EUREKA STREET

A MAGAZINE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS, THE ARTS AND THEOLOGY
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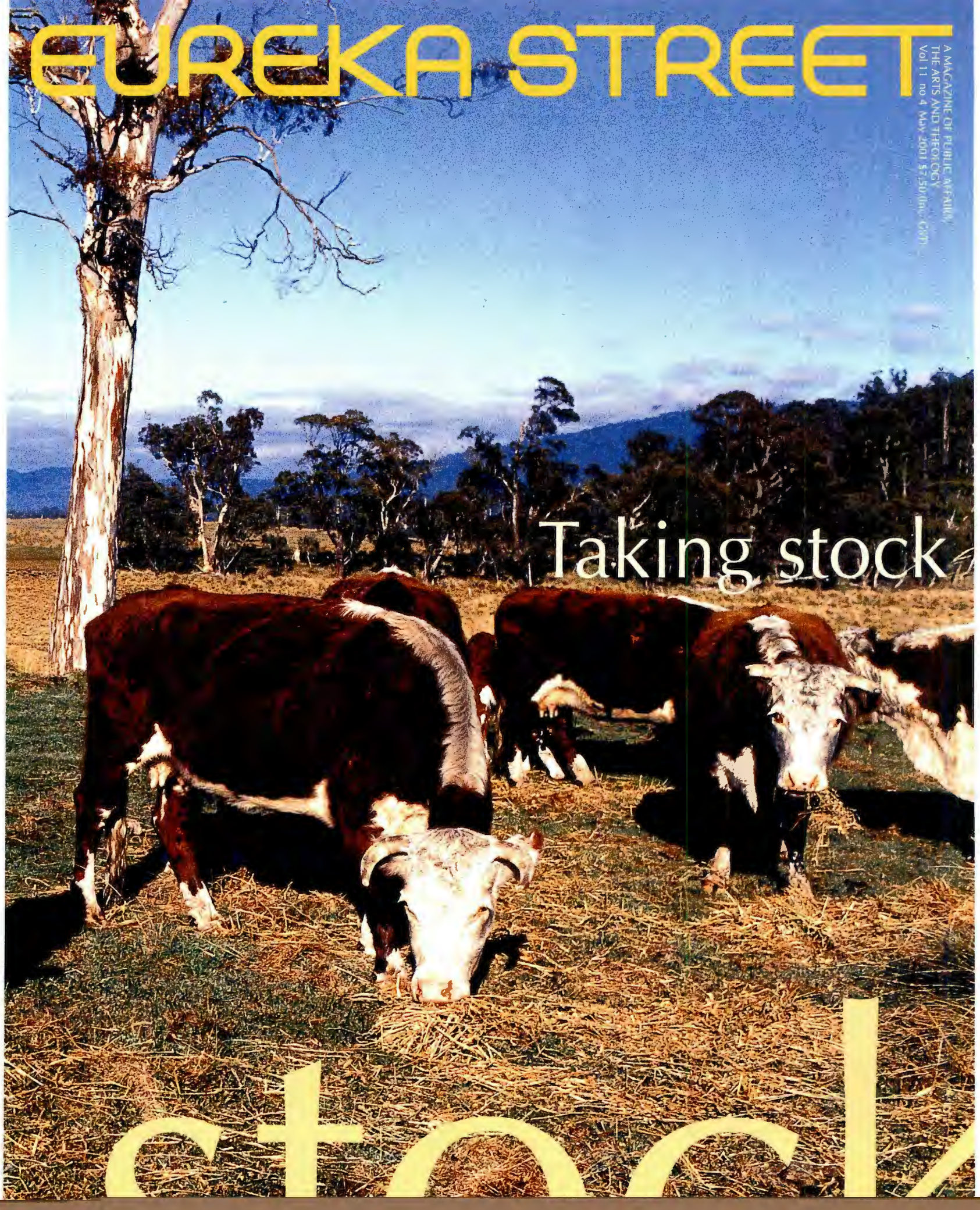

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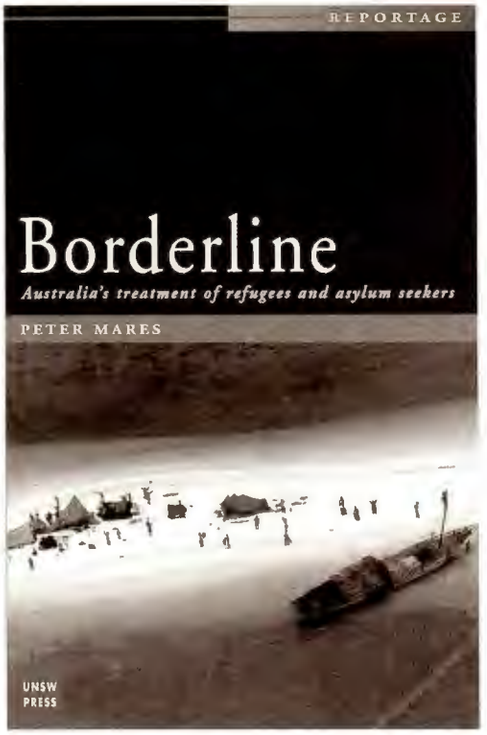

BORDERLINE

by Peter Mares

When journalist Peter Mares wanted to find out why asylum seekers were protesting at the Curtin detention centre, he found scant information in the national media.

In *Borderline*, Mares goes directly to the sources to report the story that we have not yet heard about Australia's most recent refugees. He talks to asylum seekers and other eyewitnesses, clearing away the cloud of disinformation and sensation that has obscured this critical moment in Australia's history.

Thanks to UNSW Press, *Eureka Street* has 10 copies of *Borderline* to give away, each worth $29.95.

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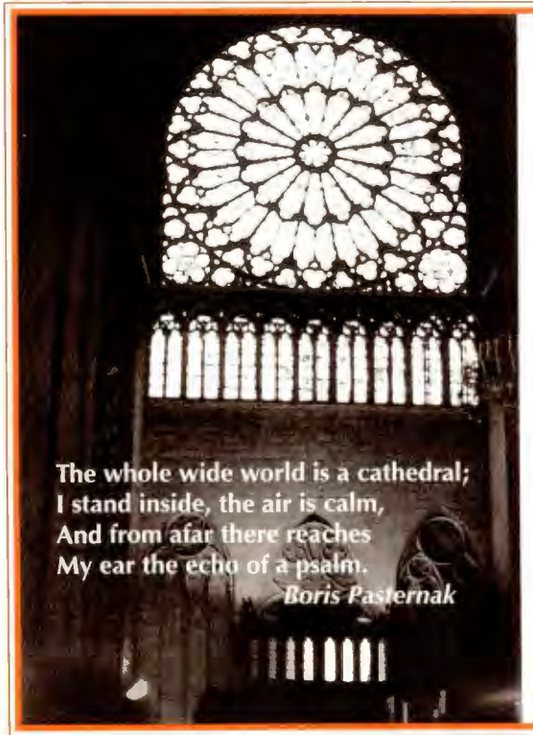

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The weight of office

Most commentators on Archbishop George Pell's appointment to Sydney have asked who made the appointment, why he was appointed and what is the agenda. They have presented it as a story of church politics.

This perspective has precedent. In the fourth century, the golden age for bishop-watchers, the Council of Nicaea forbade bishops to move from church to church, and gave the metropolitan bishop the right to veto other local appointments. Such rules hint at personal rivalries within churches, mercenary motives, careerism, and different visions of Gospel and church which could divide bishops.

Pope Gregory I inclining to his task (writing his *Dialogues*). From a 15th-century manuscript.

But the fourth century also had other, less strident, stories to tell about the appointment of bishops. Men like Gregory of Nazianzen and Augustine, private men who valued their leisure, were dragooned into public responsibilities within the church, and often spoke poignantly of its burdens—particularly of their isolation from friends and confidants, and the loneliness which their responsibility often entailed. Even now, when relationships between bishops, clergy and people are less stratified than previously, bishops remain vulnerable human beings with need for companionship and support. The more so when their appointments arouse high passions.

The tension between the public and the private stories of episcopal appointments was reconciled or heightened within the story of the community. Some congregations sent their new bishop packing, whereas Augustine found easy acceptance within his church. If communities are reconciling, then relationships are robust, leaving room for difference and for sharp differences. But these arguments are played out in direct and affectionate relationships between human beings who share vulnerabilities, foibles and humanity. Not to mention a common faith and commitment to love one another.

The hagiographies of Augustine and Gregory, though, leave the reader in no doubt that the story of their episcopal appointments was ultimately God's story. And if the appointment of bishops sometimes causes bitter controversies, perhaps it is because we inarticulately see the Bishop as a symbol of God. If we have a Bishop who likes us and favours our views, then we are more easily assured that God likes and favours us. And a Bishop who is not one of us makes us ask if God is on our side.

But the God of the Gospel stories is met, not first in hierarchies and roles, but in human vulnerability and in mutual love and forgiveness within a community. So, we step back from controversy for a moment to wish Archbishop Pell well in Sydney, recognising the human cost which his move to another city will entail for him. We hope that even when the life of his church is turbulent, he will find himself welcomed and at home in his community. ■

Andrew Hamilton SJ is publisher of *Eureka Street*.

Capital Letter

Jack Waterford

Democrats roleplay

Are the Democrats a party of protest, or are they a party that aspires to exercise power, if in the short term, by cutting deals with either Labor or the Liberals?

It is hard to be both at once, because the constituencies are quite different. About 70 per cent of voters see their politics primarily in terms of Labor or the Coalition, but there is always the chance that some of these will park their vote with the Democrats on the way to making a decisive shift from one party to the other. Another 30 per cent have got used, in upper house elections at least, to voting against both major parties, feeling that neither represents them or their interests. It is among this smaller group that the Democrats are most in competition for votes, but, increasingly, they are also hemmed in on all sides. A dramatic change of leadership, even to younger politicians who purport to embody a generational shift in politics, cannot necessarily make any substantial difference to their position.

Try as they might, the Democrats can never be the Greens; nor would they want to be, however much they seek to attract the votes of those for whom environmental issues are central. At heart, the Greens are anarchists, unwilling to make deals for a share in the power and highly suspicious of those who will trade for limited gains. There are limits to the votes they can hope to win, but, essentially, they win more votes by putting themselves in extreme positions than by appearing reasonable or willing to make concessions.

For more than a decade, the Democrats have recognised that carving an environment position to the left of Labor is a critical part of its formula for success, but, increasingly, they have lost the moral high ground to the Greens. And another part of the Democrat strategy—being to the right of the Labor Party on economic and industrial relations issues—has made them look pragmatic, and therefore less able to attract the radical vote.

Perhaps the Democrats can argue that they play an important moderating role between two big ends of town. But the process of being seen, each day in parliament, choosing between one or the other and having to be responsible for the outcomes, has stripped them of the claim of keeping the bastards honest.

The One Nation constituency, if well to the right of the Democrats on most issues, is potentially susceptible to the Democrats. Not all One Nation voters are motivated primarily by racism, hatred of immigrants, or being at the bottom of the scrapheap. What unites many of them is a loss of faith in politicians, in economistic nostrums and the modern shift away from the provision of services. If One Nationites do not believe, it does not mean that they do not want to believe and follow; if they can respond to the charisma of an anti-politician such as Pauline Hanson, they might readily follow a more practical, moderate leader who could offer faith as well as hope.

But even strategies for politics of the middle are not easy to come by. Accept, for the moment, that Meg Lees lost support for the Democrats by making deals with the Coalition over the imposition of the GST. The message, then, would seem clear: it is important for the Democrats to be seen to shift to the left. And who better to present the face of such a shift than Natasha Stott Despoja, whose disagreement with Meg Lees' approach was always made clear?

Oh yes, but think forwards to election time. Five of the nine Democrats are up for re-election, including Stott Despoja herself. Most people who vote at that election will be expecting Labor to win. There will be the usual risk the Democrats face of being swamped in a landslide election. Suppose, however, that the Democrats are making a pitch that voters should take out an insurance policy by keeping the Democrats in the balance of power. Will that pitch work if the Democrats are seen to have shifted to the left and become great chums with Labor?

I'm not sure that the Democrats committed suicide by voting for a modified GST. Granted, they might have chosen a more popular issue, but what mattered was the symbolism of the party's becoming a player. The pragmatism and the juggling involved has compromised it within its own party constituencies, and with that part of the electorate which might vote for it. The Democrats seemed purer when they did not have the balance of power, or shared it.

Were I Natasha Stott Despoja, I would not be spending much time persuading economic journalists that I was responsible, or playing games with the Coalition or Labor about which of their measures I would support. Instead I would be staking out some limited but fertile territory—particularly on social policy, the environment and reformed processes of government (the Democrat policy framework is already there, if insufficiently emphasised)—and never miss an opportunity to grandstand on it. I would be making the major parties come to me, and making the price of any deals concessions on my agenda, not piecemeal amendment and 'improvement' of their agenda items.

The biggest task is not in parliament but on the hustings. That's where a media-smart duo with some appearance of idealism and not too much depth on wider issues will have impact. Even then, I expect, the Democrats will be heavily squeezed, on the one plane between the Greens and One Nation, on another, between Labor and Liberal. ■

Jack Waterford is editor of the *Canberra Times*.

Classifieds

More is less

From Professor Neil Buchanan

The excellent, thought-provoking article by Meg Gurry, 'The Heart of the Matter' (April 2001), struck many a chord for both my wife and myself. Thank you Meg for having bothered to put pen to paper. I am a medical practitioner with university, hospital and community-based experience over three decades, and the angst and discomfort expressed in the article is, sadly, too familiar. Surely not the rule, but still all too familiar.

The feelings of fear and humiliation represent a loss of identity which people experience as they turn into patients. They may be stripped, albeit unwittingly and usually with good intent, of personhood. It is this loss of personhood which is the humiliating, dehumanising experience. Too often, lip service is paid to fears and anxieties: 'Of course you are anxious', 'I understand your concerns', and so on. Pleasant, but often platitudinous remarks, too often recognised as such.

There must be many reasons why Milo has been replaced by nuclear scans or Viagra. Selecting future doctors on their HSC marks (fortunately going out of fashion), an ever-increasing amount to know, endless technological change, financial imperatives (public and personal), hungry lawyers, commercial pressures and the fear of 'not knowing' must all contribute. However, doctors, like other professionals, reflect the mores of society. Presumably the lack of humanity and compassion which Meg describes is in part a reflection of the world around us, where egocentricity reigns supreme. If so, part of the solution is societal and the remainder educational. Sadly, within the medical curriculum, doctors are taught to 'do' and not to 'be', while compassion scores few marks as a non-examinable subject. The matters which Meg Gurry brought to our attention are not 'teachable', other than by example.

Recognising that patients are people just like us (doctors) and being able to admit that none of us is infallible—being able to say 'I don't know (but will endeavour to find out)' is not a crime. In my own case, I try my best to avoid these pitfalls by frequently asking myself the questions, 'How would I like to be treated?' or 'What would I reasonably expect in this particular situation?' A large part of the solution lies in listening to the answers that come back to these questions—they are quite illuminating and keep one pretty much on the straight and narrow.

Perhaps Charles Mayo was right in 1938 when he wrote: 'The definition of a specialist as one who "knows more and more about less and less" is good and true.'

