronisms, no longer demoniacal (with the possible exception of North Korea), just malign; and abandoned by those whose enthusiasm was at its peak precisely when they *were* demoniacal. James McAuley (and my father) were born in the year the epoch began; they both died before it ended, McAuley 13 years before.

Though he was above all else a poet, she is not concerned with his poetry. It appears only as a psycho-diagnostic aid.

In the month I write (October), the English translation of a monumental and very important book has just been published by Harvard. It appeared originally in French two years ago, as *Le Livre Noir du Communisme*, and was quickly translated into many central and eastern European languages. I first saw it in Polish. It is over 800 pages, and based in part on new archival findings and hitherto unrevealed documents from former Communist archives. The state crimes of every country that has endured communism are documented by some of the leading scholars of these matters in the world. Their editor estimates that between 85 and 100 million people died as the result of deliberate official action in these countries in this period. About 20 million in the Soviet Union, 65 million in Communist China, several millions more in Cambodia, North Korea, Vietnam and Eastern Europe. These estimates are controversial, of course, but whatever the figures, as Martin Malia puts it in his foreword, 'the Communist record offers the most colossal case of political carnage in history'.

And that is perhaps not the most important part of this tragic tale. Hundreds of millions of people were condemned to live stunted, thwarted lives, by regimes which sought to infiltrate every aspect of their subjects' beings and managed to crush, diminish and demean them, even as they slid from ruthless repression to slovenly despotism to collapse. A collapse, by the way, which, unlike that of the Roman Empire or the Austro-Hungarian, or the British Raj, left *nothing* good in its wake. By the end, most of these regimes were shabbily horrible, rather than energetically and repressively horrifying as they were to begin with; but by then they had far fewer Western supporters.



The comprehensiveness, many of the details and the figures of the Black Book are new and some of them inevitably controversial. The contours are not new at all, however, to anyone who cared to look for them. But many people never did, and Pybus doesn't even now. Not because she would likely be interested to deny any of this, but because she seems to think it is irrelevant to her subject. But what if her subject thought differently?

The first issue of *Quadrant* appeared in December 1956. In his first editorial, McAuley wrote:

> Suddenly this one huge glaring visage, this enormous mask made of blood and lies, starts up above the horizon and dominates the landscape, a figure of judgment speaking to each person in a different tone or tongue, but with the same question: And what do you think about *me*?

Pybus writes of the 'extraordinary performance' that this editorial represents. What is more extraordinary, as noted by Andrew Riemer (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 July 1999), is that she doesn't 'acknowledge the conjunction between McAuley's editorial and that defining moment in modern political history' which had begun the month before: the Soviet invasion of Hungary. This was not an event noticed only by anti-communists, of course. It had a profound resonance for millions, then and since. But like so much that happened in the world during the life of her subject, and notwithstanding her professed interest in the 'political impulse' of his views, Pybus passes it by in silence.

There are many ways of accounting for the differences between Pybus and McAuley on these matters, but one is overarching. She has no understanding of something fundamental which weighed with him: the radical evil of communism. Without wishing to be cruel, I believe the reason is expressed in the subtle but important distinction Henry James makes, when he observes that Thoreau was 'worse than provincial—he was parochial'.

Provinciality is a geographical matter; no-one to blame. Parochialism is a matter of will and imagination. One, of course, can foster the other; but it needn't and in McAuley it didn't; on the contrary, whatever else one thinks of his *Quadrant*, it was the least parochial of Australian magazines; indeed it was a self-consciously *de*-parochialising influence in this country. Of this significance, there is not a word from Pybus.

Parochialism comes in many variants. Peasants are often parochial, which is why Marx despaired of the 'idiocy of rural life'; they show no interest in things that do or have gone on, or might, in a wider world. Less obviously, and more commonly among parochial intellectuals, even clever ones, a real interest in larger things is combined with lack of awareness or ability to imagine that they might be qualitatively different from what one finds at home. Everything is measured on the local scale.

This is not merely Pybus' problem. It is a common feature in Australian responses to communism, and much else. A great deal of discussion of communism in this country never had anything to do with communism at all, but only with one's attitude to the social and political order here. And so it didn't depend, for many people it has never depended, on knowing anything about what was happening in communist countries, even when precisely that was the subject of bitter debate. What one thought about communism couldn't be refuted, even dented, by evidence of those things. This was true of many who had no wish (as many others, however, did) to believe anything particularly wonderful was happening under communism. They just had no imagination of catastrophe and were happy to misunderstand communism by accommodating their picture of it to the slack and easy standards of everyday Australian life. What mattered was where you lined up in the Australian debate, and who your friends would turn out to be, as a result of what you were prepared to say about this strange phenomenon of which you knew nothing.

Some people couldn't think of communism in this way, because they had experienced it 'on their skins', in the Polish phrase. As it happens, my father was one such, and so was Frank Knopfelmacher. They didn't just pop up in this country, as they do in the book, without a past, ready to be walk-on extras—eccentric, devious, altogether excessive—in Pybus' psychodrama.

They were driven to make some things that seemed desperately important to them apparent to others, in this implausibly peaceable and complacent island on the other end of the world. They spoke of things beyond local experience. Some people believed them and were influenced by them, though it did not always come easily.

Even though I grew up in an anti-communist home, for example, it was in Bondi not Warsaw, and I had no privileged understanding of these things. I still recall a lecture on Czechoslovakia given by Knopfelmacher in 1968, shortly before the Soviet invasion. Knopfelmacher was a Czech Jew who, unlike most of his family, had escaped the other world-historical scourge of the century, Nazism. After fighting in the War, he returned to Prague and resumed philosophical studies (under Jan Patocka, later to influence Vaclav Havel). As he explained in the lecture, he resolved to escape again in 1948, when it became obvious the Communists would take over. He tried to warn a friend, but his friend said he would stay because, as he was apolitical he'd be okay. Knopfelmacher commented, without any emphasis, as though it went without saying, 'he didn't understand that this was a regime in which what you did or didn't do protected you from nothing'. I was stunned by this remark, realising at the ripe age of 19, and at a highly political time, that I had no understanding of such a regime either. That led to an obsessive attempt to gain such an understanding, which has yet to stop. I still am not confident I understand much, but there are some things that I have learnt.

And it was not so hard to learn. Certainly, no-one was starved of information, neither then nor even much earlier. There were scarifying works by ex-communist writers such as Silone, Koestler, Milosz, and later by former victims, such as Ginzburg, Nadezhda Mandelstam and Solzhenitsyn, which profoundly influenced people such as McAuley, and which, needless to say, Pybus never mentions. There was plenty of material available to convince anyone who cared that communism was a human calamity in every country on which it had been visited. People with an ability to imagine catastrophe—such as George Orwell who saw only a bit of what he so profoundly understood, or more recently Simon Leys of whom the same can be said—understood this material. They were not thanked for it at the time.

Certainly, for a very long time not everyone was convinced; indeed many reserved their hatred not for a system of rule responsible for so much unmitigated tragedy, but for those who sought to expose that system, and thought it important to do so. I have often wondered why.

