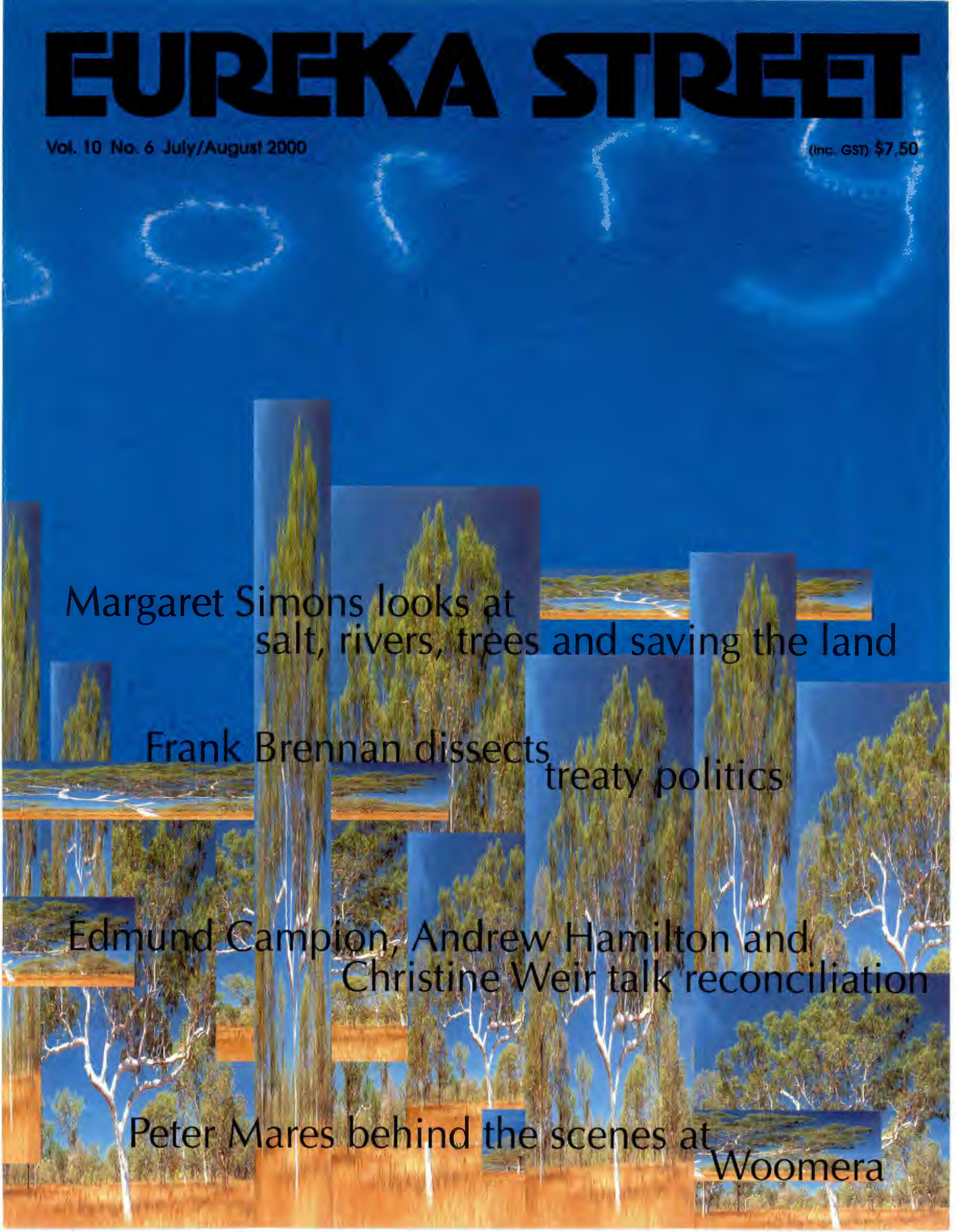
EUREKA STREET

Vol. 10 No. 6 July/August 2000

(Inc. GST) $7.50



Margaret Simons looks at salt, rivers, trees and saving the land

Frank Brennan dissects treaty politics

Edmund Campion, Andrew Hamilton and Christine Weir talk reconciliation

Peter Mares behind the scenes at Woomera

EUREKA STREET

A magazine of public affairs, the arts and theology

Volume 10 Number 6
July/August 2000

CONTENTS

Cover design by Siobhan Jackson
Cover and p3 photograph by Peter Davis.
Photographs pp16–17 by Peter Davis.
Graphics pp18, 20–21, 26 by Siobhan Jackson.

Eureka Street magazine
Jesuit Publications
PO Box 553
Richmond VIC 3121
Tel (03) 9427 7311
Fax (03) 9428 4450

EUREKA STREET

A magazine of public affairs, the arts and theology

General manager
Joseph Hoo

Editor
Morag Fraser

Assistant editor
Kate Manton

Graphic designer
Siobhan Jackson

Publisher
Michael McGirr SJ

Administration manager: Mark Dowell

Editorial and production assistants
Juliette Hughes, Paul Fyfe SJ,
Geraldine Battersby, Ben Hider

Contributing editors
Adelaide: Greg O'Kelly SJ, Perth: Dean Moore
Sydney: Edmund Campion, Gerard Windsor
Queensland: Peter Pierce

United Kingdom correspondent
Denis Minns OP

South East Asia correspondent
Jon Greenaway

Jesuit Editorial Board
Peter L'Estrange SJ, Andrew Bullen SJ,
Andrew Hamilton SJ
Peter Steele SJ, Bill Uren SJ

Marketing manager: Rosanne Turner
Advertising representative: Ken Head
Subscription manager: Wendy Marlowe

Administration and distribution
Mrs Irene Hunter

Patrons
Eureka Street gratefully acknowledges the support of C. and A. Carter; the trustees of the estate of Miss M. Condon; W.P. & M.W. Gurry

Eureka Street magazine, ISSN 1036–1758,
Australia Post Print Post approved pp349181/00314,
is published ten times a year
by Eureka Street Magazine Pty Ltd,
300 Victoria Street, Richmond, Victoria 3121
Tel: 03 9427 7311 Fax: 03 9428 4450
email: eureka@jespub.jesuit.org.au
http://www.eurekastreet.com.au
Responsibility for editorial content is accepted by Michael McGirr SJ, 300 Victoria Street, Richmond.
Printed by Doran Printing,
46 Industrial Drive, Braeside VIC 3195.

Unsolicited manuscripts, including poetry and fiction, will be returned only if accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Requests for permission to reprint material from the magazine should be addressed in writing to:
The editor, *Eureka Street* magazine,
PO Box 553, Richmond VIC 3121

COMMENT: 1

MORAG FRASER

Out of a clear sky

'THE WINTER OF OUR DISCONTENT' is one way of looking at the dramatic events of the past month. But things are rarely so simple.

The vibrant blue of the Sydney sky, bearing its fragile, unforgettable message, is emblematic of the mixed state of Australia's current circumstances. What looks like glorious summer was in fact a day whipped by a piercing wind, but that didn't stop the people coming, any more than sleet, wind and

rain stopped them from marching in other state capitals. The vibrancy was sustained, even if the politics were intransigent.

You will catch some of its energy and complexity this month in the reflections on reconciliation, politics and Pacific coups, written by Andrew Hamilton, Edmund Campion, Frank Brennan, Jean Ker Walsh and Christine Weir. The latter two are newcomers to *Eureka Street*, and welcome, for the depth of their experience in Australia, Fiji and the Solomon Islands, and for the clarity of the distinctions they draw between the circumstances in our respective countries.

Also in this issue, Peter Mares investigates the conditions for detainees and local residents in Woomera. Read him on page 26 for the background story, including the news that the Catholic priest in Woomera, Fr Jim Monaghan, has been advised that contact with the media is 'not appropriate'.

Margaret Simons reports this month on the specifics of Australia's latest environmental push. We now *know* how to address the degradation of our land and waterways. But will we do what is necessary? See page 18. Finally, writer and photo-journalist Peter Davis, who took this month's reconciliation photographs, introduces the first of an intriguing series of essays on working lives.

See you again in September. **—Morag Fraser**

BRETT EVANS

Union blues

Some recent victories don't suggest that it's all plain sailing for Australian unions.

THE AUSTRALIAN UNION movement still knows how to organise a good demo. On June 1, over 20,000 rank-and-file members marched in Sydney against Workplace Relations Minister Peter Reith's 'third wave' of industrial relations reform.

In keeping with the union movement's increasingly sophisticated presentation skills, Sydney's CBD was awash with colour as unionists marched peacefully through the city streets waving multi-coloured flags to the sound of whistles, drums and reggae music.

Later that day in the Senate, the Australian Democrats handed down an adverse finding on Reith's Workplace Relations Amendments Bill, which was designed to outlaw strike action in support of industry-wide agreements, otherwise known as 'pattern bargaining'.

Unions one, Reith zero. But the game is just beginning.

On June 30, the workplace agreements covering 1000 Victorian manufacturing companies expire. And the Metal Trades Federation of Unions in Victoria can't wait to use their freedom to pattern bargain. This powerful grouping of unions—the so-called 'New Militants'—have organised Campaign 2000, an old-style campaign designed to deliver higher wages to union members across the industry.

Minister Reith presents this as a return to the 1970s, when unions were held accountable for wage-push inflation. In fact, it represents a new era for Australian unions.

Union membership peaked at 62 per cent in 1954. By 1999, it had fallen to 26 per cent. This decline in membership reflects a fundamental change in the labour market. Jobs growth has shifted away from traditionally unionised areas, like manufacturing, towards non-unionised industries, such as information technology.

Increasingly, unions can't find new members among the young, casualised and female workers of the new economy. Therefore, they must learn to protect the niche markets they already dominate. And, as in any business competing in a niche market, it's all about servicing the customers—in this case union members.

So for the leaders of Australia's few remaining powerful unions, there is still much to be gained from flexing their industrial might and getting back to basics: delivering on wages and conditions. Just as 'The Bush' is revolting against the supposed benefits of deregulation, so too are the suburban working classes.

And not before time. As Sydney University's Russell Lansbury recently explained, Australia is rapidly heading 'down the US path of low minimum wages and less social security'. From a system of 'managed centralism' under Labor's Accords in the 1980s, Australia has moved towards the 'fragmented flexibility' of Peter Reith.

In this fragmented, flexible labour market an increasing number of Australians are 'involuntary' part-timers, holding down two jobs; working in casual employment without job security; or working unpaid overtime in full-time jobs. Given the incentives, unions might actually flourish in their niche markets.

So where does this leave the labour movement's parliamentary representatives?

Much to the annoyance of the government, the federal Labor Opposition is playing its policy cards close to its chest. Like the Coalition in the lead up to the 1996 election, Labor prefers to offer up a small target, giving its opponents less to attack.

Yet, on May 31, Opposition Leader Kim Beazley outlined a major part of Labor's policy on industrial relations.

Labor would 'restore the powers of the independent umpire', the much-maligned Industrial Relations Commission; it would support the right to collective bargaining; and it would scrap Reith's Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs).

Even though less than one per cent of the Australian workforce is covered by these agreements, unionists hate them on principle because AWAs are individual contracts negotiated without union involvement or recourse to collective bargaining.

For his troubles, Beazley was roundly condemned in the editorials of all the major papers and attacked by the government, but he did gain valuable political points within the labour movement.

At the end of July, Labor will hold its National Conference, and party strategists are keen to present a united front in the lead-up to next year's federal election.

By promising to ditch the AWAs, Beazley is hoping to win on another, even more important, economic issue without a damaging fight at conference.

Under Hawke and Keating, Labor became a resolutely free-trade party, and Kim Beazley wants to keep it that way. The same unionists behind Campaign 2000, such as the National Secretary of the Metalworkers, Doug Cameron, are leading the push for 'fair trade' within the labour movement.

Would union delegates to conference really want to roll the man who looks set to banish the dreaded individual contracts to the dustbin of history? ■

Brett Evans is a current affairs producer with ABC TV and a freelance writer.

Capital Letter

Jack Waterford

What's at the top

In this winter parliamentary recess, one party steels itself for government 18 months down the track. The other prepares itself to do what it must to stave that defeat off. Neither is a very lovely sight, and it remains to be seen whether either will be much more presentable after the party conferences and the outbreaks of internal brawling. Probably, however, it depends as much on substance as on $400 million of publicly funded Liberal Party public relations, or staged presentations of goodwill, harmony and slogans organised by ALP machine men.

Will these PR campaigns present us with politicians, of either side, who we can believe in? Or follow?

For me, the answer may well be 'no', if one recent test is any indication—the ALP would prefer to be led by a hard-nosed realist such as John Della Bosca, rather than a dreamer such as Barry Jones. Give me the dreamer any day. I am sure that Mr Della Bosca is a splendid person, but his rising to the top indicates that the political parties are out of touch with voters.

It is of no particular moment, in this context, that Mr Della Bosca comes from the NSW Right, the most powerful and ruthless machine in Australian politics. The machines and their machinations dominate both sides of politics.

The internal processes of both of the major political parties are, or have been, deeply corrupted in recent years. If people can advance up the greasy pole only by branch-stacking, manipulation and, often, outright fraud, how can we trust the products of the system? If politicians, even senior politicians, are deeply in the debt of other people, including those who have a chokehold over their pre-selections or advancement in the party, how can one be certain that they will make political decisions unaffected by their obligations to them?

Once the processes, though corrupt, were reasonably transparent—the appointment of power-brokers to cushy statutory jobs, the granting of public monies to public organisations which favoured the governing party. Up to a point one expects that: the purpose of politics is about exercising power and organised bodies in politics are about nothing if they are not about exercising power in a way which supports the interests that have motivated them in the first place. What is, however, increasingly obvious is the way in which many of those exercising power and influence behind the scenes are less concerned with theories of what is best for the nation, and more concerned with what serves the personal, and sometimes the financial, interests of tight cliques with little discernible body of principle.

Some politicians seem above it, and some are. Others may have a distaste for the processes but have come to regard the business of getting pre-selected and elected, and keeping in with the power-brokers, as intrinsic to the game of politics. Kim Beazley, for example, is an ardent student and player in the disposition of numbers. So is John Howard. Both are too high up to have their fingers in the ballot boxes, but when scandal breaks, their first instinct, as often as not, is to calculate how it affects their own factions and positions. They will act, or push their own party to act, only when the smell is too intense, or when their failure to act becomes seen as a test of their leadership.

In this context, it is interesting to reflect again on the success of a new crop of independents of the ilk of Ted Mack (now retired from politics) or Peter Andren, the member for Calare. They have counterparts in most of the state parliaments. In most cases, they have been elected not because of some pressing local issue, or even because of a particularly woeful former local member, but because they have said they want to clean up the processes of government. Their calls for a more open executive and more independent and accountable institutions, and their assault on the perks and privileges of politicians, have attracted strong support.

Such idealists are often impractical, and they often think too much about the processes of government and too little about its outcomes. They often lack coherent ideas or policies about dealing with the full range of problems of government, and they lack the staff or the support bases which allow them to develop such expertise. At the same time, however, their clear idealism, and their articulations of notions of public good, make them particularly attractive politicians by comparison with those whose words cannot inspire and whose deeds do even less.

There are some who imagine that the ideal parliament would involve only independents, assessing each issue on its merits as it arose. That will never happen. Groups will always coalesce around common ideas or interests. Those who want better government would do better reforming the parties than establishing new ones or going off alone. Until the parties themselves focus on being organisations of ideas and ideals, open to public participation, accountable in their internal processes, and seen to prevent or punish those who corrupt its processes, they will find it more and more difficult to inspire and enthuse, more and more difficult to recruit the best and the brightest, and themselves less and less able to function with popular consent. For not a few voters, an amiable and eccentric Barry Jones, bubbling with ideas and enthusiasm, and almost unable to stop being decent, is a better symbol of a Labor Party than an apparatchik from the Labor machine. ■

Jack Waterford is editor of the *Canberra Times*.

Paper pulpit

From Ray Cassin

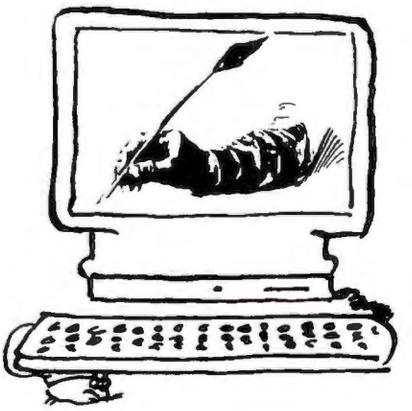
Journalism is by definition an ephemeral activity, but Denis Minns OP (Cogito, *Eureka Street*, June 2000) is wrong in thinking that newspapers are thereby excluded from 'continuity of moral consciousness'.

Newspapers have a relationship with their readers that extends beyond the tenures of particular editors and writers, and that relationship is maintained by, among other things, the acceptance of a moral obligation to publish what is true and to correct errors. Surely that implies a continuity of moral consciousness? It is easy to be cynical or contemptuous when someone speaks of the ethical obligations of journalists, because the examples of journalists failing to live up to these obligations are plentiful. But reputable newspapers—the kind I imagine that Denis reads in the common room at Blackfriars, Oxford—are reputable because they do in fact acknowledge their errors when these are pointed out, and sometimes even before they are pointed out.

The fact that newspapers make their apologies for misdeeds in the recent past hardly makes them less likely possessors of a continuous moral consciousness than the two institutions that Denis speaks of as possessing this characteristic, the church and the nation.

An apology by a newspaper reflects a clear continuity with the error that required it, whereas the apologies recently made by the church, and the apology that is yet to be made by the nation, are noteworthy for the elapse of time between the errors and the apologies. It has taken seven centuries for the church to apologise for the crusades, and five centuries for it to apologise for burning Giordano Bruno for heresy. Whatever else may be said about the moral consciousness that called forth these apologies, it is only by straining at the meaning of words that it can be called continuous. Yet Denis not only appears to think that there is no problem in speaking of the church's 'continuous moral consciousness' but that it would be 'pompous and ridiculous' for that ephemeral product, the newspaper, to pretend that it had such a thing. It is unwise for clerics, even clerics as genial as Denis Minns, to look outside the church for examples of pomposity.

Eureka Street welcomes letters from its readers. Short letters are more likely to be published, and all letters may be edited. Letters must be signed, and should include a contact phone number and the writer's name and address. If submitting by email, a contact phone number is essential. Address: eureka@jespub.jesuit.org.au



The newspaper with which I am most familiar acknowledges its mistakes under the frank headline 'We Were Wrong'. Compare that with the elliptical language used in the church's apology for the crusades and the inquisition, which were described as 'errors committed in the service of truth'. When it comes to admissions of error, I think that our all-too-pompous, all-too-ridiculous church could learn a lot from that very human and fallible institution, the daily newspaper.

Ray Cassin
Roxburgh Park, VIC

Apologetics

From John Haughey

Is it ever ethically appropriate for me to apologise for something I haven't done? Surely it is. I would say 'sorry' to a foreign tourist on a Melbourne tram if I saw her suffer a racist insult from an Australian passenger.

That's an easy case. I am ethically involved in the offence because I am connected (by nationality) with the offender. But what if there were no connection? What if the offender were not a fellow Australian but, say, another foreign tourist? Clearly my involvement would be less and hence require of me only a lesser measure of sympathy. But how much? Hard to calculate.

Fortunately there is now an amount authorised for such cases. It is represented by the word 'regret' (as distinct from the word 'sorry'). So I ought to tell the offended woman candidly (but tactfully) that while I regretted the abuse she had suffered, I was not sorry for it because 'sorry' would represent an amount of sympathy which it would be imprudent for me to offer for abuse in which I was not involved.

I'm sure that's right. But I know what would happen. Her tears would get the better of me and I would blurt out a full, unauthorised, 'Sorry Missus'. Just like that—quite inappropriately and in front of the other passengers.

Then there would be hell to pay. They would never let me on the trams again.

John Haughey
Toorak, VIC

Winners of the May 2000 Book Offer

O. Abrahams, Southbank, VIC; A. Albeck, Thallon, QLD; T. Dopheide, Eltham, VIC; V. Ferris, Sydney, NSW; M. Fogarty, Meerschaum Vale, NSW; T. Mahedy, Culcairn, NSW; K. McDermott, East St Kilda, VIC; K. Murray, Balwyn, VIC; L. Reardon, South Brisbane, QLD; J. Ryan, Leichhardt, NSW; T. Ryan, St Helens, TAS; G. Savige, Moe, VIC.





The Month's Traffic

It's been a tumultuous five weeks. Corroboree 2000 and the Sydney reconciliation march have had a ripple effect throughout Australia. In the South Pacific, one coup after another prompted more questions than can't be answered by the current terms of debate over land ownership.

Reconciliation: Sydney

They were a Brisbane Uniting Church couple whose faith committed them to social justice. So when they learned that the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation was planning to focus the nation's attention during the last weekend in May, a weekend in Sydney called Corroboree 2000, they determined to be there. Mr and Mrs Robert Campbell travelled south and stayed with relatives at Asquith, one of Sydney's most northerly suburbs. On Saturday morning they got up at five o'clock, had some breakfast and caught a train which got them to the Sydney Opera House just after seven. There was coffee and tea and a view of the harbour, but nothing to eat. So they stood around until the doors opened, 29 minutes late, at 9.14 am.

The next day, despite Bob's crook feet, they would walk the Harbour Bridge to Darling Harbour, 4.1kms, for concerts and talk. They wanted to go to St Mary's Cathedral for the ecumenical service mid-afternoon, but they had a job to do. Down at the Botanic Gardens, near the Opera House, there was a Sea of Hands, one of the expressive rituals the process of reconciliation has developed. People were needed to take down the display and the Campbells, foot soldiers of social justice, of course volunteered. They might not get into the papers or on to the news bulletins, but Corroboree 2000 belonged to the Campbells as much as it did to the high-flyers who made the news.

It was a ceremonious weekend, the meanings of which could reveal themselves suddenly in a gesture, a phrase, or a piece of symbolism. One such revelation came unexpectedly at the end of the most newsworthy event, the Prime Minister's speech at the Opera House, when Koori anger boiled over like milk on a stove and row after row of the audience stood and turned their backs on him. Pissing into the wind isn't fun; and John Howard battled gamely through a storm of jeers and catcalls. Still, he knew that was coming and was ready for it. Then came the unexpected gesture which transformed the encounter. As they walked across the stage together, Geoff Clark, elected chairman of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, put his hand on John Howard's shoulder and gave him a companionable squeeze. It was a matey gesture that spoke volumes of hope for the negotiations which lie ahead.

For some, the most emotional moment at the Opera House came right at the beginning, when representatives of the traditional peoples of the Sydney region welcomed the audience to their lands. Ms Ali Golding of the Viripi people said she stood in the gap of her ancestors, 'the unseen guests', and welcomed those who had their hearts in the right place. Standing on the stage of Sydney's proudest building, these representatives fleshed out what Premier Bob Carr would later call the resilience of their peoples, as well as their great generosity of spirit.

One has grown used to speakers saying they acknowledge the Aboriginal people on whose lands we meet—it has become as formulaic as beginning a speech, 'Ladies and gentlemen'. No-one who was there on that Saturday morning, however, will easily forget Beryl Timbery Beller of the Tharawal people, Colin Gale of the Darug people, Ali Golding of the Biripi people and the others who stood up and put meaning into the formula. The applause for their presence, their survival, was tumultuous.

Similarly, Evelyn Scott, chairperson of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, was given a standing ovation when she spoke. Then, with one of the many freighted gestures which this day carried, she turned to her audience and gave *them* a standing ovation. Her generous gesture spoke a clear message: mutuality—we are all in this together, or we fail. Evelyn Scott's speech resonated at deeper levels than the surface politics which caught media attention. For more than 50 years, she said, she had watched our country struggle with its conscience. *Conscience!*—here was a moral issue, a question of right and wrong, beyond party politics. Of course party politics was everywhere at the Opera House. People talked about the rebuffs to John Howard and the cheers for Kim Beazley and the strange silence which folded round the appearance of Meg Lees (with the exception of one heckler: 'Thanks for the GST!'). All this, however, was on the surface. Their hopes ran at a more profound level than this, as they showed when they gave the Governor-General a standing ovation before he had even spoken. In Australia today, Sir William Deane has become a prime articulator of spiritual dimensions, so that his mere presence tells of a different order of reality.

Other presences spoke too. Seeing Henry Reynolds reminded one of something Ken Inglis had said at the Sydney Writers' Festival the week before—that Reynolds has made a greater impact on Australia than any other historian, because his research destroyed the doctrine of *terra nullius*. Father Frank Brennan sj was another speaking presence there, too. And Gough Whitlam. And Eddie Mabo's family. One thought of that line from W.B. Yeats:

'Because I helped to wind the clock/I come to hear it strike.'

Of course the great presence came the next day, when something like a quarter of a million people walked across the Harbour Bridge, a bigger demonstration for a cause than even the Moratorium marches of Vietnam War days. It was a sunny clear Sunday morning, so everyone could see the skywriter printing one word, SORRY, over and over on the blue Sydney sky. They could see, too, the Aboriginal flag flying on the Bridge, on Government House and on the Jesuits' St Aloysius' College. And the picnic. The only times they warmed up were whenever the skywriter finished one of his signings of *Sorry*; then they stopped walking and cheered and clapped and took photographs.

As they walked, they spoke of many things. Those who had been to the Opera House told the others of Mick Dodson's wonderful speech which counterpoised two lives, his own and John Howard's; and the symbolism of that candle which was burned all day in remembrance for the stolen generations; and the ochre and black hands printed on a canvas by participants; and the Queensland university student who helped found Australians Against Racism; and the applause which swept the hall when the outside cameras showed the Sea of Hands in the Botanic Gardens; and the shy emotions which could ignite at any time throughout that electric day.

If you had asked every person on the Bridge walk why he or she was there, you might have got a different answer from each one of them. The *Sorry* word was much in evidence, as was *Apology* and *Treaty*. Succeeding weeks would show that a diversity of activists could justly claim

Dr Evelyn Scott gives her address inside the Opera House, while outside on the steps, Aboriginal soldiers form a guard of honour for the arrival of the reconciliation document. *Photograph by Peter Davis.*

signs people carried ... *Jews for Ethnic Tolerance* and *Dominicans for Reconciliation* and *Support your local Elders* and *Sorry* and, most mysteriously, a man standing all alone with a handprinted sign, *Atheists and Rationalists against Racism and for Reconciliation.*

The mood of this vast crowd was relaxed and happy, as if they were on their way to a music and dance and songs; and how they had cheered big Malcolm Fraser when he reached up and put his handprint at the very top of the canvas; and how they had given three cheers for the Governor-General as he went off to lunch; and how two of the best speeches came from young people, Marcus Lacey, a teacher from North Arnhem Land and Elcho Island, and Renee Coffey, a some sort of a Bridge mandate for their particular proposals. One meaning was instantly clear. Whatever its outcomes, Corroboree 2000 was a radical demonstration of conscience. It was a recognition that Australia had not given everyone a fair go and that it is time to face the moral question which haunts us all.