Neil Buchanan
Westmead, NSW

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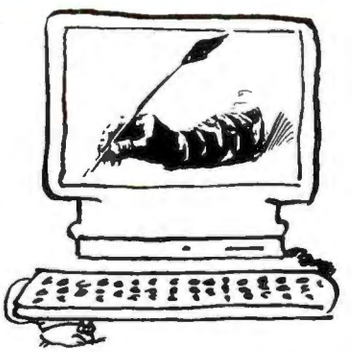


Temple contemplation

From Roslyn Beer

Rabbi John Levi, in his article 'The Peace of Jerusalem' (March 2001), makes several good points. However it is important to point out the differences between Christians and Jews.

Rabbi Levi says that the denial of the history of the ruins of the Temple, in a claim made by Yasser Arafat, is alarming. At the same time, just as alarming is the denial of the present history of the Dome of the Rock—the presence of the Palestinian people and real justice and land rights for them.

To claim that the Temple did not exist 'is a serious challenge to all the monotheistic faiths'. I concur with Rabbi Levi on this point, but he creates at times a nostalgic vision of the Temple, and stresses an importance attached to it, to which Christians may not subscribe. Christians do not hold such a nostalgic view of the Temple. For the Christian, the Temple was also a place of conflict. Christ drove the moneychangers out when he cleansed the Temple, and Christ himself became 'the Temple' which would be raised up in three days. Historically, it was important for Christians, but it was not to be a place where the Christian forms an earthly attachment. Christ gave the example of radical non-attachment to the Temple.

As a result, the Christian, even though he or she acknowledges the history of the place, is called to a radical non-attachment to the Temple. It is not to be the focus for spiritual aspirations in the present or the future. The focus is to be on Christ himself. The Rabbi, in his conclusion, cites the injunction given in Psalm 22: 'Pray for the peace of Jerusalem and may all those who love you prosper.'

As Christians, we share this prayer but we are also called to aspire to a 'Heavenly Jerusalem'. Aspiring to a 'Heavenly Jerusalem' means that for the Christian the earthly Jerusalem is not to be the point of focus. Christ calls the Christian to work for justice for all peoples and not to cling to land and possessions. A place where all peoples of every nation live in justice and peace.

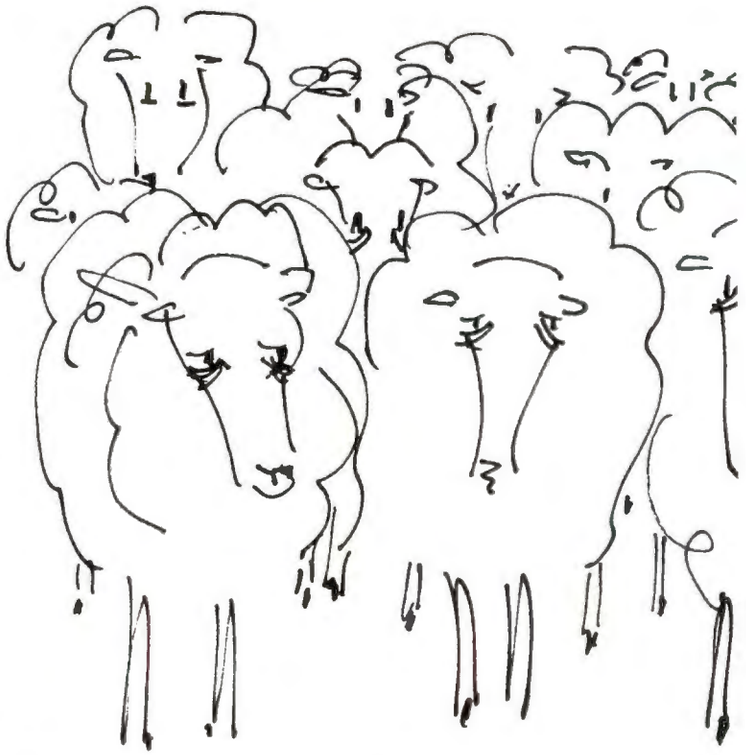
Roslyn Beer
Maribyrnong, VIC

Garrett's pitch

THERE WAS A CROWD, probably over a thousand in the end, swarming in to attend the Dean's Lecture on 22 March at the University of Melbourne. They spilled out of the Copland Theatre and into two others that were video-linked with jubilant speed to catch the overflow. Some, possibly a hundred, gave up and left when they saw the Copland packed to the gunwales. You could have been forgiven for wondering how many would have turned up for the title of the lecture ('Reconciling the Economy and the Environment in a Civil Society') if the lecturer hadn't been Peter Garrett, albeit in his manifestation as President of the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF). As it was, the air of excitement was a breathable, infectious agent: celebrity had bent down from Olympus to speak to the little people about their fears.

The title was a golden question-begger, proffering the hope that you could do this enormous thing: turn (in the minds of those who make things happen in the world) these two nouns from functioning opposites into a kind of symbiotic, yin-yangy thing. Reconciliation of any kind is a hard, hard thing to do: ask anyone working in Aboriginal people's policy. The same people who decide what happens on Indigenous policy issues are making the decisions in environment, and think we can't have an environment and an economy at the same time. But *voilà*! The title had done the work already—all the lecture needed to do now was to tell unbelievers how it was done.

Garrett began by acknowledging difference: greeting the Melbournites 'from another planet, Sydney, where the ecological footprint of the city has reached 37 times its actual size'. That was a nifty way of getting stuck into the whole thing, the fact that with high resource and energy consumption still the main driver for the economy, we are all living beyond our means. Environmentalists are Cassandras, he said, but added that it is a sane thing to be when the government's own 'State of the Environment' report of 1995 lists 75 per cent of rainforests, 90 per cent of temperate woodland and mallee and 99 per cent of south-eastern grasslands gone since white settlement. He quoted the ACF's publication *Natural Advantage: A Blueprint for a Sustainable Australia*: 'We have a particularly "hot, heavy and wet" economy; one that requires large amounts of energy, materials and water to produce a unit of gross domestic product. Unless we can "cool, lighten and dry" our economy we will be stuck in the 21st century peddling the products of the 20th century—coal, woodchips, iron ore—all of which will decline in demand and value in coming decades.' A cool, light, dry economy would be one that used renewable, less-polluting energy, that favoured industries that were about research, know-how and sustainability, and that used water less prodigally.



At the end of the lecture, of course, it was what most of us must have guessed, or known to start with: that 'the economy', as interpreted by current economic regimes, is the opposite of economy, if by economy one means healthy balance and some sort of life span. In order not to go bankrupt very soon in all the things that matter, including things (such as clean water) that money can buy at the moment, but may not be able to quite shortly, we must stop land-clearing, over-fishing, over-consuming and polluting.

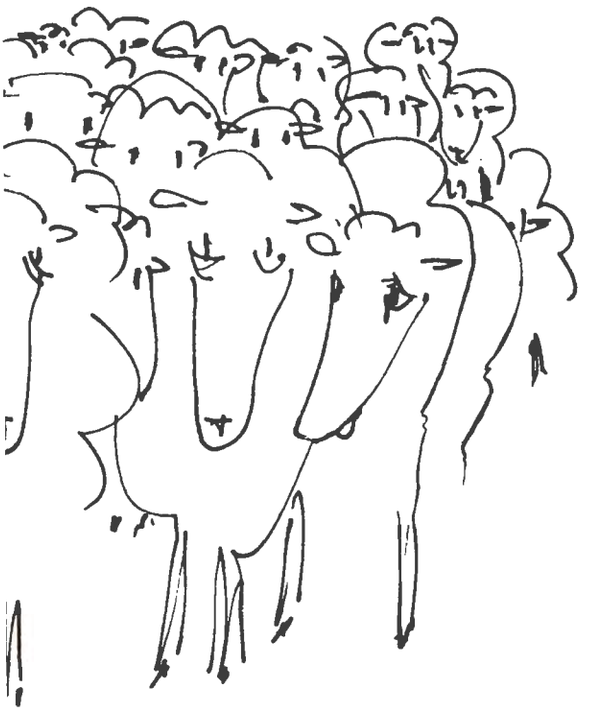
The signs of hope that Garrett gave were definite, but small. These were that the young will vote green, that politicians will take notice as their constituents vote them out for not performing properly on environmental issues, and that businesses that have managers with responsible and enlightened strategies will prosper. The 'first-mover' effect would, he said, be already familiar to those in business studies: there is a hefty advantage in being the first into a new area. (I recalled at that point that BMW is now developing hydrogen fuel-cell technology in partnership with Dubai.) So hope was held out: if science couldn't convince the corporate world, perhaps self-interest would. That was it, apart from a potted history of the continent, a swipe at those who want to Europeanise the landscape, and a call to community action.

Within a week, George Bush had dumped Kyoto and Canberra was looking even more environmentally embarrassed than usual, with neither major party within a bull's roar of being on top of the issue. Garrett, when asked to comment, said that we are prepared to 'simply follow the US into isolationism, leaving our regional allies and neighbours and most of the EU to press on with one of the most important international dialogues of the post-Cold-War era'. 'The economy, stupid' has become The Economy Stupid. **—Juliette Hughes**

Doubting nags

Off to the Cairns racecourse, Cannon Park, at last, I caught a Sunbus south and alighted in drizzling rain. This was the much touted Young Guns day, so in a sense I was there under false pretences.

It soon transpired that I wasn't at a race meeting at all. Though the track was only rated slow at 10am, the chief steward called things off an hour later. The tottering racing industry in Cairns had copped another blow. 'Jockeys are wimps,' said Kathy the barmaid;



while Brian the bookie (left with no program to field on) gave a less polite version of minister Abbott's 'we're rooned'. It doesn't help that the track is built on a mangrove swamp.

I looked out on a grey scene, desperately enlivened by young women who had come anyway, wearing 'fashion'. The stage was forlornly set for a band which had been cancelled. The crowd of dozens stayed in touch with racing all around the country by television, but I had missed my chance to be right-hand man for Bluey Forsyth as he called the card. In consolation, I was there, notebook in pocket, at my first phantom meeting.

That morning I had gone to my hairdresser's to inquire into the prospects of her husband Darrel Dean's five rides that day. But she'd trustingly set off for the races while his chances of extending his lead on the local jockeys' premiership were dashed. Later in the day I was introduced to trainer Paula D'Addona, for whom Dean rides. She was disgusted, reckoning that she would have saddled four winners (admittedly three of the races had fields of four or less: not all entertainment industries flourish in tropical Cairns). At 29 she is second on the trainers' list, a former show-jumper who works her own horses and would like to be on them in real life. She regaled me with tales of meeting crocodiles that had strolled out of the mangroves at early-morning track work, of wallabies so tame they stand still while the horses gallop around them. I had a tour of the stables round the back of the course. One is named Euphoria; but another trainer, George Doolan, long in the game, settles for Poverty Lodge.

Fortunately my touch with the punt was back. It's been a dreary year, with the quality of horses below par. If a plugger like Tie the Knot is hailed a champion and the nearest we have to one—Sunline—was last seen running third in the Dubai desert, the outlook is grim. No outstanding two-year-old has appeared, although Hosannah and Red Hannigan impressively won the last lead-ups to the Golden Slipper. I was on Shags, figuring that if the name could sneak through on the rails so might the horse: he paid $6 for third. The three-year-olds were more promising: Miss Kournikova won the Oakleigh Plate while the crack colts Desert Sky and Mr Murphy dead-heated in the 104th running of the Futurity. A spell was announced for Desert Sky, who promptly turned up and, a tired horse, was beaten in Sydney. Mr Murphy also went north, failing twice. Australian trainers are not noted for their patience.

The big event in Sydney this day was for three-year-olds: the Roschill Guineas. I had scored in the previous when rogue galloper Bello Signor mended his ways and saluted at 10/1. Universal Prince was evens favourite in the Guineas, so ran without mine. Instead I had a big quinella when Sale of Century at 22/1 beat Danamite at eights. The favourite was unsighted. Things kicked on in the other Group One race, the George Ryder, where an old favourite of mine, Landsighting, at 15/1 put value in the quinella, in defeating the honest Shogun Lodge. By that stage we had abandoned Cannon Park and were in Cazaly's, the gambling annex to the Bundaberg Rum stadium, which was the venue for an AFL match between the Western Bulldogs and Brisbane Lions on the day in February that Cyclone Abigail passed through town. That would have been a better excuse to stage a phantom meeting than today's weather afforded. Cannon Park will have to wait: next stop Chantilly, where they run the French Derby (Prix du Jockey Club) on the first Sunday in June. **—Peter Pierce**

Thai plane scandal

While the world watched ever more closely the developing stand-off between the United States and China over the spy plane downed on Hainan Island, it forgot another air accident with political overtones.

On Saturday 3 March, a Thai Airways Boeing 737-400 caught on fire while parked at the domestic terminal of Bangkok's Don Muang airport. One member of the cabin crew died and seven others were injured. Had the fire started half an hour later it would almost certainly have killed Thailand's newly elected Prime Minister, Thaksin Shinawatra.

Tensions between the new US presidential administration and China's increasingly confident leadership are more significant news, but in Bangkok, the innuendo and false leads that followed the public outcry and rushed investigation of the fire made the assassination attempt/air-conditioning failure story equally intriguing.

Initial reports of the fire that destroyed TG114 declared that authorities suspected a bomb. Adding to the air of conspiracy was the suggestion that a device was placed underneath seats reserved for Prime Minister Thaksin and his son, even though no-one but their inner circle knew they would be on the flight to Chiang Mai in Thailand's northern region.

Thaksin himself fuelled speculation. Even before the wreckage had cooled, he was claiming that explosives were planted on the plane, and—as far as he knew—'there were no other important people on the plane'. He also pushed for all avenues of investigation to be pursued. As a result, four separate inquiry teams were set up. Two days after the incident, one of the teams declared it had found traces of Semtex. The Thai press was quick to draw parallels with the Pan Am flight brought down over

Divine comedy

APPARENTLY JESUS would not have enjoyed the recent Melbourne Comedy Festival, for 'Christ never laughed!' Or so Umberto Eco's 14th-century character, Jorge, maintains in *The Name of the Rose*. Jorge, guardian of the great Benedictine library in northern Italy, is locked in debate with William of Baskerville, a Franciscan visitor to the monastery, over the virtue—or otherwise—of laughter. Jorge is determined to prevent the discovery of the 'lost' second book of Aristotle's *Poetics*, thought to contain an extensive treatment of comedy.

Aristotle had by this time become the intellectual authority for Christianity in the West. Plato, Aristotle's mentor, recognised in Homer's poetry the potentially aggressive or indifferent nature of 'comic pleasure'—especially that of the gods—and believed that unbridled laughter needed to be tamed. Aristotle, on the other hand, saw laughter as one of the defining marks of human rationality. For Jorge, however, 'laughter is weakness, corruption, the foolishness of our flesh ... the peasant's entertainment, the drunkard's licence'. Worse still, 'laughter foments doubt' and it is with laughter that 'the fool says in his heart, "*Deus non est*" ["There is no God"].'