I have no Pybusian explanation for why what was obvious to any ordinary Polish peasant was calumny to so many eminent Western thinkers. Instead I would venture a charitable explanation, which *is*, I confess, 'wildly speculative' and even if true could only be partial: in Australia, at least, radical and systematic

evil, conducted on a mass scale, is hard to imagine. It might have been that McAuley, perhaps even for the reasons or some of them that Pybus gives, was more than usually receptive to understanding it, and to recognising its most powerful political site and source in the world at the time he lived. That would have been an interesting marriage of psychological predisposition and awareness of empirical reality. But it is not a hypothesis that Pybus ever entertains, since she appears to know nothing and care less about the realities that McAuley did know and did care about. Nor does she seem to think it important to know. And so, since nothing else, least of all communism, for example, is thought to have anything to do with McAuley's anti-communism, the answer must lie deep in his groin.

In the polarisation of the epoch, Manichaeanism came easily to people who found themselves continually derided for saying something important and true. It might well be that it came too easily at times, and hardened into a reflex rather than a considered response. But these are discriminations and criticisms which can only have purchase if, in making them, you understand the context in which they occurred.

IN THE MOST remarkable passage in the book, Pybus explains in a crisp schoolmistressly way:

> McAuley's insistence that communism was an aggressive force of evil, rather than a political and social system created by human intelligence and practised by mortal men, made him uncompromising toward those who did not regard communism as an abomination.

Here we have it: either evil or human. Try substituting 'nazism' or 'Pol Pot's regime' for communism in that sentence. How irresistible is the choice that poor Devil-obsessed McAuley is supposed to have overlooked? The plain truth is that communism *was* an aggressive force of evil *and* it was a political system [and the rest] ... *and* it was an abomination. Nothing to choose. If it had been my fate to have to listen to much prating of this sort, I think I would have become pretty uncompromising too! I might have even been moved to religion; certainly to drink. Religion clearly informs McAuley's understanding of evil as it cannot mine, and perhaps he was better for it. It does appear to have helped him understand something Pybus can't.

None of this is to say that McAuley was necessarily right or admirable in all his particular views, hostilities, obsessions, that he wasn't tormented, that it was always the better course to be *contrarian* (to use a new and ugly coinage) in his manner. In the polarisation of the epoch, Manichaeanism came easily to people who found themselves continually derided for saying something important and true. It might well be that it came too easily at times, and hardened into a reflex rather than a considered response. But these are discriminations and criticisms which can only have purchase if, in making them, you understand the context in which they occurred. Pybus doesn't even see a need to.

It might also be that, if McAuley had lived past 1989, his view of the world and those of some others who had been in or around *Quadrant* would have diverged, on the grounds less of the state of their libido than of their beliefs.

It is, for example, very plain in post-communist Poland, with which I am familiar and which has local resonance for me, that people who were once closely united against a common foe may come to discover they have less or nothing in common when that foe disappears. Polish Catholics of a traditionalist anti-modern bent, conservatives, nationalists, many for whom modernity is a problematic achievement at best, now respond in very different ways to the challenges of post-communist modernity, than do, say, Polish liberals, among them Catholics and others, for whom modernity and a tolerant civil society are ideals for Poland's future and grounds for conflict with friends of the past.

Among those who agreed on the evil of communism, after all, are many who see it as but a development and heightening of modernity, and they dislike many features of the latter, even without the former. So did McAuley. Others, once equally opposed to communism, see it as a perversion of modernity. Much that was most objectionable about communism died with it, and grounds of political alliance and antagonism are no longer the same. Recent splits in what was once called the '*Quadrant* group' attest to some divisions and re-divisions of these sorts. What they had in common was fundamental, but new questions arise to which they now have conflicting answers.

But this is idle, if not completely wild, speculation. My point is merely that unless one penetrates the actors' own views of the world in which they lived and tries to see what in the world (both of action and of thought) might have led them to these views, psychological reductionism of Pybus' sort is not really a *conclusion* of one's research but its presupposition. When everything else of potential importance is filtered out, whatever is left wins by default.

To conclude, in anticipation of correspondence, I have not asked that Pybus answer a question she now repeatedly declares is 'of no concern to me ... who was right or who was wrong about communism' (*The Australian*, 13 October 1999). That is not a bad question, by the way, and not one, as we have seen, on which she avoids expressing uninformed yet censorious opinions. But there is a different point, which has to do with the obligations of a biographer. One of these is to understand your subject. Ignoring the significance of ideas to an intellectual and communism to an anti-communist and poetry to a poet is not the best way to meet it. ■

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Paul Collins

All this and heaven too

The High Price of Heaven, David Marr, Allen and Unwin, 1999. ISBN 1 86505 201 5, RRP $24.95

This book is both fascinating and infuriating. David Marr is a fine writer, and *The High Price of Heaven* is full of interesting and penetrating sketches of some of Australia's most important people and religious institutions. But sometimes it left me impatient and occasionally annoyed. I suspect my feelings will be mild compared with those of some readers; I have no doubt a number of Catholics—and others—will be positively fuming.

Fundamentally, the book is a series of essays about the deep-seated, pervasive influence of the mainstream churches, especially the Catholic Church, on Australian politics, social mores and culture. Marr maintains they still have an ability to put real pressure on governments and he assumes that the churches still have a constituency that is relatively coherent. He points to the important influence of the church on questions like drug law reform, censorship and even equity in industrial relations.

Anyone who has been around the religious ridges would have known this. Sociologists are beginning to grant that even nominal religious affiliation has an influence on the way people see politics. Political scientist Graham Little illustrated this vividly in his fascinating articles, before the 1993 election, about the religious backgrounds of Paul Keating and John Hewson. Marr's purpose is to examine how the churches use this influence. While his barbs are not confined to the Catholic Church, it is his major target.

Marr has the good journalist's ability to sum up an individual accurately in penetrating and sometimes cruel pen sketches, and he does not hesitate to do this, especially when it comes to Catholic clerics. But the problem here is that those he chooses are not really typical. They often represent their own particular agendas, and their constituency in the wider Catholic Church is often small. As he admits himself, 'sometimes it's as if two churches were operating under the same Catholic banner'.

The High Price of Heaven focuses almost exclusively on the official church, and then

really only on those who want to play politics. The book almost totally neglects the vast majority of Catholics who have already been through a process of renewal and are struggling to find out what it might mean to be a Catholic in the contemporary world.

The book also highlights the difference between perception and reality when considering the role of the Catholic Church in Australia. Catholicism is often perceived by observers as morally oppressive, narrowly focused and obsessed with controlling sexual expression. Given the Church's public record, this is a perfectly understandable perception.

But the reality of the Catholic community is much more complex and multifaceted. Out in the real world there is another Catholic Church. I kept thinking that for every censorious and wowser Catholic that Marr nominates, I could name a dozen sensible, intelligent, progressive and committed Catholics, very much in touch with modern life. It is so much easier to reject a parody of Catholicism than deal with the more complex, intelligent and integrated faith of say, a Max Charlesworth, or a Veronica Brady.

Having said that, it would be unfortunate if one of Marr's fundamental points were to be lost in arguments about some of his more provocative statements. One of the most useful things he does is to discuss pleasure and to remind us of one of Christianity's most long-lasting contradictions: its deeply ambivalent and negative attitude to the human body and more broadly to the material world.