—Edmund Campion

Being seen to be sorry

In the last month, we have been preoccupied with reconciliation and its lack within Australian society. Meanwhile, ordinary Catholics remain unreconciled to the loss of their communal rite and to exhortation to individual confession. So why not try to reconcile old and new by drawing on old and private wisdom for new and public challenges?

Older treatises on penance used to enumerate the elements of the process: examination of conscience, confession of sins by number and kind, act of contrition, forgiveness of sins, purpose of amendment and penance.

This outline throws surprising light on public reconciliation by offering a map for visualising it and for locating ourselves in the process. The examination of conscience encouraged penitents to examine their personal history against the claims of God and of others' history. The current debate about reconciliation in Australia is mostly at this initial stage, as a dominant history, which assumes moral uprightness, confronts the shameful reality of Aboriginal history.

After the examination of conscience, we confessed our sins to a priest, ideally enumerating their number and type. In public reconciliation, confession takes us beyond examination of our history to a moral accounting for it. It acknowledges that we live in a moral community with continuity with those who have shaped it and that we must go beyond generalised regret to answer for what has been done in our community.

Only after examination and confession did we move to request forgiveness. The sequence of steps suggests that we should apologise only after we have taken the measure of the seriousness of what we have done. And that we must apologise to representatives of the community whom we have offended. There is no point in a perfunctory apology.

In the sacrament, contrition is automatically followed by forgiveness because God always has that on offer. In relationships between communities, however, a forgiving response is not to be presumed. It requires as much magnanimity to forgive as it does to ask for forgiveness. It would therefore be shallow to treat reconciliation as simply a new beginning that can be taken for granted.

The process of penance concludes with the purpose of amendment and a penance. These are symbols of seriousness in asking forgiveness. It suggests that there can be no public reconciliation without making reparation for wrongs done. To that extent, the Australian government might be right in refusing to make an apology if it has in principle ruled out compensation at the end of the process.

But if Australia moves towards reconciliation, as it surely will, the main contribution the church can make may be its own experience—ensuring that the path towards reconciliation is lined with appropriate symbols. And perhaps if symbols designed for reconciling individuals so illuminate the public sphere, the church may be persuaded to make the symbols of public reconciliation again available for the reconciliation of individuals. ■

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

Reconciliation: Canberra, Fiji

Tonight, I am haunted by an image from the evening news. In a theological college, surrounded by garden, with a circular chapel as its centrepiece, military men and armed terrorists meet to decide the fate of a nation and probably to tear up its constitution. The press swarms around, and on the roadside youths with stones taunt passing cars. The staff and student houses on the campus are empty, vulnerable; among them are the homes of my friends. Fifteen years ago, I taught English there to the students' wives, and it is a place of happy memories.

I had been forewarned, via the internet and phone calls, that the Fiji Council of Churches had been asked to provide a neutral meeting place for negotiations between the newly declared military government and George Speight's men, who have been holding the Fiji Cabinet hostage. They offered the Pacific Theological College (PTC) premises, just next door to the parliamentary compound. It is an old and honourable role for the church to provide a safe place, where people may attempt to be reconciled. The Lutheran Church in East Germany provided such a place for meetings between civil rights activists and the Communist Party for years before the fall of the Berlin Wall. The offer of the Fiji Churches falls within that tradition, yet I am still shocked by the image. It seems sacrilegious.

The chapel at PTC, its focal point, is dedicated to the memory of the islander missionaries, the covenant makers, those who travelled from their homes across the Pacific to bring the gospel to other islanders. It is dedicated to, among others, Tongan Joeli Bulu, who fought his mythic shark in the Rewa River, to Aminio Baledrokadroka, who pleaded with the colonial governor of Fiji to be allowed to evangelise in New Britain, to Semesi Nau and Pologa, who sat for six months in a boat in the lagoon at Ontong Java before consent was given for their landing. It is a memorial to thousands of men and women who were prepared to give their lives—and many did just that. Some would say that they were the dupes of colonialism, forced to work for a pittance in areas deemed too dangerous for a white missionary. There is some truth in the charge. I have read the arguments over pay, the scathing comments made by white

missionaries about the perceived shortcomings of their islander colleagues. Yet they were not forced, nor are they seen as duped. Rather, they are seen by their descendants and by others as epitomising that which is best and noblest among Pacific people. It is here that the armed men come.

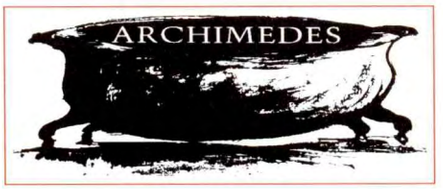
The image persists as I attend an ecumenical reconciliation service for Corroboree 2000. Tonight, for most of the congregation, reconciliation is exclusively about black/white relations in Australia, about indigenous rights here. For me, it has become more complicated. Can there be any equivalence between the struggle for the rights of the minority, the genuinely dispossessed in a settler society, and the manipulation of 'indigenous rights' by a majority to justify the dispossession of others? There are strident voices on the internet which would seek to persuade me that the two are the same. But I cannot agree. What links my walk on Sunday across Canberra's Commonwealth Bridge in the sleet and wind, with the walk I will do tomorrow with the Fiji community, is a belief that it is possible for different communities to live together in harmony, but only if the past is acknowledged, if there is mutual respect, if there is justice and equity. Three years ago, I thought I had seen that belief in Fiji. Visiting for the first time in 12 years, I had watched services and ceremonies of reconciliation as the new, fair constitution was accepted. Now all that was blown to the winds. Had it been a chimera?

After the Corroboree service, I describe the scene at PTC to a theologically inclined friend, and ask him whether he thought the use of such sacred space for the negotiations was part of the Church's role of reconciliation, or a sacrilege. 'Perhaps,' he replied, 'that depends on what they decide.'

—Christine Weir

This month's contributors: **Edmund Campion** is an emeritus professor of the Catholic Institute of Sydney; **Christine Weir** is a research student in Pacific history at the ANU, and has lived in Fiji for several years. She is a member of the Uniting Church in Australia.

Addendum to 'Cyclonic variations', May 2000: The winner of the Seaview Hotel Belly Flop Competition was the 150kg contestant known as Pothole ('always in the road'), whose manager said that he won so effortlessly, or his guts were so large, that his ears didn't get wet.**—Peter Pierce**



Putting the cat out

AUSTRALIANS LIVING ALONG the Eastern seaboard are about to be confronted by the man in the cat hat, Dr John Wamsley.

He's hell bent on saving Australia's wildlife, and he has a plan: buy up at least one per cent of the nation's land mass (including a slice of all significant habitats); fence it off; clear it of rabbits, foxes and cats; replant the native vegetation; and bring back the native animals. It's a simple enough strategy, and he's demonstrated that it works. Already in sanctuaries at Warrawong in the Adelaide Hills, at Yookamurra in old-growth mallee in the Murray Basin in South Australia, and at Scotia near Broken Hill, rare and endangered marsupials are thriving. They include creatures most of us have never seen—bilbies, numbats, bettongs, stick-nest rats.

But the Wamsley plan doesn't come cheap. One per cent of Australia is a lot of land, about 77,000 square kilometres. So John Wamsley has established Earth Sanctuaries Ltd—the world's first public company devoted to conservation. It's a deadly serious enterprise, listed on the Australian Stock Exchange.

The company can reward its shareholders in several ways. Any land the company buys and rehabilitates is an investment. In addition, the company's plans include providing accommodation, conference facilities, restaurants, gift shops, ecotourism, native plant nurseries, and selling wildlife and other animals. More than $12 million was subscribed to the initial float of $15 million.

Wamsley plans to establish sanctuaries near the large population centres—one on the slopes of the You Yangs near Melbourne, another in the Blue Mountains near Sydney, a third outside of Goulburn near Canberra.

But Wamsley's way of working runs counter to much of the ideology of the Australian conservation movement, which is not greatly enamoured of the idea of privatising wildlife, and is not happy with closing off access to large areas of bush and desert. And in the past, while shooting and poisoning foxes and rabbits could be defended, cat-lovers were outraged when he started on the objects of their affection. But times change. In 1990, he confronted cat protectionists by striding out of the gates of one of his sanctuaries wearing a hat fashioned from a cat pelt. Ten years later, local councils are registering cats in their areas and putting curfews on them.

Wamsley may be single-minded, but he is not sentimental about his wildlife. Kangaroo fillets are on the menu in the restaurant at Warrawong. 'It's not our job to get involved in ideological arguments. After looking at the menu, nobody bothers telling me I should campaign against culling kangaroos.'

He is also willing to trade in animals. It's a logical outcome of being in the market. Australian accounting standards now include provision for 'self-generating and regenerating assets'. That means Earth Sanctuaries can put a price on its animals, and value them as part of the company. 'I expect the trade to be of the order of $1 million within the next couple of years. It was started by us. We will sell to anybody who wants wildlife on their land.'

Wamsley is convinced that these are the kinds of choices one has to make to save native wildlife. Eventually all of us will have to decide if we agree, because John Wamsley is going to confront us whether we like it or not. ■

Tim Thwaites is a freelance science writer.

Exhibiting signs

SAMUEL JOHNSON MADE his celebrated remark that a second marriage represented the triumph of hope over experience not to deprecate marriage as such, but simply as a wry observation about an individual whose unhappiness in one marriage did not deter him from entering another as soon as he was able. But the witticism has been generalised, to be called on whenever we observe hope triumphant against the odds.

I was reminded of the remark recently when I visited the exhibition *Seeing Salvation: The Image of Christ*. Although I was at Trafalgar Square shortly after the National Gallery opened, the exhibition rooms were already uncomfortably crowded, and by the time I left, the queue stretched all the long way back to the entrance of the Gallery itself. Had I not read of the Gallery's surprise at the great popularity of the exhibition, leading to an extension of opening hours? Did I not remember queuing most of the way round the outside of the National Gallery of Victoria in the 1970s, before being admitted to peer over shoulders at the absurdly propagandistic captions accompanying the Chinese archaeological exhibition? And Monet at the same Gallery in the 1980s! How could I have forgotten that warm Sunday afternoon, when on the spur of an unguarded moment I had accepted an invitation to view the exhibition on its last day? All of Melbourne, it seemed, had had the same thought, and was there *en famille*—junior members, to judge from the epidemic of flatulence afflicting them, having been previously bribed with Sunday lunch at McDonald's. Looking at paintings in a crowd is never comfortable; bustling unbreathing through a crowd in search of an open window as the very haystacks on the walls turn green is something else again.

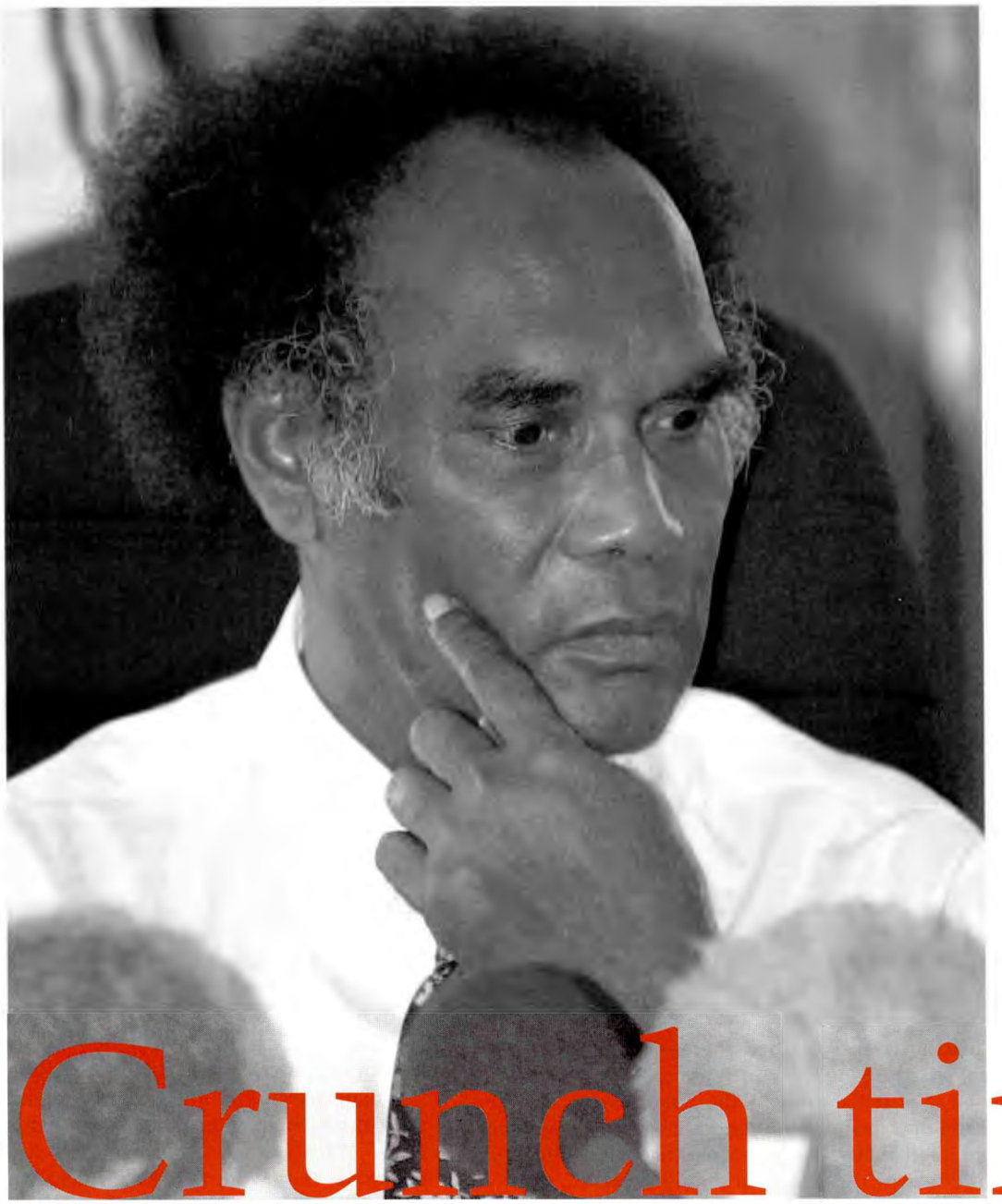
It could be, then, that I came to *Seeing Salvation* with a slightly jaundiced eye. An excellent exhibition, to be sure—but a victim of its very excellence. The intention to educate by demonstrating continuities and discontinuities was clear, but thwarted by the throngs. Unable to be instructed, I simply gaped, and was put in mind of the Second Vatican Council's wise provision that the number of sacred images in a church 'should be kept under control, and arranged in a suitable pattern, lest they excite sensationalism ... or pander to a devotion that is not quite right'. ('Oh no, no! All that blood and misery!' a confrère lamented in soft Lancastrian tones when I told him what I had been to London to see.)

But in the midst of this excess there was room to be struck by how far religious sensibilities have changed over centuries. The contemporary resonance of a late-medieval Dutch carving of a naked *Christ on the Cold Stone* has provoked much comment, but might be due to the loss of iron spikes from the crown of thorns, and all the original pigment from the body. Velázquez's *Christ after the Flagellation Contemplated by the Christian Soul*, however, while no doubt a beautiful painting, might today be thought to risk pandering to a devotion that is altogether not right.

THE LAST ROOM OF THE exhibition brought relief, beyond the obvious, in the form of Stanley Spencer's *Resurrection, Cookham*, a painting hitherto unknown to me and as much to be enjoyed for its general loopiness as for the artist's charming conceit of restricting his view of the General Resurrection to that part of it to be envisaged as taking place in the graveyard of his own parish church—an English village waking on a fine Sunday morning in spring, throwing back covers of flower-flecked turf in readiness for a long and leisurely day of recreation—presided over by Christ as a squat and swarthy nursing mother with babes in arms.

A smaller painting by Spencer on the facing wall was no less arresting. The catalogue tells us that the artist was put to some pains to have this work correctly named: *Christ Carrying the Cross*—not *his* cross, and carrying it, not *bearing* it. The setting again is Cookham, and the figure of Christ is partly obscured in the press of villagers about their business on a radiantly sunny workday and barely distinguishable from the carpenters who follow him, except that the tools of trade that they carry are ladders, while his is the cross. A welcome antidote to the Continental hysterics of earlier rooms, and a vision of salvation to linger long in the imagination. ■

Denis Minns OP is *Eureka Street*'s United Kingdom correspondent.



Associated Press AP

Strife in the Solomon Islands has its roots in complex traditional differences and colonial legacies. **Jean Ker Walsh** reports on the present crisis.

Crunch time

PT 05 WAS A GOOD JOKE in Honiara. A couple of the local kids painted '05' on their canoe and were known to paddle it mischievously around the patrol boats 03 and 04 tied up at the Point Cruz wharf.

There was nothing funny about the patrol boat story that swept through the Solomon Islands capital on 7 June. In the morning darkness, PT 03, under the control of Malaita Eagle Force (MEF) militants, pushed off from the Point Cruz wharf. It sailed east for just a few kilometres. Standing offshore, PT 03 began bombarding the Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM) stronghold near the international airport. There were unconfirmed reports of up to 100 people being killed.

In Solomon Islands *kastom*, this was resounding payback for the gunshot injuries to four Malaita Eagles in a shooting match the day before. In no time at all, thousands of IFM reportedly mounted their response. Armed with sophisticated weapons stolen from the Gold Ridge police station, the IFM stormed out of safe hiding past the airport to the road bridge leading direct to Honiara. They reportedly engaged the MEF in an open machine-gun battle.

Don't worry about the niceties of whether or not either of the militant leaders has said so. No need to bother with the official diplomatic dispatches. This was war. War in the Happy Isles.

SOLOMON ISLANDS' Prime Minister, Bartholomew Ulufa'alu (pictured above announcing his resignation, 14 June), has a melodious voice. It sings a little, even when he talks tough. Ulufa'alu is a man with vision; he has a respect for history. He has no illusions about the size of the nation-building task he took on when he became Prime Minister in 1997.

'Unity must be the focus of any communication strategy,' Ulufa'alu said,

opening a Communications Forum in Honiara last February. 'What sort of forces can make us a united people?'

Elaborating on his own rhetorical question, Ulufa'alu took a post-colonial perspective.

'Solomon Islands is a melting pot of different races,' he said. 'In the west, we are close to the Australian Aborigines. In the east, we are Malay; in the north, Melanesian; and in the south, Tongan.

'We are united because of an external power. [It was] the imposition of unity. History shows ethnic tensions in post-British societies because the development [under the British] was not deeply rooted, not equally distributed ... It was networks of cronies in power that held countries together,' the Prime Minister said.

Ulufa'alu and his Alliance for Change were working against the odds to replace cronyism with open, accountable government. His efforts were generally supported by the electorate—his government had lasted longer than any other since independence. But it still wasn't long enough to do much more than make a start on the reform process and begin to be appalled by the great size of the challenge.

What has boiled over in recent weeks in the Solomons and Fiji, and what simmers in Papua New Guinea, is rooted in the post-colonial legacies each of these nations has been trying to manage. But while the root cause may be shared, it would be trite to say that the turmoil in one country sets the pattern and simply prompts a copy-cat response in another—as if islanders aren't smart enough to do anything but mimic their neighbours.

THE DECADES SINCE departure of the colonial powers have been plenty of time for tensions in the Pacific to become localised versions of each country's struggle towards nationhood. In the Solomons, the so-called ethnic tension has been brewing since independence. Longstanding grievances are about land ownership, work opportunities, laissez-faire migration, exclusion from decision-making. More recent grievances include loss and destruction of property, kidnapping and killings, insulting behaviour and disrespect.

The aggrieved parties are primarily the Gwale people of Guadalcanal, and their neighbours from Malaita who constitute the largest and most migratory ethnic group within the Solomons archipelago. Their open conflict peaked in the middle of last year when the IFM took the initiative and, with makeshift guns and arson, forced more than 20,000 Malaitans out of their homes and their jobs. While most fled back to Malaita, many resettled in and around Gizo in Western Province near Bougainville. They fled, but they didn't forget.

Beneath the Gwale–Malaitan rivalry are some traditional differences. In Malaitan *kastom*, for example, land ownership passes down through the men, while on Guadalcanal and other islands, tribal land and goods pass down through the female line. So a Malaitan man who marries a Gwale woman—and there have been many such marriages, especially since Malaitans came to Guadalcanal to support the WWII US war base operations—gains access to land and property not belonging to his tribe. The tradition of sharing with *wantoks* (people from the same tribe who speak the same 'one talk') meant that more and more Malaitans came to Guadalcanal and enjoyed the use of Gwale land. Others came and squatted, even building large and lavish houses around Honiara. They took up jobs in the public service and police force, in business and politics, and over time the perception developed that Malaitans exercised more positions of power and influence than their Gwale hosts, enjoying more than was their right.

This discontent was further fed by Honiara's growth as the national capital. It is claimed that no-one ever negotiated with the Gwales over the taking of this land. Why was it Gwale land and resources that were being exploited for the national benefit while other island groups kept their traditional lands to themselves? The unanswered questions around this unequal development led to the periodic emergence of groups claiming compensation for Guadalcanal. For decades, nobody listened. Even Ezekiel Alebua, current Premier of Guadalcanal and a leader of the Isatabu Freedom Movement, officially ignored the Gwale compensation demands when he was prime minister in 1988. Successive governments did the same. Finally, Alebua lit a slow fuse by calling for direct action in December 1997.

At that time, Bartholomew Ulufa'alu and his Solomon Islands Alliance for Change (SIAC) were still settling into government, having been elected on a visionary platform of reform to fight

The Solomon Islands is a strongly Christian country, a place where you'll be asked your denomination as easily as Australians suss out your footy allegiance. For an Australian used to small, ageing congregations, it is remarkable in the Solomons to see the numbers of young men and women and the families filling churches to standing room only. By government regulation, public servants begin the working day with collective prayer. At workplace meetings, in letters to the editor, in public speeches, God is regularly called upon to bless the Solomon Islands. The words of blessing and reconciliation are everywhere.

The influence of the churches should not be underestimated. Their networks throughout the islands are wider and more established than any the government has yet been able to establish. Some clergy are close to members of the militant groups if for no other reason than that the militants, like most Solomon Islanders, are regular church-going people.

Church leaders have been called upon to take an active role in resolving the ethnic tension. Catholic Bishop Adrian Smith was chosen by the government to lead a committee seeking to identify the whereabouts of those missing since the first days of violence. He has repeatedly used his homilies to relate the gospel messages of reconciliation directly to the ethnic conflict. He has urged people to speak up about where kidnapped people have been held, or where bodies are buried.

The Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA) was nominated by the MEF to help broker any face-to-face ceasefire negotiations. Reluctant at first, the SICA leaders agreed and were set to co-chair ceasefire talks with the Commonwealth Peace Envoy scheduled for Friday, 2 June. Neither the MEF or IFM considered they were ready to meet, so the talks were deferred.

If and when peace talks are held, it is expected that SICA will again be asked to get directly involved. Prayers for peace will not be enough. ■

corruption with transparency and accountability.

'Cronyism had been legalised,' said Ulufa'alu, 'and people [were] cry[ing] out for change. How does the change happen? Change is righting the wrongs of the past,' he said.

Ulufa'alu knew that his government's commitment to righting wrongs was fraught with danger. 'There is smoke on the battlefield,' he said in February. He noted that within 12 months of being elected, he had faced three votes of no-confidence. Each was unsuccessful. 'Then came the ethnic tension,' Ulufa'alu said, clearly interpreting the rise in tension as a stepped-up campaign to destabilise his government.

Just who might be the mastermind behind such a campaign of political destabilisation is open to speculation. The SIAC government had certainly put some powerful interests offside. The international buyers of Solomon Islands' forest logs and timber were on notice that export volumes would be cut back to sustainable levels. The kickbacks to corrupt officials were doomed by the promise of transparency and accountability in government procedures. Phantom jobs given to *wantoks* disappeared with a seven per cent cutback in public service positions. The money flow sourced by liberal overseas borrowings was slowed to a relative trickle.

In reality, few of the planned reforms had been given a chance to make a positive difference. The government appeared for a time to deal with the ethnic tension issues while moving ahead with a range of projects to strengthen governance and administration. This was where the Australian government was focusing its aid and support. But it soon became apparent that the ethnic tension had struck where the government was most vulnerable—its cashflow. The government's major income from palm oil production was completely cut in mid 1999, when the IFM forced the Malaitan workers off the government-owned palm plantation. Other business ventures closed. Tourists began staying away. Government revenue collections fell as staff stayed away from work or fled Honiara for the safety of their villages.

Increasingly distracted from their reform agenda, Ulufa'alu and his key Cabinet ministers became focused on securing the support of international partners who could—or would—help manage issues to ease the tension. The Solomon Islands government requested personnel and funds to help pay compensation claims. The Commonwealth sent a Multilateral Police Assistance Group, but, once the Malaita Eagle Force emerged to directly counter the IFM, their numbers and limited powers were inadequate for the task.

When it was agreed to bolster their numbers with another 50 from Fiji who would focus on maintaining order in Honiara, the decision was negated by the Speight-led coup in Fiji. With Australia and New Zealand declining to send police personnel, the request was taken up by Vanuatu. Fifty Vanuatu police were scheduled to arrive in Honiara on 3 June. They failed to arrive.

PREPARING FOR A MEDIA conference on 22 May, Andrew Gabriel H. Nori was clearly in control. He sat at the computer making the final changes to the 'Pre-Cease-Fire Guidelines' to be signed by himself and three others. After the signing, each one made a statement. When it came to Nori's turn, he spoke at length with strength and authority on behalf of the Malaita Eagle Force. He had 'outed' himself. Previously, Nori had represented himself as a legal advisor acting under instruction from his client, the MEF. Now that the government had lifted the order which had banned the two militant groups and declared any of their associates to be criminals, Nori was free publicly to assume his MEF leadership role.

'The MEF will act responsibly and honestly,' Nori told the media group as he outlined the terms of a 14-day period of voluntary restraint by the Eagle Force. 'The MEF are not desperate for peace, for a ceasefire. We have built a military infrastructure ... We are committed to provide security (in Honiara). The MEF leadership is dealing with the criminals. We call on people to obey the law. The MEF will take serious measures against criminal activities.'