If, over its history, the Christian tradition has reflected something of Jorge's platonic anxiety, it cannot claim a neat scriptural warrant for doing so. In the story of Sarah and Abraham, the indissoluble covenant relationship between God and God's people Israel is revealed through something as ambiguous and fragile as laughter—appropriate given the precarious conception and childhood of the patriarch Isaac (literally, 'he will laugh'). Scripture certainly does not exclude the comical from the domain of the sacred. Often, in fact, the amusement is divine: in the Psalms God is seen to laugh at earthly rulers, a theme echoed by Paul at the start of his Corinthian correspondence. And while Jorge would gain some support from biblical 'wisdom literature' (e.g. Ecclesiastes, Proverbs and Sirach) for his denunciation of laughter as sinful or at best frivolous, laughter is repeatedly presented as an accompanying sign of jubilation in both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament.

If the church can resist the triteness of suggesting that in the resurrection God gets the last laugh, there is much to be said for Easter joy as one of the costly and unexpected gifts that the Spirit makes to the world through it. Jürgen Moltmann puts it well:

> Both the laughter of Easter and the sorrow of the cross are alive in liberated men and women. They are not only laughing with those who laugh and weeping with those who weep, as Paul proposes ... but they are also laughing with the weeping and weeping with the laughing as the Beatitudes of Jesus recommended. [This challenge to the situation of the world] provokes harassment by those who prohibit laughter because they fear liberty. (*Theology of Joy*, p53)

So committed is Eco's Jorge to enforcing this prohibition that he commits murder, and the entire library with all its (serious) treasures is lost, along with Aristotle's subversive text. Tragic, really. ■

Richard Treloar is Associate Chaplain to Trinity College in the University of Melbourne, and teaches at the United Faculty of Theology.

Lockerbie by a device that included the plastic explosive.

The prime minister continued to cry foul, stating, four days after the fire, that it was clear that a bomb had been planted inside the cargo hold (the seat theory no longer rated a mention). He then set up a fifth investigation team headed by his deputy prime minister. He also threatened the head of Thai Airways and the airport authority with the sack if they did not come up with an answer within the week.

Some pointed the finger at Thaksin's Deputy, Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, a man renowned for his ambition. Others suspected that Thaksin had planted the device himself: in the face of corruption allegations coming before the Constitutional Court he needs all the public sympathy he can get. The *Bangkok Post* joined in the guessing game by all but naming the culprit suspected by 'authorities'—a businessman angered by the possible loss of the cargo-handling contract at the airport.

With conjecture becoming wilder on Thai talk shows, an investigation team drawn from Boeing's American headquarters, the FBI, the National Transport Safety Board and the Federal Aviation Authority quietly slipped into the country. They contradicted findings that the wreckage had traces of explosives in it. Suddenly the prime minister stopped talking, the stories quoting unnamed sources dried up and it was decided that the conclusions of the American investigation would be final.

Executives at Thai Airways have hidden themselves from view, their only response to the crisis being the announcement of new security measures. All passengers will now be required to show identity cards when boarding flights, and staff will now receive 'air safety training'. A spokesperson declared that no comment would be made to the press as the matter was subject to an ongoing investigation that may take up to two years to complete. They believe, though, that their new safety measures will be enough to restore public confidence.

International passengers coming to Thailand after the incident will note one change to security measures: bags are now x-rayed before they clear customs. Comforting, that.

—Jon Greenaway

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KATHRYN O'CONNOR & JOHN HART

Global warning

The foot-and-mouth and 'mad cow' disease outbreaks have put the world, not just Europe, on red alert.

On 29 February 1872 a bull called 'Achmet', the property of cattle importer William McCulloch, arrived in Melbourne on the steamship *Northumberland*. He spent two nights at stables in Melbourne and then two months at the owner's property in Darebin before being sold at auction at the Royal Horse Bazaar in Bourke Street, Melbourne. He was then driven by road to Mr Samuel Cobbledick's property in Werribee, staying overnight at Cunningham's stables on the Ballarat road. Soon after, disease broke out among Cobbledick's cattle. Mr J.P. Vincent, a veterinary surgeon, described 'bladders on the tongue ... and also at the heels'. Mrs Bowman, the wife of a tenant farmer, noticed 'illness, the loss of milk, the shivering'.

This was foot-and-mouth disease (FMD), a disease of cloven-hoofed animals which causes milk to dry up in cows and growth failure in young cattle. It was one of four outbreaks in Australia in the late 19th century. Given that the incubation period is about three to seven days,

Achmet probably contracted the disease in Cunningham's stables on the Ballarat road. A prize bull would sometimes be granted the comfort of a horse stall where it was not unusual to use, as bedding, straw packing from goods imported from the UK. There was an epidemic of FMD in the UK at the time, so this straw may have been contaminated. (See E.M. Pullar, *Victorian Veterinary Proceedings*, 1964–65.) Achmet was killed and burnt, along with 37 pigs and 58 cattle. The disease did not spread beyond one neighbouring farm.

The virus that causes FMD is incredibly hardy and highly contagious. Direct animal-to-animal spread occurs readily via saliva, urine, faeces, milk and semen, as well as air. Feeding animals the waste products of other animals increases the probability of direct spread. This practice has been implicated in the current UK outbreak, where pigswill was found to contain waste meat from a South African cargo ship which began its journey in India. The virus can survive for up to six months in mud and up to a month in dry soil. Windborne spread occurs over distances of up to 10km. Why then did the 1872 outbreak not spread further? Why was it confined to two farms west of Melbourne?

In a 1998 paper in the *Australian Veterinary Journal*, the Department of Primary Industries looked at this question. They found that late 19th-century Australia was protected by minimal movement of animals, materials and people, a lack of mechanised transport and low livestock densities. The other major factor was the weather. Windborne spread of the virus requires a stable atmosphere and low wind speeds. Bureau of Meteorology data for Melbourne around this time indicated high winds and unsettled conditions.

The current strain of the virus has spread across Asia and the Middle East and down to South Africa over the past few years. Are we still protected against a full-blown outbreak? Probably not. A great deal has changed since 1872. People and animals move further, faster and more often between places. In the year 2001, after being sold in Melbourne, a bull like Achmet might be taken by truck to NSW. The other cattle in the truck might continue their journey to Queensland. A handler in the sale yard in Brisbane might board a plane to visit family in Perth. Within days the disease could spread all across the country.

Australian livestock densities have increased though they are still not high on a world scale. Our farming industry has grown mainly through progressive expansion into natural environments (with the regrettable side effect of loss of complex ecosystems and habitats). This

We are primed, but is it enough? The current epidemic is
But the more significant change has been in how we

Meanwhile, in England ...

WHILE GOVERNMENTS can be prepared to deal with foot-and-mouth disease, there is nothing they can do to prevent it in advance or to anticipate the timing and scale of any outbreak. Governments don't create FMD. They can only respond to it.

The response of the British Government to the present FMD outbreak has been far from perfect, sometimes embarrassingly tardy and may, depending on which reports one reads, have even contributed to the rapid spread of the disease. At the very least, politicians and civil servants were caught off-guard by the speed and reach of the infection, which had already contaminated markets and dealers' premises before the first symptoms were discovered on 22 February.

The British Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) has been much criticised for its role in handling the FMD outbreak and will probably, in its current form, not survive this crisis. Prime Minister Tony Blair has also been criticised for his lack of decisive leadership. Direct personal involvement by Blair in the crisis was five weeks too late, and the conservative press in Britain are all too willing to explain this in terms of his preoccupation with the next British general election.

The FMD outbreak is certainly more complicated and quite different in scale from the last outbreak in 1967. There's now an intense argument about the merits of vaccination versus slaughter as the most appropriate response. There are the problems of the tourist industry, which is suffering badly (tourism contributes far more to the British economy than farming). There are environmental problems caused by burying vast numbers of diseased animals. And in 1967, no elections were planned or intended in the middle of the outbreak. No wonder the government gets caught off-guard.

The British political process has also been caught off-guard because what the present foot-and-mouth outbreak in Britain has exposed is the power of one particular interest—the farmers, or to be more precise, the National Farmers Union (NFU)—over the government and British public opinion.

There is tremendous sympathy with the plight of farmers in Britain, a sympathy reinforced by the horrific images on the nightly television news of livestock being slaughtered and the burning pyres of diseased carcasses. It matters little to British public opinion that all these animals would eventually have been slaughtered for the market anyway and burned by one method or another prior to appearing on the British public's dinner tables. Much of what the British public is reading and viewing about the FMD outbreak is the farmers' perspective, encouraged by the activities of the NFU.

cannot continue; farmers are already reaching environmental limits with salinity problems and limited water supply. Not quite the 'clean and green' which is promoted by our farming industry. But we don't pack animals on to farmland beyond its capacity to feed them, as occurs in the UK, where sheer proximity of animals has contributed significantly to the spread of FMD. We haven't had to resort to the disease-promoting practice of feeding herds animal waste. Low-density farming may provide some slight protection against the spread of disease.

OUR OTHER RELATIVE protective factor is our geographical isolation. But the disease managed to survive in straw during a long journey by ship from the UK in 1872 in order to infect Achmet the bull. The risk is many times greater now with air travel and faster ships.

Australia is on guard. The Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has suspended imports of all animal products from the UK and upped the ante at our airports and international mail centres. Sniffer dogs now await nearly every flight, all travellers from affected countries are thoroughly searched and any disease-carrying items (such as shoes) are disinfected.

CSIRO's Animal Health Laboratory in Geelong is also ready. As part of AUSVETPLAN (the Australian Veterinary Emergency Plan) early detection and management strategies are in place. There is an emergency Animal Watch Hotline which vets and farmers can call with information on suspected cases. If an outbreak were suspected, samples would be taken directly to a high-security Animal Health Laboratory in Geelong. They would have an answer in 24 hours. The police, the State Emergency Service and Emergency Management Australia (an arm of the Australian Defence Force) would be alerted to set up roadblocks and quarantine areas, and organise the slaughter of the infected herd.

We are primed, but is it enough? The current epidemic is the result of a changed, more aggressive form of the virus. But the more significant change has been in how we farm our world and how we move between places. There are other diseases. Some also cause illness or death in humans, like the pig-borne Nipah virus. It hit Malaysia in 1998 resulting in 100 human deaths and the loss of millions of dollars to the Malaysian pig industry. In the 1872 FMD outbreak the major out-of-control factor was the wind. In the year 2001 so much more is beyond our control. And Australia is not immune.

—Kathryn O'Connor

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The farmers have been very successful. The NFU has been receiving 'floods of donations' as a consequence of the FMD outbreak and have now set up a 'Supporting-Farmers-in-Crisis' fund even though the government fully compensates every farmer at current market value for every animal slaughtered as a consequence of FMD. Farmers have been doing badly over the last five years, but the financial plight of farmers cannot be attributed to FMD.

The NFU is justified in pushing its cause with the government and with the British public. But there is no countervailing force to balance its power and influence. The NFU has a highly privileged relationship with government—described by the authors of a major study in the early 1960s as 'a near monopoly'. Little has changed in the intervening years. In fact, the relationship between government and the NFU is almost set in concrete as a result of the passage of the Agriculture Act of 1947 and the annual price review process in which MAFF and the NFU are the only participants.

In a significant, but lone attempt to balance the farmers' perspective on FMD in Britain, Polly Toynbee published a most revealing picture of British agriculture and what she called 'the non-existent plight of farmers' in *The Guardian*'s 21 March edition. Taking most of her evidence directly from the Ministry of Agriculture's web page, she pointed out that agriculture accounts for just 0.8 per cent of British GDP, just two per cent of the total workforce and that farmers are the most heavily subsidised sector of the British economy.

The thrust of Ms Toynbee's article was to challenge the view that the foot-and-mouth outbreak is a major crisis bringing Britain to a standstill. 'All proportion and perspective has been lost,' she writes, and blames the media, particularly the BBC for painting such an unbalanced view—'mad reporter disease' is what she labels the media's reaction. She then went on to contrast the position of farmers with the 6,000 steel workers and the countless car workers who lost their jobs last year without any government payments in lieu.

There is a problem with the political process when one interest group can affect public policy with no competing interest to contest its domination. Government in Britain doesn't mediate between competing interests over agricultural policy, because there is no competition.

Once the foot-and-mouth outbreak is under control there will almost certainly be a review of the role played by MAFF and there's a strong likelihood that present political dissatisfaction with the Ministry's bureaucracy will ensure that it will be radically restructured and renamed. If the power of the MAFF bureaucracy is broken up as a result of that review then at least some of the unbridled power of its principal client, the National Farmers Union, will also be broken. That will be a healthy development in British democracy. **—John Hart**

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London's bearable lightness of being

The countryside might be in mourning, but the city's dancing.

In 1970, when I first reached London, the place was having an enormous hangover. Carnaby Street was spluttering into irrelevance, while Ted Heath (his smile straight from the Commedia dell'Arte) somehow managed to slaughter Harold Wilson on the anniversary of Waterloo. Within a few years there was a postal strike so protracted that postboxes were sealed up, a (pioneering) garbage strike, and a miners' strike that, because of power restrictions, led to a three-day week. Walking around London in January 1974 was a bit like finding yourself entrapped in a smudgy lithograph from Dickens: only every second streetlight was on to direct you through the misty midwinter landscape.

London is now a very different city. Whereas it then felt as though sooner or later the whole place would crumble away—there was little evidence of repairs—nowadays those great, long terraces are punctuated by regular outcrops of scaffolding. In 1973 a friend of mine joked of pound–Australian dollar parity. O hubris! Now, instead of being worth 73 pence, the dollar tarries in the mid-30s. More strikingly, beyond the tourist traps and outside the regular holiday breaks, one did not often hear Europeans talking: today they are everywhere. A united Europe has brought to London more Continentals—to use an archaic term—than at any other time in its history. When you approach anybody who is under 25, particularly the people in a shop or restaurant, be prepared for a foreign accent.

Other changes are less agreeable. The traffic is Thatcherite—more aggressive and more of it with each passing year. In a land once famous for its courtesy on the road, a pedestrian will now find it safer crossing a street (even with the lights) in Sydney than in London. PoMo franticity is also evident in the large number of people you see who smoke, despite the spread of no-go zones. Even more strikingly, gum is increasingly chewed and spat out on the pavement. (It's the betel of Britain.) Thirty years ago I was struck, as an innocent Austral lad, by the number of people seen in the streets talking to themselves. These days they're still at it, but with a difference. Over four million mobile phones were sold in Britain last Christmas.

A number of things strike the visitor. One is that political correctness is still relatively restricted in England: it hasn't got into the air-conditioning, as it has in Australia. One could say that its constituency runs almost coterminously with the *Guardian* readership; which means that an immense number of people go about their daily business without coming into much contact with it. The layered complexities of England, together with its size, tend to blunt the impact of any new movement. This has even meant that economic rationalism, while often applied brutally, has also been applied unevenly. There remains the famous eagerness to part you from your money. (In Oxford I was asked to pay for drycleaning in advance, and then—after the statutory four or five days waiting period—discovered that, under the cellophane, the trousers had not been done. No bull charges like a wounding Pom.)