This, of course, is strange, given that the fundamental Christian doctrine of the incarnation highlights the fact that God enters the world in the flesh of a human body, that in Christ God experiences the human condition in its totality, and that 'God sent his own son in a body as physical as any sinful body' (Romans 8:3). That same doctrine of the sacredness of matter is further emphasised in the doctrines of bodily resurrection and eucharist.

However, Marr's treatment of the history of repressive Christian attitudes is sketchy and incomplete. This is unfortunate since it is a key element running through his whole argument about the Australian church's stance. For instance, he tells us that 'Christianity came out of Judea with the terrible idea that the body was the enemy of the soul'. Not so: the Jews never drove a wedge between body and soul. The split finds its origin in Greek Platonic thought and only influenced a small part of the Wisdom tradition very late in the period just before Christ.

The body–soul dualism largely entered Christianity in the third and fourth centuries AD as the church struggled to express itself within the cultural context of late Roman times. As a result it became immersed in a social context that, increasingly, was deeply ambivalent about matter, the body, and the primal expression of corporeal existence, sexuality. As a result, the Western church's predominant spiritual tradition became increasingly suspicious of matter, the body and pleasure, and highlighted an asceticism which brought to the Christian a spiritual clarity that was preparatory to the final vision of God.

In this context Marr mentions Peter Brown's splendid book, *The Body and*

Society (1988). But he misses the complex picture that Brown develops. For Marr everything is summed up under the rubric of repression, what he calls 'the moral heroism of saying no to sex'. He argues that this creates a deep Christian fear of sensuality and pleasure of any sort. This, he says, has led Christianity to be particularly hard on homosexuality as well as all sexual expression outside marriage.

While there is considerable truth in this, Brown suggests a lot more nuance:

> It is not sufficient to talk of the rise of Christianity in the Roman world in terms of a shift from a less repressive to a more repressive society. What was at stake was a subtle change in the perception of the body itself. The men and women of later centuries were not only hedged around with a different and more exacting set of prohibitions. They had also come to see their bodies in a different light. (Brown, pp29–30)

For the early Christians, chastity symbolised an experience of transcendent freedom from earthly ties. It was a way of emulating the angels, of recovering to the pristine state of purity before Adam's fall. They were sure that the end of the world was nigh and the kingdom of God was just around the corner, from whence a 'new creation' would arise and the human body would be possessed by the Spirit.

While I would be the first to agree with Marr that the results of these attitudes have been parlous for many, they do need to be seen within their cultural and historical context. *The High Price of Heaven* would have been much stronger if it had acknowledged that context and argued that it was precisely these past conceptions that the repressive Catholic authoritarians of today were trying to maintain.

Marr argues that the churches, as inheritors of a compromised tradition, act as the primary agents of repression in Australian society. He examines this claim in relationship to issues such as censorship, euthanasia, homosexuality and drug law reform. The recent Vatican intervention to force the closure of a safe injecting room at the Sisters of Charity's St Vincent's Hospital in Sydney gives some weight to his argument.

I said that Marr created brilliant character sketches. It is to some of these 'characters' that I will now turn.

The first is Dr George Pell, Archbishop of Melbourne. Marr says that Archbishop Pell 'is hard on freedom'. He quotes the Archbishop as saying that 'Catholic teachers should stop talking about the primacy of conscience. This has never been Catholic teaching', and, according to Archbishop Pell, 'rests squarely on the fallacy of overwhelming natural virtue. All you have to do to fulfil yourself is to follow your natural instincts.'

As it stands, Pell's view is hard to square with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Paragraph 1778) which says: 'In all that he says and does, man is obliged to follow faithfully what he knows to be just and right. It is by the judgment of his conscience that man perceives and recognises the prescriptions of the divine law.' The *Catechism* then goes on to quote John Henry Newman, saying in part that 'Conscience is the aboriginal Vicar of Christ'. This merely re-states a long Catholic tradition of freedom of conscience. The Catholic tradition says that a person is bound to follow even an erroneous conscience. Again, as Newman says in the *Apologia*, in the context of his conversion: 'I have always contended that obedience ever to an erring conscience was the way to gain light.'

In contrast, Pell's emphasis is almost exclusively on authority, especially papal authority. He equates any assertion of freedom of conscience with a kind of radical liberty to form moral opinions without any reference to an outside authority. However, his position is not typical of the mainstream Catholic moral tradition. That is why I warned earlier that Marr needs to be careful when he takes Archbishop Pell as typical of mainstream Catholicism.

ANOTHER OF MARR'S Catholic 'characters' is Senator Brian Harradine. He details Harradine's role in censorship and opposition to pornography in Australia and comments that if 'we are to make sense of what's going on in Australia regarding these issues we have to learn to listen to the old Puritan arguments that linger ... behind the secular language'. In other words, the whole Harradine argument is essentially theological. It is really about preventing the experience of what Catholic moral theology used to call 'venereal pleasure' anywhere outside the context of marriage.

Marr argues that Harradine has devoted his long political career to furthering what he variously calls 'the minority positions of his faith' and 'the demands' of his 'Catholic God'. It is not about 'freedom of choice but freedom from sin'. This is probably true, but the difficulty again is that Harradine himself is in many ways a minority Catholic

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in a much bigger Catholic Church. Oftentimes he represents the emphases of the theology of a past age.

One of the most interesting issues Marr raises is the question of the church and industrial relations. This is an important and practical issue because the Catholic Church, with its network of schools, hospitals and other institutions, is now the largest employer in Australia after the federal government. This raises the question: is everyone employed by the church 'engaged in propagating religion' as Marr puts it? If they are, then what if they are in de facto relationships, or are homosexual or lesbian, or unmarried mothers, or remarried divorcees? 'If they are [propagating religion], religious rules apply to their employment. If they're not, then they may have secular protection of the law against church bigotry.'

It is clear to me that people merely working for church institutions as cleaners, cooks, receptionists or accountants are simply employees doing a job. Certainly, a Christian approach might be asked of them through some form of 'mission statement', but nothing more. The church has no right to interfere in their private lives nor demand that they live according to rules demanded of those who work in ministry. Ministry does not flow from mere employment by the church, rather from spiritual gifts and ecclesial call. One is gifted by God to carry out the work and called and authorised by the church community to do the ministry. As John Collins has shown so well in his *Are All Christians Ministers?* (to which question he answers 'no'), ministry involves training, leadership and an intimate identification with the sanctifying personhood of Christ.

The issue becomes more difficult in the case of teachers in Catholic schools, where a demand could be made that all teachers accept the essentially Catholic ethos of the school. It is hard to spell this out in practice but when you experience it you know it is there. I have always held that the key teachers in the school need to be practising Christians or even, specifically, Catholics, especially in the key roles of Principal and Religious Education Co-ordinator. Marr sees this as unjust because it means that other teachers in the system cannot aspire to these jobs.

The High Price of Heaven is a very personal book, and also a very 'Sydney' book. Because it is written with passion it sometimes outstrips its evidence and gets carried away. But it is well worth reading, if only because it highlights the influence of a small group of unrepresentative individuals on the social agenda of Australia.

Marr speaks honestly of his desire to belong to a church community and of his own period of Christian commitment. But in the end he was repulsed by the emphasis on guilt and shame and says 'it's left me unable to forgive those Christians who are still at work, inflicting misery'. While he might find that most Catholics these days have changed radically, the book is a timely reminder to those of us who are comfortable with faith that the very institution we value can for some people be very destructive. ■

Paul Collins MSC is a priest, writer and broadcaster.