The 'Pre-Cease-Fire Guidelines' outlined by Nori were no ambit claim. They were an all-or-nothing list of pre-conditions, some of which had little or zero chance of being met. '*The Restraint Period shall terminate if ... any IFM member or supporter or any Guadalcanal person or leader releases or causes to release for publication any news item by radio broadcast or by written or electronic communication which is aimed at belittling, annoying, insulting, provoking or causing fear in the minds of Malaitans ...*' No-one pretended that the interpretation of the clause would ever be argued in a court of law. And not surprisingly, the period of restraint which began at 3pm was effectively null and void by 10pm the same evening. It's doubtful that Ezekiel Alebua and the IFM in rural Guadalcanal had even seen the Pre-Cease-Fire Guidelines by that time. Nevertheless, Nori waited 14 days.

'FELLOW CITIZENS and visitors to Solomon Islands.

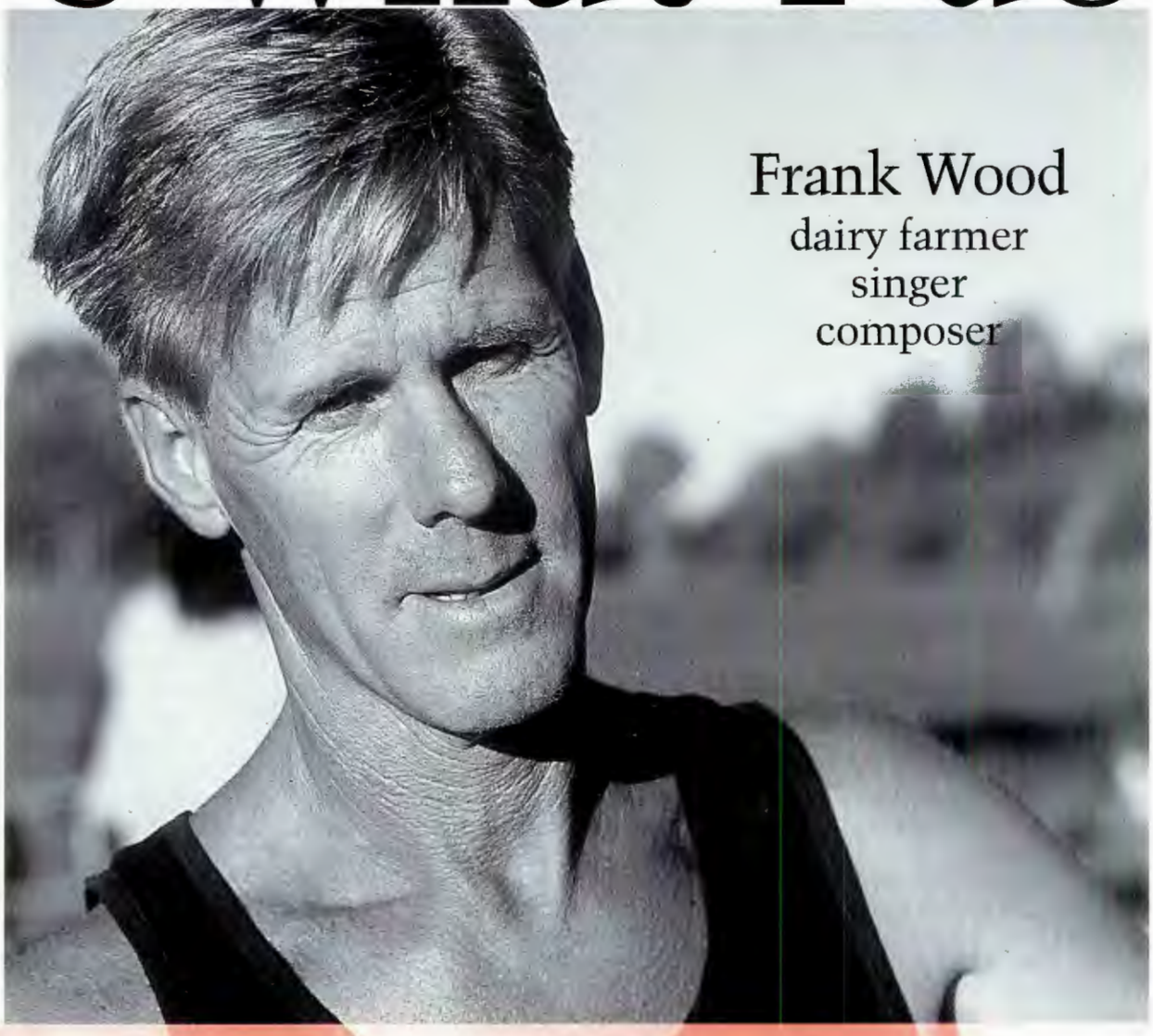
'At exactly 0400 hours this morning local time (GMT +1100 hours), elements of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force, with the assistance of two platoons of the Malaita Eagle Force, stormed and took total control of our country's main police armouries located at Rove in Honiara. Shortly afterwards they proceeded to take control of weapons located in three of the Police patrol boats anchored at Bokona Bay near Point Cruz. Thereafter, the group removed arms and ammunitions stored at the Central Police Station in Honiara. One of their units was deployed to the Prime Minister's residence where it over-powered the security staff and dispossessed them of their weapons. By 5 AM the operation was over and complete ...'—*Extract from Public Statement No. 1 issued by Andrew Nori, 5 June 2000.*

The path to peace in the Solomons is a long one. Each of the killings, injuries, acts of arson, thefts and insults inflicted during this conflict in the Solomons will need to be individually addressed and compensation agreed during any peace process.

For Solomon Islanders and their neighbours, it will be a long time before lasting peace returns to the Happy Isles. ■

Jean Ker Walsh is Director of Ker Walsh Communications. She worked recently with the Solomon Islands government as a strategic media and communications consultant.

It's what I do



Frank Wood
dairy farmer
singer
composer

Most of us, when asked, 'What do you do?', respond with a statement about our jobs (if we are fortunate enough to have one).
Whether we like it or not, employment and identity are closely related.
Yet the nature of employment is changing rapidly.
And many of us know that 'what we do' isn't just about our paid jobs.
In this new series, writer and photographer, **Peter Davis**, profiles people and what they do as well as the industry in which they do it.

On his 360 rolling acres in Waroona, 100kms south of Perth, Frank Wood milks 60 cows (from his herd of 200). He also bakes scones for visitors, plays host to regular school groups seeking a rural experience and fine-tunes the opera he's been composing for five years.

On top of his Beckstein piano is a black-and-white picture of a younger Frank in army uniform. 'I was conscripted in 1969 and sent to Vietnam. I was 21 then and, like most 21-year-olds, I thought I was invincible. I lost good friends in that war and I look back on the whole experience as being in the wrong place at the wrong time.'

Now 52, Frank proudly declares that he's missed only ten milkings in his 15 years on the farm. Some of his days off were due to his attendance at the 1988 Welcome Home Parade in Sydney for Vietnam veterans, an event Frank describes as being 'too little too late'. 'The highlight of my visit to Sydney was a chance to see John English play Rasputin.'

For many years, Frank served as president of the Waroona RSL. He resigned because of political differences, but each year he continues to direct the program for the local ANZAC day. 'I do all the arrangements and conduct the choir. It's a great event. This year about 250 people attended.'

Music and milk—that's what Frank's life is about. Verdi and Mozart occupy as much of his time as the quality assurance procedures on his milking line. When *Evita* came to Perth, he secured a role in the chorus. 'I would do the early morning milking then drive one-and-a-half hours to Perth for rehearsal, come back for the afternoon milking and then drive back to Perth for the nightly performance. It nearly killed me, but I loved it.'

His opera is called *Roseta*. It's a story of love, mistaken identity, murder and cultural traditions. It is loosely based on a true story of the murder of a 12-year-old girl in a small town in WA. 'My dream is to live to see my opera performed at Her Majesty's in Perth,' he says with much laughter.

During the interview, Frank obligingly sings some of his verses. With great theatrics he outlines the events leading to each piece. After about half an hour of this, his cows crank up their late afternoon chorus and Frank shifts with ease from lounge-room impresario to milking-shed labourer. His only costume change is to put on his gumboots.

When the conversation shifts from music to dairying, Frank feels the anger welling up. Deregulation is the agenda dominating the industry. 'Farm income will significantly decrease. The big farmers will eventually benefit, but a lot of small operators will be forced out,' he says. As for his own future, Frank is diversifying. He's purchased a goat and he's learnt to make goat's cheese. He cannot say for certain that he will continue with milking cows, but he cannot imagine leaving his land. Perth, Sydney and Vietnam are the only places he has ever visited outside Waroona. 'I start to feel edgy if I'm more than one-and-a-half hours from home. This is a beautiful part of the world. The land is good to me. I'm not really into making money. I might get angry at the changes, but overall I'm an optimist. I believe that doors open as you need them.' ■

Dairy farming—the big picture

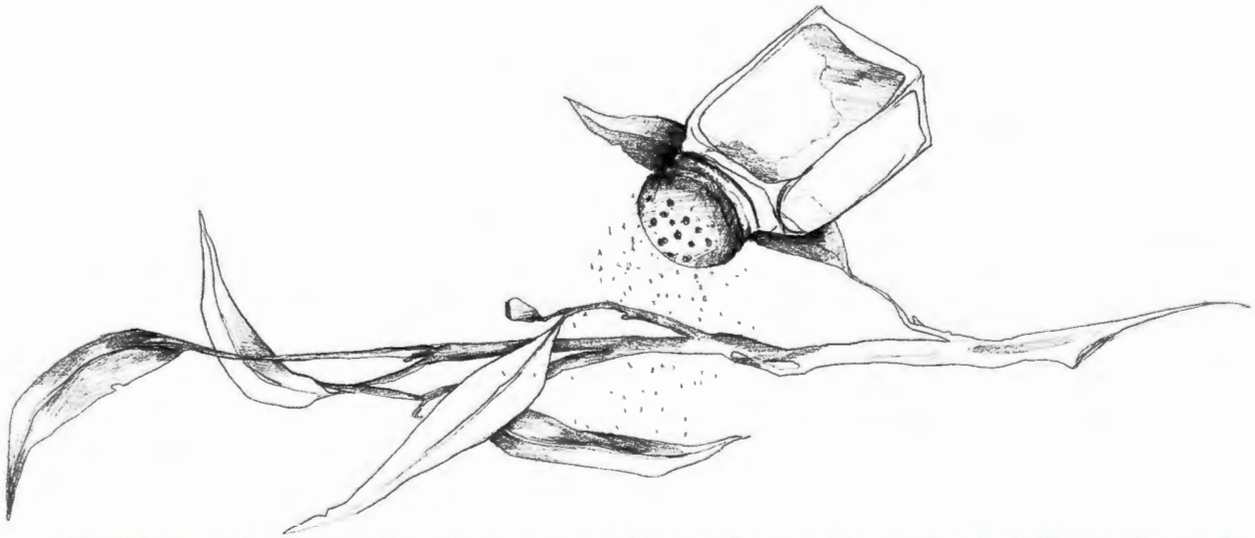
- There are 2.1 million dairy cows in Australia and 13,156 registered dairy farms (ten years ago there were 15,400 registered farms).
- 60 per cent of all Australian dairy products are manufactured in Victoria.
- 55 per cent of Australian dairy produce is for export, mostly to Asia. Australia is the third-largest exporter of dairy produce in the world. Dairy farmers work on average 80 hours a week and earn around $51,000 a year before interest payments on loans and other crucial expenses have been met.

On 1 July, the government subsidy of manufactured milk in Australia officially ended. That subsidy, which has allowed milk to be sold above world market prices, has been replaced by a $1.6 billion eight-year restructuring program to be administered by the newly formed Dairy Adjustment Authority. The cost of this will be met by a levy on retail sales of milk that is already built into the price of milk.

According to John McQueen, CEO of the Australian Dairy Farmers' Federation, the deregulation will have a significant impact on the industry. 'I feel there is going to be a significant number of farmers in all states who are going to retire. But I don't expect a reduction in the volume of milk produced,' he said. ■

Peter Davis is a Melbourne-based writer and photographer. He lectures in Professional Writing at Deakin University and Photojournalism at Photography Studies College.

Sown in salt



***Margaret Simons** asks what Australia will reap if we don't follow through on the environmental initiatives in the report from the National Farmers' Federation and the Australian Conservation Foundation.*

NOT MANY OF US CAN read the country. We drive from city to city and know what we are likely to see. Hummocks grazed by sheep. Flat wheat fields and pasture. Big paddocks, butter-yellow or stubble-grey depending on the time of year. Sometimes, in recent years, brighter yellow with canola or purple with the flowers of lucerne. Everywhere, dry gulches and creeks with unreliable flows, many with obvious or ominous names. In my travels from capital to capital over the last few months I have been collecting them. Muddy Creek. Reedy Creek. Blackfella Creek. Poison Waterholes. Death Creek. Then there is the occasional big eucalypt tree in the middle of a paddock. Or sometimes a patch of bush by the side of the road. These old trees have survived since the early days of settlement, or before. But they stand alone.

Those who know how to read the country can see the trouble. There are thin spaces in the treetops where the leaves are dying. This is one of the first signs of salinity. The thinning of leaves at the tips is a sign that the tree has its roots in salty groundwater. Soon the crops will thin out, and salt-tolerant weeds will come to dominate. Only in the last stages will the problem be visible even to those who are illiterate in the language of land. Salt scars. Greasy poisoned soil. Acne scars on the face of the country.

If you know how to read the country, you can see that most of it is sick.

We've known this for a while now and in the last 15 years, since Bob Hawke stood on the banks of the Murray and proclaimed the planting of a billion trees, the country has begun to change. Now you can see new trees growing by the sides of roads and in fenced-off sections of those paddocks. Is there a schoolchild anywhere in rural Australia who has not taken part in a tree-planting exercise? I doubt it.

Farming families I know are buying their milk in cartons rather than two-litre bottles these days. Why? Because at their back doors are crates and cardboard boxes filled with the cut-off bottoms of the cartons. In each, the seed or seedling of a native tree. It is the women and children, mostly, who gather seeds from those remaining old trees and remnant bushland. They have done courses in native seed propagation. The new trees get quietly planted out and fenced off to protect them from the stock and the rabbits. Already you can see the results. More trees on farms. A few generations have been missed, but the survivor eucalypts will at last have progeny.

Rural Australia has been fighting a big battle against salinity and land degradation, but as we near the end of the Decade of Landcare, it is clear that it hasn't been anywhere near enough.

IN THE NEXT FEW MONTHS, a number of key political events are scheduled to occur. Together, they are

likely to initiate huge changes to the way rural Australia looks, and works. If governments move to do what is needed—and there are mixed signals at present on whether they have the political will—there will be enormous financial implications for us all. The scale of change needed over the next ten years will dwarf all the efforts made so far, and fundamentally change both the literal and metaphorical landscape.

First, there is the August meeting of the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council, which includes representatives from state and federal governments. The council will be asked to endorse a new Salinity and Drainage strategy. Its centrepiece will be the setting of salinity reduction targets for every river valley in the basin. Previously, the whole salinity reduction effort has been based on an objective of reducing Murray River salinity at Morgan in South Australia, only a few hundred kilometres from the mouth. The moving of the targets to valley mouths will give enormous responsibility and powers to regional areas. Officials of the Murray-Darling Basin Commission are already touring to prepare communities for the new regime, although details of the recommendations to go to the Council have yet to be released to the city-based media.

The Ministerial Council meeting follows the release of the Murray-Darling Basin Salinity Audit last October which showed 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 two centuries of land clearing.

The setting of targets for each river valley, let alone the achievement of them, will be an enormous exercise in regional realpolitik that will directly affect almost every resident of the Murray-Darling basin. How the targets are to be achieved is something each region will have to work out. Engineering schemes, in which saline groundwater is pumped from under irrigation areas to evaporation basins, can only be mid-term solutions. Long-term, there will have to be big changes to land use, including tree-planting on a huge scale, and possibly salinity credit trading with those adding salt having to 'buy' salinity credits by investing in afforestation or engineering works elsewhere in the valley.

But salinity management is only one part of the problem. The second critical political move to affect the landscape will be the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting, expected to be held late this year. The Prime Minister, John Howard, has already signalled that bipartisan commitment to natural resource management will be the main agenda item. It will be the biggest challenge COAG's member governments have ever faced—far bigger than previous cross-government initiatives, such as that on drugs.

Over the last 12 months, a range of government and other reports and programs have all come up with the same message. Massive public investment, and massive changes to land use, are the only future for rural Australia, and the effort has to start soon. The look of the land has to change, and so does its economy.

Some recent studies have shown that up to 70 per cent of land in some areas may have to be planted to trees if salinity is to be kept under control. But how are the farmers to live for the decades it will take for them to get their first crop of timber?

A recent report commissioned by the National Farmers' Federation (NFF) and the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) found that the annual cost of degradation in rural landscapes was at least $2 billion a year, and would become $6 billion a year by 2020, if no action were taken.

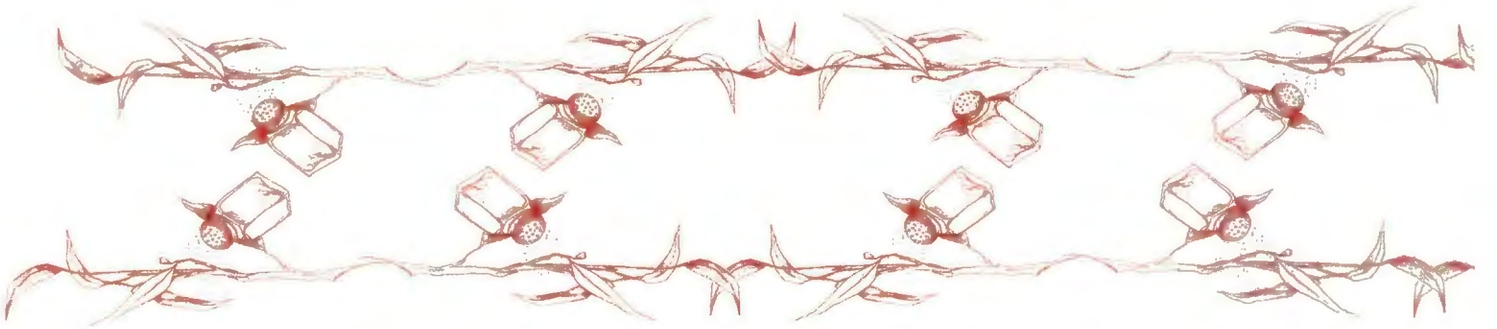
Compare this to the net value of agricultural production in Australia, which for the 1998–99 season was only $3.9 billion a year, and it becomes clear that the look of the landscape is only part of the problem. We are talking about the viability of Australia as an agricultural nation. More than half of our exports are derived from the land and water.

The NFF/ACF report found that if rural landscapes and systems were to remain sustainable, major management and land use changes were needed. They costed the changes, and came up with a figure of $60 billion capital investment, with an ongoing maintenance program of $0.5 billion, needed over a ten-year period. About $33.5 billion of this would have to come from government, with the rest from private investment.

The figures dwarf the present schemes, including those financed by the half-sale of Telstra, the funding from which runs out the year after next. At present, Commonwealth expenditure on landscape degradation stands at $0.5 billion a year, and in spite of Prime Minister Howard's commitment to the issue at COAG, the last federal Budget forecast a reduction in spending on land degradation to just $27.7 million in 2002.

The figures in the NFF/ACF report are not fanciful, and cannot be easily dismissed. The report does not stand on its own, but is one of a number of documents coming from various government and non-government agencies, all indicating similar directions. The impetus for the NFF/ACF report was a discussion paper on natural resource management prepared by the Commonwealth Government, and likely to be the basis for the recommendations going before COAG.

Meanwhile, the Productivity Commission, hardly known for green activism or radical flights of fancy, recently released a study on ecologically sustainable land management, which described the stresses on the environment, and therefore the economy, as 'profound' and confirmed that 'the market on its own is unlikely to conserve sufficient capital for future generations ... government must accept the final responsibility for the outcomes.' The Commission also observed that it was governments that had contributed to land degradation by encouraging and even compelling previous generations of landholders to clear trees.



The Commission was scathing about the accountability and management of present programs, including the Telstra-sale-funded National Heritage Trust. Objectives and achievements were obscure and policies had been poorly implemented, the Commission said. A more rigorous, bipartisan and long-term approach was needed.

The Commission recommended legislation introducing a statutory duty of care for all individuals, businesses and governments whose activities were likely to harm the environment. This duty of care—similar to that already existing in occupational health and safety legislation—would be written into uniform national legislation, and would oblige everyone to take reasonable and practical steps to prevent environmental harm.

The Productivity Commission also recommended a range of measures to encourage markets for trees and forestry products. Like the NFF/ACF report and work coming out of the Murray-Darling Basin Commission, the Productivity Commission envisages that much of what is now wheat and sheep country will have to become plantation forests.

The Productivity Commission recommended making forestry more profitable by the establishment of a system of tradeable carbon credits, in which those adding to the greenhouse effect can gain a 'right to pollute' by investing in carbon-absorbing forests elsewhere.

ALL THESE REPORTS and documents call for a massive co-operation between governments, and a level of commitment that will transcend party politics.

Forestry is not the only method of combatting salinity. There is also a move to develop new deep-rooted perennial crops that will mimic native vegetation in their use of rainfall. As well, some communities will have to find ways of living with salinity.

But there is unanimity that the future for much of rural Australia is as plantation forest. The level of forestry production implied in the NFF/ACF document is 15 to 20 times Australia's current annual gross value of forestry production. Up to one third of what are presently pastures would go under trees, and up to ten per cent of the cropping land. The remainder of improved pastures would have to be sown with deep-rooted perennial species, like lucerne. Commercial products from forestry might include timber, charcoal, and biomass for energy production and, possibly, tradeable carbon and salinity credits.

If all these trees are planted, there will be other implications. More trees mean more rainfall absorbed on the land, and less run-off to rivers. Irrigators may not have the water they need to stay sustainable, let alone enough for environmental flows to preserve wetlands and keep rivers healthy.

Another issue that governments will find hard to face, at a time when everyone is trying to win votes in the bush, is that far fewer families will be able to make their living from the land. It is estimated that about 17 per cent of present-day farmers will be pushed out by the changes to land use.

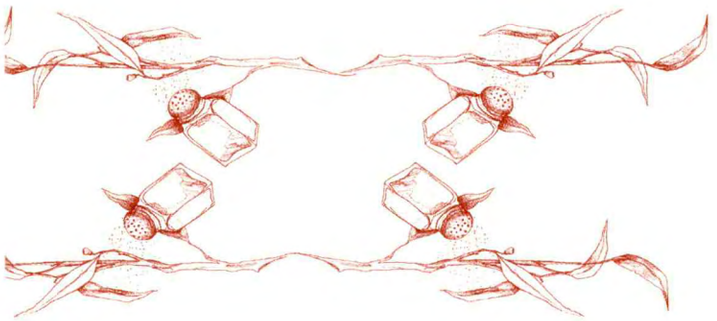
Neil Barr, a social researcher from Victoria's Department of Natural Resources and Environment, has been analysing the social and economic factors of the land use change. He says that farm incomes presently average between $15,000 and $30,000, but in many of the grazing areas most likely to become tree plantations they are below $20,000, with families increasingly looking to off-farm income for their survival. 'Being farmers is important to their self-image, but if you look at what they do, they are not behaving commercially in their farming activities,' he says.

At the same time, the average age of farmers is rising rapidly and few of their children plan to take on the family farm. Barr believes that much of the contraction of the agricultural industry might happen naturally.

Already, he says, most of Australia's agricultural products are drawn from the best one-third of agricultural land, with the rest barely paying its way. In the future, he says, there will be an emphasis on farming better areas more intensively.

What will happen to the more marginal land? Much of it may be turned over to hobby farms and retreat properties. Some of it may be kept as part of existing farms and left to re-vegetate. Some of it will be bought for plantation forestry.

'In areas that are pleasant to live in, like northern Victoria, we will be looking at an amenity-based landscape, where people care more about how it looks



than what it produces, and the income will come from telecommuters or people working in the nearby town,' he says. 'If you look at the results in the Benalla by-election, you can see that this is already happening. A lot of the vote was due to demographic change, to lifestyle, conservation-aware farmers moving in and altering the make-up of what used to be a die-hard National Party area.'

In the areas that are less pleasant to live in—what Barr refers to as the agricultural equivalent of industrial landscapes—there are fewer options. Some landscapes may never recover.

So how will we read the land in a generation's time? If the recommendations in these documents are followed, there will be trees everywhere, and rural income will come from a much smaller proportion of land, together with forestry products and tradeable environmental credits. Even in the rich cropping land, there will be more trees, kept in small commercial woodlots.

In irrigation areas, water will become even more preciously guarded than it is at present, and its cost will rise. This will be reflected in the price of the produce.

Is all this a challenge that governments in Australia are able to face? There are no short-term gains. Even if trees are planted immediately, the land will still be sick for hundreds of years to come. Some areas will probably never recover.

But whatever governments do, in the river valleys and plains of inland Australia, the biggest national story since European settlement is being played out.■

Margaret Simons is a freelance journalist.

Walking the walk and treaty talk

The positive spirit of the reconciliation marches is not matched in the policies of the two major parties, argues ***Frank Brennan****.*

DURING THE LEAD-UP to the Commonwealth Games in Brisbane in 1982, the Queensland churches organised a forum on Aboriginal land rights in Rockhampton.

Neville Bonner, Liberal Senator for Queensland, was one of the speakers. He castigated the Bjelke-Petersen government for its failure to grant adequate security of title to the Aboriginal reserve lands. That was the last straw. The Liberal Party machine dropped him to an unelectable position on the Senate ticket.

Eighteen years later, in old Parliament House Canberra, one week after Corroboree 2000 and the Sydney Harbour Bridge walk, Liberal Party members hosted a testimonial dinner in memory of Bonner. Prime Minister John Howard, who had been jeered at the Opera House the previous weekend for refusing to say 'sorry', spoke personally and movingly about Neville Bonner's contribution to public life, their party and his people. He admitted that the Liberal Party had treated Bonner very badly in 1982, and that he, as Prime Minister, was privileged to have welcomed Bonner back into the party fold at the Queensland Conference in 1996. This also happened to be the conference at which Howard had declined to condemn One Nation, on the basis that everyone was entitled to free speech.

Neville Bonner's widow, Heather, was profoundly grateful to Howard, who had escaped the media for over an hour to share afternoon tea with Neville and family at his nursing home, shortly before his death.

