EUREKA STREET

A MAGAZINE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS, THE ARTS AND THEOLOGY
VOL 10 no 9 NOVEMBER 2000 $5.00 (inc GST)

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EUREKA STREET

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Australian
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2001

AUSTRALIAN RELIGIOUS DIARY ~ 2001 ~

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Jon Greenaway's Sri Lanka report and Penelope Buckley's review essay have been assisted by the Commonwealth Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.

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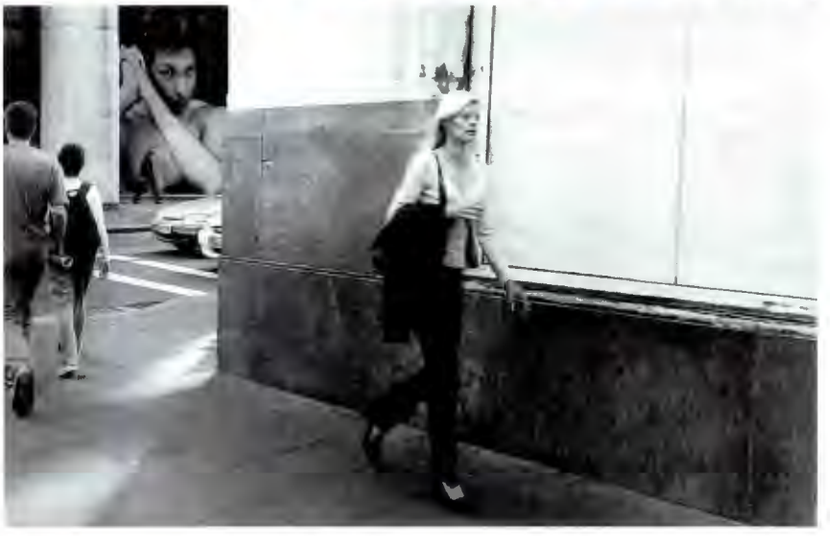
COVER STORY

Eureka Street turns 100 (issues)
Special life and times supplement lift-out.

MORAG FRASER



100 not out

THERE WAS A CRICKET match competing against the background static of the *Eureka Street* computers in early 1991. Someone scored a century. I remember a brief cheer going up.

It's one of the consolations of a magazine office that nothing much slips past unheralded. Someone is sure to ring as soon as the vote is decided or the legislation passed or the child born or the wall torn down. The urge to communicate is one of the strongest human reflexes. In an office like ours it has the pulsing imperative of a heartbeat. When something happens someone will inevitably let us know. The technology might have changed: faxes, emails and the internet now multiply the sources of information almost intolerably. But the job is the same as it has always been: to fit what can seem like random events, random observations, into some pattern of coherence. We look for connections. Or notice gaps. We try to keep the cricket in mind while focusing on the war. Ask why this or that angle on a story has not been pursued. Remember the wooden sculpture of an Aboriginal woman with a child painted on her womb—what iconography is this?—while sub-editing an article on Western prejudices about Islam. We try to build links.

What we were thinking about most of the time when the first edition of *Eureka Street* was being pieced together was the Gulf War. It began just as we were deciding what to put on our first cover. You can't use day-after photographs for a monthly magazine. Time and visual recall will always overtake you. We needed something that took the long view. I remember the founding editor of *Eureka Street*, Adrian Lyons SJ, writing his editorial about the war. He saw it, and the events that led up to it, as a radical failure of communication. One side not talking to the other. Ego and political ambition blinkering the broad view that might otherwise allow contending sides to imagine peace, imagine the kind of creative compromise that allows human beings to live together fruitfully.

We found our cover in the multivalent art of John Spooner. Spooner, like the rest of his prodigiously gifted tribe—Australian cartoonists are as good as they come, anywhere—is a skilled juggler, able to keep more than one idea moving inside the frame of a high-finish, two-dimensional drawing. His cover for us

showed an Everyman, eyes fixed on a broadsheet newspaper, while in the sky above him rockets raged at one another like so many malevolent paper darts.

Spooner's drawing was as much a challenge to us as it was an illustration of the irony of the times. (You'll find it reproduced on the first inside page of this month's 100th edition supplement.) Remember the night after night of 'managed' news during that period? Australia was rapidly committed to a US support role by the then Prime Minister, Bob Hawke. The ABC was chastised for using commentators, like academic Robert Springborg, who were critical of the course of events. The Pentagon put out image after triumphant image of Iraqi targets being blown apart by remote-control technology. And Australian television played the footage, and replayed it, night after night. It was almost impossible to know what was really going on, impossible to step back and discover a context sufficient to the complexity of the events. Mostly we were urged only to take sides.

Eureka Street was first envisaged as a magazine that would do a little more than take sides. Out of a long tradition of Jesuit intellectual endeavour and critical practice—bringing theological thinking to bear on the day-by-day concerns of the world—it was set up to do something like the monthly equivalent of John Spooner's artful juggling. To notice what is ignored. To keep the country in mind while all eyes are focused on the city. To see the red poppy as well as the rat when you are mired in the trenches, as the great World War I poet, Isaac Rosenberg, was able to do.

I REMEMBER VIVIDLY the first conversation I had with one of our writers, the Discalced Carmelite Prior, Ross Collings. I'd expected an austere cleric. The man who came into our office was almost incandescent with enthusiasm for the art of John Perceval and wanted to write about it, which he did. But he was an austere cleric as well. He wrote for us about art, about theology. He wrote with lucent authority about mysticism. He was politically astute.

As was the writer and political scientist Graham Little, who often contributed to these pages—on republicanism, on what patriotism might mean to an expatriate Protestant Irishman settled (if that is the word for a spirit as volatile as Graham's) in Australia. Graham could be as frank about friendship as about being daunted by the prospect of interviewing Edna O'Brien.

I single out these two men because, when they died, unexpectedly both of them, they left a gap that could not be filled. As an editor, I still reach occasionally for the phone to ring one or the other, sure that they will bring a perspective to our conversation, and to the ongoing business of the magazine, that I can't predict in advance. Both of them were wise, modest and as rigorous and exploratory in their thought and analysis as one could ask. If they were alive today I could thank them through the simple continuity—100 not out—of the work we shared with them.

But they are not, so what I will say is that they represent the kind of dispassionate commitment, balance and blend to which *Eureka Street* has aspired since those summer war and cricket days of 1991. That same commitment is embodied in all the writers, photographers, theologians, cartoonists, entrepreneurs, poets, editors, designers, proofreaders and artists who have taken us this far. It has been a rare privilege to work with them all. **—Morag Fraser**

Eureka Street's documentary photographers have recorded the events of the last ten years, but with an eye to the art of the timeless moment.

Top left: A Palestinian selling wares on the way to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Old City, Jerusalem, 1995—**Emmanuel Santos**.
Centre left: A good month in the country. Eric and Chris Sharkey harvest the 'best crop in ten years', 1996—**Bill Thomas**.
Bottom left: Catching the Thorpedo's eye, George Street, Sydney, 2000—**Andrew Stark**.

Capital Letter

Jack Waterford

Discredit card

A POLITICIAN IS GIVEN a telephone credit card and gives the PIN to his son. Through this misfeasance, or by his or his son's negligence, others get hold of the number and $50,000 worth of improper calls are made. One reason why it takes so long for the abuse of the card to emerge is that politicians on both sides had earlier agreed that call records be kept entirely private and simply be paid. When politicians were being given the perk, seven years ago, Bronwyn Bishop had feared that Labor Government staffers might analyse telephone bills to find out who was talking to the then Opposition. They might have done so, too. The cynic might observe that there is, in any event, usually a bipartisan spirit when it comes to perks for politicians.

Meanwhile, up in Queensland, Labor is convulsed by a scandal in which there is clear evidence of trafficking in votes, the raising of the dead from cemeteries come election days, and branch stacking. While it is Labor which is presently writhing, the Liberals and Nationals are strangely silent. There are any number of similar scandals involving their parties as well.

Nationally, of course, it is much the same. Rorting by Labor figures is a serious problem in Victoria, NSW and South Australia. It is also rampant in the Liberal Party in NSW and South Australia, and will again become a major problem in Victoria when the party gets over its grief at losing government and begins concentrating on trying to win it back.

In the ACT, an Auditor-General has finally produced a report into the mismanagement of the Bruce Stadium. This did not involve corruption in the ordinary sense of the word. Rather, in a play all too familiar to those who watched the mismanagements which took out state governments one by one through the 1980s, it is about politicians thinking that they could play the market, seed business enterprise and make things happen for their state or territory. Probably $60 million of public money has been lost.

This experience, and an earlier one with the implosion of the Canberra Hospital, in which a young girl died, illustrate another of the problems of modern government. In each case, government had allowed its own expertise base to wither away. The new managers are not experts in anything but management and even then, they have to subcontract in outside advice. Around the nation, state and federal departments have let departmental memories slip, made redundant experienced public servants whose jobs are supposedly able to be performed in the private sector. And then, it is not only a matter of jobs often going to the lowest tenderers, even if they seem to have no idea of how to do the job properly. It is also sometimes a matter of contracts going to mates. It is far easier, usually, to pervert the contracting process than it is a public service process.

Even what remains of a professional public service is, in many cases, out of the loop, and in a way that exposes the public. The rise of the ministerial private office, and of consultants reporting directly to ministers, means that public service advice is now only one of the sources of advice going to government, and that public servants are usually frozen out of the actual decision-making process. Those who are collating the advice, and putting their own spin on to recommendations, are accountable only to the minister. They are scarcely documenting their decisions and their interventions, or the way in which public money is being diverted into a political reward-and-punishment cycle. The process was not invented recently, or by one party alone, but has become more and more marked over the past two decades.

And so too is another process, of purely patronage appointment to the many positions directly or indirectly at the disposition of government. It has always been the case that governments seek people of generally friendly disposition in statutory offices and on boards and committees; always also the case that they use them as dumping grounds for old allies who have become inconvenient. In the past five years, however, the process has become an art form, particularly at federal level. Cabinet devotes a significant amount of time to even minor appointments, with much of the time taken to looking at pedigrees, past associations, and what people have done for the cause. There is now more patronage in government at all levels than there was at the time of the Northcote-Trevalyn report of the 1850s, which gave the modern ideas of a neutral professional public service.

POLITICIANS BEMOAN THE low level of public confidence in politicians, the widespread cynicism about their motives and about their alleged propensity to rort the public purse. I am not entirely sure that politicians, as a class, are any worse than ever they were, but what is clear is that the opportunities they now have to rort are greater than ever they were. At the same time, it is becoming rarer and rarer for politicians even to bother to express any sort of idealism about their work, to invoke notions of public trust or of public good. No doubt there are decent men and women in politics, but not many are articulating those decencies or performing deeds which might inspire good men and women to want to follow them. If anyone wanted an example, it would be in analysis of the words used to condemn Peter Reith and in the words used to defend him. It is hard to believe that any of the politicians got the point. ■

Jack Waterford is editor of the *Canberra Times*.

Opening up

From Maurie Costello
Re: Vatican Document, *Dominus Jesus: On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church*
I write merely as a grass roots lay member of the Roman Catholic Church, who has been involved in ecumenism over the past 10 years: first, as a representative of my Catholic parish on Rockhampton Churches; second, as a representative of the Diocese of Rockhampton on Queensland Churches Together; and finally as a past member of the Rockhampton Diocese Commission on Ecumenism.

I am *not* writing in any official capacity, as the following are my personal thoughts and opinion.

Dominus Jesus has further torn the rift in my personal life between my spirituality and my religious practice, for I strongly believe that God loves *all* humans equally, and that through the Holy Spirit brings salvation to all through all religions.

I have a deep belief in the Risen Christ who I do believe is God and is equal in the Trinity to the Father and the Holy Spirit. I believe the Holy Spirit to be the Love which flows between Father and Son. God *is* love.

I believe Christ's simple message of 'Love God and love your neighbour' is being lost sight of through history as more and more emphasis has been placed on the human bureaucracy of the church with its many man-made rules.

I believe that my Catholic faith is how I have discovered personal spirituality through the Judeo-Christian tradition. Equally, however, I believe other humans have been discovering God with the guidance of the Holy Spirit through their historical and geographic exposure to other traditions. I refer to the Australian Aborigines, to the North American Indians, to Buddhists, to Hindus, to Muslims—to name but a few.

To claim that our Catholic path is superior I find arrogant in the extreme. I find it personally insulting to myself and to my dear wife, who is not a Catholic, but is a deeply spiritual person. I apologise to my many Buddhist friends, who have helped deepen my Christian faith (and vice versa). To my numerous friends I have met along my ecumenical path I likewise apologise and wish them to accept that I do not consider their form of Christianity any lesser than my own.

I personally pray for Cardinal Ratzinger that he may be guided towards accepting the simple faith of Jesus Christ—a faith free of arrogance, free of judgment and free of condemnation. I pray that he may experience the simplicity of the theology of Julian of Norwich (14th century English mystic) who taught that God was the Perfect Parent who forgives us the instant we commit a misdemeanour even before we ask His forgiveness. We do not need the bureaucratic scandal of the Third Rite of Reconciliation fiasco if we accept such a theology.

I believe we are experiencing the death of a particular historical form of church structure. But just as a plant needs to die and resurrect itself via its seed into new life, I believe the seed of the new church is presently being germinated in a strong culture broth made up of grass roots spiritual seekers and questioners seeking a depth of genuine spirituality, devoid of paternalistic power-brokers. The new church will be one based on the simplicity of genuine love flowing between God and between all fellow humans.

Maurie Costello
Rockhampton, QLD

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

September 2000 Book Offer Winners
G. Mahon, Canterbury, VIC; P. Hogan, Ivanhoe, VIC; M. Wells, St Ives, NSW; M. Sheather, Downer, ACT; A. Baumber, Wollongong, NSW; P. Hannon, Kensington Gardens, SA; J. Devitt, Bulli, NSW; J. & M. Connolly, Paynesville, VIC; J. Bennetts, Wentworth Falls, NSW; J. Ellis, Darwin, NT; R. Selah, Clifton Hill, VIC; I. Somerville, Riverview, NSW; D. Ingley, Nerrena, VIC; R. Borrell, Port Fairy, VIC; C. & J.Vandersman, Lilydale, VIC.


The Month's Traffic



Tunnel vision

HERE ARE A FEW important political abstracts. 'The voters.' 'The battlers.' 'Small business.' Political reporting, if not politics itself, runs on these concepts. They introduce an odd distance between us, and what is happening in public life. 'The voters', for example, are often assumed to be a group entirely different from the reader or viewer of the report that refers to them.

Sometimes these concepts serve as screens for the projections of political reporters. 'The voters won't like this,' often translates as 'I don't agree with this.'

In the last few months I have noticed a new and powerful abstract abroad in public life. I am talking about 'the bush'. I live in the bush, and yet I can't find my community or myself in 'the bush' that is reported.

Ever since Pauline Hanson, and more acutely since the Victorian rural vote tipped Jeff Kennett from power, 'the bush' has been important politically. Suddenly the bush is the subject of headlines—but only certain kinds of headlines.

Nearly 15 years ago now, I attended a seminar held in Brisbane on the topic of Aboriginal people and the media. I was offended, during discussions, to hear an Aboriginal woman refer to the newspaper for which I worked at the time as part of the 'white media'.

I was younger then, with the sort of idealism that is a kind of innocence. I was offended—or perhaps confronted is a better word—because I thought my newspaper served a broad public. I didn't like the assumption that it served only white people. Certainly that isn't what I thought I was doing when I wrote my stories.

But from that day on I was a little more sensitive to all the ways in which my newspaper and other media outlets wrote about Aboriginal people. Always, they were assumed to be the subject of stories, never part of the audience. Aboriginal people were reported on. They did not report, and they were not addressed.

In country towns, broadsheet newspapers and national news programs are routinely referred to as the 'city media'. The same dynamics are at work.

A couple of months ago now I reported for *Eureka Street* on the really big bush story—salinity. Editors of other publications have told me that salinity has a turn-off factor—that it is hard to make it interesting. That is unfortunate because the salinity story is really one of apocalypse—far more important to our national viability than fluctuations in interest rates and the value of the dollar, which, let's face it, are also hard to make interesting.

Of course the 'city media' does report on salinity. The early September announcement by Federal Minister for Agriculture, Warren Truss, of a new Salinity Management Strategy was reported at some length. Journalists noted details like the selling of river valley targets and salinity credit schemes—once the press release had been issued.

Without recapping all the detail, the announcement had as its underpinning the knowledge that there would have to be land-use changes on a huge scale to keep Australia sustainable in the medium term.

It was a huge story, or should have been.

Yet officers of the Murray-Darling Basin Commission had been cosily touring country areas for months before the announcement, addressing community meetings about what was coming. This isn't surprising, because successful salinity action rests on community co-operation. In fact, one of the largely unwritten stories of contemporary Australia is about how communities have struggled to deal with salinity—wrestling in the most fundamental way with the way land and water bind us.

So rural Australia knew what was coming. The process leading up to the announcement was necessarily as leaky as a sieve. Yet nobody leaked, by which I mean told a city-based journalist what would be in this hugely significant announcement.

This was because nobody asked them to leak. There were no excited journalists hanging out to find out what was coming, or cultivating rural sources, or swapping favours for advance information. There were no city journalists at the community meetings.

For the mainstream media, giving a fair amount of space to the announcement itself was a thorough enough job.

If you bleed the idealism from journalism—the belief that publishing information matters because information is about power—then news sense becomes merely a matter of pattern recognition. When journalists decide what to report on and what to put on the front page, they look for the sort of thing that is regarded, or has been regarded, as news in the past.

There are two dominant patterns to stories about the bush—'crusty eccentric' and 'disenchanted voters'.

In the pages of the media, 'the bush' is stroppy, fickle and tending towards the anarchic. It is also endearing, wise and the backdrop for various celebrities' attempts at *SeaChange*s. It is the home of strange growths like Hansonism and gun lobbies. It is forever slightly exotic, both endearing and threatening. It is 'other' and 'out there'.

It is not 'us'.

The salinity crisis challenges these views because it will determine the nation's future—not just in the long term but in the next couple of decades. Most editors know this by now, at some level, but the patterns are slow to change.

—Margaret Simons

Building up

Right: UN troops in East Timor construct a stage for the first anniversary of independence celebrations in September.

Page 11: Young trainee policemen work out in Dili. Photographs from a recent exhibition by Mathias Heng.

Boundary riding

END-OF-TERM REPORTS are notoriously epigrammatic and unreliable indicators of future performance. A report on the eternal Catholic Church, written to mark the hundredth issue of an ephemeral periodical, might seem merely impudent. So be it.

Over ten years we can see a consistent direction given by the Roman Curia. It may best be illustrated, not by documents, but by the recent remarks of Cardinal Biffi, reportedly supported by the Secretariat of State, that Italy should give preference to Catholic immigrants in order to preserve the national identity.

Most recent Vatican statements and appointments of Bishops to major cities have demonstrated this preoccupation with Catholic identity, and the determination to mark out clear boundaries between Catholic and non-Catholic, priests and laity, and so on. The movement to engage in an exploratory way with the non-Catholic world, characteristic of the Second Vatican Council, has been reversed. It would be wrong to say that the emblematic statements of the Council have been repudiated. But they have been fenced in and respected as museums. Cardinal Biffi's insistence that church allegiance should be a criterion for accepting refugees and immigrants flows as naturally from this preoccupation with Catholic identity as did an earlier Australian attempt to ensure that Catholic children were included among British child migrants.

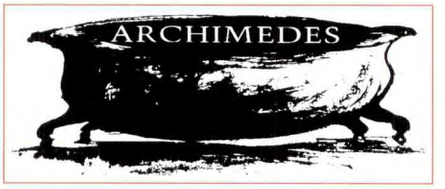
A clutch of recent events shows the reality of the Australian Catholic Church to be complex. A discussion about the future of the church in the popular Spirituality in the Pub series was well attended, but the majority of the participants were grey-haired. These were the people who had been influenced by Vatican II and had come to participate fully in the life of the church. For the most part, their commitments within the church have not been taken up by their children.

On the Sunday before the Grand Final, two services were held in the Melbourne Cathedral. The first was a football Mass, well publicised and tapping into the dominant local culture. It was attended by some 400 people. During the afternoon, a Mass for immigrant and refugee communities was celebrated with little publicity. Over 4000 people, including families and young people, joined the celebration.

There were also meetings of young Catholics from school and afterwards. Those taking part formed a very small proportion of those in their Catholic institutions. Many were committed to work with the underprivileged; their faith and church allegiance were more fluid. A few of them later joined the Youth Pilgrimage in Rome.

And finally, a couple of good parish Masses. In both, adolescents and young adults were under-represented. In both, too, there was an easy acceptance of lay responsibility for the life of the parish, and a relaxed attitude to boundaries.

Together with another thousand or so similar occasions, these events sketch



Beating the Bogong moth

THE DUST HAD BARELY SETTLED on the triumphal Olympic marathon when the science establishment and the business community began a predictable (see Archimedes, October) but surprisingly sophisticated campaign to goad the government into providing more resources for research, development and innovation.

How is it, the lobbyists wondered out loud, that the nation can justify expending about $8 billion over seven years on organising a glorious sporting competition, while its government baulks at putting similar amounts towards winning gold medals in science and education? After all, they argue, what will have a greater impact on our future?

Of course, to the politicians, the answer to these questions is obvious. Show us the votes in supporting science, they would say. People just don't identify with it. It doesn't have the human impact of sport—end of story. But real-life research is just as human, just as active, just as courageous, just as fickle, and just as fascinating as sport. So why is science not reported with the same sense of human engagement as sport?

Part of the answer lies in an age-old vicious circle of myths. Australian scientists have constructed the myth that in order to be objective, researchers must set themselves apart from society. So traditionally they have not sullied their hands with business, or even with explaining what they are doing. On the back of this, the media built a myth that science is boring and hard to understand.

In the end, the media took the easy way out and simply reported results—nifty gadgets, medical 'breakthroughs', new species—not the hard graft of the laboratory, the human story of people at work, the failures and the near misses, the bits of scientific life to which people can actually relate.