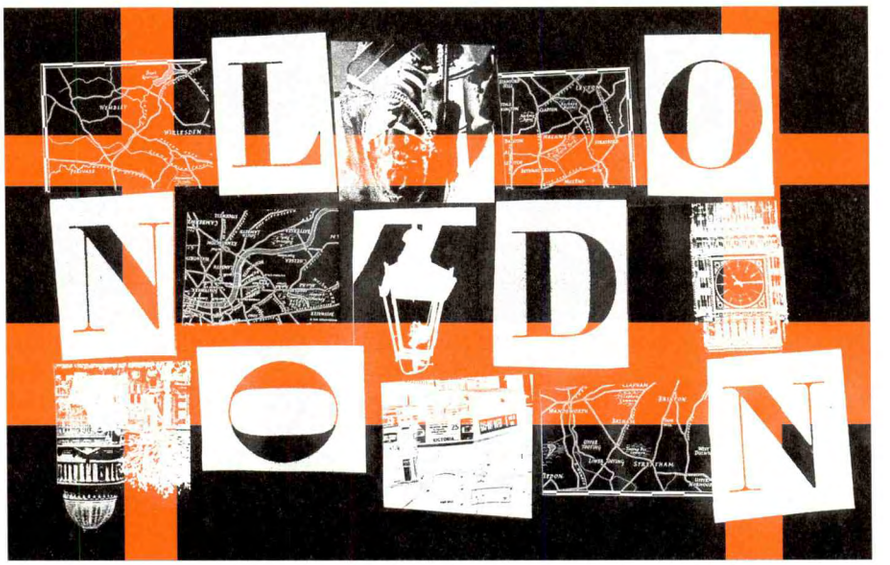
The English love intricacy and respect differentiation; in consequence their country can still seem, in some respects, an incomplete democracy. The traditional elements of the constitution have been weakened all right, not least by Tony Blair's reforms of the House of Lords and even, to some degree, by devolution—so that a recent Scottish decision to increase teacher pay by a hefty 21 per cent is an embarrassment for London. But attitudes in some quarters still lag behind. Recently a Tory shadow minister, in urging stiffer penalties for drug-taking, qualified her remarks by saying that she didn't mean them to apply to middle-class kids experimenting, but to those persistent offenders on the housing estates. Meanwhile a multi-millionaire businessman, shortly to receive life imprisonment for murdering his wife, was able to negotiate himself out of jail on the grounds that the squalid conditions there would impede the preparation of his defence. Concern about new human rights requirements elided into the gross inequality whereby he was allowed to pay for his incarceration in a comfortable house, with a security firm of his own choosing. The ultimate privatisation: a prison of one's own.

To return to the housing estates. These have become places of dread: it was here that the 10-year-old Nigerian boy, Damilola Taylor, was stabbed and bled to death a few months ago. A sense of shame at once spread across the land: the police, sensitive to the recent charge of 'institutionalised racism', went in strongly, supported by massive media coverage. But so far they have not had enough evidence to charge anybody. The conspiracy of silence is deafening—terror, probably, rather than solidarity—while it nonetheless serves to underscore the racist nature of the murder. A racist attack resulting in death or severe disablement would seem to occur every couple of weeks. Now there are reports—for the first time—of black gangs emerging in the Midlands, choosing white victims. And, as the culture of violence spreads, of Sikh and Muslim rival gangs, of mixed-race gangs, and of one place in North London that has become so violent that eight blacks have been shot there in the past 12 months.

The black presence is increasingly evident. By 1980 one was struck by the way the black young had begun to speak with London accents; now one is struck by the number of spokespeople for the black and Asian communities. There are black MPs (the Duke of Edinburgh once famously asked one of them which country he was from), an Asian Cabinet minister, and a black newsreader on ITV whose style is as Tory as they come. The BBC, recently described by its new director as 'hideously white', is concerned to increase participation from the black and Asian communities. Tellingly, the debate in the *Independent* about whether this should be done by applying quotas or not, took place between two black people. In this context, Prince Charles' remark that he saw himself as a defender of faiths rather than Defender of the Faith makes considerable sense. Indeed in Church of England circles there is some speculation about a British Pakistani who might become the next Archbishop of Canterbury. Transformation through the extension of tolerance (or in the 19th century the franchise) is the desired English way.

It is easy to mock that much-vaunted tolerance, or indeed the English penchant for order. But the place is crowded; if people didn't tiptoe around it, it might fall to bits. So—at least in the provinces—crowds are still quiet and orderly. People queue. Gradually you come to see that the apparent repression and indifference is really a way of giving people in so populated a country the personal space to be themselves. (I once stayed with a Chinese friend in a flat in Kowloon: there the principle was taken further. Different family members would carry on their activities in the corners of a room as if they had all of it to themselves—ignoring, and being ignored by, all the other family members.)

Nonetheless England is changing fast. Recently the number of immigrants overtook the natural growth of population for the first time. (The persistence of large-scale illegal immigration causes concern, and repeatedly crops up in conversation.) Meanwhile technological growth is having sharp demographic effects. Hi-tech developments in the Thames valley have boosted property values to the point where service workers can no longer really afford to live there: the plaint is echoed by teachers across the south-east. Meanwhile the new rich, in pursuit of a traditional lifestyle, have similarly made it harder for young people—and the impoverished elderly—to remain living in attractive villages, which have become yuppified. In myriad ways England is being transformed; then there are the statistics of social



breakdown. Here it is catching up with America. Each year there is one divorce for every two marriages, while the level of illegitimate births is the highest in Europe.

These days Australians are not such a large part of the landscape as once they were. Less is heard now from the older generation—Greer, James, Humphries—and it is perhaps symbolic that the most urbane intermittent commentator on Australian ways these days is Howard Jacobson, the English novelist who has spent a great deal of time here. In Earl's Court there are a few Australian relics, such as the Down Under Club, but a more telling indicator is the way that a small Australian flag is usually missing from the exchange rates displayed in bank windows. Indeed these days the South African presence is probably stronger, but in that case the push factors are greater. Many Australians have other source countries in Europe now, and other destinations available closer to home. So although a journo friend of mine remarked that at any one time there were 100,000 Australians

in London, the fact is that the figure was much the same in 1962—when our population was a lot smaller than it is now.

Nevertheless surprising links remain. Recent issues of the British *Who's Who* still list Australian notables; the *Independent* carried an obituary for Mietta O'Donnell. In an Oxford common room it turned out that all three of a group of dons had at some stage toured or worked in Australia. Australian soaps are still popular, and the old stereotypes still sufficiently strong for a pair of rough Sydney lesbians—one of whom had run a brothel—to have caused mayhem in the best English society. Counting on the English preference for relying on word of mouth, they ran up enormous bills in posh hotels, bought expensive cars and conned the social set out of their money. The *Independent*, relishing the bizarre nature of this escapade (the girls somehow got themselves invited to the Royal enclosure at Ascot), told the tale as 'The Smart Sheila's Guide to Becoming a Bonza-Fide Con Woman'. Which was precisely why the pair had got so far. The Poms think *all* Australians are a bit rough like that; and so—in these days when most English accept the inevitability of an Australian republic—they broadmindedly accept that this is the way we are. It's all very puzzling: Australia has come up so far in the world that these days the English now buy more Australian wine than French. So any crudeness must be placed within a broader picture ...

Which explains why this pair of adventurers got further in London than they would have done in Sydney or Melbourne.

And what of the possibilities for an English republic? The polls now show a significant segment in favour of the idea, while the royals continue to get dubious if not outrightly bad press—except for Prince William, of course, marketed as a teenage heartthrob. Princess Margaret's recent collapse was generally reported as though she had it coming to her; Princess Anne ruffled a few feathers when she was reported as saying to an elderly woman, who had travelled a considerable distance to give the Queen Mother a present as she came out of church at Sandringham, what a funny thing to do! Yet the monarchy, I suspect, is in a sounder position than meets the eye. For one thing, if devolution proceeds further (as surely it must), then a union of crowns becomes a practical proposition and, following one line of thought, a positive necessity. Similarly, the monarchy has become an important token in contesting the considerable opposition to the euro: at least, in England, it will have the Queen's head on it. So it is possible that the monarchy may continue to symbolise the English (if not the British) nation until such time as it has become entirely leached of meaning.

The future of New Labour, now that its high priest Peter Mandelson has gone, is more difficult to foretell. The government will get back in the next election; the Tories under William Hague are in such bad odour that the recent bloodletting in the government hardly dented its standing in the polls. But it is not popular. People are sick of spin, of the world's most smiling prime minister since Harold Holt, of the whiff of corruption arising from all those deals and all that fixing. Hefty donations from big businessmen to the party make many feel uncomfortable, as did the pronouncement by one developer (and donor) recently that 'Blair is the new Thatcher. He is running an enlightened government. Thatcher ran an enlightened government.' Tony Blair's tokenistic class war against foxhunting—now outlawed by the Commons, not yet by the Lords—is seen as cynical symbolism at best, and as giving into fringe pressure groups at worst. So the question is, how many seats will Labour lose? This is a real question, much more than it would be in Australia: in a country without compulsory voting, people can cause mayhem by just not bothering to turn out. In 1970 the papers prophesied a landslide Labour victory; but weariness with Wilson and Labour abstentions brought in Ted Heath. So radical a result is not likely, given a continuing recoil from the long period of Tory rule. But stand by for surprises; and for more coming out of England, which—having got its confidence back—is now more changing and vibrant than it has been for many a year.■

Jim Davidson, who is writing a biography of the historian Keith Hancock, recently spent 10 weeks in England.

CATRIONA JACKSON

From the inside

What, other than images of horror, can you take away from museums of genocide?

THE TINY SCHOOLBOYS in their neat navy shorts and shining white shirts have to jump high to slap Pol Pot's cheeks. As their open hands come level with the bust of the Khmer Rouge dictator, they swing and thwack, then giggle hysterically to each other. One boy pushes out his skinny chest, and calls the fat-cheeked statue 'pig'. The rest collapse in paroxysms of schoolboy laughter. Then they turn and run out into the obliterating sunshine.

Twenty-five years ago boys like these went to the school next door, Tuol Sleng Primary, before the Khmer Rouge marched into Phnom Penh, capital of Cambodia. After five years of civil war the people were desperate for peace and they welcomed the victors.

Within days the Khmer Rouge regime of Democratic Kampuchea had emptied the capital, sending almost the entire population into the country to become agricultural workers.

Banned 'pre-revolution' currency littered the deserted streets, as did abandoned cars, washing machines and television sets. Throughout the occupation there were no shops, temples, markets or schools. Barbed wire enclosed the few factories and government offices that remained open to sustain and run the regime.

Eighteen months after they took the city, the Khmer Rouge turned Tuol Sleng Primary and the high school next door into the highly secret S-21 death camp. Secrecy was maintained by many means, but most effectively by killing the inmates.

Between 1976 and the first week of 1979 at least 14,000 people were imprisoned; all but 12 specially exempted inmates were put to death. They died after torture or of starvation at S-21, or were murdered at the nearby Choeung Ek killing field.

By the time the Vietnamese swept the Khmer Rouge from power in 1979, 200,000 people—according to reliable estimates—had been executed as class enemies, another 1.5 million had died of malnutrition, or misdiagnosed and mistreated disease.

One in five Cambodians died during Pol Pot's reign.

Above left: Chan Kim Srun, the wife of a foreign ministry official under the Khmer Rouge; both mother and child were later killed by the regime.
Centre and left: Unnamed prisoners of the regime.

Eighteen months after they had marched in, the Vietnamese turned S-21 into Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocidal Crimes.

FROM THE OUTSIDE the building looks like any other school still standing in the city. It is not until you get inside that you feel its chill. It is deadly quiet. No-one enforces the silence, but—as with a church or cemetery—the atmosphere dictates it. Tuol Sleng makes you mute.

For the first time, our local guide would rather not accompany us, and is happy to go off for a cool drink with the members of our group who share his reluctance.

The first corridor in building A was reserved for 'important' prisoners, one to a cell. In the final days, when the regime had begun to consume even those at its head, senior cadres were imprisoned there.

As the Vietnamese approached the city, the killers slaughtered their last 14 victims, and faded old pictures of the corpses hang on the walls above the metal bed frames.

On the floors lie the shackles which forced the prisoners' legs apart. There are also rectangular ammunition boxes, the lids swinging open. Some contained human faeces when the Vietnamese discovered S-21.

Time has turned the stains that run down the walls a uniform, fetid brown, with darker patches on the floors.

Tuol Sleng has been pretty much left as it was found by the Vietnamese who still run it, albeit with increasing local involvement. The vanquishers have not been able to resist a bit of 'explanation', written in a rhetoric distressingly similar to that of the regime they are condemning.

The Tuol Sleng brochure explains, in fractured English, that the aims of the museum are to expose the crimes of 'the Pol Pot criminal' and to 'educat[e] the young people ... to comprehend and keep hatred against the genocidal criminals'.

But this is South East Asia, and it should come as no surprise that there is more than one way to tell the story. The Vietnamese attempts to simplify such great evil are defeated by the place itself.

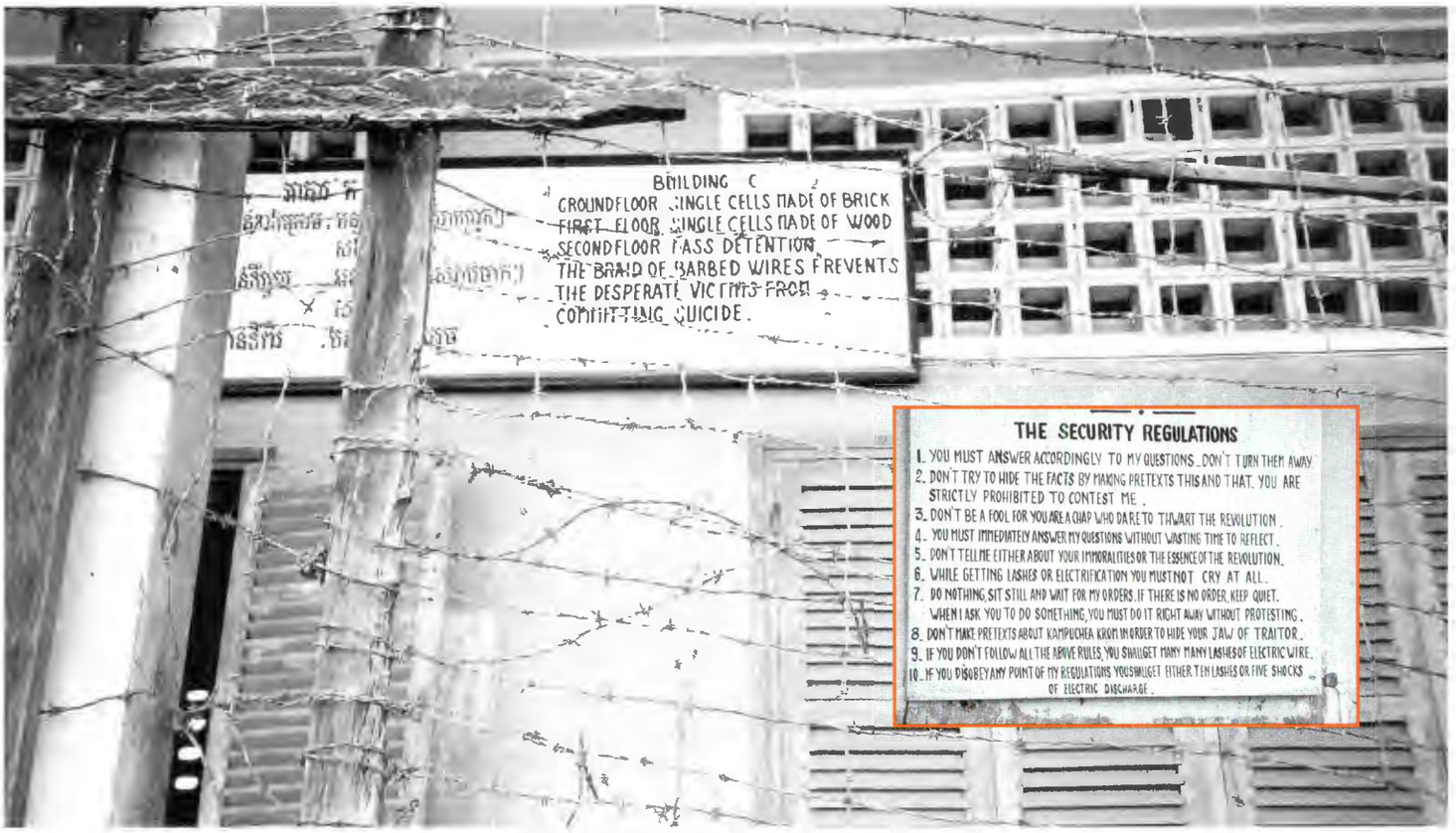
The smaller individual cells in building C are shabby structures built of bricks stacked sideways. Mortar spills out where no-one bothered to scrape the edges. The cells are as long as a small body, and so narrow that my outstretched elbows touch both sides. The mass detention cells are large, featureless rooms with numbers painted around the walls.