These stories were recounted to guests who were from all races and from all sides of politics, most of whom had attended the Sydney events on the previous weekend.

The week's indigenous news stories had been taken up with renewed calls for a treaty and guaranteed indigenous seats in the Parliament. John Howard had gone on to the front foot immediately after Corroboree 2000. Speaking into his preferred microphones, with Alan Jones and John Laws, he rejected both suggestions out of hand. Though Kim Beazley was happy to leave the door slightly ajar on both issues, Howard could firmly shut the door, offering the consolation that his party was the first to make a place for an indigenous representative in the national parliament, and that he, as Prime Minister, had a proven track record in negotiating with the new Democrat senator, Aden Ridgeway. Meanwhile, Evelyn Scott, Chair of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, went public and claimed that Corroboree 2000 had been hijacked by indigenous leaders anxious to resurrect the treaty issue.

Immediately prior to the 1982 Commonwealth Games, the Bjelke-Petersen government did commit itself privately to amendments to its land rights legislation for Aboriginal reserves. But no changes would be made until after the Games, in part to avoid any suggestion that government was responding to protests.

Neville Bonner's Rockhampton address had placed pressure on both the Fraser government and the Bjelke-Petersen government. Change did come; though in the meantime Bonner was branded an Uncle Tom when he urged protesters to go easy during the Commonwealth Games. Susan Ryan was the Labor Party's federal shadow minister for Aboriginal Affairs at the time. She promised that a newly elected Labor government would legislate to override the Bjelke-Petersen laws. In her recent autobiography, she confessed, 'To my shame and distress the Hawke Government ... was not able to deliver this policy.'

ON THE EVE OF THE Sydney Olympics, there are some parallels and lessons. Aboriginal leaders have reconfirmed their commitment to a treaty. The Labor Party in Opposition says it is open to dialogue, though Beazley has told parliament, 'The Aboriginal community is thoroughly cognisant of the fact that what we end up with may well not be a treaty.' The Coalition government says the matter is non-negotiable.

Just as people used to focus on the personality of Joh Bjelke-Petersen, so they focus on the personality of John Howard, and many find hope in Labor's open-textured promises. But, as ever, there is a need for incremental gains to be negotiated with the government of the day while leaving open the door for better prospects in the future.

Beazley cannot afford to be too specific in any promises, because his strategy this far out from an election is to focus on the government's short-

comings without detailing policies of his own. He can hardly publish a detailed Aboriginal Affairs policy without an equally detailed policy on tax, the economy, industrial relations and employment.

Labor's self-imposed policy constraint allows Howard a freer hand to counter suggestions of a treaty, apology and compensation for the stolen generations, while he is, at the same time, able to advertise his basic decency at events such as the Bonner dinner and declare openly his disagreement with those who espouse special rights and processes for indigenous groups.

All of us now have the detailed quantitative and qualitative research commissioned by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, which demonstrates that the majority of Australians are agreeable to measures aimed at rectifying continuing disadvantage. But that same majority indicate that they have little sympathy with specially entrenched rights for indigenous peoples.

Howard knows he speaks for the majority on this issue and he knows that it is risky politics for Beazley to be too specific in conceding special rights to indigenous Australians. The Labor Party is further constrained by the exposed gap between its national rhetoric and state action on *Wik*.

The Labor state where *Wik* has most impact is Queensland. The Beattie government has already passed a law guaranteeing the extinguishment of native title on grazing homestead perpetual leases which cover up to 12 per cent of the state. This is despite legal advice, from the QC who acted for the Wik peoples, that such leases do not necessarily extinguish all native title. The Beattie government has also passed a law winding back the Keating double right of native title holders to negotiate with mining companies both at the exploration and mining stages. Under the terms of the 1998 Howard/Harradine compromise, this second state law can be disallowed by a vote of the federal Senate.

Were federal Labor to join with the Democrats and disallow the Queensland scheme, Labor would face acute political problems in Queensland. In Opposition, it is always possible for Labor to overstate the rhetoric of its commitment to indigenous rights. Though Kim Beazley knows there is some public sympathy for the apology to the stolen generations, there is little electoral advantage in furthering the *Wik* agenda. The complex detail of federal–state relations on *Wik* has disappeared from the consciousness of urban Australians, and in the bush, where *Wik* has practical impact on the ground, it is no vote-winner for Labor.

The law of native title will remain uncertain until the reconstituted High Court considers the appeal on the New

Reconciliation politics on the bridge. *Photograph by Peter Davis.*

South Wales western lands leases. One of the Federal Court judges in that case has already highlighted the problems in the *Wik* reasoning regarding the High Court's use of history and statutory interpretation of the word 'lease'. Pundits expect the High Court to go 4–3, but no-one can confidently predict in whose favour. Some conservative judges, who would have restricted native title to vacant crown land were they deciding the case afresh, may feel constrained to follow the *Wik* precedent despite their own personal reservations about its mode of argument.

While the Coalition is in government, future Aboriginal gains will come only with parliamentary responses to ongoing court actions. There will be no compensation fund for the stolen generations until there has been a successful test case. Calls for such a fund without a positive result in the courts will receive the same response as did the call for national land rights prior to the *Mabo* decision. The Coalition will be opposed to it, saying it is a state matter; and the Labor Party will fudge the issue as Bob Hawke did when dealing with Brian Burke over national land rights. The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC)'s *Bringing Them Home* report highlighted two test cases, both of which have, so far, failed (*Williams* in New South Wales and *Kruger and Bray* in the Northern Territory). Kruger and Bray failed in the High Court on constitutional grounds. Williams failed on trial in the New South Wales Supreme Court, with her barristers conceding at the outset that hers was not a stolen generations case.

Initially, the HREOC inquiry was not to inquire into compensation. That term of reference was added in August 1995, during the parliamentary recess. The Coalition had always said that it was opposed to special arrangements for compensation. The Keating government opposed the claims by Kruger and Bray in the High Court. The Commonwealth's arguments succeeded in defeating the claims of Kruger and Bray that the *Aboriginals Ordinance 1918 (NT)* was invalid and that the Constitution created private rights enforceable directly by an action for damages. It remains to be seen if Kruger or Bray can succeed in the lower courts, establishing that the powers and discretion vested in Commonwealth officers were wrongly exercised, thereby giving rise to a claim for damages. (Any statutory power has to have been exercised reasonably 'by reference to the community standards at the time of the exercise of the discretion'. It is not enough to establish unreasonableness 'only from a change in community standards that has occurred since the step was taken.')

The *Williams* case was an even more devastating loss for those (including HREOC) who viewed it as a test case on the stolen generations. Justice Abadee commenced his judgment with the observation that 'it is important to make clear that the case does not concern so-called "Stolen Generation" issues. The plaintiff was not a member of the "Stolen Generation".'

It was unimaginable that any Commonwealth government would set up a native title tribunal until the successful completion of a *Mabo* case. Equally, there should not be adverse criticism of a Commonwealth government that does not set up a reparations tribunal until the satisfactory conclusion of at least one test case. The vagueness of HREOC's findings (one third to one tenth of previous generations and their offspring being eligible for compensation), and the failure to date of the specially selected test cases, warrant the putting on hold of the issue of compensation. Richard Court was right when he spoke before the *Kruger* case in the 1997 apology debate in the Western Australian parliament. He had no problem in joining in the apology while distinguishing the issue of compensation:

> Compensation is a more complex issue, and a great deal has been said about it. The States and the Commonwealth have adopted a consistent position. We will wait until the High Court hands down the decision in *Kruger*. When the decision is handed down it will be easier to undertake a proper consideration of the issues.

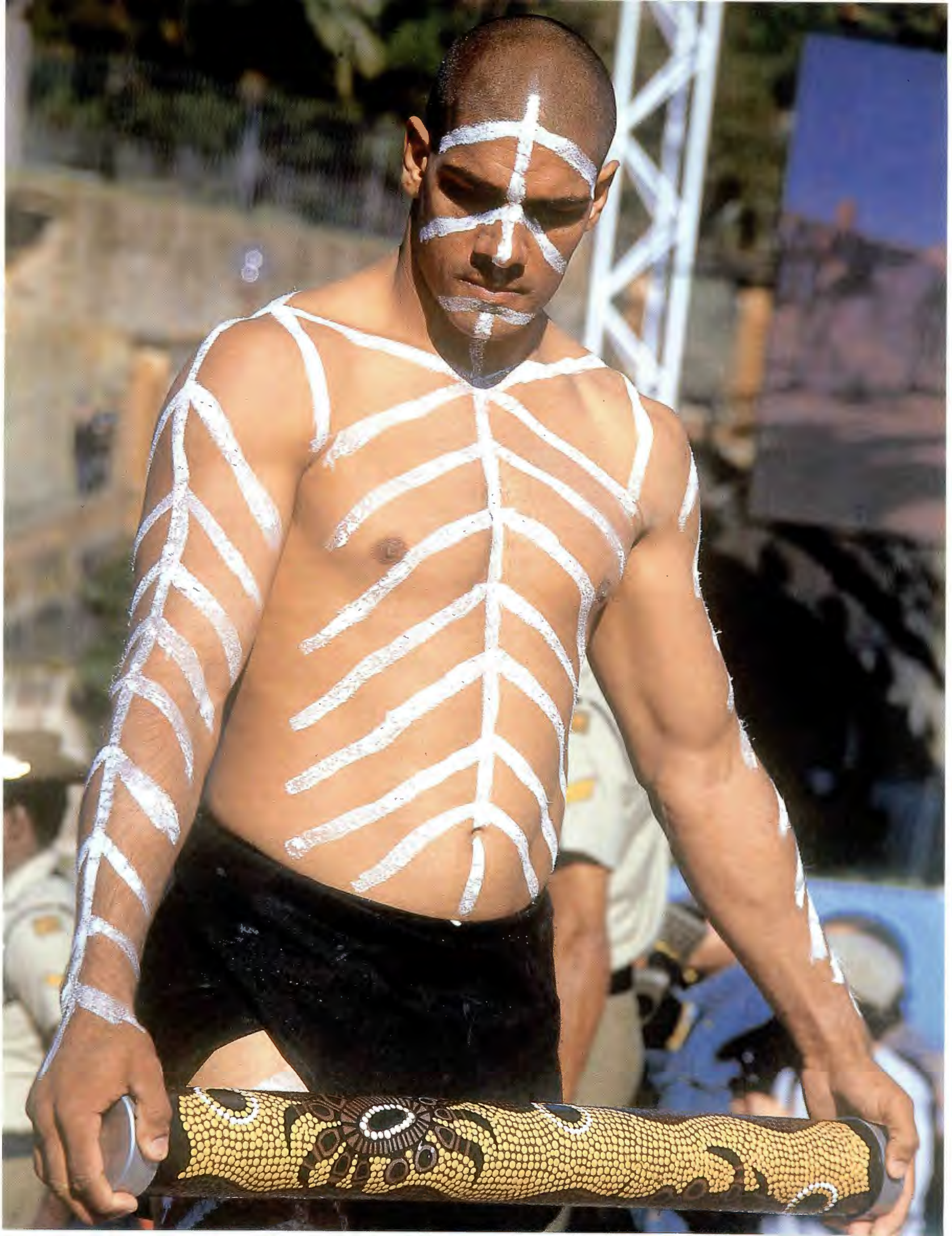
Nonetheless, it is clear that the debate about the apology has nothing to do with government liability for any compensation. That is a matter for determination by the courts once any member of the stolen generations establishes a case. What might be said by politicians in parliament is irrelevant. No parliamentary resolution could be used in court proceedings to establish or defeat a claim to damages. Indeed the greatest blemish on the Commonwealth parliament in recent years is its failure to say 'sorry'. The nation did so in the marches across city bridges following Corroboree 2000. The nation has also started to comprehend the link between past policies and present trauma for indigenous Australians.

John Howard has now closed his reconciliation file. Just as he espoused Pauline Hanson's right to free speech in 1996, he will welcome public discussion about treaties, native title, apologies and compensation. Unless the courts force him to do more, he will do nothing further, adhering to his own standards of personal decency. Kim Beazley will want to be seen by Aboriginal supporters as wanting to do more, hoping for understanding that decency demands he not commit himself to promises he cannot deliver. And as we settle in for the Olympics and the centenary of federation, we can all be content that Australian politics and law have moved far since Neville Bonner signed his political death warrant in Rockhampton in 1982.

There is still unfinished business. Most Australians accept that there is still a wide gap of disadvantage between indigenous Australians and the rest of us. That gap must be closed by a commitment to what John Howard calls 'practical reconciliation'. But there is another, wider gap—the gap of culture and values. That gap is not to be closed. It needs to be bridged by our commitment to what John Howard on election night 1998 called 'true reconciliation'. Sadly, only the Labor side of politics acknowledges the reality and validity of that gap. And even Labor knows this is not the time for major bridgeworks. The work must proceed one strut at a time. While Howard is in the Lodge, Bonner is a model for us all. ■

Frank Brennan SJ is director of Uniya, the Jesuit social justice centre.

Right: Glen Kelly carries the document of reconciliation from the Aboriginal boat, *Tribal Warrior*, to the waiting crowd at the Sydney Opera House. *Photograph by Peter Davis.*



Woomera

Peter Mares visits one of Australia's tidiest but also most notorious towns to discover what lies behind the rhetoric of the government's current policy on detainees.

At first I thought it must be the town itself; bright lights, sudden and sharp against the dark horizon. It was after midnight, the Greyhound was six hours north of Adelaide and we were due any time to arrive at Woomera. But then the coach turned right off the highway and travelled down a neatly kerbed, modestly lit street. We could have been back in the northern suburbs of Adelaide. *This* was Woomera, I realised, tidy town *par excellence*. The flood lights on the desert horizon had been my first glimpse of its satellite suburb, Woomera West, site of Australia's largest detention centre. With a population of around 1400, the detention centre holds almost five times more people than the town itself.

The bus driver dropped me off next to the cinema and pointed the way to the Eldo hotel: not a contraction of Eldorado, as I first thought, but the acronym of the European Launcher Development Organisation, the body responsible for the Blue Streak, the Redstone and other rockets launched at Woomera during the '50s and '60s, and now on proud display at the missile park by the town's main intersection.

The rocket range gave life to Woomera and in its heyday in the mid '60s Woomera boasted a population of around 7000 people. Until 1982, access to the town was limited to authorised personnel. Today Woomera is still run by the Defence Department, with a mayor, or 'area administrator', appointed by Canberra. When work on the rocket range slowed, the town was sustained by another secretive military installation, the satellite tracking station at nearby Nurrungar, with its giant ray domes (known as the golf balls in the desert). Now that too has gone. The last US military personnel pulled out, leaving Woomera depleted and in need of a new industry.

A sharp increase in the arrival of 'boat people' on Australia's northern coasts (from Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and other parts of the Middle East) appeared to offer a nice fit with the town's under-used facilities and its isolation.

The detention centre has certainly been a lifeline for the Eldo Hotel. As I walked there from the bus stop, Woomera appeared deserted, apart from a plague of grasshoppers. But behind the Eldo's formidable brick walls the Boomerang Bar was doing good business. About 30 people, men and women, were playing pool and drinking, while the juke box sang 'I wanna have sex, on the beach, on your naked body.' Several patrons were wearing sandy-brown uniforms, and had ID tags looped on to their belts. The Eldo has become the main watering hole and feeding place for the 100 or so guards employed by Australasian Correctional Management (ACM). ACM is a private company that runs the detention centre, or the Woomera Immigration and Reception Processing Centre, as it is officially known, under contract from the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA).

The next morning, I meet Dr Tom Atherton, the local Uniting Church Minister, who takes me on a tour of the town. 'The American presence defined the town. Now it has no definition,' he says. 'Woomera is in mourning.' If I were in need of evidence to support his claim, then I found it at the local snack bar, where we stopped for a cappuccino and a chat with the proprietor, Susan Rotherham. She had just farewelled her sister-in-law, who'd left Woomera after 29 years to move to Darwin. 'People want to stay here,' she said, 'but they just can't get a job.' I ask about the detention centre. Isn't that providing work? 'We were told it was going to boost the town,' she says, 'but so far it hasn't done that.'

In fact, some locals are working in the administration section of the camp, others are working in the kitchen and tradespeople are getting plenty of jobs in construction. The local supermarket is doing OK too, selling cigarettes, biscuits, drinks and other goods to the detainees via a weekly order service. (The detainees pay for the goods with money that they brought with them to Australia.) Susan Rotherham's gripe is that the detention centre guards, or officers, are flown in and out of Woomera on six-week turnarounds. She claims that they earn $13,000 for a six-week stint (a claim I hear repeated by many others in the town), but says that very little of the money stays in the town. 'It's an obscene waste of money,' she says, and she wants to see the guards, and their families, stationed permanently in the town to help bring Woomera back to life. After all, it's not as if Woomera is short of accommodation.

Tom drives me past rows of vacant transportable houses, all for sale, and

blocks of empty brick flats. He shows me the town's three ovals (one with floodlights 'as good as the MCG'), the swimming pool, the bowling alley, the community hospital and the miraculous green lawns of Breen Park. By the standards of rural Australia, Woomera is massively over-serviced. As the Americans left, the population plummeted. In October 1999, there were 1200 residents. Six months later, at the end of March, just 325 and falling. Of course, the exotic new residents brought involuntarily to Woomera West are not included in the head count. Tom Atherton, soon to leave Woomera, and preparing for his final posting with the Church before retirement, has watched his own congregation shrink from 70 to seven. At least the establishment of the detention centre down the road provided Tom with a new focus for the final months of his ministry.

IT WAS EARLY NOVEMBER, the start of the fierce South Australian summer, when the government announced that 400 'illegal immigrants' would be detained at Woomera West. They were to be housed in former army barracks, which were, according to Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock, 'not thought appropriate for air-conditioning'. He described them as having 'flow-through ventilation'. Tom Atherton was concerned. Woomera is a town where summer temperatures can soar into the high 40s and where even the local boarding kennels are air-conditioned. Together with the local priest, Father Jim Monaghan, Tom went on TV and, in his own words, 'squealed about the air-con'. The public response was immediate and vitriolic: 25 phone calls and an equal number of letters, almost all of them hostile. He was called 'a dickhead' and told to 'fill his pews and mind his own business'. According to some of his callers, the 'invaders' from the Middle East would 'jump the fence and breed like rabbits'. Undaunted, Tom agreed to speak about the issue on the John Laws program. He fielded more abusive calls, and weathered Laws' own scorn. 'If you're so worried about it, why don't you pay for the air-conditioners yourself,' Laws said. 'Put your money where your mouth is.'

Tom Atherton is no firebrand. After all, you don't send a rabble-rouser to be Uniting Church Minister in a defence town like Woomera. Tom is loquacious, but his views are considered. He has a thoughtful, inquiring manner that betrays his academic training. Tom was badly burned by his media experience, but he continues to speak out about conditions in the detention centre. Now he believes the air-conditioning was the wrong issue to focus on. Four months on, he is less concerned for the detainees' physical well-being, than for their mental and spiritual health. He says the mood of the detainees swings from 'excited and excitable' to 'flat and frustrated'. 'Up and down, and looking for signs in your eyes of help. It's a classic sign of depression. That is their condition,' he says. 'To slap them in the clink in this environment is, I think, a touch inhumane.'

Tom Atherton has some insight into the well-being of the detainees because, occasionally at least, he is allowed a glimpse behind the barbed wire. Every second Monday, Tom and his Catholic counterpart, Father Jim Monaghan, hold a joint worship service for non-Muslims. (Islamic observances are conducted by clerics among the detainees.) Around 150 people attend. Most are not actually Christians at all, but followers of the gnostic Mandaean sect from southern Iraq, a sect which was traditionally hostile to Christianity. The Mandaeans' prophet is John the Baptist and their liturgy is in ancient Aramaic, the language of Christ himself. They are known in Iraq as 'Subbi' or 'baptisers', because ritual immersion is a key feature of their religious practice. It is a rite which cannot be observed in the detention centre.

The worship service begins with a simple song, jointly sung, in English. Then Father Jim reads a lection from the Old Testament and Tom gives a homily, with one member of the congregation providing simultaneous translation into Arabic.

Tom says that he tries to identify with the situation of the detainees: 'My themes have been Jesus the refugee, or Abraham the Iraqi. These guys are in prison and there is a long history of Jewish and Christian people being in prison and of having to go to a foreign country. There are many Old Testament heroes like Abraham or Jesus himself, who had to flee a country, or go to another one, unknown and insecure.'

A couple of guards sit in on the worship, and word has got back to Tom that his homilies are regarded as too political by camp administrators.

'It is not just political, it is theological,' he retorts.

The ecumenical service may not seem entirely appropriate for members of a sect that officially regards Jesus as an apostate, but Tom says the response is very positive.

'You can tell by their eyes, you know. Their eyes light up and of course they sense that this guy has an affection for them. They seize on the potential helpers, as we all would caught in prison, or in detention.'

Jim Monaghan agrees: 'I mean it is not that we've got anything terribly flash to offer, but we'd be the only visitors that they would have that aren't there in some official capacity. And so we have no particular axe to grind or whatever and so they can relax a bit with us.'

Children make up one third of the non-Muslim congregation. Tom Atherton engages them by trying out his limited Arabic. 'Oh dear God, my Arabic's pathetic,' he says.

'"How old is this child?" I ask. I can say five but I can't say six, so they follow me around trying to correct my Arabic. They feel empowered because I am struggling with their language, rather than disempowered because they are struggling with my language.'

Both Tom and Jim believe that, at the very least, the children should be allowed to leave the detention centre for outings, to make use of Woomera's vastly underused facilities.

'It's just such a waste of resources that those things are not used and it is so cruel to keep children cooped up like that,' says the priest. 'The security issue would be minimal, because the children are not going to run away; they're not going to leave without their parents. You could hold the parents hostage in the camp, against the return of the children, if you wanted to be as bloody-minded as that. But why not let the whole family group come out and have a picnic or something, or why not let the kids come out and play on an oval?'

When I meet Jim and Tom in early April, their concern for the welfare of the detainees has escalated. For the past two Mondays they have not been allowed into

the detention centre. They have been told to suspend their worship visits because Shi'ite Muslims in the camp are preparing to celebrate the tenth day of the month of Muharram, which commemorates the martyrdom of Imam Husayn, the emotional high-point of their religious calendar.

It seems unfair that minority groups should be prevented from celebrating their faith because a more dominant religious community is preparing for a festival, and perhaps the Shi'ite feast was not the only reason that Tom and Jim were excluded from the camp. One week earlier, the priest and minister had been quoted extensively in a front-page story in the *Sunday Age*, which ran under the banner headline, 'Revealed: $100m bill for outback gulag'. DIMA is reluctant to have independent observers monitor conditions in its detention centres, particularly when things are tense, even though the emergence of such circumstances would logically suggest a need for more frequent visits from outside, not less. External visitors provide some diversion for the detainees, and the chance to speak to a neutral outsider is a way to let off steam, to gain perspective and to counter the cauldron effect of extended detention.

PROOF THAT THE atmosphere in the camp was stretched to breaking point came on the night of Monday 10 April. Two men escaped and made it 170km south before being caught trying to change US dollars at a petrol station in Port Augusta. The men made their break when a couple of fences were pushed over during a rowdy protest involving about 200 detainees.

The situation was serious enough for detention centre authorities to call out the local fire brigade.

Lynton Stephens was the doctor at Woomera hospital at the time. He saw the fire truck parked next to the perimeter of the detention centre, with its emergency lights flashing, its siren blaring and with an officer sitting ready atop the water cannon. He understands that the truck was being used as a form of deterrence, to prevent the detainees damaging another fence and to convince them to end their protest.

Dr Stephens is deeply concerned about the incident, because Woomera Emergency Services also runs the local ambulance. The same staff members perform both tasks. So, officers could find themselves engaged in crowd control on the back of a fire truck at one moment, and rushing to pick up an injured asylum seeker in an ambulance at the next.

When I asked Woomera Area Administrator, Joe Van Homelen, about the incident, he referred me to ADI Ltd, the private corporation that used to be called Australian Defence Industries when it was owned by the Commonwealth. ADI runs the Woomera Emergency Service on a commercial basis. A company official at ADI referred me back to Joe Van Homelen, saying nothing happens without the Area Administrator's knowledge. Both men confirmed that the truck had been called out to the detention centre, but refused to discuss the circumstances in which the call-out had occurred. DIMA says that the truck was called out as a precaution, in case the protest resulted in a fire.

Dr Stephens' concerns don't end with the fire truck. When the detention centre opened, he agreed to provide medical services to the detainees. It was a lucrative adjunct to his job at the hospital which, with the declining town population, no longer kept him at full stretch. But Dr Stephens became concerned at the way the camp clinic was set up. He believed nurses were getting out of their depth and carrying out procedures that would ordinarily require greater supervision. Dr Stephens cited the use of the sedative Midazolam, given intravenously to calm a detainee who was extremely agitated. He says that Midazolam is a strong respiratory suppressant that can slow breathing and lower blood pressure to dangerous levels. He says that to administer it intravenously requires greater monitoring than was possible in the detention centre clinic.

In any business it is essential to minimise costs, and ACM runs the Woomera detention centre on a commercial basis. In simple terms, the company will only turn a profit if the cost of running the camp is less than the price the government pays to ACM for the service of keeping people locked up, fed and healthy. Dr Stephens believes that in the medical area, this creates a conflict of interest. Although he was never aware of any policy directives to limit or

Woomera Detention Centre, November 1999, only hou

cap medical treatment, he did run up against some obstacles to routine practice. For example, Dr Stephens attended to one detainee who suffered from painful gastric reflux. The patient had already been treated with the standard medication, Zantac, but had not responded. So Dr Stephens wrote out a script for a more expensive drug called Omeprazole, a more powerful medication used to treat reflux oesophagitis and ulcers. Two weeks later, the patient presented once again and the symptoms were undiminished. Upon inquiry, Dr Stephens discovered that his prescription had never been filled. He learnt that a sister in the clinic had torn up the script and thrown it in the bin, apparently because the medication was too expensive. The detainee eventually obtained his medication, but suffered two weeks of needless discomfort in the meantime.

In mid February, Lynton Stephens chose not to continue the work at the detention centre, which is now performed by doctors from the mining town of Roxby Downs, 80km further north. He has also written to ACM, telling the company that, with 1400 inmates, the detention

ırs after the arrival of the detainees. *Photo: Newspix*

centre requires the services of a full-time medical practitioner. He points out that the medical issues in the camp are further complicated by the fact that many of the detainees are victims of severe torture and trauma; on several occasions during treatment sessions, Dr Stephens came across the scars of Taliban whips on the chests and backs of detainees from Afghanistan. I sought a response from ACM to Dr Stephens' concerns, but my phone calls and emails went unanswered.