Now, however, Australian society is so overwhelmingly dependent on technology that the myths are starting to buckle. The current campaign, for instance, rides on the back of the Games. The grand irony is that modern sport, most particularly the Olympic Games, would be impossible without science and technology. And in Sydney's case, a creditable portion was home-grown.

From the theatrical wizardry of the Opening Ceremony to the synchronised power of the closing fireworks, science and technology were ever-present: giant television screens; measurement of time and distance; drug testing; the virtual flags and the moving world-record line on television; robotic cameras; high-tech sports equipment; the clever heating, water circulation and air-conditioning of the world's fastest pool; the fabrics worn by Australian athletes; and even advice from CSIRO Entomology on how to cope with the Bogong moth invasion.

The present lobbying also sees an historic alliance between science and business. After years of rhetoric, the two are just beginning to recognise how utterly dependent they are on each other for a successful future. And so the campaign was kicked off with an open letter signed by the heads of the universities, the scientific academies and the peak business bodies.

There are signs of hope that Australians are beginning to realise that we're good at science. But Archimedes still awaits the day when the nation follows the exploits of its researcher heroes with as much interest as its sports heroes. ■

Tim Thwaites is a freelance science writer.

aspects of the future Australian church. The paucity of youth suggests that the proportion of practising Catholics will continue to decline. The greying of the Vatican II generation and the declining numbers of priests and religious suggest that future leadership will not be provided by religious and laity inspired by the Council. It also suggests that responsibility for the church will largely fall to the laity. On the other hand, immigrants will be disproportionately represented in church attendance, especially among the young. And finally, the piecemeal character of youth involvement suggests that religious commitment will continue to be counter-cultural.

In the face of these trends, two broad pastoral strategies have been adopted. The first is to accept the changes which have occurred over recent years, to encourage lay people to take responsibility for the church, to engage in conversation at the boundaries, to seek common ground with those who are alienated from church and those who are not Catholics. It would hope to commend faith and church through the education of adults, through a deep formation in personal spirituality, and through encouraging commitment to the underprivileged.

An alternative strategy, one likely to be increasingly favoured for Australia, accepts the analysis and the remedy offered by the Roman Curia, and focuses on building a strong Catholic identity. This involves a strong institutional stand on moral issues, clear religious teaching in traditional language, clear delineation of boundaries in theory and practice between Catholic and non-Catholic, between Christian and non-Christian, between clerical and lay. This policy would hope that a cohesive, well-schooled and loyal church would attract converts, retain the young, and result in loyal leadership by a numerous clergy.

While these strategies are not mutually exclusive, they represent different readings of the church. Both strategies pose the question: what is the church for? For the more exclusively that the church's identity, public image and boundaries preoccupy us, the more incidental will seem the radical concern of Jesus Christ for the marginalised and excluded as persons. This risk is evident in Cardinal Biffi's concern for the Catholic identity of Italy at the expense of Islamic refugees. In Australia, an exclusive preoccupation with identity and good name is likely to further alienate generous young Catholics and so suck the blood from the future church. **—Andrew Hamilton** SJ

Truth on the wing

A SPOTTED TURTLEDOVE has built a nest on the windowsill outside my office. I've spent a lot of time watching her lately, all fluffed up against rain and wind, warming her ivory egg in an intricate basket of twigs. The corner catches lots of morning sun and the external blinds keep out the worst of the rain.

There she sits and waits. She leaves the nest only for a few minutes each day, when the sun is warmest, and quickly returns. It will take 14 to 16 days before her egg is hatched. There's something honest and real about this dove and her nest of twigs.

Meanwhile I've also spent a lot of time watching the Olympics on television. And, inevitably, I've seen a lot of commercials. The Qantas commercial featuring the children's choir spinning round the world used to be a favourite, but you can only call Australia home so many times in an hour. If I were one of those minor celebrities who gets asked what song they hope never to hear again, right now I know what I'd say.

I also noticed something rather strange about the Qantas commercial: it appears to me that when the children are standing among the anthills in the red desert, their shadows are going in different directions. Either there is more than one sun out there in that desert, or the scene is faked. Then I looked at all the scenes more closely, and wondered if they *all* were faked.

Fantasy is fine, so long as you know it's fantasy. We all know that most scenes on television are fictions, and most of the stunts are nothing more than stunts. We all know that advertisers stretch the point. We even understand the different levels of deception. Some forms of deception are nothing more than a genre: snake oil has never cured baldness and never will; saving 'up to 40 per cent' might mean saving five per cent; 'one owner, lady driver, never left the garage' usually means the car looks OK, but you'd better check the gear box.

I can easily cope with a talking koala. I get furious at advertisers being given a licence to lie, but I can usually tell that they are lying and I can just cope. But were those Qantas children really standing in the desert, on the beach, in the ocean, running around Stonehenge, on the bridge in London? Was the desert really that red, the beach really that white? Or was I being fooled?

What happens when we can no longer tell whether or not we are being deceived? Whom can we believe? Plato's solution to the problem was to trust geometry and banish the artists, because geometry offers universal knowledge while artists falsely represent reality. But art can reveal hitherto hidden realities, and science is not as value-free as is commonly proclaimed.

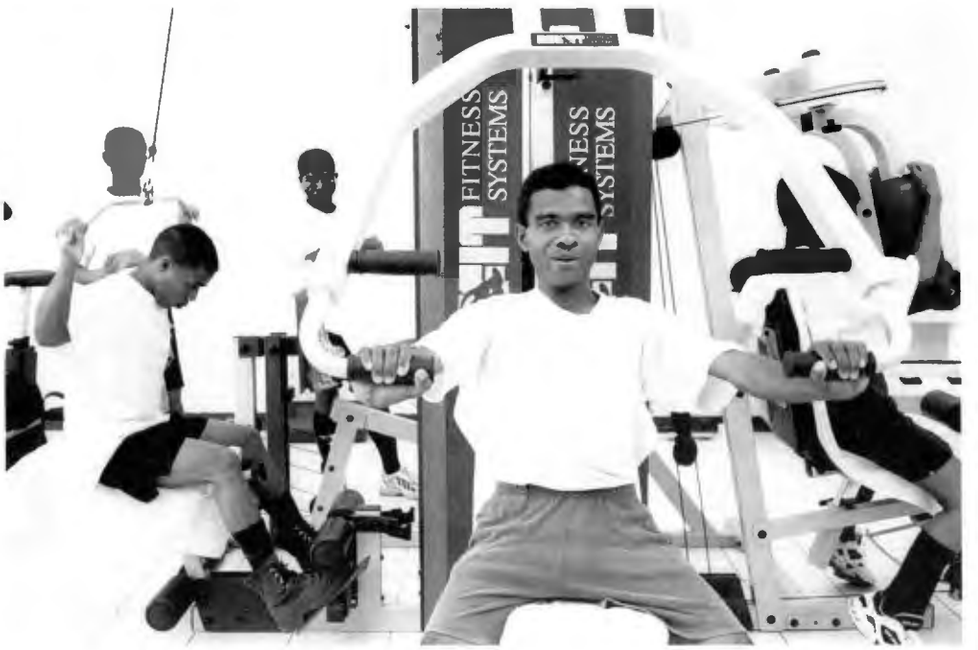
Belief is important: it connects people in a circle of trust, it draws us out of ourselves. The abuse of belief, however, is deadly, just as illusions are deadly and drugs are deadly. Walking along Paisley Street in Melbourne's Footscray, as I do most days, means encountering the worst side of the drug trade: young people unkempt and desperate, chasing for a fix; big plain-clothes policemen restraining squirming dealers; knives flashing in the sun. It makes you feel sick.

The dove at my window is my measure of reality. There is no illusion here. I am reminded of Michael Leunig's formula for determining whether or not someone is telling you the truth. You go and look deeply into a duck's eyes for a while, and then you look deeply into the eyes of the person you are unsure about. You will *know*, Leunig declares emphatically, if they are telling the truth. The dove and its intricate nest belong to the real world. Falsehoods do not, whether in drugs or advertising, pulpits or parliaments. The dove brings life. Illusion brings despair.

Eureka Street, thankfully, has become a life-giving journal. Truth and art and belief are all welcomed here. There's a circle of trust here. There's something for the future here. Words have been gathered like twigs, carefully chosen, carefully placed. When we talked about establishing a journal a dozen years ago, I had no idea how it would end up. That's why I liked the name *Eureka Street*. It's still a journey of discovery. As the Russians say, 'There are no birds this year in last year's nests.' **—John Honner**

In your dreams

IT IS DIFFICULT TO believe that scarcely a year has passed since the referendum of 6 November 1999, that decisive moment when Australia seized the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to throw off the oppressive yoke of a foreign dynasty and become a republic.



Who among us will ever forget the giddying flush of patriotism that swept across the country as the ballot figures flowed into the national tally-room on that fateful night?

Not that there was ever any real doubt about the outcome, of course. With the full weight of informed opinion behind the republic, along with the support of the nation's most distinguished expatriate cultural commentators and the patriotic endorsement of the Murdoch media, it was clear from the outset that the Australian Republican Movement would be vindicated at the polls. Perhaps the only surprising

element was that fact that some 46 per cent of the voters, ignorant and fearful rednecks, fell for the despicable un-Australian lies of the monarchists and the craven obfuscation of the direct-election splitters.

Events moved rapidly in the immediate aftermath of the referendum. Since the vast majority of Australians had declared their support for an idea which he opposed, John Howard had no real option but to resign immediately as Prime Minister. With the prospect of a divisive and possibly inconclusive federal election looming, the ARM stepped into the void and offered itself as a unifying force, one that could heal the damaging divisions that had blighted our history during the long, dark days of the monarchy.

By uniting the pro-republican elements of both the Liberal and Labor parties into one organisation, the ARM was able to bring new levels of efficiency to the political process. Millions were saved by replacing expensive elections with public-opinion polls conducted by experienced professionals. By utilising proven corporate management skills, the amount of time wasted on debates was slashed to a minimum.

Free at last from the heavy hand of the Windsors, our way of life has been transformed so rapidly that it is now almost impossible to imagine what our country would have been like if the referendum had been lost. Time and time again, our decision to vote Yes has been vindicated by subsequent events.

The Y2K bug, for example, had practically no impact in Australia due to the move to a republic. And very few world atlases do not now include at least one map of Australia, even those published overseas.

Internationally, the value of the dollar has risen steadily against all other major currencies and Australia's leadership in world affairs has been recognised in a way that would have been impossible had we not decided to become a republic.

Domestically, the reconciliation process has succeeded in bringing Australians together as never before. The price of Telstra 2 shares has soared, affirming our emergence as a share-owning democracy. The drought has broken and many feral animals have chosen to live elsewhere.

The Treason Trials were regarded with some apprehension at first, particularly among the more ignorant and backward sectors of the population who had maliciously opposed the historic inevitability of an Australian republic by the Year 2000. But as Chief Justice Turnbull put it to Phil Cleary when he sentenced him to ten years on a retraining course, 'You can't go bleating to the Privy Council now, traitor.'

But perhaps the greatest affirmation of the nation's decision to accept the ARM model was the outpouring of national pride that accompanied the Olympic Games. As so many commentators have pointed out, the Sydney Games would have been a national embarrassment if the Yes vote had not been carried. If the referendum had failed, our country would have been exposed before the entire world as an insecure, backward-looking outpost of a vanished empire. Instead, we were able to hold our heads up high in the knowledge that we have succeeded in re-badging our national brand.

And what greater affirmation of the fact that any ordinary Australian child can now aspire to be head of state than the sight of the Games being declared open by our new president, appointed after careful consideration by our nation's leaders? How could any loyal Australian not feel a rush of pride when she stepped to the microphone, our own native-born Sophie Gosper?

—Shane Maloney

HELEN DANIEL
In memoriam

The death of Helen Daniel is a significant loss to Australian literature. Her selflessness, dedicated editorship of *Australian Book Review* gave Australian writers a window to the world. In a culture which prizes hecklers, she was an encourager. It was typical of Helen that in recent weeks she was working on a scheme to enable young reviewers to be heard. Those who care for Australian writing will mourn her death.

—Edmund Campion, former Chair of the Literature Fund of the Australia Council
16 October 2000

Wait for ages

DOWN TO INNISFAIL by bus, and hours early for a Greek wedding, I found the TAB on the Cairns side of the Johnstone River, hard by the Crown Hotel. After my money was palmed, I was presented with a plastic wallet to house the king-sized betting tickets that Queenslanders prefer. The Keno rules were printed on the back. Not many tickets crossed to the credit side. I forgot that my hairdresser's husband was riding on the Tablelands, where he duly kicked home Raving in the Atherton Cup. These days to bet in Melbourne is to find oneself doing the form on weight-for-age races that are easy game for welter horses, with names like Skoozi Please. To bet in Sydney has been a waiting game: after the Olympics. But the old Adam won the 1600m George Main, which was further than he was meant to be able to go and the T.S. Eliot tip, Falls the Shadow ('which 'hollow man' christened him?', a friend inquired) scored well in the Dulcify.

A week passed. Sydney's big early spring racing days at Randwick had to wait till October and a Monday to stage a program that should make the Victorian clubs as sick as rival trainer Lee Freedman felt when he saw Bart Cummings' Saintly parading before it won the Melbourne Cup. With my money aboard, the lithe filly Dynamic Love took the Group Two Stan Fox. The Spring Champion Stakes (first of three Group Ones for the day) underlined the poor quality of the three-year-old crop (some of which will, necessarily, go down as 'classic' winners). Where was the Octagonal for instance? (He won the Fox in 1995 before much else, and now shuttles contentedly on stallion duty between Australia and France.)

This year the honest colt Universal Prince, by Scenic, beat Falls the Shadow. In the next race, the ageing million-dollar stakes winner Yippio won the Queen's Cup from Pravda. Freemason, as usual carefully spacing his best efforts, was third (and that's where he might finish in the Melbourne Cup). The Flight Stakes produced a winner of a different order, the outstanding Quest for Fame filly, Unworldly. (Regrettably, Unworldly broke a leg during the track work and had to be put down.)

Again one saluted the gifted woman who picks the names for the Woodlands Stud Syndicate horses of the genial 'Chicken Kings', Jack and Bob Ingham. Once the Epsom, the big spring 'mile' at Randwick, vied for importance with the Doncaster, run in the autumn. No longer: the Epsom is worth just over $550,000. Thanks to San Miguel beer sponsorship, the Doncaster's prize money is almost five times as much.

This year's Doncaster was won by Over, which may add a Toorak Handicap or Emirates Stakes to his record by the end of the spring. The Epsom also went to a first-

rate galloper, hitherto unlucky, or too often the subject of excuses. Shogun Lodge (9/1) pushed up along the rails. Stradbroke winner Landsighting closed but the winner's class saw it home. The pair gave me a good quinella. Habitual timidity meant that although I'd backed the third horse Chinhoyi (36/1) as well, I eschewed the trifecta. Crawl ran home hard from last—Caulfield Cup perhaps? The favourite Hire squibbed it again in a big field as it had in the Doncaster. Tie the Knot, by far the least talented of all Australian thoroughbreds to win over five million dollars in prize money, is still coming.

A year to this day, I turned sadly home from Paris, thus missing the world's greatest weight-for-age race, the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe. Run on the 'deepest' (heaviest) ground at Longchamps for two decades, the going put paid to the chances of the Godolphin (the operation of the Dubai sheiks) champion, Daylaami. Sportingly, it ran anyway. Montjeu won. But not this year: only nine runners went to the start—the smallest field since 1946. The victor was the top-drawer three-year-old Sinndar, who added to his wins in the English and Irish Derbies. Montjeu ran fourth.

Neither will be coming to Flemington in early November. Nor will the great but now retired stayer Kayf Tara, which was thrown into last year's Melbourne Cup with 58.5kg but scratched before the race. Its moderately performed travelling companion Central Park ran a close second to Cummings' seven-year-old gelding Rogan Josh; two second-rate mares dead-heated for third. So—bring on Arctic Owl, Mont Rocher and the rest. Let them emulate the Irish horse Vintage Crop (first, seventh and third in successive cups) and end the complacency about the quality of our racing that is bolstered by ever increasing, ever more ignorant carnival crowds.

—Peter Pierce

This month's contributors: **Margaret Simons** is a freelance journalist; **Andrew Hamilton** sj teaches at the United Faculty of Theology, Melbourne; **John Honner** is co-ordinator of mission and social policy at MacKillop Family Services. In 1990 he decided that our Richmond back lane (Eureka Street) was a good name for a magazine; **Shane Maloney**'s new novel, *The Big Ask*, has just been published by Text Publishing; **Peter Pierce**, Chair of Australian Literature and Head of the School of Humanities, James Cook University, is *Eureka Street*'s turf correspondent.

Two-way conversations

To celebrate a heap of Olympic gold and 100 glittering issues of *Eureka Street*, where could Summa turn this month but to a genuinely Aussie battler of a theological periodical, *Pacifica* (October, 2000)?

The issue discussed by Geoff Thompson is that broadly addressed by *Dominus Jesus*, the Vatican document discussed last month (October, pp12 &16), and recently criticised by Roman Cardinal Edward Cassidy as mistaken in tone and timing and as written by professors for professors.

As Cassidy hints and Thompson argues, what is at stake is the possibility of real conversation between people who differ. Religious dialogue is not primarily the province of professors working out of theory, but of monks and Christians living together through religious conflict, and finding that they understand their own faith the more deeply they enter the conversation.

Thompson poses a broad question correctly, asking if we hope to learn anything about God and Christ from the non-Christian world. If we cannot, then conversation would be pointless. If we can hope to learn, as he holds, then we must account for the traditional Christian belief that Jesus Christ is God's final word.

Thompson looks at three writers who take conversation seriously, beginning with the second-century writer, Justin Martyr. Justin claimed that the learned of his culture shared in the Wisdom of God, which is fully embodied in Jesus Christ. So, while outside of Christian faith there is truth, 'those who know Christ, know it all'. They have no compelling religious reason to engage with the non-Christian world.

Thompson then considers a United States theologian, George Lindbeck, who argues against the common assumption that all religions and beliefs represent in different forms a common experience of God. Lindbeck claims that each religion is unique, shapes its own distinctive experience and beliefs, and gives its own explanation of the world. But he also accepts that Jesus Christ is the uniquely privileged way to God, arguing finally that in Christ we shall come to all that is ultimately important, but that through other visions of the world we may find some illumination.

Thompson considers that in Justin's and Lindbeck's approaches, engagement with the world is ultimately unnecessary for faith. He endorses the approach of Hans Frei, who also taught in the United States and who claimed that in the Gospels Jesus Christ establishes his identity as Son of God through engagement with God as Father and with the large events of his day. We, too, can know Christ through the Gospels and through reflection in the church only through engagement with our world. Conversation with the non-Christian world is not an optional extra. It is essential for a living knowledge of Jesus Christ.

While I have over-simplified his subtle treatment of complex theologies, Thompson shows that if we are to speak about the unique claims of Jesus Christ, we must begin with a high estimation of the importance of conversation. He illustrates different ways of conceiving conversation that avoids the defensive assumption that one side will have nothing to learn from the other. ■

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At the university of Sydney

Notes on change and continuity. *For Myfanwy.*

HALF A CENTURY AGO, a young man took a tram from Enmore to Chippendale and enrolled in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Sydney. He was 17 years old and, by today's norms, something of an oddity: he had never been in love, nor tasted alcohol, nor missed Sunday Mass, nor eaten meat on a Friday, nor read a book on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*.

For that matter, the University of Sydney then was somewhat different from today's norm. It was the only university in New South Wales, then. In the whole university there were fewer than two dozen postgraduates pursuing PhDs, principally in the physical sciences. In the Faculty of Arts, the number of lecturers in the big departments, such as History, English or Philosophy, could be counted on the fingers of your hand. After World War II, university enrolment, boosted by ex-service people, had soared; now they were dropping again to more comfortable proportions. On the campus there was plenty of space—car drivers, a rare species, could park outside the Great Hall, or wherever they pleased.

Change, however, was on the way. A principal element of change was the Commonwealth scholarship which the Menzies Government had recently introduced. Those scholarships begin the modern history of Australian universities, for they opened them up to society at large and pointed towards today's maxi universities. Previously, in all of New South Wales there had been only 400 free bursary places and getting a tertiary education had been a restricted privilege. Now, however, the university would see a new population swelling its numbers and changing its ethos.

The new undergraduate from Enmore was part of this swelling population. His sister, already an Arts student, in

Orientation Week introduced him to the Newman Society, the Catholic society on campus. One of his first memories of the University of Sydney was a Newman hike one Sunday early in his first term. The young people he met there were similar to himself, products of Catholic schools. There, the religion they had absorbed with the air they breathed was disciplined, observant, dutiful, deferential to authority, fearful, guilty and sin-obsessed—the list is familiar from a lifetime's reading. Yes ... but their religion was also celebratory, colourful, comforting, heart-stirring and sacramental: it saw the impress of the divine underneath and behind the whole created world. Their world, like G.M. Hopkins', was indeed charged with the grandeur of God; it could indeed flame out ... turn but a stone and start a wing. In class each day at school, nevertheless, religion had been chiefly a matter of 'apologetics', the school subject which trained them in debating skills to defend every corner of the Catholic package, from transubstantiation and the Trinity to the Renaissance papacy or the Inquisition. (When the Enmore undergraduate went into the Army, for his national service, he found Protestant Christians amazed at the Catholics' ability, eagerness even, to get into arguments about the existence of God or the resurrection of Jesus.) In the schools Catholicism was taught as a set of intellectual propositions, rather than as a poem which invited and sustained heartstir.

So it was no surprise to find the Newman Society spending much of its energies in organising public talks on those aspects of the faith thought to be under challenge at the university: the infallibility of the pope, for example, or the sinfulness of abortion and contraception. Some intellectual champion, usually a priest, would be brought in to speak; a lecture hall would be booked for a lunch time; and society members would hand out dodgers at the university gates on the morning of the talk. At lunch time the Newmans would be in the lecture hall to barrack for their champion and cheer as he rebutted questioners. It was like being at a prize fight—one at which you had fixed the referee. For behind the display of apologetics was a belief that we were the one true church, which had all the answers, if only you could lay your hand on the relevant papal encyclical.