In building B the contents of the Khmer Rouge picture archive is on the walls. What little written explanation there is is in French. There are great blocks of uniformly sized headshots. Prisoners and staff would be indistinguishable if it weren't for the fact that identification numbers accompany the faces of the victims.

Many are very young, and could have lived in the same village, or gone to the same school as their persecutors—except that the cooks and guards didn't go to school and neither did the inmates. The cadres at S-21 were chosen from exactly the same group as the mass of the inmates: ill-educated peasants. The 'poor and blank', as Mao put it.

The workers who made the regime function were certainly not possessed of revolutionary fervour. Many said their lives had been better, freer, as soldiers in the civil war. A young S-21 interrogator, Ma Meng Kheang, described the life: 'It's difficult to think so much. You get so tired. It's a political place. You never know when the day is finished. You never know if you are correct.'

There is no modern museum paraphernalia at Tuol Sleng, no shiny cabinets and scrubbed instruments of torture. Nothing stands between the visitor and the barbarous reality of what happened here. There is very little space to step



Above: Interiors and signage of S-21 after the Vietnamese had turned it into the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocidal Crimes.
Right: Phnom Penh in April 1975. After five years of civil war, the Khmer Rouge took the city and emptied it, forcing the population into work camps or imprisoning them.

back into. The closest thing to a contrived display is a filthy pane of glass with the clothes of the dead piled up behind it, or the often-reproduced map of Cambodia built out of skulls. After what has gone before, these displays are strangely unaffecting. They can't compete with the bleak horror of the place itself.

As you come close to the busts that the little boys are slapping (there are two identical ones) you can see a faded black cross painted across each, neatly quartering the former school teacher's face. All the photographs of Pol Pot low enough to reach have had the eyes scratched out.

As I turn sideways to squeeze through the almost closed gates that lead up to the top floor of building B, I catch a glimpse of one of my travel companions. He is sitting outside, under a frangipani tree. His arms are stretched along the back of the bench seat; the only movement is the rise and fall of his shoulders as he sucks in the clean, outside air.

Upstairs most of the doors to the big cells are locked up, but if you peer between the broken slats you see the same open mass detention rooms that housed the bulk of the prisoners. In one corner there is a box, with clothes, bones and a skull spilling out.

The stairwell at the end of the corridor is stacked with what looks like rubbish. As I get closer I see there are shoes, mostly plastic cross-front sandals made brown and indistinct with dust. At the bottom of the stairs I can see a single, discarded boot.

Now I want to get out. I think about the frangipani tree and try to maintain an even pace as I walk down the stairs. But at the bottom of the stairwell the gate is pulled right across and padlocked. Just for a moment I am stuck with the dust and the weeping walls and the signs of lives perhaps still being lived, but probably not.

In my haste to get back up the stairs I kick what I later realise must have been a coconut husk. It makes a hollow thud and my stomach lurches. I run up the stairs, past the cells, and out the way I came in.

Outside, the little boys are running about, and a mother is calling to her family that dinner is ready as she lays the rice and meat out on the balcony table.

Different people will react differently to Tuol Sleng. Most walk through a few rooms and leave, preferring to breathe what they believe to be the clear air of the present.

That's not good enough. After 45 minutes in Tuol Sleng, I can't pretend to understand what happened in Cambodia. But as members of a common race, we must force ourselves to stare the greatest evil square in the face—and admit that at least part of what we see there is ourselves. ■

Catriona Jackson is the education reporter for *The Canberra Times*. She travelled to Cambodia courtesy of Goddard and Partners travel consultants, Canberra. Email: catriona.jackson@canberratimes.com.au

Further reading: *Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot's Secret Prison*, David Chandler, Allen and Unwin, 2000. ISBN 1 86448 638 4.

ANTHONY HAM

Two women

INDIA AND Turkey are countries where the rights of women have long been contested. They are also countries where women have broken through into domains and freedoms from which they were once excluded. Both India and Turkey have had a female prime minister; female MPs are no longer unusual. Most areas of employment are open to women. Many laws have been enacted to ensure greater equality between the sexes.

Yet remnants of the old order remain, in social expectations and family attitudes, which can be more restrictive than any laws.

Meenakshi Jain, known to everyone as Meenu, was born in Udaipur, in the south of the Indian state of Rajasthan. In her 18 years she has never left Udaipur. A woman of limited resources but broad horizons, Meenu has set up for herself a small space where the people of the world can visit her. It is called the Queen Café.

Udaipur is one of Rajasthan's most popular tourist destinations, a town of whimsical lake palaces, white-washed buildings and twisting lanes climbing up from the lake shore. Precisely because it is one of the prime stops on India's tourist trail, Udaipur has its share of touts. Rickshaw drivers will swear, bare-faced, that your chosen hotel has burned down, slid into the lake or suffered some other inglorious fate. Shopkeepers desperate for your business will assail you with insistent whispers.

Amid such clamour, the Queen Café is an oasis. It has no pretension to luxury; in fact it's so ramshackle it is easy to miss and there is no-one stationed outside forcing you to run the gauntlet. There is not a lot obviously on sale, but if you know where to look you may just come across Meenu. If she's not there, she'll be looking after someone else's child or chatting to a neighbouring shopkeeper.

Meenu's welcome is warm and understated. She'll probably have to turn the lights on and you'll most likely be the only one in the café. She'll serve a drink or a home-cooked local speciality—if you like it, you pay, but only if you want to. Her mother might be around; you can usually find her in the kitchen, three flights up an impossibly steep staircase, or a further flight up on the roof where she dries her chillies. The building is a typical Udaipur structure—this compact city is given over to steep, knee-breaking staircases often climbing up five storeys, making maximum use of blocks scarcely four metres wide.

Meenu's mother speaks no English, only Hindi. She is shy and lets Meenu take the lead, thinking nothing (or at least saying nothing) of having to climb back up to fetch something. Hers is a wiry, wizened frame; her face is etched with the cartography of a difficult life.

I ask Meenu how old her mother is. I expect to be told she is in her 60s. She is 43.

Meenu is in her early 20s. Her schooling was curtailed because her father had drunk the family's money away and her brothers couldn't be bothered working. She had watched her mother being beaten at home. She hinted that the same had happened to her. Her father came to the café one day while I was there. I wanted to give him a taste of his own medicine. Meenu flashed him a smile and called him 'Papa'.

Confined within the walls of family expectation and loyalty, she has carved herself a space where she can flourish. She has taught herself the finest embroidery, detailed miniature painting, how to cook the cuisines of the world. She mastered ayurvedic massage in her spare time. When I visited, she was teaching herself carpentry so that she could put a door on an upstairs room. To the travellers who come to the café she teaches Hindi, Mewari (Rajasthani) cooking and any other skill she herself has acquired.

Meenu is the sort of person everyone wants to marry. At last count she had received nine wedding proposals from travellers. While not tempted to make it ten, I could see why. The winning pride in her culture. The probing intellect. Her kindness to all, even to those who had made her difficult life even more difficult. A mischievous sense of humour. Above all, the dignity of a disarming smile.

One Swiss man came for a week and stayed for six months, in the process winning Meenu's heart. When the pair asked her parents for permission to wed, her father refused outright. Her mother said that it would kill her if her daughter were to marry a European and leave Udaipur. Meenu accepted the ruling. She talks about the Swiss man with wistful longing, and by her own admission thinks of him often. 'In every life there is one true love and it will always be my Swiss friend,' she said one afternoon with no evident bitterness. She seems wholly resigned to a fate which determines that there are some things she cannot do.

One day, when I returned to the café, Meenu had been shopping and showed me the two saris she had bought. Initially I was pleased that she had finally done something just for herself. Then she told me that they were for her wedding. 'It is time for me to get married. My parents have decided. They are looking at a few men and soon they will choose one.' I asked her what she wanted and whether that mattered. After a pause, she said, 'I would never do anything to hurt my mother.' We both knew that it was no answer and at the same time the only answer she could give. The only way that she could protect

Meenakshi (left) and Hilal (right). Photographs by Anthony Ham.

the woman she most cared about was to replicate the cause of her mother's suffering. And then, typically, she smiled.

AT AROUND THE same time, far away in the Turkish Mediterranean village of Olympos, another friend of mine was facing a reality of no happy endings.

I had first met Hilal three years before. It was during one of the happiest periods of my life and I had stumbled by accident into her guest house in the wooded valleys leading down to the pristine coastline. Hilal's place was the last building in the village and the closest to the beach that you reach only by going through Roman ruins—an amphitheatre and an old church with mosaics and stone statues that were slowly being consumed by the forest.

In Olympos, you sleep in tree houses, meals are served in open-sided, roofed platforms covered with cushions and carpets, and the evenings are mellow affairs, given over to music, backgammon and conversations past midnight. Hilal was the energy of the house, if not the whole town. Her father lurked in the shadows and her mother laughed with mock outrage at what her guests got up to. Hilal's brother was on the run from his father somewhere in Turkey because he owed him money.

Like Meenu, Hilal knew the world only through the people who visited. It became difficult to distinguish Hilal, either in her dress or apparent freedom, from the women from Australia, England, the Netherlands and South Africa. She skipped from one task to the next, taking pleasure in the harmless mischief she caused, cajoling sleepy travellers out of bed, dressing up as a man for one of her nightly performances. Such was her sense of fun and her confident command of her realm that hers seemed an ideal life in an ideal place.

I knew from Hilal that it was soon her turn to marry, although she was evasive, ever the joker, about when it was to be. She laughed off the marriage as if she hoped it would never happen.

I returned to Olympos three months later to find Hilal still in fine form. She took us to one of the village weddings. Gunshots were fired into the air as part of the celebrations. Revellers drank potent *raki* (a homebrew firewater that could start your car) in large quantities. And the guests assured us that we could sing along even if we didn't know the words. An old man swayed rhythmically through the crowd, scarcely able to walk, yet with an economy of movement and a stunning sense of grace and poise. Throughout, Hilal was a practical joker, laughing and singing, a dancer to the end.

On the following day when we were due to leave, Hilal was nowhere to be found. We waited all day and into the night, catching the last bus when it was apparent that she would not be returning. A week later I learned that her father had closed the pension and that the wedding was imminent. No argument was to be entered into. The last news I received was that Hilal had become an unwilling housewife.

I think she stayed away deliberately on our last day so as not to be confronted with the fact that we were leaving because we could. Like Meenu, Hilal had no such choice. Her future was determined by her love for her family, the duties she owed them and the unwritten obligations that society had decreed for her as a woman.

When Meenu smiled she masked the pain of a life she could not direct. And when Hilal danced it was because there was no tomorrow. ■

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MOIRA RAYNER

Too many hats

UK precedents have raised questions about the continued viability of Westminster-style government.

EARLY THIS YEAR, Lord Irvine, the United Kingdom's Lord Chancellor, personally signed a letter inviting senior British lawyers to attend a fundraising political dinner and to make donations of no less than £200 to the Labour Party election campaign. The storm that erupted over this has implications for all Westminster-style governments.

The holder of the office of Lord High Chancellor, established 615AD, wears three constitutional wigs—which would make anyone look silly. As a Cabinet minister, he is a member of the executive and in charge of a large government department. As Speaker of the House of Lords, he is a member of the legislature too. He is also Britain's most senior judge: he can, and sometimes controversially does, sit as a member of the House of Lords' Appellate Committee, heads the British judiciary and is responsible for appointing all senior judges and Queen's Counsels. He thus offends against the principle of the separation of powers and is a major example of its feebleness in the British constitution.

As head of the judiciary, the Lord Chancellor is supposed to be above politics. Asking lawyers to donate to the faction to which his Cabinet head is attached made it seem as though professional preferment might be politically inclined. It penetrated the Chinese walls between his three roles. It astounded the lawyers: 'The integrity of the Lord Chancellorship depends on an informal bargain in which the incumbent imposes a rigorous self-discipline that removes any (such) risk of abuse', according to the *Independent*.

But Lord Irvine defended himself. He quite rightly pointed out that many of his predecessors had been politically active. Some have been so disgracefully: Francis Bacon was removed from office in 1621 for taking bribes, and Judge Jeffreys—of the 'Bloody Assizes'—died in disgrace in the Tower in 1689. Some flagrantly: in

the 1920s Lord Eldon refused to make political opponents King's Counsel and in the early 20th century the great Lord Halsbury appointed Tory supporters to the Bench.

Lord Irvine also said that he was no different from any other Cabinet minister, which is a moot point. A minister who controls the judicial system is not just any Cabinet member. Faith in the justice system depends upon a perception of that person's absolute integrity. Irvine's predecessor, Lord MacKay, certainly possessed that quality in Presbyterian quantity. And the separation of powers now matters much more, because the executive has so much more power over citizens' lives than it did a century ago. An independent judiciary is a singularly necessary check on both the legislature and executive.

There is a marvellous scene in Gilbert and Sullivan's *Iolanthe*, where the Lord Chancellor has to consider whether or not he has a conflict of interest. He remarks, as he puts the arguments to himself, 'I had personally been acquainted with myself for some years ... I had watched my professional advancement with considerable interest ... I yielded to no-one in admiration for my private and professional virtues'. He then finds in his own favour. Lord Irvine, in similar vein, found that he had done no wrong.

Lord Irvine is genuinely an honourable man. He chose not to sit as a judge in the month following a warning by lawyers that they would challenge his dual role as a Cabinet minister and a judge as being in breach of the 'fair trial' provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). In October 2000, the ECHR became part of the UK's domestic law when the Human Rights Act came into full effect. That Act allows the ordinary courts to declare whether or not legislation and administrative actions are in breach of ECHR provisions. But Lord Irvine appoints those judges and administers those courts. Well might the *Independent* say, in relation to Lord Irvine's fundraising activities, that:

> At a time when judges, through judicial review and application of the Human Rights Act, offer one of the now pitifully few checks and balances against government, it is no longer defensible that the government appoints them.

