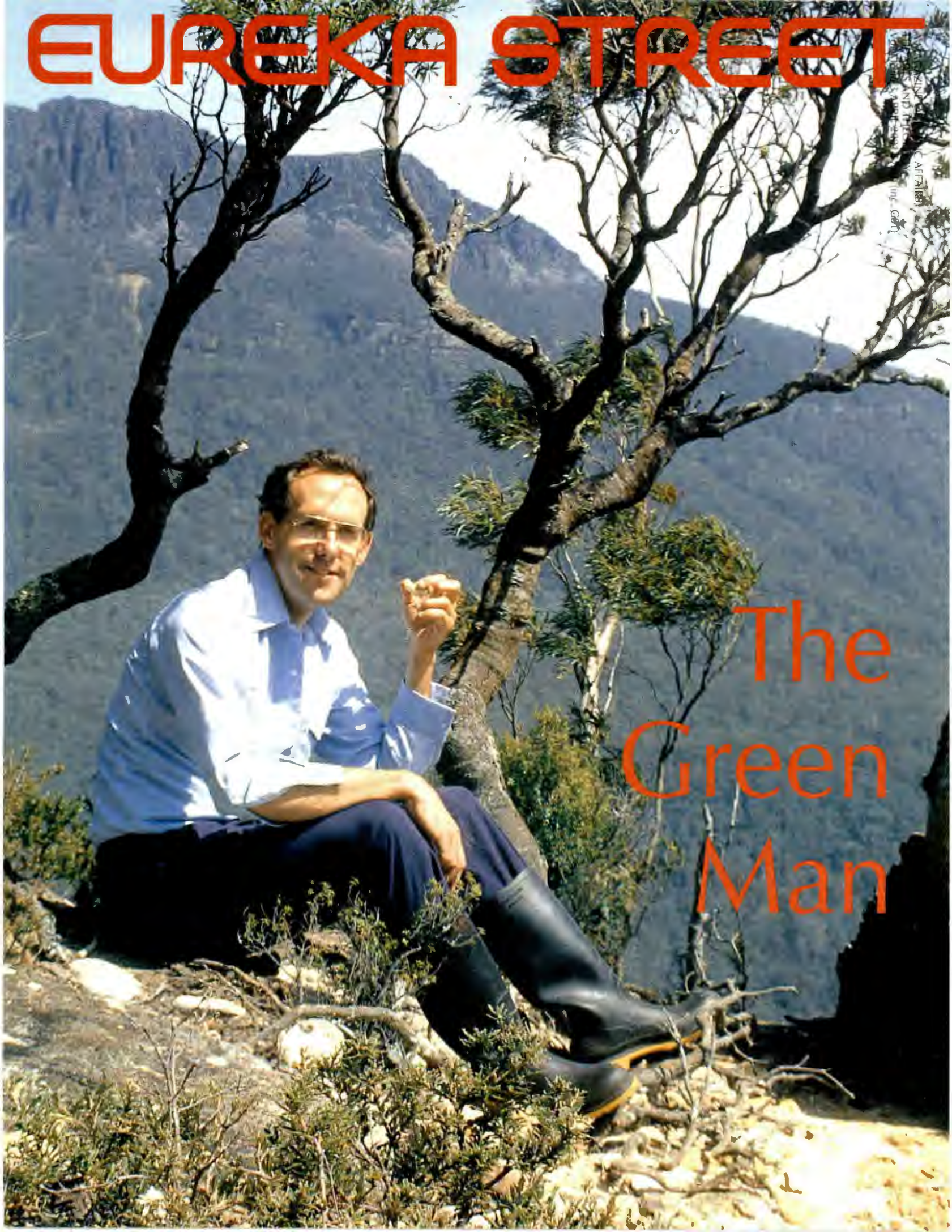
EUREKA STREET



The Green Man

(See page 8 for winners of the January–February 2001 Book Offer.)

EUREKA STREET

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MICHAEL McKERNAN

Home-ground advantage

The opening of the National Museum of Australia presents us with an opportunity to commemorate those who have suffered in conflicts on our native soil.

In 1979 Melbourne historian Professor Geoffrey Blainey was commissioned to undertake a study of the Australian War Memorial's displays to assist in a better presentation of Australian military history.

Blainey's trademark then, as now, has been to see connections that most of us miss. He has, one of

his publishers claimed, 'the eye of a poet who takes in the detail, the subtlety and the sentiment'. Blainey advised the War Memorial that 'within the next decade' there would need to be a display on Aboriginal–European warfare. That was a given, he believed. How to go about it? It might be best, Blainey continued, to give 'special attention to home-ground advantage and how to exploit difficult terrain' by incorporating into the one exhibition 'Aboriginals, Eureka, the commandos of the Boer war, New Guinea 1942–44 and Vietnam'.

Blainey's creative vision of the past might have produced a remarkable Australian War Memorial exhibition on guerrilla warfare. Certainly the Boers and the Vietcong enjoyed a 'home-ground advantage' as Geoffrey Blainey was quick to recognise. To place Aboriginal–European warfare within that context was challenging and far-sighted, anticipating the ground-breaking research of Henry Reynolds.

Not surprisingly, the War Memorial's governing body—of which, ironically, Geoffrey Blainey is now a member—declined to take up his suggestion and the report was quietly buried. No-one branded the idea 'black-armband history' because Geoffrey Blainey had not then given the expression currency. He would launch that notion in 1993 and find it embraced enthusiastically by John Howard.

If Blainey's suggestion had been adopted in 1979, how difficult might it have been for current revisionists to deny the fighting on the frontier? For museums, certainly as treasured a museum as the Australian War Memorial, tend to bring a certain imprimatur to their displays that is perhaps stronger even than the certainty we seek to find in books. Even journalists such as the Melbourne *Herald Sun*'s Andrew Bolt would find it hard to deny 'the stolen generations' if they were to study the documents contained in the National Archives of Australia's extraordinary travelling exhibition, 'Between Two Worlds'. I remember standing speechless before a police officer's account of the forcible, tearful removal of children at Wave Hill in the Northern Territory in 1950. Parents were terrified by the noise of the plane, he reported, and in future, he recommended, children should be removed by truck.

Perhaps the idea that the Australian War Memorial should incorporate the war on our own soil within its displays was adventurous in 1979. It may also have been outside the terms of the War Memorial's governing Act, but when that Act was changed in 1980 there could be no doubt of the wider coverage that parliament had sanctioned. Previously limited to the wars of the 20th century, the new Act gave much wider powers to the displays. The War Memorial embraced the colonial wars, Sudan and South Africa, but still steadfastly ignored the wars at home.

Geoffrey Blainey had correctly picked public interest in the issue and, on cue, 'within the decade', members of the public began to ask where were the Australian War Memorial displays on Aboriginal–European conflict. 'There was no war on Australian soil', the die-hards at first asserted—as if to use the same word for frontier engagements and mechanised slaughter on the Western Front was somehow to belittle the memory of the Diggers. But, as Geoffrey Blainey had perceived, guerrilla warfare and conventional warfare might be vastly different in the telling, yet warfare each was, nevertheless.

Blainey's interest in museums had possibly been stimulated by his appointment in 1975, courtesy of Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, to the Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections (the Piggott inquiry) which was to be a milestone for Australian museums. High on the list of recommendations from the Piggott inquiry was the idea for a National Museum of Australia. Embraced by Fraser, funded by Hawke, marginalised by Keating, embraced again by Howard, the Museum finally opened its doors in Canberra on 11 March 2001, 20 years and more in the making.

The idea of a National Museum of Australia had proved a godsend to staff at the Australian War Memorial who had been given the responsibility of replying to the increasing numbers of letters from those arguing for some recognition of the war at home. 'Fully recognising the importance of the issues you raise', those replies parroted, 'nevertheless such matters are now properly the responsibility of the National Museum of Australia.'

On a preview tour of the Museum, as an old War Memorial hand, I was keen to see if our expectations for the Museum were justified. It is a pity, I think, that the majority of Museum visitors will explore the Museum backwards, as it were. They would expect to find the Gallery of First Australians before they study Australia after the coming of the Europeans, but the Museum puts European Australia first. This is an architect's solution that conflicts with my historian's interest in clear narrative and meaningful chronology and context.

Even so, the Gallery of First Australians does not dodge the hard, uncomfortable issues. Its treatment of frontier warfare is uncompromising and revelatory. At the entrance to a small and temporary display on Belsen at the Imperial War Museum in London, the Museum recommended that children not be admitted without adult supervision. It was a stark and chilling display. There is a similar feel to the permanent exhibition on European–Aboriginal warfare in Canberra. Thrown on to the carpet from spotlights above, without any comment, are some Australian place-names: Slaughterhouse Creek, Battle Mountain, Poison Water Creek. These place-names should say as much to us as Lone Pine, the Kokoda Track and Sandakan. Perhaps in time they will. Excellent museums provoke us to want to know more and the National Museum is telling us that we cannot pretend any more that these things did not happen.

Yet I came away unsatisfied still. The Australian War Memorial exists to commemorate Australian war dead. It does so in a way that its founders had wanted to be unique. Not just a museum, not just a memorial—they wanted their institution to tell a story of 'the greatness and the smallness'. But they wanted that story in a place that in every corner, at every turn, reminds us to pay tribute to those who gave their lives for their country and its cause.

Study and understand what happened at Lone Pine or Kokoda, I used to say to school visitors, and then go to the Roll of Honour to be reminded that real people, maybe just a couple of years older than you, lost their lives in that or this battle. Look at their names, run your fingers over the bronze tablets, to understand that they had the same hopes and aspirations for life that you have, the same joys and fears. Feel their reality. Then you will begin to comprehend the cost of war to Australia and Australians.

If we are to incorporate into our national story an account of the war on the Australian frontier in the 19th and 20th centuries, we need to know not just the details of that story, we need also to understand its human content, its people and its implications for us. What the National Museum of Australia has done is a start. But commemoration means more. 'Here is their spirit', Charles Bean had written of the Australian War Memorial which he had helped to found, 'in the heart of the land they loved'. Others, like Will Dyson, interpreted Bean's words to mean that our Australian War Memorial would, in some sense, be a spiritual resting place for those buried so far away. 'Calling Them Home' was Dyson's interpretation of Bean.

That sentiment remains central to the purpose of the Australian War Memorial. 'Calling Them Home' seems even more appropriate to the Aboriginal wars now that reconciliation is so high on the national agenda. The National Museum of Australia has done a fine job in telling the story of that conflict; there remains a place, however, for its commemoration. ■

Michael McKernan is the author of the commissioned history of the Australian War Memorial, *Here is Their Spirit* (University of Queensland Press, 1991).

Opposite page, left: 'The Coming of the Light' by Kathryn Norris, pastel on paper, 1996. Source: National Museum of Australia. Christianity was brought to the Torres Strait Islands by the London Missionary Society in 1871. Some Islanders see this as a form of assimilation, others embrace it and celebrate the event.

Opposite page, right: 'Damelapel' by Gullawun (Daniel Roque Lee), synthetic polymer on turtle shell, 1999. Source: National Museum of Australia. The Larrakia people of Darwin lodged the Kenbi land claim in 1979. This painted green sea turtle shell shows the last hearing for this claim in 1995. The judges' decision is still pending.

COME & HELP CELEBRATE THE GOLDEN JUBILEE OF THE AUSTRALIAN JESUIT MISSION IN INDIA

50th ANNUAL MAYTIME FAIR

HELD AT XAVIER COLLEGE, KEW, MELBOURNE, SATURDAY 5 MAY 2001

Fr Gaudentius Kongari SJ, Provincial Superior

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In February 1951, a group of pioneering Australian Jesuits left Australia, missioned to Hazaribag in India. Of the more than 50 Australian and New Zealand Jesuits who followed that first group only 23 remain in India now. We are blessed also with 150 Indian Jesuits.

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42 Mission Stations, 430 Mass centres, 4 hospitals, 204 schools, 7 Grihini schools, 35 dispensaries, 5 leprosy centres and many Welfare centres.

Helped to support ...
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59,000 school students, catechists, teachers and health workers, farmers and village development personnel

Helped to ...
improve water resources and food production, maintain bicycles, motor bikes, jeeps and ambulances and provide legal aid for exploited people.

Father Tony Herbert SJ, 36 years in India

Father Peter Doherty SJ, 44 years in India

Amusements, food & drink, music, market goods, raffles & wheels, from 10am to 6pm.

Capital Letter

Jack Waterford

Panic stations and policy-free zones

PROBABLY ONLY THE grim reaper or Kim Beazley himself could prevent Kim Beazley occupying the Lodge by the end of the year. So embattled and discredited is the government that it is difficult to imagine anything redeeming it.

But has Beazley yet given voters any reason to vote for him? Does the virtual inevitability of a Labor victory mean that Labor will present itself to the electorate even shorter on policies and promises, or the intention to honour them, than it was when the result seemed less certain?

Those contemplating Howard's demise might note that the indications of a crushing defeat have been there for some time. About a year ago I commented that the polls were consistently showing that the Coalition would be lucky to win more than 30 or 40 seats—that is, that Labor was looking at a majority of up to 50. For more than a year, trend polls have suggested that the margin between Labor and the Coalition was anything between six and ten per cent, suggesting Labor's biggest landslide ever. And that was before the consternation induced by successive electoral disasters in Western Australia and Queensland, and—more damning—the sheer panic manifested by John Howard in its wake. John Howard had lost the confidence of the electorate by the beginning of the year; his abrupt reversals of policy and principle since, however, have raised questions of his very fitness to govern.

Which is not necessarily to say that any of his climb-downs, rollbacks or rollovers was intrinsically bad policy. The charge from within the ranks of his own constituencies—that he simply had not been listening, indeed that he had been jeering at those warning of great peril, and making a virtue of his obstinacy—were true enough. His GST settled down among consumers better than expected, but the rage in small business, and claims of genuine anomalies, were very badly handled, both by Howard and his Treasurer, Peter Costello. Similarly, housing industry lobbies were warning of a drastic slowdown in their sector six months ago, but were insulted and ignored.

The petrol climb-down was even more galling and humiliating. Petrol prices, even the GST-induced component of an extra $1 a tank, were hardly Howard's fault, but he was on a hiding to nothing from the time of Labor's opportunism in suggesting the forgoing of a routine excise increase. Howard's revenge, of cutting out automatic excise increases altogether, will hurt Kim Beazley more than himself. Most people now think that there is nothing John Howard would not do, no policy he would not adopt and no taxpayer's dollar he would not spend, in his desperation to get the Coalition re-elected.

For a sentimentalist such as myself, the most touching moment of Howard's Gethsemane was at the opening of the National Museum. The Museum is a triumph of popular culture, but of just the sort of popular Labor culture that Howard has not only always loathed but the destruction of which has always been at the top of his agenda. It has been with the portrayal of history that Howard has been most concerned. As things stand, the place for him in the museum—his place in history—will probably be as a rubbery figure.

NOW, EVEN WITHOUT economic uncertainty, government is getting harder. The younger and more ambitious ministers have already given the next election away and are polishing their curricula vitae for the election of 2006. No-one in politics for the long term would be challenging Howard for the glory of leading the Coalition into its most ignominious defeat. The art will be in preventing his taking them over the cliff with him, a fate that Peter Reith, Michael Wooldridge and John Anderson will find it almost impossible to avoid. The smarter political staffers are getting ready to depart. Most of the significant lobbies have given up on the Coalition's chances and are making a beeline for the Opposition's doors. When all discipline and central direction disappears, it is jolly hard winning single-handedly against the odds. Not impossible perhaps—as Paul Keating would say of his performance in 1993—but then he had John Hewson and the GST on his side.

Kim Beazley does not want to be John Hewson, and may well accurately judge that he should stay as small a target as possible, making the government the issue and relying on the fact that, finally, it has been found out. Why not rely on bland phrases about how important education and health are, along with some soothing phrases for the suburbs and the disillusioned?

The short-term advantages are obvious enough, but those who actually want a Labor victory because they want different outcomes should bear in mind that much of Labor's vagueness on policy represents not strategic reticence but actual vagueness and uncertainty about what to do. Those, for example, who want more investment in our universities and education generally should realise that the last thing that Labor wants right now is an auction on education. Labor wants the educational lobbyists, all of whom it assumes are already safely in its pocket, to shut up. It thinks it has pitched itself on the right side of the mean and ideological David Kemp and that it deserves to be taken on trust.

Anyone who thinks that, on what has actually been offered so far, deserves a Labor government. ■

Jack Waterford is editor of the *Canberra Times*.

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

Points at issue

From Bridget Griffen-Foley, University of Sydney

While I am reluctant to respond to reviews, I must take issue with two of Matthew Ricketson's points in his review of my book *Sir Frank Packer: The Young Master* (*Eureka Street*, March 2001).

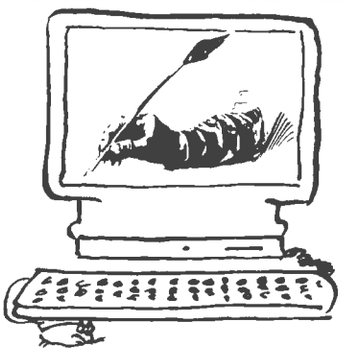
First, Mr Ricketson asserts that the biography is divided into 15 chapters that seem to start and end 'at random'. The book is conventionally structured, following chronologically episodes in Packer's life. Thus Chapter One ends with R.C. Packer's move into Sydney journalism, Two with Frank Packer's decision to try his hand as a jackeroo, Six with his enlistment in the AIF, Ten with the departure of the Theodore family from the ACP empire, Twelve with Packer's first failed bid for the America's Cup, and so on. I fail to see how such structure could be described as 'random'.

Secondly, Mr Ricketson comments that there is far too much detail about 'minor' events. He suggests that I should have omitted details of the itinerary for the first Miss Australia, Beryl Mills, in the USA in 1926, and the food supplies taken on a 'minor' business trip by Packer to central Australia in 1932.

As there is only one extant letter written by Packer during his months chaperoning Mills, I was forced to rely on Australian and American newspaper reports of the group's activities. Packer was part of a celebration of ideal Australian womanhood, a point now being explored by historians such as Judith Smart and Marion Brooke.

In 1932 Packer joined an expedition to the Granites in search of gold. It was no 'minor' business trip, inspiring scores of newspaper articles and at least two books. Packer did not keep any letter or diaries describing the journey, so I used these other accounts as the basis of a (short) paragraph describing the harsh weather conditions and limited food and water provisions. My point was simply that a bachelor-about-town from Sydney's exclusive eastern suburbs would have found the journey a rugged one. Before the party reached its destination, Packer was only too happy to follow his father's directive to return to Sydney and clinch the newspaper deal that would make the family's fortune.

Bridget Griffen-Foley
Sydney, NSW



Whodunnit

From Dr J.J. Carmody

Edmund Campion's memoir of his academic youth ('At the University of Sydney', *Eureka Street*, November 2000) was evocative and elegant but a little unreliable. He left its temporal location rather imprecise—'Half a century ago ...'—but provided sufficient hints that we were revisiting the early 1950s.

So one of those little slips of memory was fascinating, a reminder of what psychological blindness can be. 'The University of Sydney', he wrote, 'was ... [then] the only university in New South Wales.' Alas, that is incorrect: the NSW University of Technology (now the University of NSW) had begun teaching undergraduates at the beginning of 1948 and was constituted, formally and legally, early in 1949. For many years, its academic legitimacy was denied and sneered at—especially from the University of Sydney and its barrackers—but it is disappointing to discover that, over 50 years later, a fine historian like Fr Campion still seems a prisoner of that mindset.

January–February 2001 Book Offer Winners

M. Arch, Alice Springs, NT; M. Byrne, Port Lincoln, SA; M. Carty, Richmond, VIC; D. Cotter, Red Cliffs, VIC; B. Dallas, Glebe, TAS; M. Duncan, Avalon, NSW; I. Hansonn, Vincentia, NSW; L E Hodgson, Blackmans Bay, TAS; F. Hogarth, South Brisbane, QLD; C. Hunter, Elsternwick, VIC; L. Jones, St Kilda, VIC; I. Kelly, St Ives, NSW; J. Nancarrow, Lang Lang, VIC; P. Ryan, Kirribilli, NSW; S. Scahill, Kirribilli, NSW.

His other error is both more serious and more puzzling. In referring to the establishment of Commonwealth Scholarships, he gave the Menzies government credit for them and, further, asserted that 'Previously, in all of New South Wales there had been only 400 free bursary places'. It is true that the *name* 'Commonwealth Scholarship' originated with the Menzies government (in 1951) and so did the fact that they had no means test, but Menzies did not *establish* those scholarships: the credit belongs to Curtin and Chifley.

In 1942 the federal government had set up a Universities Commission (under Professor R.C. Mills) which, from the next year, began to provide assistance to means-tested students in certain 'reserved' faculties. Following the successful referendum change of 1946 (one of the few ever approved), in the words of the *Australian Encyclopaedia*, 'the modern relationship between the Federal government and the universities began to develop', part of which was the expansion of that Financial Assistance Scheme which supported over 1800 students across the nation in 1945. The renamed and expanded Menzies scheme provided for 3000 scholarships 'entirely on merit' distributed *pro rata* among the states (by this time, total undergraduate enrolments exceeded 23,000).

It may well be that (in stark contrast to the actions of his professed admirer, John Howard) Sir Robert Menzies' greatest achievement was the revivification of Australian tertiary education. In making that encomium, none of us—Edmund Campion now included—should deny the achievements of the federal and state Labor government of those optimistic post-war times.

John Carmody
Roseville, NSW

Figuring work

From Ian Manning, Deputy Director, National Economics

In March's *Eureka Street* Patrick McClure defended his report on welfare reform against attack by Francis Castles by pointing to the 'long-term conditionality' of unemployment benefit. By this he presumably means that, from its first introduction, unemployment benefit was subject to a work test as well as a steep means test. Both work and means tests have remained part of the system ever since, though modified since the end of full employment. McClure advocates the refurbishment of the work

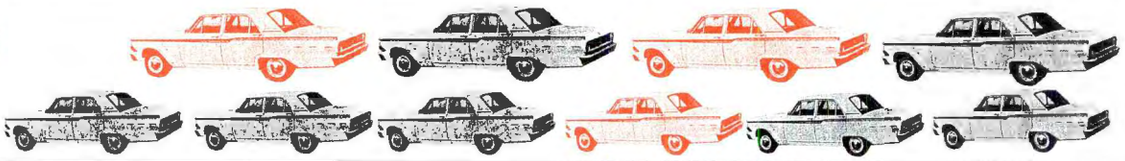
test and its extension to many social security recipients currently exempt (though not to age pensioners), accompanied by some relaxation of means tests and above all by increased services aimed at chivvying clients into work or other approved activities.

Compared with the Henderson report of the 1970s and the Cass social security review in the 1980s, both of which produced reams of detailed research, the McClure committee kept to the conceptual level, and was rewarded with instant rhetorical success. In 'mutual obligation' they lit upon a concept which Labor politicians could not repudiate, and which at the same time allowed Liberal politicians to reconcile themselves to increased spending on welfare services. The achievement on the Liberal side can be seen by comparing McClure with the Report of the National Commission of Audit, prepared for the Howard government by a group of financial luminaries and widely regarded as its economic policy manifesto. These luminaries made it clear that their prime concern was to reduce expenditure, and they advocated a blunt approach to limiting eligibility and cutting rates.

If a work test is the price of bipartisan commitment to humane social security policies, it is a price worth paying, on one condition: work tests only work under conditions of full or near-full employment. It is at this point that the McClure committee's lack of attention to detailed research lets them down. They were aware that labour markets differ across the country, but not sufficiently aware of the scale of difference, and the extent to which the social security system has dampened appreciation of the difference. According to the Bureau of Statistics, in June 2000 regional unemployment rates ranged from around three per cent in Sydney east of Olympic Park to 11 per cent or so in the regions of highest unemployment. However, these rates are affected by social security practice. Young people now work for the dole and are no longer counted as unemployed, while in regions of high unemployment it has become customary to transfer older workers considered to have little chance of obtaining a job on to disability support payments, and so out of the workforce. In recent work for the Australian Local Government Association, National Economics recalculated regional unemployment rates by adding back workers for the dole and transferees to disability support. This made very little difference in Sydney: the re-estimated unemployment rate was still around three per cent, but in high unemployment regions like north west Tasmania, the north coast of New South Wales, the 'iron triangle' of South Australia and Gippsland in Victoria, the rate rose to 20 per cent or so.