A SIMILAR explanation might be found for the existence of a Catholic political machine at the university then. Tales of bubble-gum politics are not worth much space, although they may have had unintended consequences which make them notable. This story begins with a curate in a nearby parish who used to say Mass at the Catholic women's college, Sancta Sophia. Each week the girls would leave on his breakfast table a copy of the student newspaper, *Honi Soit*. The priest, who had had no contact with universities before this, was flabbergasted by what he read: it seemed to him blasphemous, atheistic, raunchy

and possibly Communistic. So he asked the Sancta undergraduates to recruit some male students and together they initiated a political machine housed within the secretive Santamaria political movement. By the time the 17-year-old turned up from Enmore, not only was *Honi Soit* edited by a Catholic, but there were so many Catholics on the Student Representative Council that at SRC Friday dinners an announcement was regularly made, 'There's either fish or chicken; but the fish is for the Catholics.' Overall, an acute observer might conclude that Catholics at the University of Sydney acted as if they were walking through unfriendly territory, which might be sown with land mines.

Yet there were unintended consequences of such political activism. More than they realised perhaps, those young Catholics had come from a small, tight, limited world. Everyone knows that the word 'ghetto' has a precise historical meaning; to use the word loosely can be a disservice to history. Nevertheless, one can say that the young Catholics of those years displayed a ghetto mentality, in that they mixed with their own, read their own, treasured their own and favoured their own; and that in time their political activism would erase the ghetto mentality, replacing it with an openness which gave them new friends, new thought patterns and new ranges of experience. It was as if previously they had spoken a foreign language; now they joined in the Australian conversation.

In any case, change was already in the air. On that first Newman hike, and at subsequent Newman picnics and socials, the 17-year-old had noticed an older Arts student, a priest with an open smiling face, high intellectual forehead, athletic physique and an engaging, sympathetic manner. Later in the same year, at the annual Newman dinner, Cardinal Gilroy's auxiliary bishop, the historian Dr Eris O'Brien, would announce that this priest, Roger Irving Pryke, was to be the first full-time chaplain to the Newman Society. (Typically, Gilroy, a mean man, did not provide any funding; as Father Pryke gradually realised—so fêtes had to be organised.) The Newman Society had been a service organisation, providing daily rosary in a classroom, social events, those apologetical lectures and occasional weekend camps outside Sydney. Now, with Roger Pryke as chaplain, it became something else: a formational body. Put simply, it would explore new ways of being an Australian Catholic. A decade before the event, it would try out the themes and meanings which historians associate with the Second Vatican Council (1962–65). So that if you look at the University of Sydney in those days, you can discern, already dawning, the new light which was to break on the church in the Second Vatican Council.

> Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
> But to be young was very heaven!

A single-sentence summation of Vatican II might say that it brought the church out of the Middle Ages and tried to find a place for it in modern times. A lengthier description of Vatican II would point to some of its outcomes: the Bible placed at the centre of Catholic liturgy, theology and spirituality; Catholic worship 'in a language understanded of the people' (to borrow a phrase from Anglicans); the love of God replacing the fear of God as the dynamic of moral choice; a morality of striving for justice and mercy rather than a morality of guilt; a recognition of the rights of conscience and religious freedom; acknowledging the brotherliness of other churches and the authenticity of other intellectual traditions; pluralism inside the church; the freeing of lay intelligence and the slow erosion of clerical control systems; and a laity who set their own agenda. These are observable outcomes of the Vatican II era; and there they are, at the University of Sydney, in the decade before the Vatican Council actually met.

THE MEANS Roger Pryke used to change the Newman Society from a service organisation into a formational community were not novel. They came from Joseph Cardijn's *Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne*—the JOC, or Young Christian Worker movement in Belgium and France, also known as the Jocists. People of similar interests, such as those in the same faculty, met in a small group to become agents of change. Their meetings began with discussion of a Gospel passage which each member had already prepared and meditated. Thus, over time, their spirituality came to be biblically based as they encountered personally the Christ of the Gospels. Next, in the Cardijn Jocist pattern, group members came to grips with the real life of their milieu or environment ... What was it like? What could it be like in, for instance, God's plan? And what could they do about it? It is difficult to convey the actuality of these enquiries into the milieu; for you can readily make them sound priggish or judgmental. In reality, these undergraduates were learning to take responsibility for their own lives, both as Christians and as university people. The groups leached out any latent proselytism or impulse to colonise the university; instead, they came to love the university and to want to serve it as intellectuals.

While this was going ahead, they were thinking seriously about Christian belief. Thus, in a paper on the Trinity, John T. Woodward reported:

> The emphasis of Sydney University Newman Society thought, in recent years, has been on three of the great doctrines of Christianity: the Incarnation, the Kingship of Christ and the Mystical Body. Our aim has been to form an apostolic ideology appropriate to the nature of the University and the nature of the Church.

So these lay people took responsibility for their lives as lay Christians. As Robert Vermeesch told a Newman camp, 'the layman is not simply the passive object of the clergy's ministry'. Behind Vermeesch's remark sat a recognition that lay people were not agents of a clerical mission or ministry; there was, rather, a genuine lay vocation as genuine as any clerical vocation. This perception was sharpened by a remarkable English layman who turned up one day at a Newman meeting. John Kenelm Dormer was a member of one of those old English Catholic families you read about in Evelyn Waugh. Of independent means—his mother's father had founded Toohey's brewery in Sydney—he had led a restless life since serving as a captain in the war against Hitler. Somehow he had made contact with the English version of Cardijn's Jocist movement, to which he had responded enthusiastically. 'I knew,' he used to say, 'that if the church were true, something like this must exist.' In Sydney he became a great encourager of the new Catholics. It wasn't so much what John Dormer said that made a

difference; rather, it was his capacity to listen and sympathise with them as they explored these novel relationships with church and university in night-long sessions in Sydney's companionable coffee shops.

This sense of a genuine lay vocation freed and energised a whole generation of Catholics, as they insisted that all were responsible for the mission of the church. Thus they anticipated the ecclesiology of Vatican II. They rejected a view of the church which promoted a churchmanship of two tiers: the directing/governing/owning level, the hierarchs; and the accepting/obeying/directed level, the laity. The bishops owned the church and only they, in concert with Roman authorities, would decide what was to be done. For a good example of such hierarchism, see Cardinal Gilroy's pastoral letter for Advent 1959, in preparation for the Vatican Council. The cardinal gave a history of past church councils but seemed to have no idea why a council might be needed in the middle of the 20th century. In this pastoral letter the only role for the laity was prayer. There was nothing about the laity reading, or discussing, or going to seminars, or contributing any ideas to the council's agenda. Such was not the role of the laity in his theology. About this time, the cardinal told one of his seminarians that he expected that the Council would be all over within a few weeks; after all, he said, the Roman Curia knew what was needed and they would simply tell the bishops what to do. By contrast with such hierarchism, the new-style Catholics saw their church not as a pyramid, but as a community of believers, a people, a family, a circle. We are all grown-up Christians here, they said.

The theologian who spoke most closely to the expectations of the Newman society Catholics was a French Dominican who is now largely forgotten, Yves Congar. From an early age, Congar had seen that the critical theological question for his time was the question of the church; and he dedicated his life to exploring that question, its history and its changing cultural forms, century by century. To him the word 'church' did not mean, as it often does in common speech, only the clergy; he gave it back its richer historical meaning, the people of God. Congar's *Lay People in the Church*, published in English in 1953, was seized on by his generation as the book which made sense of their own lives. It was a key text for that generation, the one, more than any other, which prepared them for what was to come. This note of the future was struck by Pope John Paul II when he made Congar a cardinal a few months before his death, in 1995. Because his theology aimed at the future, said the citation, it needed courage to keep working at it. Here the Pope may have been thinking of the persecution Congar suffered. In 1954 the Vatican had forbidden him to teach, to lecture or to publish. He was sent into exile, first to the Dominican biblical school at Jerusalem (whose founder, M.J. Lagrange, had also been under a Vatican ban); then to Cambridge, where the local Dominican superior made life difficult for him. Well, it is an iron law of church history that those who would make a significant contribution must pay for it in blood.

This season of hope in the life of the church was also a time of change in Australian journalism. The year 1958 saw the appearance of Tom Fitzgerald's *Nation* and Donald Horne's *The Observer*, both of which were to have a profound effect on mainstream journalism. Both magazines were interested in religion, especially Catholicism, so that church historians neglect them at their peril. Donald Horne's recent book of memoirs, *Into the Open*, confirms what one had previously guessed at: that he thought Catholics had been left out of the national conversation and, through *The Observer*, he intended to include them in. He would draw his conversationalists, not from the hierarchs, but from the new university Catholics. On their part, finding it difficult to get a fair go in the diocesan papers or magazines run by religious orders, they had turned to these new journals to make their voices heard.

In all of this, Roger Pryke was not silent. Although other voices would be heard among Sydney Catholics, principally from Vincent Buckley's circle at Melbourne University (for a time the two Newman Societies were symbiotic),

Father Pryke continued his central role as chaplain to the Newmans over this decade. A large part of his contribution was his leadership on worship. As a phenomenon of church life, the liturgical movement had spanned the 20th century and Roger Pryke was a tireless activist. The core idea of the liturgical movement is that liturgy is neither a duty to be observed nor a private devotion; it is a public prayer offered together by the community of Christians. So Pryke set his altar in the middle of the circle and encouraged students to participate in dialogue Masses offered, not just by the priest, but by everyone. In time they would come to see that the prayer of all should use the language of all—in a memoir, one of Pryke's collaborators, Richard Connolly, records that the first person he heard arguing for an English-language Mass, at a sort of senior Newman discussion group, was another Pryke collaborator, James McAuley. English in the Mass was a signifier of a deeper shift in meaning; to the Mass as an authentic communal prayer.

I said above that one of the other outcomes of Vatican II was 'the love of God replacing the fear of God as the dynamic of moral choice; and a morality of striving for justice and mercy rather than a morality of guilt'. You will find no evidence for that sort of thing in the moral theology columns of the clergy's trade journal, the *Australasian Catholic Record*, until long after the Council. But at the University of Sydney? Contemporary evidence of moral formation is hard to find, since much of it is necessarily done in private. Yet in the lives of Newman Society members, then and subsequently, guilt and fear are noticeably absent; and dedication to social justice as a religious imperative is a strong presence. One rare piece of evidence is an article by Roger Pryke, 'An Examination of conscience for Students', in the *Newman Review* (February 1958). It is a description of the 'states of soul' (rather than 'sins') that might keep one from God. A quotation from the introduction conveys its flavour:

> Our focus should constantly be on Christ, while regularly examining our lives to see where we fail Him—but do not let us become spiritual introverts, picking away at our souls like religious woodpeckers. We centre on Christ, to know Him, love Him, serve and imitate Him.

Evidence of another kind can be found in contemporary Newman Society songbooks. Evanescent roneoed productions, these are a valuable historical archive for they open a window on to the mentality of the students who sang these songs. From this evidence a historian may conclude that, far from being fearful and guilt-ridden, these Newman songsters were joyful and happy Catholics—even if their sense of humour could prove too jocular for conservative clergyman. Young they might be, but their Catholicism was already grown-up.

Perhaps the aspect of this story a historian would find most significant is the way the Newman Society groups took on the central vocation of a university as traditionally conceived, namely the disinterested pursuit of truth. Again and again, in their published talks and articles, Roger Pryke and Newman Society leaders rejected any suggestion that they should be spin doctors for Catholic power structures, or proselytisers, or colonisers. Insistently they repeated that their call was to love the university and university values. So they came to acknowledge the brotherliness of other churches and the authenticity of other intellectual traditions. When Hugh Gough, the Anglican Archbishop of Sydney, made his celebrated attack on the university's philosophy department as an anti-Christian centre—he drew his firepower from a pamphlet emanating from the Aquinas Academy, a Thomist night school attached to St Patrick's Church in the city—it was noticeable how Newman Society leaders, including Pryke, defended the department's rights. Here was an ecumenism of the human mind and spirit wider than mere church ecumenism. It pointed the way towards today's Catholic pluralism.

Well, the 17-year-old lived through all this, and went elsewhere, and got a life (of a sort). And always in his heart he kept true to the motto of his first university, *Sidere mens eadem mutato* ('the same outlook under a different sky'). Whatever his location, he kept faith with the poem of a grown-up Catholicism he had learned to love in the happiest years of his life.■

Edmund Campion teaches at the Catholic Institute of Sydney.

Between the

Sri Lanka's civil war has been raging for almost 20 years with no resolution in sight. 60,000 people have died in the conflict between the military, fighting under the national flag with its lion, and the rebel Tigers of Tamil Eelam. **Jon Greenaway** reports from an island where strife is so much the way of life that Buddhist monks counsel war and guerrilla fighters take time out to talk about the cricket.

Below left: the Venerable Hadigalle Wimalasara, photographed in Colombo. Centre: Sri Lankan soldiers in Jaffna's abandoned railway station, unused for more than a decade. Right: Soldiers and mortars protecting Sri Lankan military barracks near Palali airport. Photographs this and following pages by Jon Greenaway.

lion and the tiger

THE VENERABLE Hadigalle Wimalasara sits on a wicker chair behind a temple in a Colombo suburb, under the shade of palm trees that lean at lazy angles.

He is explaining why he and other Buddhist clergy have opposed the new constitution put forward by the People's Alliance Government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga. 'This new constitution would divide the country into eight regions and we reject this because the people should be united not divided,' he says.

Wimalasara rejects government claims that the new constitution (which, in the event, failed to pass through the national assembly) would clear the path to peace. Attempts have been made before, he argues, to deliver some level of autonomy to Sri Lanka's Tamil minority. But the war—which since 1983 has been fought as both an open conflict and an insurgency by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)—has not been brought to an end.

Wimalasara speaks in a quiet, clear voice that impresses his argument on the listener partly because of the effort needed to hear. He is a young man with a gaunt but open face and an easy,

purposeful smile. I ask him if continuing the war is the only way to bring peace to Sri Lanka. He answers this question as steadily as he had all the others.

'If the solution is war then it must be war.'

In early August, Wimalasara sat on a podium erected in central Colombo and refused food and water in protest against the new constitution then being debated in the assembly. Other monks made their point by assembling outside the parliament building itself, backed by crowds of Sinhalese opposed to any devolution of power to the regions. Wimalasara says he was prepared to fast until death. With the deferral of the vote after three days, he was taken to hospital and put on a saline drip. Asked whether he would be prepared to repeat his protest if devolution comes before parliament again, he replies, 'Of course.'

Sri Lanka is at a turning point in a conflict that has cost more than 60,000 lives, depopulated the northern and eastern regions where it has been fought, and made a pauper of the Sri Lankan economy. Not knowing where to turn, voters in the October 10 parliamentary elections, following weeks of pre-election violence and amid ballot irregularities, delivered more uncertainty. The People's Alliance won more seats than the UNP opposition, but lost the one-seat majority of the old parliament and now require the support of minority parties. Yet perhaps news of the death of Sirima Bandaranaike, the President's mother, upon returning from casting her ballot early on the morning of the poll, prevented a worse result for the government. The passing of the three-times prime minister, whose most recent stint only concluded in August, further entwined the fate of the current President and her family with that of the country.

The prospect of a federalised Sri Lanka has alarmed the majority Sinhalese population. Sri Lankan Tamils, who claim a centuries-old lineage on the island, are the largest minority (12 per cent of the island's 19 million). The other significant minorities are the Tamils in the south and the Muslims, both at seven per cent each. The southern Tamils, brought over by the British to work on tea plantations, have little in common with the established Tamil community and are certainly less nationalistic. The Sinhalese have the overwhelming numbers on the island yet still look nervously across the narrow Palk Strait at the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, with its population of 55 million. They have been described more than once as a majority with a minority complex.

Buddhism thrives in Sri Lanka. And, according to Dr Jehan Perera from the National Peace Council of Sri Lanka, a politicised and nationalistic clergy want an intermingling of temple and state.

'The Buddhist monks—right from the mid-'50s when proposals of a federal arrangement were first discussed—have opposed it. [In their mind] any weakening of the central state is a weakening of Buddhism in this country.'

President Kumaratunga's father, Prime Minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, was shot dead by a Buddhist monk in 1959 after he had attempted to appease Sri Lankan Tamil aspirations. Three years earlier Bandaranaike had upped tensions by making Sinhala the only official language of Ceylon (as Sri Lanka was then known). One suspects he would understand the difficulties currently being faced by his daughter.

Opposition to the course that President Kumaratunga wishes to plot for Sri Lanka has seen a resurgence of Sinhalese nationalism. While the government was looking to produce a consensus with the main opposition and Tamil political parties earlier in the year, Sihala Urumaya (Sinhalese Heritage) was formed. Its president, S.L. Gunasakara, believes that instead of bringing Sri Lanka closer to peace, the government's efforts will undermine the integrity of the nation.

'The Sinhalese are a very small race. The Tamils are a very large race, well over 100 million scattered all over the world, yet they have no state. A small and impoverished people, the Sinhalese have a sovereign state and that is Sri Lanka.'

The government's current initiative differs from previous attempts to give control to the regions, because it aims to enshrine the devolution of power in the constitution. Gunasakara argues that this would also deliver to the Tamil Tigers what they want: a separate state.

Gunasakara believes that the only solution is a total war that would crush the Tigers once and for all. Sihala Urumaya is not a party of alienated extremists. It is made up of mainstream professionals. Gunasakara, a successful commercial lawyer, recruited academics, a retired General and a former Governor of the Central Bank for the 10 October parliamentary elections. With Buddhist clergy, they bolster public resistance to conceding ground to Tamil nationalists.

National Peace Council's Dr Perera regards the government's failure to get the necessary two-thirds majority in parliament (the constitutional bill was withdrawn before it could be brought to a vote the government knew it would lose) as a lost opportunity. Yet he also believes a precedent has been set that could see the beginning of the end of Sri Lanka's troubles.

'What has happened in the last several months is unique in our political history. For the first time the opposition co-operated with the government in a political reform process related to the ethnic conflict.'

Compromise is rare in this polarised nation. And the most uncompromising player in Sri Lanka is Velupillai Prabakharan, the 45-year-old undisputed leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Prabakharan leads a band of 5000 committed (and indoctrinated) guerrillas, in a fight for an independent Tamil homeland. With financial support from the Tamil diaspora, he has kept the fight going against a demoralised military (its desertion rate is 20 per cent) that outnumbers the Tigers 13 to 1.

In 1998 I travelled to the east of Sri Lanka from Colombo, along the island's narrow roads and through the many checkpoints that Tamils claim are the scene of their daily harassment. Trincomalee and Batticoloa, the two biggest towns on the east coast, are claimed by the LTTE as falling within their disputed state, Eelam.

Coming through Batticoloa, our minibus slowed to a crawl as we negotiated the increasingly frequent guard posts. While a Tamil Jesuit father explained my business to police and soldiers, the Tamil and Muslim population going about their daily business were lined up at checkpoints. Their handbags were upended on tables, pockets were turned inside out and the lining searched, and bicycle seats were inspected for objects hidden in the padding. We trans-

ferred to a three-wheeler *bajaj* and then on to a lagoon ferry. Halfway across, someone told me, in a 'by the way' tone of voice, that we were in LTTE territory.

The villages on the other side lacked the bustle of the town and the omnipresence of security forces. I'd grown used to the symbols of war, and their sudden disappearance was unsettling. Our *bajaj* driver fidgeted constantly as we drove along a dirt road past abandoned houses. From our left a motorcycle appeared—man driving, woman riding pillion. They kept pace with the *bajaj* for a few moments, peering at us before they sped away. The woman had an automatic rifle slung over her shoulder.

That evening I was taken to a house bristling with radio and television recording equipment. Four young men were busy splicing together a video that showed footage of recent raids, both on land and sea, against Sri Lankan forces. Most of what we saw of the Tamil Tigers in action served as a backdrop to a band of musicians and singers from India playing a song trumpeting Tamil nationalism. When finished, it was to be sent to expatriate Tamils who contribute to LTTE coffers.

Afterwards we sat on the porch. I drank Fanta out of a bottle while they sipped black, unsweetened tea—the only beverage they were allowed—and we talked a little about cricket. That night a raid on an army garrison north of Batticoloa inflicted injuries on government troops, but the Tigers did not achieve their goal of capturing weapons and ammunition.

Open hostilities between the military and the Tamil Tigers began in 1983. They were sparked by the killing of 13 soldiers by Tamil guerrillas, and by the Sinhalese anti-Tamil riots that followed, after which 100,000 Tamils fled to southern India as refugees. Since then the Tigers' most potent weapon—and the measure of their zeal—has been the suicide bomber. The LTTE usually choose young girls and boys, because more explosives can be strapped to their thin frames without a telltale bulge appearing. After they die, their portraits join those of other martyrs at the LTTE headquarters in the Wanni, the Tigers' traditional forest stronghold. In June, a minister was killed, and in September, a hospital was attacked in a failed attempt to assassinate another

Tiger girl

SHE IS 14 YEARS OLD, she knows how to fire a semi-automatic assault rifle, throw grenades and what a cyanide pill is for.

Arumugam Malar is a fighter with the Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam. She was caught by government forces on the Jaffna peninsula in July. LTTE cadres are supplied with death pills (they wear them on their necks) so that the Sri Lankan military cannot interrogate them. 'If I had one when I was captured I would have swallowed it,' says Arumugam.

Shifting in her plastic seat underneath a mango tree, Arumugam looks part shy girl in her early teens, with averted eyes and a charming smile, and part rebel guerrilla reluctant to talk about what she knows. She has been with the LTTE since the age of seven, so she probably knows a lot.

'An older girl came to the house one day and told my sister who was looking after me that she would take me shopping, but instead she took me to the Tigers,' she explains through a military interpreter. Arumugam's father was dead and her mother was in hospital at the time. She was told later that her uncle had asked about her among the LTTE. They told him they had her. She has not seen or had contact with her family since.

She describes an intensive daily routine for the 48 girls and women in her unit: marching drills, weapons-handling and radio communications begin at 4.30am and go on through the heat of the day. There can be an additional hour's sentry duty at night, watching over their thatch-roofed hideout.