IN AUSTRALIA, Lord Irvine's potential or perceived conflicts of interest would be practically unchallengeable. Australia has not incorporated its international human rights obligations into domestic law in any formal way. It would be fascinating to enable Australian courts to declare whether or not, say, the Northern Territory's mandatory sentencing laws complied with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights or the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Similarly, one could ask whether the Commonwealth's proposed changes to its treatment of refugees comply with international norms. It would also be impossible for the Australian government to do what successive federal governments have planned, and may yet complete.

The Common Law already acknowledges the importance of international obligations to domestic ideas of justice. In 1996, the High Court in *Teoh* found that Australia's international obligations to protect the rights of children under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child are part of the Australian law of

natural justice, as they are in England. This was, naturally, inconvenient, especially to those making deportation, refugee and asylum application decisions. (Ah Hin Teoh was the custodial father of several Australian children. The *Teoh* decision would have given him, and them, only the right to make representations before the immigration authorities took their deportation decision.)

The then ALP Attorney-General, Michael Lavarch, acted immediately to eliminate the 'legitimate expectation' that the Australian government intended to be bound by its international promises. The 'anti-*Teoh*' bill then tabled was flawed and bitterly opposed, shelved, then revived under the Coalition administration in 1997, but again not proceeded with. It is very worrying that the Howard government has just revived a similar bill. In 2000 it retreated from co-operation with the UN's human rights committee system, after its treatment of immigrant and Indigenous populations attracted national and international criticism. The initiative may be linked to the growing flow of asylum seekers detained in desert camps and the crackdown on their rights to appeal and obtain advice on those rights.

We must not go down that path.

Nobody who possesses power can abstain long from using it, or easily feeling satisfied that the common good is commensurate with their own. It is time to demand an expansion of the courts' legitimate role in balancing the protection of citizens' rights against the convenience and priorities of administrators. The protective constitutional principles have broken down. Even the ancient natural justice principles are being wound back by 'pragmatic' governments of both political camps. Given the centrality of the ordinary courts in interpreting and applying international human rights principles within the Common Law tradition, Australia should seriously consider the UK's Human Rights Act as a model for human rights protection. We cannot leave these fundamental rights to the discretionary judgment of even the most high-minded ministers. No-one should be a judge in their own cause. ■

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A Mir bagatelle

However objective and remote from politics scientists like to think themselves, their handiwork will always be viewed through a political filter. Ever since the Russian revolution, for instance, Russian science—the good, the bad and the ugly—has never been treated on its merits. On the Eastern side of the Iron Curtain, it was hailed as the finest flower of the Communist system; on the Western side, it was a symbol of the malevolence and shoddiness of the Evil Empire.

Which is one of the reasons why the flagship of the Russian space program, the Space Station 'Mir', is so interesting. During its 15 years aloft, the Iron Curtain was rolled back, and its image varied according to the time.

When Mir was launched in 1986, the American media regarded it with a somewhat patronising suspicion. (It didn't help that the earlier US version, Skylab, had been forced to shut down inside a year, and then plummeted out of control into Western Australia five years later.) But Mir was finally steered back into the south-eastern Pacific earlier this year to grudging admiration. By that time, the Americans had paid it the ultimate compliment—by having the Russians design and launch Zarya, the first module of the International Space Station.

The Cold War was still chilling East–West relations when the core module which formed Mir's living quarters was put into space 15 years ago. In an era of great secrecy, Soviet officials revealed little about its design except that it was equipped with six ports for affixing further modules or docking spacecraft. In fact, the somewhat ugly structure took ten years to complete. And by that time one of the docks had been modified to take NASA's Space Shuttle.

In 1995 the Americans began arriving on their Space Shuttle, and US money was pumped into keeping it flying. Even so it's hard to eradicate Cold War attitudes entirely. Most American commentators, for instance, say the research that was undertaken on Mir was 'not up to the Western standard', according to a report in the British weekly, *New Scientist*. The Europeans have been much more gracious. One particularly important piece of research showed that plants could grow normally in space, to provide a future food supply.

Even in its death throes, the likelihood of a successful splashdown for Mir was not always presented objectively. It was only by visiting the NASA website, for instance, that I became aware of the fact that the Russians had performed the same manoeuvre at least 85 times before—putting 80 spacecraft and five smaller space stations into the same area of the Pacific—with only one notable failure which ended up in the Chilean Andes. Admittedly, handling Mir was a lot more difficult, but the Russian experience and track record in these matters was far superior to anyone else.

Mir was a huge success. As an undeniable illustration of what Russian science could do, it became a source of huge national pride when its country needed it most. And, ironically enough, it even lived up to its name. As a bridge between the Soviet Union and modern Russia, between competition and co-operation in space, between cosmonauts and astronauts, it could hardly have been dubbed more aptly. Mir. Peace. ■

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WHEN WAS OUR NATION BORN?

Historian John Hirst offers three options:

- 1 January 1901 with the federation of the colonies and the establishment of the Commonwealth.
- 25 April 1915 with the landing at Gallipoli.
- The emergence of multicultural Australia, which might be dated to 1966, the end of the White Australia policy or to 1967, the referendum that removed discriminatory references to Aborigines in the constitution.

SOME PEOPLE DOUBT whether Australia deserved the name 'nation' in 1901. Wasn't Australia still no better than a colony in the empire? The founders had no doubt that they were creating a nation. They rallied the people with this cry. A nation within an empire was very different from a colony within the empire and they expected Britain to recognise that difference. With the formation of a nation Australians would have the same status as other peoples of the world.

Samuel Griffith, who wrote the first draft of the constitution, always gave this answer when he was asked why he was a supporter of federation: 'I am tired,' he said, 'of being a colonial.'

Griffith wrote a constitution designed for a nation whose only link with Britain would be the crown. Legally that position was not reached until the Statute of Westminster of 1931, but that was the object Griffith had in view. For him one of the most satisfying aspects of the inauguration of the Commonwealth was that the colonies would now be called states. 'Colony', that badge of inferiority, would disappear.

In 1901 the founders had no doubt that 1 January would become a national anniversary; that the founders would be honoured, and that their deeds would be rated historic. Of course there was no grand drama or bloody conflict in the federation story, and at the time this was seen as a matter for pride. Other federations had been formed by force or fear of force. Australia had united in peace by the free vote of its citizens—a further sign that Australia was in the van of progress. The blood-letting of earlier nation-making was deemed a form of barbarism.

The poets and speech-makers made this a regular theme at the celebrations in January 1901. One of the guidebooks declared: 'Ours is not the federation of fear, but the wise, solemn, rational federation of a free people.' The nation had its founding myth.

But there were signs, even then, that Australians did hanker after warfare and blood. The last stages in the federation saga coincided with the Boer War. There was great enthusiasm for the war in Australia and much less criticism of it than in Britain itself. Certainly there was much more interest in the progress of the war than in the final stages of federal negotiations. While the British forces were still besieged in Mafeking, no-one could be too excited over the federal leaders' campaign in London to limit

appeals from Australian courts to the Privy Council. Every colony sent troops to the war—eager to help the empire and be recognised by the empire. Fortunately their troops did not let them down. They gained a reputation for dash and daring. They were not as well-disciplined as regular British soldiers but they could look after themselves.

Australians had long worried about their inferior colonial status: they knew that the world still scorned them as the descendants of convicts. They were immensely reassured, then, to have their soldiers praised by the highest British authorities, and delighted that men bred in Australia were willing to sacrifice themselves in war.

We can see here prefigured the story of Gallipoli and why Australians came to believe that their nation was formed not in Centennial Park, Sydney, on 1 January 1901, but on the Turkish coast on 25 April 1915.

At Gallipoli Australians were fighting as a separate unit and not distributed among British units as they were in the Boer War. Everyone agreed that they had been given a near-impossible task and had

performed magnificently. The deep misgivings that Australians had about themselves were finally swept away by the valour of their troops and the recognition of their efforts. In World War I Australian soldiers had fought for the empire—but better than anyone else, including the British. Australians now had the self-confidence to think of themselves as a nation.

The federation of the colonies was a great civic achievement and it gave Australia the formal status of a nation, but it did not express the deepest needs and sentiments of the Australians in the way that the diggers did. So the diggers eclipsed the federal fathers as the founders of the nation.

But needs change, and we are constantly seeing past events in new ways. At one stage in the 1960s it looked as if the memory of Gallipoli would disappear. Instead, there has been a great revival of interest, though now we celebrate chiefly the personal qualities of the men, their doggedness, their stoicism, their mateship. We do not celebrate them as fighters for empire and we are less inclined to say that the nation was born at Gallipoli. We now have abundant grounds for the self-confidence of nationhood.

And we are also now more open to the view that the nation was formed on 1 January 1901. There is certainly much more interest at this anniversary in the details of how federation was achieved than there was in 1951. Then federation seemed just another step in the progress of this British nation; there was more honouring of the deeds of explorers and diggers than of the federation fathers.

Not that I would claim that there has been extraordinary enthusiasm for the current federation celebrations. It is perhaps unsurprising that one person, after seeing the parade in Sydney on 1 January, said, 'I always wondered what a straight Mardi Gras would be like.'

But the democratic founding myth is reappearing. On the evening of 1 January at Centennial Park, Bob Carr spoke of federation as a great democratic achievement and he linked the voting on the constitution at referendum with the referendums on conscription in WWI and the dissolution of the Communist Party in 1951. The prime minister also spoke of the virtues of a nation that came together freely through the ballot box.

In this pacific age, when the notion of blood sacrifice is abhorrent, the myth may become appealing again. When Paul Keating sought advice on the celebrations in the early 1990s, he set up a committee headed by Joan Kirner. Kirner, like many Australians, knew little of the federation process and was quite swept away by how open, how consultative it had been. The founding fathers were, it seemed, politicians who listened. They *had* to listen, of course, because any disgruntled group had the power to vote 'No' at the referendum.

The constitution was developed over ten years, via a convention in 1891 and a convention which met three times in 1897 and 1898. It was assembled by consultation (which is one reason why it is such a dull document). It eschews grand principles, fudges and elaborates minor matters in tedious detail. Take, for example, the deliberations over the position of civil servants—the postmen, customs officers and soldiers—who were to be transferred from the colonies to the Commonwealth's service. The first draft of the document said simply that their rights would be preserved. But what of the benefits they reasonably expected to acquire in the colony's service, would they be preserved when they transferred? And what would happen to civil servants who were not chosen for the Commonwealth when their department was transferred? And who would pay the pensions, the state or the Commonwealth? One line in the original draft became 22 lines in the final document. The reason for such close attention? All the civil servants would be voting in the referendum.

Modern readers of the constitution look for a stirring preamble or a bill of rights and are disappointed. No constitution, before or since, has given so much attention to the pension rights of postmen. Nonetheless, it was a fitting beginning for a federation named a commonwealth, a federation which was to be concerned for the common good and the good of people previously thought of *as* common.

BUT THERE IS resistance to the celebration of federation. The third in the ABC Barton lecture series was given in February 2001 by Professor Mary Kalantzis, Dean of Education at RMIT. She reminded us that alongside the federal story is what she called, arrestingly, the 'German' element in our history, the one concerned with racial purity and racial segregation, eugenics, and the removal of Aboriginal children. 'The big picture ideas are no different to those of the

German '30s and '40s: of the necessity to create "one people, ...without admixture of races" (to use Deakin's words) ...'

How can we unambiguously celebrate federation, Kalantzis asks, when unity of race was the strongest motive for union and the early Commonwealth was protecting the industry, trade and wages of white men? We do have some things to celebrate, she says: our escape from this world with the abandonment of White Australia, the end of legal discrimination against Aborigines, our success with the migration program, and the creation of a multicultural Australia.

With the disappearance of socialism, all we have to put against the forces of global capitalism in this place is our egalitarian national tradition.

Not only is our past racist and masculinist, Kalantzis argues, but there is also not much that is credible as democracy in our constitution-making. Yes, she grants, the people's approval at referendum was necessary for the acceptance of the constitution. But women were excluded, so 50 per cent involvement is as good as you can get. Voting was not compulsory. So we end up with only 11 per cent of the adult population voting on the document. What sort of democracy is that, Kalantzis asks. I am sure her calculation is wrong. I've seen low figures but hers are lower than any I've seen before.

What these calculations hide is the acceptance, in the Australian colonies of the 1890s, of the amazing democratic principle that citizens should be directly involved in constitution-making. Where women were accepted as citizens—in South Australia and Western Australia—they were in fact included.

This Kalantzis manoeuvre reminds me of what I am always encountering in my work on civics in schools. We want to introduce the students to democratic Athens, where citizens voted directly on all laws and were chosen by lot to hold office. We commission writers to prepare lessons on this subject. Invariably, the first thing they want children to know about democratic Athens is that women and slaves were excluded from citizenship. By applying this test of inclusiveness, of course, all the past looks the same and children are encouraged to believe that western civilisation was of no account until the passage of the Equal Opportunity Act.

What we hide in this view of our history is that men have frequently proclaimed principles more ample than their interests required and those principles have then been used against them by other men—and by women. And that underneath the hierarchies and exclusions, equality has been the great sleeper in the Western tradition:

> There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

Kalantzis is right about the racism of our founding fathers and the centrality of the White Australia ideal, even though she is wrong to claim it as the chief spur to federation. The ideal was not wholly racial; this was racism certainly, but social democratic racism. The upholders of White Australia wanted a racially pure society and of course for them whiteness was best; they also wanted a society where all could meet as equals and which accepted the dignity of labour and paid high wages. Coloured labour in their view was a lesser, degraded form, one that led to exploitation and harsh social division. They had an example of such a society before them in the Queensland canefields where white men did not labour; they supervised the indentured labourers from the Pacific Islands, the kanakas.

YES, THE RACISM of these founders was crude and uncompromising and it is easy to condemn them out of their own mouths. Consider, for example, one of the famous racist manifestos from the *Bulletin*, the radical nationalist republican weekly, in its glory days of the 1880s. But as you read, watch for the social democracy:

> By the term Australian we mean not those who have been merely born in Australia. All white men who come to these shores—with a clean record—and who leave behind them the memory of the class distinctions and the religious differences of the old world ... are Australians. No nigger, no Chinaman, no lascar, no kanaka, no purveyor of cheap coloured labour is an Australian.

So it's to be a society without class and religious divisions; those are to be left behind in Europe. The people named as ineligible to be Australians are those who have been used as cheap labour in Australia: 'the nigger, the Chinaman, the lascar, the kanaka'; and, no matter what his race, the supplier of such labour is not to be Australian—'no purveyor of cheap coloured labour is an Australian'.

The concern for the dignity of labour and its proper reward was expressed by the most distinctive institution of the early Commonwealth, the Arbitration Court. Supported by all parties, the court was set up to solve industrial disputes peacefully, without the need for strikes. Under Justice Higgins, the Court in 1907 established a basic wage calculated on the needs of an average employee living in a civilised community with a wife and three children to support.

This used to be a celebrated moment in Australian history. But Kalantzis is now only the last in a long line of feminist historians who for 30 years have been reading the basic wage as a gendered settlement. They say its effect was to define women as subordinate and confine them to the home. But Justice Higgins was not the inventor of women's subordination nor of their role as homemakers. The position the basic wage judgment accorded to women is in fact quite unsurprising. What *is* truly surprising is its central principle: that wages should not be set by the market, not by the ability of the employer to pay, but by the needs of the worker.