What this means is that, in the last years of the 20th century, full employment was achieved in Sydney at the same time as much of the rest of the country was depressed. It is highly likely that, had McClure's welfare system been operating in 2000, it would have worked admirably in Sydney, but in other regions his social workers would have been overwhelmed by the lack of jobs. As Australia slides into recession and the glories of Sydney 2000 become a memory, the point is yet again being made that work tests presume job vacancies. More generally, it is far easier to design social security systems for full employment in all regions than for a country with a patchwork of structural unemployment.

Ian Manning
Clifton Hill, VIC



Blue ribbon seat

In the Gunning showgrounds, two or three hundred metres from where I live, there's a monument to a local boy, Denis Joseph Murray. Murray was a casualty of the Boer War. 'After rendering highly appreciated services in both field hospital work and several engagements with the enemy, he succumbed to enteric fever at Krugersdorp, Sth Africa, on 10.01.01.' Murray was 31; his country was ten days old.

When I discovered this monument, I thought for a time that the date of Murray's death would appeal to any self-respecting numerologist. The thought nearly blinded me to the coincidence that I happened to be standing in front of the monument on the 100th anniversary of Murray's death. I wanted to do something. I walked back to the local post office where a rosemary bush has been planted in memory of the fallen. The plant has thrived to the extent of taking over the adjoining fence, so I thought it could easily spare a branch in memory of Denis Murray.

Besides, I'd taken a sprig or two from this bush on previous occasions to garnish a leg of lamb. The local economy is largely dependent on sheep so I gambled that interfering with a sacred monument might be tolerated for such purposes.

A week or two later, I was at the showgrounds as part of a CFA training course. We spent quite some time circling the centre wicket of the oval, pretending it was on fire and dousing it with both water and foam. We attended so conscientiously to this task that several of us began to wonder if the local cricket team were due to take the field and their bowlers had required the assistance of a bit of moisture. During one of our breaks, I pointed out Murray's monument to a fellow trainee. 'Bloody long way from home,' he said simply.

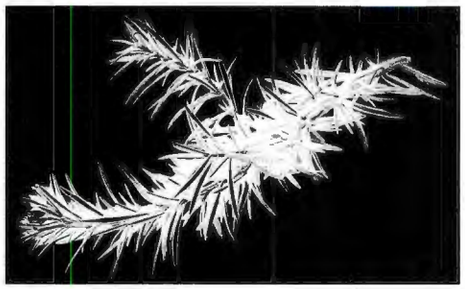
It wasn't long after this that preparations for the Gunning show got into full gear. This year, Gunning, halfway between Goulburn and Yass in the NSW southern highlands, had its 100th annual show, a milestone that seemed to attract as much local comment as the centenary of federation. It's the kind of show where you look at the prize-winning geraniums or tomatoes or zucchini and decide that you could do as well yourself and will enter next year. But, of course, you won't. You won't do the meticulous planning that gets a garden through the savage local summer. You won't attend faithfully to frail seedlings. The prizes are for stubbornness, as much as anything. For sticking it out.

The champion cake-maker turned out to be the local doctor. She had presented a butter chocolate cake. Onlookers were relieved that, whatever advice she gave on the two days a week she is in the surgery at the local community health centre, the heart foundation was yet to make its presence felt in her kitchen. Meanwhile, all the entrants in the Miss Tiny Tot competition were awarded equal first place. Prizes were on display. They included perpetual trophies that went back years. They also included such modest spoils as a three-pack of film donated by a Goulburn Pharmacy to be awarded to the best photographer of the district.

On the other side of the oval, the horsing fraternity had been camping out overnight. Their accommodation was pretty makeshift. Yet young people managed to step into beaten-up trailers, far older than they are themselves, and emerge some time later immaculately groomed for the dressage. There is a race memory that enables the achievement of such feats. It takes generations to learn how to look elegant at a country showground.

Phil, one of Gunning's senior citizens, said that this is her 50th show. 'This one is the best ever.' About 2,600 people came over the course of the weekend. The CFA was there, recruiting volunteers. It organised a demonstration of aerial bombing, doubtless in order to put enough water on the field to bring up the grass for the football pre-season.

Also present was Alby Schultz, the local federal member of parliament. Schultz has crossed his leader, Mr Howard, over the cancellation of the fast train project from Canberra to Sydney and over fuel prices. John Fahey, a far more prominent politician, wants his seat. The *Goulburn Post* has been giving more than sympathetic coverage to the One Nation candidate. Yet



Schultz is not about to lie down. His car has signs stuck to its front doors which leave no doubt as to his identity. The car spent the whole Saturday of the Gunning show parked in the shade beside the monument to Denis Murray. He must have got there early to have secured the plum parking spot. It's one sign that you know your patch. You know where to park.

—Michael McGirr

Democrats two-step

When Senator Meg Lees claims her leadership is under challenge because of her age or appearance, she is using feminism as a smokescreen. Being female and over 50 certainly can harm one's employment prospects, but it is equally true, as her challenger, Senator Natasha Stott Despoja says, that being young can hamper a candidate for a job like this.

For party members considering their options in the current leadership ballot, there are weightier moral and political concerns. The decline in the Australian Democrats' WA and Queensland State votes has put the writing on the wall for Meg Lees. But while this is rightly interpreted as a payout for her part in delivering the GST to a reluctant Australian populace, there was more to it. When the Democrats leadership switched to a policy of 'not ruling out' a GST a fortnight before the 3 October 1998 election, there is evidence that they betrayed the party processes and membership. They argued that the party's June ballot on tax policy justified their about-turn.

But they were less than frank with their members and voters. The ballot closed in August, but results were not communicated until the party's November journal, and then only by listing successful and unsuccessful proposals by numbers. To flesh out the result, members would have had to juxtapose the November results with the June ballot form. Most probably did not bother.

A former Victorian Democrats assistant state secretary, Stephen Hart, argued that the policy shift was so late in the campaign that many Democrats voters would not have noticed. A week before the election, he wrote to the editors of Australia's daily papers to draw readers' attention to the Democrats' newly articulated support for a GST subject to the exemption of food. This, he said, would leave low-income earners to pay a GST on all other necessities including clothing, electricity, gas and water.

Only the *Financial Review* and the *Warrnambool Standard* published his letter, prompting an attempt by the party hierarchy to expel him. This attempt foundered on the party's constitutional provision which asserts a member's right to speak freely on policies. Since then he has left the Democrats for the Greens.

Hart claimed on ABC radio that the general questions put to members did not mandate support for the GST. While a narrow majority agreed with the proposal to tax services as well as goods, they had voted against any flat tax on services, opting instead for differential rates. They were not asked about a flat tax on goods or, for that matter, about a GST. He predicted that the Democrats would not have the 'ticker' to stand up to John Howard in tax package negotiations, a prediction he now considers fulfilled.

What made the government's tax package, even as amended, fundamentally inequitable was not simply that it taxed

Intimations of immortality

Donald Bradman was, as they say, an icon. Not to mention a legend, a myth and a cult figure. His theological status may be less assured than these epithets suggest, but he has helped me understand what Easter is about.

Theological teachers run to well-worn examination questions. Students of the Resurrection are often asked if Easter is the happy ending to a sad story. Like most cunningly devised questions, it leads you into difficulty whether you answer yes or no. The truth, both of human life and so of God's workings, is more complex than this simple metaphor suggests.

The trouble with happy endings is that they cancel out what has gone before. In happy endings, everybody lives happily ever after. Before, all was trouble, grief, sin and absence. Now, all is joy, serenity, grace and radiant presence. Before, doubt about God and Jesus Christ; now, conclusive proof both of Jesus Christ's divinity and so of God's existence. Before death, and now life. Before unrelieved sin, and now dominant grace.

This large rhetoric collides with our experience of life on both counts. Endings rarely bring unrelieved happiness, while the saddest of stories, seen in retrospect, are rarely without meaning for our journey. In the grimmest of loss, a stubborn hope rises, and where hope is totally lost, even the most extravagant deliverance does not resurrect it. The deepest experiences of faith and grace are often edged with hesitations and ironies. Presence and absence flow into each other.

At this point of tension between rhetoric and life, Don Bradman contributed to my understanding of Easter. As a child, I went to his testimonial game, my last and only chance to see him play. The crowd was restive while the openers went about their task. A wicket fell, and out strode the great man, wearing, as I remember it, his South Australian cap. A standing ovation, as he touched his cap a little nervously. He began batting, and the doubts began. Then word spread that this was not Bradman, but Ron Hammence, a fine but not legendary South Australian player. He batted for long enough for me to be taken home before the great man appeared.

Now, in straightforward factual terms, I did not see Bradman, and the day was a loss. But in the context of the day and the reception mistakenly given Hammence, I did see Bradman. There was an intimation of his presence, even if it was played out through his absence.

This experience resonates with the tone of the Gospel stories of Jesus' resurrection, in which the same dialogue between presence and absence is enacted. The disciples are awoken to a presence, but one that is elusive enough to require the imagination to fill out. It resists capture—Jesus is often not recognised. He appears and disappears at will, and arouses fear as well as joy.

All this is more like the happiness of a journey than of an ending. It is a new beginning—indeed, like the applause that comes after a century scored in a tight game. ■

Andrew Hamilton SJ is *Eureka Street*'s publisher.

goods and services, but that it moved away from a system of progressive taxes on income and goods, which set higher rates for people on higher incomes and on luxury goods. These have been partially or wholly replaced with a flat-rate tax on goods and services which takes proportionally more of the disposable incomes of people on low incomes.

In their 1998 ballot, members voted 'to increase the proportion of direct (income and/or wealth) tax relative to indirect (expenditure) tax'. Yet the GST package was clearly going to increase the proportion of indirect taxes.

But Senator Lees persuaded supporters that the package would, once amended, be a socially just source of extra funds to meet community needs, despite Treasurer Peter Costello's assurances throughout what had passed for a 'tax debate' that the government's package would be revenue neutral.

So five out of the seven Democrat senators followed the siren song of 'relevance' in 1999 and voted for the GST, and Senator Lees is now headed for the political rocks, if not in this month's ballot then at the federal election. The polls (including 79 per cent of a Network Nine *Sunday* program viewer poll) and prominent Democrats (including party founder Don Chipp) are pushing her to go sooner.

If Senator Natasha Stott Despoja is elected leader, she would be wise to reopen party nominations in the next month or so in the hope of attracting some new blood, untainted by the GST.

—Rosemary West

Market benefits

In an interview with Liz Jackson on ABC TV's *Four Corners*, Dr Michael Wooldridge defended his new Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC), saying that 'the chosen members [had] a range of experience'. The 'chosen members' include a pharmacist, a GP, a professor of rural health, pharmacologists, a professor of medicine and (the source of most controversy) Mr Pat Clear, a previous senior executive for Glaxo Wellcome and Bayer. In the same breath Dr Wooldridge said it would be 'terrible to have all academics—they only have one way of looking at things'.

The previous advisory committee had in fact largely been 'all academics'. It was headed by Professor David Henry, from the Department of Clinical Pharmacology at Newcastle University and did, it seemed, have only 'one way of looking at things'. That 'way' was via the science of pharmacoeconomics. Pharmacoeconomics compares clinical outcomes of a new treatment with the costs associated with its use. It then tests the result against a drug already on the market and used for the same indication. Drug companies need to show either 'equivalence' or 'superiority' with the older drug, with the outcome relating to 'patients' lives saved'. The committee then assesses the validity and accuracy of the data and (if the data passes the tests) recommends a price that we as taxpayers would be willing to pay.

This is known as the 'fourth hurdle' for drug companies. The first, second and third hurdles relate to the quality, efficacy and safety of a drug, and in Australia these are dealt with by the Therapeutic Goods Administration. By the time a drug makes it to the PBAC, all that remains is to ask the questions 'should taxpayers pay for it?' and 'how much should they pay?'.

This systematic assessment of the 'fourth hurdle' does not occur in many countries. Most of those who do assess it have learnt from the Australian model. In the US the free market prevails and the cost of drugs appears to have no ceiling. It is not unusual for US citizens to travel to Canada or Mexico to get medications at an affordable price. In the UK the pharmaceutical companies are able to set their own prices and then the government blacklists those that cost the National Health Service too much. The system Australia uses has enabled this country to keep its drug costs down to around 12 per cent of the health budget (low on a world scale), leaving more available funds for other essential aspects of health such as hospitals, community health centres, health promotion and medical staff.

But our system does have its shortcomings.

Measuring outcomes in terms of lives saved makes it difficult to assess drugs that have a 'lifestyle' benefit rather than survival benefit. Lifestyle benefits are much harder to quantify. Viagra, as an example, was rejected by the PBAC. The drug company, convinced of its benefit to the Australian public, is taking the case to the

High Court. Perhaps lifestyle benefits need to be factored into the equation. The system may need some refining. But this does not take away from the value of an independent evidence-based assessment of price. And until now it has kept the powerful lobbying machine of the pharmaceutical industry well out of the loop.

Under the old system, to have a drug accepted on to the PBS, a company had to provide high-level data to the committee and then wait 12 weeks for the verdict. No contact was allowed between drug company and committee during this time. The company waited with no idea whether to order the champagne or contact their lawyers to start a litigation process (often the next step). Dr Henry believes that this arm's-length approach is essential because of the conflict of interest between the two parties: 'The committee is trying to get the best price for Australia. The industry is trying to get the highest price for itself.'

With no joy from lobbying the PBAC, the pharmaceutical industry has reverted to directly lobbying the government over the past few years—to get the system changed. In June 1998 an industry working group was set up comprising six CEOs of drug companies, Dr Wooldridge and the Minister for Industry, Senator Nick Minchin. The last meeting of this group was in November last year. At that meeting, the group raised concerns about the 'hostile attitude (of the committee) to industry'. In December 2000, legislation was passed to the effect that no PBAC member could serve for longer than eight years. This meant that, come the end of 2000, Dr Henry and other senior members of the committee would be out of office (Henry had been there for 10 years). When the appointment of Pat Clear was announced, most of the remaining committee resigned.

It seemed that the government no longer valued the independence created so deliberately by the committee in their efforts to remain objective and evidence-based. On *Four Corners*, Dr Wooldridge described the old committee as 'overly antagonistic'. He hopes the new committee will be more able to 'work together'. But work together with whom? With the pharmaceutical industry?

The new members have a great deal of expertise in many areas. Unfortunately for the Australian public, for the most part this experience is not in the complex type of pharmacoeconomics that Dr Henry pioneered. And in one case it is direct pharmaceutical industry experience. One of the previous members, Professor Aubrey Pitt, described this as akin to 'the plaintiff in a court case being a member of the jury'. How will this affect the committee's ability to make decisions about the cost of drugs? And what pressures may be exerted by the pharmaceutical industry as part of a 'working relationship'? The answers lie in the future. I wonder what it will cost us to find them out.

—Kathryn O'Connor

Caught in slips

FOR THE PAST few years the International Cricket Committee has been in damage control over gambling and corruption.

Its desire to rid the game of gambling is laudable, but public confidence in Test cricket in particular has been damaged, not only by gambling, but by an innovation meant to improve the game—the introduction of the third umpire.

The intention of this unseen adjudicator analysing close or disputed decisions using TV replays was to reduce the effect that umpiring has on the game. Ironically, it was meant to *strengthen* umpires' authority by lessening the number of decisions, and therefore the number of possible mistakes, they make. But the obsessive use of TV replays appears to have so undermined the confidence and authority of Test umpires that they're making more, rather than fewer, mistakes. And player behaviour, no doubt owing in part to frustration at the number of bad decisions, has deteriorated markedly.

The increased use of technology, for all the assistance it has given umpires, has upped expectations of umpires—from both players and supporters. There have always been bad umpiring decisions—it's part of the game—but players, influenced by the TV replays that expose mistakes, are becoming less tolerant of them.

You only have to look at the two Test series played in March, in India and Sri Lanka, to see how Test cricket is played today. The emphasis is on verbal and physical aggression.

A case in point was Australian opening batsman Michael Slater's outburst during the recent First Test against India in Mumbai. He erupted spectacularly when a catch he believed he'd taken cleanly was disallowed. Unsure whether Slater had taken the catch cleanly, umpire Venkatragavan referred the matter to the third umpire. The third umpire decided the TV footage was inconclusive, therefore the benefit of the doubt went, as it should, to the batsman.

Slater greeted the decision with an unrestrained tirade against the batsman and umpire which even Captain Steve Waugh described as 'out of order'. As it's been reported, Slater was upset that the umpire and batsman didn't accept his word that he had taken the catch. The umpire didn't have the confidence to 'call it as he saw it', the batsman wasn't prepared to walk and the TV replay couldn't prove conclusively that Slater took the catch cleanly. A situation which once might have been solved by sportsmanship became intractable in the hands of the silent arbiter.

In Sri Lanka, the match referee of the second England–Sri Lanka Test, Hanument Singh, described the players' behaviour as 'betraying the true principles of the game'. The incidents in this game stemmed from players reacting to a series

of allegedly appalling umpiring decisions.

Cultural theorists argue that the medium—in this case television—produces the response. Thus, because umpires rely more and more on TV replays, their ability to call close appeals actually diminishes.

Several times this summer I've seen umpires at one-day and Test level hesitate before calling for the third umpire to judge a run out, stumping or catch. In each case it was clear the umpire thought the batsman was out but decided better safe than sorry, or, better not to back yourself just in case you're wrong.

It also appears that umpires are struggling to control the players' behaviour. Michael Slater was not punished for his outburst until he spoke about it on radio the next day. Australian cricketers unapologetically use sledging as a weapon against opponents. They play tough cricket, an attitude echoed by the Sri Lankan and English coaches who reportedly claimed Test cricket was 'a tough game with no quarter asked or given'.

Penalties have so far been tame. Mainly monetary, they seem insignificant given the ever-increasing salaries and sponsorship dollars for winning. In the ultra-commercial, ultra-competitive world of international cricket, confrontation and controversy (even if they're generated out of the tools designed to minimise them), make good TV, and good TV makes money.

The technology is as much about providing entertainment as it is about improving the game by having better and fairer decisions. Technology feeds on itself. A whiz-bang innovation one season quickly becomes stale—think how boring stump cam appears now—so TV networks must keep coming up with innovations to maintain viewer interest and ratings.

To compound matters, there are also inconsistencies in its use. In the England–Sri Lanka Test match, referee Singh claimed that the umpires 'cannot refer a possible bump ball to the third umpire'; yet this appeared to happen with Shane Warne's dismissal by off-spinner Harbhajan Singh in the second Test at Kolkata. There was no doubt the catch had been taken at short leg, but Warne stood his ground. The decision—on whether the ball had bounced—*was* made by the third umpire.

Technology won't go away, in fact it will increase. Umpires will come under more and more scrutiny and pressure to get it right; Test cricket will continue to be ruthlessly competitive. The game's administrators must acknowledge the effect that technology is having on the game and protect umpires, spectators, players and the game by having clear rules and enforcing tough penalties against players who breach them. Otherwise these ugly scenes will only become more frequent.

—Tim Stoney

Carbon cop-out

AFTER THE FAILURE of the United Nations Climate Change Summit held in the Netherlands last year, Prime Minister John Howard argued that Australia's push for carbon sinks is crucial for meeting our Kyoto target and is in our national interest.

The government's claim is questionable. A different approach is needed before the nations of the world reconvene talks in mid 2001.

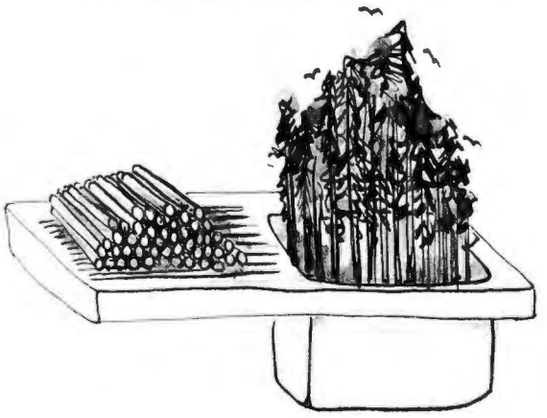
The climate treaty, known as the Kyoto Protocol, is three years old and not yet finalised. Its targets for reducing pollution are not ambitious. Nonetheless, many people believe that meeting them is a crucial first step in shifting to a future free of disruptive climate change.

And certainly, few people would have imagined that planting trees would become so controversial in the context of an environmental treaty.

Carbon sinks are plantations of trees which can absorb carbon dioxide, and are therefore meant to absorb this greenhouse gas after it has been emitted from power stations, cars or factories. There are concerns that this strategy does not prevent greenhouse gas pollution from being emitted

in the first place nor lead to the introduction of new energy and transport technologies. Scientists are now questioning whether trees are a secure store of carbon, given that carbon dioxide from the chimneys lasts in the atmosphere for over 100 years, while the trees that are meant to absorb it may well not live for 100 years.

Just before the 2000 UN Summit began, the British Meteorological Office published research in the journal *Nature*, suggesting that climate change could be hastened by a vicious cycle of system feedback. Carbon sinks may become generators of carbon dioxide midway through this century, leading to even higher temperatures by 2100.



The findings suggest that land sources will switch from being net carbon absorbers to net emitters by 2050, as soils warm and forests decay under the influence of rising temperatures. As a result, atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide could be higher than previously predicted, leading to more severe climate impacts.

These concerns are combined with scepticism about how adequately we can measure and verify carbon-sink projects (and the carbon credit schemes associated with them) that supposedly store the emissions of polluters who may be in another part of the world. Who will track these projects and the use of the credits that they generate for the 100-plus years?

A major concern is that the tree-planting fad will simply delay the introduction of solutions to decarbonise the economy, solutions like the reform of domestic energy and transport systems to make them less carbon intensive and more energy efficient.

If the Prime Minister were to agree with the advice of the CSIRO, then he might also argue that it is in our national interest to avoid climate change, rather than avoid the solutions. Australia's top scientists have told us that we can expect climate change this century and that it is likely to disrupt lives, industries and ecosystems.

Over the next few decades, Australians are likely to notice that we have become much drier overall, that river systems will have less water in them, and that when it does rain it will rain in extreme downpours, creating floods, erosions and landslides. Days will be hotter, northern Australia more vulnerable to the spread of malaria, the Great Barrier Reef bleached, and coastal communities more vulnerable to salt water intrusion and storm surges.

But we simply do not need additional tree plantations to meet our Kyoto target. The word 'target' sounds like a constraint, but the reality is that our target (and the clauses that apply to Australia) allow energy and transport emissions to *increase* by 25 per cent, and yet still come under the number we agreed to three years ago.

Late in the night at the 1997 Kyoto meeting, the other participating nations agreed to the 'Australia clause'. The Australia clause allowed a decrease in land clearing since 1990 to be included in our accounts.

Australia has been required by the United Nations Secretariat to submit figures on expected increases in energy and transport greenhouse emissions, and on what it expects land-clearing rates to be in 2010, the year by which Australia is required to meet its target.

The figures show that from 1990 to 2010, emissions from land clearing are predicted to decrease from 120 to 42 million tonnes (Mt) of carbon dioxide. While clearing rates still remain far too high, emissions in 1998 had fallen to 64Mt. The expected further decrease is explained by the fact that we are running out of land to clear.

Over the same period, from 1990 to 2010, greenhouse emissions from the industrial, energy, and transport sectors are predicted to increase by 25 per cent, from 423 to 529Mt.

When these tonnages are put together in Australia's greenhouse account, they show that Australia can come under its Kyoto target—of an eight per cent increase—while still increasing pollution from chimneys and exhaust pipes.