Arumugam was caught on the Jaffna front line after being wounded in her right hip by a mortar. 'Before then I had no battle experience,' she says in a quiet, unemotional voice. But there are other scars on her arms to suggest that she had seen the war up close before then. 'We lived as brothers and sisters and we all had the intention to fight,' she adds.

Asked if she thought it wrong that a girl of her age should be fighting a war, she refuses to answer. She doesn't answer again when asked if she ever had any toys, but allows herself a little chuckle and looks at her feet. She also equivocates about whether she would prefer to be where she is or back in the jungle with her former comrades. As she talks, a chameleon lies pressed against the trunk of the mango tree above her head, twirling its eyes at the strange gathering of cameramen, reporters, soldiers and prisoner below. After a while it makes a break for it, scuttling down the dirt road in between two destroyed houses.

At one point Arumugam says that the soldiers who captured her gave her a beating, but she is cut short by the translator.

The government claims that the drafting of child soldiers is a measure of how desperate the LTTE are to reclaim Jaffna. If they do capture Jaffna once again, the LTTE are expected to declare the existence of Eelam for the first time. ■

member of parliament. Six people were killed and many others wounded. And last December, 17 people died and President Kumaratunga lost her right eye when a girl suicide bomber triggered a vest of explosives she wore to a rally a few days before the Presidential elections.

'I don't think the passage of the bill itself would have resulted in the escalation or de-escalation of the conflict. The conflict has a life of its own,' says Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, Lakshman Kadirgamar, from within his department's heavily guarded building. 'And I'll tell you why it has a life all of its own. It is because the gentleman who leads the LTTE has only one obsession in mind: to achieve a separate state by force of arms.

'It is absolutely unspeakable the things that they have done. Murdering children in large numbers, young Buddhist monks, pregnant women ... They have systematically eliminated almost the entire democratic leadership of the Tamil people.'

The LTTE's leader, Prabakharan, has been ruthless in his pursuit of Tamil leaders who have opted for a negotiated resolution. On 29 July last year, a suicide bomber threw himself at a car travelling along Kynsey Road, Borella (a fashionable Colombo suburb), incinerating the occupants. One of them was Dr Neelan Thiruchelvam, a universally admired constitutional expert and parliamentarian for the moderate Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) party, the largest Tamil party in parliament. Thiruchelvam had played a prominent role in the drafting of the constitutional reform package that was to be introduced to parliament the following week. The TULF party now opposes the package, saying it does not do enough and is useless without direct negotiations with the LTTE.

Damalingam Sidhathan knows LTTE leader Velupillai Prabakharan well. Before he entered parliament, Sidhathan's organisation, the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam, was one of many militant groups associated with LTTE in armed resistance against Colombo. In the late 1970s, Sidhathan established an office for the Tamil resistance in London, and it is now the Tigers' international headquarters.

'Most of the Tamil parties today were one-time militant groups. Even though we started for a separate state, our conviction cannot match his,' remarks Sidhathan. 'When the Indians put the pressure on in 1987, only he had the courage to fight the Indian might.'

BP-sponsored security post in central Colombo in the financial district, near the Hilton Hotel.

Sidhathan concedes that the Tigers emerged from four years of attempted Indian peacemaking in 1991 with enhanced popularity. 'The people saw him resisting, saw him being consistent on the cause of a separate state. Some people call it intransigence; I call it dedication. But having said that, I believe it is not going to work.'

In May 1991, Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated by a Tamil suicide bomber, reportedly because the LTTE feared that, if returned to power, Gandhi would make a full-scale effort to wipe them out. That, and the LTTE's unilateral withdrawal from the only direct peace talks ever held with the Sri Lankan government, in 1995, has turned international opinion against the Tigers. They have been blacklisted by the US since 1997, and in July Britain passed a law specifically prohibiting the activities of groups linked to terrorism within its borders. Other countries—Australia included—are set to follow.

I met Damalingam Sidhathan in a hotel lobby on his suggestion, because he was afraid that if I went to his office it would 'cause trouble'. He always travels with protection and is never regular in his movements. He has lived like this since 1980.

Even more security conscious is Douglas Devananda, of the Eelam People's Democratic Party, whose electorate lies in the war-torn Jaffna peninsula. Devananda wears a bullet-proof vest under his shirt and is surrounded by half a dozen large and very twitchy bodyguards armed with semi-automatic rifles. The Tigers have tried to blow up his home in Colombo. In 1998 he was badly beaten by captured LTTE cadres while he was visiting a jail south of Colombo.

'The LTTE does not like democracy,' Devananda says. 'We are the main alternative party and if they destroy us then they can push the others out. Prabakharan cannot survive in a political set-up. He is fighting for his own piece of land so he can be dictator.'

Both Sidhathan and Devananda need to deliver something to their constituents from the drawn-out negotiations in which they have been involved. If they cannot win concessions from the central government over crucial issues such as language, land ownership and federalism enshrined in the constitution, then the decade they have spent seeking a political resolution will have been in vain.

'The Sinhala nationalists are making us weaker day by day,' Sidhathan says. 'Our survival depends on the political process.

'By continuing the war they are destroying our Tamil community. Nearly 800,000 Tamils have left these shores for the UK, Canada, America and Australia.'

Since the breakdown of peace talks with the LTTE in 1995, President Kumaratunga's government has pursued a strategy of alienating the Tigers' potential support in the Tamil communities of the

north and east. 'The vast majority of the Tamils, whether they live here or live abroad, want to see a peaceful solution,' says Foreign Minister Kadirgamar. 'As the war goes on, the point of a political solution being offered to the Tamil people for the first time ever is approaching. The Tamil people can be left in no doubt that this government intends to do everything it possibly can to have this bill passed and thereby give the Tamil minority ... certain fundamental safeguards enshrined in the constitution.

'The support of the people on whose behalf a group claims to be fighting is very important. And if you find that support weakening, not so much in terms of numbers but in the sense of the enthusiasm for the cause and the fund-raising directed towards it [then they are in trouble].'

In August this year, we fly into Jaffna on a military transport plane—the first group of journalists to visit the besieged township since the LTTE offensive a few months before. From this vantage point the threat posed by the LTTE is more obvious than it is down amid the pill boxes and checkpoints that line Colombo's streets.

Charting a course up the west coast of the island, we veer left and out to sea to avoid LTTE fire. Coming in to land at Palali airport, 15 kilometres north of Jaffna town and within the reach of Tamil Tiger weaponry, the transport drops to 200 metres—the low altitude makes it difficult for shoulder-launched anti-aircraft missiles to lock on to target. Personnel and supplies are pushed off the plane. The propellers don't stop turning. A helicopter gun ship flies over and around the airport before the ageing Antonov turns back on to the runway and takes off for Colombo.

In April the LTTE captured Elephant Pass, a strategic causeway the width of a football field that links the peninsula to the south. They then embarked on a full-frontal assault of government positions for the first time in the conflict. They shunted the front line from the northern edge of the Wanni up to the eastern outskirts of Jaffna itself. Government forces stopped them in June by employing newly purchased MiG-27 jet fighters from the Ukraine and a fleet of truck-mounted rocket launchers from Pakistan. They financed the big guns by raising military spending by US$358 million, taking the defence budget up to one third of Sri Lankan GDP.

A pair of military liaison officers escort us to the barracks next to the airport. We can hear artillery fire and the intermittent thud of incoming and outgoing mortar. The elder of the two officers, a Colonel from the medical corps whose initials spell W.A.R., seems slightly mystified at our reasons for being there. He gives us the official army line on the woe caused by 'Mr Prabakharan'. His colleague, a Captain in the media relations department, is a year younger than I am. His left leg is paralysed—a knee wound. He understands what we want and indicates as much with a discreet smile and circular movement of the head.

A Tamil being searched at the gate of an outer Colombo police station.

The following day, as we drive in to Jaffna, I notice a small scar on his right arm, no longer than a 50 cent piece. 'I got that from the bomb that nearly killed the President last year,' he says. 'I was standing on the podium and all I remember is a girl jumping the barricade and raising her arm like this'—his right arm reaches to the roof of the truck.

'Their interest is Jaffna. There is no doubt about that, because for them if there is no Jaffna, there is no state,' Major General Anton Wijendra says from within his heavily fortified command post. General Wijendra, with approximately 30,000 troops under his command, took control of the Jaffna forces at the beginning of August. He is the fourth Jaffna commander in the last 12 months and the ninth in three years. Two of his predecessors were assassinated by the LTTE. He chooses his words carefully and often finishes his sentences with a nervous laugh that tails off into a sigh.

'The biggest difficulty in fighting them is that they do not present in large numbers,' Wijendra says. 'Whatever they do, they do it quickly then scatter. They have sophisticated communications, encoding equipment, and they have a supply route from the eastern coast where they have a number of ships, under different flags, able to transport goods and weapons.'

Working from intelligence the military has gathered, General Wijendra expects an assault on Jaffna before the end of the year. He will not be drawn on whether the government plans to counter-attack before then. (They did so ten days after my visit.)

The road into Jaffna from the airport and command base is lined with partially destroyed houses. The few that are occupied are hidden behind slanting piles of sandbags. There are soldiers stationed at regular intervals and at crossroads all the way into Jaffna. The road is not used at night. A 7pm–6am curfew is in place in the government's half of the peninsula. In the morning it takes three hours to check for mines laid by LTTE infiltrators during the night.

But despite the destruction of the last decade and the sound of the sporadic

fighting that many believe heralds an impending onslaught, there is an air of activity and industry about Jaffna's main street. The people go about their business seemingly oblivious—that is until you speak with the vendors selling their goods at inflated prices, each one of them saying they want peace without describing what kind they wish for. The top floors of most buildings have been blown away. Saucer-shaped bullet holes pockmark the masonry.

The army is confident that extra firepower will preserve its hold on the town. However, United Nations representatives and aid groups have been communicating more regularly with the LTTE in recent months in case Jaffna falls into their hands. One NGO representative, who requested anonymity, said that since May his organisation had been in regular radio contact with the LTTE.

'We monitor their radio and traditionally they forewarn the local population to move two or three days before they launch an attack,' the representative said. 'That's when we will make our decision whether to go or stay.'

But the other residents of Jaffna peninsula do not have the luxury of contemplating a retreat to safety. The only way in or out is via irregular ferry movements or by crossing over the front line into LTTE-held territory. Around 1500 to 2000 civilians travel by boat each week. There is a waiting list of 30,000 for a berth heading south.

The total population of Jaffna and the surrounding peninsula is 500,000. It is almost exclusively Tamil owing to campaigns of ethnic cleansing of Sinhalese and Muslims conducted by the LTTE. About one-third of that population has been displaced by the LTTE's advance and the reciprocating government bombardments. Some 20,000 are housed in makeshift refugee camps.

If and when the attack comes, most people will shift to the western half of the peninsula and hope that the battle is fought only around military positions and the air and sea ports to the north. Meanwhile, those already in the government-run camps are having to make do with inadequate support.

'In their heart of hearts people want an end to this war, but there is also some sympathy for the Tigers because they express the desire of the Tamil people for self-determination,' a spokesman for a Catholic aid group in Jaffna told me.

Kingsley Rajanayagam, a regional manager for a Sri Lankan bank, is one such sympathiser. He argues that the Tamil community is pushed into supporting LTTE because of constant discrimination at the hands of Sinhalese authorities, particularly under emergency regulations in place since April.

'The harassment of Tamils in Colombo is very severe,' he says. 'I have just come back from three months in Colombo where I was on business and three times I had to spend a day at a police station having my permit renewed. As a Tamil you are subjected to constant checking.'

Rajanayagam was in Jaffna prior to 1995, during the period when the LTTE had control.

'Law and order was well kept in those days. Sure, they extracted taxes, there is no doubt about that, but we lived in peace. When they retreated before the government advance, they took us with them. I went to the Wanni and ran the bank from a *cadjan* (thatch) hut during the day and slept in an oil-cloth tent under a mango tree at night.'

'We are used to a type of gypsy life for 10 years now,' Rajanayagam adds. 'But the speed with which people are leaving—I think in the near future there will be nobody left in Jaffna.'

Rajanayagam concedes that since the army took full control of Jaffna in 1996 the treatment of Tamils has been better than it was in the past. But Tamils remain bitter about the brutalities, killings and disappearances that the Sri Lankan army—almost entirely Sinhalese—has perpetrated. Only in the last few years has any attempt been made to bring them to account. And even now there has only been one conviction—of a handful of lowly ranked soldiers for the murder and rape of a Tamil schoolgirl.

Last year, one of the convicted men spoke from the dock about the existence of a mass grave at salt mines near the town of Chemmani. His revelations shocked the Sinhalese community, the majority of whom had been unaware of or had not believed allegations of atrocities committed by the armed forces.

When government forces pushed the LTTE back to the Wanni in 1995–96, a campaign was launched to purge the newly captured territory of suspected Tiger operatives and sympathisers. Nearly 600 people were picked up: they were taken from their homes, from school and off the street. They were never seen again.

Prior to going to Jaffna, the recently appointed head of Sri Lanka's armed forces, Major General Lionel Balagalle, spoke at length of the military's efforts to improve its human rights record.

'We have had our excesses in the field of human rights. We have had disappearances to a large extent ... We have had excesses committed by the security forces.'

General Balagalle understands the tactical point to being more humane.

'The purpose of this exercise [stopping human rights violations] was to win the hearts and minds. Secondly was accountability. In the long run we have benefited from treating the public or the suspects in custody properly.'

Jaffna's residents are, by and large, more exhausted than partisan about their uncertain future. They fear both the government and the LTTE—caught 'between the Lion and the Tiger' as one Tamil politician put it—and the consequences of more fighting.

In Colombo the Hilton Hotel stands tall among a clutch of buildings in the business, financial and administrative heart of Sri Lanka. As I wait in the foyer for hotel staff to retrieve some bags, a jazz band plays and walk-in stores around the perimeter sell gems and luxury goods. It could be any hotel in any capital city. But then the sound of hammering and drilling starts—the final touches to repairs made necessary after the massive bombing of the nearby Central Bank three years before. A truck bomb blew the Bank apart. Tamil Tiger guerrillas fought street battles with security forces. Eighteen people were killed and 105 wounded.

To pass the time, the concierge asks politely where we have travelled from and is surprised by the answer. He asks, since I had seen the worst of it, whether there will be an end to the violence soon. I reply that I cannot say.

He nods a couple of times before answering, 'I suppose if there was an easy solution it would have been found by now.'

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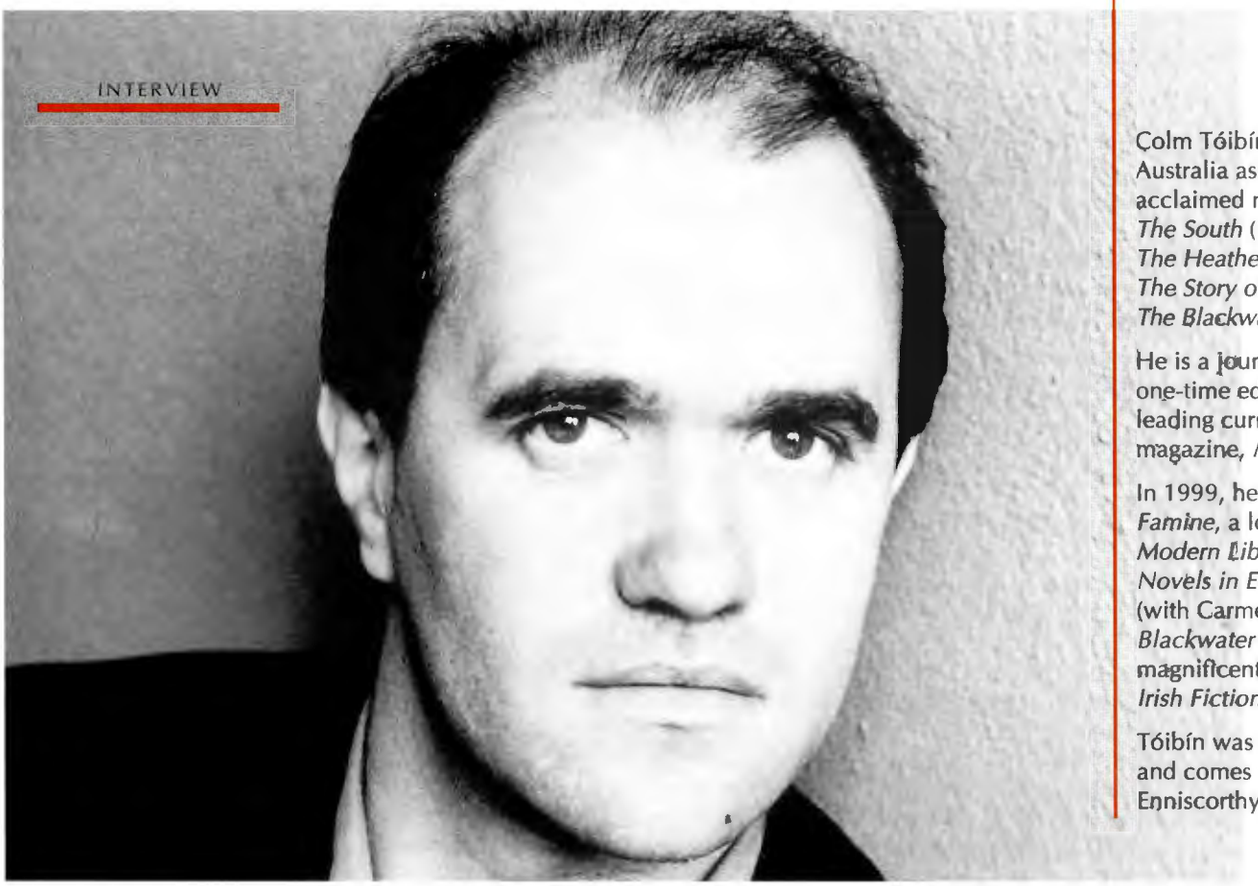

Colm Tóibín is best known in Australia as the author of four acclaimed novels:
The South (1990)
The Heather Blazing (1992)
The Story of the Night (1996)
The Blackwater Lightship (1999)

He is a journalist and one-time editor of Ireland's leading current affairs magazine, *Magill*.

In 1999, he published: *The Irish Famine*, a long essay; *The Modern Library: The Best 200 Novels in English Since 1950* (with Carmen Callil); *The Blackwater Lightship*; and the magnificent *Penguin Book of Irish Fiction*.

Tóibín was born in 1955 and comes from Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford.

Talking to Tóibín

During summer, when Irish novelist Colm Tóibín was in Australia, he began a long conversation with *Eureka Street*'s **Hugh Dillon**. When Tóibín went back to Ireland the conversation continued, by email. This is part of it. Tóibín begins with the influences that shaped him.

Colm Tóibín: My mother had no formal education much, but was addicted to Shakespeare and to Yeats' poetry and to Tennyson and could play the piano and had seriously educated herself. She wouldn't read history but would read poetry. Later on she got enormous pleasure from contemporary poetry—she loved Wallace Stevens and Larkin and all that—so there were my mother's books, and my father's books, which tended to be history—he wrote local history which was published in the local paper and was really very good. [Tóibín Snr edited a collection of it called *Enniscorthy: History and Heritage.*]

Eureka Street: *How did you move from writing non-fiction and journalism into fiction?*
CT: I know that I told someone the story of *The South* in 1981 or '82, and I wrote the first chapter of it, and later discarded it, in 1982. Then I started snatching time to do it. At the time I was working as the editor of *Magill* which was the main current affairs magazine in Ireland. It became my private life, the life away from the language of public events, the life away from constant discussion of matters of the day. Any flourishes, anything poetic was so far away from the language of journalism, so that it became a sort of relief to write that sort of language and to deal with the sorts of things which had nothing to do with how the country was being run.

ES: *Has journalism influenced your style? What else has influenced the way you think and write?*
CT: Journalism was very helpful, although as a journalist I wrote the way I do more or less from day one. *The Sun Also Rises* made an enormous impact on me, as did Sartre's fiction, the novels of Henry James and Thomas Mann. The poetry of Elizabeth

Bishop, which I have been reading since I was about 18, and the poetry of Anthony Hecht (I abandoned my MA thesis on him) were also really important, Bishop especially.

ES: *Do your characters develop organically, and do you plot in a very detailed way before writing?*
CT: There's a novel which has been in my head for some time now. I'm not sure how it got there or when, but say two years ago, maybe a bit more. About 18 months ago, I wrote a first chapter, which I knew was possibly wrong, then left it and now I have scrapped it. But every so often a new part of the book occurs to me. However, the main character and his general situation and the overall shape of the book has been in place from the very beginning. I don't yet have a tone for the book, and how I will get this is strange. I will simply some day get a sentence, or a paragraph and I will write it down. It will be when I least expect, and it will be the proper opening of the book. I have also written the first chapter of another novel which I have also been thinking about for a long time, and I know now that this first chapter I have just written will stand. Then it will be two years before I get the opening of the other book, maybe more. I do discover things as the writing goes on, and because the writing is about detail and because you use the detail closest to hand, then as work progresses the novels become more and more autobiographical, but in a private way.

The very proximity to London and the use of English mean that Irish words can be easily spread in print, in books and poems and plays. That is what London is for, to print and publish Irish words. That is why we built it.

ES: *Your writing is extraordinarily simple and clear. I assume you spend a lot of time revising and cutting?*
CT: No, it's the other way around. The simplicity arises from a sort of fear, that if I over-egg this pudding, it will collapse, that I won't be able to do more than this: 'This is as much as I can say now.' If I showed you an original page it would be even simpler than the final version and not cut back from something more elaborate.

ES: *I'd like to discuss the way you write your characters. It seems to me that your women are generally more sympathetic. Certainly in* The South, The Heather Blazing *and* The Blackwater Lightship *they seem warmer people. The men on the other hand seem often to be constricted by all sorts of things, particularly social expectations. What do you think?*
CT: I think this question, if you'll forgive me saying so, says more about you than the books. Katherine in *The South* walks out on her child and comes home 20 years later wanting all that to be forgotten. The women in *The Blackwater Lightship* are involved in constant power-play. Susan in *The Story of the Night* is hardly sympathetic. Richard in *The Story of the Night* and Eamon Redmond [the main character in *The Heather Blazing*] try their best.