In recent years, the economic rationalists have been attacking the Arbitration Court. The frontal attack has come from big business, organised as the H.R. Nicholls Society. But feminist historians have been their outriders, softening up progressive opinion by depicting Justice Higgins as a male villain. They see little reason to honour this part of Australia's past.

Two parts of me will not let me ditch old Australia. First, I am an historian and I know that the new beginning of the 1960s and 1970s is not a complete break from the past. The success of multicultural Australia can only be understood by reference to the characteristics of old egalitarian Australia, the world of mateship and the basic wage. Imagine the fate of millions of migrants going to a country which cared a lot about who your parents were, or your schooling, or how you spoke, or whether you had read the right books, or whether you gave people their right titles. Australia was the opposite of all this. Because it was easy-going, informal and egalitarian, it was more welcoming to migrants and wanted them to have 'a fair go'.

We can connect the ideals of white Australia and the basic wage very directly to the success of migrants in Australia. The unions were opposed to the migration scheme. They objected to coloured immigration most strongly, but they opposed all assisted migration schemes, fearing them as a device to lower wages. They were afraid such schemes would bring in British paupers or European peasants who would accept low wages and not have the gumption to insist on better. The Labor government that introduced the migration program after the war had to promise the unions that migrants would be paid award wages.

So migrants did not start work for low wages in sweat shops; they did not become an underclass, which was the fantasy of left-wing sociologists. The Italian peasant, within 48 hours of leaving the boat, was working at Holden at award wages and was, by compulsion, a member of the Vehicle Builders Union. Australia: it's an odd place when you look at it. And yet the migration scheme is, in some quarters, still rendered as a tale of oppression—the huts at the Bonegilla migrant centre were cold in winter and there were no social workers.

THE OTHER PART OF ME that wants to hold on to old Australia is me as citizen. With the disappearance of socialism, all we have to put against the forces of global capitalism in this place is our egalitarian national tradition. Our democratic manners, which I value highly, can still be nourished by the songs and stories of Lawson and Paterson and the deeds of those disrespectful diggers.

Let me be clearer about the position held by Mary Kalantzis. She is one of the school that is opposed to nationalism. They are not looking for the birth of a new nation in the 1960s and 1970s, but the beginnings of nationalism's demise. To them the defining of a nation is always limiting and oppressive. They hail Australia's new diversity and do not want nationalism to be the force that holds it together. Rather, they argue, we should be held together by civic values merely: parliamentary democracy, the rule of law, respect for diversity. We should not be afraid of differences or search for some unifying force; we simply become skilled at negotiating our differences. Their aim is community without nation.

Imagine an anti-nationalist anthem (not, I hasten to say, written by nationalism's opponents—they would hate anthems).

> Australians all, let us rejoice,
> Diversity's our name;
> We're set apart by race and class,
> And gender does the same.
> Our land abounds in differences
> Which we'll negotiate;
> In hist'ry's page, let ev'ry stage
> Dissolve the Australian state.
> In joyful strains then let us sing
> Dissolve the Australian state.

It makes the official anthem sound good.

The puzzling thing about the anti-nationalist position is that its proponents declare that nationalism is already dead. In 1988 Stephen Castles, Bill Cope, Mary Kalantzis and Michael Morrissey produced a book predicated on its demise (*Mistaken Identity: Multiculturalism and the Demise of Nationalism in Australia*, Pluto Press, Sydney). I think the death notice was a little premature. For all our diversity, nationalism is still a very powerful force, as the Olympics and the East Timor expedition in different ways demonstrated.

Nationalisms come in different varieties. One of the books prompted by the anniversary of federation deals with this issue and deserves more attention. It was written by the Monash sociologist, Bob Birrell, at first with the title *A Nation of Our Own*, and reissued on 1 January this year as *Federation: The Secret Story*. He classifies nationalisms and rates Australian nationalism as middling on the social democratic scale—not as strong as Sweden, but much stronger than the United States, which scarcely scores. He thinks nationalism continues to give a sense of community, and that social democrats in Australia should not pour scorn on the national achievements of the federation period. I take my stand with him. And so I say the nation began on 1 January 1901 and thereabouts. ■

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The above is an edited version of the first *Eureka Street* Monday talk given at Newman College, 26 March 2001.

JACK WATERFORD

For the record

'In Denial: The Stolen Generations and the Right', *The Australian Quarterly Essay*, Issue 1. Schwartz Publishing, 2001. ISSN 1 444 884X, RRP $9.95

A SIGNIFICANT proportion of the Australian population is embarrassed and angry at a seeming impasse in black–white relations in Australia. It wants reconciliation. It wants to get to some point where the past can be acknowledged and the talk can move to what is ahead. It fears that the true stolen generation of Aboriginal affairs is the present one—whose progress and liberation seems stalled by almost semantic debates about how much they are disadvantaged and why. Those in this camp, who include most younger Australians, yearn to move on; if they want a formal apology to Aborigines from government it is because they wish for a situation in which they have nothing to apologise for.

Another sector of the community, overwhelmingly but by no means exclusively older, think that there is nothing to apologise for. There are many aspects of modern society, and many notions of younger Australians, which irritate and annoy them, or which they think are built on false history or wrong perspectives. For them there is something special about the 'sorry industry' and about Aboriginal affairs generally which galvanises a particular tic. Their view of the present lot of Aborigines is not that they are disadvantaged, but that they are specially and wrongly privileged; they see the failure by Aborigines to advance as a group as a function of an unwillingness to work and take their place in the community as 'ordinary Australians', and of their being misled, sometimes deliberately, by hopeless, romantic collectivists. Modern accounts of black–white history threaten both their own romantic notions of progress since settlement and some settled comforts of their Christian childhoods. Much the same could be said of their irritations with other aspects of modern culture and what they would characterise as political correctness. But there is some extra ingredient giving them the needle when Aborigines are being discussed; some peculiar basis for what seems a desire to prolong the conflict and to make Aborigines cave in.

As Robert Manne has demonstrated in his pamphlet 'In Denial', it is easy to find an intellectual focus among the die-hards. It is to be found among several gatherings of right-wing intellectuals historically based around Melbourne, and closely linked with the H.R. Nicholls Society, the Samuel Griffith Society, the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA) and the patronage of the boss of the Western Mining Corporation, Hugh Morgan. It has much gained in strength over the past decade, following the *Mabo* and *Wik* decisions by the High Court, the Hindmarsh Bridge affair in South Australia (if to a lesser extent), the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's *Bringing Them Home* report on the 'stolen children', as well, generally, as the apology and reconciliation push. In even more recent times, it has acquired some discipline, if that is the word, by its capture of *Quadrant*, now the leading journal of anti-Aboriginal sentiment, and by the readiness of some leading conservative columnists—not least *Quadrant* editor Padraic McGuinness, but also Frank Devine, Michael Duffy, Piers Akerman and Andrew Bolt—to use their newspaper columns in support of such ideas. Their agendas receive positive feedback from the Prime Minister, John Howard, and his erstwhile Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, John Herron, and some cheers in the pub from supporters of Pauline Hanson, many of whom have more simple hostilities towards Aborigines.

'In Denial' is billed as the first of a series of *Australian Quarterly Essays* intended to present significant contributions to political, intellectual and cultural debate. Each essay is intended to be of at least 20,000 words—providing a small book—its publishers hoping 'to mediate between the limitations of the newspaper column, where there is the danger that evidence and argument can be swallowed up by the form, and the kind of full-length study of a subject where the only readership is necessarily a specialised one.'

It is aimed 'for the attention of the committed general reader'.

If this first essay sets any precedent, the form involves polemic, reasonable economy with footnotes, but ample space either for developing arguments or for canvassing the evidence. This essay is not simply a review of the literature, or the justice, of the stolen children story, though it is these as well. Its focus is on the way in which right-wing commentators have attempted to frustrate the debate upon the stolen children. As the general editor, Peter Craven, puts it, this is an account 'of how a failure of sympathy, a hardening of the imaginative arteries, is abetted at every point by a form of wishful thinking about the past and compounded by a woefully impoverished sense of evidence.'

Robert Manne makes out his case, in the process shedding some interesting light on the circumstances of his removal from the editorship of *Quadrant*, which he fixes closely to the earlier *Quadrant*'s open mind (under his editorship) on Aboriginal issues. But he is no mere champion of the official report of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC), acknowledging that in places it overstated its evidence or occasionally leapt to conclusions. That this is so has bedevilled much of the critical discussion of the report, if only because critics, by making lists of contentious assertions, have succeeded, in some quarters, in creating an impression that the report is riddled with error. Ron Brunton, of the IPA, has been one of the more trenchant critics of the HREOC report, one whose close canvassing of the material has been much used by other critics as well.

He has also led the ridicule of the charge of genocide—a legal word which, in retrospect, might have been better unused. To the layperson, 'genocide' must inevitably imply a conscious policy of extermination; wider meanings, either of forced assimilation, conscious breakdown of tribal links and attachments, will be resisted.

Manne is reasonably respectful of Brunton's analyses—if more condemnatory of his motives, and of those who have misrepresented even what Brunton says. Brunton, after all, does not deny the fact of the wholesale removal of half-caste Aboriginal children in all states of Australia (though he disputes some of the more extravagant estimates of its scale) and is unequivocal about acknowledging the extent of the breaches of human rights involved. Brunton is, however, stringently criticised by Manne for his failure to acknowledge a critical difference between pre-war 'breed-'em-white' policies, and post-war welfarist and assimilationist policies, which, if still highly objectionable, are of a different category in judging a legal genocidal intent. He is also strongly criticised for his claims that, in effect, Commissioners Sir Ronald Wilson and Mick Dodson had betrayed the victims of forced removal by their failure to mount 'a precise, careful and sober case'.

'In Denial' begins by describing a recent news report in which Andrew Bolt claimed that Lowitja O'Donoghue had recanted on her claims of forced removal; Manne forcefully underlines the report's tendentiousness. The essay moves to discussion of how the stolen children inquiry was established, recounting, in some detail, four well-documented stories of forced removal spanning seven decades of the last century. It is not without significance—a significance almost invariably lost on the critics—that two of the cases involve forced removal of children from NSW and Queensland, where it could not be said that part-Aboriginal children were being removed from highly traditional communities where they might be alleged to be at risk because the community did not accept 'half-castes'. The recounting of the stories also provides an opportunity not only to demonstrate the development of official policies, but to show that statements made by senior administrators of the 'breed-'em-white' variety were not mere private expressions of opinion but represented adopted official policy.

There follows some discussion of the *Bringing Them Home* report. Manne acknowledges that HREOC could have benefited—and made itself less vulnerable to attack—had it been more active in soliciting the evidence of the public servants, policemen, patrol officers and missionaries involved in implementation of policies of child removal. It would, he suggests, also have been wiser to have discussed some of the other criticisms and concepts of genocide.

He also brings forward recollections made by men in less self-serving times, and deals particularly effectively with assertions by a former cadet patrol officer, Colin Macleod. Macleod's background in child removal was scanty, and many of his claims are wrong. He is often cited by those who almost seem to deny that forced child removal occurred—he was called by the Commonwealth as a witness in the Cubillo case. In truth, Manne says, Macleod understood remarkably little about the policy of child removal, 'yet, because he was singing a tune which many Australians wanted to hear, his opinions carried a very considerable and altogether undeserved weight'.

Two others are subjected to stringent criticism. First is Reginald Marsh, with his glib explanations about how 'half-caste' kids did not fit with moiety structures and had to be 'rescued'. Marsh's claims run counter to the evidence even in traditional areas and in any event provide no explanation of child removal in places where moiety systems had broken down. Second is Douglas Meagher QC, who led for the Commonwealth in the Cubillo case. Then comes an old but, even in his time, highly ineffective champion of assimilation, Peter Howson, who has become a latter-day polemicist against the stolen children case, is demonstrated to be as confused as ever.

There might be some who would see highly sinister motivations behind the vehemence of the hostility to the stolen children affair. There are, after all, interests at odds with Aboriginal aspirations, and some of the critics, and some of their backers, can be closely identified with those interests. Annoyance with prevailing trendy social morality can provide some basis too, not to mention some pleasure at twitting what is seen as a 'politically correct' liberal establishment. Robert Manne's essay provides, however, some powerful ammunition to show some of the flaws of their approach; at the end of the day, the very title, 'In Denial' retains a special ring. ■

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MARGARET COFFEY

Chequered history

Crusade or Conspiracy? Catholics and the Anti-Communist Struggle in Australia, Bruce Duncan, UNSW Press, 2001. ISBN 0 86840 731 3, RRP $49.95.

Between the Glossary and Our Prayers at the rear of the new Melbourne Archdiocesan Year 7 Religious Education text is a 'Timeline from Abraham to Christ'. It begins with the 'End of the Second Ice Age' c13,000BCE and ends eight pages later with the 'Year of Jubilee to celebrate 20 centuries of Christianity'.

Twenty-three significant events are listed post World War II, including the definition of the Dogma of the Assumption in 1950, the founding of the Missionaries of Charity by Mother Teresa, the Second Vatican Council, the 'promulgation' of the Catechism of the Catholic Church and (the only encyclical mentioned) Pope John Paul II's '*Veritatis Splendor* (on morality)'.

The United Nations does not rate a mention, nor, apart from India, Pakistan and Israel, do the accumulation of democratic states that was truly a 20th-century achievement. But there are 11 entries related to Communism, including the 1954 'Communist takeover of North Vietnam. Vietnam divided into North and South', the 1957 'Viet Cong (Communist guerrillas) begin raid on South Vietnam', the 1962–65 'Beginning of US military involvement in Vietnam', and the 1975 'Both North and South Vietnam now Communist'. Search the text proper and the only reference to Vietnam is to the 18th-century martyrs canonised by the present Pope; the dates just sit at the back like a bell tolling. It may be that the teachers' guide makes explicit the connection between the truths of the faith and what went on at Dien Bien Phu. I don't know. But Bruce Duncan's book, *Crusade or Conspiracy?*, surely does.

Crusade or Conspiracy? narrates the evolution of a Catholic response to social concerns of the 1930s into an organised struggle against Communism and, finally, into an expanded political vision which provoked the 1954 split in the Australian Labor Party. It charts the accompanying and continuing division both within the Australian Catholic hierarchy and among the clergy and laity.

Bruce Duncan is clear that, despite later denials, B.A. Santamaria ultimately aimed to exercise a dominant influence in the Australian Labor Party, by 'getting the numbers', so that it would adopt Movement policies which encapsulated his Christian social vision. Further, he aimed to achieve influence at the behest of religious authorities.

This important book has been written out of copious research, much of it in archives not previously available, including church archives in Australia and Rome. A fund of reference and quotation, person and moment, it inches its way from the late '30s to the '60s. There *are* times when reading it seems like a visit to a much-too-distant and alien past. However, the 2001 Year 7 text calls us to its ever-so-present meaning.

The most graphic contribution *Crusade or Conspiracy?* makes to the historiography of 'the Split' is its documentation of the disagreements among the Australian bishops as to the proper role of Mr Santamaria and 'his' Movement, their final referral of their difficulties to the Vatican, and the Roman response in 1957 which obliged the bishops in 1958 to sever the church's connections with the Movement. Bruce Duncan details the national Movement's emergence from the Melbourne Freedom Movement of 1943 and the serpentine changes both in its structural relationship with the church and its ambitions.