The good news is that, with serious government action to reduce industrial pollution in line with the Kyoto promise, and action to stop the damaging practice of landclearing, Australia could have one of the strongest targets in the world.

By concentrating on reducing industrial pollution at its source, rather than 'cooking the books' in a desperate attempt to cover up its inaction, Australia could be leading with a target to *reduce* greenhouse gases in this country rather than increase 1990 levels by eight per cent.

The bad news is that by continuing to claim that we need even more flexibility in meeting our Kyoto promise, Australia sounds increasingly like an advocate for a limited number of large, polluting corporations, not a country committed to its own broad national interest.

The sinks strategy has not worked and will not work to deal with climate change. Let's talk about a new approach.

—Anna Reynolds

This month's contributors: **Michael McGirr** is the author of *Things You Get for Free* and *The Good Life*; **Rosemary West** is a freelance journalist in Melbourne and was a member of the Community Coalition Against the GST in 1998; **Kathryn O'Connor** is a freelance writer; **Tim Stoney** is a journalist and broadcaster; **Anna Reynolds** attended the UN Climate Change talks in The Hague and co-ordinates the Climate Action Network Australia (www.climate australia.org).

ALEX MILLER

Speaking terms

I FIRST NOTICE THEM when I'm going back across the island to where the ferry is waiting. We are the only ones going towards the ferry. Everyone else—a considerable crowd—is moving away from the ferry dock and fanning out over the island. And that's what takes my attention with them, the fact that they are the only ones going in the same direction as me on this fine summer morning on the island. They walk a distance apart from each other and they don't look at each other and they don't speak to each other. The distance between them varies, stretching out at its furthest to around 15 or 20 metres and coming back at its closest to around four or five metres. That's as close as they get. He's the one causing the variation. She's staying on the crown of the road, going straight down towards the ferry dock, keeping a steady pace. He strays a bit, out onto the grass verge then veering back onto the tar, looking about at whatever takes his interest. She doesn't look about. It's early and the sun is still low. It glints on his spectacles when he looks around. She stays out front.

On the ferry we are the only passengers. As we pull away from the dock he's leaning on the aft rail looking back at the island. His khaki rucksack on the deck beside him. Like a little tan dog waiting with him. Hungry. His denim jacket is dirty and frayed at the cuffs. His jeans are stained, maybe with paint or some kind of chemical substance that doesn't clean off. He leans on the rail looking back at the island and crosses one foot over the other. His shoes are black and heavy and they're dull and greasy looking. Street shoes that he's using as work boots. He leans there looking back at the island, watching the in-line skaters and the families setting up picnic spots and claiming positions at the public barbecues, the children throwing balls and the older people opening up stripy canvas chairs. It's a warm Sunday in June and as the ferry moves across the open water towards downtown Toronto there's a cool breeze on deck. Even when the detail is lost in the distance the man still stands there, leaning against the rail, one foot crossed over the other, gazing back at the pleasure island. He stays there till the ferry docks.

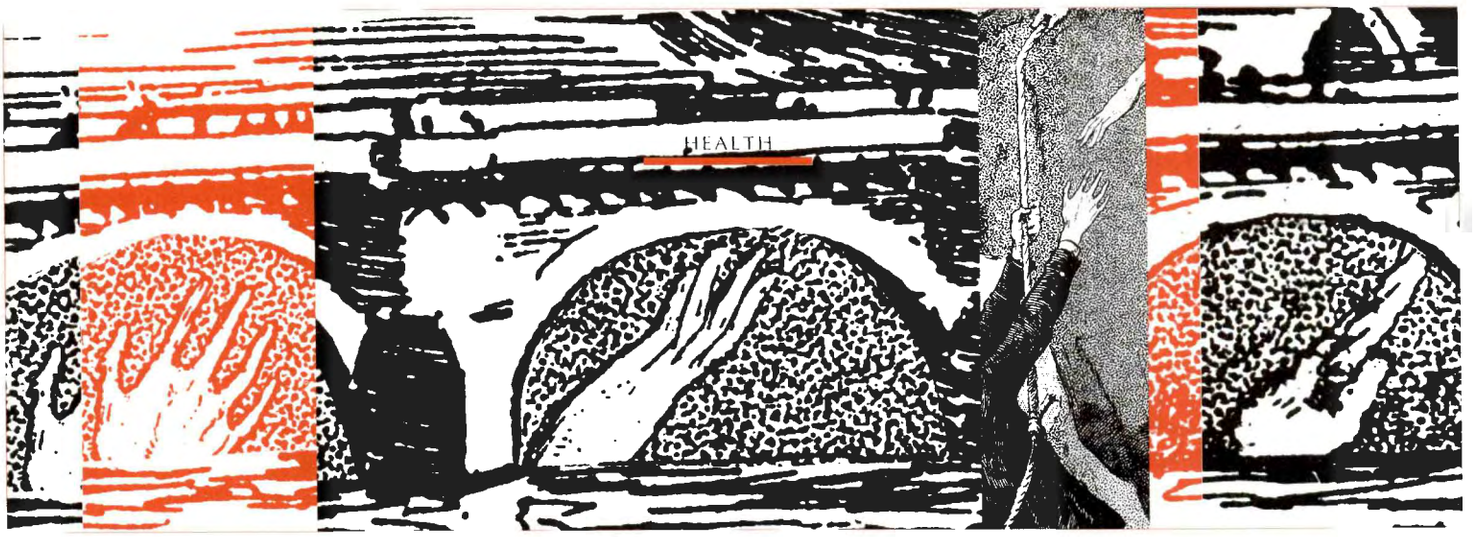
When we came on board the woman went into the cabin and I haven't seen her. When the ferry docks I go down to the front and she's sitting in the shade by the gates to the exit ramp, which is as far forward as a passenger is permitted to go. Between her feet the plastic shopping bag. Heavy and full of stuff. Three crewmen stand talking beyond the passenger barrier in front of her. They don't look at her. As I come down the stairs from the upper deck the woman turns and looks at me. She doesn't acknowledge me in any way, but her eyes stay on me all the way down. When I reach the deck on a level with her she stands up and faces the exit ramp, her back to me, watching the three men getting things ready for the disembarkation. She is wearing a cerise headband made of some kind of silky material. It is tied like a turban or bandeau and makes her black hair stick up like an untidy rooster comb. Her yellow jacket is old and frayed and made of some light cottony material. There is a pale stain in the shape of a heart low down on the back. Under the yellow jacket she is wearing a cerise dress in a matching silky material to the headband. The dress is coming unhemmed. Her flat shoes are heeled over to the outside. They have the same dull greasy look as the man's.

The man comes down the stairs from the upper deck and waits behind me. The woman doesn't look around for him. We make a queue, the three of us, the woman in front at the barrier, then me, then the man.

ON THE QUAY I hold back and let them go ahead of me. He is looking about again, as if he could be a tourist and has never been to the Toronto harbourfront before and is interested to get his bearings and see what goes on here. She is walking straight ahead, the heavy plastic bag hanging from her hand. They're closer now. Two or three metres apart. And keeping on a level with each other. They're not exactly sauntering, they're not aimless, they know where they're going, but they're not hurrying either. They've got time. Or maybe they're dog tired.

I cross Queen's Quay West behind them and stand watching them go on up Bay towards Union Station, seeing them go in under the elevated freeway, going into the neutral area between where the tourists are down at the harbourfront and where the commuters are in the business district. They're close now. Less than a metre separating them, and I see him lean in towards her. She doesn't look at him but she must be speaking to him the way he leans in towards her, stepping close beside her, his shoulder almost touching hers, to catch what she's saying to him. ■

Alex Miller won the 1993 Miles Franklin Award.



The heart of the matter

There must be ways to take the fear and humiliation out of being seriously ill, argues **Meg Gurry**.

LAST YEAR I UNDERWENT open-heart surgery. It was meant to be straightforward. Mitral valve repair, they told me, was this particular surgeon's 'favourite' operation: less invasive than it once was, 97 per cent success rate after ten years, weeks rather than months to recover.

The operation went well; the valve *was* repaired successfully. But post-operatively, things were anything but simple. One complication after another set in. What was most significant for me, however, was not just how quickly I deteriorated medically, but how fast was the descent into an emotional and alienating 'other' state of being. I crossed an invisible but nevertheless real boundary to become part of the undifferentiated 'sick' of our society. It was not a pleasant place. I did, however, learn a few things along the way. The experience gave me insight into the psychologically transforming nature of illness, and just how emotionally complex the whole process can be.

In her book, *Tiger's Eye*, Melbourne historian Inga Clendinnen discusses her experiences as a liver-transplant patient. One of her most interesting revelations, I felt, was her observation that the gap between the sick and the well in our society is at least as great as the other big gaps of race, gender and class. It certainly felt that way for me. One day I was a university lecturer, co-ordinating and teaching undergraduate courses and programs; the next I was in intensive care, weak and dependent on others for my daily needs, indeed for my very survival. I was also depressed by my new vulnerability and confused about what it all meant. Now, having crossed back to rejoin the 'healthy' side of the divide, I'm left wondering how unbridgeable is that gap, and how best we can reduce it to make the experience of illness more manageable. This is not, strictly speaking, a medical problem. Rather it is a question of medical culture, and therefore it is one in which the medical profession must be centrally implicated.

My problems began when a pre-operative procedure went wrong. It was no-one's fault. I developed a rare complication following a coronary angiogram and found myself back in hospital for a week, receiving ameliorative treatment. Naively I thought that after this the rest would be plain sailing.

I was wrong. From the moment I regained consciousness in intensive care I was overwhelmed by pain and nausea. Morphine made me sick, and every anti-nausea drug only made it worse. This debilitating reaction went on for weeks and, I am sure, affected my body's ability to resist the number of complications which then beset me. One of the intensive care doctors told me, rather disturbingly I thought, that no one knows exactly what causes post-operative nausea or, for some patients, how to fix it. I had my first glimpse of the distance we have yet to travel.

The night before my major surgery, the anaesthetist visited me and listed all the disasters that could eventuate in the next few days, including a one per cent chance of dying and a two per cent chance of stroke.

Other, more medically challenging, complications were to follow. Atrial fibrillation (irregular heartbeat) and pericarditis (inflammation of the lining of the heart) had set in by day five. I was in such pain that I could only sleep or rest sitting up, propped forward, and then only with sleeping tablets. On day eight I went home. Within 24 hours I was again rigid with pain in my chest and in my right lower back. I had a nasty hard red lump developing on my chest along the incision line. I still could not sit or lie, only pace the house. Painkillers provided brief and only partial relief.

I was soon back in hospital, once again in intensive care, with a right lung half full of fluid. The surgeon returned—late on a Sunday night—to drain all one-and-a-half litres of it. The experience was hideously painful and frightening. I had, I thought, reached a new low point. My husband certainly thought so; he told me later he thought I would die that night.

I went home again the next day but continued to get sicker. A CAT scan revealed an infection sitting right behind the sternum; blood tests showed alarmingly high readings for infection. Within hours I had returned for the fourth time to hospital, this time back to the cardiac floor and connected to an often painful four-hourly intravenous antibiotic drip. My surgeon by now was on his way to a cardiology conference in Washington so I was introduced to a new surgeon who dismayed me with the news that if the infection hadn't shown signs of clearing up shortly, I was facing more surgery. I wondered how my already weakened and undernourished body would ever cope with another surgical assault. Medical probabilities aside, I was quietly convinced I would die if I faced another operation.

It took two weeks for that infection to be beaten. I finally came home a full four weeks after the initial operation. The pain eased. Gradually I regained freedom of movement in my chest and arms. The nausea lessened and I could eat, although only a little, and for a long time with no enthusiasm. Still weak and anaemic, I remained on huge doses of oral antibiotics for another six weeks.

It was during this slow recovery time that I began thinking about sickness and health in ways that I had never done before.

What had I learnt? My first epiphany related to the debilitating impact of fear in seriously ill patients. Once the chest infection had set in—poised and ready, or so it seemed, to invade my unhealed sternum and cripple me with osteomyelitis—I became psychologically and emotionally paralysed by fear. This in turn deepened my sense of alienation from 'normal' life, further inhibited my digestive system, and reduced my strength even more. I would lie awake at night, dredging up memories of people who had entered hospital for minor operations, contracted bugs, and died.

It seems to me that the medical process has not yet accommodated and worked out adequate responses to patients' fear. I can see that this is a difficult area. Doctors and nurses, facing potential litigation if they are wrong, cannot be expected to reassure their patients if they themselves are not sure of the outcome. There is a serious problem, however, with the extent to which the threat of litigation is shaping patient–doctor relationships, and adding to patients' fears. The night before my major surgery, the anaesthetist visited me and listed all the disasters that could eventuate in the next few days, including a one per cent chance of dying and a two per cent chance of stroke. Given that the earlier complication arising from the angiogram had been a one-in-a-thousand chance, plus the fact that both my parents had died of strokes, those odds seemed disturbingly short.

It must be possible to find a better form of words, a way to reassure patients that their situation—and their fear—is quite normal. But, particularly once the problems started, this was not my experience. I was not reassured. Indeed, the most common response from the medical staff was surprise: 'Aren't you unlucky', was a frequent observation. They often added that they hadn't 'seen anything like this for years'. While it was comforting to know that my case was not a daily occurrence, feeling like a freak, a statistical anomaly, made the future—which I so desperately needed to imagine—seem precarious and remote.

It was during my regular trips from my hospital bed down to radiology that I realised the extent to which I had shed my former identity and become part of another reality. There were no individual differences here. In our dressing-gowns, with hospital blankets over our knees, we were lined up in wheelchairs, our various bottles and drips on display and medical records on our laps. We each silently and obediently waited our turn, the casual social chatter among the young medical staff around us only serving to underline the irreducible distance between us and them. It was here I felt most defenceless, vulnerable and—for reasons I don't fully understand—humiliated.

The humiliation was somehow tied up with a sense of failure, a terrible fear that I had let down those closest to me. As I lay ill and miserable in hospital—very unsuccessfully combating my sickness, in fact at one stage getting sicker by the day—it distressed me that I was putting my family through such misery. Friends made many suggestions: try meditation, kinesiology, vitamin injections, draw on your inner strength to beat the infection. This might sound like helpful advice, genuflecting as it does towards the non-traditional sources of health and healing, but at the time it seemed more like a variation on the 'pull-yourself-together' theme, and my failure to do so only made me feel worse.

The problem was that I had no inner strength. I had no strength at all, so all the advice only exacerbated

my feelings of impotence. I was reminded of a friend who had died from cancer and who, towards the end of his life, became increasingly frustrated with all the books he was being given, books on the success stories of those who had fought the good fight and survived. He also, I remembered, talked of a sense of failure.

I still have not been able to resolve this question: who should I have talked to about my fears, my feelings of failure? I could not talk to my husband or children because I did not want to increase their anxieties. Their daily visits could be difficult enough—for them and me—as they anxiously (and unsuccessfully) searched my face for signs of recovery. Perhaps I should have broached it with my doctor, particularly as I know he would have been open to such a discussion. I liked and trusted him. But I think I was worried about becoming a 'difficult' patient. In fact I felt difficult enough—and he was busy enough, dealing with my ever-compounding physical problems—without asking him to take me on emotionally as well. The hospital does provide a pastoral care service. Maybe I should have turned to that, but sharing my inner world with strangers seemed far too confronting.

THERE ARE, I believe, some answers. As I grew stronger, I was able to see more clearly that it is possible to identify factors which help to bridge that gap between the well and the sick, between coping and not coping with serious illness. But these answers won't be found in the cutting-edge technology of modern medicine. For me, it was the small acts of kindness and empathy of the medical staff—their acknowledgment, in essence, of my pain, fear and anxiety—which made the big difference.

I realised this in the middle of one sleepless and unhappy night, when a wonderful Irish nurse appeared through the curtain with a drink of hot Milo, insisting that it was my empty stomach that was making me feel so lousy. It wasn't pills I needed, she said, but a good nourishing drink. I had not had a hot chocolate drink for years—in fact I don't even like milk much—but it worked. The combination of the nutritional benefits of hot milk in an undernourished body, together with the reassuring kindness of her offer, helped calm my anxieties and fears and began to address my problem with nausea. I drank and ate little else but this comfort food for weeks. What I see when I look back at this otherwise incidental event is a busy health professional who has not lost sight of what matters, and what works, in the art of healing.

Another example: one of the worst nights of the whole experience was the night my lung was drained. It was done while I was fully conscious. I remember at one particularly painful moment my doctor and the intensive care nurse simultaneously and separately reached out to hold my hand. It was a small, spontaneous, human gesture on their part, but at the time it made a big difference. It gave me a sense that they were there not just as technical experts, but to bear witness to my distress as well. I didn't expect them to alleviate the pain, but their willingness to acknowledge it undoubtedly helped me to cope. It's a moment I remember with enormous appreciation.

On a more abstract level, I learnt how we abnormalise illness in our society, how frightening that is for those who become sick, and, in turn, how little space there is in the system (or in our lives) for an acknowledgment of this fear. Yet, since my operation, in a number of deeply satisfying conversations with many friends and relatives, I have been struck by just how many people are affected by serious illness, either their own or that of a close family member or friend. Illness in fact is not abnormal at all. So why do we act as if it is?

I had a privileged ride. I was a private patient in a large and exceptionally good Catholic hospital. I had faith in all my doctors. The intensive care and cardiac nurses, overworked as they were, were concerned, attentive and competent. I had a devoted family, and friends who never left me. But even with all this support, I still found my experience alienating and frightening, at times intolerably so. How terrible it must be for those with less support, for those with a less benign prognosis. All the more reason, then, for the medical process to accommodate better the usually unspoken need of patients for reassurance and empathy—for more hot Milos and outstretched hands.

How can we best teach our young doctors and nurses that the spontaneous, empathetic response is still an essential part of the process of caring for the sick? ■

It seems to me that the medical process has not yet accommodated and worked out adequate responses to patients' fear.

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Sticks and stones

THE FIRST edition of *Cinderella Dressed in Yella*, compiled by Ian Turner and published in 1969, included, among a rich array of children's taunts and insults, the following two chants:

> Catholic dogs
> Jump like frogs
> In and out the water.
>
> Protestant cats
> Sit on mats
> Eating maggots out of rats.

By the time I began to collect playground lore in the 1970s, these boisterous sectarian put-downs had died out among the young, and no new variants could be found to include in *Cinderella*'s second edition in 1978. It seems as if change in the adult culture, the decline in fear and loathing between Christian denominations, gradually influenced the folklore of children. Adult racial prejudice, however, has declined less markedly. Consequently there is no shortage of racial insults in the playground.

Will the proposed Victorian Racial and Religious Tolerance legislation do some good? Will it, as the Premier, Steve Bracks, declares in his opening to the 'Discussion Paper and a Model Bill', 'reinforce the right of all Victorians to live without fear of vilification in their public and private lives'? Does vilification legislation work as its exponents desire? And is the cost to other rights justified?

Argument about the pros and cons of racial vilification legislation is not new. In Australia in 1983 the Human Rights Commission was proposing amendments to the Racial Discrimination Act which would have made racial insult and abuse, and words spoken or published that might result in hatred, intolerance or violence, unlawful. In the 1990s both state and federal governments endeavoured, sometimes successfully, to introduce variants of such legislation. The community was as divided then as it is now on the justice, and the efficacy, of laws which attempt to prevent racist speech, writing and behaviour.

On a Fitzroy wall someone has painted: 'Stop Kooris bashing Asians'. How would the writer of this plea fare under the proposed legislation? Is she or he racist for saying that Kooris bash Asians, or anti-racist for defending Asians against brutality? What happens the next time a cleric declares that only his faith provides true salvation?

Response to the 1994 federal government proposal for racial vilification legislation is typical. It became a subject of intense public interest. Organisations passed resolutions for or against; there were letters and articles in the press and much radio talkback; conferences and specialist publications all contributed to an often passionate debate. Prominent individuals who supported the legislation included civil liberties luminaries Ron Castan QC and Alan Goldberg QC, while other prominent civil libertarians such as Ron Merkel QC and Robert Richter QC were opposed, as were John Button, Robert Manne and Peter Costello (then Deputy Leader of the Federal Opposition). Newspaper editorials almost always opposed the legislation. *The Australian* (1 November 1994), under the heading 'Problems in Race Law Proposal', quoted one of the leading QCs associated with the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, Elliot Johnson: 'conciliation and education are likely to be more effective than the making of martyrs, particularly when it is words not acts which are an issue'. *The Age* the next day declared it was 'an unnecessary law' largely because 'the Government has provided no proof that the proposed bill is necessary when laws against racial violence and damage to property already exist.' The editorial writer concluded:

> ... ours is a society where the scores of ethnic communities live for the most part in harmony. That being so, why muddy the waters with a bill for which there is no demonstrated, let alone urgent, need and which, however carefully it is phrased, may transgress the right of free speech? Our fear is that this bill will create more problems than it solves.

MUCH THE SAME arguments circulate now, together with some added concerns, since the Victorian government's proposed legislation goes further than any other in Australia—it includes religious as well as racial vilification as a basis for penalty, declares that 'the person's motive in engaging in any conduct is irrelevant', encompasses vilification in private as well as public places, and creates criminal vilification offences.

The government has very properly called for public response to its Model Bill—what it calls a 'consultation program'—and promises that the Bill 'will be revised following the consultation'. As someone who long ago joined Milton's party, I offer the government his 1644 declaration against 'a cloistered virtue

unexercised and unbreathed that never sallies out and seeks her adversary', and his manifesto: 'Give me the liberty to know, to utter and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties.' Put more prosaically, the salve to hurt feelings provided by anti-vilification legislation is always temporary—symbolic rather than effective—for there is no evidence that any legislation against speech and writing prevents or even diminishes racial hatred and abuse (consider the rise of racist parties in Europe and our own home-grown Hanson version). Existing legislation already outlaws threats, violence and incitement to violence; and the injury to freedom of speech and debate that is an inevitable consequence of such legislation (and in a country lacking a bill of rights or other constitutional protection of free speech) weakens our capacity as a community to know what others think and say, and therefore effectively to oppose racial and religious bigotry.

And then there are the practical problems. On a Fitzroy wall someone has painted: 'Stop Kooris bashing Asians'. How would the writer of this plea fare under the proposed legislation? Is she or he racist for saying that Kooris bash Asians, or anti-racist for defending Asians against brutality? What happens the next time a cleric declares that only his faith provides true salvation? And who will judge the multitude of children who comically or maliciously include racial and religious slurs among their diverse repertoire of rhymes, taunts and insults? Are they protected under the exemption for 'the performance ... of an artistic work' if it can be argued that these expressions are part of children's oral literature?

Better to avoid these minefields. Instead, the government should adequately fund that part of its proposal which accords with the recommendations of numerous advisory committees and commonsense: an imaginative, inclusive community education campaign against racism and bigotry. That might make a difference. After all, it was something similar which helped banish Catholic dogs and Protestant cats from street and playground. ■

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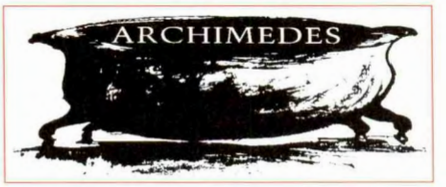

More mouse than Mickey

ARCHIMEDES HAS BEEN TRULY bemused by the reaction to the unveiling of the human genome. There was a feeling of genuine disappointment when humans were found only to have about 30,000 instead of the predicted 100,000 genes; a chagrin that we share about 60 per cent of our genes with fruit flies and 90 per cent with mice, and near-outrage that we can claim only about one per cent of our genes as unique.

Since when, in this world of miniaturisation, did sophistication have anything to do with size? And are we really that much more complex than a mouse? In fact, what makes us different from other animals is the relative size of our brain, and the extent of our consciousness and free will.

Viewed from that perspective, the fact that we don't have three times as many genes as a mouse is grounds for great rejoicing. You see, genes provide the plans for making the proteins which govern every biochemical reaction in our bodies—from the reactions which release the energy we use, to those which create the pigments that colour our eyes. The original gene estimates were based on the amount of genetic material we harboured, and the fact that there seemed to be a far greater variety of biochemical reactions, hence proteins, needed to produce a human than a mouse.