ES: *You are probably right about me, but I'd like to press you on the point a little longer. I was struck by how 'beautiful' but empty your characters in* The Story of the Night *are. Only Pablo seems to have any real warmth.*
CT: I think this is important. None of my characters is 'good'; all of them behave badly or inauthentically in their lives, all of them suffer from a sort of coldness, which may have as much to do with my early reading of Sartre, Camus, Hemingway and Joyce as anything else. (*The Outsider, Iron in the Soul, The Sun Also Rises, The Dead.*) Wanting characters in fiction to have 'warmth' seems strange to me. I am writing about Man after the Fall, I'm afraid.

ES: *I think your novels are different from those of the existentialists you have mentioned in that your characters have redemptive qualities ...*
CT: A great deal of writing shows us a sort of badness, from *Moll Flanders* to *Emma* to *The Wings of the Dove* to *The Golden Bowl* to the other books I mentioned. What I do which is different is that I enact in the book a forgiveness, a sort of cleansing and reconciliation, even a sort of redemption, and that the novels mimic elements of the New Testament story.

ES: *The opening chapter of* The Blackwater Lightship *I found entrancing—one of the most accurate pieces of writing about parents and young children I've ever read. How can a man without kids be so observant and precise in capturing those sorts of domestic relations?*
CT: Simple. I was on a plane, and I saw a woman holding a child, and I could see the child's face all the time, and then the woman turning as she walked the child up and down the aisle. It was the time when I was thinking about the book. I knew immediately what I would do with it and I watched it like a hawk.

ES: *The Tuskar light makes an appearance in all your novels except* The Story of the Night. *Is it (or lighthouses in general) important in some way to you? Is this a case of being able to take the boy out of Enniscorthy but not Enniscorthy out of the boy, or does the landscape itself become a character (or series of characters) in your novels?*
CT: I'm not much interested in lighthouses at all, but just in the poetic and dramatic possibilities of this small stretch of coastal landscape and the town of Enniscorthy. In the novel I'm writing now there's London and Sussex and Rome and Florence and Venice and Boston. I'm studying these places very carefully. I'm outside Florence at the moment. I must be careful to put no lighthouses in.

ES: *Does it bother you that, after the success of* The Story of the Night *and* The Blackwater Lightship, *you may be typecast as a 'gay writer'?*
CT: I don't think I'm in a position to complain ... I'm quite happy to have a small American gay audience. It's very compartmentalised in America and it's very hard to resist that. People in America who have read the other books, the Famine book say, are puzzled and say, 'How come?' Because if you're gay or Irish, then you should stick to being one or the other. I do this because that's what I'm interested in. In Europe, or indeed in Australia, it's less of a problem. People who read *The Story of the Night* are puzzled by *The Heather Blazing*, but they get over that quickly. I'm not going to be changed from what I do [by being categorised as a 'gay writer']. I don't think it's hard, I don't think it's a problem. In Perth someone introduced me as 'gay and atheist and anti-nationalist' and I was appalled by that really strong categorisation. If they'd asked me for three categories in which I could be placed I would have said: 'Most of the time, I'm alone, I work hard and then I love—love isn't a strong enough word—being distracted.' Maybe those three descriptions cover the case more usefully. Or 'I'm bald, I'm 45 and I have false teeth.' In certain ways, of course, I'm God-fearing and a fierce patriot. But I am gay, there's that to be said.

On the subject of gay and Irish, it's worthwhile pointing out that the modern novel was invented by a number of Irish people and a number of gay people. In other words, Thomas Mann, Henry James, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Samuel Beckett. People are still teaching Thomas Mann and Henry James at university as though they are not gay, as people used to do with Beckett not being Irish (a displaced Protestant is the most Irish thing you can be.)

People are still teaching Whitman as though he was not gay—he's become the American national poet, but his gay poems are left out of the canon. It's almost amusing ... You appropriate what you need to appropriate, and since gay people have become serious influences in American universities, the queering of Henry James has become one of the great subjects of the last ten years. It will be harder and harder for people who won't take that on board to deal with. Of course, like all ideologies, it will go too far. Within ten years it will be a nightmare, the queering of Henry James—it will only be the queering of Henry James, no-one will be reading the novels for anything else.

ES: *Although you are no longer a believing Catholic, in* The Sign of the Cross *you identify with the tribe. That is a theme you haven't explored in your novels. Is it something you may yet explore?*
CT: Catholicism in fiction is a real problem and it was not solved by either Graham Greene or Brian Moore. If the faith informs your character's life, in other words, if your character believes in heaven and hell, then surely his or her internal life will be entirely devoted to that. The plot will have to thicken around the notion of faith (as in, say, *The End of the Affair* or Brian Moore's *Black Robe*). How can you also have a narrative which centres on other things? Please note that Carmel in *The Heather Blazing* and Dora in *The Blackwater Lightship* are practising Catholics and that the central drama in *The Heather Blazing* comes from Eamon scratching out the word 'God'. I also think that I haven't dealt with the whole Catholic faith stuff because I try to keep any debate about ideas out of the books and concentrate on drama, ambiguity and character.

ES: *Do you have a preference for writing fiction or non-fiction, or do you like the balance of both?*
CT: I prefer writing fiction, but I love the sort of thinking you have to do to write criticism. I think I prefer talking on the radio to anything.

ES: *I also wondered who and what you enjoy reading for fun or relaxation. For example, do you read non-fiction, crime writing, serious journalism, sports writing? Have you had a chance to read Australian writers?*
CT: In her poem about Robert Lowell, Elizabeth Bishop writes: 'Fun? It always seemed to leave you at a loss.' I don't read any crime fiction, and tend to dislike books in which a murder takes place, or non-fiction, unless biographies of writers. I read poetry and fiction and I read as much as I can of new fiction. I admire David Malouf, Tim Winton, Peter Carey. I read a novel a while ago called *Power Without Glory* [by Frank Hardy] which I also liked. When I was in my late teens I admired the work of A.D. Hope, and I still read him, as I do Les Murray.

Wanting characters in fiction to have 'warmth' seems strange to me. I am writing about Man after the Fall, I'm afraid.

ES: *Can you talk about the relationship between Irish culture and what seems like a disproportionately large number of good writers?*
CT: What is Irish culture? If it is a certain way of seeing things, then that has been caused by history (poverty, vast emigration, loss of the language) rather than survived an historical process. In other words, the Irish experience is one of brokenness, strangeness and Irish literature seems to explore that and only that. We have no Jane Austen and are unlikely to get one now. Words are cheap, they can be whispered; they can't tax words, so words take on a strange sharpness in a world where there is dispossession and no industry. The very proximity to London and the use of English mean that Irish words can be easily spread in print, in books and poems and plays. That is what London is for, to print and publish Irish words. That

is why we built it. Loads of money seems to add to the strangeness in Ireland; rather than create blandness, it thickens the ironies, but the way children are brought up isn't changing much, I don't think, and the way people feel about family and place isn't changing. Maybe I'm wrong. And Ireland is not Europe. It never colonised anywhere, the Romans had no interest in Ireland, the Nazis had no interest in Ireland. There was no Renaissance in Ireland, no Enlightenment. There was a Counter-Reformation with no Reformation.

ES: *You remark in your introduction to the Penguin anthology that Irish writing is now entering a conservative phase, but that there is a 'wildness' in Scottish writing. Is this Irish conservatism a temporary phenomenon, or do you think that the dynamism of the Irish culture will lead to a new wave of Irish writing?*
CT: I think contemporary Russian fiction and Scottish fiction arise from the same set of circumstances which gave us Synge and Joyce and Beckett. Those no longer obtain in Ireland. We were brought up full of respect for our father and mothers, our neighbours and friends. We want to be read by the middle classes. So the tone of the writing is sad rather than wild.

I believe there will be no return to the violence of before and those of us who loathed the IRA and Sinn Fein not only for their methods but for the crudeness of their ideology, will have to get down off our hind legs and help the terrorists into the fold.

ES: *Tell me about writing your non-fiction works, especially the* Penguin Book of Irish Fiction*?*
CT: I think that *Homage to Barcelona* is the best-written book I have done. The book on Catholic Europe [*The Sign of the Cross: Travels in Catholic Europe*] I couldn't wait to finish. *Bad Blood* gave me a view of the horrors being inflicted on Northern Ireland in the name of nationalism and also gave me a version of ordinary life which has been very important for me. *The Modern Library* was an extraordinary experience but a dreadful slog.

On the other hand, the Penguin book was a work of love. I would do it in spurts. I would do a month at a time. I would go to the National Library which is one of the great Irish institutions. They would say, 'How long are you here?' And I would say a month and I would plan the book: all of *Gulliver* in Lilliput to start and then the full text of *Castle Rackrent*. I really enjoyed writing the [15,000-word] introduction. It was a great way to live. Both writing the introduction and writing the Famine book were periods of great happiness, when I suddenly realised I actually don't need anyone. But that fades, I'm afraid.

ES: *You come from a strong nationalist family, but you see Ireland as now in a post-nationalist period. How do you perceive Irish nationalism?*
CT: I think nationalism has to be viewed as a phase in history which no longer serves any purpose. There are attempts to say it never really existed. One definition of it is 'an imagined community', but it isn't like that really. When I was in Catalonia, I watched an upsurge of Catalan nationalism which was actually at that time quite inspiring but it presumed that there was such a thing as being Catalan ... If you are Moroccan or even Castilian in Catalonia things can be slightly more difficult for you ... The reason I'm opposed to it in Ireland is that it doesn't allow for difference, and that the dream-island of Ireland they conjure up is a pure nonsense. There is no such thing, thank God, as Irish blood.

If you want to empty the landscape, you can have a perfect nationalism. Once you put people into it, especially the million people whose Irishness is tentative to say the least, and whose Unionism seems to me to be just as sensible as anyone's nationalism, then you have a problem. But it's not just about Unionism, most Dubliners don't feel 'Irish' in the way that Irish nationalism demands. Nationalism is dangerous nonsense as we know from Northern Ireland and Croatia whose nationalism caused immense trouble in another nationalism. We all should keep our nationalism to ourselves.

ES: *Conor Cruise O'Brien regards the peace process in Northern Ireland as a fraud being perpetrated on the Unionists. In some respects your views seem to be similar on the nationalism issue. How do you see the peace process?*
CT: I think he is mistaken about the intentions of the IRA and Sinn Fein. I believe that there will be glitches and breakdowns on the way to agreement. But I believe there will be no return to the violence of before and those of us who loathed the IRA and Sinn Fein not only for their methods but for the crudeness of their ideology, will have to get down off our hind legs and help the terrorists into the fold. I have a different background to O'Brien. His forebears were in the Irish Parliamentary Party, he has scant understanding of Sinn Fein; mine fought in 1916, the War of Independence and the Civil War, and then took part all their lives in democratic politics with gusto.

ES: *Dublin is said to be one of the most expensive cities in Europe. What effect is globalisation of the economy having on Ireland?*
CT: Because the island is very small, family ties are very strong. The regional accents are more or less intact—these accents are instantly recognisable still despite 35 years of a blitz of television. The whole business of knowing who you are and where you are from, which has been the great loss in general in the 20th century, still obtains here to a large extent. In Ireland, certain things are under pressure and certain

things are not, which makes it interesting for a novelist, but the society is not disintegrating as a family-based, community-based place. It's not globalising in that way. It's globalising in other ways.

Whereas when immigrants arrive in the USA or Australia, they reinvent themselves, people don't do that in Ireland. Nobody is ashamed of being from a poor background, which is different from England. If someone would say, 'We were brought up like pigs', someone else would say, 'We were brought up like ...' There'd be a competition—who'd had no toilet, who'd had rickets. That's very important. People are able to shrug their shoulders and say, 'When I was a kid we didn't have that.'

ES: *In* The Irish Famine *you adopt a revisionist stance—you refuse to blame the British for the entire tragedy, and you imply that the Famine is still of great importance in modern Ireland.*

CT: I didn't put it in the Famine book—I don't like that kind of talk [about physical appearance]—but it is possible sometimes to feel that that middle-man from the Famine period who owned the shop, and upped the price and speculated in food, that sort of person has really survived into now, and is walking the streets of Dublin. They are a different shape from other people, and they drive big cars, and they bark into mobile phones and they love politics and thrive on the corruption that is always close to politics. They're bad, rude, greedy, untrustworthy and I think that made it's way into certain elements of Australian life and certain elements of American life. As you're walking up the street you can see them coming towards you—Irish bad middleman males. That's one of the things we handed over to you ...

ES: *Thank you very much. I wonder whether fame as a writer makes it more difficult to do what you want to do (write, presumably)?*

CT: Fame is a bit strong. I live in novels now, and sometimes I feel it's for the want of anything else, but the lack of constrictions means I can walk away much easier from anybody or anything. I'm not sure that's how God wanted us to live ... ■

Hugh Dillon is a NSW magistrate.

Lanes of communication

As an Australian living in New York, I've had to adjust to hearing intimate information from people I hardly know.

Stuart is one of the regulars at the small pool where I swim. He spends two to three hours a day in Lane 3. I first noticed him because he's sneaky—always fudging the time he writes down so as to give himself an extra few minutes on the half-hour maximum you are meant to book your narrow lane for. Then I noticed that he was always there whenever I came, and that as soon as he finished one half-hour swim he wrote his name down again on the whiteboard. (This whiteboard system is how you know people's names because you yell for the next person on the list when you finish your go.)

So I said, 'You like to swim for an hour do you?'

'More than twice as much as that if I can,' he answered.

'Wow.'

'I used to have much worse obsessions before I took up swimming.'

Over the months I often changed lanes with him as he only likes to swim in Lane 3. He says it's because he had a stroke and can't look at the clock that tells you how your time is going, from the right. I haven't bothered to suggest he buy a waterproof watch for $9.95—I don't know him that well.

The talk at the pool, mainly by Stuart who is very chatty, has been about his forthcoming wedding. I've heard all about how she didn't want to commit and told him that she didn't love him, but he saw how she looked when he came round to see her and decided to respond to her behaviour rather than what she said. 'I knew she loved me,' he told me, 'even though she didn't know it yet.'

'Hmm,' is all I manage, but Stuart's not a person who seems to need much response. He's in his 60s and it's his third marriage, the last time being more than 20 years ago. He's in good shape—no gut—all that swimming. And he doesn't seem to have webbed feet or soggy fingers.

Friday was the wedding. A week earlier I'd suggested he have it in Lane 3 and then we could have got it in as the Wedding of the Week in the Style section of Sunday's *New York Times*—they're into gimmicky weddings.

Suzanne, a 70-something regular, one of the many who swim with a snorkel, said to me 'Do you think the girl's young?'

'No idea.'

'He said something about her living in another country so maybe she's marrying him for a green card.'

'She must know he spends most of his life in Lane 3, but why do you think she's young?'

'You now how men are,' she said. 'The older they are the younger they want them.'

I was intrigued, but decided I'd probably never find out as I was about to move out of the area and would be gone by the time Stuart got back from his honeymoon.

But Stuart didn't go on a honeymoon. There he was the day after the wedding, swimming up and down Lane 3 and looking miserable.

'My psychotherapist warned me that I'd feel let down after the wedding.'

'Congratulations,' was all I managed to say.

'Still, the wedding was fabulous. At the Buddhist Temple. And my friend who'd been at my first wedding said, "May you have a long and happy ever after, again."'

Turns out Suzanne was wrong. Stuart's wife is called Edith, she's from Austria and is 51 years old. When I asked him why he hadn't gone on a honeymoon, Stuart said that he couldn't afford it. But I think he just wanted to keep on swimming. ■

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REVIEW ESSAY

PENELOPE BUCKLEY

Mews and Hughes: on Heloise and Abelard and Plath

The Lost Love Letters of Heloise and Abelard: Perceptions of Dialogue in Twelfth Century France, Constant J. Mews, Macmillan/St. Martin's Press, 1999. ISBN 0 312 21604 1, RRP $35

THE LOST LOVE LETTERS *of Heloise and Abelard* was written here by Constant J. Mews, but published overseas by Macmillan. While I waited impatiently for this cloth from our wool, I was reading Ted Hughes' *Birthday Letters* of 1998. Why so eager to know more of Heloise yet reluctant to know more of Plath? Was it the too-muchness of the 20th century and the not-enoughness of the 12th?

The Lost Love Letters earns its glowing mysterious cover from the *Song of Songs*. The translation by Mews and Neville Chiavaroli is a fine clear medium, exactly adjacent to the Latin. Though the diction is both metaphorical and abstract, the letters are vital, sometimes astonishing and often moving communications; they can stand alone but can only benefit from Mews' inspired decoding. The book is designed to present the letters, and to explore why he thinks they are by Heloise and Abelard and how that might matter.

His task is intricate. When he examines these letters in the light of the established Abelard–Heloise collection, he is looking for similarities to establish authorship, and for differences to establish the value of the letters as a supplement and corrective. What he finds is a long-term difference between

the man's voice and mind and the woman's, a difference that crosses the gap from one collection to the other. He constructs a social, geographical, ecclesiastical and political context for Abelard, and describes a literary context for the letters as a 'space' opening up for women's voices. Finally, he wants to help recover Heloise's voice and submerged oeuvre. He succeeds in all these purposes, and keeps them distinct.

The Lost Love Letters of Heloise and Abelard is itself a book about love. Its theme is the woman's philosophy of love: Mews' case is that 'He [the male writer] never rises to her sense that love is an ideal which embraces both *amor* and *dilectio*' (selfless love). But Heloise's philosophy is like the woman's (and Abelard never rises to that either). Mews takes issue with 'assumptions that Heloise's professions of love are incompatible with monastic tradition'. He even sees her as a kind of spiritual cousin to the Cistercians with their value for sincerity in the emotions.

The story of Heloise and Abelard is stranger than that of Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes. Abelard was a renowned dialectical philosopher who, in about 1113, began attracting large crowds of students to the cathedral school of Notre Dame. He lodged with Canon Fulbert in exchange for teaching Fulbert's niece Heloise, a celebrated scholar herself. He taught her to love, made her pregnant, sent her off to his sister in Brittany (who was left holding the child) and brought her back for a secret marriage intended to appease Fulbert while protecting his own reputation. He sent her off again to the convent where she had been reared, and was then surprised one night by a group of Fulbert's men, who castrated him. Abelard dealt with his shame by becoming a monk, but first he ordered his wife to become a nun.

For more than ten years they seem to have had no contact. Abelard founded a small community which he called the Paraclete, but it did not survive. Heloise became abbess at Argenteuil, but in 1129, as part of a reformist backlash against women in religion, her community was evicted. Abelard, now abbot of a savage group of monks at St Gildas in Brittany, gave the site of the Paraclete to Heloise for her community, and the two met again. There she read Abelard's memoir, *Historia calamitatum*, in which he claimed that he came to Paris in a flush of pride, decided to have an affair with someone and picked her.

> ... with this end in view I came to an arrangement with her uncle ... he gave me complete charge over the girl ... if I found her idle I was to punish her severely. I was amazed by his simplicity ...

After his castration, 'All sorts of thoughts filled my mind'; not one was for Heloise. He considered his humiliation afterwards at Soissons, where his book was burned by an ecclesiastical court, to have been far more painful.

Heloise responded to this dismaying *Historia* with a moving letter asking him not to disown her together with their past. She said she would rather be his whore than Augustus' empress, that she had taken the veil in the spirit of one who would have followed or preceded him to hell. Abelard answered 'his dearly beloved sister in Christ' by inviting her as a dutiful wife to pray for his safety in Brittany. His letter would be insufferable were it not for its level of anxiety. Again Heloise wrote, naming her agonies of regret and the impossibility of truly repenting past joys. 'Men call me chaste; they do not know the hypocrite I am.' Again Abelard returned repudiations. After this, Heloise silently accepted his terms, and they formed a new collaborative relationship in which he assumed some responsibility, wrote a Rule for the community and a body of hymns, engaged in theological dialogue with them, and was finally buried among them. Their history is extensively yet incompletely documented. The many letters and love songs Heloise invoked were apparently lost.

The Lost Love Letters begins in a library: 'Clairvaux 1471'. A young monk, one Johannes de Vepria, is copying a collection of letters for his monastery as fine examples of the epistolary art. He begins by recording the greetings but becomes absorbed by the substance. The story shifts then to Auckland, 1993, when Constant Mews returns to Ewald Könsgen's 1976 edition of these letters after years spent investigating Abelard's thought elsewhere. He notices how often in the long exchange the man uses the word *singularis* for the woman and his feeling for her. 'Whereas the woman never describes him as singular, she does call him special.' The echo in his head is the opening of Heloise's third letter to Abelard: *Suo specialiter, sua singulariter*, 'To him who is hers specially, she who is his singularly.' Other terms reinforce Mews' intuition.

When Könsgen first edited the collection, he subtitled it *Briefe Abelards and Heloises*? Place and period and literary culture seemed right: Île de France, early 12th century, between a man whom the woman describes as a *magister* among clerics, a teacher (see letter 66), a philosopher and poet (112), one who sings as well as writes (62), 'to whom French pigheadedness rightly yields' (49); while he calls her 'the only disciple of philosophy among all the young women of our age', 'you who discuss the rules of friendship so subtly that you seem ... to have given those precepts to Tully himself' (50). The wonder is that both this remarkable collection and Könsgen's suggestion about its authorship should have gone almost unconsidered. As Mews points out, though, any anonymous collection is liable to neglect, and Könsgen's edition of 1976 coincided with a resurgence of doubt 'about the authenticity of the Abelard–Heloise letters'. The case was in effect closed when Peter Dronke dismissed the suggestion almost out of hand in his two books, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1984) and *Intellectuals and Poets in Medieval Europe* (Rome, 1992).

Perhaps Woman was blamed for Man's ruin in the 12th century, and the man blamed for the woman's in our own. Perhaps in the 12th century the sexual man was danger, and the writing woman dangerous in ours.