BOOKS: 2

HUGH DILLON

Politics out of court

The Political High Court, David Solomon, Allen & Unwin, 1999. ISBN 1 86448 716 X, RRP $29.95

During the late '80s and '90s, the majority on the High Court adopted a 'dynamic' approach to the development of the common law and interpretation of constitutional questions. Simultaneously they adopted of policy of transparency in relation to judicial creativity. As Chief Justice Sir Anthony Mason put it:

> Because policy-oriented interpretation exposes underlying values for debate it would enhance the open character of the judicial decision-making process and promote legal reasoning that is more comprehensible and persuasive to society as a whole.

Prior to this, a doctrine of 'strict legalism' (or legal literalism) had masked the underlying assumptions and values affecting the Court's decisions.

The Mason Court's concern to uncloak the decision-making process was designed to enhance the public's understanding of its work and confidence in its processes. Mason and others recognised that such transparency also exposed it to fair and unfair criticism. They got plenty of both sorts, but particularly the latter, especially during the Mabo and Wik debates.

Given the dynamism of the Court's work during the Mason–Brennan period, the significance of the debate concerning the limits of judicial activism, and the seductive title of David Solomon's study, I had anticipated a critical analysis of the sea change which the Court brought about in recent times. After all, Solomon has spent many years as a journalist watching the High Court and studying its members, so I had hoped for insights into the internal dynamics of the Court. On both counts I was disappointed.

Helen Garner has remarked that a writer should be granted the right to his or her own material. There is an element of unfairness in criticising authors because they have not written the books which the critic would write or wish to read. Nevertheless, if a book on the High Court's political impact fails adequately to address a critical political and jurisprudential issue concerning the Court's methodology, one which directly affects the very subject matter of his study, then the author cannot shield himself from criticism behind his subjective agenda.

So what does Solomon give us? The book divides into three parts: an introduction; a consideration of 'problem areas' (native title, tax, environment, federalism, interstate trade, etc.), and 'institutions' (or the relationship between the Court, the parliament and the political mainstream). In these he gives us a history of the significant cases dealing with these various issues. Solomon knows his constitutional case law and is able to explain the decisions in terms which an intelligent layperson would understand readily.

Where I think the book fails is in the analysis of how and why the Court came to

its critical decisions. In his concluding chapter, Solomon confesses: 'This book has not attempted to explore the political proclivities of the judges ...' One asks, why not? If, as Mason admits, values and value-judgments are an integral part of judicial decision-making, the factors taken into account, and the weight given to those factors by the judges are crucial to a full understanding of their decisions.

Solomon seems to have accepted former Chief Justice Sir Harry Gibbs' tendentious claim that differences of opinion on the High Court are explicable merely in terms of 'differences regarding legal principle, not political policy'. In his concluding chapter, he quotes Gibbs at length expounding the theory that, because the judgments of High Court judges reveal no political bias (as if they would leave their fingerprints in such a way), there is no reason to doubt that all High Court decisions by all judges are made purely on legal principle.

No doubt all High Court judges do decide on the basis of 'legal principle' but which legal principles they select in a given case turn on a number of things, including precedent, consequences (or policy outcomes) and their philosophies of the role of the judge. High Court judges are never entirely predictable, but some are more predictable than others because they have explicit judicial philosophies.

Not everyone accepted the Mason Court's approach. Dr Greg Craven, Dean of Law at the University of Notre Dame, WA, accuses the judges of a systematic abuse of power, undemocratic politics, absolutism, faulty jurisprudence and placing their personal values above legal principle. He argues:

> The question is not whether judges make law—everyone cheerfully accepts that they do—but rather in what contexts they make law, and to what extent. The fact that it may be appropriate for the judges carefully and incrementally to develop the law in a particular context may no more be regarded as conferring upon them a general competence to mould the law in their own image than that the cautious acceptance of the concept of self-defence constitutes a general tolerance of homicide.

Solomon's sympathies, as far as I can tell, are with the judges, but his commentary on the debate is unfortunately limp and fails to traverse Craven's arguments. Craven is a right-wing dogmatist with a value-system of which he is unashamed. It is unsurprising that he reserves his sharpest darts for those he regards as belonging to the 'radical' wing of the High Court. The obvious riposte that he is entirely selective in his criticisms is never made by Solomon. Yet some conservative judges espoused the very sorts of judicial methodology Craven purports to find so repugnant in the Mason–Brennan Court.

Chief Justice Barwick, for example, not only refused to be bound by precedent, but thought that if the composition of the Court changed, that was sufficient justification for a previous decision to be overruled. Sir Harry Gibbs pronounced 'it is for this Court to assess the needs of Australian society and to expound and develop the law for Australia in the light of that assessment'. Even Sir Owen Dixon, the great exponent of the ultra-conservative doctrine of 'strict and complete legalism', felt constrained to throw off the shackles of the House of Lords when he felt that their decisions were so fundamentally wrong 'that I could never bring myself to accept them'.

If Solomon falls short regarding judicial activism, and the nagging issue of the Court's internal politics, he succeeds in showing the complexity of the work of the High Court, the integrity of the judges and the intensity of the pressure on them. Sir Gerard Brennan once told me that he started work in the car being driven to work at about 7am and he worked well into the evening, every day. While the prestige associated with membership of the High Court is undoubtedly tremendous and a reward in itself, there is also, for the judges, an element of self-sacrifice in the nation's service which is not often acknowledged. If Solomon's intention was an apologia for the judges whom he obviously respects enormously, he prevails.

I think the book can be read with advantage by anyone wanting an intelligent, well-written introduction to the work of the High Court. It was a useful historical refresher course for me, but it will disappoint those hoping for more than a general narrative of the Court's progress. Those who wish to understand the debate concerning the Court's activities during the last decade need to look further afield. ■

Hugh Dillon is a NSW magistrate.

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GEOFFREY MILNE

Dramatic writ

Plays of the 60s, Katharine Brisbane (ed.), Currency Press, 1999
Plays of the 70s, Katharine Brisbane (ed.), Currency Press, 1999

CURRENCY PRESS, Australia's leading performing arts publisher since 1971, is never short of a major project. Its major achievement to date has been the *Companion to Theatre in Australia* in 1995; the long-awaited *Companion to Music and Dance in Australia* is due out this year and a third in the series, a *Companion to Film, Radio and Television*, is scheduled for 2000.

But in the meantime, another major project has begun to materialise, in the form of collections of plays and performance texts from two points in the continuum of contemporary Australian drama and theatre. From the recent past, two volumes have appeared from each of two three-volume collections of *Plays of the 60s* and *Plays of the 70s*, part of an ongoing new project called the Modern Drama Series, while a collection of much more recent contemporary performance and physical theatre texts appeared early this year under the title *Performing the Unnameable*. Currency is thus simultaneously tunnelling forwards and backwards to mine the rich lode of ore that constitutes our recent performance literature.

To bridge the gap, the Modern Drama series will later address the '80s and then push back to the '30s, '40s and '50s. This is a very big and very welcome project indeed. The series is edited by Katharine Brisbane, who contributes her usual perceptive introductions to each volume, paying particular attention to the social and political context of the short span of years in which each group of plays appeared. A production photograph of each play and a short word about its author are accompanied by details of the plays' first productions and the presentation makes it as useful to the general reader as to the scholar, as well as for the classroom or the rehearsal room.