The latter may well be true, but it doesn't necessarily follow that you need more genes to produce a greater range of protein-controlled reactions. It can also be done with smarter, interactive genes and proteins.

Mapping the genome is only part of the story. What we are only just beginning to find out is how widely those genes interact with each other and their environment.

To develop into a human being, a single cell has to undergo a process whereby it replicates itself into millions of cells of hundreds of different varieties. Along the way billions of complex molecules are produced and react in just the right ways at just the right places. And it all happens unassisted, like the installation of a software package on a computer, set in train by information contained in the genes.

So the human embryo is a self-assembly system, where genes are controlled by other genes and told when to switch off and switch on; where one gene can produce proteins which assemble differently in different environments, be they the liver or the brain; and where the environment can interact directly with the genetic material to alter its function.

This is a world in which the genetic blueprint is not deterministic, where the environment has a say, where twins can never be truly identical, where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts, and where 30,000 interactive, flexible, multi-tasking genes may be able to do the job of 100,000 inflexible, single-task genes.

It is also a world, it would seem, where the genetic blueprint allows a greater role for nurturing, free will, learning, culture and religion. Far from being disappointed by our 'humble' genome, Archimedes is intrigued, excited and liberated. ■

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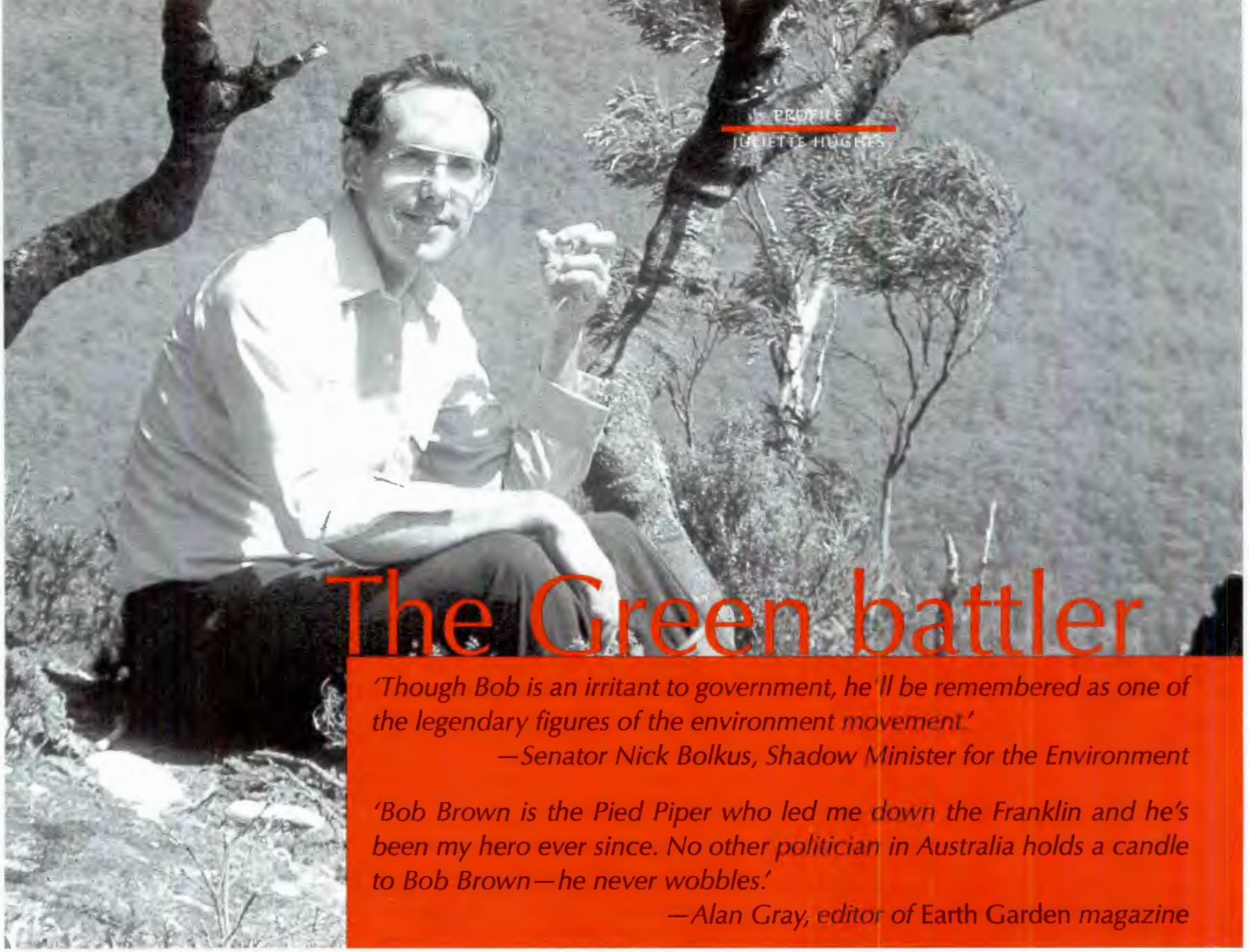


The Green battler

'Though Bob is an irritant to government, he'll be remembered as one of the legendary figures of the environment movement.'
—Senator Nick Bolkus, Shadow Minister for the Environment

'Bob Brown is the Pied Piper who led me down the Franklin and he's been my hero ever since. No other politician in Australia holds a candle to Bob Brown—he never wobbles.'
—Alan Gray, editor of Earth Garden *magazine*

Senator Bob Brown talks quickly, understandably (and understandably in both senses of the word). First, because to siphon an unwelcome message into unwilling ears he must work fast. And understandably in the other sense because over the years he has been refining a complex discourse to make his words stick in the mind.

Lone Australian Greens Senator in Canberra since 1996, Brown is more than vocal: avalanches of evidence, fact, context, roll out as he speaks. He is unafraid of complexity, but has learned the art of the soundbite, something to which most environmental campaigners are tone-deaf. With a huge network of formal and informal workers behind him, based in such groups as the Wilderness Society, he spearheads the Greens push in the national parliament. The relationship between the Greens and the various environmental groups that support them at election time is something that parties with bigger campaign budgets might still envy.

Yet in recent years Brown, who was *The Australian*'s Australian of the Year in 1982, and who was the 1990 recipient of the United Nations Environment Programme's Goldman Environment Prize, has faded from the front pages and the screens of mainstream Australia. His indefatigable pursuit of the major parties in the Senate on matters of the environment, social justice and public accountability has until recently been largely ignored by a press gallery whose greatest interest is in the fine shadings of Coalition/ALP policy differences. At times like these, Brown's efforts can be the talk of Parliament House, while the rest of Australia remains oblivious.

'Last year, when the Regional Forest Agreement Bill came in here to give forest companies power to disinvest the minister for the environment's powers over the forest ... I debated every clause. It was the 14th or 15th longest debate in Senate history, and it didn't rate a line in the press. Because Labor and Liberal supported [the Bill], the mood was: "Here's a greenie on the benches, delaying things, filibustering, carrying on." The press gallery, particularly the doyens of the press gallery, have made a high artform of putting acres of newsprint towards discussing smaller and smaller differences between the big parties, who are both economic rationalist parties.'

Shadow Minister for the Environment, Senator Nick Bolkus, is unworried by the charge that Labor is just another economic rationalist party. 'The bottom line is, we're not the Greens. And Bob will tell us where we go wrong, but he also knows he's got more hope with us than with any other party.'

But Brown can document the change in attitude that came over the Labor Party in the early '90s. Change came from the top end first: 'Things became progressively more difficult after the late '80s—the halcyon Green years. Even Maggie Thatcher said she was green! But after 1990, with the decision to stop the Coronation mine in Kakadu, when Bob Hawke held out against Cabinet, promoting the rights of the Indigenous people, the environment was taken off the agenda. Graham Richardson told me in 1990 what was going to happen. And when Paul Keating came into office in '93, he told his staff Christmas party that the environment was going on the backburner. Ros Kelly as the minister of the day saw to that.

'What we're seeing now is a continuation of that through to Robert Hill being a very effective burier of the environment. His job has been ... to apply bandaids and greenwash.' ('Greenwash': *noun, coll.*, creating an atmosphere of spurious concern for the environment while continuing to pursue anti-environmental policies.)

In Victoria in February 2001, *The Age*'s Claire Miller reported the leak of an industry paper. It predicted the loss of many logging jobs because the native forests have been logged unsustainably, raising the question of what possible economic benefit there could be for a community to deplete a resource and be left with nothing. Brown sees that as part of 'greenwash'.

'Jobs, jobs, jobs. Talk jobs all the time—the representative unions have become very close to the corporate sector on that. I've challenged the CFMEU time and time again: "When did you ever step off the footpath to prevent a job being shed by a woodchip company?" Since woodchipping was introduced in 1969, 20,000 jobs have been shed out of the industry. And the protests have been against environmentalists who have never cost *one* of those jobs.'

However, even amid the press hype that zoom-magnified One Nation's

Extract from the Senate Hansard, 22 March 1999

Senator BROWN (Tasmania) (10.18 p.m.) ...The second matter I refer to tonight deals with political donations by woodchippers to the coalition and to the ALP. A review made by a researcher of the donations made to the older parties has found that, in the 1994–95 financial year, two of Australia's largest woodchipping companies, Amcor and Boral, gave money to the ALP and the coalition on the very same day that the then federal resources minister, David Beddall, renewed and extended the export woodchip licences for the same companies. It was also the same day that another giant woodchipper, Wesfarmers Bunnings, gave their largest political donation of that financial year.

People who were here then, or indeed anybody watching from outside, will remember that 21 December 1994 was a dark day for those people concerned about Australia's forest environment. It became known as 'Beddall's blunder', and I will explain that in a moment. The expectation around the country was that the federal government—the Keating government—would save some of our precious wild forest. Despite this overwhelming expectation, the minister—Beddall—handling this matter gave vast new tracts of publicly owned old-growth native forest to Amcor, Boral and Wesfarmers Bunnings to be woodchipped and end up ultimately as paper bags and other paper produce on the scrap heaps of the Northern Hemisphere.

Mr Beddall's largesse was so breathtaking, and the backlash against the government from the populous [sic] at large so destabilising, that three weeks later, on 13 January 1995, the *Sydney Morning Herald*'s editorial reported it as 'Beddall's blunder' and noted that Prime Minister Keating had promised to phase out all export woodchipping by the year 2000. That is only nine months away but we are not getting that phase-out. We are in fact facing a total removal of all export woodchip ceilings under the Regional Forest Agreement legislation about to be voted on in this chamber. I seek leave to table a graph which clearly demonstrates this extraordinary coincidence of the dates of donations in relation to woodchip licence renewals. It is a four-page document.

Leave granted.

Senator BROWN—I thank the Senate. I ask, for those who will read this graph, what fair-minded person in the wider populous [sic] could be expected to believe that those massive donations by Boral, Amcor and Wesfarmers Bunnings—Australia's rich and destructive woodchip companies—happened purely coincidentally on the same day that their woodchip licences were renewed? Do the big parties—the ALP and the coalition—really expect the average voter to believe that this is pure coincidence? If so, please give an explanation. The point of this is to seek some explanation, in the absence of which the circumstances really reek of corruption. This really has the stench of the sort of shoddy deal that says, 'You donate some money to our party coffers, and we will extend and defend your licences to export the wild forests as woodchips.' These companies got what they wanted on the very day—21 December 1994—that they donated $242,500 to the ALP and the coalition. The ALP and the coalition should make amends to the people of Australia by now voting down the Regional Forest Agreement legislation and protecting what remains of the nation's heritage.

I sum up there: on the very day—in a sea of public controversy, with the nation watching—on which the export woodchip licences were renewed for these three giant corporations in Australia, massive donations went to the two principal political parties, and not least the government which was making that decision. Remember, it was supported by the opposition.

While this is some five years back, an explanation is owed here.

contribution to Labor's successes in Western Australia and Queensland, the pivotal role of environmental campaigning in those wins is now being widely recognised. Labor is learning, again, that if it wants Greens preferences, it has to deliver on policy—the price of support in the Ryan by-election was a commitment to end the agricultural landclearing that has put Australia in the same ecological sinbin as Brazil. We are, says Brown, 'alone amongst wealthy nations [in] the six worst destroyers of native vegetation around the globe.' He added in his press release that 'the Howard Government denied the Democrats this outcome during the GST deal two years ago.'

The Democrats had a very strong environmental platform in the late '80s and early '90s. However, as the political clout of environmentalism waned during the '90s in Canberra, there was a discernible change in the Democrats' parliamentary performance on environmental issues. Under Cheryl Kernot and Meg Lees, the agenda became more friendly for the two major parties, and when Senator Lees enabled the Howard Government to introduce the GST, there was wide disaffection, and claims that she had let the Bill go through without exacting enough concessions on a range of issues.

According to Brown, there are plenty of closet greenies in the major parties. 'Time and time again I see them having to go and vote on the other side. They'll say, "I wish I could sit with you on this."'

Alan Gray, editor of *Earth Garden* magazine, says of Bob Brown that, during his ten-year (1983–1993) stint in the Tasmanian House of Assembly, he saved 1.4 million hectares of Tasmanian wilderness from woodchippers, simply because he is a forceful and doughty cross-trader. 'Democrats don't cross-trade,' says Gray. He is of the opinion that 'they've shamefully wasted their balance of power in the Senate for many years.' When the Democrats were soundly beaten by the Greens in the WA election, there was much soul-searching among rank-and-file Democrats, and this was the final spur to Natasha Stott Despoja's leadership challenge. Is Brown concerned that under a Stott Despoja leadership the Democrats would poach Greens voters?

'Well look, I don't mind! My view is that we need a much stronger green ethic in parliament and that if the Democrats can help inject that into the parliamentary system then good on 'em. The important thing is that we get green issues, both social and environmental, on the agenda. I wasn't a fly on the wall within the Democrats—hardly!—when these matters were being discussed. But in the week that the GST went through, I can remember [the Bill] had a $3 billion per annum subsidy to the burning of fossil fuels by the logging, mining and corporate companies, just with the diesel fuel rebate.' At the same time, says Brown, a mere $200 million per annum over five years—and that drawn from part-selling Telstra—goes to environmental needs.

On 9 March, Jon Faine interviewed Stott Despoja, on ABC Radio 774 in Melbourne, and asked her what the essential difference was between her party and the Greens. This question came the day after *The Age* had published an extraordinary appeal from Janet Powell, former leader of the Democrats in the early '90s. In it, Powell, who has since campaigned for Brown, invited Stott Despoja to join the Australian Greens, dangling the prospect of future Greens leadership as bait. Don Chipp weighed in the following Sunday with his own front-page plea to Meg Lees, variations on the 'for God's sake, go!' theme. But he sedulously avoided any mention of the Greens. Being beaten by them five–nil in Western Australia was perhaps a reason for hoping the whole Greens problem would go away if Natasha would just step in and save the Democrats from similar oblivion in the next federal election. On radio, Stott Despoja responded: 'Democrats are not a single-issue party' and referred to their raft of policies. But, she emphasised, 'The last thing I want to do is to split progressive politics'; she said that she would be interested in 'working co-operatively with the Greens'. In the interview with *Eureka Street*, Brown dismissed any suggestion that the Australian Greens are a single-issue party: '... the Greens are a party of the Left. Our social policies are as important to us as our environmental policies.'

He reminisced about the warmer relationship that existed between the two parties under Powell's leadership: 'We went very close to forming a coalition with Janet Powell in 1990. We had discussions about it in Launceston with the five Greens ... in Tasmanian Parliament but ... Cheryl Kernot reversed that. Cheryl was very anti-Greens, and saw us as a threat, not an ally, and that sentiment has gone right through the Democrats. My view is that we know where we're going; the Democrats are much more a party of the Centre Right ... They want to be in there as brokers with this government.'

Whether the Western Australian public voted in five Greens because of the upsurge in concern about the state's old-growth forests or whether they voted out the Democrats along with Richard Court in a reaction to the GST (and perhaps as part of a punishing mood against sitting members), does not worry Brown overmuch: 'I sit next to Natasha Stott Despoja in the parliament, and I would be able, I'm sure, to work very well with her, if she were to assume the leadership.'

Circumstances currently favour the Greens. With a hugely disproportionate skewing in favour of young people voting for them they are, Brown says, in exact contrast to One Nation whose voters are largely over 50, with very few under 25. If the Greens can keep their voters motivated and loyal, they have longevity built in. Globally, there is a quiet but growing resurgence in respect for environmental issues. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released its report on global warming in February, with results that could only dismay the nay-sayers. In Britain, the Ministry of Defence recently brought out

its 30-year strategy plan. There alongside the weapons wishlists were predictions of water wars and huge population displacements as global warming renders some countries barely viable. Brown is certain that under current ways of managing the environment, Australians will be among the two-thirds of the world's population that will be living in 'water-stressed' conditions by 2025. He points to the expected increase of 30 per cent in the population and the predicted 30 per cent drop in water supplies as salinity, catchment-logging and climate change take their toll.

'How can we respond to the catastrophe? We can have the good common sense to change what we're doing to avoid the catastrophe. But if it is catastrophic, the Greens are going to be called upon to help in that too-late scenario, the world that deals with lost opportunities. Yes, we are not facing a global environmental catastrophe, we're in it. But that said, I am one of those who believe we have the collective good sense to turn it around.'

The Global Greens 2001 conference will draw Greens politicians from more than 60 countries to Canberra's Old Parliament House in April, where they will discuss how to position themselves politically. There are over 300 Greens elected to state and federal governments throughout Europe; France and Finland both have Greens in coalition with government, with the minister for the environment in both countries a Greens member.

This territory is familiar to Brown, who went into the world's first-ever Green Accord, with the ALP in Tasmania. Would he work in coalition with a major party again? Would he accept a ministry this time?

'Yes. But they wouldn't want me. In 1989 we went into the Green Accord in Tasmania. We decided we wouldn't go for ministries because we had three new young parliamentarians ... we wanted to drive that government as hard as possible, particularly in the first six months, to get out of it what we could. And we got FOI and we got voting changes for the young and we protected 25 schools from closure. So we got a whole raft of social and environmental benefits and a doubling of the World Heritage area, which we wouldn't have got later on. It was the right decision to make.'

But image is always a problem, not just the perceived tension between being an activist (a tag that Brown, with his six arrests over the years, can certainly claim) and being a suited politician dealing with the big end of town. The mums and dads, the middle-ground voters who are so desperately sought by all parties, can be put off by the fact that they see mostly dreadlocked ferals on the television news whenever there's an environmental issue being aired. Brown is unworried by this and is benevolent towards the ferals with their dreadlocks. He adds that he is used to the distortion of the Greens' image by the popular press.

'Yeah, when I'm feeling a bit frazzled by that I go and read about the suffragettes. And you see they were wanton women, they should have been home at the sink, they were going to destroy the economy, they broke all the tenets of St Paul in the Bible, they copped it from the pulpit ... and worse still, they copped it from other women. And yet they brought about a change in the thinking of society which has benefited us all and will never go back.'

He recently wrote to James Packer, inviting him to walk in the Tasmanian forest with him. 'I think it's very important for us to keep open avenues of communication with the new generation of movers and shakers as well as the dreadlockers at the other end of the spectrum.'

But political temperatures have been rising in Canberra all this strange and turbulent year, and Brown will continue the gritty business of thrashing out preference deals, even in the knowledge that politicians desperate for a deal might make promises that turn out to be 'non-core'. John Howard, when he was in Opposition, criticised Keating's woodchipping record. And Sheryl Garbutt, Victorian Minister for the Environment, who had excellent relations with the environment movement when she was in Opposition, is now execrated by environmental groups for permitting highly contentious logging in water catchments near drought-affected areas.

Brown says, 'We are not going to be taken for granted by Labor. While the impulse is strong for the Greens to get rid of the Howard government, it's not one that says we should hand government to the alternate economic rationalist government, which is the Labor Party. Suddenly the Labor Party is starting to put the environment on its agenda ... but we are very clearly aware that the Labor Party has a corporate agenda way above the environmental agenda ... However, if we direct preferences, the number of preferences that go to Labor increases from about 65 to 85 per cent. That's enough to change eight to ten seats. In close elections that's enough for Labor to win or lose office. So we have to take that very, very seriously.'

'Since woodchipping was introduced in 1969, 20,000 jobs have been shed out of the industry. And the protests have been against environmentalists who have never cost one of those jobs.'

—Bob Brown

NSW Premier Bob Carr's proposed 25-year environment tax to protect that state's water is part of the new Labor environmental consciousness, but Brown praises it mildly as only 'halfway there'. He would like to see strong eco-taxes of the 'polluter pays' type. He cites Helmut Kohl's initiatives in 1983 when 17 Greens were elected to the Bundestag. 'Chancellor Kohl brought in the world's strongest environmental laws for recycling and for pollution control,' says Brown. 'Business went ape, threw up its hands and said "we won't be able to compete with other countries ... this is terror legislation". However, Germany is now streets ahead in environmental science technology, it's got 500,000 jobs as a result of that legis-

lation, it's exporting technology worth billions of dollars per annum to the rest of the world.'

Brown argues passionately that we are ideally placed to take advantage of the huge population centres to our north, which should not be taking their cue from the 'dinosaur industries' like coal, mining and logging. They need, he says, environmentally smart industries where the jobs and the prosperity are going to come from.

Nick Bolkus agrees. 'I don't take the environment lightly—I've been involved in it for 30 years,' he says. 'Matters environmental are dominant in Australia. You can't talk about Australia's economic future, and you can't talk about the new economy without talking clean industry and clean technology. For me it's a core issue.'

According to Brown, there are plenty of closet greenies in the major parties. 'Time and time again I see them having to go and vote on the other side. They'll say, "I wish I could sit with you on this."' He is, however, very sceptical about whether the structures of major parties will allow enough change from within to meet current crises. Helen Caldicott's historic exhortation to the anti-nuclear rallies in the 1980s to join the ALP and change it from within is, he feels, unrealistic.

'It will be changed from without. Not from within. But it's still very important that there are people within who have the new ideas.' He says that the Labor Party is stifled by its own establishment. 'The men in the Labor Party and the way they predominate over the debate—their whole aim in life is to get back into office, and they'll do what it takes ... I'm more and more aware of it, because at the moment the Greens are getting the good press, if you like, from the Labor Party—they need our preferences. One very senior figure in the Labor area said to me some months ago, "Bob, we need the Greens' preferences." I said right back to him, "And we need our forests."'

He praises WA Labor Premier Geoff Gallop's undertaking to protect that state's old-growth forest as 'a gutsy thing to do'. He argues also that Gallop has shown pragmatism as well as courage. 'It has shown the Labor Party that if it has guts on some of the environmental and social issues, it'll do well too, instead of getting the frighteners ... that the market and then the press will act against them and therefore they'll lose. [But] you need at least the voices in the big end of town if you're going to win government in an election.'

The Australian Greens, says Brown, don't need those voices from the big end of town, because 'we're not yet in the business of getting government. We're in the business of getting a much bigger representation in the parliament. But that said, we are going for government down the line. And I've read a lot of history. I know what's going to happen to the Greens. If anything they're going to come under huge pressure. They'll be fractionated. But my job is to help set some of the groundwork that'll make them strong and enduring and public-minded and particularly keeping in mind that we as a party have to do what's right by coming generations. If we get that right now, we'll get the decisions then right as well.' ■

Juliette Hughes is a freelance writer.

Borderline cases

Tricia Fitzgerald *reports on the refugee situation in West Papua.*

West Papuan refugees who crossed into neighbouring Papua New Guinea three months ago, in the wake of violence between pro-independence supporters and Indonesian troops, haven't, it seems, found a safe haven.

In mid-December, 400 border-crossers, many of them women and children, fled from Jayapura, the provincial capital of West Papua (Irian Jaya), to the Papua New Guinean (PNG) border town of Vanimo, but have not been officially recognised as refugees by the United Nations or Port Moresby.