Yet Dronke's work on the existing Abelard–Heloise collection has laid much of the foundation for Mews' case. Dronke has argued magisterially that that exchange is authentically theirs, that the two writers show significant differences of mind and temperament, and that philosophical influences probably went both ways, not just from the older teacher to his student. All these lines of analysis have been productively used by Mews on the Könsgen letters.

Mews commits himself boldly—'These letters must have been written by Abelard and Heloise'—yet his procedures in establishing this are cautious and quiet. He

traces the birth of the Abelard and Heloise legend from Jean de Meun (in Meun's translation, and in his version of Heloise's argument against marriage in his 13th-century extension of the *Romance of the Rose*). Mews then follows their stereotypes as great thinker and great lover through romantic and puritanical periods: at times they are great, free spirits, or else Heloise is unbelievable. By interlacing his chapters with the letters, he enlivens every issue raised, showing how, if these *are* the lost love letters of Heloise and Abelard, they might amend myth and part-truths. The *Historia calamitatum* had a disproportionate influence. Mews sees it as conditioned by time, trauma, Abelard's new monasticism, politics, and the confessional mode (Augustine sitting on his shoulder). If the letters are what Mews thinks, they give a very different account of Abelard's emotions at the time. In letter 24, for example, the man acknowledges himself transformed by the woman's letters: 'I am stirred in a new way when I look at them more carefully ... my spirit itself is shaken by a joyful trembling ...' For the first time he responds to her repeated desire that he discuss love philosophically with her, and the key term of his definition is identical with Abelard's in his dialectical victory over William of Champeaux.

Letter 24 goes out to meet the woman's self-accusing passion in 23, a highly wrought piece which apparently responds to his calling her 'poor in words, but rich in actions' in 22: this seems to have devastated her self-esteem as a writer (though she probably misunderstood him). It is a vital, unpredictable exchange in which the man, as well as the woman, is plainly overtaken by serious and unexpected emotions.

Mews places Abelard in a chart of power struggles and alignments and shows how these might be reflected in the letters. He was educated in Anjou. Angevin culture was associated with new ways of dressing and singing and discussing love, and with a more inclusive attitude to women in religion. His patron in Paris was Stephen of Garlande, one of the new men in the royal administration. Stephen had links with Orleans and the Loire valley (sites of enthusiasm for Ovid) and with Bertrada, the Angevin duchess to whom, for some years, Philip I of France was bigamously married. There was a power shift when some of the First Crusaders arrived back. The king broke with Bertrada, Stephen lost power, and Abelard left Paris for a three-year health cure. The 'manly' style of the crusaders prevailed again, as did French and Norman influences and the cause of ecclesiastical reform. But circa 1108 the situation shifted again. Stephen was back, serving the new king, and so was Abelard, at Sainte-Geneviève and then at Notre Dame, whose school was 'outside the jurisdiction of the bishop'. When Abelard's affair with Heloise started, he reigned supreme in dialectic, but he had enemies and the campaign to impose a monastic celibacy on all clergy was gathering strength.

Abelard was affected by all this, but was himself a force of restless innovation and lawgiving, a great polariser. (When he arrived in Paris circa 1102, he had already outgrown and dialectically defeated his teacher in the Loire valley, Roscelin de Compiègne—thus making for himself a lifelong enemy.) Paris was the site of Abelard's triumphs and his disgrace. It was the site for his serial constructions of identity—from brilliant outsider to violated eunuch to reconciled son of the church. Abelard and Paris together were pivotal in the development of the schools into autonomous institutions, universities. Ironically, as Mews notes,

> The expanding influence of the Parisian schools effectively marginalized women from benefiting from the education which Heloise had once enjoyed at Notre Dame.

Heloise is not so easy to track. We may never know how she came to know Hebrew or Greek or be famously learned before Abelard taught her. She is sketched indirectly in 'Traditions of Dialogue' where, building on Dronke, Mews considers a range of Latin writing about love, some of it by erudite monks exchanging verses with erudite nuns. One of Marbod's poems assumes a mixed community of students that includes nuns. Another monk, Baudri (an historian of the First Crusade), wrote verse epistles to at least four nuns who were all reputed to be accomplished poets; included in his collection is a remarkable reply from one, Constance. This Constance drew on Ovid's *Heroides*, as did Heloise and the woman writing in the Könsgen letters. But as the urban schools 'to which women were denied access' became the chief centres of learning and dispute, this form of high culture passed.

> The monastic correspondence of Heloise and Abelard represents perhaps the last great flowering of the genre. It articulates with unusual clarity the tension between traditional perception of *amor* as lapse from commitment to God, and an ethic based on the obligations of love ...

'The Voice of Heloise' completes the contextual narrative, filling in Heloise's part; for, having symbolically died to the world, she is paradoxically now in it. Not only does she regenerate her relationship with the beleaguered Abelard to the point where he can turn to her and her community for a good deal of moral sustenance, but she negotiates the renewed dominance of traditionalist Reform sooner and better than he does. Nothing was without cost, however. One of the poems Mews proposes to add to Heloise's oeuvre is an arresting, bitter complaint in the voice of a nun who has been driven into exile for her writings. She laments the now unregarded classical authors, scorns new leaders who hate poetry and acknowledge only piety 'whose face always looks to the ground, / Who, knowing nothing, thinks that she or he is good.' She mourns the loss of a reasoned approach to God. 'It is not for holy women to compose verse,/ Nor for us to ask who Aristotle might be.'

She ends by challenging her enemy—'Whoever you are'—to a writing duel. 'Equal genius usually reconciles two people!'

What an epitaph that might make.

Mews builds a fine case for seeing this poem as written by Heloise when her community had been evicted from Argenteuil. If he is right, the great part of her oeuvre still lies hidden. This poet takes her writing seriously and has public reputation. Where is the writing, and what incendiary forms might it take?

With the letters, Mews focuses on terms which are keys to the writers' identities and attitudes. He explains the woman's

If Heloise and Abelard are obscured by time and lost evidence, Plath and Hughes are obscured by layers of interpretation, by telling their story in so many ways.

preference for *specialis* in terms of her commitment to an idea of love which has the ethical dimension of friendship. The man participates in this idea irregularly, but *amor* is his usual term, whereas she refers almost as often and with no sense of discontinuity to *dilectio*. The woman's letters engage Mews more. He examines the emotional power of her writing, her creative neologisms ('If a droplet of knowability trickled down to me from the honey-comb of wisdom' (53)), her struggle to find new terms for the inexpressible. He focuses on her use of terms which give value to the inner disposition very much as Heloise does in her letters from the Paraclete.

It is touching to see the man assure the woman so fervently that she fulfils his every need, she is his rest, his food, his light, and so on, painful to see the gap between his self-referring attachment and hers. She loves to ornament:

> To the spice of perfect quality and finest fragrance, multiplied a hundredfold with the seed of sweetness in the wasteland, a full moon: the delights of binding love. (94)

She can be transgressive:

> Nothing will ever be so laborious for my body, nothing so dangerous for my soul, that I would not expend out of care for you. (9)

And she actually ends the correspondence twice. Yet the substance of her letters is this:

> The most precious thing I have I give to you, namely, myself, firm in faith and love, stable in desire for you and never changeable. (102)

Her stability in love is a stability in the autonomous self, who chooses to forgive or obey.

> Through loving you, I searched for you; searching for you, I found you; finding you, I desired you; desiring you, I chose you; choosing you, I placed you before everyone else in my heart ... nor will I ever take back my whole spirit from you. In you I have what I searched for, I hold what I chose, I embrace what I desired; only your qualities will do.

Once the suggestion is argued, it is almost impossible to read letter 84 without hearing it as Heloise: her powerful intelligence, masterly eloquence, uncompromising passion and almost unparalleled honesty.

The man's answer (85) seems to belong almost as much to Abelard. It is brilliant but unstable, divided in just that point of intention where she is so firm (he confesses 'too much mental distraction of one unsure of what he should rightly say'). His farewell blends disingenuousness and intense charm:

> ... may it always be kept uncertain which of us loves the other more, since this way there will always be between us a most beautiful contest in which both of us will win.

The snapshot of an insecure, competitive master-rhetorician in love?

Mews also demonstrates that it is a real exchange which has the untidiness of lived experience. Many of the letters refer to conversations or events not represented in the collection. If one tried to read it as a single composition, one could waste much energy looking for the letter which the man in 75 so much regrets having written. If, as Mews says, Johannes de Vepria is consistent in recording his omissions, the letter is not missing by his choice; and, if Mews is also right in guessing that the woman made and kept the collection, it is more likely that she discarded the letter which gave her pain. As fiction, it would be unsatisfactory, 'with the relationship between the two parties still unresolved' (Mews, p143). But that—if Abelard and Heloise wrote the letters—is part of their value.

The Lost Love Letters of Heloise and Abelard needed to be written. Of course there are imperfections,[1] but they are minor. This very fine book will quickly become a landmark; soon no-one will remember what Heloise and Abelard studies were like before it appeared.

There will be counter-cases to Mews'.[2] But even if he is wrong, his illuminating study will be justified by the attention he will win for the letters. In fact his case must become the working hypothesis. If he is right, the implications are stirring. For example, Dronke sees Heloise's greeting in her third letter ('*suo specialiter, sua singulariter*') as an evident response to Abelard's 'remember him who specially is yours' in his first reply (*Women Writers of the Middle Ages*, p27). Mews comments, 'it seems more likely that she was reminding him of the contrasting ways each of them used to single out the other'. Yet, if Heloise did have the Könsgen letters with her at the Paraclete, there is surely a double echo. Might not Abelard's recent words, 'who specially is yours', have had a dynamic effect on Heloise, as a signal to her that Abelard had not forgotten what they had shared, and that at the level of sub-text he was not disowning her? She might have made the extraordinary effort signified by her third letter just because he had given her this signal.

Abelard urged Heloise to rejoice with him at their escape from lust:

> What a hateful loss and grievous misfortune if you had abandoned yourself to the defilement of carnal pleasures only to bear in suffering a few children for the world ... Nor would you have been more than a woman ... How unseemly for those holy hands which now turn the pages of sacred books to have to perform degrading services in women's concerns.

The sad irony is that he was probably right. In the straitjacket he designed for her, she may well have lived a life of more dignity, distinction and purpose than she might have done as his wife or body-servant housekeeper or even as his *meretrix* (whore). Her letters to Abelard show not only great powers of mind but great authority; and as soon as she turned her unused energies to new purposes, she produced a masterful critique of monastic Rules as they failed to apply to women. When Abelard sent the hymns he had written for the Paraclete, he rehearsed in admiring detail the arguments she had used to make him do it. What the woman of the Könsgen letters strove for—her philosopher–lover's engagement with her ideas—the abbess Heloise commanded. Yet this authority came from a kind of death. When she became a nun, 'she broke out as best she could through her tears and sobs into Cornelia's famous lament' (before suicide). 'So saying, she hurried to the altar' (*Historia calamitatum*, Penguin ed. pp76–77).

Sylvia Plath seemed to have an abyss of freedoms. She did have institutional support and rewards, but not the stable direction she seems to have craved when she asked Ted Hughes to give her writing tasks. Those exercises had structure, and could win approval if successfully performed. Success was perhaps a crueller God than even Abelard's castrator. Over and again Plath reckoned up the prizes she was striving for or had won, like the addict for whom the fix is never enough.

> God, if ever I have come close to want to commit suicide, it is now ... Five years ago, if I could have seen myself now: at Smith ... with seven acceptances from *Seventeen* and one from *Mademoiselle*, with a few lovely clothes, and one intelligent, handsome boy—You would have said: That is all I could ever ask! November 3, 1952.

Was she ever in any real sense free not to marry 'and bear in suffering a few children

for the world'? Or was her achieving post-war American girlhood so branded with expectations of marriage that the question was never if, only whom and when? Marriage and nuclear family were the institutions which stood stiff as a strait-jacket for her, and the power of family may be measured as a power to replicate its own patterns in spite of individuals. If Plath and Hughes were right, her life-long insecurities and torments sprang from her father's early death and the need to placate and therefore hate her hardworking 'sacrificing' mother and if possible blame her. In Plath's death, the pattern is restated, only starker, more extreme: she has replicated for her children the abandonment by one parent in dying; she has managed not to murder her own mother except symbolically (in *The Bell Jar*), only to murder theirs; and she has left her death as a charge against their father. Her father was thought to have contributed to his own death, but she has designed hers perfectly. Dying is an art.

We know hardly anything of Heloise's family beyond the uncanny replication with her too that she was reared by church and uncle, and her son by church and aunt. If the foregrounding of nuclear family is stifling in Plath's case, its backgrounding in Heloise's is troubling. When she writes to Abelard of her yearning and sorrow, Heloise does not mention their son Astralabe. Much later, writing to Peter the Venerable on Abelard's behalf, she asks for a church position for their son: evidently, he grew up. What kind of a silence is this? Discretion, taboo, denial, indifference, a grief too deep for tears? Why didn't Heloise fight for her right or duty or desire to bring him up? At this point, the 19th-century novel intervenes and the 12th slides behind a fog. In the myth, they are always two people, not three. Abelard's own parents parted when first his father entered the monastic life and then his mother—another replication. Was the nuclear family always so predictive? Or rather was it more fluid, able to flow into the more powerful structures of the church?

Even allowing for Plath's bi-polar tendencies, her ecstasies and exaggerations, allowing for self-exhortation and 'social' voices, she does seem to have enjoyed her marriage hugely. At least some of the time she seems to have loved producing and caring for children, cooking, saying 'my husband'.

Hughes' *Birthday Letters* has a theory about Plath and domesticity. But *Birthday Letters*, like *Historia calamitatum*, is the man writing the woman, and also writing himself in answer to 30 years of accusation. Abelard answers various charges in the *Historia*, but he never admits the idea that he may have injured Heloise. A 20th-century man could not write with such cold clarity and unconcern: not without a stance of defiance, at least, or belittling her (which Abelard does not do). For him, one point of the *Historia* is to disown the past they shared, or own it in a posture of exemplary penitence.

The point of *Birthday Letters* is almost the reverse: to own the past, recover the lost 'you'. On terms. *Birthday Letters* does not exactly seek to exonerate its writer, rather to define their roles. Abelard answered Heloise's call to guide and govern. Hughes insists that his role was subsidiary to Plath's. '... I was being auditioned/ For the male lead in your drama' ('Visit'). 'I bustled about./ I was nursemaid' ('Fever'). 'Do as you like with me. I'm your parcel' ('The Inscription'). He is nurse, mentor, facilitator, her man-Friday.

As he reworks material familiar from other narratives, he resuscitates the emotions of the moment: sometimes the bias as well. In 'The Rabbit Catcher':

> ... I simply
> Trod accompaniment, carried babies ...
> Somewhere I'd bought food ...
> I sat baffled.
> I was a fly outside on the window-pane
> Of my own domestic drama.

Plath is the one actually, in Hughes' verse, 'Feeding babies', but this is obscured by 'Your Germanic scowl, edged like a helmet'. The civilised speaker is quietly 'aghast', while she is wild and 'weeping with a rage'. But what is the occasion of her wild weeping? The cruelty of rabbit snares that the Hughes traditionalist speaker loyally approves. 'The fly outside' is more innocent than the speaker, whose effort to understand is suffused with hunter's bloodlust:

> ... was it
> Your doomed self ...?
> The poems, like smoking entrails,
> Came soft into your hands.

The whole book insists that Plath's death was written in the stars, her genes, her childhood. Even Assia Wevill, who displaced Plath, served it: 'The Fate she carried/ Sniffed us out' ('Dreamers'). There was a third in their marriage: 'Your Daddy,/ The god with the smoking gun' ('The Shot'), 'the dust-red cadaver/ You dared not wake with, the puckering amputations' ('You Hated Spain'). Hughes' role, he claims, was to be the unknowing substitute.

> I did not feel
> How, as your lenses tightened,
> He slid into me. ('Black Coat')

Yet the urge for self-exoneration gives way before distressed empathy.

> You bowed at your desk and you wept
> Over the story that refused to exist ...
> ('The God')

Domestic life, children, love, sex, food, were remission from this. As Hughes construes it, her poetry is her story and her story her doomed self: if her truth is to emerge, it will cost 'Your husband, your children, your body, your life' ('Apprehensions'). His role, then, was as 'midwife' to both poetry and death. The poem 'Suttee' spells it out.

In some ways *Birthday Letters* has its analogue not in Abelard's *Historia* so much as Heloise's letters. In the *Historia calamitatum*, Abelard had written Heloise out (and she was writing herself back in). In the *Ariel* poems, Plath had done something similar to Hughes. In her bee poems, she is sacrifice and queen bee and sweet God: 'They have got rid of the men' (*Ariel*, 'Wintering'). No Hughes, no Daddy. True,

> A third person is watching.
> He has nothing to do with the bee-seller or
> with me,
> Now he is gone
>
> In eight great bounds, a great scapegoat.
> ('Stings')

If that is Hughes, it might as well not be. The God in Hughes' bee poem is male and 'Deaf to your pleas': Daddy has come out of the well and ordered the sacrifice of Hughes by stinging. 'Your face wanted to save me/ From what had been decided' ('The Bee God'), but the action is the defeat of Zeus by Chronos, with Plath as helpless looker-on. In Hughes' poem, she cared. He is persistent in writing himself back into her story. His motives are more confused than Heloise's, perhaps, but there is the same human need to be acknowledged.

THE 'SPACE' in which Hughes and Plath write is as far from Abelard's and Heloise's as their bee poems are from the Könsgen woman's 'droplet of knowability'. It is the distance between the woman's 'fish hide in streams of water, stags climb mountains' (84) or Heloise's calm reference to nuns' 'monthly purging of their superfluous

humours' (Heloise's third letter, Penguin ed. p160) and Plath's 'In the bowl the hare is aborted .../ Let us eat it like Plato's afterbirth' (*Ariel*, 'Totem') or Hughes' 'The hare in the bowl screamed' ('The Afterbirth'). Theirs is a post-Lawrentian space where attention is paid to violence and surreal horror. Sometimes *Birthday Letters* becomes blunted through over-insistence. (And I think ... is he exaggerating?) But he can't have been exaggerating. Plath had given proof.

Abelard liked being famous, but he and Heloise showed no concern to be seen as mythic figures. Their story was extraordinary, centred on an act of great irrational violence. There were no roles to accommodate their truth. Hughes and Plath, on the other hand, were fed on myths and dreams. In a poem to her father, Hughes concedes, 'I was a whole myth too late to replace you' ('A Picture of Otto'). If Heloise and Abelard are obscured by time and lost evidence, Plath and Hughes are obscured by layers of interpretation, by telling their story in so many ways.

Myths are wild and will not stand to attention. Perhaps Woman was blamed for Man's ruin in the 12th century, and the man blamed for the woman's in our own. Perhaps in the 12th century the sexual man was danger, and the writing woman dangerous in ours. Perhaps both women made gods of men who were not quite their equals. In spite of everything, the story of Heloise is about survival. Is Hughes, too, salvaging and nurturing his and Plath's past in defiance of their myths?

Problems of authenticity are not the same. There is no dispute as to whether or not Hughes and Plath wrote what they say they did, and even with journals destroyed or missing there is more documentation than many of us can face. The questions are rather of voice. Heloise mastered and incorporated other, earlier voices, with their languages and traditions, to achieve her own. Plath practised and discarded voices and masks. She stripped self and voice right down to sheer authentic (and rhythmically finished). But *Birthday Letters* reworks much of her material—it being also his—into an expository form which includes the raw untidiness of the undigested life. 'And we/ Only did what poetry told us to do' ('Flounders'). Why did Hughes keep that last stubborn syllable? What kind of authenticity required it? And having written Plath in this book, did fair-mindedness lead him to agree to the publishing of her unexpurgated Journals? Full of writerly craft they may be, but will they push the clean intensities of *Ariel* even further out of sight, as, in Heloise's words, 'one nail drives out another'? ■

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1 There are moments where the mosaic of facts develops an air of non sequitur—e.g. p42, last paragraph; or some detail is omitted—e.g. pp61–62, where it is not explained how Bertrada, 'finally' renounced by Philip I in 1104, comes to be touring with him in 1106/7; or a connection lost—e.g. p62 'Abelard returned to Paris by 1108, to take up a position at the abbey school of Sainte-Geneviève ... Not long after 1108, Louis made Stephen dean of Sainte-Geneviève, an ancient abbey on the Parisian left bank ...' and p69, 'Peter Abelard was invited to teach at Sainte-Geneviève at the same moment as Stephen became its dean.' Occasionally the cautious judgments become timid—e.g. his reference to Joseph on p108. A more interesting and much more obvious interpretation of the reference to Joseph in the letter quoted springs to mind. There are a few typographical mistakes, notably *non* for *nos* in 82. There is also a reference on p21 to two omissions in the letter replying to 61, but no omissions are marked in 62. There are some non-matching footnotes in the dual texts and an odd insertion of 'not' ('lest you do *not* give them to the mind') in a letter quoted on p105. The Latin quoted in number 106 confirms the mistake, though it is not clear where the mistake was made.

2 Dronke's observations of Heloise's and Abelard's preference for *cursus tardus* over *velox* need testing in reference to these letters. Then there is his point that the Pauline quotation in 84 ('you have not yet received the prize') indicates an unconsummated love. It may indicate that, or a love which was consummated later, as Mews says, or it may mean something more abstract. Many of the other letters seem transfused with sexual gratitude and confidence: 'An equal to an equal, to a reddening rose under the spotless whiteness of lilies' (the woman, 18). The later correspondence is much more candid and specific than this; but we do not know what de Vepria left out. There is certainly a problem with Mews' interpretation of the penultimate letter: if the 'haven of your love' refers to a pregnancy, how will that help her desire 'to be free to be unfailingly devoted to you'? In this context, too, her withdrawal into addressing him as '*domine*' and '*Magistro*' makes no sense. Mews says comfortably, 'Even in letter 109 ... she seems to be signaling a desire that their relationship become more like that of spiritual friendship ... By bearing his child, she has all that she wants.' Heloise's later correspondence contradicts this. On the other hand, a bad reception by the man of the woman's pregnancy would perfectly explain her abrupt change in 112a. (This essay with full footnotes is available from *Eureka Street*.)