Many of the plays gathered into the four volumes seen so far have already been published by Currency, while a couple are making their third appearances; some others have never been in print before. In either case, gathering them together into collections like these provides a context in which to re-examine these works from the past.

Looking at the *Plays of the 60s*, for example, one is forcibly struck by several persistent elements of content, form and language. One is the seemingly constant pressure on (mostly youthful) individuals to conform to established codes of behaviour while they are simultaneously trying to establish a sense of their own self-determined identity. So many of these plays chronicle dashed hopes and the crushing of idealism, none more pungently than Alan Hopgood's previously unpublished *Private Yuk Objects*, written and first performed in 1966 at the height of the anti-Vietnam War protests but just before Harold Holt's pro-war conservative government was paradoxically returned with a huge majority. Tony, the educated, draft-dodging son of conservative MLA Henry McKay, is subjected to all kinds of pressure to come to his senses and toe the family line—not least because his elder brother Peter is fighting the good fight in Vietnam. Given a week to drop his 'commo' sympathies, Tony finally tears up his 'Hey Hey LBJ! How Many Kids Did You Kill Today?' placard, saying 'I suppose you'll say, rather glibly, that I'm starting to grow up. But perhaps the truth is ... I'm facing the utter pointlessness of being an idealist' (Vol. 2, p 52).

Jude Kuring as Coralie in the 1974 Nimrod Theatre production of *Coralie Lansdowne Says No.*

To some extent, this clash of idealism and conformity dates back to Alan Seymour's 1961 play, *The One Day of the Year*, which is one of the few notable omissions from the 1960s collections. On the other hand, a surprising inclusion in Volume 2 is James Searle's long-forgotten (and, I'm afraid, still forgettable) *The Lucky Streak*, in which nothing happens to jolt the young Ken and Colin out of their depressingly conformist torpor, conditioned as it is by the stultifying influence of their battle-axe of a boarding-house landlady, Mrs Bailey.

Elsewhere in the *60s* collection, dashed ideals surface in Bill Reed's *Burke's Company* of 1968 (Vol. 3) and Dorothy Hewett's 1967 play *This Old Man Comes Rolling Home* (Vol. 2).

The politically stable landscape that formed the backdrop to the plays of the early 1960s, to which Brisbane refers in her Introduction to *60s* Volume 2, has given way to turmoil, doubt and a crisis of confidence by the time we get to the plays of the late '60s. Still, numbing conformity and sanctioned suppression of outsiders are the main concerns of Alex Buzo's *Norm*

and Ahmed (1968, the last play in Vol. 2) and *The Front Room Boys* (1969, Vol. 3).

But the most interesting of these plays to re-read today are Rodney Milgate's *A Refined Look at Existence* (1966) and John Romeril's *Chicago, Chicago* (1969), both of which appear in Volume 3. They were way ahead of their time in form and style and outward-looking in their aspect, although only the latter has had a recent revival of sufficient potency and insight (David Pledger's 1998 adaptation for *Not Yet It's Difficult*) to realise its late 1960s potential. The extent to which American-style political machinations and election propaganda have superseded, in recent years, the idealised 'Australian style' of politics, has made *Chicago, Chicago*'s prescient warnings more resonant today than they might have been in 1969, when we still believed the dream of *Don's Party* would come true at the next election.

While Romeril looked to America for his source, Milgate looked to classical Greek tragedy for his in the bizarre marriage of Euripides, Pinter and Ionesco, rock 'n' roll, commercial hype and religious revivalism that was *A Refined Look at Existence*. Interestingly, it was this part-time playwright (Milgate was also a painter and poet) who had as much influence as any of the Sydney writers represented here upon the iconoclastic style and content of the so-called New Wave of Australian drama that was to follow in the last years of the '60s and the early '70s.

But before launching into the New Wave, a third preoccupation of the '60s' playwrights needs to be mentioned—their love of language.

In many of these plays, words are the predominant tool of the dramaturgy. Speechless, inactive characters (like Hoth Yuk in *Private Yuk* or Jacko in *The Front Room Boys*) suddenly wax lyrical and become active—once they have articulated their inner feelings—only to be plunged into war or ostracism. Tommy Docherty is at pains to ensure his daughter Joycee can spell the name of the communist candidate Sharkey properly (in *This Old Man*), but when the police arrive they flee, leaving the pathetic 'Shakey' scrawled in chalk on the Redfern streetscape. Likewise, Laurie's rambling odes to a forgotten past in the same play and Ahmed's unnaturally formal speech (in *Norm and Ahmed*) signal their outsider status and lead to their doom. Verbal debates also proliferate, most prominently those between Henry and Tony McKay in *Private Yuk* or Penthouse and Donny (Milgate's latter-day Pentheus and Dionysus) in *A Refined Look*. One is left with a powerful sense of the word as deed.

As Belly Cadmush says early in *A Refined Look*, 'Language is not communication' (Vol. 3, p12); but this is countered soon after by the Greek Zeus figure, Jovey Smith's 'I'm telling you all this because I need desperately to be understood' (p19). So the talk goes on and on ... and, so often, little happens and no-one is understood.

But, beside the language of disillusion and non-communication, there are also poetry and heightened imagistic speech. Some of Hewett's characters quote from 'The Lady of Shalott' and 'Bannerman of the Dandenong', but others forge poetry from the banal utterances of everyday speech. Bill Reed's defeated explorers in *Burke's Company* can find heightened expression in their mouths when they can scarcely summon action from their exhausted bodies, the young idealist John King especially, as when he responds to Wills' urgent plea to get a rake to uncover the buried box of provisions and letters at Cooper's Creek: 'Yes, yes, the rake. I'll get the rake, Mr Wills, sir. I'll ... I'll get the rake! I'll get the rake! You'll find it here within my hands.' (Vol. 3, p85). This play remains as moving to read today as it was to see in 1968, precisely because of the power of its words.

ACTION CAME TO EQUATE to deed more vigorously in the New Wave plays of the 1970s, especially those in Volume 1 (all drawn from the brief period 1970–72). While the volume opener's *The Legend of King O'Malley* (by Michael Boddy and Bob Ellis, 1970) might still be rooted in the verbal-debate structure of some of its predecessors, notably Milgate, this widely toured and much-revived harbinger of the Sydney New Wave is still action- and character-driven and even its debate is couched in the forms of vaudeville, song and dance and the ribald satire that characterised at least one strain of the enduring appeal for a decade and a half of the Nimrod Theatre, whose life was arguably spawned by this landmark show.

This volume would suggest that the New Wave's gestation in Melbourne occurred in more modest circumstances, especially given the absence of the APG's equally vigorous *Marvellous Melbourne*. The plays that follow *King O'Malley* are short pieces by Alma De Groen (*The Joss Adams Show*, about a post-natally depressed mother who kills her baby) and John Romeril (*Mrs Thally F*, whose abused wife Vonnie kills two husbands with rat poison) and then Jack Hibberd's quintessential and much-revived 1972 monodrama, *A Stretch of the Imagination*. The other play in Volume 1 is David Williamson's *The Removalists*, first produced in Melbourne in 1971 but frequently revived since. This is the only naturalistic play in a volume otherwise devoted to experiments in epic and presentational form.