Grace. In Mathias Wenda's guerrilla camp, troops say grace before a meal of sago, sweet potato and chicken. Some of these men are PNG citizens fighting for their sister country's freedom, but most have escaped persecution from Indonesian offensives. Photograph by Ashley Gilbertson.

The group does not have official refugee status, and political developments between PNG and Indonesia are also threatening their future.

At meetings in February in Jayapura, between PNG border liaison officials and West Papua's vice-governor, Konstan Karma, PNG reportedly offered to clear refugee and rebel camps and to strengthen security along the border.

The flight of refugees into PNG has always posed diplomatic problems for Jakarta, which has been keen to keep the West Papuans' push for independence as an internal affair.

In 1984, 10,000 West Papuans fled into PNG, escaping a military crackdown, and were granted UN refugee status. Many of them remained in refugee camps until last year when the PNG government granted them residency.

December's border-crossers have been treated differently.

The current group left Jayapura when the Indonesian military began targeting West Papuans from the highland town of Wamena who were at the time living in the capital. The crack-down followed a massacre of 30 Indonesian settlers in Wamena in October, after police shot three independence supporters who were raising the separatist 'Morning Star' flag.

The refugees told freelance journalist Mark Worth, who was on the border at the time, that they'd been subjected to intimidation and violence and in some cases had suffered beatings and torture by military and police.

Joe Haganeur, of the UN's refugee agency, UNHCR, was on the border when the group crossed into PNG. 'They were up in no-man's land ... and there were armed elements on both sides, both the Indonesian and PNG authorities were trying to keep the area safe and you could hear gunfire during the day and the evening, so security was the biggest problem,' he said in Vanimo, in December.

Despite the violence and arrests under way in West Papua (following a 1 December 2000 commemoration of the declaration of independence by West Papuans), the UN's official position now is that the border-crossers don't qualify for UN protection as refugees, as they came into PNG fearing violence, rather than fleeing from it.

'UNHCR has not conducted interviews of the latest border-crossers, because our mandate has not really been fully engaged. They have been saying they were seeking temporary protection as a cautionary measure because there had been some anticipated conflict following that December the 1st commemoration of the declaration of independence, but that has not eventuated. I guess the worst fears have not been realised,' the UNHCR's Pacific spokesperson, Ellen Hanson, said.

'We don't have a formal terminology for their status and we are referring to them very loosely as "border-crossers". They have not been through a formal refugee status determination process. It has been premature for that,' Ms Hanson said.

Church and relief agencies are opposing any forced repatriation of West Papuans from PNG and say that the UN should have automatically assessed and determined the December border-crossers' refugee status, rather than waiting for them to apply formally.

'The West Papuans are not fleeing from something that's going to happen; they're fleeing from something that's been happening continually since 1963 when the Indonesians took over the country,' says Bishop Hilton Deakin of the Catholic Aid Agency, Caritas. 'There are groups of people, individuals and families, who are targeted because they are regarded as effective leaders in their community or they're more expressive of points of view opposed to the Indonesian government.'

'They put those sorts of people in jail, or as the locals say, "they disappear them", or they torture them, or they put them in prison without due process.'

'People who live in the jungles of West Papua, in tribal situations, don't know what the refined ways of seeking refugee status are; they just flee, so it's up to us to do something about it, not to expect them to come into an office and sign a form,' he says.

Bishop Deakin has written to PNG Prime Minister, Sir Mekere Morauta, calling on PNG to recognise and protect the December border-crossers as refugees.

Exiled West Papuan leader, Jacob Rumbiak, said that over 300 West Papuans were illegally detained during the December crack-down. He believes that many of the border-crossers would be at risk if they were forced back over the border.

'Since December, the leaders of West Papua's Presidium Council have been locked up without trial, independence fighter Matheus Wenda has been arrested in PNG, and many of those detained, particularly young students, have been tortured and beaten,' Mr Rumbiak said.

The UNHCR's Ms Hanson says that the UN has not yet been briefed on the outcome of meetings between Indonesia and PNG on the closure of the refugee camps, but has sent a protection officer to Vanimo to investigate recent border agreements between Jakarta and Port Moresby.

She says any Indonesian–PNG deals on the refugees should not affect PNG assurances already given to the UN, that the refugees would be allowed to stay until they are able to return home in safety. ■

Tricia Fitzgerald is a reporter on *Asia Pacific*, broadcast on ABC Radio National and Radio Australia.

THE REGION: 2

JOHN F. McCARTHY

Chaos in Kalimantan

DURING FEBRUARY and March the newspapers reported savage 'headhunting' in Central Kalimantan.

Some journalists have accounted for the violence by evoking Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, and suggesting that the natives of Borneo have returned to savage, atavistic practices. But anyone familiar with the province will tell you that the Dayaks are usually gentle, friendly, hospitable and not easily provoked. The violence can more readily be understood in other terms: the tragedy of Central Kalimantan is the tragedy of outer-island Indonesia.

Central Kalimantan is rich in natural resources yet most of the Dayaks indigenous to the area live below the poverty line. Until recently, virgin rainforests covered the province. Gold, diamonds and other mineral deposits lay below its surface. During the 1970s, President Suharto's foresters divided the whole province into timber concessions and handed them out to well-connected cronies in Jakarta. These concessions encompassed the villages, traditional lands, forest gardens and sacred sites of the indigenous Dayaks. Dayak intellectuals like to joke that these concessions included their kitchens, and indeed a forestry map from the time showed that a concession contained the provincial capital of Palangkaraya.

Over 30 years, industrial logging has degraded the once-splendid forests. At the same time, mining companies—including some operated by Australian miners—have exploited the province's gold and diamond reserves. Companies took most of the profits from mining and timber exploitation to Java and further afield, leaving behind them the poor hinterland of Central Kalimantan.

Sampit, the eye of the recent storm of violence, is the capital of Kotawaringan Timur district. This district is larger than the province of Central Java, but, with only 500,000 people, has only a fraction of that province's population. Over the last 30 years Central Java has advanced

while in many respects the districts of Central Kalimantan have marked time. For instance, the province has only one sealed highway, and even today most of the region can only be reached by river, and then only when water levels permit. The district government faces significant difficulties extending even basic services. Most of the indigenous Dayaks still live in isolated outlying villages where education and health services are elementary and electricity, postal and telephone facilities practically non-existent. The Dayak people like to compare their situation to that of a hungry chicken living in a rice granary.

THE SECOND FEATURE that Central Kalimantan shares with other regions in the outer islands is in-migration. During the Suharto period, the government sponsored large numbers of migrants to move to the province. In addition, many others moved in of their own accord.

By 2000, these migrants made up almost 50 per cent of the province's population. Better attuned to the commercial opportunities offered in the mining and timber industries, these outsiders have profited from Central Kalimantan's rich resources. The incomers, from Java, South Kalimantan or the island of Madura, are concentrated in the capital where they have opened and now operate businesses. As poor indigenous villagers look on, or at best work as labourers in the forest, outsiders reap most of the profits from logging and other businesses. This creates bitterness between the outsiders profiting from the situation and the indigenous people who find themselves evicted and alienated from their own lands.

This cleavage also reflects a religious difference between the largely Islamic in-migrants and the Dayaks who are mostly of Christian or the indigenous Kaharingan belief. For some time Dayak commentators have felt that this could lead to ethnic conflict. As the most aggressive and least accommodating group of newcomers are the Madurese, a people with a reputation for meting out retributive violence, Dayak resentments have focused on this group.

The situation of the Dayaks of Central Kalimantan is, as Indonesian sociologist George Aditjondro has noted, especially ironic. During the 1950s, the Dayak Ngaju indigenous to the uplands of Central Kalimantan revolted, demanding a separate province. At this time the Islamic groups in neighbouring South Kalimantan were agitating for the creation of an Islamic State. Fearful of being overwhelmed by the more aggressive and business-minded coastal Muslims, the Banjarese, or upriver Dayaks, demanded their own province. Now, 50 years later, they feel like strangers in their own land.

To address these problems, Indonesia, since the fall of Suharto, has set about restructuring its government, decentralising decision-making and ensuring that local communities obtain a fairer share of national revenue. These measures are designed to overcome the threat of national disintegration. Unfortunately, in many districts across the outer islands, the people tied into networks close to district governments belong to specific ethnic and religious groups. These people—either migrants or indigenous—attempt to make the most of the opportunities opened by the reforms. The struggles for positions within the local government tend to occur between groups with different ethnic and religious identities. The consequence: ethnic and religious tension.

The final problem that Central Kalimantan shares with other parts of Indonesia is the absence of impartial institutions that can address grievances, resolve disputes and offer justice. As demonstrated in Maluku and elsewhere, once a violent dispute arises, the security forces prove either unwilling or unable to take actions necessary to dispel the fighting.

Madurese violence against the Dayaks has not been officially countered. 'The Dayaks don't have a voice, there is no ombudsman here and there is no justice for them,' one long-term resident of Kalimantan noted.

The only way the Dayaks could obtain justice, it seems, was by taking matters into their own hands. Finally, in February, another murder of a Dayak proved to be the match that set the province ablaze. Dayak leaders declared war on the Madurese, and an orgy of blood-letting and ethnic cleansing ensued. ■

John F. McCarthy is a researcher at the Asia Research Centre, Murdoch University, Western Australia.

Broome's other pearls

In the north-west, **Susan Varga** found a culture that confounds stereotypes.

Mary Durack, for all her lifelong devotion to the church, was an incisive and fair observer of Kimberley life. In 1967, in her preface to *The Rock and the Sand* she said this:

> It seems clear to me ... that the work of the missionaries, sometimes inspired, sometimes blind, was the only evidence the Aborigines had of anything in the nature of consistent altruism within an otherwise ruthless and self-seeking economy.

Durack's summation of the Catholic Church's role in Broome and the Kimberley still holds some truth.

I suspect that there is nowhere else in Australia where the church is so central to the emotional and cultural life of a town as it is in Broome. In an era where all the mainstream religions are struggling to maintain some sort of spiritual mandate or even a foothold in their communities, I was intrigued to discover what a deeply, vitally Catholic town Broome is.

With my partner and fellow writer, Anne Coombs, I had long thought of writing a book about a country town. We believed that a look below the surface of a small rural town might well reveal interesting things about Australia itself and where it might be heading as it approached the centenary of Federation.

For years the idea lay in abeyance; we never found quite the right town. Then we went to Broome on a holiday. We arrived on a Saturday. The main street wasn't much—an untidy jumble of one- and two-storey corrugated iron and weatherboard buildings that went past in a flash. We did see an intriguing mix of faces—Filipino–Chinese? Malay–Aboriginal? Japanese–Indonesian? Chinese–Aboriginal? Afghan–what?—faces that were the legacy of Broome's exotic pearling past and a century and more of intermarriage.

The next morning, Sunday, we went for a walk. Turning a corner we saw a sea of cars. There must be a football match on, we thought, but it turned out to be the roll-up for the Catholic Church. We went inside. My notes from then read:

> The church is packed. A young Asian man stands at the door; Aborigines, serious, neat and silent, sitting towards the back. An old dog lying quietly at the door while the humans just walk around him. Inside, little girls of all colours decked out in white finery for their confirmation. A simple triptych behind the altar. The priest (the Bishop I think), a burly, olive-skinned man with a shiny pate and a certain command about him, refers to 'these difficult times'—meaning Hanson times. He talks about unemployment—how it would be 33 per cent or higher if it weren't for the work-for-the-dole scheme, which most Aboriginal people are on. I think I want to do a book on this place. I start planning it in my head.

When we returned to Broome for a nine-month stay, I met the Bishop of Broome, Christopher Saunders, a bluff, sometimes abrupt man of considerable intelligence. He had already spent half a lifetime in the Kimberley, often in the combined role of priest and station manager. When he first arrived there were several Catholic missions dotted around that vast area—at Lombadina and Beagle Bay on the Dampier Peninsula, at Balgo, Bidyadanga and Kalumburu. In most of these places the church still retains an educational and pastoral role. I spent many hours with Chris Saunders in his dim but comfortable living room, a room that reminded me disconcertingly of the only other ecclesiastical living room in which I'd ever taken tea—in Transylvania! I learned much from him, and from a trip we took with him in his plane—all the Bishops of Broome have flown their own planes around their huge, sparsely populated diocese—to Lombadina and Beagle Bay. But mostly we learned just from being in a town that was deeply imbued with its own, sometimes idiosyncratic version of Catholic culture and tradition.

Two things became apparent to us fairly quickly: that Broome and surrounding areas have not escaped the bigoted, limited, destructive effects of Christian evangelising since the 'settlement' of the Kimberley. But also that the church was very often the bulwark against persecution and massacre, the source of a halfway decent education, and that many of its former 'charges' regard it with enormous affection and loyalty. As one of Broome's matriarchs, Phyllis Bin Bakar, said, 'The white habits were our mothers. They grew us up.'

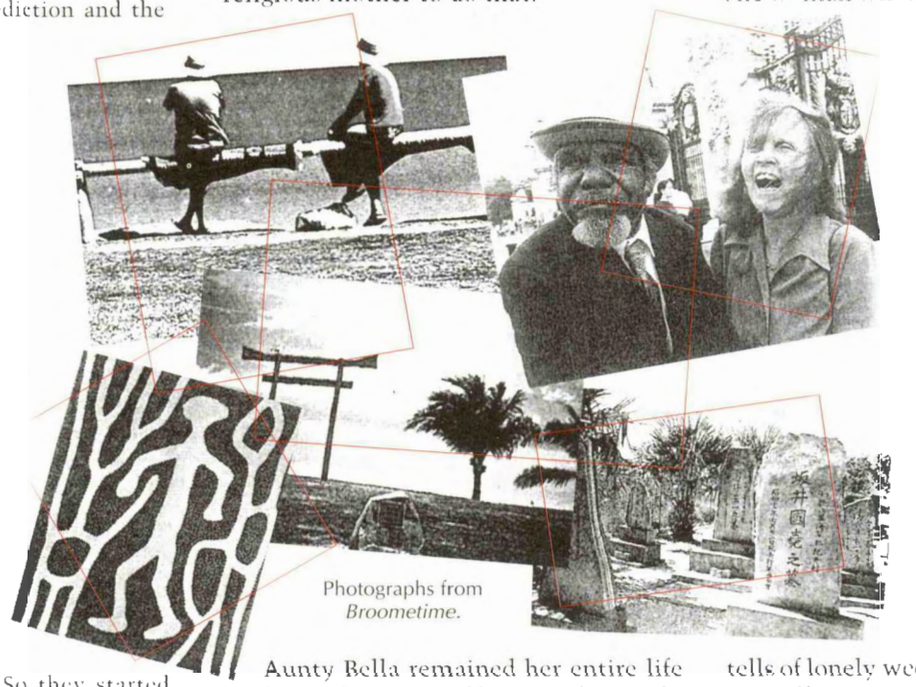
There is a whole generation of impressive women aged from their 50s to their 70s, who form the backbone of mixed-race and Aboriginal Broome, and who take every opportunity (often in defiance of their more radical sons and daughters) to defend the German Pallotines, and even more passionately, the St John of God Sisters, who they say gave them a decent start in life. Yet these women also have a wry perspective on just how extraordinary was the invasion of their own culture. Here's Pearl Hamaguchi, Broome matriarch, part Aboriginal, part Chinese, part Japanese and part Scottish,

describing her mother and aunt's first meeting with the Catholic world:

> When they got to Beagle Bay—to see these nuns in their great big white habits! They thought they were birds. Their first introduction to Christianity was the old benediction—this is after they've been processed and washed and dressed and deloused. They put them in what they called bag dresses—just made out of cotton flour bags. So they're sitting in the sand there for their first benediction and the priest turns around and he holds this shining, monstrous thing up in the air. And one of the little boys, he shouts out in their language 'Hit the dirt! This is a weapon he's got. He's going to shoot us!' The nuns and priests didn't know what was happening all these little kids throwing themselves down.
>
> And this other business—the liturgy, where the priest calls out and everyone responds 'Saint Catherine ... pray for us, Mother of God ... pray for us'. And the kids thought, 'Hey, I can relate to this, like a corroboree, the chanting.' So they started clapping their hands and saying, 'Pray for us, pray for us.'

Pearl insists, nonetheless, that Beagle Bay was a good place where her mother and her Aunty Bella were well cared for.

Take the case of Aunty Bella, a revered figure in Broome, who died a couple of years ago, aged 96. Bella was the daughter of an Aboriginal mother and a white man, a partner in the station at Ruby Downs. She was 'taken' from her people and sent to the Pallotines at Beagle Bay. That's one side of the story. But the station manager, a friend of her father's, and a relatively enlightened man, sent her to Beagle Bay for her protection and education. Bella eventually ended up in the Catholic 'orphanage' in Broome. As with many things in Broome, this too is a nuanced and complicated tale. On the one hand, the 'orphanage' was a lie; most of the girls who went there were not orphans at all but were taken from their communities and given a kind of education—just enough to then farm them out as domestic help to the wealthier families around town. So, for instance, Baamba Albert's mother was for a time the domestic help to Dame Mary Durack and her husband Horrie Miller. Baamba Albert, who became a Canberra bureaucrat, then the star of Jimmy Chi's musicals, will never bag the church; he has too much respect for his deeply religious mother to do that.



Photographs from *Broometime*.

Aunty Bella remained her entire life in the 'orphanage' and became the much-loved surrogate mother to generations of small girls taken from their families. 'She never married, she never had a man,' Phyllis Bin Bakar said. 'She was a saint.'

During her last illness Aunty Bella was cared for by her niece, Pearl Hamaguchi, at Pearl's home. It was there that she had a vision of the Virgin in a blue cloak coming through the bedroom wall. Bishop Saunders duly relayed the vision one Sunday. When Aunty Bella died, everyone in Catholic Broome went to her elaborately prepared and loving funeral.

Broome and Catholicism are so entwined that the combination is intrinsic to the town's unique flavour. There used to be a saying, still sometime heard, that Broome was '90 per cent coloured, Catholic and poor'. That is no longer the case. The racial balance is turning more and more towards the white as business people and tourists flood the town; some, not enough, of the Indigenous population have attained middle-class status, and other denominations, including the fundamentalist and fringe sects, have made serious inroads into the religious mix. But still the overwhelming majority of black and mixed-race kids go to the local Catholic school, St Mary's, while the government high school is predominantly white. I know one woman whose father was a Timorese Muslim-turned-Anglican and whose Aboriginal mother was a Jehovah's Witness. But she sends her kids to St Mary's, not because she likes the Catholics—she is scornful of them and resentful of their hold on the town—but because all her kids' friends go there and she doesn't want them to feel left out.

Peter Yu of the Kimberley Land Council is bitter about being sent away for a Catholic education in Perth. 'We had to shine our boots till we could see our black faces in them.' He tells of lonely weekends being farmed out to well-intentioned white families, of being separated from the other black kids in all-white classes. He talks of his many classmates who did not survive the cultural split and have succumbed to alcoholism or suicide.

Yet he's sending his daughter to a Catholic school in Perth. 'I don't really know why.'

Sarah Yu, his white wife, articulates some of the contradictions of being a Catholic in this part of the world. 'Church ceremonial has a unifying effect,' she says. 'Beagle Bay is a wild community but when there's a feast day they're all there, weaving their garlands, making it beautiful. The church is full on those days. It's really something. They might be bad Catholics, but they're Catholics.'

It seems to me that in Broome at least the church takes seriously the business of cultural give and take, as if trying to atone for the early days of wholesale cultural appropriation. The current term

is 'enculturation'. This is, of course, a loaded area. For Bishop Chris and his priests, 'enculturation' means adapting the ideology and culture of the church to Aboriginal culture and values in ways that will make its teachings relevant and appropriate. To others, and to at least one woman who was working for the Catholic Education Office in Broome, what is really going on is a modern and cynical version of the same old appropriation—a surface 'indigenisation' which only serves to mask the weakening and distortion of Aboriginality.

As an outsider, I can only say that it is impressive to be in an overflowing church on Sundays and to listen to the bare-bones beauty of the Missa Kimberley, a simplified version of the Mass set to music, sung by a choir of every hue. And to hear local musicians, in church and elsewhere, sing the deeply felt songs of Jimmy Chi from his hit musicals, *Bran Nue Dae* and *Corrugation Road*: 'Lay me in the arms of Jesus; Heal me O Risen Lord; I Believe, I Believe.'

It was also impressive to hear the Catholic Bishop of Broome consistently preach on the dangers of Hansonism and take the issue of social justice for his Aboriginal flock very seriously indeed—to the chagrin of many conservatives around town who see him as 'too political'.

Which reminds me of a very Broome story. As a fundraising stunt for St Mary's, four prominent citizens, including the bishop, were 'arrested' one morning by the police and thrown in jail. The local radio station appealed all morning to the citizenry to donate the 'bail' money to get them out. The money poured in: the Bishop was the first to be released, the real estate agent was the last. But the downside was that a number of old ladies from the community of Beagle Bay rang the bishop's office in alarm—had the Bishop been arrested because he had been too outspoken about Pauline Hanson?

And another story. We visited the new convent near Cable Beach where all but one of the nuns were elderly retired women; the one active nun is the Vice-Chancellor of the Broome Notre Dame campus, Sister Pat Rhatigan. The old ladies were a little reluctant to be interviewed, but also shyly eager to justify their former roles as care-givers and educators, citing the prominent citizens of Broome such as Baamba Albert who would vouch for them. Our interview broke up when someone from BRAMS, the Broome Aboriginal Medical Service, called to pick up the BRAMS birthday cake (the organisation was celebrating its 20th year) that one of the nuns had iced for them. We all trooped off to Sister Veronica's flat to see the cake. Sister Veronica allowed herself to be gently proud of the magnificent icing job she'd done, with accoutrements especially flown in from Perth. Around each tier of the dazzling white cake she'd wound a ribbon in the Aboriginal colours.

I was a little puzzled by all this, until I found out about the connection between the old nuns and BRAMS. Many years ago, when Broome's indigenous people, Baamba's mother chief among them, first began to agitate for their own Medical Service, John Jobst, the then Bishop of Broome, asked his home order, the Pallotine Brothers in Germany, to find the funds. They did, and it was only after that initial German contribution that the Australian government was shamed into kicking in. That has never been forgotten by BRAMS.

Such are the intricate cross-connections in Broome between people, religion, culture, money and politics, that it is very hard to 'take sides' for and against the church's role in this part of the world. There has been both good and bad. And a lot of it has been good.

If the Catholic church in this country is to do more than just struggle to survive in the 21st century, it might take on more of the activism and passion it has shown in less 'developed' countries, and certainly in the Broome diocese. It might well look to Broome Catholicism for clues on how to hold on to hearts and minds—through the promotion of racial tolerance and racial integration, a sincere search for social justice, and by looking for a genuine synthesis between local culture and official religion. ■

Susan Varga is a writer and (with Anne Coombs) the author of *Broometime*, published this year by Hodder.

JON GREENAWAY

Hong Kong kings

Hong Kong's economy prospers, but democracy and the rule of law in the Special Administrative Region are under strain.

HONG KONG'S legislative council building sits in the middle of a small piece of public land. The towers surrounding it rise in glass-panelled tribute to capital and enterprise.

One of the tallest, the Cheung Kong Centre, was recently built by Li Ka Shing, Hong Kong's wealthiest resident and one of the ten wealthiest men in the world. Li came to the territory from the mainland in the late 1940s with nothing and began amassing his fortune by selling plastic flowers.

Rising above the glass towers, perched on the hills above Central, are impossibly narrow apartment blocks reaching 40 or 50 storeys high. Real estate agents have been known to advise their clients against living in the mid-levels if they are prone to bouts of vertigo.

In the legislative council chamber on a Thursday in early February, Hong Kong's Chief Executive, Tung Chee Hwa, is making a regular appearance before the Legco (as it is known). Though Tung's purpose in being there is to convince the public—and more importantly perhaps, the watching world—that there are checks and balances in the Special Administrative Region (SAR, Hong Kong's bureaucratic title since 1997), his opening address on the status of the Falun Gong sect is what the press and the diplomatic representatives in the gallery have come to hear.