Illumination of Abelard and Heloise from Penguin Classics' edition of the established letters; photographs of Plath and Hughes by Rollie McKenna and Lax Godwin.

Cave Men

For Evan Jones

On their cold wall, thin as the bows they wield,
they are dancing death, taking the strain
of rod and sinew, fear a match for hatred,
each another's offered victim.

They stay, while the cataract of time plunges
millennia and seas away—
a sage commending, 'When angry, paint
bamboo', a peasant blessing peace.

In the flaked heads, a storm at Crècy builds,
Odysseus homes on the bellying heartwood,
Hun and Mongol twist in the saddle.
In the cave there is all the time in the world.

Peter Steele SJ

DAVID McCOOEY

Poetry as first and last resort

The Midday Clock: Selected Poems and Drawings, R. A. Simpson, *The Age*/Macmillan, 1999. ISBN 0 9585743 7 5, RRP $32.95
Mines, Jennifer Maiden, Paper Bark, 1999. ISBN 90 5704 046 8, RRP $20.85
Wicked Heat, Kevin Hart, Paper Bark, 1999. ISBN 90 5704 076 X, RRP $20.85
Invisible Riders, Peter Steele, Paper Bark, 1999. ISBN 90 5704 106 5, RRP $20.85
Empty Texas, Peter Minter, Paper Bark, 1999. ISBN 90 5704 036 0, RRP $20.85

CHRISTOPHER Beach's account of contemporary poetry in American culture, *Poetic Culture* (1999), contains a chapter pointedly called 'Discussing the Death of Poetry to Death'. The terms of this discussion should be familiar to Australian poetry readers. Contemporary poetry is terminal because: creative writing courses have led to homogenised 'McPoems'; poetry is increasingly marginalised in the mainstream media; poetry reviewing lacks critical bravery; there is an ever-increasing split between the professional and the common readers of poetry; and there is a gap between academic and avant-garde critical stances.

Beach responds not by disagreeing as such, but by turning his attention elsewhere, to 'the popular', served by the new and electronic media—films, websites, online discussion groups, and television—and by 'cross-over' artists who use poetry and other media, such as music (not exactly an innovation). For Beach, what's notable is 'the resurgence of poetry as an oral, public, and performative medium'.

Meanwhile, unspoken, private, and non-performative poetry continues long after the life support was switched off. It's not big and sexy—rather more like a cottage industry (though the cottage is definitely online). This condition is reminiscent of that met by the Australian 'Generation of '68' which, in the early 1970s, responded to poetry's marginal status (the 'death of poetry', in fact) by going self-sufficient (photocopied publications, readings, free magazines and so on). Today, however, despite the internet and desktop publishing, most people don't actually believe that such production will make poetry central to Australian culture.

Poetry's marginal status is beyond dispute, but marginality is not morbidity. Performance and the new media in Australian poetry are present, though whether they represent a resurgence of poetry in the popular realm is debatable. There's no *MTV Unplugged* here, or any Australian equivalent of the television program, *The United States of Poetry* (more's the pity). And among those who are talking, for instance, on John Kinsella's 'poetryetc2' internet discussion group, many (probably most) are associated with 'traditional' modes of reading and production. So how's 'mainstream poetry' (an oxymoronic term) faring now, after the withdrawal from the field by Penguin, Angus & Robertson and University of Queensland Press (not to mention OUP's decline in England)? Given the quality of the books under review here, one might say that the increased marginalisation of poetry has not led to its death; rather (in the jargon of the market) poetry has been funnelled into niche (usually 'boutique') markets. These five books, from two publishers, are all exceptionally handsome objects, with good paper, binding and editorial standards.

R. A. Simpson's *The Midday Clock* contains poems from his last three collections. Co-published by *The Age* and with a foreword by Andrew Clark (a past arts editor), this work celebrates Simpson's 28 years as the poetry editor of *The Age*. Poetry is indeed a long art, and Simpson's career stretches back to his grouping as a 'Melbourne University' poet in the '60s with Vincent Buckley, Chris Wallace-Crabbe and Evan Jones. Simpson's major development since then has been an increasingly austere, pared-down style. With poets as different as Gary Catalano, David Malouf and Gig Ryan, Simpson represents a minimalist arm of Australian poetry, the histories of which are so weighted down by the maximalists, from Murray to Tranter.

As Wallace-Crabbe notes in the work's introduction, the poems in *The Midday Clock* elegantly knit together the suburban and the cosmic: 'Though carrying a grief too heavy for him/ still he lifts their hefty cat/ and puts her in the night outside'. Simpson characteristically works by subtle shifts of syntax and perception like this (putting the cat 'in' the outside). He is also a poet of wit. One of the nicest examples of this is 'Parallels', an eccentric mini-history lesson detailing the parallels between the deaths of the American presidents Lincoln and Kennedy. The strange world created in his poetry, Simpson seems to be saying, is no stranger than 'real life', coming as it does from experience, grief, mortality, the inexplicable.

There are also a number of impressive poems centring on the experience of having

cancer. One of these, 'As One', is also a love poem: 'Not unique/ with cancer/ I plainly need/ your wiser love'. As with Philip Hodgins' poetry, this work mixes artfulness with plain-speaking. Whether through the mordant autobiographical poems from *Dancing Table* (1992) or the extraordinary abstraction of *The Impossible* (1998), Simpson suggests a metaphysician's sensibility without the belief in the metaphysical. This entails the elegiac, certainly, but Simpson (despite the disquieting effects of his poems) also reminds us of what we have: 'The world is teaching you/ the world you nearly lost'. *The Midday Clock* is a very fine record of an incisive, brilliant poetic imagination.

RATHER THAN paring back, Jennifer Maiden's poetry works through additive effects. Her latest and 13th collection is well named. Each poem in *Mines* is shaft-like, columnar in shape, and exploratory. Maiden has left behind the abstract and symbolic features of her earlier work ('The Problem of Evil' and 'The Trust', for example, or the allegorical verse-fiction of 'Guarding the Cenotaph') producing instead autobiographical and associative verse essays. Her concerns—theoretical, moral and intellectual—have not really changed, rather her approach to them has.

Many of the poems in *Mines* begin with a place, occasion or thing, to produce arabesque-like figures around their starting points. This makes for a more artfully structured poetry than would first appear. Maiden's concern with the real worlds of her partner and daughter, of her fellow writers, of the NSW Torture and Trauma Rehabilitation Centre where she was a writer in residence, of CNN news beamed into her house, is always about how these things intersect with the imaginary and the symbolic.

Where this works it can produce poetry like no-one else's. It doesn't really matter if the poem's occasion is a NATO bombing, a moonstone, or the Pharaoh's penis, there is a surprising homogeneity about the poems. It might be argued that this is what style is. Indeed, something notable about the five collections under review here is how narrow they are in range (both formally and tonally). This is not so much a failing as a desire to produce strong, recognisable poetry. Maiden's style, though, can be oddly self-regarding, as seen in her liking for referring to her works, poet friends, and especially her theories about representation, sex and power.

Mines is strange poetry, but that's what is attractive about it, and like the individual poems themselves, the collection adds up to more than the sum of its parts.

CNN finds no place in Kevin Hart's poetry, which is more concerned with negativity and absence emanating from quiet, domestic scenes. Hart's poetic is one of extreme clarity inhabited by darker, metaphysical concerns, a duality supported by his battery of archetypal images: clocks and hands, water and stone, sun and moon, the north's heat and the south's cold. He is an elegiac poet with a strongly erotic impulse.

All these characteristics inhabit Hart's autobiographical evocations of Queensland, which feature strongly in *Wicked Heat*, his first full collection of new poetry since the remarkable *Peniel* of 1991. A quarter of this new collection consists of the new poems from the *New and Selected* of 1995. This may seem a little steep, but the Paper Bark edition makes for much more pleasant reading than the earlier Angus & Robertson volume (my copy, at least, is one of the most badly bound books I own). And the reprinted poems certainly fit well with the other poems in the book.

Wicked Heat contains some of Hart's best and most beautiful work. The poems set in Brisbane in the first two sections are particularly impressive. The heat, the sense of the past, the numinous workings of the quotidian all knit together almost effortlessly. What is most notable is the apparent simplicity of the work. Sometimes it is enough simply to describe:

> One of those late summer days, flaring and still.
> Brisbane idles outside, while the fan
> Churns air all afternoon. One of those days
> When good for nothing hours
> Go by just carrying smells of cut grass.
> ('The Dressmaker')

Hart almost habitually writes iambic verse in this collection (though less strictly than in *Peniel*) and does so with great authority and musicality. But where the first half of the book contains many of his best poems, the erotic love poems of 'Nineteen Songs' are, for me, among his weakest. In love poetry tone is immensely important, but in this sequence Hart's ear seems less sharp, allowing infelicities such as unfortunate double entendre and bathos.

The best poems of *Wicked Heat* show that Hart's characteristic structuring device is duality. Doubleness here is a figure of human ambivalence, of experience, of our fears and desires for this world (which contains another world, as the epigraph to one of Hart's earlier books claims). This duality is most clearly stated in 'The Voice of Brisbane': '"Nothing is lost", whispered the heart of things,/ Or was it "Nothing lasts"? I could not tell'. Doubleness is the driving force of *Wicked Heat*, which produces much of its beauty by placing Eros alongside Thanatos.

THOUGH VERY DIFFERENT from Maiden's poetry in almost all respects, Peter Steele's is similarly essayistic (and columnar, too). His tone and highly stylised syntax might call to mind A. D. Hope, Richard Wilbur and Anthony Hecht, but his concerns, musicality and wit are his own. One of Steele's most characteristic features, periphrasis, reminds us that lyric poetry is not necessarily an economic form of locution. Steele also reminds us of the delight in sound that poetry can create:

> A brown cloud shadows the shining ones
> as a harrowing farmer sweats through Monday:
> to left, hills of tungsten and biscuit: to right,
> puffballs floating like divers' bubbles.

The occasions for the poems can seem a little bookish. Characters from history appear, while quotations and classical references abound, sometimes to the point of producing a text by means of a web of intertexts (showing that postmodernists aren't the only ones to use postmodern techniques). Among these intertexts are Traherne, Montaigne, Emerson, Swift, Shakespeare and the Bible, Chaucer, Hume, the fellow clergyman-poets Herbert and Hopkins, Loyola and so on. Other poems, though, such as 'Ape', 'April Fool' and 'Mendacity's Brother', are extraordinarily engaged with the world as well as the other-worldly. Steele deals with the oldest themes—power, the nature of truth and human emotions, mortality—and is by turns mocking, pessimistic and wise.

His complicated syntax, erudition, quotation, periphrasis, epigrams, puns and half-puns, are not, however, unapproachable. His poetry requires attention, certainly, and sometimes a number of readings, but it is intensely generous in return for such attention. The poet shares with us the follies he anatomises. This is especially notable in the parallel world produced by Steele's humour, seen in the fictitious artists, quotations and books (most appealing being 'the deluxe fourth edition/ of *Humility in France*'). Steele's

wit is never facile, and much of its power comes from its ability to praise even when mordancy is the go: 'exalted and fearful we make a start'.

Empty Texas, Peter Minter's first full-length collection, is the most ambitious and obviously experimental of these works. Some of this material calls to mind the similarly ambitious, experimental work of the aforementioned Generation of '68 (right down to the penchant for unclosed parenthesis). The eponymous second section relies considerably on the image of the poet as seer and alchemist. There is a cut-up quality about much of the poetry:

> Content is a slippery glimpse, or so the
> light
> of three bodies, authenticated grace
> stretched blue under laying out the
> notes
> the Pacific Highway riddles into Sunne,
> moves northward as light tauter
>
> takes it or leaving it
>
> ('Linguige')

Probably the most attractive section (at least for those seeking the 'consolations of referentiality') is the last, in which Minter shows again that it is pastoral that is often at the unlikely centre of new Australian poetry. (One thinks of John Kinsella, Craig Sherborne, Anthony Lawrence, Martin Harrison and Philip Salom. As this list shows, though, it does tend to be a blokey thing.) As with Kinsella, especially, the pastoral is here shown to be not antipathetic to avant-garde poetics.

These are all well-produced books, suggesting once again that the death of poetry is something of an 'effect of discourse', as we used to say in the '80s. The resilience of poetry is not only seen in such publishing ventures, but also in the careers of poets themselves. Save Minter (who is much younger), these poets have careers spanning 20 to 30 years. In the end, poetry itself is the engine of poetry's survival, as these five poets know. We see this in Simpson's elegies for poets; in Maiden's implied conversations with her fellow-poets J.S. Harry and Dorothy Porter; in Steele's use of past poets' work as a vast commonplace book of the mind; in Hart's erudition, converted, as Harold Bloom points out, into passion; and in Minter's self-creating aesthetic. In his 'On Smoking by the Harbour, Thinking of Friends Recently Published in the Australian's Review of Books', Minter too is conscious of the place and calling of Australian poets. In the end, he also sees the dual nature of poetry as something both special and marginal:

> Our poems fall about us,
> opened up by the feeding,
> bodies spread slowly
> like a map of gold
> as we walk on,
> time to time dodging selves
> that catch in the half light,
> lovely acrobats
> talking up real estate
> just between '*A*'
> and the fold. ■

David McCooey is the author of the 'Contemporary Poetry' chapter in the *Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature*.

BOOKS:2

DENIS MINNS

Sleuth gone missing

When We Were Orphans, Kazuo Ishiguro, Faber and Faber, London, 2000.
ISBN 0 57120516 X, RRP $19.95

In the days before television, when it was not unknown for people to suppose that they faced a moral choice in the use of their leisure, a friend, a serious-minded youth, took the view that the reading of novels was immoral. By definition, he reasoned, fiction told a story that was not true; but to tell a story that was not true was to lie, and telling lies was wrong, and so was reading them. *When We Were Orphans* brought his lofty logic to mind, as I wondered, futilely, what he might have made of it, for, although a work of fiction, it is all about truth.

Verisimilitude is hardly a striking feature of detective fiction, which classically deals in worlds which, even if they existed, would be foreign to the experience of most readers—English villages, vicarages, and

manor houses scarcely less implausible than mean city streets in America. We know that these settings are not real, but a classic detective story would not be true without them. Just so, we read detective *fiction* to discover who *really* did it, and we expect a competent practitioner in the genre to do his or her level best to keep us from getting at the truth for as long as possible.

This is a novel about a detective, but although it plays with elements of the genre, it is not a detective story. There is, indeed, a central mystery to be solved and its solution is held back, gratifyingly, until the end, and is suitably shocking and sad. But it is not, so it seems, the author who is out to mislead us. Rather, he gives us a narrator—the detective—who misleads himself. His fate, he tells us, has been to face the world as an orphan, 'chasing through long years the shadow of vanished parents', with the result that he never grows up. His childhood is not, as for most of us, 'like a foreign land once we have grown', it is where he has continued to live all his life. So, while

Christopher Banks, the 'well-known detective', is engaged on a life-long task to solve the central mystery—a mission which becomes increasingly detached from reality—the real sleuthing is left to the reader, who must work out what this book is all about.

Although the fact is noticed only once, it is clear that Banks is to be understood as *writing* the narrative—a journal, then, but an odd kind of journal, for it is not especially continuous, and more often than not it deals with events that happened, if they happened at all, between about 25 and 55 years before the time of writing. The novel's six parts are precisely dated, which allows us to plot the narrator's increasing disengagement from the real world.

First we see that he is unable to recognise himself in the recollections that others have of him, then that, although a famous detective he is unable to spot quite obvious and startling things in the world around him, and eventually that he is in the grip of an over-mastering delusion, in which the solution of the mystery of his parents' disappearance merges with the solution of the world crisis of the 1930s: his 'great vocation', he says, 'got in the way of quite a lot, all in all'. Because this deeply deluded man is telling the story we can never be sure whether what he tells us, what he reports others as saying, is true, or whether, as is said of another famous detective in the story, who finds opium a useful *aide-memoire* (and who is *not* Sherlock Holmes), 'most of his stories *are* preposterous'. At times he reports others as sharing his delusions, with grimly comic effect. This is especially so in the most surreal part of the novel, when the 'great task' takes him into the thick of a battle of the Sino-Japanese war. Yet, for all this, the narrator meticulously records his doubts about the veracity of his recall. Memory, and its vagaries, are a constant preoccupation, and much of the narrative has a dreamlike, and sometimes nightmarish, quality.

Nearly all the major characters of the novel are represented as earnestly seeking to do good. All of them fail, and their failure is due, to a greater or lesser extent, to their failure to grow up. That, at least, is how it appears, but perhaps their infantilism exists only in the mind of the narrator. Towards the very end, however, when there are signs that reality has begun to break in upon his self-understanding, Banks records a character as wanting him to know the truth, to 'see how the world really is', and saying to him, 'Your mother, she wanted you to live in your enchanted world for ever. But it's impossible. In the end it has to shatter. It's a miracle it survived so long for you.'

Most of us know people whom we explain to ourselves as having never grown up—but I have known none to have been affected quite so severely as Christopher Banks. It may be that the author does not want us to sympathise with Banks' plight so much as to take the moral point that the will to do good falls an easy victim to romantic fantasy and self-delusion, but even so, we need to be persuaded that his plight is real. In this, I am not sure that the author succeeds, oddly enough, because of the very quality of the writing, which is never less than clear, precise, elegant, and acutely *observant*. Throughout Banks' losing battle to control his memory, to keep a grip on reality, it is never quite possible for the reader to suspend disbelief, to accept that it is Banks and not Kazuo Ishiguro who is the author, trying to entrap us in a world of make-believe. The fiction does not quite ring true, but it is, nevertheless, an engaging, moving, and very moral tale. ■

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

Changing stages

The last decade of the millennium was not lacking in drama. **Geoffrey Milne** revisits the highs and lows of Australian theatre, onstage and off, throughout *Eureka Street*'s 100 issues.

THERE WAS CERTAINLY plenty of drama in Perth in the early 1990s, when WA's state-theatre equivalent, the WATC, merged with its long-time rival, the Hole in the Wall Theatre, to create the new State Theatre Company of Western Australia. Barely two years later—and after just nine productions—the new company ceased operations, in March 1993. In a sense, the STCWA's collapse wiped out three entities: the State Theatre itself and its two predecessors, although a vestige of the old Hole in the Wall remains an occasionally producing project-based company.

Worse was to follow in Hobart three years later, when the only permanent professional company, Zootango, was wound up, leaving the Island State with no professional adult theatre at all. Thereafter, Tasmanians were to see only touring product from the mainland plus the occasional project-based local production.

The 1990s were also rather unkind to well-established alternative and middle-sized theatre companies. Brisbane lost its TN! Theatre Company in 1991, Adelaide lost both the Red Shed and the newly badged Magpie 2 in 1998, while Melbourne's enterprising Anthill disappeared in 1994. In Sydney, many small-scale but often interesting ventures—like the Lookout Theatre Club, the Crossroads, the East Coast Theatre Company and Iron Cove—came and went after short spells. Despite the formation of the very impressive Brink Productions and the Greek–Australian Theatro Oneiron in Adelaide, Kooemba Jdarra Indigenous Performing Arts in Brisbane and Yirra Yaakin Theatre in Perth, the late 1980s and the 1990s saw much of the middle torn out of the fabric of Australian theatre.

Things in regional Australia were no better. The Hunter Valley Theatre Company at Newcastle went under in 1995 after nearly 20 energetic years; the Q Theatre at Penrith and the New England Theatre Company at Armidale were forced into a geographically bizarre merger by funding cuts in 1997 (which also diminished Theatre South at Wollongong), while South Australia's regional touring company, Harvest, and Lismore's North Coast Theatre Company had already gone in 1991. Only the inauguration of the imaginatively structured Northern Rivers Performing Arts at Lismore and the clever transformation of the old Murray River Performing Group at Albury-Wodonga into HotHouse Theatre redressed the balance a little.

Australia's young audiences have also witnessed considerable change. With the losses (again mainly due to funding cuts) of companies like Toe Truck in Sydney, Barnstorm Theatre and the Woolly Jumpers in regional Victoria, Brolgas in Brisbane and the original Magpie in Adelaide, professional, year-round schools touring has all but finished, apart from some of the work of Zeal Theatre in Victoria, Barking Gekko in WA, Freewheels in the Hunter region, Kite in Queensland and Salamanca in Tasmania. Most of the handful of surviving theatres for young people—like Patch in Adelaide and Arena in Melbourne—are now opting for just a couple of large-scale, in-theatre productions annually and targeting increasingly older audiences. The closure in 1998 by Monash University of its long-standing and brilliantly curated children's theatre seasons at the Alexander Theatre has also robbed Melbourne kids of a very rich resource.

By contrast, the growth of new young people's theatre festivals, like Out of the Box and Stage X in Brisbane and Awesome in Perth—and the return to form of Adelaide's Come Out Festival—have gone some way to broadening the scope of what's available to young people. Similarly, there has been a huge growth in the ranks of participatory Youth Theatre in Australia in the past decade.

At the same time, however, after 20 years of extraordinary innovation and world leadership in the field of puppetry, Australia has lost half of its permanent companies in the past four years and one of the form's pioneers—Handspan Visual Theatre has been all-but invisible for the past three. Puppetry largely shed the clichéd tag of 'puppets are just for kids' through the 1980s and '90s, especially through the work of companies like Handspan, Carouselle and the outstanding Company Skylark, so it is ironic to note that survivors like Spare Parts in Fremantle, Terrapin in Hobart and Polyglot in Melbourne are almost entirely *children's* companies.

Meanwhile, back in the adult mainstream, the four remaining state theatres have continued to soldier on, although as I noted in the May issue this year, they are mounting considerably fewer new productions now than they were ten years ago. Even the 15-year boom in musicals has shown recent signs of tapering off.

GIVEN THIS GRIM picture of erosion and loss, how is it that I am just as busy reviewing theatre as I was ten years ago? (I average 140 productions a year and, given what is available, could see half that number again. This year looks like being even busier.) Where is it all coming from?

The answer, I think, is three-fold (allow for the fact that I live and mostly work in Melbourne where the losses of companies have been less keenly felt than in, say, Adelaide, Hobart or Perth).