As well as taking me on a tour of the town, Uniting Church Minister Tom Atherton is kind enough to lend me his car so that I can drive the few kilometres out to the detention centre. I would have walked, but I thought that trudging up the highway would make me a bit conspicuous in a town that seems to have more cars than people. I need not have worried, because I am destined to be conspicuous anyway.

I drive as far as I am permitted. There is a gate across the road, with a large red stop sign and a warning: 'NO UNAUTHORISED ENTRY. BEYOND THIS POINT TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED.' The gate is a more symbolic than effective barrier. To the left, it abuts the property of the local earthmoving firm, Wagnitz Building Contractors. To the right, it is attached to a cyclone fence which stops abruptly just 15 metres beyond the bitumen. The truncated fence line is forlorn against the vastness of the desert. It would be a simple matter to skirt the fence and walk on to the detention centre proper. The only thing that stops me doing so is the presence of a uniformed guard sitting sentry in a pre-fab hut next to the gate.

One side of the gate is open, allowing vehicles to trickle in and out; builders in utes and four-wheel drives, trucks delivering supplies; lawyers or DIMA officials in city sedans. Most just honk or wave at the guard and drive cheerfully on. It is evident from the guard's interest in the number plate of Tom's car, which she notes down assiduously, that I won't be granted the same liberty. My official request for permission to visit the camp had already been rejected in Canberra.

I park the car and walk away from the gate and around the back of the Wagnitz office. Here a semi-trailer is busy delivering a load of metal and a broad young bloke in a bulldozer is scooping up sand to mix concrete. Wagnitz is evidently doing well from the expansion of Woomera West. I ask the bulldozer driver for permission to walk across the property to get a closer look at the detention centre. He gives me a sunburnt grin and waves me forward, a security pass dangling from the belt loop of his jeans. 'Don't get too adventurous,' he says, 'or they'll be out after you, quick smart.'

Behind Wagnitz lies a tangle of old junk—scrap metal, secondhand timber, an abandoned school desk sinking into the red sand. There is also a ramshackle collection of outhouses and bare dirt paddocks housing bored ponies. I feel like a skulking schoolboy as I make my way along the fence line, but I also enjoy a boyish sensation of victory as I realise that I am now well past the gate on the road and on to forbidden territory.

I push forward as far as I dare to get a closer look. The perimeter fence is at least 4m high, the tips of the posts angled inwards and topped with a forbidding coil of barbed wire. One section of the fence is sagging; presumably at the point it was pushed over during the disturbances of 10 April when two detainees absconded. A banner in Persian is strung against the wire: red writing on yellow cloth; not a protest banner, but a devotional exhortation to mark the tenth day of Muharram. Behind the fence, I can see low-slung buildings. As the camp population has rocketed upwards, the original 1950s brick barracks with their 'flow-through ventilation' have been augmented by prefabricated, transportable buildings that are equipped with air-conditioning. There are also two rows of large, dark-green canvas tents. The tents appear empty and I learn later that they are intended to accommodate the overflow, should there be a sudden influx of new arrivals.

A cooling breeze takes the heat out of the day and keeps the sticky South Australian flies circulating. I am too far away to make contact with anyone, but I can catch a glimpse of life behind the wire. A child sitting in the shade, a woman carrying a blouse just washed, a young man with his head wrapped in a T-shirt as a shelter against the sun. They are stick figures beneath an immense and glorious sky.

The boss at Wagnitz is friendly, but turns down the offer of a chat. I want to know what he is actually building out at Woomera West. He waves a fat contract in the air which he's just received from the construction company Thiess. 'There's lots of legal stuff in here and I haven't read it yet,' he says. I get the impression that, had I arrived earlier, before that contract landed on his desk, then he may have been more forthcoming.

That reluctance to talk about what goes on at Woomera West is shared by other contractors at the site. Most, like the guards, have signed secrecy clauses, and are required to report any media approaches to ACM management. Still, word filters out, in various ways.

It is 2pm in the afternoon when I walk past the offices of the Woomera Area Board, where the sign in the window says 'Dog licences may be paid here'. Across the road a blue-and-white minibus pulls out of the community hospital. The driver is wearing the ACM uniform and the four or five passengers look as though

they hail from the Middle East. One wears a black Nike baseball cap and trails an arm out the window, a piece of paper folded carefully between two fingers. The man catches my eye, glances from me to the paper, which he waggles almost imperceptibly, then glances away at the ground. I give a quick nod and he lets the paper drop. The bus drives off and, endeavouring to affect an air of nonchalance, I saunter over to retrieve his missive. It is an envelope with 'S.O.S Please help us' scrawled on both sides. Inside are two letters. The first, again under the heading 'S.O.S', contains the following request: 'Dear my friend. We are homless imigrant's that we live in Woomera detention centre. We have no things to live and we are in bad situation please call UN office for us. Thank you for your kind.'

The second letter is in the same handwriting, and is more personal: 'Dear my friend, I'm Iranian homeless imigrant, my name is A and nobody know that I have arrived to Australia or not. please call my phone number in Iran on humanity, thank you for your kind. this is a big help for me.'

There are two names and two Iranian phone numbers at the bottom.

I was not alone in receiving this kind of plea from detainees at Woomera. Lawyers, migration agents, medical staff and others visiting the camp told tales of similar folded notes tucked discreetly into their palms, out of sight of the guards. Most were requests to contact relatives in the Middle East. Some recipients dared not fulfil the request, believing that it was a federal offence to do so. Others went ahead and made the phone calls (as I did).

One request came from an Islamic cleric, or mufti. His request was carried out, and after months of wondering what had happened to him, of no news and of fearing the worst, the mufti's family was at last alerted to his whereabouts. He was a big austere man with a beard to match his position—a man of authority and stature among the detainees, but when he learnt that his message had indeed got through to his family, he broke down, his relief bursting forth in tears.

According to clause 11.1 of DIMA's own Immigration Detention Standards, 'Contact between detainees and their families, friends and the community is permitted and encouraged except when in separation detention.'

Indeed, in Port Hedland detention centre in Western Australia, in Maribyrnong in Melbourne and in Villawood in Sydney, detainees have access to a payphone. By working in the kitchen they can earn money to buy a phone card, or else they can buy one with whatever money they had with them on arrival in Australia. The camp at Curtin airbase in Western Australia also has a pay-phone. It was only installed after hundreds of detainees went on a hunger strike in early February. A handful of the detainees even stitched their lips shut in protest at being held incommunicado.

In Woomera, after four-and-a-half months of operation, there was no public phone for the detainees to use. The explanation given for this was that Woomera West is still 'a site under construction'. A spokesman from the Minister's office told me that alternatives were being investigated, such as the use of mobile phones, until a fixed phone line could be installed.

But there is another obstacle to phone contact, and this is where the 'except when in separation detention' of clause 11.1 comes into play. It is DIMA policy to hold new arrivals separate from detainees who have already passed through the primary stage of an application for political asylum.

One reasonable justification for separation detention is that it allows new arrivals to be screened for infectious diseases, but this is a matter that can be resolved quickly. The other aim of separation detention is to prevent 'coaching'. DIMA believes that if new arrivals mix with longer-term residents, or are able to contact people outside the camp by telephone, then they will be 'coached' on their rights—rights of which they are not otherwise informed. For example, detainees may learn that they have the right to see a lawyer and to apply for refugee status. DIMA also fears that they may be 'coached' on how to handle the crucial first interview of the asylum process, an interview which can transform their official status from the damning classification of 'illegal immigrant' to the liberating identity of 'refugee'. Detention centres like Villawood and Port Hedland have different sections for different classes of detainee. But as of mid April, Woomera had only one combined area, which meant that all detainees were effectively held in separation detention, regardless of how far their refugee applications had progressed.

DIMA's preoccupation with 'coaching' suggests that there is little official confidence in Australia's much-vaunted refugee determination procedures, or in the capacity of departmental delegates to distinguish between a genuine story of persecution and one quickly stitched together after a few quick words of advice. And problematic as the Department's logic may be, the coaching issue does not explain why detainees did not even send out letters. The detention centre opened at the end of November 1999, but it was mid March, three-and-a-half months later, before any mail from the detainees started passing through the Woomera post office. When I raised the issue of mail with DIMA, a spokesman told me, 'There are no restrictions on detainees' correspondence at any detention centre.'

I pressed the matter and rephrased my question. 'Had there been any such restrictions in the past?' I asked. The answer came back, also rephrased: 'DIMA's communications policy in respect of detainees at all detention centres allows for them to send and receive mail. This policy has been in place for a considerable time and pre-dates the opening of Woomera.'

A fundamental question remains unanswered: if DIMA policy was implemented at Woomera, if detainees had the right to send out mail, and were informed of that right, then why were they surreptitiously pressing secret notes into the hands of visitors, or dropping them from the window of a minibus?

'Some of the detainees have said to me that they feel lost,' says Reverend Tom Atherton. 'They have fallen off the planet and their relatives back home in Iraq or wherever might think that they are dead ... boats do sink.'

While I was in Woomera in mid April, Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock said he believed that up to 220 boat people had died while attempting the crossing from Java to Christmas Island, after their vessel went missing in monsoonal seas. Obviously such news

must cause acute distress to families back in Iraq or Iran, who know that their brother or son or granddaughter is attempting that same journey. Yet at Woomera, the Minister's department was holding 1400 people incommunicado, and some of them had been in that situation for at least three months.

Prisoners of war are able to access the Red Cross so that basic information can be communicated back to their homeland. Convicted criminals in Australian jails can make and receive phone calls. Yet these people, who have not been charged with any offence, have been denied that fundamental right, the right to reassure their family that they are still alive.

IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, it is hardly surprising that trouble should break out in the detention centre. Father Monaghan draws a parallel between the uncertainty experienced by the townsfolk of Woomera and the plight of the detainees up the road.

'As Woomera began to say goodbye to the Americans and as various facilities began to close down and as various organisations in the town began to lose numbers and so on, the feeling of uncertainty would give rise to lots of rumours. One of the classics is about the bowling alley. In the space of a few weeks we heard that the bowling alley was getting sold to Western Mining Corporation and shifted to Kalgoorlie. Then no, it's being sold to some entrepreneurs in Alice Springs and it will be going to Alice. No, Western Mining have bought it and it's going to Roxby Downs. Then finally, no it's not going anywhere, it's staying right here. These sorts of things are very debilitating in the life of a community.'

Father Monaghan says that the tribulations of the Woomera locals hint at the much greater turmoil that must be in the hearts of the detainees: 'With very little information coming in to them, apart from scraps here and there, rumours, gossip, a few words from a guard and recalling what they might have heard in Indonesia on the journey or what the people smugglers might have told them, and their experience with the various layers of bureaucracy that they are meeting, it must be terribly draining and internally it must lead to a real imbalance of emotions in people.'

In early June, that 'imbalance of emotions' tipped right off the scale. After three days of protests, hundreds of detainees pushed down a perimeter fence and marched into town, carrying banners and chanting 'freedom'. There were some clashes during the initial break-out; three ACM officers were reportedly injured and several detainees claimed to have been beaten. Later in the town centre, another ACM guard was punched to the ground and kicked. Overall, though, the protest was well organised and peaceful. The authorities acted with restraint, and waited for the passion of events to run its course before negotiating a return to the detention centre.

According to sources in the town, the protest coincided with a rumour in the camp that no-one would be given a visa until after the Sydney Olympics. The story was baseless, but its spark fell on dry tinder. After six months of operation, not a single person had been released from Woomera. Detainees believed the Olympics rumour because it was consistent with their situation.

Other events may also have contributed to the uncertainty. In May, construction was completed on a second stage at the detention centre. Detainees could now be divided into two groups: those who had entered the refugee determination process, and those who had failed to cross that initial threshold and who now face removal from Australia. Initially, some 180 detainees were separated out, causing considerable distress in the camp. In some cases, members of the same family found themselves on different sides of the wire.

At least detainees with the money to buy a phone card can now make use of the one telephone that was installed in the camp in late May; visitors describe long queues as detainees wait their turn to contact anxious relatives.

After the June protest, I rang Father Jim Monaghan to get his perspective on events, but he said he could no longer speak to me about the situation in the detention centre. Since our meeting in Woomera in April, DIMA had made it clear that the priest was not exempt from the conditions applied to other people going in and out of the camp for professional reasons. Contact with the media was not appropriate.

DIMA blames the problems experienced at Woomera on circumstance; on ad hoc arrangements in a detention centre still under construction. The Minister points to the strain on the system caused by a sudden huge increase in boat arrivals in 1999, and the inevitable delays in processing asylum applications that result.

But what if Mr Ruddock's worst nightmare came true? At the height of the boat arrivals in November, he told a press conference that 'whole villages' in the Middle East were packing up and that 'as many as ten thousand people could be ... trying to access Australia'. What if 10,000 'boat people' did arrive on our shores? After all, around the world, war and torture show few signs of abating in the new millennium. Nor does unauthorised migration. DIMA has suggested that Woomera may become Australia's main holding centre for asylum seekers and illegal immigrants in the future. If 10,000 'boat people' arrived, would we isolate them all under lock and key in the desert? What would that cost, in human misery and in taxpayers' dollars? And if we cut them off from news of their families, condemn them to boredom and uncertainty, must we not expect escalating protests and increasing conflict?

On the wall of the dining room of the Eldo Hotel, clashing violently with the electric blue carpet, is a huge patchwork quilt made by local schoolchildren. The quilt celebrates the history of Woomera. It shows black gibber stone against the sandhills and native animals around a waterhole; there is grey-blue saltbush and the brilliant red of the Sturt Desert Pea; there are the domes of the satellite base and its radar dishes, and the dramatic centrepiece—a two-metre long, three-dimensional black-and-silver rocket, with cloth flames spewing from its tail. If locking up asylum seekers is to be Woomera's next industry, then I can't help wondering how the quilt might one day be updated. How will the children of Woomera depict the detention centre up the road and the cloud of secrecy that hangs over it? ■

Peter Mares is the presenter of *Asia Pacific* on ABC Radio National and Radio Australia. He is currently writing a book about Australia's treatment of asylum seekers and refugees, to be published by UNSW Press.

Whose heart of darkness?

Reserve your judgments until you've experienced Africa on the ground, says ***Anthony Ham****.*

AFRICA. Think of the savage violence in Sierra Leone. Think of the political opportunism in the complex post-colonial maelstrom of Zimbabwe. Or of the recurring nightmare of famine in the Horn of Africa, the floods in Mozambique and Madagascar, the bewildering array of intractable conflicts from Angola to Sudan. It is difficult not to despair.

In the fierce Sudanese heat in March, a dishevelled man named Vincent approached me, not far from Khartoum's central Souk el-Arabi. Vincent comes from Sierra Leone. Somehow, with a resilience belied by his fragile frame, he had made it across much of the continent, through war zones, without papers, carried along by a single-minded desire to escape, to keep moving. Now sleeping rough in Khartoum, Vincent had reached a dead end, unable to leave Sudan until he had paid off an illegal-entry fine to the government, unable to return home because home was Sierra Leone.

His will to survive had transported him from Sierra Leone to Sudan—one war-ravaged country to another. He drifted off into the crowd, another black face among millions. He was going nowhere.

In N'Djamena a few weeks before, I sat in a travel agency in the main business district. I was there to arrange a vehicle and driver for a journey down through southern Chad to Zakouma National Park, located in one of the most remote and inaccessible corners of central Africa.

While waiting to be served, I caught sight of a group of five young boys, all clad in simple, grubby *galabiyyas*, walking past with their empty brown begging bowls. One boy stopped as the others continued around the corner, chattering as they went. He stood and stared intently at a poster on the window. It was of the Great Wall of China, a wonder which he will never see. He stood for what seemed like an age, brow furrowed. Then he walked off, his step just a touch more uncertain than before. Prior to rounding the corner, he paused for one last serious look over his shoulder.

A couple of months later, *The Economist* published an issue devoted to Africa. The map of the continent on the cover featured a gun-toting soldier and was entitled simply: 'The hopeless continent'. A Reuters article published in the *Sunday Herald Sun* on 21 May ran under the headline, 'Lights go out in darkest Africa'. A series of evocative photographs of conflict published in *The Weekend Australian* the previous weekend were subtitled, 'Deepest, darkest Africa'.

The misery which has become synonymous with Africa makes you want to throw up your hands and cry out, like Kurtz in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, 'the horror, the horror!'

Think of Africa. Think of darkness.

Think again.

Ever since Joseph Conrad journeyed into Africa's geographical heart, the continent's diverse peoples have strained under the dangerous sobriquet, 'the Dark Continent'. 'Africa' has come to represent an undifferentiated mass, wholly at odds with the diverse reality of 54 independent countries.

The easy collapsing of this complex mosaic of disparate linguistic and tribal groups into a single 'African' identity owes much to a Conradian racial stereotype. Peoples united only by skin colour, by the geography of their birth, by a supposed propensity for tragedy, become a single 'dark' collective, stripped of individuality. And the dark imagery which often accompanies reporting on Africa ensures that a pervasive darkness clouds our view of Africa. Despair and savagery become recurrent primary motifs.

Just how far this process has penetrated popular culture and mainstream journalism was evident in *The Economist*'s blanket assertion that:

> No-one can blame Africans for the weather, but most of the continent's shortcomings owe less to acts of God than to acts of man. These acts are not exclusively African—brutality, despotism and corruption exist everywhere—but African societies, for reasons buried in their cultures, seem especially susceptible to them.

Such thinly veiled theories—which owe much to a seductively simple belief in universalist racial characteristics—are more than just sensationalist news reporting, the effects of which end at the conclusion of each broadcast. These are racial stereotypes, pure and simple.

STEREOTYPES AND THE reactions which they engender hide historical causes and individuality, presenting as accepted wisdom an all-encompassing identity devoid of historicity or context.

When it comes to the causes of modern conflict in Africa, there is frequently an assumption that four decades of independence is time enough for these countries to have freed themselves from the shackling effects of colonialism. 'Analysis' such as that offered in *The Economist* prefers to blame African society and its apparently innate susceptibility to authoritarian rule. In doing so, it ignores the evidence that many governments in Africa are on the nose precisely because they do *not* represent the vast majority of their citizens or the societies over which they rule. The fact is rarely mentioned that most of Africa's longest-serving rulers were protégés of their colonial mentors.

The view from Africa itself is much more textured than suggested by the reductive conclusions of even respected journals like *The Economist*.

The central African state of Cameroon illustrates the point. The country has never been at war, yet finds itself increasingly divided along linguistic lines, with the majority Francophone and minority Anglophone communities at loggerheads over the share of national resources and political power. This fault-line did not exist prior to the colonial era. After World War I, the

Opposite: Sudanese student in Suakin, a town on the Red Sea coast. *Photographs pp32&34 by Anthony Ham.*

authorities in Paris and London (with the mandate of the League of Nations) carved Cameroon into wholly artificial spheres of influence where the only benefits (administrative convenience and the self-justifying games of the 'Great' Powers) completely bypassed Cameroonians themselves.

Since independence, Cameroon has had only two presidents—Ahmadou Ahidjo, one of France's favourite sons, and current president Paul Biya, who last year spent more time living in France than the country over which he presides. Consistently throughout the post-independence history of Cameroon, Anglophone Cameroonians have been marginalised, reflecting the balance of power cultivated by the French and British. On 30 December 1999, a splinter group issued a declaration of independence for the Anglophone North-West and South-West Provinces. This schism in an otherwise peaceful country, arguably the most multicultural in Africa, is of purely colonial origin.

In the town of Zinder, Niger: a traditional Hausa geometric design on the wall of the Zinder Museum.

In April 2000, I sat in the bus station in Bamenda, a staunchly Anglophone town in the country's North-West Province. Bomba, a softly spoken elderly man, assured me that English-speaking Cameroonians had had enough and were ready to rise up against the government. He laughed at the government's dismissal of the declaration of independence as the act of an embittered splinter group. Staring off into the middle distance of the beautiful Bamenda highlands, he whispered a dire promise: if the situation did not change soon, then the world would most certainly be hearing of Cameroon.

Such a statement has broader implications than those intended by Bomba from Bamenda. Cameroon, one of many countries in Africa which never appears in the Western media, would, if Bomba's prediction were to prove true, receive coverage only when it became a site of conflict. Decontextualised from the origins of Cameroon's linguistic divide, news coverage would necessarily feed into the image of Africa as trouble-spot, perpetuating stereotypes, blaming Africans for the painfully slow process of overcoming colonial policies of divide and rule.

The dangers of such a scenario are manifold. Stereotypes are invariably a precursor to prejudice, through which labels are affixed to entire communities, an entire continent. Conflict and a propensity for suffering become the rule, peace and stability the exception. The unwitting individuals who must labour under this overarching identity must disprove that they are people without hope, never the other way around.

On a tour in which I participated in northern Cameroon, my driver was Muslim, the guide a Christian and the owner of the company an Animist. They have never been to war and are, like the communities to which they belong, highly unlikely to in the foreseeable future.

Cameroon is one example among many. Mozambique, which had been ignored when its economic success produced a rate of growth which was one of the fastest in the world, was discovered by the international media only when it was devastated by floods.

Eritrea is now universally described as one of the poorest countries on earth, and has received extensive media coverage because it is at war with Ethiopia. Never mind the fact that Eritrea only became independent in 1993, since which time it has maintained a strict policy of self-reliance, shunning all aid money which came with strings attached. Against all the odds, Eritrea astonished international experts with the unprecedented and unassisted pace of its infrastructure construction projects.

In Sudan, the government has become an international pariah. Both the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and the US Department of State warn that Sudan is highly dangerous and should be avoided if at all possible. And yet, Khartoum is known by travellers as the safest city in Africa. Everywhere I went, I was overwhelmed by the hospitality of ordinary Sudanese people whom I found to be the very antithesis of the reputation which may accurately describe the government, but unjustly smothers its people. It is difficult to get off a bus, a train, a footpath without being invited to share a cup of tea with a complete stranger, to share a meal at their home, to sleep at their house instead of at a hotel.

BUT NONE OF THIS is newsworthy. As a consequence, we are led to believe in the image of Africa as a basket case, a hopeless and hostile continent irretrievably riven with conflict and corruption, dependence and desperate poverty.

When I told people that I was travelling to Africa, the most common first response was, 'Is it safe?' I showed the recent, dismissive media coverage of Africa to some friends, each of whom is university-educated and compassionate. To a person, they shook their heads, *not* in outrage at the irresponsible stereo-

typing at work, but because these headlines struck a chord with them, they saw in them more than a grain of truth.

At a policy level too, support among Western nations for peacekeeping operations in Africa is non-existent, the recent British intervention in Sierra Leone being a notable exception. Conflicts are seen as so intractable, so central to the African 'reality', that reconciliation of the warring parties can't be contemplated. It is easier, like Kurtz, to detach from the complex reality and look on with horror, no longer able to cope with the endless trails of despair. Like Rwanda.

By assuming that African societies are monolithic, that African cultures have a propensity for tragedy of their own making, we give up on this richly diverse continent. We implicitly blame individual Cameroonians, Sudanese, Eritreans for conflicts, as if something insidious in their genes were responsible for their suffering. Instead we should be challenging media representations that perpetuate views of a 'hopeless' or 'dark' Africa.

In the early 1990s, American soldiers were sent packing from Somalia in humiliating circumstances. Since then, the retreat has become a telling metaphor for the Western world's 'engagement' with Africa. We prefer to make scarcely understood but strongly endorsed pronouncements from the safety of distance. We prefer the relative simplicity of detached head-shaking to the complexities of searching for something more constructive than catchy headlines, lest the reflective glare of the West's actions in Africa reveal some uncomfortable home truths.

The possible reasons for such a disengagement are disturbing.

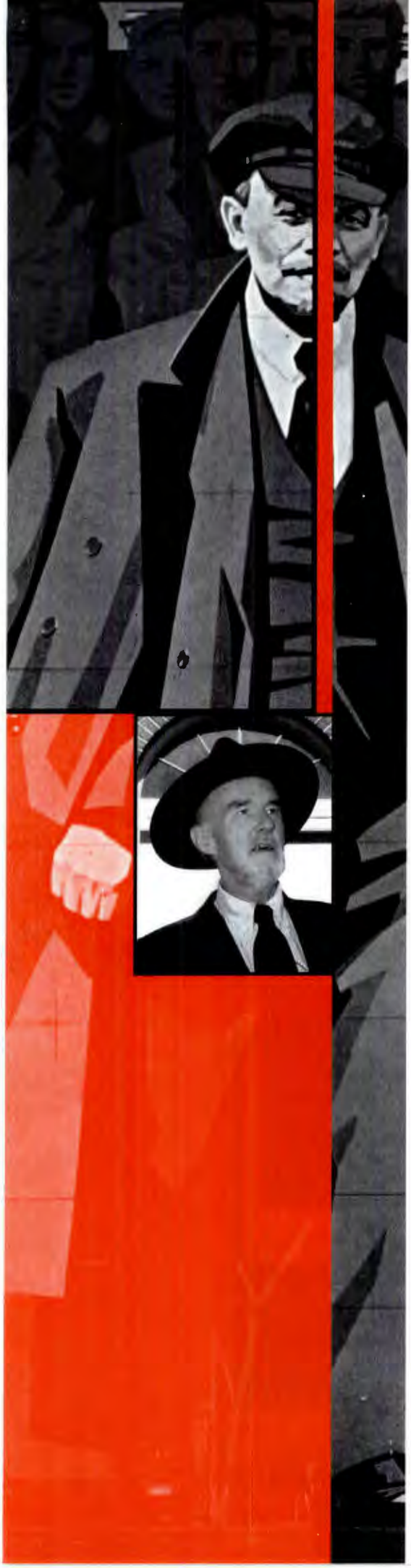
As I was returning to Australia, I transited through Johannesburg, where I picked up a number of local English-language newspapers. At the height of the Zimbabwean farmers' crisis, reports from African journalists were textured with the layers of complexity that lie behind the problem. President Mugabe was condemned for his actions, but the condemnation was coupled with a detailed and balanced analysis of the need for land reform.

Back in Australia, coverage of the situation was chronically superficial, concentrating on the land grab as a dehistoricised bid for power—racially motivated, dark and menacing. Significantly, the white farmers, the lords of Zimbabwean land, were suddenly victims, white victims.

White Africans get offers of a safe haven when they encounter strife. Black Africans are left to suffer indifference and the 'First' World's susceptibility to compassion fatigue.