Falun Gong, outlawed by Beijing, has made its presence felt recently, particularly in Tiananmen Square where individuals reported to be members of the organisation self-immolated in full view of television cameras. After the Tiananmen protest, a member of Hong Kong's executive council, Nellie Fong, was reported as having said that now would be a good time to consider invoking treason laws against the group, as set out by article 23 of the 'Basic Law'—the blueprint sketched for Hong Kong before handover, incorporating legal principles that prevailed during British rule. The Legco observers are waiting to hear whether Tung will announce the enacting of legislation on acts of sedition, in accordance with the Basic Law. When Tung prefaces his remarks by saying he wishes to comment on two matters, regulations governing foreign investment and Falun Gong, members and watchers shift forward in their seats.

Two days before, the leader of the Democratic Party of Hong Kong, Martin Lee, argued that the response of the executive to the activities of the Falun Gong movement would be the acid test of the 'one country, two systems' arrangement that supposedly allows Hong Kong to operate with a degree of independence.

'This is the first time that the central government has expressed unhappiness over the way the Hong Kong government has handled anything,' says the veteran legislator and lawyer. He is alluding to the editorial urgings in the Chinese-language newspapers—well known to be mouthpieces of the politburo. 'In the past the Chief Executive would cave in to Beijing, even without their asking,' he declares.

And more: 'If Falun Gong has committed no criminal act up until now and then you enact a law under article 23 which would make the conduct that has hitherto been lawful, unlawful, then you are really stifling some of the people's freedoms here.'

On this occasion in the Legco, the issue is left hanging. Tung Chee Hwa argues that Falun Gong is exhibiting the characteristics of a dangerous cult. And in an oblique reference to Nellie Fong's reported comments, he says that it has always been the intention of the SAR government

to implement sedition laws and that intention has not changed. It would not be now, however. But he warns, three times, 'we will be keeping a very close eye on the activities of Falun Gong.'

ACCORDING TO critics of the Hong Kong executive and Beijing's overbearing ways, 1999 was not a good year for legal or democratic precedent. The territory's highest legal body, the Court of Final Appeal (CFA), made a ruling on a case concerning rights of abode for descendants of Hong Kong Chinese. The SAR government, afraid that the ruling might allow another 1.68 million currently living on the mainland to obtain residency rights in Hong Kong, went to the National People's Congress Standing Committee (NPCSC) for a reinterpretation. (The right to live in Hong Kong is highly restricted, not least because Beijing could not bear to see a flood of migrants seeking to cash in on the Hong Kong dream. Per capita income in Hong Kong is roughly 15 times that on the mainland.)

The SAR's move might well be argued to be in contravention of the Basic Law. The CFA had given a 96-page ruling on the matter. It was overturned by a two-page NPCSC dictate denying citizenship rights to mainland-born descendants of Hong Kong Chinese.

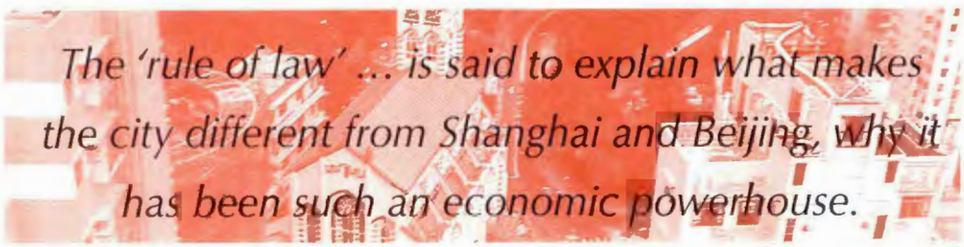
There is now, according to the head of the Hong Kong Bar Association, Alan Leung, a real possibility that cases currently before the Court of Final Appeal could again be pushed upstairs to Beijing even before a decision is made.

'The government is really saying, "Well look here, CFA, before you rule on this particular case, please refer to the NPCSC before final interpretation."' Leung is concerned: 'On the face of it, it seems okay, but with the 1999 case in the background it is as if a sword of Damocles is being hung over the head of the CFA.'

Both the political opposition and Hong Kong's legal community have called for the executive to assure the public that it will not automatically take decisions with which it disagrees to Beijing, or that it will at least put limits on when such action can be taken. According to Alan Leung, the CFA is damned if it does and damned if it doesn't on the request to receive an interpretation before final adjudication on the cases presently before it.

'It puts the CFA in a very invidious position. And we must defend the independence of our judiciary fearlessly because it is the cornerstone of the rule of law.'

The 'rule of law' is a phrase used often when the nature of Hong Kong is discussed. It is said to explain what makes the city different from Shanghai and Beijing, why it has been such an economic powerhouse, and why so many people came there from the mainland when the territory was under the control of Britain. Hong Kong academic Michael de Golyer argues that the rule of law is the source of Hong Kong's competitive advantage. 'It's not a societal advantage, it's not a relic, it is the whole core of Hong Kong's ability to prosper. Under people like Mao Tse-tung there was no law in China; the mood he woke up in on any particular morning was the law.



Hong Kong was the only place that had laws that required the government to act in certain rational ways and to go through a process and where there were some restraints on it.'

Michael de Golyer heads the Hong Kong Transition project at Hong Kong Baptist University. He suggests that the common law principles which inform much of the Basic Law are beyond Chief Executive Tung Chee Hwa, not only because he is appointed by a politburo used to having the law bend to its will, but because he also has no innate appreciation of Hong Kong's unique situation.

'He got his "tycoonship" from his daddy; he had a reckless streak, got into trouble and got bailed out by his friends—which is why this guy backs loyalty *über alles*. The problem is [that] neither in politics nor in government can this be the case.'

According to de Golyer, Tung's first act was a clear indication of what was to come—he flouted civil service rules on tendering to ensure his personal assistant and driver were employed by the government. 'This was a small infraction but in the end a very telling infraction.'

'And this was 1997, not 1999.'

Prominent Hong Kong businessman, Henry Tang, agrees with Alan Leung and Michael de Golyer about the importance of the rule of law to Hong Kong. But as a member of the Executive Council, the body appointed by the central government to counsel and assist the Chief Executive in the running of the SAR, he has a different view of its state of health.

'Hong Kong, like every society, is changing all the time, but the best things about Hong Kong before the handover have not changed and I would put rule of law first and foremost among these qualities.

'I regard the presence of multinationals in Hong Kong as the best test of how our system is operating. Last year we experienced a 20 per cent rise in the number of multinationals with their Asian headquarters here in Hong Kong. They could easily set up in Singapore or other capitals but instead they are coming here.'

Tang also points to the drop in emigration. In the decade prior to handover, roughly half a million people relocated to America, Europe and Australia. Since 1997, the stampede has reversed: emigration levels are now at their lowest since the 1970s.

'They are coming back in droves and now we have much more inflow than outflow. They voted with their feet before handover and they are voting with their feet once again.'

But 1999 was also the year that a pollster from Hong Kong University alleged political interference from the office of the Chief Executive, an allegation later given a measure of vindication by an inquiry chaired by a retired High Court judge.

Robert Chung, head of the Popular Opinion Program at Hong Kong Univer-

sity, recalls two incidents, in January and again in November 1999, when his thesis supervisor (who is also Pro-Vice Chancellor) came to his office to discuss his work.

'I was very disappointed ... because up until then I had faced a lot of political pressure from outside the university,' says Dr Chung who, because of the sensitivity of his case, has not spoken to the media for eight months. 'Every now and then so-called "leftist" papers would print letters to the editor supposedly volunteered, but we know they are important articles representing the view of the central government.

'So when the Pro-Vice Chancellor came to me and said that the Chief Executive is not happy with your work because you are producing low ratings of his performance and that of the SAR government, I felt that what I was doing was not understood by my colleagues. Never before had an academic colleague come to me and said you better be careful because what you are doing is not well understood by the authorities.'

After Chung went public with his allegation of interference, Hong Kong University appointed an investigation panel, in July last year. It found that, while there was a possibility his superiors might have been motivated by a concern that his popularity polls lacked academic rigour, it was more likely that Andrew Lo, an assistant of the Chief Executive, was responsible for the specific targeting of Robert Chung's work. Lo had had conversations with Hong Kong University's former Vice-Chancellor.

After the inquiry established that Andrew Lo was an unreliable witness, there was a clamouring for his resignation and/or removal. Tung Chee Hwa not only refused to criticise or censure his assistant but also publicly supported him, an act that Robert Chung described as 'very Confucian'.

If 1999 was a bad year for democratic principles in Hong Kong, the portents for 2001 are worse.

Willy Lam was China Editor for the *South China Morning Post* and a popular columnist, well versed in what was happening over the border. At the beginning of the year he was forced to resign.

'Management had been trying to ease me off in the past few years,' Lam said in a function room of a major hotel (he'd been addressing a breakfast meeting of the Australian/Hong Kong Chamber of Commerce). 'They took the opportunity of management restructuring to push me upstairs.'

He was muzzled not by any directive from Beijing, Lam argues, but because media owners in Hong Kong invariably have business interests on the mainland which they are reluctant to jeopardise by having one of their papers or TV stations criticise the central government.

Under people like Mao Tse-tung there was no law in China; the mood he woke up in on any particular morning was the law.

'News owners across the board have input on the news room and they are reluctant to run anything antagonising.'

But Henry Tang nonetheless rejects suggestions that the Hong Kong press has been curtailed in its freedoms, either directly or indirectly, since the handover.

'If anything there has been self-censorship on the praise because I think we have done a good job which they don't always give us the credit for.'

Hong Kong's English-language tabloid, the *Hong Kong Imail* (formerly the *Standard*), is one of the papers that Tang points to as an example of a free press. But a member of its editorial team (speaking on the condition of anonymity) countered by arguing that the paper was 'useful' for the SAR government. The paper has a small circulation and is not as prestigious as the *South China Morning Post*, but 'They can point to us and say "well if you don't think we have press freedoms then how about these guys?"'

The *Imail* was last year acquired by a new owner, a tobacco king with business interests on the mainland. His potential impact on its style of reporting is now the subject of much speculation.

In February Tung Chee Hwa's deputy, Anson Chan, announced her resignation, effective from April. As the head civil servant under Hong Kong's last Governor, Chris Patten, Chan was seen as embodying stability in the transition from Britain to Hong Kong. The reason she gave for leaving office 18 months before the expiry of her term was that she wished to spend more time with her family, an explanation that Martin Lee argues was calculated not to be believed. 'She wanted the public to guess why she went.' (The worst-kept secret in Hong Kong in 1999 was Tung's dissatisfaction with Chan's independent cast of mind and his desire to have her removed from office there and then, a desire countermanded by Beijing. Reports suggested that Beijing realised her importance to Hong Kong's external image.)

Chan's replacement, former finance secretary Donald Tsang, is respected for his quick and firm action in protecting Hong Kong from the full impact of the Asian financial crisis. He is seen, however, as someone who will follow the Chief Executive more faithfully than his predecessor.

Martin Lee is not alone in wondering whether it was the Falun Gong issue that pushed Anson Chan to resign. In January Falun Gong, boasting a mere 500 followers in Hong Kong, organised an international meeting. Unable to find a hotel willing to grant them facilities, they were given the use of City Hall by the SAR government, at the express order—many suggest—of Anson Chan. Their meeting went ahead. Beijing was not amused.

Businessman Henry Tang is cautious when commenting on the Falun Gong issue. 'The Basic Law informs us that we have to do it at some stage but I for one would not like to see sedition laws enacted as a knee-jerk response to an issue of the day. It has to be considered and done with maximum consultation, and that needs time.'

Meanwhile, Tung Chee Hwa will be keeping a close eye on the Falun Gong and the rest of the world will be keeping a close eye on Tung Chee Hwa. ■

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

JOHN BUTTON

Cautionary tales

Santamaria: The Politics of Fear, Paul Ormonde (ed.), Spectrum Publications, Melbourne, 2000. ISBN 0 86786 294 7, RRP $24.95. **Frank Hardy and the Making of *Power Without Glory***, Pauline Armstrong, Melbourne University Press, 2000. ISBN 0 52284 888 5, RRP $43.95

FRANK HARDY WAS married in St Patrick's Cathedral on 27 May 1940. His bride had converted to Catholicism. The celebrant was Father Arthur Fox. About six months later, Hardy converted to Communism and joined the Party.

Father Fox went on to become Auxiliary Bishop to Archbishop Mannix and then Bishop of Sale. In both positions he was a virulent critic of Communism and of Catholics who remained members of the Labor Party. Hardy went on to write *Power Without Glory* and other books of greater literary merit and lesser notoriety. *Power Without Glory* was a 'double whammy' designed to discredit the church hierarchy and parochial capitalism in one hit.

The writer Doris Lessing has often lamented the impossibility of explaining to current generations what it was like to be a member of the Communist Party in the 1940s and 1950s. One imagines that a follower of Bob Santamaria, a member of 'The Movement' (or the National Civic Council) would have the same difficulty. It was such a different world; hard to explain today, a time in which poll-driven politicians jostle for position in a crowded middle ground. Those Cold War warriors of the mid 20th century might well ask themselves, 'Is all passion spent?'

To today's generation, preoccupied with totally different issues, the ideological battles which began in the 1930s and continued into the 1960s may seem like a storm in a teacup. But Australia was a teacup; ethnically homogenous, culturally remote, derivative in ideas, clutching sentimentally to old allegiances. Europe's ideological battles seemed distant; but they were to wash back to Australia as people took sides on the great issues of the time. These began with the rise of Hitler's Germany and included Nazism and Fascism, the Spanish Civil War, and the Soviet reaction to Nazism, ultimately reflected in the heroic achievements of the Red Army.

Frank Hardy speaking at the Centenary Celebrations of St Bernard's School, Bacchus Marsh, 5–6 May 1990.

The Spanish Civil War was the crucible of the political commitments of Europeans. It engaged the idealism and passions of a generation. Unlike those other great issues, there was no 'Empire' view on which Australians could rely. British opinion was divided. Even Winston Churchill changed his mind about which side he supported.

It became easy, however, to identify the Catholic Church with Franco's Nationalists and the Communist Party with the Republican Government. With the wisdom of hindsight (informed, for example, by Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*) much of the idealism seems to have been misplaced. But this meant nothing to the protagonists at the time. On both sides the untarnished truth took some time to emerge.

In 1937, under the auspices of the Campion Society, the Spanish Civil War came (metaphorically speaking) to the then sleepy township of Bacchus Marsh. According to Frank Hardy, who was then aged 20, he took part in a debate on the war, arguing the Republican case with Father Rovira, a curate at St Bernard's Church and a Republican sympathiser. The adjudicator, a Mr B.A. Santamaria from Melbourne, pronounced the Franco side the winners. This experience and the intellectual influence of Father Rovira undoubtedly had an effect on Hardy. As Pauline Armstrong points out, 'In his later years, Hardy enjoyed the piquancy of blaming a Catholic priest for his recruitment to the CPA.'

Whatever the truth of Hardy's conversion to Communism there is no doubt that the Spanish Civil War first brought B.A. Santamaria to public prominence with his participation in the famous and controversial debate about the war at Melbourne University on 22 March 1937.

Both Santamaria and Hardy were to reach the height of their political influence in the 1950s. This was the decade in which Santamaria became the *éminence grise* of Australian politics. In later years he strongly supported Australia's participation in the Vietnam War, involved himself in the 1970s 'State Aid' debate and remained a prolific commentator on public affairs. But his influence steadily declined.

Hardy published *Power Without Glory* in 1950. He enjoyed the limelight for several years. He continued his political writings and was much in demand as a public speaker. Later in the 1960s he actively supported the claims of the Gurindji people and was a strong opponent of the Vietnam War. He renounced Soviet Communism in 1968. Of *Power Without Glory* Pauline Armstrong quotes Bob Santamaria as saying, 'It was interesting I can tell you. It was like a grand final football match.'

Santamaria and Hardy were both charismatic personalities. With Santamaria this came from apparent strength of conviction, intellect, courage and his ability as a communicator. With Hardy it was an Australian larrikin charm, his passion about particular causes, and again, enthusiasm which engaged an audience.

In the Protestant milieu in which I spent

my childhood and teenage years the fact that Frank Hardy, a Catholic, became a Communist would have caused no surprise. Rather, if it had at the time been newsworthy, it would have been advanced as evidence of the fact that Catholicism and Communism were opposite sides of the same coin, a coin easily flipped.

The church and the Communist Party were both, it used to be argued, dogmatic and authoritarian institutions, demanding obedience and total commitment. The fact that one promised eternal life for its faithful adherents and the other an earthly Utopia was only a matter of degree. Perhaps the Catholic Church had more going for it. But how easy to make the transition from one to the other.

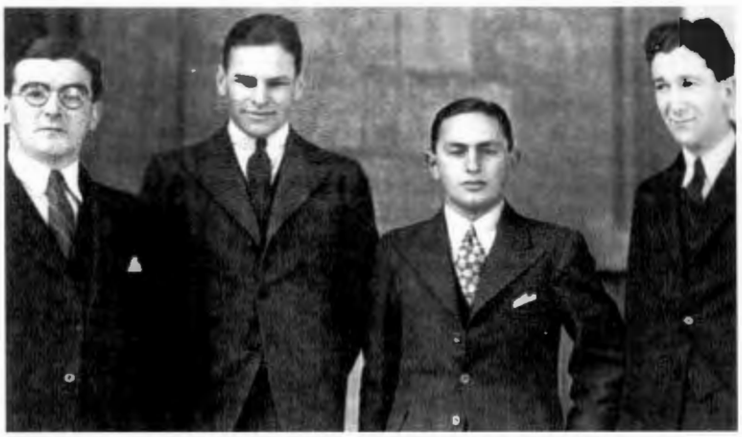
This sort of argument was supported by a multitude of half-truths, and some real ones. The church was conformist and authoritarian, the Communist Party ubiquitous in the lives of its members. If Hardy enjoyed the piquancy of blaming a Catholic priest for his conversion to Communism, so did many others. Look, people would say, at all those Communist leaders: Healey, Thornton, O'Shea, Sharkey, all refugees from the discipline of the Christian Brothers. Junior seminaries like the one later portrayed in Fred Schepsi's film, *The Devil's Playground*, were the church's equivalent of the Gulag.

And, of course, there were renegades from both sides. Nuns were leaping over walls long before the Berlin one was built. Koestler's *The God That Failed* was published in 1950. In the same year the report of a Royal Commission on Communism (prompted by the defection of a relatively minor CPA official, Cecil Sharpley) was tabled in the Victorian Parliament. The larger defections were to come years later as a slow flow-on from Khrushchev's exposure of Stalin's monstrosities and the liberalisation which followed the second Vatican council.

If the ideological battles of the mid 20th century were not enough, it is worth recalling that Australian public life was further complicated by a pervasive sectarianism, which had as its heraldic flag-bearers various Masonic orders on one side and the Knights of the Southern Cross on the other. But it went much deeper than that. In a predominantly non-Catholic society it led to justifiable suspicions of discrimination against Catholics in employment and membership of clubs and organisations. Political ideology, sectarianism and the development of the politics of guilt by association ('McCarthyism' as it was then called) produced a volatile mix.

The key political event of the 1950s was the 1955 split in the Labor Party. If cooler heads had prevailed, as they did in New South Wales, it need not have occurred. It kept the Labor Party out of office for 23 years and damaged the image of the Catholic Church.

According to Robert Corcoran, who remains a diligent student of the period, 'You had to be Labor and Catholic to understand the Movement and the split. I was both.' Nonetheless both the Movement and the split had a profound impact on the thinking of non-Catholic members of the ALP.



The successful Melbourne University debating team, in Adelaide, 24 August 1935. B.A. Santamaria (secretary, aged 20) is second from the right. From *Crusade or Conspiracy? Catholics and the Anti-Communist Struggle in Australia*, Bruce Duncan, UNSW Press. (Courtesy Mrs Margaret Kelly.)

When I joined the Carlton Branch of the Labor Party in 1952 the Santamaria forces were in a controlling position in the Victorian Branch of the ALP. At the monthly meetings there were usually about 25 members present. There were 400 members 'on the books' who could be called on when necessary and who voted at pre-selections. At my second meeting, innocently believing that a Labor Party branch was a place in which people freely debated ideas, I moved that the Labor Party should adopt a policy of recognising China as the British Labour government had done. My short and hesitant speech was received in stony silence, and then derided as pro-Communist and naive. My motion was soundly defeated.

Though this seemingly blinkered hard line (to be encountered on a number of subsequent occasions) was mystifying, it was not totally incomprehensible. The idea of beating one's (Communist) enemies by refusing to acknowledge them is an ancient if rarely productive technique.

It was the leaked extracts from Santamaria's 1953 speech to the Catholic Social Studies Movement (known at the time as 'The Movement of Ideas' speech) which put the cat among the young pigeons who embraced the broad tenets of democratic socialism. In this speech Santamaria argued that 'We must destroy the Chifley legend.' This was a bombshell. The ALP was in the wilderness; politically and intellectually. 'The Light on the Hill', the Chifley legend, was all we had going for us. Evatt, erratic, opportunistic and apparently uninterested in social issues, was hardly a role model. Calwell, his deputy, seemed confused and uninspired, and was already enmeshed in the dilemma of being a Catholic and a member of the divided Labor Party.

I first encountered the phenomena of overt sectarianism and guilt by association as a university student, working part-time in the Victorian Public Service in 1953. 'Micks' and Masons muttered about each other with a hostility which suggested that the world could not contain them both. One might have been in Northern Ireland. As it happened I worked in a room with five others, one of whom was Barry Jones, also working part-time. We were both members of the Labor Party. Of the other four, three were Catholics, who regarded Santamaria as a knight in shining armour, and one a lapsed Catholic who took it upon himself to adjudicate debates on the political issues of the day.

The three Santamaria followers were clearly of the view that as ALP members, Barry and I were both victims of an addiction which inevitably led to Communism. The 'debates' turned not on the merit of Communism or otherwise, but whether or not prominent members of the Labor Party in Australia and indeed in Britain were in fact Communists. The adjudicator would issue magisterial pronouncements such as: 'The fact that Evatt was President of the United Nations does not in my opinion justify the conclusion that he is a Communist.' This was engaging stuff, but symptomatic of a much deeper malaise.

Robert Corcoran has observed that the daily papers 'chose not to publish the full facts about Santamaria and the Movement at the time of the split'. Why would they? The Movement, and later the DLP, suited conservative politicians and conservative newspaper proprietors very well. And in fact there was not much known at the time, except in the inner sanctums. So hysteria prevailed over rational analysis. Both the Movement and, for that matter, the Communist Party, whose tactics Santamaria openly adopted, were secretive organisations. And investigative journalism of today's variety was not yet in vogue.

Over the years more and more information has been revealed. The Santamaria book, edited by Paul Ormonde, and Pauline Armstrong's account of the making of *Power Without Glory* are part of the process of revelation. They provide detailed insights into the tactics adopted by the movement and the Communist Party.

I OPENED *Santamaria: The Politics of Fear* with some trepidation. Did I really want to know more about all that? In fact I found it fascinating, not just because Santamaria was a fascinating man, but because of its rigorous critique of his ideas, his methods —one might say his 'techniques'.

Each of the contributors to this book was associated with *The Catholic Worker*, characterised by Bishop Fox as a journal for 'so-called Catholic intellectuals'. Their starting point is a profound difference from Santamaria's ideas about the values which they felt should flow from adherence to the Catholic faith, a difference which they have held for nearly half a century. So there are no reassessments in the light of new information, no second thoughts, no apologies. They have all been at it for a long time, which lends depth and credibility to their argument.

Not surprisingly their views are expressed with some vehemence. There is not much mincing of words. More surprising is the breadth of detail, from a description of Santamaria's university days, to the influence of the strange political bedfellows he picked up along the way, his manipulative skills, his capacity to ignore an argument or fact which didn't suit his particular vision, and the expansion of his overweening ambition.