Plays of the 70s, Volume 2, offers the most interesting selection of all, revealing the increasingly divergent interests of our playwrights—and the increasing diversity of the playwrights themselves. First up is Peter Kenna's *A Hard God*; dating from 1973, this is more like a play of the 1960s (it is set in 1946) in its critique of the stultifying effects of the past (here, the Catholic Church) but in its lightly encoded exploration of homosexuality (the 'furtive love' of a later Kenna play) it is also tip-toeing into the territory of new-wave values. The ubiquitous Buzo's *Coralie Lansdowne Says No* (when she really meant yes, after all) is unambiguously into new-wave life-values.

If both of these take up residence in what Brisbane calls the domestic sphere, so too does Jim McNeil's surprisingly gentle *How Does Your Garden Grow*, premièred in 1974. While I am not as strongly persuaded as Brisbane that prison drama is such a prominent Australian sub-genre, this play does fit neatly into the collection in the way that inmates Mick, Sam and the transvestite Brenda are, in a sense, practising a kind of new wave, unsanctioned, furtive love in itself (like Kenna's Joe and Jack) and at the same time practising for real life (like Coralie). The revelation that Mick's future 'outside' lies in the arms of the 'mannishly' dressed but clearly liberated (though unnamed) 'Woman' is a fascinating twist.

The final play is Robert Merritt's *The Cake Man*, rightly included as the first play by an indigenous playwright to make it into the mainstream professional theatre. This play about life on the Aboriginal mission at Nowra in the 1950s is yet another chronicle of dashed ideals, but its national and international tours after its Sydney première in 1975 got issues of Aboriginal health, welfare and rights on to the national theatre agenda in a way that no other play had done previously.

Currency is doing us all a great favour in reviving (at least in print) the repertoire of our past. ■

Geoffrey Milne is head of theatre and drama at La Trobe University.

Unreal

eXistenZ, dir. David Cronenberg. Anyone familiar with the films of Canadian director David Cronenberg will recognise the pet obsessions in his latest, *eXistenZ*; the blurring of boundaries between flesh and technology, paranoid anxieties about the crossing of psychic and physical borders, the fetishisation and sexualisation of the line between the human and inhuman. The film plays these obsessions out in the multiple worlds of virtual reality; 'eXistenZ' is in fact the title of the latest fully immersive VR game from designer Allegra Geller (Jennifer Jason Leigh, above with Jude Law). It's played through a game console of pulsating, living flesh, grown from mutated amphibian DNA, and jacks into a surgically implanted bioport at the base of the player's spine via an eight-foot umbilical cord.

eXistenZ begins with Geller on the run from the 'Realists', an anti-VR terrorist group who've put a $5-million bounty on her head for 'crimes against reality'. Her only companion is Ted Pikul (Jude Law), an amateur security guard and games virgin, who justifies his lack of a bioport to a bemused Geller on the grounds of his 'fear of being penetrated'. As you can see, Cronenberg misses no opportunity to play on the sexual ambivalence of the new bodily orifice created by the bioport (when Geller finally convinces Pikul to have a bioport installed, she spouts lines about it 'just waiting to be filled'—you get the picture).

There's also plenty of fun to be had in Cronenberg's self-knowing play on the parallels between game and film (when Geller and Pikul have sex in the game world she has created, she berates herself for having scripted such a 'transparently obvious attempt to heighten the emotional stakes in later scenes of the game'), and the ambivalence about what's real and what's virtual amplifies as the layers of games within games multiply throughout the film. Gross, grotesque, queasily erotic and parodic by turns, *eXistenZ* offers a great introduction to one of the most consistently interesting directors of the past two decades for anyone fool enough to have avoided him till now.

—Allan James Thomas

Seventh heaven

The Sixth Sense, dir. M. Night Shyamalan. It's possible that you've already seen this film, since it opened just after *Eureka Street* went to press last month, but it's so unusually good that it's still worth talking about. If you haven't seen it, go immediately—you are at a double disadvantage for not having seen it and because there are lost souls around who will try to tell you the ending. If someone starts to do this, put your fingers in your ears and sing 'Eskimo Nell' loudly. It may be difficult to do this in, say, a posh restaurant or David Jones, but you might improvise with an elbow to the solar plexus.

Shyamalan wrote the script, and it is extraordinarily well-crafted: on a second viewing I noticed things that were integral to the plot that lay hidden the first time. The performances are uniformly compelling. Toni Collette, as Lynn Sear, the harried single mother of a very troubled ten-year-old, shows her best work to date. Bruce Willis is excellent as Malcolm Crowe, a child psychologist who must deal with his own pain as well as that of the boy he is trying to help. But Haley Joel Osment as Cole Sear, the tortured child visionary, is amazing, a powerful natural talent.

The difference between *The Sixth Sense* and other horror or ghost movies is fundamental, because here there is no gratuitous wallowing in evil and grue. The plot deals with courage, love, pity and terror, and do not underestimate the terror. Both times I went I was glad of company. But I was also moved. **—Juliette Hughes**

Shaggy dog

Black Cat, White Cat, dir. Emir Kusturica. This new film by respected director Kusturica (*Underground* and *Time of the Gypsies*) has a plot to rival the most convoluted of operas. The film is like an over-exuberant pup jumping into your lap. It's fun at first, but then you wish it would back off.

Set on the banks of the Danube, the comedy revolves around the interaction between two rival gypsy families controlled by two wealthy octogenarian patriarchs, Grga Pitic and Zarije. Zarije's crooked son, Matko, devises a black-market 'get rich quick' scheme involving a train-load of petrol, but makes the mistake of letting Dadan, a drug-crazed gypsy gangster, in on the scheme. Dadan double-crosses Matko, resulting in Matko's owing Dadan a heap of money, a debt that can only be satisfied by marriage between Matko's son and Dadan's unmarriageable sister. Compared with this, *Cosi Fan Tutte* is just a simple yarn!

The film begins slowly, but ultimately achieves a frenetic pace driven by wild gypsy music and emphatic direction.

However, despite the vibrant colour and movement, the film consistently fails to deliver as a comedy. The acting is overwhelming and frantically unfunny, with real laughs few and far between. A repeated sight gag of a large sow devouring a car was the biggest hit at the session I attended, closely followed by a Keatonesque scene in which the betrayed Matko tries to recover his money from a corpse hanging from a railway boom gate.

It requires inspired comedy to overcome a foreign language and the resultant subtitles. Subtitles distract from the visual impact of a film and of course deprive the audience of the subtle nuances and colour of idiomatic speech, but here everyone tries just too hard to please, virtually begging for laughs. There is a running *Casablanca* joke, anal jokes, the bodies-kept-on-ice joke, and Fellini-like use of animals as the film searches for zany impact.

In the event, two hours seemed to take four and towards the end, when the film simply refused to lie down, my buttocks were telling me it was time to go home.

—Gordon Lewis

The beau ideal

An Ideal Husband, dir. Oliver Parker. Adapting Oscar Wilde to the screen is like trying to put nail polish on skin: the surface keeps sloughing off. In Oliver Parker's attempt at this stagey 1895 comedy of manners and misdemeanours, the intimate camera seems to extract from his players a patchy naturalism rather than Wilde's enamelled style. Characters chat where he would have them declaim. They deliver their *bons mots* with method intensity. All except for Rupert Everett that is. Everett, as the youthful Lord Goring (34, but he only admits to 32) is so polished and infectious that he carries this otherwise pedestrian drama before him.