It is time to start listening to the millions of disparate and diverse voices on the African continent. Or are we afraid of what they might tell us? ■

Anthony Ham is a *Eureka Street* correspondent.



Not the Lenin medal

New information reveals that Manning Clark was no Lenin lackey. At the very most, he had a bet each way, argues ***Stephen Holt****.*

Manning Clark's private papers, previously under embargo in the National Library of Australia, have now been opened to researchers. As a result, new information is available that bears directly on the claim—never retracted by Brisbane's *Courier-Mail*—that Clark was an 'agent of influence' for the Soviet Union.

Originally, the claim was based on the allegation that in 1970 Clark was seen wearing the Order of Lenin.

Called on by the Press Council to withdraw its claim, the *Courier-Mail*, in its own words, 'launched a massive counter-offensive'. It revealed that for the centenary of Lenin's birth in 1970 the Australia-USSR Society (a 'propaganda arm for a brutal regime') sent Clark to Moscow, where he praised Lenin at an 'international communist symposium'. He also received, along with 'high-ranking cadres', a Lenin Centenary Medal (seen as a 'signal honour').

The 1970 visit, on which so much rests, is well documented in Clark's papers. They show the exact nature of his contacts with the Australia-USSR Society during the Lenin centenary year.

The Lenin centenary came at a time when Clark was far less interested in developments in Soviet literature and politics than he had once been. It was ten years since he had published his book, *Meeting Soviet Man*, and he maintained only intermittent contacts with the Australia-USSR Society.

Clark did not attend the 1970 national conference of the Australia-USSR Society at which four of its office-holders—none of whom were 'high-ranking cadres'—were awarded Lenin Centenary Medals. Getting such a 'gong' was by no means a 'signal honour'.

In 1967, the Society invited Clark to speak in Sydney on the 50th anniversary of the Russian Revolution, but the next significant recorded contact was not until 20 April 1970, when Clark spoke at a Lenin centenary reception in Sydney.

Clark's speech was 'much appreciated', and resulted in an 'unexpected invitation' to visit Moscow in order to speak on Lenin at an 'International Meeting of Representatives of the Soviet Public and Activists of Foreign Societies of Friendship with the U.S.S.R.'

Such an invitation was indeed 'unexpected', because Clark was not a friendship society 'activist'. In 1970, the Australia-USSR Society did not have a branch in Canberra for him to actively participate in. His connection with the Society at this time comprised the odd public appearance in Sydney.

Clark's papers contain the pocket diaries in which he jotted down his thoughts after he arrived in Russia on 15 June. The entries indicate that he favoured 'better relations' but that he did

not see this in terms of Moscow 'supplanting' the USA. Australia, as Gough Whitlam was suggesting, should aim to be more independent of superpower rivalry.

CLARK SPOKE ON THE second day of the international symposium when he described Lenin as 'a political genius' and 'one of the great teachers of mankind', who wanted a 'good life to be shared by all'. But in contrast to other speakers, Clark did not dwell on political issues, even though condemnation of Israel and of America's role in Vietnam was decreed, by the 'bullies' (Clark's description) who ran it, to be one of the 'focal points' of the conference. Their condemnation was incorporated into draft 'statements' which the Australia-USSR Society chose to ignore because it felt that they were too 'controversial', thus vindicating Clark's approach.

For the next 27 years, a Russian-language transcript of Clark's remarks at the symposium languished in the Soviet archives. The *Courier-Mail*, on locating this transcript, believed that it had hit upon the original version of the Clark speech. It then printed a translation in which the following alarming proposition appeared:

> Lenin was convinced that this [a good life to be shared by all] could only be attained when communism conquered the world. We are lucky to live in a time when this tenet is being verified by life.

The Russian-language transcript is not, however, the definitive version of Clark's address. His papers contain the actual text of the speech given at the conference. The text is in English and, in contrast to the *Courier-Mail*'s version, it conveys an ambivalent message. Clark's actual words about sharing a good life were as follows:

> Lenin insisted this could only be done when the whole world was won for communism. We have the good fortune to live at a time when this is being put to the test.

Clark, in short, never said that Lenin's vision was being 'verified by life'.

Clark was profoundly ambivalent. He was never an 'agent of influence', because communism was not the only side in the Cold War that he was tempted to back. This situation is dramatically confirmed by other documents in his papers, which reveal that all through the Lenin centenary year he was still a member of the Australian Association for Cultural Freedom (AACF), an anti-communist group linked to *Quadrant* magazine. On 22 July 1970, he drafted a note of acceptance after Richard Krygier, its secretary, invited him to a reception for Canberra AACF members.

Lenin's aura, for Clark, was always matched by the rival appeal of Roman Catholicism. In this same winter of 1970, the historian Ian Turner, a friend and former student of Clark's, published an article for the magazine *Overland* in which he documented his old teacher's underlying hope for 'a reconciliation of individual and collective redemption, of Rome and Moscow'.

The potentialities of Catholic redemption were personified, for Clark, by the poet James McAuley. The militantly anti-communist McAuley was described last year by Cassandra Pybus as 'Clark's opposite number', but in truth he was an old friend and fellow AACF member.

In 1970, on learning that McAuley had cancer, Clark wrote to him about their 'common vision of life'. Richard Krygier seems readily to have obtained Clark's support for McAuley when the poet cabled a message of solidarity to the disruptive Russian novelist Alexander Solzhenitsyn, after the Soviet government prevented him from going to Sweden to accept the 1970 Nobel Prize for Literature.

Clark's involvement in the Lenin centenary was, in truth, surreal rather than sinister. Here we have a member of an Australian anti-communist organisation being invited to deliver a speech on Lenin at an 'international communist symposium' in the Soviet capital. Precisely who, amid these conflicting currents, was influencing whom? ■

Stephen Holt is the author of *A Short History of Manning Clark* (Allen & Unwin, 1999).

ANDREW HAMILTON

Convergent views, divergent ways

Reconciliation: Essays on Australian Reconciliation, ed. Michelle Grattan, Black Inc./Bookman Press, 2000. ISBN 1 86395 186 5

THIS TIMELY COLLECTION of articles, commissioned by Michelle Grattan to appear at the same time as the report of the Council on Aboriginal Reconciliation, will be a resource for carrying further the process of reconciliation.

It brings together reflections on policy by most of the key players over the last 10 years, links them to a range of autobiographical comment, and associates them with the opinions of a range of social commentators on associated issues. The arrangement makes the book a useful overview of the process of reconciliation and the difficulties which it has encountered. Those with a commitment to encouraging reconciliation are in debt to Michelle Grattan for her conception and for her evident energy in following it up.

It is difficult to review a collection of short articles, particularly when they deal with a topic that necessarily questions aspects of the reviewer's own identity. Such work requires that we go beyond description to response, and response in turn calls into question the respondent's credentials. If daddy is writing about the great war, the children will justifiably ask what daddy was then doing. What is at issue is not precisely whether you have moral authority to comment on a controversial issue, or even whether you have the knowledge to grapple with complex issues, but whether you have ever been in a place where you can hear what is being said.

So my response begins with autobiography. I read this collection over the weekend which saw the culmination of the reconciliation process. I was at a meeting in the Kimberley with people who work pastorally with Aboriginal communities. As I read, took in the landscape and listened, I was increasingly struck by parallels with Central America, where I had earlier spent some time. I found in particular that two recurrent themes of *Reconciliation* echoed the experience of Central America.

First, the relationship of different communities to the same land. As in El Salvador, huge tracts of the best land seemed to be tied up in large stations to which roads led, while the Aboriginal communities lived for the most part on marginal land and often could do no more than dream of their ancestral places. The land was the object of fierce attachment by Aborigines and the later owners, but the common attachment was a source of conflict because it pointed back to an original sin of expropriation. In the articles that make up *Reconciliation*, the land and rights to it are sometimes hidden behind the rhetoric of reconciliation, but they reassert themselves because they are central to the identity of both peoples.

For that reason, the most direct pieces of writing in the collection call for a treaty. While it may be politically unhelpful to speak of a treaty, something like it is unavoidable if effective reconciliation is to take place, because nothing else seems able to accommodate and accept as valid the different claims and interests of two groups with respect to the same land.

The experience of Central America also resonated with the emphasis on history in *Reconciliation*. In Central America, an official history tells of the coming of the Spanish and the emancipation of the local landowner society. This is a history of progress to political independence, economic development and independent institutions. But it does not record the history of the Indians and their descendants: a history of subjugation, massacre, the privatisation of public land, and of unequal access to justice or opportunity. This history is carried in the memory of communities and in the bullet-pocked walls of destroyed villages.

The same bifurcation of history can be seen in the Kimberley. The larger history tells of the heroic travels of the stock-drivers who named the roads and began the stations, of the growth of irrigation and of the generous service of the flying doctors and administrators. The history less heard is that of the Aborigines—of their original status, of their initial meeting with white culture, of attempts to 'domesticate' them, of their subjugation on stations, of their loss of access to traditional lands, of massacre, dispossession and humiliation, and sometimes of return to their ancestral lands. Their history is also written into the names of the land. The mistake commemorated at Mistake Creek, for example, was to believe the false rumour that an Aborigine had killed the innkeeper's cow, and consequently to massacre the whole group of Aborigines thought responsible, and all eyewitnesses—up to 30 people in all. Other massacres did not involve such a mistake.

IN CENTRAL AMERICA and Australia, there are many histories; all need to be told, to be heard, and to be held together. When the telling is done properly, there will be ample space for black armbands and for white armbands, but not for an exclusive choice of one or the other. What is required is the patience to listen to histories previously disregarded or made marginal, and to recognise that these are part of our history for which we must answer. Whatever else a treaty may involve, the concept has the merit of recognising that there are two communities with radically different memories and histories, and that they must meet in acknowledging the truth of how they came into contact.

Finally, being out of your own place may allow you to weigh rhetoric. In this collection there are many kinds of rhetoric: passionate, angry, discursive, humorous. Those which rang most true were those which displayed the kind of imagination that enters the lives of ordinary people and sees their history from inside. I found those by Inga Clendinnen, Pat Dodson and Robert Manne exceptional in that respect.

There are poor articles, too, in this collection. They are those which lack a generous imagination and which indeed try to deride the generous imagination by analysing the looseness of argument displayed by its advocates. In doing so, they paradoxically make their opponents' case: that reconciliation requires that we see Australia in a radically different way. ■

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

politics in perspective:

Saul Bellow's Ravelstein

Professor Ravelstein buys his jackets from Lanvin and takes his coffee at the Café de Flore. But in the hands of novelist Saul Bellow, this extravagant character might just build a bridge between politics and literature, argues **John Uhr**.

Ravelstein, Saul Bellow, Viking Penguin, 2000. ISBN 0 670 891312

THE RECENT PUBLICATION of Saul Bellow's latest novel, *Ravelstein*, has begun a new chapter in that old controversy over the place of literature in the study of politics.

At the centre of much of the interest in the novel is the role of the central character, Abe Ravelstein, a professor of political science given to speaking philosophically about the current situation in world politics. As a noted teacher of politics, Ravelstein has many former students now serving in high public office. Through the character of Professor Ravelstein, the novel brings together the Great Politics school of world affairs and the Great Books school of political philosophy.

As a concept, *Ravelstein* sounds too abstract: academics rarely make interesting characters in novels, and academic philosophers are hardly the exception that proves the rule. But *Ravelstein* works because politics is made subordinate to philosophy; politics is put in its place, as a pursuit that is necessary but insufficient for human happiness. Professor Ravelstein's hard-nosed interest in affairs of state is subservient to his warm-hearted interest in the state of the soul, and in the place of politics in satisfying a soul's longing for completeness through human fellowship. Politics both makes and breaks the highest human achievements. Referring to Shakespeare's Roman plays, Professor Ravelstein says: 'without great politics the passions could not be represented'. *Ravelstein* is punctuated by similar references to the contribution of literary works to our understanding of this fundamental longing.

Properly approached, *Ravelstein* promises to freshen enthusiasm for literary

contributions to political understanding, including the limits of politics. This dimension has not been prominent in most of the commentary which, thus far, has focused on the probable identity of the model for the central characters: Chick the narrator of the story being presumably based on Bellow himself, and Ravelstein inspired by Bellow's association with his late University of Chicago teaching colleague, Allan Bloom, a leading student of the political philosopher Leo Strauss—here identified as the 'famous, controversial Felix Davarr'. Bloom is best known for his 1987 bestseller, *The Closing of the American Mind*, which included a foreword by Bellow. In that work, Bellow had, as it were, the first word; in *Ravelstein*, he returns by having the last word.

I doubt the wisdom of seeing Bellow's *Ravelstein* as his homage to Bloom. I think that Bellow's intention in *Ravelstein* is quite different and that most reviewers have misunderstood his purpose. They have focused on the merits or defects of politics as seen through the eyes of Abe Ravelstein. Reviewers favourably inclined to Bloom (and his mentor Strauss) have tended to praise *Ravelstein*; others not inclined to Bloom's outlook have tended to disparage *Ravelstein*. Both sets of reviewers presume that Bloom's political views are central to the construction of Bellow's Ravelstein character, with Bellow in effect providing credentials for Bloom's neo-conservative dispositions. The fact that Bloom's critique of political correctness found favour with the conservative circles around Reagan and Thatcher is proof enough for many readers that *Ravelstein* 'tells it as it is', either justifying neo-conservatism or, alternatively, portraying its very excesses.

The division within critical responses is itself significant: it illustrates how interpretations of works of fiction can relate back to the various critics' ranking of the philosophy of the models for the fiction's

central characters. In place of this search for the background specifics, we should instead appreciate *Ravelstein* as a recent example of literature written with a prominent political theme. World affairs feature through the comments and conduct of Ravelstein, the well-connected professor of political science. Yet Bellow seems more interested in comparing the spiritedness of political life (*thymos*) with the desire or longing for love and friendship (*eros*) which Abe, but not the narrator Chick, seems able to hold in balance. To my mind, Bellow wants readers to focus not simply on the magnificence of Abe but also on the uncertainty of Chick, whose working biography of Abe is itself modelled on the life of another great thinker, John Maynard Keynes, who also demonstrated the ability to balance his public responsibilities and his private passions.

MOST REVIEWERS have noted the political perspective associated with the Bloom character and presumed that Bellow means to endorse this prominent example of conservative politics, and endorse friendships based on this type of shared high regard for Great Politics. But the 'politics' of *Ravelstein* is best understood by reference to Bellow's literary orientation rather than to Bloom's political outlook.

Bellow has contrasted the humdrum state of the contemporary novel (it takes a Nobel Prize-winner to do this) with the undiminishing demand by readers for new novels. For a writer, this demand is instructive: the contemporary novel 'is a sort of latter-day lean-to, a hovel in which the spirit takes shelter'. The reading public wants artists to 'return from the periphery, for what is simple and true'.

The character of Ravelstein may be inspired by the real-life Allan Bloom, but his significance in *Ravelstein* owes more to Bellow's literary project than to Bloom's impact as a professor of politics. A number of reviewers have tried to save the reputation of the real Bloom from Bellow's treatment of the Ravelstein character. This, I think, is to misunderstand the art of the novelist, who derives material from a myriad of sources with no commitment to the fidelity of fit between the originals and his artful characters. The point is not to save Bloom from the various revelations about 'his' character as they emerge through the medium of Abe Ravelstein: for example, that Abe 'was doomed to die because of his irregular sexual ways'; that he was 'destroyed by his reckless sexual habits', leading to death after an HIV-related illness. Instead, we should see *Ravelstein* as an important new document on the relationship between literature and politics.

Even if the Ravelstein character is inspired by Bellow's friendship with Bloom, it is designed to serve a purpose other than as a faithful memorial. If Bloom were the larger-than-life character claimed by reviewers, chances are that an artist with Bellow's gifts would appreciate the difficulty of trying to reduce those expansive qualities to words on paper.

I suggest that Bellow's real intention is to be faithful not so much to Bloom's personality as to his philosophy. That is, Abe Ravelstein is Bellow's construct through which the novelist hopes to make his own contribution to Bloom's distinctive project of teaching about the place of art in understanding politics—including the limits of politics in the realms of love and friendship. The important point for Bellow is not whether Abe Ravelstein is a match for Allan Bloom, but whether *Ravelstein* keeps pace with Bloom's last work, *Love and Friendship*, which is a 1993 collection of remarkable studies of the political teaching of standard literary classics, including Stendhal, Jane Austen, Flaubert, Tolstoy, Shakespeare, and the perennial Plato.

Ravelstein is something of a companion piece to Bloom's last work, which opens with a section on the fall of *eros* in contemporary social theory and concludes with a longer section on the ascending ladder of love as revealed in Plato's *Symposium*. For Bloom, *eros* is the spirit of longing associated with the quest for human wholeness, reaching from the pleasures of the body to those of the soul. The purpose of *Ravelstein*, then, is not to document the character of Allan Bloom, but to use the character of Abe Ravelstein to arouse wonder about the roots of a political scientist's interest in love and friendship. Wonder is what is working its way through Chick as he brings together his recollections of Abe's life.

The reader's focus is not solely on Abe's breadth of vision as a 'genius educator', but also on the curiosity of Chick, who struggles to make sense of the integrity of Abe's theory and practice. Part of Bellow's purpose is to allow readers to look over Chick's shoulder and to use Chick's fascination to generate a sense of wonder about what makes an Abe Ravelstein tick. Abe's commitment to politics falls short of active partisanship, just as his pursuit of *eros* is transformed into philosophy. If Abe's political sense cannot be reduced to his personal *eros*, then what does this tell us about the ideal relationship between the public and the private, between politics and philosophy? These are Bellow's questions. And the test is not whether Bellow has got the Bloom character right, but whether he has got our character and capacity as readers right.

Chick reports Abe's own description of what he wants, which is for Chick 'to write me up, after I'm gone', to prepare 'a really fine memoir' composed in Chick's 'after-supper-reminiscence manner'. Abe insists that 'I want you to show me as you see me.' The memoir was expressly intended by Abe to give Chick an opportunity to present Ravelstein from Chick's own perspective, taking account of 'the slant given by my temperament and emotions ... my swirling vision' of Abe's 'essentials'. Bellow forces us to see Abe through Chick's eyes as he organises the memoir around 'what was characteristic—characteristic of me, is what I mean, naturally'. *Ravelstein* contains a rich portrait of Abe Ravelstein, but the

novel itself, more fundamentally, portrays Chick's mind.

Chick describes the intended work as 'a memoir', but he reports that Abe 'clearly didn't want me to write about his ideas'—ideas that Chick says he is 'not interested in presenting'. But, of course, Bellow might well be very interested in just those things that tend to complicate and slow down Chick's work of art. Chick describes himself as one 'who lived to see the phenomena, who believes that the heart of things is shown in the surface of those things'. The point is that although Abe and Chick are the very closest of friends, Chick admits his limitations in trying to comprehend Abe's thoughts: unlike Abe, Chick is 'no sort of scholar'; he admits he's 'by no means a professor', and that, in contrast to Abe's enthusiasm for Socratic philosophy, he 'did not study those great texts closely'. In Chick's forceful image, Abe is more like an eagle whereas he, Chick, resembles a lowly flycatcher.

The character of Ravelstein may be inspired by the real-life Allan Bloom, but his significance in Ravelstein owes more to Bellow's literary project than to Bloom's impact as a professor of politics. A number of reviewers have tried to save the reputation of the real Bloom from Bellow's treatment of the Ravelstein character. This I think is to misunderstand the art of the novelist.

WE CAN TRY TO PLACE Bellow's art in the context of the larger theme of literature and politics. What is it that literature can contribute to the understanding of politics? The formal academic study of politics is generally hived off from literary studies, so that students have to leap across disciplinary boundaries to do justice to both fields. Writers of novels might think that they have things of interest to say about politics, but university teachers of politics generally leave the interesting connections to departments of literature.

Over recent decades, though, political theorists and philosophers have begun to recognise that many of their classic texts in high theory—like Plato's *Republic*, a text translated and edited by Bloom—are carefully composed works of art. Partly at Bloom's insistence (based in turn on Strauss' exposition of the importance of the rhetorical ordering of many classic texts), readers are now encouraged to approach the substance of many works in the great tradition through their artistry. Plato's *Republic* provides a classic case in point: careful consideration of Plato's compositional and artistic form has emerged as an important guide to his philosophic content. Thus the contribution of literature to political theory opens up the literary qualities of many traditional theory texts, as well as the political and theoretical content of many literary works, such as novels.

From this perspective, Plato's dialogues are not that far removed from Shakespeare's plays, both being works of great art that can teach us much about the nature of politics. It matters little that Plato might be a philosopher who turned to literature or that Shakespeare might be an artist who turned to philosophy: the common ground is that both told stories about politics (and of course much else, including love and friendship) in works of astonishing artistry. Both placed dialogues at the centre; both featured characters (often drawn from real life) who stand in place of the invisible author, although it is never altogether clear which characters, if any, speak for the author. Maybe authors really speak through the arrangement of the whole effect. In this way, unravelling the form (yes, through his title Bellow might well be inviting readers to unravel *Ravelstein*) is essential if readers want to advance their understanding of the content.

So who speaks for Bellow in *Ravelstein*? The novel is narrated by Chick, who describes his final association with Abe Ravelstein, and the beginnings of his attempt to satisfy Abe's request that Chick write a portrait after Ravelstein's imminent death. Chick is an author and his name seems to suggest that he is the junior in the relationship with Abe. Ravel is a great French composer, and the novel begins with Chick's description of visiting Abe in Paris where Abe orchestrates their way around a city he clearly knows very well. Much of the discussion between these two characters relates to their Jewish identity. To be Jewish in Paris is to be confronted by reminders of the totalising potential of politics to purge itself of contested identities. The 'Jewish Question' looms very large in this novel, with Abe and Chick rightly suspicious of the political might of anti-Semitism. There are other characters who appear throughout the novel, notably Chick's former wife, Vela, and his new wife, Rosamund, as well as Nikki, Abe's companion in a relationship described by Abe as 'more father and son'.

Reviewers are right to focus primarily on Abe and Chick, 'the principals', as Chick puts it. But while Abe is the *object* of Chick's narrative, Chick himself is the *subject* of Bellow's novel. Abe dies by page 159 of this 233-page work. Chick is like Bellow, older than Abe but now having to learn how to live without him—that is, without anything other than his memories of him and the memoir that he is preparing. Unlike many critics, I do not think that *Ravelstein* is the final form of the book that Chick so often reports he is working on. By *Ravelstein*'s close, we have no sight of Chick's work-in-progress, but instead his accumulated record of the 'humongous obstacle' facing his project and delaying its completion. *Ravelstein* is to no small degree Bellow's contribution to the literature on the generation of a work of art. While Chick's work remains incomplete, in part because of the debilitating food-poisoning he suffers soon after Abe's death, Bellow's work is a finished product (despite the fact that the real-life Bellow also nearly died from food-poisoning).

The manner of Abe's death has much to teach Chick about the value of life, and Bellow arranges these two primary

characters so that we can also learn something important about learning to die—to use the famous Socratic formulation of what philosophy is all about. It is not simply that Abe resembles Allan Bloom, but that Bellow himself also resembles Bloom in using the techniques of a novelist to promote the interests of his friend the philosopher. Those interests include the use of literature to contribute to our understanding of politics and philosophy with their characteristic drivers or psyches, *thymos* and *eros*. The realm of politics satisfies many legitimate human interests and has its distinctive political virtues that characterise the excellent ruler; but the realm of love and friendship also has its distinctive virtues characteristic of the excellent lover and friend. The two realms can be aligned only with difficulty, each tending to crowd out the other. An important quality of great literature is its capacity to recognise this tension in the development of these two core aspects of human well-being.

One of Allan Bloom's major contributions to political science was to work the seams of this relationship between *thymos* and *eros*, and to recover the contribution that many old and forgotten works of literature might make to our understanding of the nature—and limits—of politics.

Bloom's earliest work in political science related to the political spirit or *thymos* as revealed in literary works; his final work was a collection of literary studies related more directly to *eros*.

The convergence of the perspectives of Bloom and Bellow is evident in Bellow's Foreword to Bloom's *Closing of the American Mind*. There, Bellow asked what 'a purposive account of the artist's project' might comprise.

Despite acknowledging his own uneasiness with such grand description of a novelist's craft, Bellow argued that artists are transformers; their performances can transform the world as we experience it, opening up new possibilities for understanding our place in the world. His personal view was that artists 'should give new eyes to human beings, inducing them to view the world differently, converting them from fixed modes of experience'. *Ravelstein* attempts to do this through our response to seeing Chick rethinking his own categories of importance and not, as most reviewers suggest, by confronting us directly with Professor Ravelstein's superior vision.

The intention behind *Ravelstein* can be discerned by comparing Bellow's Foreword to Bloom with other accounts of the novelist's art provided by Bellow. The most telling of these accounts is his statement a decade earlier in his lecture on receiving the Nobel Prize in 1976 (published in his 1994 non-fiction collection, *It All Adds Up*).

Seen in retrospect, the Nobel lecture marks the beginning of Bellow's preparation for *Ravelstein*. I mean this in only the most general way, for at the time Bellow simply identified the importance of great characters as the focal point of great novels. Abe Ravelstein was much later to emerge as Bellow's most emphatic portrait of a great character. At the time, Bellow used the Nobel speech to signal the general project rather than to prefigure his search for the right candidate for characterisation. Exaggerating for the sake of effect, I can say that Bellow identified an important new political project for artists, although at no point did he put the case in political terms. The political dimension emerges implicitly in the use that Bellow makes of his practical model of the exemplary novelist, Joseph Conrad. For Bellow, Conrad is instructive because he understood that the highest ambition of the novelist's art 'was an attempt to render the highest justice to the visible universe'.

Not surprisingly, it is the proper development of the human character that has attracted Bellow. He has contrasted this high hope with the trend in contemporary literature to retreat from 'characters' and the flight into abstraction common in contemporary literature. He has seen this 'death notice of character' as out of keeping with the deeper needs of the reading public, which longs for 'living' characters. The anxiety that is common in our era presents us with 'private disorder and public bewilderment' in which we are 'tormented by public questions'. But Bellow's preferred strategy is to explore the comparatively neglected question: is it still possible to be delighted by and wonder about the public lives of private characters, as distinct from the private lives of public characters?