First, there has been an explosive growth in Fringe theatre. More young artists graduate each year from the training institutions than can be absorbed by a shrinking number of drama companies producing a diminishing repertoire. Ad hoc companies have banded together to produce

theatre of all kinds in all sorts of venues ranging from draughty halls to abandoned warehouses, pubs, alleyways and even theatres. This is DIY theatre of the truly passionate and committed: unsubsidised (except by 'day-jobs' and the dole) but fired by a desire to make new experimental work or to show off skills in other people's and fuelled by the growth of new and nurturing fringe venues.

Despite the strong historical influence of the Adelaide Festival Fringe, Melbourne has long been the acknowledged alma mater of fringe theatre. La Mama has been recently joined by venues like the Melbourne Trades Hall, the North Melbourne Arts House and Chapel Off Chapel as year-round sites with infrastructural support for new work and emerging artists. The Blue Room in Perth's Northbridge, the Lion Arts Centre in Adelaide and the Metro and the Merrivale St Studio in Brisbane—not to mention the exciting new development of the Powerhouse in the same city—have also aided the development of new work. Brisbane, in particular, has become one of the most vibrant cities for alternative and fringe theatre, as witnessed in the extraordinary variety of work now offered by companies like Zen Zen Zo, Matrix, Brink Visual Theatre and many others.

Even in Sydney, where a genuine fringe ideal has been surprisingly slow to emerge in any organised form, the creation in the late 1990s of the infrastructural Hydra Theatre in Wolloomooloo has supported a growing range of fringe groups like the Tamarama Rock Surfers, Theatre 20:20 and others.

Secondly, developments in new circus and physical theatre have compensated for some of the losses in spoken-word drama. And thirdly, there have also been considerable gains in mixed-media theatre and contemporary performance. I have particularly enjoyed the work of such companies and individuals as Not Yet It's Difficult, Chapel of Change, de soxy Theatre and Lloyd Jones (all Melbourne-based), Sidetrack Performance Group, Nikki Heywood and Kate Champion (from Sydney) and the Paige Gordon Performance Group in Canberra. One could also include skadada in Perth and Frank Productions in Brisbane, among many others.

Haunting images from Chapel of Change's *The Descent.*

Also on the credit side of the ledger has been the increasing consolidation of companies like La Boite, Melbourne Workers Theatre, Company B, Black Swan, Doppio Teatro, Deckchair Theatre and Playbox. It is the likes of these that have produced some of the most memorable new work (and some terrific older work as well) over the past decade. But the most exciting new drama company to emerge in recent years, to my mind, has been the extraordinarily prolific Keene/Taylor Theatre Project in Melbourne.

The most-produced dramatist of the decade has been, as usual, William Shakespeare. His nearest mainstream rival has been David Williamson. Others to make their voices heard with increasing force have included Andrew Bovell, Beatrix Christian, Timothy Daly, Michael Gurr, Joanna Murray-Smith, Christos Tsiolkas and Catherine Zimdahl, while older hands like Daniel Keene, Louis Nowra, Hannie Rayson and Katherine Thomson have also had their careers enhanced in the 1990s. But for my money, the playwright of the decade has been Nicholas Enright.

My favourite productions of the past decade have been some of the revisitings of Patrick White, the massive collaborative effort that was *Cloudstreet*, Neil Armfield's *Hamlet* for Company B, the second season of the Keene/Taylor Theatre Project and Zeal Theatre's brilliant play for young people, *The Stones*. We were also blessed by several memorable Australian musicals, notably *The Boy From Oz* and the indigenous shows *Bran Nue Dae* and *Corrugation Road*.

Among less orthodox theatre works, four shows stood out, three of them by indigenous artists: Leah Purcell's *Box the Pony*, Josie Ningali Lawford's *Ningali* and Wesley Enoch's and Deborah Mailman's *The 7 Stages of Grieving*. But the performance piece whose images haunt me most, even after five years was, Chapel of Change's *The Descent*.

So—some things are crook, but the best of Australian theatre is still worth going a long way to see. ■

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

Pulp comedy

Love, Honour and Obey, dir. Dominic Anciano and Ray Burdis. Watching this film, I felt a bit like some of our visitors to Australia when they were confronted by Roy and H.G. during the Olympics. I didn't get it. There is something in a nonchalant approach to violence which affects my funny bone like arthritis. Besides, we had enough of it in *Pulp Fiction*, a film this one resembles to the point of embarrassment. You see a couple of presentable types in tailored suits talking about the small nothings of their domestic lives. Then you see them open fire and blow somebody away. Then you see them pick up their conversation as if nothing happened.

The film is set in London. There are gangs. The gangsters have guns. They also have personal problems. One, Burdis (Ray Burdis), has problems with impotence. His partner Dom (Dominic Anciano) is not so troubled. He advises Burdis to take his wife to a sex therapist. Burdis doesn't like the therapist talking about masturbation in front of his wife. It's not right. So he treats the therapist to a knuckle sandwich.

This is a sideline to the main plot. Burdis and Ray work for Ray Kreed (Ray Winstone, above right), one of the most successful mobsters going round. Young Jonny (Jonny Lee Miller, above left), tired of life as a courier, comes to Kreed with an idea for using his position to intercept credit cards. Jonny slowly earns his stripes and is accepted into Kreed's inner circle. But the young bloke, unfortunately, has ideas of his own. Ideas, that is, in the most permissive sense of the word. There is some slapstick when the gang all try Viagra en route to a jewellery heist disguised as Arabs. And there's a shoot-out in a car park. And a girl to appeal to the softer instincts of the boss.

The production notes for this film advise that the actors were encouraged to create their own dialogue as they went along. That probably explains it. It's a dreadful thing when actors watch too many movies.

—Michael McGirr SJ

Space junk

Space Cowboys, dir. Clint Eastwood. It's hard not to be slightly overawed when you realise just how long Clint Eastwood has been making films, and how much he's done. He has acting credits going back at least as far as 1955 (an unnamed bit part in *Revenge of the Creature*), he's directed something like 22 feature films since 1971's *Play Misty for Me*, and he's produced most of those from 1982's *Firefox* onwards. He even has credits as composer for several films (he wrote one of the songs for *Space Cowboys*, for instance). All of which is to say that this is a man with a *lot* of history behind him.

This of course makes *Space Cowboys*, his latest project, rather thematically appropriate. Taking its cue from John Glenn's ride into space on board the space shuttle Discovery at the age of 77, the film sends a quartet of superannuated former test pilots into space to repair an ageing satellite before it falls out of the sky. The satellite's control system is so antiquated that none of the young whipper-snappers at NASA can figure out how to fix it, so they're forced to pull its designer (Clint) and his pals out of retirement to put things right. However, it you think this is going to be a film about how age and wisdom affirm their value over youth and stupidity, you're wrong. Clint and his team (James Garner, Donald Sutherland and Tommy Lee Jones) behave like a pack of saggy wrinkled 14-year-olds, throwing around more macho posturing and pointless testosterone-driven competitiveness than you'd see at the AFL Grand Final, more than equalling their younger counterparts in the (acting) young and foolish stakes. This, I think, is meant to be funny, or at least cute, as is Sutherland's septuagenarian Don Juan act, and the running gag where they keep on finding out that all their friends from the good old days are dead. Perhaps it is, and I'm just an old stick in the mud.

Gaping plot holes, perfunctory drama and forced pathos aside, it's just downright disappointing to see such a pool of talent wasted on such a banal and childish film. It's not as if Eastwood hasn't shown himself more than capable of dealing with issues of age and ageing in a complex and (drum roll please) mature fashion—most of his recent films deal with it in one way, shape or form, and 1992's *Unforgiven* still ranks for me as one of the best films of the '90s. I guess when you've made as many films as he has, you're bound to have a dud every now and then—*Revenge of the Creature* probably wasn't very good either.

—Allan James Thomas

Love–15

15 Amore, dir. Maurice Murphy. This Australian film is beautifully photographed. Never have a vintage farmhouse and its manicured lawn tennis court looked so good. Nor has the abundance of insect life which gathers around the farmhouse. You can almost smell the grass, the river, the driveway. But slowly, surely, *15 Amore* sets a poignant story at odds with the bright landscape in which it is set.

The farmhouse is missing one of its principal occupants. When World War II

was declared, Dorothy (Lisa Hensley) was hardly surprised when her husband couldn't wait to enlist. By now, he has been absent for some years and his youngest son, Brendan (Nicholas Bryant), aged seven, has no memory of him. Instead, he and his siblings, Mercia (Rhiana Griffith), aged 11, and Denis (Joel Pieterse), aged 9, have drawn close to two Italian POWs who have been assigned to the property to help as labourers while the menfolk of the district are overseas on active service.

Alfredo (Steve Bastoni) and Joseph (Domenic Galati) not only do farm chores but entertain the children and act as ball boys on Dorothy's tennis court. Alfredo and Dorothy are highly principled and fight against the attraction that is growing between them. There is much in Alfredo's character which has been lacking in Dorothy's husband. She is almost dreading the end of the war and the return of the man of the house. Two German Jewish refugees are also assigned to the property, Madame Guttman (Gertraud Ingeborg) and her daughter Rachel (Tara Jakszewicz). Rachel and Joseph fall in love. Madame Guttman is terrified and is prepared to fight to preserve what little has not been taken from her.

One of the many strengths of this film is that it creates sympathy for every character in it and yet some of their actions are appalling. It shows how small lies can build into something greater and darker while small acts of heroism seem to stand uncompromised. *15 Amore* is psychologically rich and deftly made. The writer/director has said that he 'tossed away the children's inheritance' to make this film, based on his own childhood memories. He might have made more investing in Telstra 2 but he has done far better.

—Michael McGirr SJ

Dishing it up

The Dish, dir. Rob Sitch. July 20, 1969. Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin walked on the moon, and the world watched history on television. In *The Dish* we see the making of that history, following the story of the Parkes telescope which picked up the video signal from Apollo XI and relayed it to NASA. Australia, in effect, broadcast the moonwalk.

'The Dish', as it is affectionately called, is operated by three loveable Australian scientists and one American scientist who turns out to be loveable in the end. The film splits its focus between the telescope's control room and the town of Parkes itself, in particular the mayor and his family. As with Working Dog's maiden film, *The Castle*, you're going to love these characters.

One of Working Dog's great skills is its casting—Sam Neil as the paternal scientist, Kevin Harrington as the larrikin scientist and Glenn Latham as the scientist whose duties are split between tracking the mission through space and falling in love with a loveable local girl. All three performances make up for an occasionally overwritten script.

The cinematography by Graeme Wood is exquisite, in love with sunburnt Holdens and a land of sweeping sheep. The art direction too revels in the bright fashions and the quaint elegance of the town. A soundtrack rich with period songs reinforces the nostalgia.

The Dish proves again that Working Dog can find charm and humour in unlikely places and weave a victorious narrative out of obscurity. Maybe not a giant leap for them, but a small step anyway.

—Rohan Trollope

With a vengeance

Titus, dir. Julie Taymor. This is a ferocious film, Shakespeare at his most relentless. Director Taymor is equal to it—inventive and unflinching, and much abetted by her Academy-Award-studded production team. The film begins in mock war—a modern child, Lucius, playing at death with mechanical toys. Then it modulates into the lapidary choreography of an ancient stage war, all drums and slate-visaged men marching in dread, mechanical triumph across an echoing Roman amphitheatre.

The toll of war begins. The general, Titus Andronicus, counts his dead sons. He orders the ritual 'lopping' and slaying of the eldest son of his Goth captive, Queen Tamora. Anticipating Lear (*King Lear* was written more than a decade later), he relinquishes the imperial office offered him by Rome to the corrupt and mewling Saturninus. It is a foolish move with sudden consequences. In a reflex of stoic pride, Titus kills one of his remaining sons. And, having earned the enmity of both Tamora and her lover, the Moor Aaron, he unwittingly gives them cause to engineer the ravishing and dismemberment of his own daughter Lavinia.

But 'cause' is too rational a word. Too palliative. In *Titus Andronicus* Shakespeare made one of his first full-scale poetic assaults on unaccountable evil. In other ways *Titus* is a play of its times: riding on revenge; gory; full of maniacal killing, maiming, raping, lopping and chopping. More than enough to keep a plaguey, bloodthirsty, Elizabethan pit (or a 21st-century film audience) sated. But at the centre of the play, when Titus must face the death of his sons and the savage bringing down (but not to death) of his daughter, it is not the bloody rampaging that is devastating: it is the arbitrariness of it. And Titus' understanding. 'Let my tears staunch the earth's dry appetite', he says. But knows they will not, cannot. And so on he goes, into recess upon recess of horror.

Anthony Hopkins as Titus, from the first moment you see him, that bulky body of his slightly aslant in his chariot, is reason enough to sit through all that the film serves up. His supporting actors are fine. But it is only Hopkins who can carve quiet with a gesture. He dignifies (which makes it all the worse) every moment, every perverse line, every mad or tragic insight.

—Morag Fraser

Flaws in the glass

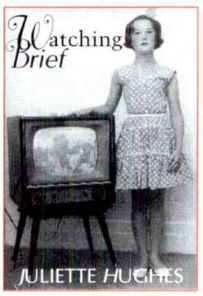
Snatch, dir. Guy Ritchie. I ain' gunna mess wiff ya, straight as the nose on this 'ere shooter, *Snatch* is near close as ya come to absolute *#!*@ rubbish. Ain't that the absolute *#!*@ soddin' truth.

Rough diamonds in *Snatch*

If you can bring yourself to imagine an episode of *Minder* directed by Peter Greenaway you'll find you're unpleasantly close to imagining Guy Ritchie's new diamond heist flick, *Snatch*. Ritchie has fashioned a world where killing people has about as much meaning as eating a packet of crisps, but knifing a dog seems to break the meanest heart.

Snatch is all fashion and no gravity. After the success of *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*, Ritchie may have the box-office pull to secure himself a jewel of a cast (Benicio Del Toro, Rade Sherbedgia, Brad Pitt) but with as many flaws as this film has, no diamond could make it shine.

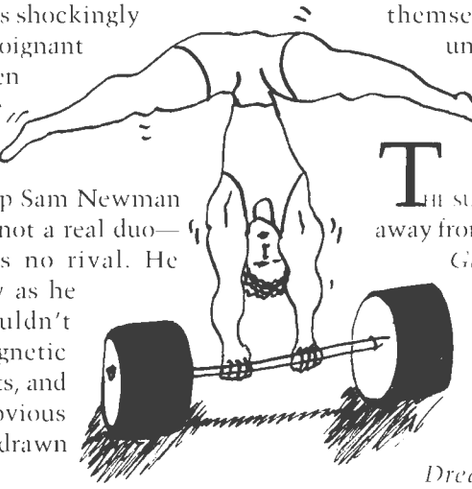
—Siobhan Jackson



See double

Unlike the Pope and most of my family, I am not infallible. I got Roy and H.G. mixed up for a long time. First I thought Roy was the magnificent ranter, the one with the quintessential long-nosed Aussie face that belonged under a cabbage-tree hat or digger's hat. Scornful loved ones put me right. (That was about five years ago, and besides, the wench is daft.)

My latest bit of fallibility has been to mix up which one was Greig Pickhaver and which John Doyle. But errors, gross or subtle, haven't stopped me from enjoying everything they do. After all, I still laughed at Morecambe and Wise when I was a kid, and anyone who saw them on the vintage Parkinson in early October would have laughed too. And at last I was sure who was Eric and who was Ernie, with Eric's shockingly funny account of his heart attack. (And poignant too, since he died of a subsequent attack. Even so it was hilarious.) And the name Ernie reminds me that I still don't know who is Bert and who is Ernie on *Sesame Street*.



But even I would be unlikely to mix up Sam Newman and Fatty Vautin. *Sam and the Fatman* is not a real duo—Newman's is a personality that brooks no rival. He dominates *The Footy Show* as thoroughly as he overshadows a single sidekick. You couldn't occupy equal places with him: he has a magnetic quality. Magnetism repels as well as attracts, and while I incline to the former reaction, it's obvious that there are numerous viewers who are drawn to him, for whatever reason.

But in the abysmal *Sam and the Fatman*—Channel Nine's attempt to emulate Roy & H.G.'s formula in *The Dream*—there is only sleaze offered instead of good ribaldry. And Newman, who was unequal to some very simple quiz questions on a celebrity version of *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* is never going to match Roy's intellectual complexity. On *The Dream*, Roy would refer to Herodotus and Socrates with ease, relevance, humour and a cleverly complimentary air of assuming that all the audience would be up to his speed.

Now that I know that Roy Slaven is in fact John Doyle, a lot of things fall into place. An article in *The Age* has shown him to be an old boy of De La Salle Academy in Lithgow, a product of deepest Irish Catholicism. Doyle's school days would have been later than mine but still in the days when the church was riding high on its confidence to meet the demands of Vatican II. The mark that has been left on him is something of authority, the kind of crowd-controlling authority possessed by John Cleese. Both men were English teachers in their 20s.

The Dream for me was part of a wonderful trio of programs; the others were *The Games* and of course the Games themselves. Many miles of newsprint have covered all three, without as far as I can see (at time of writing) commenting on how extraordinary a trio it has been. Despite Seven's many sins and omissions (missing the fighter plane swooping to capture the Olympic flame was perhaps the worst, although they almost capped that by refusing to allow viewers to see the Harbour Bridge properly; both were at the closing ceremony—was someone tired and emotional at the controls?) the Games themselves were wondrous: there was a sense of unity all around the nation as people gathered round screens at work, in shops, pubs, and even the fish-and-chippery in Queenscliff.

The success of the Sydney Olympics takes nothing away from John Clarke's brilliant achievement in *The Games*. At the very least, Michael Knight's behaviour made sure that there would forever be the ring of authenticity in the series. It is wearing well in repeats, and will be a valuable piece of cultural history in the future.

But how would anyone repeat *The Dream*? Its genius was in its evanescence: it responded organically to every changing wind; it built on a commonality that it had created from hardly anything. There's been nothing remotely like it on Australian television since Graham Kennedy's very best *IMTs*.

For two weeks their commentaries made me ache with laughter, yet no matter how scathing or bawdy their criticisms could be, they were never nasty, never sleazy. Even while you howled with mirth at the weightlifting ('Now, REMEMBER TO PICK IT UP! Good, good, now put it down, PUT IT DOWN!') you always kept a respect for effort and athleticism, because Roy & H.G. would constantly draw your attention to it. Sue Ann Post asked in her *Age* column why they didn't use 'battered clam' for female gymnasts instead of 'battered sav'. The answer I think is that they know where to stop. ■

Juliette Hughes is a freelance reviewer.

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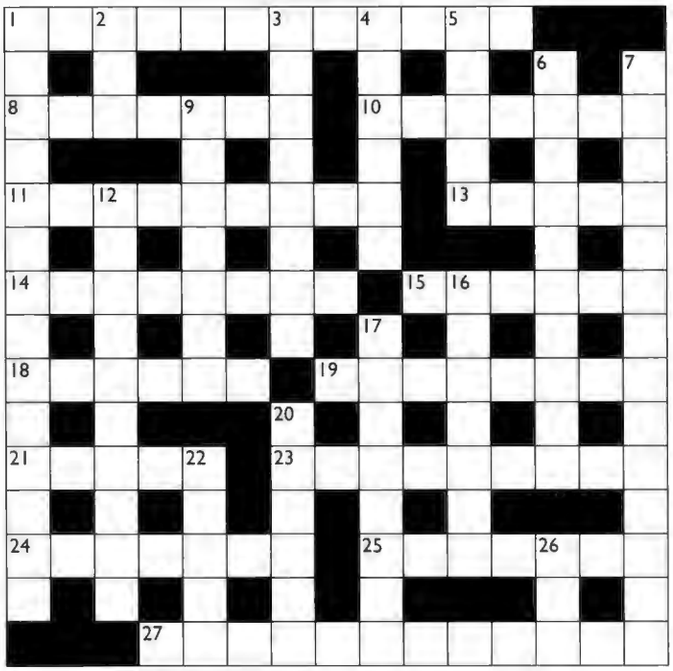
Next deadline: 6 November for December 2000 edition

Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 88, November 2000

Devised by
Joan Nowotny IBVM



ACROSS

1. When we celebrate those who've made it—celestially! (3,6,3)
8. Island king gives up love in order to succeed. (7)
10. Blissful state experienced, perhaps, by St Kilda supporters and Hindus? (7)
11. One fearful of being on a high? Should avoid 15-across. (9)
13. I'd possibly bash one who used this address. (5)
14. European Community radio disturbance could describe those mentioned in 1-across. (8)
15. Amount American University brings to top Government Conference. (6)
18. Resembles silk, that is, possibly, in appearance only. (2,4)
19. Deplorable poet wielding disc is arrogant, to say the least. (8)
21. Affirms Australian tennis great's position as one short of the top? (5)
23. Genealogist, conceivably, traces leaderless clan back to the stock of the forefathers. (9)
24. French body of water, a greeny colour, with the consistency of milk. (7)
25. Regale with humour? (7)
27. On the toss of this coin, I always get the big ice-cream. (6-6)

DOWN

1. Lily somehow used Greek letters, including C, to show how she organised them. (14)
2. His sign of pride, perhaps. (3)
3. Drug producing trance (not ecstasy) IOC, ill-advisedly, allows. (8)
4. Would he, paradoxically, celebrate 1-across? (6)
5. Artist, in Australia briefly, paints them round figures found in 1-across. (5)
6. Sounding instrument with unsatisfactory battery he made originally for deep treatment. (10)
7. Time for cultivating the mind, perhaps, while leaving the fields untilled—as in biblical times. (10, 4)
9. Somehow kept pal motivated by this means. (3,4)
12. Meditating in quietness, I recover the spring in my step, perhaps. (10)
16. Straightforward question not put? (7)
17. Peer pressure produces peer vice, I see! (8)
20. Mardi Gras procession supported by Gail? Perhaps it expresses her viewpoint. (3,3)
22. Be responsible for notice to participants. (3,2)
26. The sort of display that was in the van. (3)

Solution to Crossword no. 87, October 2000

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

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Next month: Refugee Christmas—Andrew Hamilton; Poetry—Aileen Kelly; The Middle East—Anthony Ham; Still Moving—Peter Steele.

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