His single-mindedness and ambition are revealed in two letters, the first of which was published some time ago (Edmund Campion, *Rockchoppers*, 1982, Gerard Henderson, *Mr Santamaria and the Bishops*, 1952). But it is worth quoting again:

> The Social Studies Movement (the Movement) should, within a period of five or six years, be able to completely transform the leadership of the Labor Movement, and to introduce into Federal and State spheres large numbers of members who ... should be able to implement a Christian social programme ... this is the first time that such a work has become possible in Australia, and, as far as I can see, in the Anglo-Saxon world since the advent of Protestantism.

This is heady stuff, winding back the clock, recycling poor old Martin Luther.

The second letter, sent in 1967 to 'supportive Bishops', sought to siphon off a proportion of government funds to Catholic schools to the National Civic Council, an appeal which was mind-boggling in its implications for Catholic schools and the divisive 'State Aid' issue.

Considering that the contributors to *The Politics of Fear* are a bunch of 'so-called Catholic intellectuals', this is a remarkably well-written book. If it were otherwise, how could someone like myself, not versed in ecclesiastical matters, have followed with such interest Xavier Connor's chapter on church–state doctrine? Connor's disagreement with Santamaria's views on this matter dates back at least until 1956. Connor reveals the existence of another piece of correspondence relating to an article written by Santamaria ('Religious Apostolate and Political Action') published in the *Bombay Examiner* in 1955, in which he advanced arguments subsequently rejected by the Vatican. Connor wrote to Santamaria urging him to repudiate his *Bombay Examiner* thesis. The essence of Santamaria's reply was that he had changed his position, but that it would be better not to make any public admission of this fact as such an admission could be used against him politically.

This is, for reasons which I have indicated, a somewhat passionate book. Because of this I tried, as I read it, to unearth opinions or judgments which seemed unfair to Santamaria, without much success. The authors are primarily concerned with rebutting arguments and methods, particularly in relation to the position of the church and Communism. It's on issues peripheral to this main theme—such as anti-Semitism, the position of women in church and society, multiculturalism, Aboriginal disadvantage and the environment—that Santamaria's views might have been considered in a broader context.

As a young man Santamaria was undoubtedly subjected to the influence of the right-wing anti-Semitic conspiracy theories emanating from 'Action Française' and adopted by some Australian commentators close to him. But apart from a crass and ill-informed item, appearing in an early edition of the *Catholic Worker* when Santamaria was its editor (aged 21), there is little evidence to associate Santamaria with anti-Semitism. He may well at that time have nurtured anti-Semitic views. But as an addicted crusader this was not one of his ongoing issues.

Santamaria, born in 1915, was, like all of us, a creature of his times. I can remember my father in the early years of World War II speaking with abhorrence of anti-Semitism and anti-Catholicism (or more particularly anti-clericalism), which he regarded as stupid and ignorant. Unfortunately both were rife in Australia in the 1930s and into the following decades. They had the covert blessing of influential organisations like The Melbourne Club. If Santamaria, as a young man, harboured repugnant thoughts about Jews, he was not alone.

Santamaria's views on the position of women in society, Aboriginal disadvantage, and the environment (as quoted in this book) now seem quite primitive. They were. But again it's fair to ask which other public intellectuals in Australia were, in the mid 20th century, robustly standing up for women's rights, for Aborigines, for a better understanding of and care for the environment. These were latter-day issues. At the time, ignorance and indifference were ubiquitous. The most serious charge which can fairly be laid against Santamaria is that, as events unfolded and awareness grew, he simply failed to adjust his thinking on questions beyond his immediate priorities.

What of 'The Politics of Fear'? It has been a question which has interested me since 1966, when Arthur Calwell, who believed he was going to win the election of that year on the conscription issue, took me aside at a campaign meeting in the Kew Town Hall and told me, 'John, always remember that fear is the most potent weapon in politics.' It was a remark which made politics seem even more unattractive than it is. It stuck in my mind. At times I fear it might be true.

The title *Santamaria: The Politics of Fear* stems, I imagine, from Santamaria's genius as a 'threat expert'. Like Glendower in *Henry IV*, he had a unique ability to 'summon spirits from the vasty deep' and then marshal the forces to deal with them.

From Communists in the unions, to Chinese involvement in the Vietnam War, the domino theory, middle-class intellectuals and the 'US giant with feet of clay', he perceived the threats. His ability to persuade others, like politicians, bishops, newspaper proprietors, and ordinary citizens anxious to have something to be anxious about, declined with the years but at the height of his power his influence was profound. Like a hobgoblin in the rumpus room, he himself exuded an ever-present threat, somewhat colourfully described in an article which appeared in the Sydney *Sun* on 25 September 1954:

> In the tense melodrama of politics there are mysterious figures who stand virtually unnoticed in the wings, invisible to all but a few of the audience, as they cue, Svengali-like, the actors out on the stage. Such a figure appears to be Bartholomew Augustine Michael Santamaria, of politics but not in them, a man dedicated to an unrelenting crusade against communism, reputed by his enemies (who include some powerful men) to exercise a major influence on the course of Australian politics, yet out of the public eye and seemingly a casual bystander. When his name is mentioned, as it is frequently by politicians, it is usually in a guarded whisper behind a hand muffling the mouth, for they appear to fear speaking aloud of him, just as medieval men feared to speak aloud of bogies.

Pauline Armstrong's *Frank Hardy and the Making of Power Without Glory* was originally written as a PhD thesis at Melbourne University. It is a book which is at times repetitive and could have done with more careful editing. Nonetheless it is meticulously researched and the author seems to have interviewed or obtained information from all the usual suspects across the political spectrum. Santamaria himself is quoted on the blurb as saying that Hardy's *Power Without Glory* would become a 'social document for history researchers'. The only obvious non-collaborator was Frank Hardy himself, who seems to have deliberately frustrated the author's attempts to interview him.

Armstrong fairly portrays the attractive side of Hardy and is generous in her references to his assistance to the Gurindji people and his opposition to the Vietnam War, long after his commitment to Soviet Communism had begun to wane.

By the time he commenced the writing of *Power Without Glory* Hardy had already had some success as a writer and some experience of organisational work for the Communist Party. *Power Without Glory* was not, it seems, Hardy's idea. A number of Communist Party officials obviously mulled it over, but the finger points strongly at the late Ted Hill as the catalyst. Hill wanted to 'put a dent into the activities of Catholic action'. He believed, erroneously, that John Wren was financing the Movement. Hill, described by his party colleague Cedric Ralph as a 'master of the offensive', was always a hard ball-player.

With this genesis the making of *Power Without Glory* became something of a collective work, with Hardy as the lead instrument. Armstrong's account of the research done voluntarily by various Communist Party members, of the clandestine typesetting and printing of the book, and its distribution is fascinating reading. So is the account of the activities of the 'Defence Committee' established after Hardy was charged with criminal libel.

When *Power Without Glory* was published I was at school supplementing 'approved reading' with a diet of B-grade crime novels, mostly written by a British writer named Roland Daniel. The publication was exciting because in the surrounding atmosphere of intrigue it seemed that in Melbourne too there was violence, blackmail, bribery and corruption just like London or New York. The book sold well, blurring, as it did, fact and fiction, with much more fiction than fact.

Writing about the making of the book, Armstrong points up the unattractive side of Hardy, who in the excitement of public notoriety showed little gratitude to all those who helped him produce it. Gratitude, it seems, was not one of Hardy's virtues. A heavy gambler, he borrowed money and often failed to repay his debts. He was not particularly loyal to people who had befriended him. His separation from his wife was messy, 'humiliating and cruel'. His partner in the early '70s, Eva Jago, thought he knew nothing about women, was insensitive and egocentric, and highly susceptible to flattery.

There are several suggestions in the book that Hardy was anti-Semitic. Some people, who knew him well, think this is a misjudgment of Hardy and that any anti-Semitic remarks should be seen in the context of Hardy's being 'anti-everything': the establishment, the Irish, the British, the Catholics, any group which engaged his attention at any particular time. If this is true, he at least displayed the virtue of consistency.

I only met Santamaria twice. The first occasion was at a crowded function in the Rialto Building in honour of some visiting international luminary. It was in the mid 1960s when the Vietnam War was hotting up. At one point, caught in conflicting eddies between drink waiters and six o'clock quaffers, we found ourselves standing face-to-face. We nodded politely at each other. Then a drink waiter intervened and we pushed away in different directions. I enjoyed myself with the presumptuous analogy that we were like Voltaire and God. We saluted but we did not speak. But we both understood who was who.

The second occasion was in 1996 when I went with Jim McLelland and his wife Gil for a sandwich lunch in Bob Santamaria's office. It was a nostalgic occasion. The two veterans rivalled each other with modesty as they discussed who was the brightest student when they sat together at St Kevin's all those years ago. Santamaria was a charming host and seemingly as intellectually alert as ever. He gave us some amusing thumbnail sketches of contemporary public figures, which might have been drawn by Hogarth. We sat on opposite sides of a long table. There was a framed photo of Archbishop Pell on the wall behind him.

I met Hardy only once, after he had given an entertaining talk at the Assembly Hall in Collins Street, Melbourne. Pumped up, like an ambassador or a politician at the declaration of the poll, he was enjoying the attention, dispensing charm in small and equal portions to his various admirers.

If Frank Hardy was 'anti-everything' his strongest and most positive commitment was to Communism in one form or another. Bob Santamaria's abiding commitment was to his view of the Catholic Church and to protecting it from its real and imagined enemies. In hindsight both were wrong or, at best, half right.

In *The Passing of an Illusion: The Idea of Communism in the 20th Century*, François Furet refers to the 'mystery' of ideological politics as being 'how it came to take root in people's minds. In a century divided between the theological and the political, the greatest enigma is how this intellectual mishmash could have evoked such strong sentiments and nourished so many individual fantasies.'

These two books only partly answer that question, but for the reader they are enlightening cautionary tales. ■

John Button was a senator and minister in the Hawke and Keating governments.

JAMES GRIFFIN

Big Tom

The Great Shame: A Story of the Irish in the Old World and the New, Thomas Keneally, Random House, 1998. ISBN 0 0918 7336 7, RRP $45. **Bettany's Book**, Tom Keneally, Doubleday, 2000. ISBN 1 8647 1000 4, RRP $34.95

ON HIS LATEST NOVEL Keneally has called himself plain 'Tom'. He has done this, I think, only once before: on his knockabout memoir, *The Homebush Boy* (1995). There must be a reason for such signal familiarity and it may not be unrelated to the blockbuster scope of his two latest works.

My copy came with a two-page press release, evidently written by himself. No problem with that: the puff is justifiably self-satisfied. It specifies many of Tom's 40 published works and numerous prizes, and concludes:

> Tom married Judith and raised two daughters ... he was the founding chairman of the Australian Republican Movement. When not writing, lecturing or attending speaking engagements, Tom enjoys politician-watching, swimming, cryptic crosswords, telling anecdotes about his brilliant daughters, skiing and watching sporting events.

As Tom can take some joshing—and there is a point to it—I note that with the press release there is an outgoing photo of him under a sundowner hat with arms folded and specs clasped over a black jumper and open-neck shirt. A humorous, sharing fellow, he is almost smirking, triumphantly, such that I wondered whether Tom would withdraw from the limelight if a poll showed that his rather ubiquitous images—some of them a bit Blinky Bill-ish—were seen to be a liability to the cause.

Barely conceivable, of course. So let us agree with the release and say, unequivocally, that Tom's has been a prodigious achievement since he emerged from his clerical chrysalis in his gothic first novel, *The Place at Whitton* (1964). His capacity to digest miscellaneous historical sources (*Gossip from the Forest*, *Schindler's Ark*, *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith*, *Towards Asmara*) and create a seemingly authentic product is unrivalled in Australia. However, these two latest works are indulgently long.

Writing *The Great Shame*, he says 'was akin to being locked in a cupboard with a tyrannosaurus rex'. A ferocious, slavering trial for him perhaps, but I prefer to think of it as being in an unfenced landscape with that huge, rambling herbivore, the brontosaurus. Apparently the original was three times the 300,000 or so words that remain, including 100 pages of notes, bibliography and index. This boggler grazes firstly through the life of an Irish convict, Hugh Larkin, a 'Ribbon man', 'from whom my wife and [brilliant] daughters are descended'. Interleaved with this moderately interesting but exiguously documented story are the travails of the Young Ireland rebels (O'Brien, O'Doherty, Meagher, Mitchel) who were transported to Van Diemen's Land from which the last two made dramatic escapes to the USA.

His capacity to digest miscellaneous historical sources ... and create a seemingly authentic product is unrivalled in Australia. However, these two latest works are indulgently long.

Young Ireland is then made to blend into the Fenian Brotherhood, founded in New York in 1858. Keneally relates the jailbreaks of seven of them from Western Australia with customary skill. A group portrait of Irish rebels in the USA follows with much biography unfamiliar to Australians. Meagher and Mitchel, for example, supported opposing sides on the Civil War, Meagher as a brigadier-general for Lincoln.

The problem is that the 'great shame' is not really explored until the last two paragraphs of the book and then it is somehow foretold: the unique decline of the Irish population in the 19th century; British misgovernment; the failures of the rebels; and possibly (Keneally is not sure) 'a redolence of the shame of transportation' to Australia. Still, there is much that is informative.

Bettany's Book crosses two centuries and two continents authentically. Two Sydney sisters with the unlikely names Dimple and Primrose Bettany, drive this novel. 'Prim' has gone to the Sudan as an Austfam worker after her supervisor-lover at the University inserts plagiarised material into her postgraduate thesis in order to terminate their *affaire* and save his marriage.

'Dimp' has an *affaire* with, and eventually marries, a rich boring Catholic incuriously called D'Arcy who agonises over his need for a Vatican annulment of his first marriage in order to get them all to heaven. But Dimp leaves him, taking his Arthur Boyds with her to finance a film on her Bettany ancestors. She has already had success with a title, *Enzo Kangaroo*, so that it is not all that exotic when she goes off with her Calabrian script-writer named (bless him!) Benedetto.

Jonathan Bettany (d.1883) who, the epilogue tells us, caps his career as Minister for Lands and Colonial Secretary in New South Wales, is a pioneer grazier and son of a convict with a passion for the Stoic Latin poet, Horace, much quoted here. His second marriage is to another former convict, named Sarah Bernard who is formidable but not histrionic. Her letters and his journal are the basis of the Bettany book.

Among Jonathan's achievements is the rescue and education of a mixed-race Aboriginal boy whom he pregnantly names Felix. Keneally has Felix construe Ovid at nine years of age and Greek a little later. In adolescence Felix kills his worthless white father, leaving Bettany's stoical overseer to hang quite willingly for him. (It is done expertly, 'without priapism', says the supervisory doctor, no palpable detail eluding Keneally.)

Reducing stories like this amounts, of course, to caricature, when in fact Tom provides a wealth of vivid characterisation and narrative mastery. Still, it justifies the feeling that his continuous invention is too facile even when bolstered by insight into the problems of Third World countries and the ambiguities of foreign aid, as in the Sudan sections. At such length, the ingenuity stales and fosters respectful drift rather than alert expectation.

Well-meaning, overflowing, Tom is, I feel, now free-wheeling and beginning to patronise us. Hence the moniker variation? ■

James Griffin is an historian and emeritus professor of history, University of PNG.

ANDREW BULLEN

The writing on the wall

Colin McCahon: A Time for Messages, National Gallery of Victoria on Russell, 2 February–13 May 2001

FIFTY YEARS AGO the New Zealand painter Colin McCahon (1919–1987) made his sole visit to Melbourne. In the mornings he spent hours with the painter Mary Cockburn Mercer, who had worked with Picasso and Braque, looking at the collection of the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) then housed in the grand old building on Swanston Street. 'I was taught to be a painter,' he said of her influence on him, 'and all the implications, the solitary confinement which makes a painter's life. I remember her with great gratitude and affection. She had a broken leg and no money.' (See Agnes Wood, *Colin McCahon: The Man and the Teacher*, David Lang, Auckland 1997, pp24–25.) Her hospitable example braced him for a life of great difficulty and distress.

His art was shining and immense. Now six of McCahon's works, two in the Gallery's own collection and the others from a private collection in Melbourne, can be seen in the same building in a hospitable trans-Tasman exhibition curated by Jason Smith. McCahon's works are accompanied by those of one fellow New Zealander (Shane Cotton), two expatriate New Zealanders (Rosalie Gascoigne, Brent Harris) and seven Australians, whose work has either been influenced by McCahon or is in telling confluence with it.

For example, the watery blue currents and the tangled skein of string of Judy Watson's 'Driftnet' suggest how viewers can respond to the placement of the works around the bays on the mezzanine balcony of the restored McCoy Hall. Our glance drifts to and fro, caught for a moment or longer, and then moves on and back; connections are loosely or tightly made, and we sense that much slips through. The placement of the works itself goes to and fro both across the Tasman and from painting to painting. We can wonder whether McCahon's influence has led New Zealand artists to put words and landscape together more constantly than do Australian artists, and note that Rosalie Gascoigne is the pre-eminent figure in Australia for exploring landscape and words.

McCahon's interest in narrative and traditional ancestry links with the way the art of the Australian indigenous tradition traces significant markings in the landscape to tell stories, as we see in the paintings here by Emily Kam Kngwarray and Kitty Kantilla Kutuwalumi. The exhibition trawls through differences and likenesses between contemporary painting traditions in Australia and New Zealand.

The points of reference, of course, are the McCahon pieces, and the central importance of the two in the Gallery's collection—'One' and 'A letter to Hebrews (Rain in Northland)'—is marked by their position in the central bay.

From a distance and close up, 'A letter to Hebrews (Rain in Northland)' has an immense presence. From a distance we see its six long panels as a cloudscape, with occasional black blocks of land, the veils of rain coming and going as they wash across the long horizontal scroll of land, to meet the final and obscuring squall coming in from the far right edge.

As we are drawn closer, the text becomes visible. We soon find ourselves reading in the first panel, 'so that the visible came forth from the invisible'. Part of the experience McCahon draws us to in his paintings is to notice what the painting, often through its text, is doing to us. He stresses that the experience is one that only a painting can give.

The text here is taken from 'The Epistle to the Hebrews' in the New English Bible version, chapter 11. The ancient readers or audience were Jewish Christians whom the original writer wishes to encourage in their faith by reminding them of their ancestors in faith and their own possession now of the promises these ancestors could only hope for. The rhetoric is driven by the repetition of the phrase 'by faith' towards the final and climactic verse, 'and yet they did not enter upon their promised inheritance, because, with us in mind, God had made a better plan, that only in company with us should they reach their perfection'. In McCahon's revised version these words of consolation are squeezed into three lines way down the bottom of the sixth panel, and blurred by that incoming squall. The painted weather of the New Zealand landscape reinterprets the text. For McCahon, faith contends with rain.

In 'A letter to Hebrews' the names of faithful people from Abel onwards remind us that identity has to do with

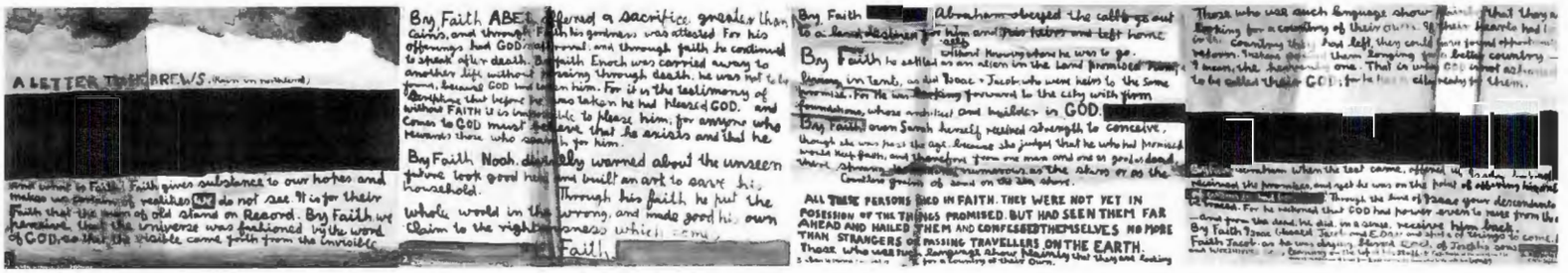
ancestry, here an ancestry of faith, which often had to endure the leaving of homeland or exile to seek a promised land. In contrast, the placing of McCahon's 'The canoe Mamari' just around the corner in the next bay of the exhibition juxtaposes landscape and Maori ancestry to suggest how identity is established by historical continuity in the same landscape. If that is so, then McCahon's putting in capitals these words from the epistle is all the more poignant: 'They were not yet in posession [sic] of the things promised. But had seen them far ahead and hailed them and confessed themselves no more than strangers or passing travellers on the earth'. The biblical text now engages with the pakeha experience, speaks for it, and the painting revises the original text yet again.

ourselves to that presence, which is sometimes enhanced by the painting having a vertical, menhir-like shape, or looking like a school blackboard. We have to face up to it.

His scripts too are forceful: 'you have to read this'. They present us with the truth. McCahon as God's sign writer. We are told McCahon was 'entranced as a child watching a signwriter near his home painting "Hairdresser and Tobacconist"' (Wood, p22). But here the words are worthy of the entrancement they can cast, and they can be signs. A sign may appear in the heavens or in the landscape. It comes as a confronting gift: we sense our inadequacy before it; we undergo an annunciation. Whether the words are in the heavens or in the landscape, we are obliged to read the text. Our

Moreover, the lines of the text work poetically: for example, the end of a line leads us to stress the first word on the following line. The text becomes alive—or, better, its liveliness is highlighted by McCahon's placement of the words. The thickening or thinning of his brushstroke, the sudden shift in font and case, the rare occasions when he writes in white on black, that single misspelling and the mistaken repeat of 'the' in the fourth panel—all this visual liveliness keeps us on our toes before the painting.

How do we speak the score of McCahon's version of Hebrews? Our eyes move along the text, we journey through the textual landscape, which eventually tells us in the third panel that is what we are doing: 'By Faith [a black block] Abraham obeyed the



Another current of suggestion comes to 'A letter to Hebrews' from 'The canoe Mamari', for here the names of Maori ancestors alone carry the story of those identified by the story. For the many of us for whom that is not the case, the experience of seeing the white names on the black ground can be like coming across a story chalked on a blackboard for another group of people. Whose secrets are these? And should I read them? Dare I tread across the boundaries into sacred space, and into somebody else's sacred space? McCahon's use of Maori myth has proved a volatile issue in New Zealand. (McCahon replaced the contentious text in the 'Urewera Mural' in 1975; the mural was stolen as a political act in 1997 but was subsequently recovered.) Maybe that sense of stumbling across somebody else's myth is also part of the experience for many with regard to 'A letter to Hebrews'.

If our experience of the paintings is any guide, for McCahon the sacred stories, whether Maori or Christian, are so potent that they lunge into our ordinary space to impose their sacred message upon us. Undoubtedly, characteristic of McCahon's art is the presence his paintings have: they are uncompromisingly there, confronting us with their otherness. We have to subject eyes are led in a journey across a tract of land or sky, as in 'A letter to Hebrews', or we are brought up short before the sheer hillside of 'One'.

FITTINGLY, AT AN EXIT of this exhibition, the panel 'Poetry isn't in my words' uses the poet Peter Hooper's blunt poem to give McCahon's last word, last judgment: 'if you're appalled/ at the journey/ stick to the/ guided tours/ They issue return tickets.' As Belshazzar found in the Book of Daniel, the writing is on the exit wall.

Either side of the Tasman our cultures are unused to prophets who use paint, and we are quickly alienated by stridency. McCahon's work, however, avoids visual stridency by having a tough delicacy of its own. The text of 'A letter to Hebrews' draws us to read it and so come closer—to make out a word perhaps—and further away to take it in. We do a little dance in front of the painted text, edging sideways to and fro: I'm reminded of the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem where the orthodox pray while dancing before the sheer honeyed stone of God's presence/absence. McCahon leads us to do this strange dance before the ark of the covenant that is both God's word in Hebrews and the rainy landscape in Northland.

call to go out to a land destined for himself and his heirs and left home without knowing where he was to go'.