Goring/Everett is the narcissist with a moralist's heart, a peacemaker's urge and a wittily incontinent tongue—the quintessentially Wildean figure. He is the pivot of Oscar's play and Oliver Parker's film. Lucky, because none of the rest of Parker's cast is much more than competent (except in the vignette roles—Peter Vaughan as Phipps, Lord Goring's gentleman's gentleman, and John Wood as his choleric father, the Earl of Caversham). Minnie Driver plays a pert and marriageable Mabel Chiltern with a bit too much jaw action. Jeremy North, as her compromised brother Sir Robert Chiltern, is afflicted with a moustache. Julianne Moore warms to her role as the scheming Mrs Cheveley with the aid of some script additions (Parker gives her more complex motivation than did Wilde), but she has rather too many teeth in her lower jaw. They distract one both from her conniving and from her vulnerable face.

Cate Blanchett drew the short straw when she was cast as the unengagingly impeccable Lady Gertrude Chiltern—the name gives her character well enough. Wilde did wicked women well and eccentric women wonderfully. He was not strong on the relentlessly virtuous, male or female. Blanchett's response is to hunch her shoulders in hapless self-defence and in a series of costumes that do not quite fit.

But Everett/Goring is immaculate. Cary Grant reincarnate—a teasing pleaser with flickers of depth. You grow so fond of his supercilious, self-deprecating humanity that by the film's end you are reconciled to the play, the film and his friends. Well, almost.

—Morag Fraser

Spiked again

Summer of Sam, dir. Spike Lee. I always come out of a Spike Lee film feeling hectored. Oliver Stone has a similar effect on me. Their films crash over you in great waves of face-pulling political rhetoric and emotional bullying.

Summer of Sam is a confused but insistent film set during the New York summer of 1977—a summer of baseball, black-outs, looting, searing heat and random killings.

As Stone often does, Lee attempts to talk about 'big stuff' by looking at 'little stuff'. As neat an artistic idea as this may be, Lee just can't make it work. The Son of Sam killings become metaphors for the end of neighbourhood trust and sexual freedom; the punk kid becomes a metaphor for bucking the system; the policemen (one Afro-American, one Italo-American) become symbols of race relations; and so it goes on. Lee's characters are so overburdened with the responsibility of educating us that they become essays rather than real human beings.

With Mira Sorvino and John Leguizamo in the lead roles you can forgive a good deal. But John Turturro is wasted as the 'Voice of Harvey the Black Dog', barking commands at David Berkowitz to go out and kill. While undeniably (but I assume unintentionally) humorous, the nattering K9 certainly represented the film's low point.

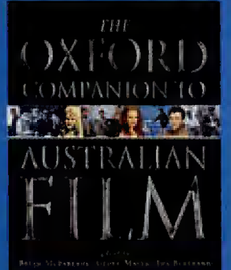
The artful design of blood-splattered car interiors and the film-clip style of the Berkowitz sequences makes me wonder and worry about Lee's artistic priorities. The virtuosity of his design is costly, and it comes at the expense of a humble engagement with the real world, both big and little.

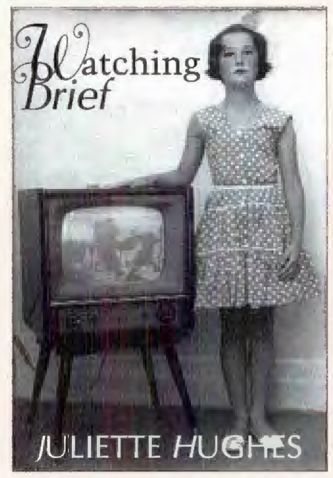
—Siobhan Jackson

Eureka Street Film Competition

For a chance to win *The Oxford Companion to Australian Film*, published in November, just tell us the names of the actors pictured on the book's cover (above).

Send your entry on the back of an envelope addressed to: 'Flash in the Pan' December Competition, *Eureka Street*, PO Box 553, RICHMOND VIC 3121, including your name, address and phone number. The winner will be drawn on 31 January 1999 and published in the March 1999 edition of *Eureka Street*.





What really happens

'OH MY DARLING, keep your hands free from your fellow creature's blood ...'

In the fifth of her Boyer lectures (ABC Radio National; Sundays at 5pm) Inga Clendinnen quotes a letter from Lillie Matthews, a young woman Victorian in place and time (the 1880s), writing to her fiancé in Western Australia which was then still in what Clendinnen identifies as 'the violent stage of the contact process'. The young man 'has confided that he himself has been "on nigger hunts"'. Clendinnen notes that Lillie may be less motivated by compassion for Indigenous people than by a desire to save her beloved's soul. Soul-saving was to be as much of a scourge for the Indigenous as any other oppressor, and its pain was to penetrate far into this century. The Melbourne Presbyterian hierarchy who ignored anthropologist Donald Thomson's pleas for the Aurukun community under the heel of its evil Supervisor MacKenzie; the well-intentioned Jesuits who gave physical protection to the people of the Daly in 1887, but left feral pigs and ill-digested biblical stories to devastate the fragile riverside environment and the culture of the people who had lived there so long.

Clendinnen shows us another woman of those times, Emily Creaghe who, in her travels around Cape York with her husband, blandly documents the treatment of an Aboriginal girl who has been hunted down and brought in with a rope around her neck, dragged behind a horse and then tied to a tree. This is to tame the 'new wild gin' before introducing her to a life of slavery at a white, presumably Christian, homestead. Clendinnen tells us that this one managed to escape. I have a wild hope it was because Emily, knowing what awaited that girl, crept out in the dark, hot Cape night, impelled by anger, pity and solidarity as woman and human being, and untied her. I can muse in this way because I am not an historian, and my imagination is under less discipline than Clendinnen's. This is not to accuse Clendinnen of lack of imagination, far from it. She is one of Australia's best historians precisely because of her fusion of sensibility and rigour.

She is strangely optimistic about human nature, given the horrors she has documented as the author of *Reading the Holocaust*, as well as in her acclaimed work on Mayan and Aztec culture and now in her investigations into the treatment of Australia's Indigenous people. Her first Boyer lecture opens with an account given in 1801 by Nicolas Baudin, a French naturalist, of an encounter with an Indigenous couple on the south-west coast of Western Australia. After shaking his fish spear at the Frenchmen (Baudin was part of a scientific expedition backed by Napoleon Bonaparte) the man flees, leaving the woman, who falls on her face, terrified. The two scientists lift her and examine her. All very benign, considering what could have happened and often did. But when Clendinnen, after quoting Baudin's viewpoint, takes us through the incident from the woman's perspective, we start to perceive something of the outrageousness of the way humans intrude upon others.

But in the midst of outrage is still this tinge of optimism. Clendinnen seems to be arguing, cautiously, throughout this Boyer series that if we cease to feed the heart on fantasies (or 'bad history'), but give instead truth (or 'good history') then hearts will grow, not brutal from the fare, but perhaps tender at last. She draws on the experience of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and notes that 'Some will still cry out for justice, but the worst of the agony has been assuaged and rendered unavailable for disreputable use by that extraordinary collective enterprise in good history.'