Bellow has contrasted the humdrum state of the contemporary novel (it takes a Nobel Prize-winner to do this) with the undiminishing demand by readers for new novels. For a writer, this demand is instructive: the contemporary novel 'is a sort of latter-day lean-to, a hovel in which the spirit takes shelter'. The reading public wants artists to 'return from the periphery,

for what is simple and true'. Readers sense that literary accounts can and should be different, that 'there is another life, coming from an insistent sense of what we are'. The responsibility of the artist is to re-examine current 'attitudes or orthodoxies' which 'no-one challenges seriously'. The task, then, is for artists 'to lighten ourselves, to dump encumbrances, including the encumbrances of education and all organised platitudes'. Or as Chick puts it in *Ravelstein*, 'Under the debris of modern ideas the world is still there to be rediscovered.'

In his Nobel lecture, Bellow argued that the possibility is there for writers to try to respond to the 'painful longing for a broader, more flexible, fuller, more coherent, more comprehensive account of what we human beings are, who we are, and what this life is for'. In *Ravelstein*, this broadening comes about through the ensemble of characters and not simply or solely through the figure of Abe Ravelstein. Indeed, it is Chick who characterises the world of most readers, who stands to learn as much from his private mistakes as from Abe's public successes.

In *Ravelstein*, Bellow is trying to present a picture of a character who excites his interest and admiration in a manner that will puzzle and arouse the wonder of readers. For Bellow, it is important that Chick should *present* but not *explain* Ravelstein and that Chick should provide markers of his distance from Ravelstein. It is as though Bellow wants to invite readers to discover for themselves whether characters such as Ravelstein stack up, perhaps by directing them to Bloom's own works where they might find his own apologia—or perhaps by simply, but audaciously, reminding readers of their own opportunities to discover genuine character around them. Bellow's art is directed against the pervasive spirit of nihilism which he has succinctly defined as 'the absence of the noble and the great'.

BELLOW SPOKE AT Bloom's funeral service in October 1992, and the address is included in *It All Adds Up*. For Bellow, Bloom appeared to be 'a clear case of greatness'. He noted that Bloom 'would make a fascinating study, if a man able enough to undertake it were to turn up'. In *Ravelstein*, Bellow eventually made good on that implied promise. In Chick we have the awakening of a soul to greatness, an experienced man of the world who is, to a degree, born again. We see him recognise that Abe had, as it were, turned him around: what he had thought was an outlook of steely realism was in fact a perspective that ensured that 'you see nothing original, nothing new ... Now this is where Ravelstein had come in'. The real merit of the novel is not that it documents Chick's discovery of Abe as a 'magnificent man', a 'superior man', indeed a 'Homeric prodigy'. Rather, it's that it prompts wonder about the deeper 'greatness of humankind'—Chick and the rest of us all included, so long as we can sustain our wonder—and about Bellow the artist as much as Ravelstein the philosopher. ■

The ANU's **John Uhr** studied with Allan Bloom at the University of Toronto.

Life Models in Oxford

New College in the winter
I sit naked in the art room
above the cloisters
while an eighty-year-old artist
tells stories about other girls
in the war years
who would stand there so ashamed
that a single tear
could be
sometimes seen
to make its way down.

'And then there was the
Baroness von Someone
lady-in-waiting to the Tsarina
(only reason she had not been
shot was her German name).
Walked all the way with her rings in her shoes
and when they did a border check
she had trodden the jewels too far
deep into the toes.
Another one looked like the Raphael Madonna
but she went crazy and jumped off Magdalen Bridge.'

In the tea break the artist shows me
her latest sketch-book
charcoal forests of birch; 'Yes'
she said, 'and one always feels
that one must weep among the silver birches.'

I go home—the night has a
delicious tonal quality,
cross-hatched soft,
grey-leaded dark, my scarf is warm
against my cheek. Shame and paucity
have not yet set in.

Kirsty Sangster

In their hands

Hermannsburg Potters: Aranda Artists of Central Australia, Exhibition, Parliament House, Canberra, 31 May–30 July 2000
Hermannsburg Potters: Aranda Artists of Central Australia, Jennifer Isaacs with Aranda interpretations by Clara Ngala Inkamala, Craftsman House, 2000. ISBN 90 5703 403 4

IT WAS A FREEZING Canberra day. The women from Hermannsburg, shivering a little in their unaccustomed parkas, were seated in a formal row in an auditorium of the Australian National Gallery. Outside, the foyer chat was about new Chinese art—installations, revolutions and politics (the Chinese exhibition, *Inside Out*, had just opened). Inside, it was about the long and rich history of the Hermannsburg Aranda people and the twists in the tradition out of which their extraordinary pots had come.

We heard some of the history—Hermannsburg is Namatjira country, and Lutheran mission country. Most Australians think they know all about Albert Namatjira. In the 1950s, prints of his watercolour landscapes were as familiar, and as popular, as the Van Gogh reproductions that hung on many a suburban wall. Indeed they became so popular that they were assimilated into white art traditions: this was one Aboriginal artist who had 'learned' the white way. Or so we thought.

The Parliament House exhibition, and Jennifer Isaacs' book which accompanies it, tell a different story. And it was some story to hear during the weekend of Corroboree 2000 and the reconciliation marches.

These Aranda artists of Hermannsburg have long artistic traditions, dynastic ones like the Boyds', deep, various and full of the extraordinary. Elizabeth Jane Moketarinja, pictured opposite, names her father, Richard Moketarinja, her mother, Gloria Panka and her uncle Ivan Panka as just some of the many artists who went before her, who passed their ideas on to her. The women photographed at right all live and work in a community that has long habits of making art. Clay is a new medium, but one they have annexed into their repertoire very quickly, with the help, at the moment, of a New York potter, Naomi Sharp (who is quick to say that in her decade at Hermannsburg she has learned more than she has taught).

As for what the pots 'mean', how one interprets the delicate, bold or exotic landscapes, the creatures, the bush tucker and Hermannsburg mission-days history glazed on to them, or the animals and birds that are the guardians on the top—that is knowledge that comes slowly.

And it comes in surprising ways. I was sitting with Judith Pungarta Inkamala, one of the potters pictured below, as she told me that 'We don't have any of those'—pointing to a pot painted with leopards. But that didn't stop the potter putting them there. It's easy to have conventional expectations about

'traditional' Aboriginal art, about traditional motifs. Just as it was easy to read Albert Namatjira's landscapes as Western watercolours. But it's not so easy to sustain the misconceptions when the artists are there, telling you what's what. Or not telling you—just leaving you to work it out with as much patience as you can muster.

On that cold Canberra Saturday, it was Judith Pungarta Inkamala who began, in shy, rippling Aranda, to tell the seminar at the National Gallery how she built her great pots. She'd seen potters in Lombok making huge urns and she liked the look, the size. So she had a go. And as she rolled imaginary clay in her palms, she forgot her shyness in this formal southern place and slipped enthusiastically between Aranda and English, her companions adding, agreeing and disagreeing as she went, all talking art. ■

Morag Fraser is the editor of *Eureka Street*.

Above: Hermannsburg potters at a site of importance along the Finke River.
Left to right: Elizabeth Jane Moketarinja, Esther Ngala Kennedy, Irene Mbitjana Entata, Clara Ngala Inkamala, Rona Panangka Rubuntjia and Judith Pungarta Inkamala.

Opposite: Elizabeth Jane Moketarinja in the Hermannsburg Potting Studio.
Photographs by Greg Weight.

GEOFFREY MILNE

Clowning around

PICTURE THIS: the foyer and auditor ium of the staid old Comedy Theatre in Melbourne smothered in snow. There are snowflakes on the ushers' shoulders and in between the stage lights and gel frames and deposits on the ledges and handrails of the boxes; snowdrifts piled high on the program-seller's podium and in the aisles; snow shifting capriciously underfoot as you take your seats, and falling from above as you wait for the show to start.

Such are the atmospherics preceding *Slava's Snowshow*, a clown show from Russia which has toured the world for seven years or so in different configurations, and which is presently playing in Australia, including Melbourne and Sydney (to 30 July).

The snow, by the way, comes in the form of untold millions of strips of specially fireproofed paper—just a shade thicker than cigarette-paper but of much greater tensile strength, so that it drifts and blows just like the real thing. And it also sticks like the real thing, but it doesn't melt; I had bits of it in my hair and down the back of my neck until I got home and I've still got bits in my jacket pockets.

The show comes from Slava Polunin, who was born in Russia in 1950 and quickly switched from studies in engineering in Leningrad in 1967 to studies in mime. Since then, Polunin has dedicated his life to re-examining and reclaiming the legacy of the circus, theatre and film clown. Some of his influences are relatively easy to identify: Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin; the equally silent Harpo Marx; the great comic duo of Laurel and Hardy. Marcel Marceau is an even clearer precursor, and there are others, less obvious—from Russian and other Eastern European clowning traditions. Slava's co-performers (pictured right) are heavily and darkly face-painted and clad in faded green, military-style great-coats and funny hats like aeroplane propellers—at the opposite end of the clown spectrum from the white-faced, Harlequin-derived figures more familiar in Western traditions.

At the age of 29 (in 1979), Polunin formed his own theatre company, Litsedei. The prototype of the current *Snowshow* was created in 1993 and Polunin has also contributed elements of it to the Canadian-based Cirque du Soleil, seen here last year. *Snowshow* is constantly evolving in form, content and personnel. Eight clowns (including Slava himself) are listed in the program, but only four or five of them make major appearances on any one night. The actual personnel and running order are determined at the last moment—theatre on the edge.

AUSTRALIA'S VERSION of the show crosses boundaries between mime, circus-clowning, visual theatre and even revue; it is a blend of extended solos, duos, group-pieces and 'quickies' (very brief, almost snapshot-like moments) and elaborate, spectacular theatrical effects. Some of these pieces are threaded together into loose sequences of an almost filmic quality; others stand alone. Some pass by in the blinking of an eye; others are extended in ways that recall moments from *Waiting for Godot*.

The solo sketches nearly all feature Slava. He is dressed differently from his colleagues, in a large, loose-fitting yellow circus-clown suit with long red fluffy slippers, but with the same dark-painted, mask-like make-up (plus fixed red nose). The make-up gives him a gloomy, even grim demeanour, except when he breaks the mask with sad or resigned sighs, a cheeky or exultant smile, a hopeful glance or a smirk, or a rare glare of authority over his outer world. In one of his solos he tries with mixed success to tame a tiny helium-filled balloon on a vertical string with two whistles, one the cajoling equivalent of the animal-training carrot, the other the stick. The glares and hopeful glances on his face here echo the notes on his whistle *and* the uncanny way he seems to be able to gain (and lose) a foot of body-height by extending and relaxing his legs inside the copious folds of his shock-yellow suit.

Later on, he starts up a conversation between two telephones—using a bizarre kind of international gibberish—in a classic 'theatre of the absurd' piece about people's need for companionship and communication. Better still is a whimsical, Michael Leunig-like piece in which he sets off to sail a foggy sea in a child-sized bed with a sheet for a sail. When he reaches his apparent destination, he steps down from the bed/boat on to the stage floor to the sound effect of a hugely amplified splash. The effect is simultaneously absurd (we can plainly see it's just the stage floor) *and* logical (we imaginatively see the 'sea' in the stage trickery); but it's a strangely compelling piece because of the complex series of *trompe l'œil* conventions he has set up.

But the best of his solos is an intricately worked-up sketch at a railway station where he takes a hat and a coat from a suitcase, places them on a hat-stand and then turns his inanimate exhibit into an enacted 'duet' of an intimate and affectionate scene of farewell (inserting his hand through the sleeve of the coat and laying his head on its shoulder). As if this were not a gorgeous

enough Marceau-style blend of 'puppetry' and mime, Polunin's ramshackle black top-hat (now recalling Harpo Marx) then self-ignites and puffs smoke, whereupon the 'train' choof-choofs its way out of the station, leaving him bereft of the object of his affection.

One of the more remarkable duos involves Slava's very slow, methodical, routine entrance towards centre stage—followed by one of his apprentice clowns who is trying very hard to keep in step with his master. But one of the acolyte's very long black clown-shoes keeps getting in the master's way. The first entanglements bring a ritualised backward turn and withering look (like the 'slow burn' Stan Laurel would deliver to his accomplice Oliver Hardy), whereupon the apprentice backs off and the routine starts again from where it was interrupted. Eventually, enough is enough in the way of intrusion and breaking of routine, and the hapless apprentice is dismissed.

This is where the sketch really takes off (the whole thing takes place without a word being spoken, of course). The apprentice turns very slowly and begins to skulk off in the direction whence he came. Slava faces resolutely front. Even as the apprentice leaves, we *know* he will turn and make an appeal. A master of timing, Polunin waits until almost the last possible moment before *he* turns; the lad (who at this point looks about 4'6" tall) rises to his full height (some 6'6" in our mind's eye), lifts an eyebrow and his shoulders, waits, receives (after a Beckettian pause) another turn of his master's disdainful back, sags back to a stooped height of about 4'3", and trudges tragically off. There's almost nothing in the sketch by way of plot, and yet it's a perfectly executed and complete human drama in itself.

But the big spectacle effects are the main talking points of the show. In one, at the end of the first act, Slava grabs a broom and climbs a step-ladder to remove a cobweb clinging to part of his backdrop. Before we can even begin analysing whatever this metaphor might signify, the cobweb suddenly becomes a giant gossamer net which, somehow and without cueing or any overt persuasion, we transport with our own hands over our heads so that it stretches across the entire auditorium ... before it vanishes before our eyes and fingertips and interval begins.

The second half climax is even more intriguing. Having beguiled us into seeing two people onstage (at the railway station), Slava dips into a pocket of the still onstage overcoat and finds a letter. He reads it with a wistful air (*à la* Buster Keaton) and then nonchalantly tears it into shreds which he throws into the air, whereupon the blizzard of the century is unleashed from backstage and from above: fan-forced and flood-lit. There never *was* such a blizzard!

Then three brightly coloured, helium balloons mysteriously emerge from backstage and float out into the auditorium. Our first instinct as an audience is to pat them back to within the stage-frame; after all, isn't that where the stage effects belong? But, with a little bit of prompting from the onstage clowns (some of whom begin to pack up for the night, while others take a seat in the stalls to see what happens next), we then decide to play with the giant balloons ourselves, some of us reportedly for up to 40 minutes after the show has ended.

This is a truly remarkable performance. ■

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

PETER CRAVEN

A man of absolute grace

JOHN GIELGUD, who died in late May, at the age of 96, was, by common consent, one of the two greatest classical actors of the century, Laurence Olivier being the other. But Gielgud maintained this reputation while being the last great actor (with the possible and ambiguous exception of Paul Scofield) who made his reputation almost entirely on the stage.

Ralph Richardson specialised in his own brand of cinematic suaveness from the '30s, though no-one bothered to capture his Falstaff or his Iago on screen. Alec Guinness formed the collective image of Fagin, Father Brown and George Smiley, quite apart from being an Ealing comedy virtuoso and the eventual incarnation of Obi-Wan Kenobi. Even Michael Redgrave, whose Antony (to Peggy Ashcroft's Cleopatra) never made it to celluloid, was the star of Hitchcock's *The Lady Vanishes*, as well as John Worthing to Edith Evans' Lady Bracknell (where Gielgud himself had been her partner on stage).

Then, of course, there was Olivier himself. A Hollywood matinee idol in *Pride and Prejudice*, *Wuthering Heights* and *Rebecca*, he went on to become the Kenneth Branagh of his day and rather more. Olivier spearheaded himself as the world's image of the great Shakespearean actor—as well as a very deft director—while preserving a couple of great performances forever. Then, while keeping his hand in with the film world—a prince to Marilyn Monroe's showgirl, a glittering Crassus in Kubrick's *Spartacus*—he devoted much the greater part of his energies to the English stage.

Olivier always saw Gielgud as his rival and only ever appeared with him, on stage, in the production of *Romeo and Juliet* in the '30s, where they alternated Romeo and Mercutio. He admitted that he could not match the power and the silver of Gielgud's voice, but then nobody could. That's why Kenneth Tynan, always more of an Olivier man, described Sir John, in a famous two-edged quip, as the greatest actor in the world from the neck up.

He was more than that or, in any case, made that seem world enough. I remember seeing the one-man show, *The Ages of Man*, which toured Melbourne in 1963. It encompassed an anthology of the great Shakespearean speeches and sonnets and sudden, fully realised characterisations—Richard II being deposed, or Cassius caught up in the intellectual seduction of Brutus, or Angelo realising that Isabella's purity is an object of lust to him. More than anything else, I remember sitting as an adolescent in the very front stalls as Gielgud, a dapper bald man in a dinner suit, turned before my eyes into the dying Lear delivering his series of 'Howls' over the dead body of his daughter, Cordelia. I'm still not sure that I have seen anything that touched this.

Of course there's a sense in which the idea of anyone being superior to Gielgud as a Shakespearean is ludicrous. When Granville-Barker directed him as Lear in 1940, he said to Gielgud that Lear was an oak whereas he was an ash, but they would see what they could do with an ash. The conception was still vibrant with life and unforgettable in its authority when Gielgud was 90 and Kenneth Branagh directed him in the role on BBC radio.

HIS WAS NOT simply a voice. It was a mighty instrument which could encompass racking howls and the highest comedy. Richard Burton used to say that Gielgud was the only actor whose voice had personality. He tested it out, sitting in a restaurant with Alec Guinness, and proved to both their satisfactions that Gielgud's voice was the only one (not Olivier's, not Guinness', not his own) which would instantly magnetise any waiter. That may be one reason why Burton (who played the part himself a couple of times with tremendous bite and style) thought that Gielgud was the greatest of all Hamlets. Dreaming, golden-toned, romantic—almost everyone who saw Gielgud's Hamlets came away using superlatives. The Harvard critic Harry Levin may have nailed it down when he described it as 'Proustian', a more complex and moody adjective than it sometimes sounds. As a boy I remember hearing one of the old curmudgeons of British theatre criticism—could it have been Harold Holson?—say that the greatest of Gielgud's Hamlets was the very first, performed when he was 25 years old in 1929, the year of the Great Crash. He said it was less rhetorically assured than Gielgud's subsequent Hamlets over the next 20 years or more, but that it was all the more moving for its youthful uncertainty, because this was a Hamlet who didn't know God was on his side. I'm not sure if you would say that of the Hamlet the BBC recorded in the early '50s, but it is a performance of dazzling lyricism and ironical finesse. Whatever else can be made of the part, this is the performance any actor or director should take on board if only to dig into the core of his or her own.

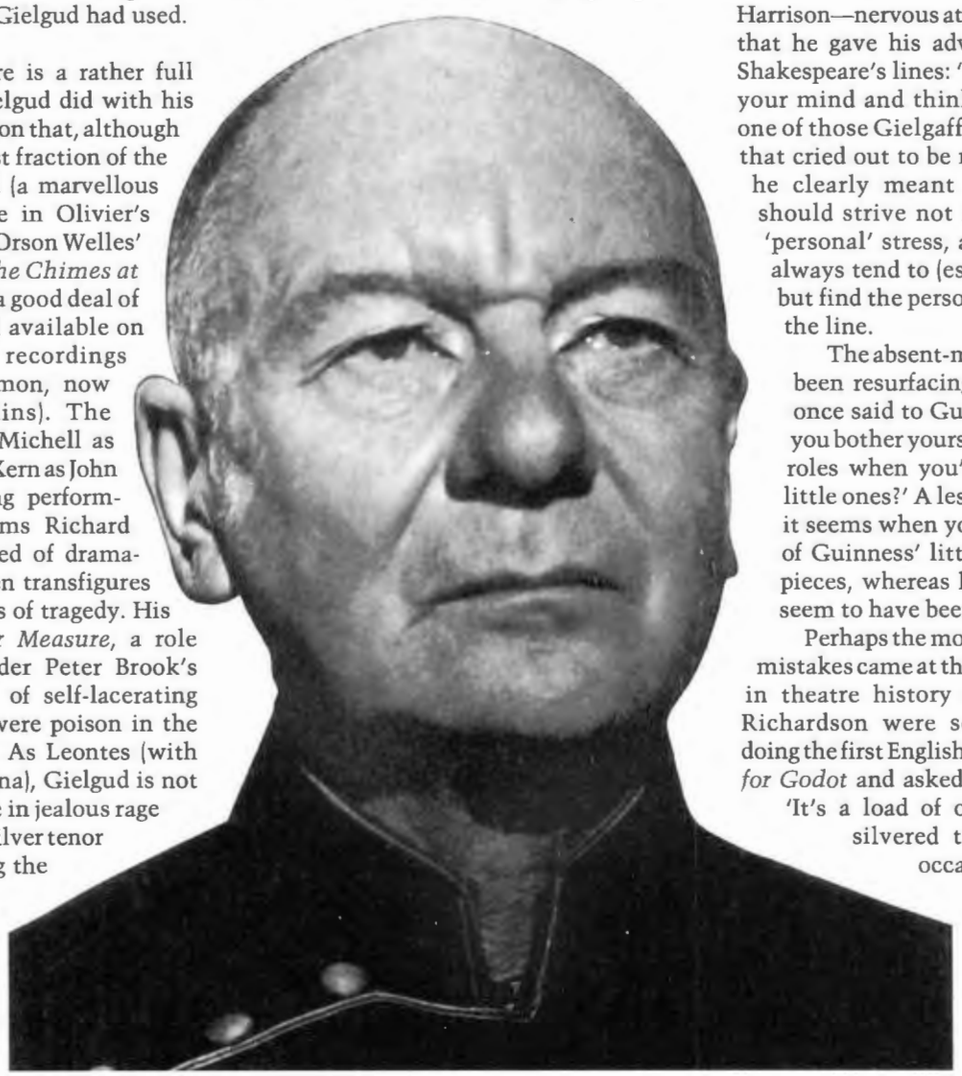
It is from the same period as the angular, mistrustful Cassius of the MGM *Julius Caesar*, which Gielgud did with James Mason as Brutus and Marlon Brando as Mark Antony. It's available on video and it is the only visual record of Gielgud in a major Shakespearean role. The simplest

thing to say about it is that it is difficult to imagine any other actor in the part once you have seen Gielgud. He has a kind of 'Virgilian' authority in the great sedition speech ('For once, upon a raw and gusty day,/ the troubled Tiber chafing at her shores'), a matchless beauty of 'line' so that the mellifluousness of the utterance is played off against the tension of the sentiment and the shadowy, turbulent character who gives voice to it. Gielgud is absolutely convincing in covering not only the craftiness of the character but the half-blind love of Brutus that blinds his judgment on two occasions. This is Gielgud at the very height of his powers, all the famous musicianship used as an instrument of subtlety, not just beauty.

Michael Redgrave said of Gielgud's Richard II that the memory of it was so indelible and the overall effect so definitive that when he played the part himself he thought that the only honest thing to do was to allow himself to echo the phrasing and tempo Gielgud had used.

As IT HAPPENS, there is a rather full record of what John Gielgud did with his voice, for the simple reason that, although he filmed only the tiniest fraction of the Shakespeare Olivier did (a marvellous near-cameo as Clarence in Olivier's *Richard III*, Henry IV in Orson Welles' Falstaff compendium, *The Chimes at Midnight*), he recorded a good deal of it and most of it is still available on various spoken-word recordings (especially from Caedmon, now owned by HarperCollins). The Richard II (with Keith Michell as Bolingbroke and Leo McKern as John of Gaunt) is a towering performance. Gielgud transforms Richard into the most bejewelled of drama-queen peacocks and then transfigures that into the desolations of tragedy. His Angelo in *Measure for Measure*, a role Gielgud performed under Peter Brook's direction, has a depth of self-lacerating sensuality, as if there were poison in the perfume of his diction. As Leontes (with Peggy Ashcroft as Paulina), Gielgud is not only neurotically savage in jealous rage (with a headlong, quicksilver tenor brilliance in negotiating the coils of barbed wire in Leontes' mind) but wonderfully calm and penitent in the play's last movement. This in turn is a preparation for his Prospero (last performed on stage under Peter Hall's direction in the mid '70s and better heard in one of the BBC versions than seen in Peter Greenaway's postmodern travesty which has the glory of Gielgud's voice amidst the tatters of Greenaway's solipsism). It's a great pity that none of the people Gielgud approached—not Ingmar Bergman, not Kurosawa—would film *The Tempest* with him as Prospero. That's one of those senseless losses, one of the might-have-beens of history analogous to thinking what a pity it is that Michael Powell had not captured his Hamlet on film or that Olivier in some access of generosity had not filmed Gielgud's Richard II as a companion piece to his own Henry V.

It's fortunate in any case that the Gielgud 'personality', as Burton called it, the voice which Alec Guinness heard as 'a silver trumpet muffled in silk', should have registered itself so casually and so indelibly on the consciousness of a film-going and TV-watching world, almost as an afterthought. No-one would have expected the bitter old writer in Alain Resnais' *Providence* (with Dirk Bogarde) or those gentlemen's gentlemen in *Murder on the Orient Express* and *Arthur*. It was as though Gielgud's talent was a lean old greyhound which he took for walks, partly for the exercise and partly to enjoy himself. His lightning portrait of Ryder *père* in the TV *Brideshead Revisited* was a master class in ironic understatement that outshone a stellar cast.



COMEDY HAD always been the other side of Gielgud's genius. He was a wonderfully rounded and secure Benedick (to Peggy Ashcroft's Beatrice) in *Much Ado*, not a blunt soldier in a vat of infatuation but a perfectly poised dandy who discovers the consequences of having a heart. He was as fine a high comedian as Rex Harrison (at home in Coward and Rattigan) and it was to Harrison—nervous at recording Benedick—that he gave his advice about delivering Shakespeare's lines: 'You should just clear your mind and think of nothing.' It was one of those Gielgaffes, as he called them, that cried out to be misunderstood. What he clearly meant was that the actor should strive not for the idiosyncratic 'personal' stress, as a 'prose' actor will always tend to (especially a comedian), but find the personality in the music of the line.

The absent-minded one-liners have been resurfacing since his death. He once said to Guinness, 'Alec, why do you bother yourself with all these great roles when you're so much better at little ones?' A less callous remark than it seems when you consider that some of Guinness' little roles were masterpieces, whereas his Macbeth and Lear seem to have been too tranquil by half.

Perhaps the most famous of Gielgud's mistakes came at that tragicomic moment in theatre history when Guinness and Richardson were seriously considering doing the first English production of *Waiting for Godot* and asked for Sir John's advice. 'It's a load of old rubbish!' was the silvered trumpet call on that occasion, a misjudgment of which Gielgud came to be thoroughly ashamed.