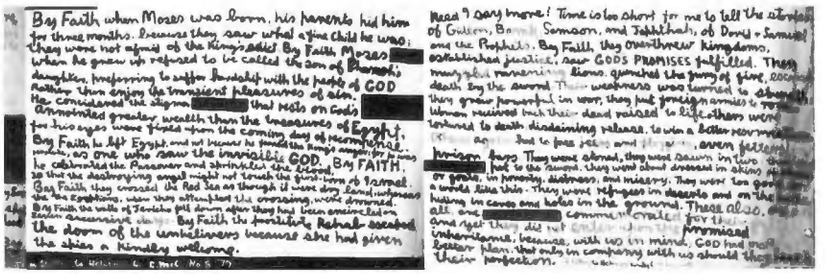
The layout controls the little dance and turns the pauses—there's a big one before 'without'—into doubts and hesitations. Further on, at the end of the third and beginning of the fourth panels, the repetition of the third panel's final line emphasises its importance to McCahon: 'Those who use such language show plainly that they are looking for a country of their own.'

The grey sheets of rain that cover the repetition are broken by two shafts of light, and in each the word 'God' appears in capitals: God is lit. Here too McCahon's orchestration of the silences is powerful: look at the immense silence at the conclusion of the paragraph, as the grey rain and shafts of light, like the black and white of text, are followed by a great black bar, which itself repeats the formidable hiatus after the title. How McCahon paints the text is what it means for him. His way of putting it or painting it is to make some words, phrases, sentences and silences lift out of their context and resonate. He shows he is looking for a country of his own by using such painted language.

In the small square of 'One' (see p41) we are confronted by a country in the tawny

slopes, the 45-degree incline of the New Zealand hills, the echo of the dark lines drawn vertically by fir trees along a boundary. McCahon is wonderful at conveying the texture of landscape: 'Beach walk: Series A' has a please-touch texture, the land is weathered, its colours so finely tuned that it almost hides itself until we get close and look for something—anything—to look at. There is a dustiness in the texture of 'One' that establishes the word and number in a field of gold, or at least a slope of tawny gold.

The tawny location transforms word and number, and so the space is alive with the energy of metaphor. The word 'one', which is both a number and a pronoun for the self, is split apart by 'I', which is both the number one and the capital 'I', so that now the 'I' is in the middle with 'on' to one side and 'e' to the other. Where one is split by the self and number breaks up the word, we can barely understand the intense play of language and sign. The great 'I' dislocates us. If this dislocation is a prelude to revelation, the place becomes the mount of transfiguration, where the central figure is flanked by a lesser figure on either side that points to the centre.



Of course, the figure 'I' is not dazzling white, but black. McCahon, a master of black, as are other New Zealand artists like Ralph Hotere, does a dazzling black, edged by an emphasis of the tawny gold.

McCahon's achievement is recognised in New Zealand, and reverberates beyond. What we may want to say of any formidable painter has to be said with special force of McCahon. His work transfigures its content and draws the viewer into the transformation; it has moral force (unless you become like a little child you will not enter the kingdom of art/heaven), it subverts the surface to reveal the depth.

Far too little of this achievement has drifted across the Tasman. The Melbourne exhibition stirs the hope that our major galleries will let Australian audiences see the vibrancy and difference in the art of the New Zealand powerhouse. ■

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The Auckland Art Gallery has major holdings of McCahon's work, which is well represented on its website: www.akcity.govt.nz/around/places/artgallery/index.html

Page 41: *One*, 1965. Colin McCahon, 1919–1987, New Zealand. Synthetic polymer paint and polyvinyl acetate on composition board, 60.7 x 60.7cm. Purchased through The Art Foundation of Victoria with the assistance of Mr Robert Raynor AM, Honorary Life Benefactor, 1999.

Page 42–43: *A letter to Hebrews (Rain in Northland)*, 1979. Colin McCahon, 1919–1987, New Zealand. Synthetic polymer paint on paper (six panels), 73.0 x 110.2cm each sheet. Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria by the Rev. Ian Brown, Fellow, 1984.

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Classifieds

FLASH IN THE PAN

Surface cut

Proof of Life, dir. Taylor Hackford. Engineer Peter Bowman (David Morse) has been kidnapped by guerrillas in the revolutionary Latin American state of Tecala and abandoned by his oil conglomerate employer; his fate lies in the hands of international ransom broker, Terry Thorne (Russell Crowe).

Threatened by time and circumstances, Bowman's marriage to Alice (Meg Ryan) is at the point of disintegration when he is taken captive. Enter Crowe, and an attempt by Hackford at a modern-day, *Casablanca*-style *ménage à trois*, played against the backdrop of intense hostage negotiations.

Tony Gilroy's screenplay attempts to present the characters as deeply complex beings but fails to do more than scratch the surface—empathy is in short supply, and as it diminishes, so too does any tension that might have built up. Bowman is at the mercy of violent and ruthless killers, yet it is hard to care whether he is rescued or not.

And it is impossible to believe that Crowe's character—a tough-talking, clinical and cynical hostage negotiator, and one-time SAS commando—has allowed his guard to slip and has fallen for a misty-eyed and bedraggled Meg Ryan. The fact that the movie is based on actual events—William Prochnau's account—doesn't make it any easier to accept.

The sporadic action scenes are exciting and suggest that *Proof of Life* would have been much better as a full-blown action movie. But in having attempted to add emotional depth, and failing, Hackford has turned some potentially great material into a rather poor movie.

—Ciaran McGuigan

Creative drive

Traffic, dir. Steven Soderbergh. There are films about drug addiction, films about the drug trade, and films about Third World politics. *Traffic* artfully combines all three into one coherent, and disturbing, whole.

It marries a hand-held camera style (filmed by the director himself, working under the pseudonym Peter Andrews) with brilliant, economical storytelling to create that rare thing: a message film which skilfully lets its polemical points arise from the drama itself. There is very little obvious speechifying in *Traffic*; it is almost all action.

Soderbergh's theme is corruption: institutional, societal, personal. Every character is tainted by the drug trade and the 'war' waged upon it.

Justice Rober Wakefield (Michael Douglas) almost loses his daughter to addiction, while in command of America's battle against drugs. The society hostess Helena (Catherine Zeta-Jones) wakes up one morning to discover her rich husband is up on a drug-smuggling charge, and quickly takes over the murderous family business when her young son is threatened. Even the brave and honest Mexican cop, Javier (Benicio Del Toro), feels like a Judas when he goes to the Drug Enforcement Agency with evidence of the entrenched corruption which afflicts his nation.

No-one in the film escapes unharmed or unsullied by the bloody—and ultimately futile—war. As Soderbergh wrote in his recently published diary: 'That people will abuse anything, given the opportunity, is part of what makes us human. The question of how much we should legislate against potential abuses is the one I haven't been able to answer for myself.' To his credit, Soderbergh refrains from delivering a pat Hollywood-style answer to this question. But he shows us the moral and physical carnage that makes such a question worth asking. It is a powerful achievement.

—Brett Evans

Sad Sade

Quills, dir. Philip Kaufman. Books and berks are the predominant theme in this ponderous piece of hysterical unpleasantry. Young Simone (Amelia Warner), the convent-raised orphan married by force to the film's 'real' villain (Michael Caine), has one of those Sloane Rangerish accents that can't pronounce a full round vowel, so when she avers that the nuns taught her to appreciate 'berks' you can only agree, since she seems to appreciate deeply the writings of the Marquis de Sade (Geoffrey Rush) with all their pomps and lack of irony or indeed any recognisable human emotion. We are asked to believe that the reading of *Justine* turned her from a trembling lamb regularly wolfed by her awful hubby to a sultry vamp who

rogers and then elopes with the home renovator.

Anyone who has read any of de Sade's interminable catalogue arias will doubtless conclude that she must have been an accident waiting to happen. Caine has little to do in the film but twirl imaginary moustaches and foreclose on the mortgage. I ended up sympathising with him. Kate Winslet (as Madeleine) is very beautiful and males who remember her in *Titanic* will get a brief glimpse of her breasts again, as long as they're not put off by the fact that she's supposed to be dead at the time. It doesn't seem to put off the romantic lead, but the film *über*-sentimentalises it by making her wake up and embrace him and then of course it all turns out to be a dream.

Geoffrey Rush was brilliant in *Elizabeth* and *Shakespeare in Love*: indeed he was the best thing about both those films. But as a heretic who was embarrassed by *Shine*'s appalling patronising of mad people, musicians and music lovers, I have to disagree with most of my fellow critics and say that *Quills* infantilises its audience outrageously, ducking the hard issues of what it means to be a person who enjoys violence so much that it gets confused with the erotic impulse. The comic-book script makes Rush's de Sade into a bit of a naughty old eccentric who is opposed only by hypocritical wowsers. If you want to see anything like a proper political contextualising of de Sade, go back to Peter Weiss' *Marat/Sade*, which, as I remember, with all its faults (actors *do* love to play lunatics), at least knew the meaning of the word 'irony' if only in a heavy-handed Brechtian sense. Next to *Quills*' sheer bloody awfulness it looks like Shakespeare now.

—Juliette Hughes

Rosetta's tone

Rosetta, dir. Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne. This film is a powerful piece. It stays with you long after you have left your seat, long after you arrive home. It is also a difficult film to watch, not just because what you see *up there* is uncomfortable material, but because *down here* isn't particularly safe or stable either.

Rosetta (left and above) is a young woman, deep in a poverty trap, driven by the desire for a 'normal' life. With no support, either financial or emotional, Rosetta finds her own way to survive. She follows a strict routine, walking the same way home, changing her shoes in the same place, checking her fishing lines, washing herself and so on. Without friends, responsible for an alcoholic mother, and with unstable employment, this routine gives her some kind of confirmation of her existence. The detail of her life is exquisitely depicted, but it is in no way picturesque. This search for meaning, for dignity, with so few resources, is raw.

The film is shot with a hand-held camera. There is little dialogue. There is no musical score. The camera is relentless in its close-ups of Rosetta and the bleak day-to-day grind of her life. It feels very intimate, too intimate. These aspects all work together—the intimate camera work, the lack of softening touches like music, the mundane details of her life—and had me questioning my role as a member of the audience. I felt a terrible voyeur, watching dwindling hope as entertainment. While confronting and difficult, however, this questioning also personalised the film for me, made me engage when it would have been more comfortable to detach.

Rosetta is played by Emilie Dequenne. It is an incredible performance. She does not indulge in any kind of sentimentality. She blends vulnerability with steel will; and it is done with such subtlety, closer to a rhythm than a characterisation.

Don't expect resolution or epiphany here. You will not be uplifted, but you will be challenged. **—Annelise Balsamo**

Moody clues

In the Mood for Love, dir. Wong Kar-wai. Wives carrying the same handbags, husbands wearing matching ties, and beaded slippers forgotten by bedsides all work as painfully simple markers of infidelity in Wong Kar-wai's new picture, *In the Mood for Love*.

When Su Li-Zhen (Maggie Cheung) and Chow Mo-Wan (Tong Leung) first become neighbours in a crowded Hong Kong apartment block, their relationship consists of little more than cool acknowledgment and the odd exchange of a kung-fu novel. But it is not long before they realise that their respective partners are having an affair. This gives an unexpected and painful context to their relationship. Anxious for the merest scrap of explanation, Su and Chow explore the liaison of their husband and wife by re-enacting ways in which it could have begun and what might have been discussed between them. This play-acting is both strange and devastating—exploring the pain of infidelity but also the beauty and surprise of the little-known lover.

In the Mood for Love is literally and figuratively made up of a delicate layering of patterns. Patterns of crowded domestic life, strikingly decorated cheongsams, the repetitive movements of preparing food, the familiar activities of work, the high-key patterns of '60s interior design and the rhythms and fears of illicit love. So strong is the use of visual patterns that we are alerted to a change of days by little more than a different design on Su's cheongsam or the need for another trip to the noodle shop to buy the evening meal.

And what a relief it is to be spoken to in this exquisitely subtle and moody way. Brash obviousness has its place on a *Die Hard* Christmas Eve with every character carrying a present and shouting about the holidays. It's not until you watch a film that allows you the time to contemplate the shade of a woman's handbag that you realise how much you miss when you are told everything.

Maggie Cheung and Tony Leung are faultless as the couple. Cheung manages to brush past a doorframe with such erotic charge it makes you shudder, and Leung is similarly affecting as he walks up and down the steep steps leading to a favourite noodle shop.

No aspect of the film is disappointing: the photography, the design, the writing, the performances—all show what this profoundly collaborative art form can achieve, given a chance. **—Siobhan Jackson**

Not really

THERE ARE WORSE SINS than hoarding old vinyl records by Richard Chamberlain, in his manifestation as Dr Kildare, long before the fans' swoony satisfaction over his confirmed bachelor status had given way to vague misgivings. If his sex appeal was as real as, say, Rock Hudson's, what did it all mean?

Dr Kildare was as real to me at 13 as God, if you go by the amount of quality time I allotted him in my thoughts. Father Christmas had been exploded a worryingly small number of years previously: at nine I had argued Yuletide apologetics with cynical schoolmates. The arguments went roughly thus: parents don't lie to kids; look at the empty glass of port and the eaten mince pie; and anyway, he can't come down your chimney and give you toys *if you don't believe*. I actually convinced a couple of the nervous ones for about five minutes with that one. The tough ones didn't do sophistry—they'd seen Mummy kissing Santa Claus long ago. Eventually my parents, embarrassed by their success, confessed about the charade of the port and mince pie—tantamount to the Pope finally admitting that the miraculously liquefying blood of St Januarius was a fiddle. No longer more gullible than was fitting, I joined the pack of disillusionés, as we went off to catechism classes and learned a lot of other interesting things. Which were of course true beyond argument.

But the challenge of what was real and what wasn't didn't go away. It never does. That's why it doesn't help when the main conduit of shared experience in our society starts to create another layer of myth on top of its other well-documented mythologies and call it 'reality'. 'Reality TV' is a bigger myth than the most manipulated quiz show, the most opinionated current affairs show, precisely because its major premise is the artificial stimulation of undefended natural behaviour, the kind of behaviour that leads us to make our conclusions about life, simply because it seems true. (This is not the time to be a clever clogs and ask Pilate's meaningless question. He didn't expect an answer to 'What is truth?' The right kind of question gets the truth as its answer.)

It's tiresome to dissect in detail the manifold disingenuousnesses of such programs as *Temptation Island* (put pretty, silly people in contact with paid seducers and see if they will be unfaithful to their partners); *The Mole*, *Shipwrecked*, *Survivor*, and suchlike (set tasks for people to perform and encourage them to undermine each other for money); *Big Brother* (eavesdrop on people's private activities and encourage them to undermine each other for money). Overseas, *Big Brother* has become big business, and its level of privacy violation extends to the participants' sexual activities. I might be being a tad over-the-top here, but at the risk of sounding like an Ayatollah, there's only one major reference figure for the kind of thing those producers are doing and it's Satan. Yep. Old Nick. Creepy Drawers himself. Now whether you subscribe to an evangelical fundamental personalised devil or whether you prefer to see evil as located in systems, and even in our own shadow side, it's problematic when society's main form of entertainment goes over so comprehensively to the Dark Side of the Force.

SCREAM TEST, sending credulous suggestibles into 'haunted' premises, aping the famous up-the-nostril camera angles originated by *The Blair Witch Project*, is so lame and unconvincing that I acquit it of evil, but not of unmitigated crassness. And I resent the way the producers do the port-and-mince-pie thing—rattling chains, banging roofs, sending balls rolling across dark rooms to scare the participants. But at least that means the program has to have built-in obsolescence—they won't be able to scare future idiots the same way.

It becomes more ugly when we contemplate the fact that 'reality TV' and its spurious spontaneity are the preferred options for TV management now because when they use the audience as the show, they don't have to worry about paying actors or proper scriptwriters and satisfying their pesky unions on working conditions. And all this debases the currency of honest documentary, such as Curtis Levy's *High Noon in Jakarta*, aired by the ABC in February. The shades of difference—between following Gus Dur round on his 4.30am walks, listening to him crooning 'High Noon' like your old grandad, and following silly exhibitionists around as they respond to the whips and carrots of their ruthless masters—are shades, but they are differences. The styles of truth can be stolen, but never the substance.

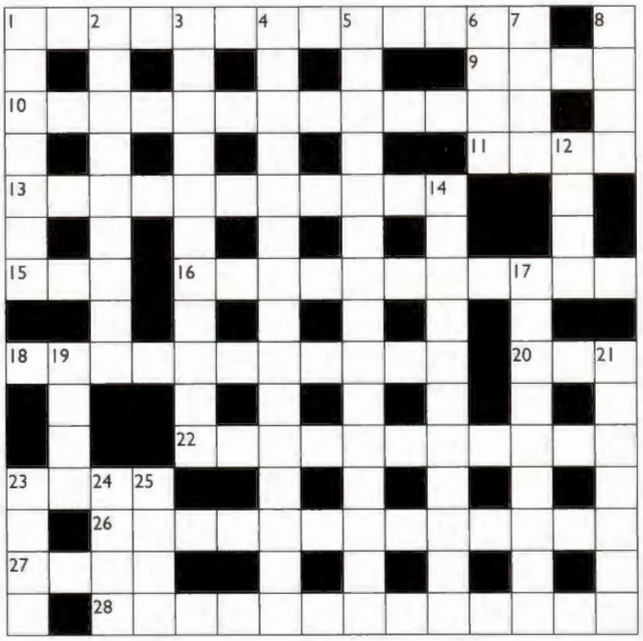
And as for honest drama, doesn't that give us everything we need? Alan Bennett's *Talking Heads* series (I will never forget Thora Hird in 'Waiting for a Telegram' as long as I live), the Rashomon-like *Talking to a Stranger*, *The Singing Detective*, *Phoenix*, *Wild Side*. We don't have to bore holes in our neighbours' bedroom walls to tell ourselves what's real. We've been looking at the truth through others' eyes since before Sophocles.

Humankind cannot bear very much fake reality. (Apologies to T.S. Eliot.) ■

Juliette Hughes is a freelance writer.

Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 92, April 2001

Devised by
Joan Nowotny IBVM



ACROSS

1. Top officer goes to the bar with licence, briefly, to address the people. (7,6)
9. Curtail disgrace at such hypocrisy. (4)
10. Ongoing struggle engaged in by batsmen? (7,6)
11. You're reported to be bringing the sheep right to the container. (4)
13. If you should, perchance, treat badly Emily's first attempt, is she likely to have a punt at Ascot? (1,4,6)
15. Out damned spot, I say! (3)
16. Just being a grocer outright isn't me, maybe, or my philosophy of life! (11)
18. Perhaps furs etc. pall unless complete colour ranges are available. (4,7)
20. Patron takes protégé in this, perhaps? Quite a drag! (3)
22. Tack followed by sailing ship? Could be handy for the manicurist. (4,7)
23. Cheery greeting in Rome—as food is heard arriving! (4)
26. Straight drive to one's destination, perhaps, with a backwards glance or a pull up the hill with a cut to the fence on the side? (13)
27. Money found in untidy den—you couldn't buy much with it in Rome. (4)
28. Chose a familiar red for CEO—E. MacDermot, but left not right. (7,1,5)

DOWN

1. Teutonic, eastern branch, is closely connected. (7)
2. No French standard lie (somewhat twisted) could ever be its equal. (9)
3. Wet salt, for example, common during northern monsoons. (5,6)
4. If no 26-across is offered, this may well be the umpire's decision. (3,6,6)
5. Girl you, reportedly, then tied round cat? A wild story that has not been verified!! (15)
6. I'll hear the passage without a mention of Tasmania, for instance. (4)
7. Some would ache with shame, if heard to do this noisily at table. (4)
8. Frost goes up to meet the ruler. (4)
12. Finishes the scraps. (4)
14. Surprisingly, a rustic I lit upon had something to do with liturgical ceremony. (11)
17. Position of year-twelve student would make it unlikely that he would be given 4-down when playing like that. (2,3,4)
19. Horrible sounding African fruit! (4)
21. How rear guard action, perhaps, produced a VC medallist? (3,4)
23. You might be able to quit with this turkey? (4)
24. Old surface measurement taken in old city of Israel. (4)
25. Part of door alignment test. (4)

Solution to Crossword no. 91, March 2001

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

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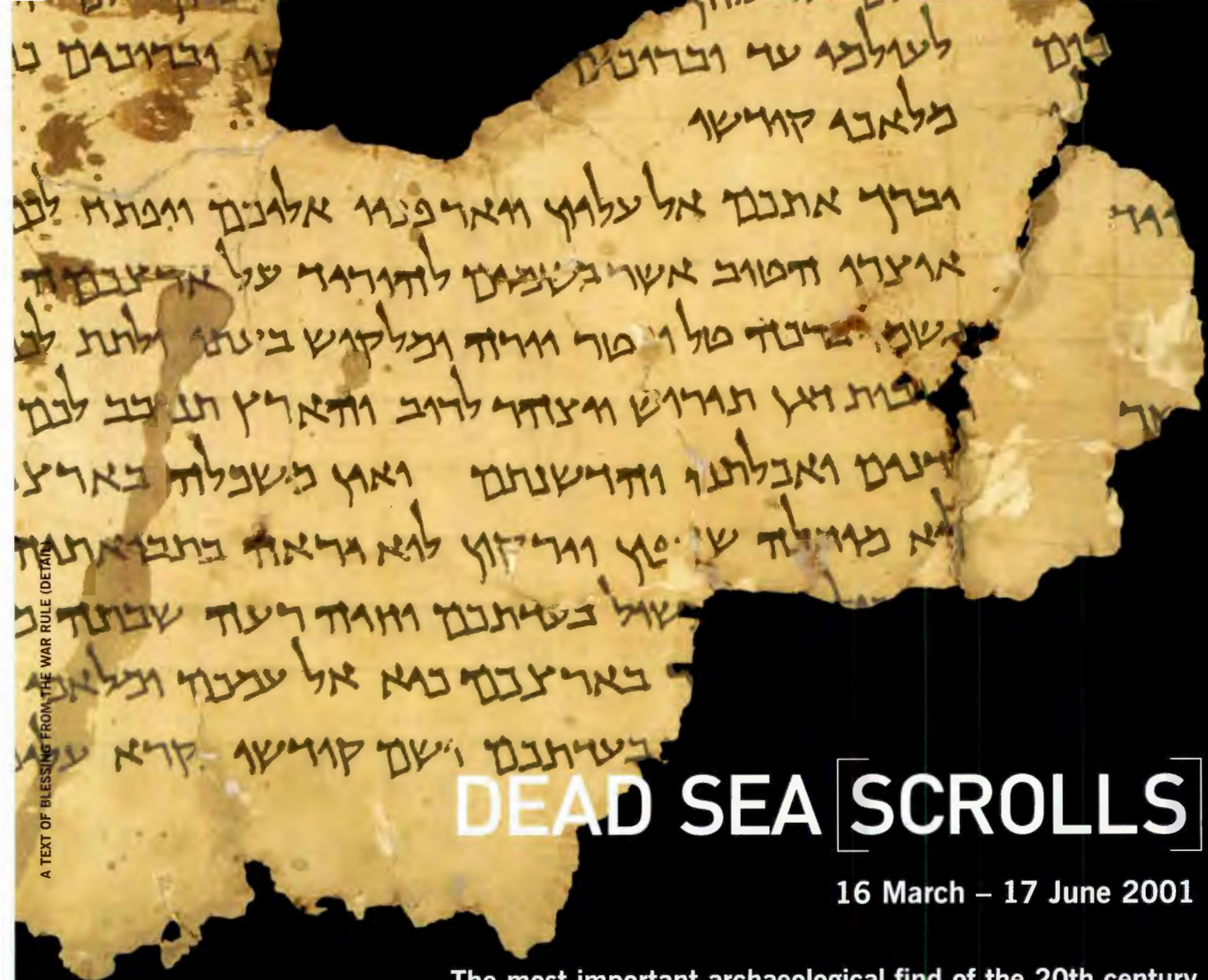

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