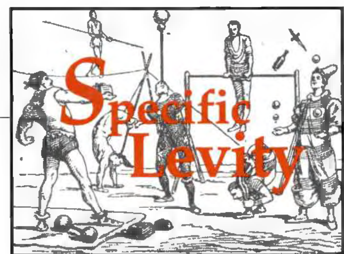
Inga Clendinnen's vision of the past is clarified by her attachment to values we need more of: a certain steady wisdom that has seen plenty but is still properly shockable, not desensitised—like that of an old, experienced teacher ferreting out the truth about an incident of bullying.

BUT THE BULLIES are still a problem. It may be that I'm going from the heights of tragedy to the rolling suburbia of easy buffoonery, but I think anyone who watched *Ramsay's Boiling Point* (on Channel Nine recently) might see the connection. Gordon Ramsay is a man you wouldn't want your son to work for. He is a chef, we are told, of great talent, and wants more than anything in life to get a third star in the upcoming *Michelin Guide*. To that end he abuses his kitchen staff. He allows the documentary team into the kitchen because he is after some 'favourable' publicity after being nominated as one of Britain's worst bosses. Like all bullies, he doesn't see his own behaviour as anything but reasonable. He might have reduced a young man to tears and then sneered at him for 'blubbering like a fucking baby' for the heinous crime of overcooking some artichokes, but he would say the young sous-chef made him do it.

Ramsay is also a liar and a cheat. Given £5000 to create a dish to promote Bramley apples, he uses Granny Smiths. When the Michelin judges arrive (unannounced, but he has his spies) he gives them appetisers that ordinary customers don't get, and makes sure the surrounding tables get them too in order to make it look good. You wouldn't want to eat there, because he spits on a teatowel to tidy up a plate that's just going out to an unsuspecting diner. Fake apples, fake generosity, spit and polish. All creating a veneer of reasonableness, care, skill, pleasure, kindness. The reality it covers, imperfectly thanks to the camera, is foul-mouthed, dishonest, egomaniacal.

And don't miss *As It Happened: Holy Hijacker: Seeking the Third Secret of Fatima* (SBS, Saturday 18 December, 7.30pm). The way the Fatima loonies see the state of the world, Our Lady's relation to Jesus is like some battered matriarch from the western suburbs, holding back Wayne who's about to go ballistic because someone dissed his tattoos. It seems the only way to save the world from cataclysmic flood and war is to grovel a few rituals, not to be kind, honest or farsighted. And Satan is stalking the corridors of power, even in the church. Well *DER*. ■

Juliette Hughes is a freelance reviewer.



Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 79, December 1999

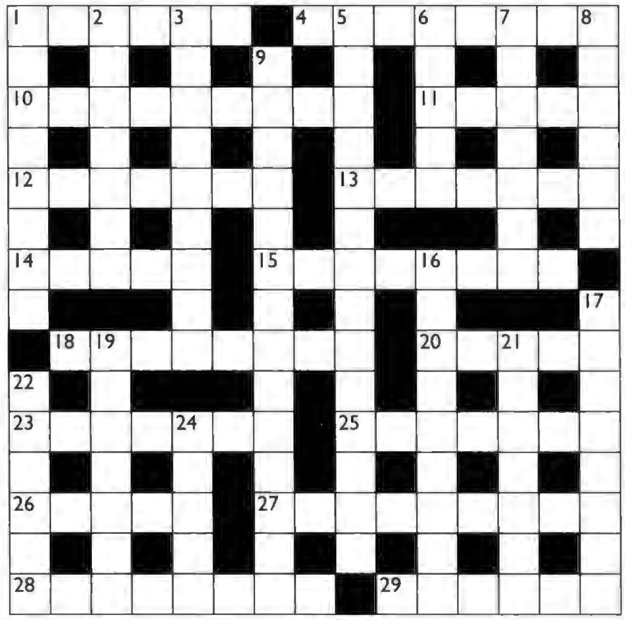
Devised by Joan Nowotny IBVM

ACROSS

1 & 19-down. Young maiden, perhaps, is about to alight on the South runway for a stay in the West Indies. (6,7)
4. What's the score? It's around two thousand and nine, maybe. Result coming soon. (8)
10. Mother and you, in Paris, take Latin translation in the morning. (9)
11. Unusual choir sings rapturously, having drunk the divine fluid, perhaps. (5)
12. Conclude with a 'No' vote? That could cause hell! (7)
13. Former healthy Head Director breathed his last? (7)
14. Fill some prelate with optimism. (5)
15. Through thirteen moons—a span of time to yearn for. (8)
18. Such people often engage in polite, rational discourse. (8)
20. Protective equipment for sixes or over! (5)
23. Bring to an end the arrangement of local leading fire fighters. (4,3)
25. 9-down could bring on such frenetic activity—it's neverending! (7)
26. The extent of the Alps, for instance. (5)
27. Showing foresight or impractical? How does one characterise a follower of 5-down? (9)
28. A craft that provides receptacles for what's too hard for now. (8)
29. Stiffening needed for such floppy charts! (6)

DOWN

1. Blackmailers, for example, could drive one bats! (8)
2. Liqueur I sipped at RAAF broadcast airshow. (7)
3. In any event, rein in your emotions lest embarrassment should ensue. (9)
5. 19th century philosopher took directions from 4th century heresy to create belief in an era of universal harmony. (14)
6. European whiskey, perhaps! (5)
8. I joined in the deal, not expecting such a dressing down. (6)
9. The temperature one can have at the thought of Christmas shopping, perhaps, or final term exams, maybe. (3-2-4, 5)
16. For a nurse, perhaps, residence off the job is not allowed. (6, 3)
17. Excursion taken yearly, initially, to church featuring painted panels as an altarpiece. (8)
19. See 1-across
21. After bush fires at random intervals, settled weather is now likely. (3, 4)
22. Beetle along in AB's new car with fellow cricketers, perhaps. (6)
24. Stout old boy takes directions to improve his condition. (5)



Solution to Crossword no. 78, November 1999

A word from the publisher

You may have noticed that with this edition of *Eureka Street* the cover price has increased to $7.50. The cost of subscriptions has also increased, but by a much smaller percentage.

We never take the issue of a price increase lightly. We appreciate the support of our subscribers and know that in some cases the money spent on *Eureka Street* is not easy to find. We are always encouraged by people who tell us that, along with coffee, it is one of the things they can't do without!

We have been forced to increase our price at this time to cover an increase in production and distribution expenses, especially postage. **We will not have another increase for the GST next year.**

You will also find that the discount for subscriptions is now much greater than before. Naturally, we are hoping to encourage our casual readers to become subscribers. Please have a look at our rates and encourage your friends to do so as well. A subscription to *Eureka Street* makes an ideal Christmas present.

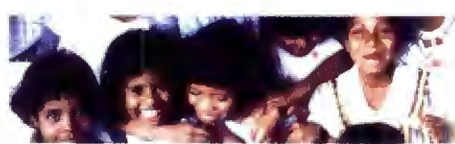
With all good wishes as Christmas approaches,
Michael McGirr SJ

Bishop Belo - Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Dili, East Timor

Please give generously to the East Timor Appeal

East Timor still needs the support of all Australians

Help the men, women and children of East Timor whose lives have been torn apart.



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