Otherwise, he seems to have had a natural feeling for the modernities of

his own generation. He's supposed to have been marvellous in Chekhov, from the '20s, with Michel Saint-Denis, and as the palavering old Gaev, the brother, in *The Cherry Orchard*, towards the end of his career. He said he would have liked to do Eliot's *The Family Reunion* but Eliot thought he had 'too little faith', so Gielgud had to content himself with a radio version in the '40s. He was magnetising and full of masculine swagger in that nearly forgotten play of the verse drama moment, Christopher Fry's *The Lady's Not For Burning*, and there was also the fashionable

side of Gielgud's West End stardom and his association with the H.M. Tennent organisation. Olivier himself was awed when he saw Gielgud do *The Browning Version* on American TV. The part of the sad old schoolmaster, Crocker Harris, the 'Himmler of the Lower Fifth', was in fact written for him. And it was playing another schoolmaster, the headmaster in Alan Bennett's *Forty Years On*, that Gielgud's stage career took another unexpected turn in the late '60s.

It was as if he discovered a new vein of comedy (a humane one) by sending up his own mannerisms and those of his generation. It was some kind of way into Pinter and his contemporaries. In the '70s, Gielgud did Pinter's *No Man's Land* with Ralph Richardson, and based the part of the down-at-heel poet, Spooner, on the most notable figure in the field. 'I saw Auden at a reading. He was there in one of those appalling soup-stained suits of his and I knew this was my character.' It was an Olivier-like piece of 'realism', of watchfulness, that was new to Gielgud, though it's typical of Gielgud that his approximation to the latter-day kitchen sink should have been via a figure as grand in his way (though not as well-dressed) as himself.

It was one of the most endearing qualities of John Gielgud as a man that he doesn't seem to have thought he was grand at all. Being interviewed on ABC television in 1963 by Gerard Lyons, he said, 'I always feel like mutton dressed up as lamb.' And, 'The other night I had dinner with Patrick White and he told me he had never been able to work Hamlet out. I've play the part many times and I've always imagined I knew what was going on and here was a much more intelligent man than me saying he didn't.' We also have White's account of the evening in *Flaws in the Glass*. He apparently cooked *coq au vin* and, just as he was about to serve the meal, dropped it on the floor among the schnautzer hairs of his pet dogs. John Gielgud, with his natural sangfroid, or perhaps just his natural grace, was completely unfazed.

By the time I came to hear smart chat about Shakespearean acting in the late '60s, it was fashionable to deride Gielgud for his mannerisms, for the way he would orchestrate the verse and leap octaves on particular words that could benefit from emotive notation. In fact, he was a great innovator in the direction of 'naturalness' in performing Shakespeare, which was the thing that American actors, like Jose Ferrer, found extraordinary about him. It's also a matter of record that the greatest experimental theatre director of our own time, Peter Brook, revered Gielgud and spoke of what he called 'his natural aristocracy'. Sir John, ever modest, said that Brook 'was always very patient with my mannerisms'. As well he might be.

His acting acquired a mystique that always bemused Gielgud. 'I can't stand listening to my voice,' he said. 'I was always praised for it, which made me very vain but I do try to tone it down.'

In the great apocrypha of actor's tales, the story is told of a young American researcher going to see John Gielgud and belabouring him with questions about the mystery of English technique. 'Well, I don't know anything about that,' said Sir John. 'I just stand on the stage and deliver my lines as best I can.' But the PhD would have none of this and went on and on attempting to pluck out the heart of this mystery of limey craft. He struggled, he strove, he attempted to explain. At a given point in his own turgid exposition, he suddenly became distracted and looked up to see the patrician face of Gielgud racked with grief, tears pouring down his face in a great cascade. 'Sir John, Sir John, what have I done?' he said. 'What is it?' Gielgud looked up, through his tears, the voice stoical, hushed, a whispered calm after the storm. 'English technique,' he said.

I'm not sure if I believe that story. I once saw John Gielgud, backstage, minutes after he had performed the 'Howl' from Lear, and his face was like the face of a man who had seen a ghost or survived a war. Perhaps it was simply the face of a man who had run a mile at a speed not previously known.

So I don't know about the antics and the mirror shows of English technique. I do know that towards the end of his life Gielgud recorded a song from Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Cats* with the composer's one-time wife, Sarah Brightman. It's Gus, the theatre cat, of course. He had acted with Irving, he had acted with Tree. He had even understudied Dick Whittington's Cat. But his proudest moment—enunciated with the most Gielgudian of caterwauls—was when he played Firefrorefiddle 'the [voice rising like the most silvered of trumpets] FIEND of the Fell'.

It's the most relaxed of send-ups. The voice is gnarled, it's gruff, it's bathed in gin; only vanity can unruffle this old thespian's fur. And at the same time—well, it would, wouldn't it—it positively purrs. It's one of the funnier and more moving things I've heard. A great actor mocking his own greatness and exhibiting it in every thrown-away syllable. Gielgud makes it as much his own as he made Prospero's 'We are such stuff as dreams are made on.'

But he made everything his own. He was—let's risk the cliché—a fellow of infinite jest and fancy. He was a prince of players too, a man of absolute grace. This was the man who read Hopkins' poetry when they laid his bones in Westminster Abbey, but said he did not warrant any such fuss himself: 'They're too much like society occasions.'

This too is the old stager who declared, at the age of 90, that he wished they would ask him to do underpants ads. 'I'd love to be able to say: "At my time of life there's not much activity on the Y-front."' Tempting everyone to disbelieve him. This was the man who made animate a bare stage which he strode with what one critic called 'the most meaningless legs imaginable'. Who cares if for Ken Tynan he was only the greatest actor in the world from the neck up? Well, the music is gone from that instrument. May the earth lie light on him. ■

Peter Craven is the editor of *Best Australian Essays 1999*.

RICHARD BAUCKHAM
British theologian/historian, Melbourne, 28 Aug.–3 Sept. 2000. Topics: Moltmann, Revelation, Letter of James. For brochure, ph: 03 9882 4851 or email: office@stjohnscamberwell.org.au

TUTORING POSITIONS
St Mary's College (Uni. of Melb.) is taking applications for residential tutoring positions, and is also seeking someone to take on a pastoral role. Applicants would ideally have a degree, and be prepared to live in College and play an active academic and/or pastoral role in the community. Applications to Sr Deirdre Rofe, Principal, St Mary's College, PO Box 140, University of Melbourne, Parkville VIC 3052.

GRAPHIC ARTIST
Lucille Hughes charges very reasonable rates for superior graphics. Also specialises in portraiture. Tel: 03 9499 6840

OLD FINE & RARE BOOKS
bought and sold.
Louella Kerr & Lorraine Reed,
30 Glenmore Rd
Paddington NSW 2021.
Tel: (02) 9361 4664
Email: lnlbooks@anzaab.com.au
Catalogues issued, or browse through our entire stock on our website: www.anzaab.com.au/~lnlbooks

FINE FURNITURE
Made to order by meticulous craftsman. Library stands, revolving bookshelves a specialty. Australian timbers available. Contact Graham Willis. Tel: (03) 94397149

PSYCHOLOGIST
Julie Houniet
(B.A., Dip. App. Soc.Psych., MaPs.S., Member of A.P.S. and clinical member of V.A.F.T.)
Individual/marital/family therapy; anxiety; depression; relationship difficulties; phobias; compulsive disorders; addiction.
Tel: (03) 9482 7836

FAMILY LAW
For sensitive, confidential, expert advice in NSW on all aspects of Family Law, call (02) 9808 6277

THEOLOGY & SCIENCE IN CONVERSATION
an introductory workshop
26–31 January 2001.
Luther Seminary, Adelaide.
This workshop is an introduction to science/theology dialogue, focusing on cosmology and biological evolution. Contact Workshop Director, Hilary Regan.
Tel: (08) 8340 3060 or
hregan@camtech.net.au

HOLIDAY HOUSE BEECHWORTH
1 up to 4 bedrooms, magnificent lake views, close to town. Weekends, holidays, midweek.
Tel. John (03) 5728 2467

COTTAGE ANGLESEA
Pt Roadknight 3BR, brand new dual occupancy; own facilities, linen supplied, views of ocean, wood fire, close to beach.
Tel: 03 5263 2725

NEWCASTLE POETRY PRIZE 2000
The $10,000 Newcastle Poetry Prize will be awarded to an unpublished poem or group of poems in English to 200 lines. Judges: Martin Duwell, Jan Owen, Peter Boyle. Deadline: 4 August 2000. Entries to: The Newcastle Poetry Prize, PO Box 5276, Newcastle West NSW 2302. *Please include a stamped, self-addressed envelope with all correspondence.*

SELF-PUBLISHING
Sick of rejection? Why not publish that book yourself?
Contact Sylvana Scannapiego.
Tel: (03) 9427 7311

EUREKA STREET CLASSIFIEDS
Got something to sell or lease? Want to buy? Need staff? Want to offer professional services? *Eureka Street* classified ads for just $25 are your answer.
Mail your ad and cheque by the 5th of the month for display in the following month's edition.
25 words for a single ad ($25) or 55 words for a double ad ($50).

Send to:
Eureka Street Classifieds
PO Box 553
Richmond VIC 3121

Next deadline: 4 August for September edition

FLASH IN THE PAN

Kissing off the rules

Judas Kiss, dir. Sebastian Gutierrez. Hollywood doesn't quite know how to handle this sharp, anarchic crime comedy: 'A simmering pile of blood, booze and bodies' (*Sun-Sentinel*); 'A lethal noir thriller with all the complexity, ambiguity, amorality of a down-and-dirty pulper' (*The Hollywood Reporter*). Maybe because director/writer Gutierrez hasn't played by the rules. He's Venezuelan and writes novels which haven't even been translated into Los Angelese.

His cast is bewilderingly international: Alan Rickman and Emma Thompson (above) play against type as two frayed Southern detectives, Thompson with her tongue in her cheek and a mouthful of coffee to oil the accent—it's a marvellous summer panto performance. Rickman is so seasoned (does he have a type?) that he manages an elusive Bogartian blend of grime and endearing depth of character. And these two are merely the anchoring bit players. The film is carried by its band of would-be-big-time kidnappers, constellating around Carla Gugino as Coco Chavez (opposite), the narrating girl with the gun and a conscience after the event. Gugino warms into her performance and accent, alternately vamping and having regrets. She is well supported by Simon Baker-Denny as Junior, her lover and small-time Svengali. Australian Baker-Denny makes a charismatic crim because Gutierrez has given him a script with some shadow in it. The hit-man of the bunch, Ruben Rubenbauer, played by German star Til Schweiger, is one of the film's highlights—murderous, freakish, and witlessly funny.

In *Judas Kiss*, Gutierrez plays irreverent games with the thriller genre, his allusions and references (nothing so po-faced as homage) coming so fast they're like a stutter. But behind the stutter there is a very savvy director and writer. If this is good, what will his next film be like? **—Morag Fraser**

Religious ruckus

Keeping the Faith, dir. Ed Norton. This is the one about the rabbi and the Catholic priest. They both fall in love with the same woman. Anna Reilly (Jenna Elfman) was their childhood sweetheart until she moved from New York to California.

Now she's back in town and wants to catch up. She'd get along fine with Fr Brian Finn (Ed Norton) except he's not allowed. Rabbi Jake Schram (Ben Stiller), still Finn's close friend despite years of separation in their respective seminaries, would get along fine with her. But the members of his synagogue expect him to marry a nice Jewish girl. There is no shortage of these, each attached to an insistent mother. It just so happens that Anna is steadily climbing the corporate ladder and about to be offered the big promotion. But rekindling her friendship with her two religious male friends has made her ponder the emptiness of her material success. So all three of them are in crisis. Needless to say, such a neat crisis will eventually find a neat solution. It does.

This is *Sister Act* meets *Sliding Doors*. Both Fr Brian and Rabbi Jake take to their sleepy congregations with all the subtlety of a talk show. Of course, they are both great hits.

The film works some pretty threadbare stereotypes. One is that if a preacher gives a good show, the joint will be packed overnight and one or two silly fuddy-duddies will get their backs up. Another is that the primary purpose of a mother is to see her daughters advantageously married. A third is that every workplace romance depends on the co-operation or otherwise of the concierge on the ground floor. Some of the set pieces wear thin and you begin to suspect that if the three main characters of this film were not so impossibly good-looking, the flabbiness of the script would be more apparent. There is, however, an excellent gentleman who sells karaoke equipment. Look out for him. He's the honest fraud.

—Michael McGirr SJ

Another impossible

Mission Impossible 2, dir. John Woo. Even an occasionally witty line from writer Robert Towne can't hide the fact that *M:I-2* conforms to one of Hollywood's most oppressive laws: as the action gets bigger, the plot gets smaller.

Our hero, Ethan Hunt (Tom Cruise), is impossibly good-looking, climbs impossibly high cliffs and (naturally enough) works for Impossible Missions Force. His love interest, Nyah (Thandie Newton), is a beautiful jewel thief who, fearless of cliché, hides diamonds down her cleavage.

In time-honoured fashion, Ethan races her off by bumping mudguards during the course of a high-speed car chase through picturesque hairpins. The Porsches need a good panel-beating by the end of it, but Ethan gets his girl.

Eventually Ethan also gets his villain, a former IMF agent gone bad, Sean Ambrose (Dougray Scott)—as if we ever doubted it.

After the requisite amount of mayhem—involving a deadly virus, their love for Nyah, and millions of dollars worth of digital effects—the two end up jousting like knights from the backs of motorbikes.

The Sydney Opera House aside, Australia is represented by the baddy's henchman (Richard Roxburgh, sporting an impossibly bad South African accent) and a

laconic helicopter pilot (John Polson), who gets to say 'G'day' a lot.

Along the way, we get to see picture-postcard shots of Sydney Harbour, some of the most beautiful slo-mo explosions in cinema history, and an excessive amount of gunplay. All courtesy of the film's real star—Chinese-born action director, John Woo.

'Our Tom' has made an entertaining, shameless action flick. If he hadn't wasted all those years on *Eyes Wide Shut* we could be enjoying *M:I-3* by now. An evil computer called Big Bill takes over the mafia ... oh, never mind, there's a great motorbike chase around Uluru at the end. **—Brett Evans**

No Sabbath rest

Any Given Sunday, dir. Oliver Stone. *Any Given Sunday* suffers from a number of more or less serious problems from its outset. First, it's a film about gridiron, a game only Americans (and a few Canadians) understand or care about. Second, it's two-and-a-half hours long (have Hollywood film-makers somehow evolved larger bladders than the rest of us?). Third, and most problematic of all, it's directed by Oliver Stone. Don't get me wrong—Stone has almost made several decent films (*Platoon* being one of the most nearly almost decent ones). Even his most bloated and self-indulgent works usually have something interesting about them (in the case of *The Doors* the interesting point is that a bloated, self-indulgent film makes a singularly appropriate biopic for a bloated, self-indulgent rock star). What Stone has never demonstrated, however, is restraint, and in *Any Given Sunday*, he demonstrates even less of it than usual.

For instance, the 'playing field as battle-field/football players as modern day gladiators' cliché is belaboured so heavily it verges on parody (and yes, it was co-written by the guy responsible for Ridley Scott's *Gladiator*). If you don't pick it up via the growling tiger noises on the soundtrack whenever the teams face off on the playing field, or the gouged eyeball that flies through the air out of the scrum, the fact that *Ben Hur* seems to be all anyone watches on television should alert you to the analogy. If not, then the gratuitous Charlton Heston cameo will do it. And just like *Ben Hur*, or *Gladiator*, it's a manly film about groups of manly men being simultaneously as naked and as violent together as possible (the group shower with the alligator scene sums it up for me, and no, I'm not kidding).

Visually and aurally, the unrelenting assault that Stone seems to have mistaken for 'style' simply exhausts the viewer long before the two-and-a-half hours is up, and the way he deals with the female characters in the film borders on offensive. However, there may actually be people out there who might like this film. I propose the following as a litmus test to find out if you're one of them. The title of the film comes from a line repeated by Al Pacino's character ad nauseam: 'On any given Sunday you're gonna win or you're gonna lose. The point is—can you win or lose like a man?' If you have any idea what this actually means, go and see this film.

—Allan James Thomas

Taken and eaten

The Filth and the Fury, dir. Julien Temple. Temple's *tour de force* offers a second chance (don't miss it) to love Punk Rock, and gives a long-overdue voice to John Lydon ('Johnny Rotten') of the infamous Sex Pistols. Their manager, the unspeakable but inevitable Malcolm McLaren, refers to himself in the film as the 'sculptor' of the band, as though it were a sort of ongoing postgraduate art-school project. This prompts Lydon into a corrosive rebuttal which also suggests that the Sex Pistols were crucial in re-energising youth culture and its music. Certainly the film shows how unerringly the Pistols took aim at *any* comforting social assumptions.

The remaining members of the band are interviewed like crime victims in silhouette, a technique which works well when it is spliced with the flaming youth of early Sex Pistols gigs. Temple scatters footage of Laurence Olivier's *Richard III* and various British music-hall comedians throughout, a device which gives some warrant to John Lydon's claim to a bastardly kinship with British traditions of lampooning their own royalty and conventions.

Temple's direction suggests a discomfiting possible truth: that the Pistols were *so* significant to the culture that bred them that they had to be devoured. And the cannibal feast is not ended: we have to have another sitting as Lydon the man rages and weeps for Sid Vicious, the young fan who joined the band and ended up glad to die.

—Lucille Hughes

Good dog

Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai, dir. Jim Jarmusch. Ghost Dog (Forest Whitaker) is a hit-man. He is not a thug or a yes-man, but an exquisitely honourable employee with a poetic and deadly sense of loyalty.

Communicating by carrier pigeon and living by the ancient codes of the samurai sets Ghost Dog apart from your usual cinematic gun-for-hire. Not to mention Ghost Dog's physique, setting him pounds apart from your regular Toshiro Mifune-type samurai. But anyone familiar with Jarmusch's work (*Down by Law*, *Dead Man*, etc.) will know his art thrives on these strange little titbits. And it is strangeness that lends this beautiful film its perfect mood.

Working for an Italian mobster who once saved his life, Ghost Dog finds himself under threat when big boss Vargo's daughter witnesses his hit on Handsome Frank. While Ghost Dog recognises and respects his employers' codes of loyalty, the mobsters are not willing to extend Ghost Dog the same courtesy. They don't need some big weirdo black guy with a sleepy eye knowing anything about their business. Bad call boys—he ain't called Ghost Dog for nothin'.

RZA's soundtrack is remarkable. As in all Jarmusch's films, music is as much a character as anything walking and talking. Robbie Müller's photography is outstanding. The opening shot of a bird in flight combined with the hypnotic sounds of RZA is unforgettable. **—Siobhan Jackson**

Formidable!

ASK ANY WOMAN YOU KNOW the following question: 'Have you read a Barbara Cartland?' Those who admit to having read one will usually add riders that are variations on the theme of 'I was too young to know what I was doing and anyway I thought they were in the worst possible taste and they were at my grandmother's place and there was nothing else to read and can I go now?'

I read many Cartlands when I was younger, as I also read L.M. Montgomery, Jane Shaw, comics, Dickens, Wodehouse, Austen, Heyer, magazines, Tolkien and Shakespeare. (Yes, we'd read it by the fire: Dad was the perfect Oberon, and he and Mum would do Katharina and Petruchio for us even though we didn't get half the allusions.) Crunch time was Tuesday: *Bunty* was delivered, usually with the evening paper, and we'd fight like cats over first reading rights. The romance novel was a direct successor to these junior heroics: girls were clever, *important*, they said. And the good romance novels like Cartland's promised you—however improbably—that, like the author, you could marry a wonderful chap who would support you while you did what you wanted, be that writing, golf, charity, painting or whatever. Servants would do the tough stuff. No compromises, no poor old Bridget Joneses. You could have it all.

When Barbara Cartland died, aged 98, she left a world she'd been fighting against with some success for the last 70 years. We've all seen the photographs of her, painted and bedizened in jewels and pink fluffy dresses. There are the awful later books, 20,000-word formulaic nothings, dictated at high speed from a mind free-associating in a closed loop on a chaise longue. She'd become an anachronism. Type her name into a search engine on the Net and quite a few of the matches in the many thousands will be earnestly unreadable essays from Harvard and Vassar on postmodernism, all quoting Eco's observation in *Foucault's Pendulum* that a man cannot say to an educated woman, 'I love you madly' as a simple statement, 'as Barbara Cartland would.' He has to say something like, 'As Barbara Cartland would say, "I love you madly."' (Actually Eco uses another popular writer in the original Italian; the translator chose Cartland as a name that would resonate for the English speaker.) Poor educated woman, say I. Bring back mad love, take away the bloody quotation marks.

But there was a time where she was truly *of* the time: the '20s. In *We Danced All Night*, published in 1970, she gives a participant's eye-view of the era. She was no impartial observer—I doubt that she had an impartial fingernail—but she had a breeziness, a drive, a zeal for living that makes me think that the world will be a duller place without her. That perception of her as a lightweight isn't borne out by her gigantic body of work (over 700 books at last count). There are other grand prolifics in the history of writing: Agatha Christie, James A. Michener, P. G. Wodehouse, Frank Richards, Enid Blyton and probably Steven King. The constant among these is that among the gush and formula there is genius, even if it is simply the reflection of a busy, busy creator who must work off the flow or drown. Christie made Poirot and Miss Marple; Michener wrote *Space*; Wodehouse made Jeeves, Blandings and Mr Mulliner; Richards created Bunter, Blyton the Magic Faraway Tree and King has written the most pointed and frightening books about the American nightmare. Cartland was not the inventor of romance writing; she was quick to claim her place in the tradition that includes Elinor Glyn and Baroness Orczy. In fact, she was quick to do and to claim many other things too, because the one thing that emerges from reading her other stuff is that she had a mighty store of energy and an astonishing effectiveness in what she attempted.

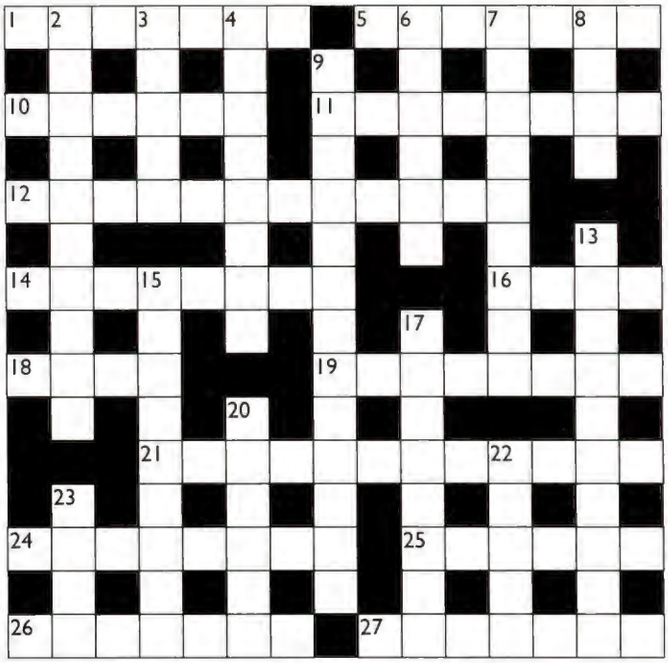
WHEN I WENT TO DO A SPOT of reading up on Cartland in the State Library of Victoria, I found that she had done a very readable and quite thorough biography of Elizabeth, Empress of Austria, mother of Crown Prince Rudolph of the Mayerling tragedy. She had also written about Charles II and Metternich, and had brought out treatises on nutrition *à la* Adele Davis, and had, in 1978, prefigured the Sister Wendy genre of painting-plus-commentary in *Barbara Cartland's Book of Love and Lovers*. This book had in fact disappeared from the library shelves, and a kind librarian offered me the use of her own copy. It's a gem. Where else would you find such commentary on Veneziano's 'The Judgment of Paris'? 'This picture is an excellent example, at an early date, of what women can do to themselves by slimming. Every result shows, from the puny little breasts to the fat tummies which are seldom affected by any diet. Goddesses should be softly curved, a comfortable armful ...'

She fought for gypsies' rights in Britain, so that they had designated places where they could rest their caravans, rather than being chased off every piece of public ground. She campaigned for better pay and conditions for midwives. She elected to be buried in a cardboard box under a tree in her garden. I'll miss her. ■

Juliette Hughes is a freelance reviewer.

Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 85, July/August 2000

Devised by
Joan Nowotny IBVM



ACROSS

1 & 5. Digest comes into line, we hear, with description of ladies' light attire. (7,7)
10 & 11. Season when chain store, so called, clears out 1 & 5 for more appropriate range. (6,8)
12. Cows and, possibly, mares on fair, dry pastures provide work and income for them. (12)
14. Mortarboard for the Principal, perhaps. (8)
16. Sort of road to call on? (4)
18. Grandfather in this? Ouch! (4)
19. What golfer did on the brink of success when he decided to deter tee shot. (8)
21. Carelessly type clauses you apparently consider descriptive of Australian natives. (12)
24. Calling in which ring is replaced by a holiday. (8)
25. Place of learning where members often look forward to 24 25. (6)
26. Condiment found in every copy of the hymn book. (7)
27. Posture adopted, perhaps, at rides in races. (7)

DOWN

2. In university afterwards, a left-wing student could be decidedly one-sided! (10)
3. Carpet for the Queen mother? (5)
4. Less dense air freed irregularly into the atmosphere. (8)
6. Edward, in short, on visiting the American port, created wild revelry. (6)
7. Is this an egotistical way to fill one's tanks? (4-5)
8. Audience I had watched carefully. (4)
9. Old time equivalent of George Speight's gun-waving behaviour, for instance? (5-8)
13. Any'ow, 'e sez, 'e wood'n go near the 'ay-fever tree!! (10)
15. Take steps here to have practice sessions in ball passage. (5,4)
17. Scorns safety—lives in dangerous speeds. (8)
20. Writer's theft in two directions. (6)
22. Escort us to drug dealer, then head off. (5)
23. Implementation of a GST multiplies a store's labels. (4)

Solution to Crossword no. 84, June 2000

S		D		P				P		A		S		F
P	R	I	M	E	R		B	A	R	B	E	C	U	E
A		A		R		A		S		E		A		A
W	I	N	E	C	A	S	K	S		D	E	P	O	T
N		A		U		K		E				E		H
			A	S	T	I		S	P	A	N	G	L	E
S		P		S		N		T		M		O		R
K	E	E	P	I	N	G	T	H	E	P	E	A	C	E
Y		R		O		T		E		H		T		D
S	E	V	E	N	T	H		B	R	I	E			
C		E				E		U		B		L		S
A	G	R	E	E		T	A	C	T	I	C	I	A	N
P		T		C		I		K		O		N		I
E	Y	E	R	H	Y	M	E		Q	U	E	U	E	D
S		D		O		E				S		S		E

ISSN 1036-1758

Eureka Street **Cryptic Crossword no. 85, July/August 2000**