Most Australian Catholics would have had no inkling of the seriousness of the accompanying disagreements among their bishops—which began as early as 1945 and continued long after the directions from Rome—and few would have been aware of the nub of the arguments. Neither would most Catholics have understood the extent of the bishops' involvement in the Movement, which continued even some years after the fracture in the ALP. They would not have known of the bishops' committee which had supervised the Movement or the extent of funding provided to the Movement by the church. Until his death Archbishop Mannix had the Melbourne Archdiocese provide £6000 per year to the Movement's reincarnation, the National Civic Council. Even in 1967 Mr Santamaria could propose to Bishop Stewart and the Victorian bishops (in a letter held in the Bendigo Diocesan Archives) that for six years 10 per cent of the expected $1,800,000 from new per capita grants to Catholic schools be redirected to the NCC. The bishops did not agree.

Cardinal Gilroy's final frank remarks to Rome about both Mr Santamaria and Archbishop Mannix make extraordinary reading: 'sadly it must be admitted that Mr Santamaria and his associates have succeeded in dividing the Church, even the Bishops, more effectively than Communists could ever have hoped to do'. Bruce Duncan notes that 'reflecting in 1966, he [Santamaria] thought Mannix did not understand the situation in the Vatican, and lacked good contacts', hence the Vatican's routing of the Mannix/Santamaria alliance. It must have been an instructive experience for him.

For me, though, *Crusade or Conspiracy?* is most significant for its placement of the Movement saga in the context both of broad social movements in the aftermath of the 1930s Depression and the evolution of Catholic social ideas in that period. The Campion Society of young people in Melbourne, which included B.A. Santamaria, were drawn to Catholic social ideas as part of a more widespread impulse to criticise capitalism and to explore other models of social organisation. We are hearing echoes of some of their critique now, in the criticism of banks and in the revival of interest in Distributist notions of ordinary people having control over their own means of production.

Campion Society members were influenced strongly by Hilaire Belloc, G.K. Chesterton and Christopher Dawson, who put the impoverishment of the working

class and the dominance of the new capitalist class into a framework which began with the destructive impact of the Reformation. Duncan's contribution is to point to the other influences at work among these Catholic activists. Essentially, these reflected diverging traditions in Europe. On the one hand, there was Charles Maurras and *L'Action Française*, and on the other, writers and philosophers such as Jacques Maritain and Charles Péguy. Duncan quotes Robert Speaight writing, in the *Dublin Review* in 1944, that Maurras had given his 'pagan doctrines a Christian framework and in doing so corrupted the minds of Catholics all the world over. The responsibility of Catholics for the rise of totalitarian, or semi-totalitarian, regimes cannot be denied.'

Those who became Mr Santamaria's most incisive critics, Duncan writes, were not his opponents in the ALP but his old Campion friends who had turned increasingly to the writings of Maritain and thus to a positive view of the freedoms implied in a liberal democracy. Among Santamaria's critics were two women, Jean Daly and Rosemary Goldie, about whom it would be interesting to hear more—otherwise it is an all-male cast.

For Maritain the role of the church was to form Christian consciences, and it was up to Catholics to act independently of the church in politics and society. Catholics in the civil sphere were able to adopt different and even opposing views and it was intolerable that a Catholic should claim to speak on a political or social question in the name of Catholicism and imply that all Catholics should follow that road. As Duncan puts it, there was an important difference, in Maritain's view, between Catholic Action (the formation and education of Catholics) and the action of Catholics (their independent activities in politics and society). His book is an account of the failure of the bishops to understand the distinction and apply it. Ironically, it was Maritain's view of the role of the church in a liberal democracy that came to be the view held in Rome from Pius XII on. Indeed, Maritain was invited to represent the world of intellectuals at the closing session of the Second Vatican Council.

According to Bruce Duncan's account, Mr Santamaria could never be brought to engage with Maritain's ideas. *Crusade or Conspiracy?* in no way attempts a psychoanalysis of Santamaria but it does point to the way in which his experiences as the child of Italian immigrants influenced his sympathies and modes of action. This is a complex matter and Duncan approaches it in a nuanced way. Santamaria emerges in Duncan's portrait as no intellectual, but rather as 'an agile political pragmatist reformulating theory to suit the purpose at hand'. Duncan points to further work to be done on the continuing impact of that agility on the church in Australia and also on its relationships and attitudes to countries in Asia since the '50s.

Overshadowing everything in the story of course is the spectre of Communism. From this distance it is tremendously hard to imagine the fears of the '40s and '50s that led to the kind of rhetoric voiced by both Santamaria and his opponents. For many, Bruce Duncan will be at his most challenging when he argues that it was not inevitable that Australian Catholics should be mobilised, post World War II, into regarding Communism as public enemy number one. He presents the threat from communism in Australia as real although at times absurdly exaggerated, but, following Maritain who opposed Communism strongly, he points to the fact of initial 'prudent co-operation' in places such as Italy and France between Christian Democrats and Communists. For Maritain, Communism, in Spain for example, was in effect a critique of the failure of Christianity to bring about social justice. 'The earth was strewn with innumerable Christian parts abandoned. They were picked up by the adversaries of the Christian name.' In Duncan's paraphrase of Maritain, Marx had to be listened to before his errors could be corrected. However, in Santamaria's mind, Marx was finally 'an even worse enemy of Christianity than the capitalist order', though the Vatican was to 'mistakenly' change its policy on Communism. It is that viewpoint which is reflected in the timeline of the religious education textbook launched this year in Melbourne for use in all Catholic schools.

Among the players. *Above:* rival ALP leaders Arthur Calwell (left) and H.V. Evatt. *Above right:* Sometime allies B.A. Santamaria and John Cotter, President of the National Civic Council in Tasmania.

For Bruce Duncan the importance of the story he tells lies in its articulation of the possibilities for Catholics to act for justice. He presents Catholic social teaching as provisional in the sense that it is developing in discussion and in debate—and in response to present social conditions. If advancing the cause of social justice is as important as doctrinal orthodoxy, as Pope John Paul II tells us, then it is very necessary that Australian Catholics learn from the history of the Movement and its involvement with the church. *Crusade or Conspiracy?* is the kind of detailed account that not everyone will wish to read—and even at 400-plus pages it bears the signs of culling. It is to be hoped that all those who ought to read it do so, and that someone, somehow, will summarise the content so that it reaches the widest range of people.■

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DAVID McCOOEY

Grecian turn

New and Selected Poems, Dimitris Tsaloumas, UQP, 2000.
ISBN 0 7022 2914 8, RRP $34.95

WHERE WOULD poets be without the myths of classical Greece? (Where would reviewers be, for that matter?) What a useful crew Odysseus, Pan, Icarus, Ariadne, and Oedipus are. How neat that Hermes is the god of interpretation and thieves. I remember, still at school, labouring through James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Seeing me reading, my geology teacher looked at my Penguin Modern Classics edition and said that he didn't know I was interested in Greek mythology. What do you say to that? 'I'm not'? Anybody interested in Western literature has an interest in Greek mythology (or perhaps, as Freud and others pointed out, it has an interest in us).

All of this rehearses the obvious: classical Greece has an enormous cultural weight. There are books on Greek motifs in Renaissance literature, classical Greece and the Victorians (and the Augustans, and the Romantics, and the modernists), on ekphrasis (commentary on working art) and modern poetry and so on and on. Classical Greece is like a black hole where the smallest item takes on a massive weight due to immense gravitational force.

The effect of this on modern Greek writers (especially poets) has been much discussed. But what of those Greek writers who write outside Greece? Dimitris Tsaloumas is interesting in that his poetry is marked not only by voluntary exile and bilingualism, but by large divisions in career (in terms of time and language) and a shift from one language to another.

Since 1983, with the publication of the prize-winning collection *The Observatory*, Tsaloumas has been well-known in Australian literary circles, but for nearly 20 years he did not write poetry. He ceased writing after his arrival in Australia in 1952, and from 1974 he published collections in Greece, establishing a reputation there. *The Observatory* links his two careers, since it is a bilingual edition (like his second volume, *The Book of Epigrams*, 1985). Most of the translation was by Philip Grundy, who in his introduction to this large *New and Selected* claims that Tsaloumas' poetry 'remains obstinately Greek'.

This is so in its continued use of Greek history and mythology, Greek forms and techniques, and tonal and stylistic elements (which, according to *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*, range from 'epigrammatic simplicity to Byzantine lushness'). The most prevalent aspect of such stylistic Greekness is usually termed (by Grundy and others) 'nostalgia': the sense of melancholy and regret for a lost past and a lost country. This is seen in 'Portents' (a title that could describe a large subgroup of Tsaloumas' oeuvre): 'Within the ribs// of this cage all song is memory, all praise/ regret'.

Tsaloumas was born in Leros—famous in ancient times for its honey—and he experienced the Italian occupation and a German attack on the island, and was in Greece during the Civil War. Tsaloumas tends to write obliquely out of such experiences. In this respect he is like the (otherwise very different) American poet Charles Simic, who grew up in German-occupied Yugoslavia during the war. In 'The Conflagration', for instance, Tsaloumas creates a world in which 'the city is burning/ and they keep it secret./ Some say that foreign agents have been caught/ in the pawn-shops of the Upper Quarter'. The poem ends: 'how can you hide calamity such as this/ when the sirens tear through/ the nervous system/ of midnight/ and the searchlights cross swords/ inside the brain?' Like any number of poems by Simic, such poetry creates a strange world inhabited by malevolent forces, and its use of metaphor makes connections between history and myth, while illustrating the divisions between society and self.

THIS IS NOT to say that Tsaloumas is always allegorical. A number of his political poems are straightforwardly outspoken and set in the contemporary world, but his work as a whole tends towards abstraction, the parabolic and the metaphorical. One line might indicate his aesthetic project as a whole: 'Earthquakes have hit the land of dreams'. His attraction to parable can be seen in the eponymous poem of another prize-winning collection, *The Harbour* (1998). The poet arrives in a town which has a harbour, a ship and 'window-panes ablaze/ with the setting sun'. But the town is mysteriously quiet. The poet comes across a figure who tells him that 'There is no town at all ... The ship ferries no passengers,/ he said, carries no cargo. This town/ is of no substance to the living'.

Like the poem as a whole this figure is figurative. The poet here is drawing attention to the fictional status of his own creation. But the poem shows something that Tsaloumas seems almost intent on hiding: his metaphorical inventiveness. The stranger's voice is 'a stagger of flame straining/ to flee its candle in the draughts/ of some wintry island shrine'. And why is the poem called 'The Harbour'? Harbours, of course, abound in Greece and Greek literature. Here, the poet seeks a harbour in the spectral town as much as in the reality of the world. Is there *no* harbour, we are encouraged to ask, or is it that the imagination is our only real

harbour? Perhaps this is an especially pressing question for an exiled writer.

This poem shows a number of characteristic features of Tsaloumas' poetry. He is attracted to those ancient forms, the monologue and the dialogue, to delineating a sense of place that is both ancient and modern, and to creating a voice that is attached to both the archaic and archetypal as well as the demotic and quotidian. But such characteristics shouldn't blind us to Tsaloumas' diversity. His poems range in tone perhaps more than is initially apparent, and *Portrait of a Dog* (1993) shows his deep interest in satire.

And as much as that interest could be shown to have Greek precedents (including the now-abandoned belief that the word 'satire' came from 'satyr'), it is here that we can begin to see the *Australian* Tsaloumas. It is no doubt tempting to see Tsaloumas' description of himself as an 'Australian Greek writer' as definitive. But the second adjective seems so much more important than the first. Given that the status of 'multicultural' writing generates less anxiety now than a decade ago, it might be time to reverse the order of the adjectives and consider the effect, especially since most local critics and general readers would have only a passing or non-existent acquaintance with modern Greek poetry. (How many of us have read beyond Cavafy and Seferis?). In any case, Tsaloumas' own efforts demonstrate a two-way poetic economy: he has edited a bilingual (English/Greek) edition of modern Australian poetry, and since *Falcon Drinking* (1988) he has written poetry in English.

At first glance this does not seem to have had a huge effect on his writing. Despite the variety of concerns, Tsaloumas' non-satirical poetry does tend towards sameness. In particular, the abstraction can become wearying. The interest in satire and politics, however, indicates a broader interest in power. Perhaps the negativity of some of the poetry reflects poetry's ineffectuality against political and economic power. This can be seen in the striking 'Towards a Metamorphosis' (metamorphosis, of course, being stock feature of myth): 'The Lords of Markets, soft with oozing fat/ now strut abroad solicitous to lead// into the splendours of the nascent century/ our diminished years'.

So what of the Australian Tsaloumas? Certainly we can see a change in his lexis (as the Greeks called it). But his satirical poems in *Portrait of a Dog* are part of a strange fashion in Australian poetry for Roman models, seen in poets as diverse as David Malouf, Peter Rose, John Tranter, Geoffrey Lehmann and Hugh Tolhurst. These satirical portraits (often of the literary scene) illustrate a very Australian anti-authoritarian stance, present in Tsaloumas almost everywhere, whatever the tone.

In addition, Melbourne, and Australian myth, are present in numerous poems, often in counterpoint to a lost Greece. The new poems, collected under the title 'Exile', show just how equally poised the two terms—Australian, Greek—are. If anything, these new poems have an even greater elegiac weight (many are poems for the poet's late brother). But they also show a greater tendency to the austerities of old age (Tsaloumas turns 80 this year) through immaculately executed lyrics.

In these late poems the sense of doubleness has become more than a matter of biography. Duality is the most common motif ascribed to ethnic minority literature, but in Tsaloumas' case it has become a poetic. His work seeks to praise, but does so from the realms of the negative; it seeks the demotic speech of the contemporary but places it in a strangely timeless world; it is often luminous in its imagery, while remaining dark in meaning. Australia itself is often a source of such duality, not simply an accidental site where it can be experienced. 'The Gift' ends: 'In the wastes of my continent/ one travels on, no longer thirsty,/ seeking the luminous beauty of the mirage/ that carries no despair'. ■

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BOOKS: 4

PETER CRAVEN

Short blacks

The Body Artist, Don De Lillo, Pan Macmillan, 2001.
ISBN 0 3304 8495 8, RRP $29.95
Eclipse, John Banville, Pan Macmillan, 2000.
ISBN 0 3303 3933 8, RRP $38.40

When Don De Lillo published *Underworld* three years ago it looked like the culmination of a career and the substantiation of a reputation that was already as high as any. He was already the author of *White Noise*, with its hilarity and cavernous sadness, of *Libra*, which made labyrinths of paranoia seem like the codes of realism itself when it came to the Kennedy assassination, and of works like *Mao II*, in which artists and people of violence become enmeshed like so many metaphors of each other.

De Lillo is by common consent the reigning American master who has not yet disappeared into the kind of afterlife that comes from being associated with a bygone moment or generation. He is the great artist of a moment that might be thought to start in literary terms with Pynchon, a moment when the distinction between the popular and the highbrow gets iffy and when a realistic and supple manner is capable of allowing in all manner of trashiness as well as stylistic highjinks. This summons up the spectre of postmodernism. De Lillo belongs to that strand of more or less innovative and caper-cutting fiction which does not overwhelm the mind in a stasis of persiflage (as Pynchon does following Joyce) or pop art routines (as Pynchon does with some grandeur, doing his '60s thing). Instead, De Lillo's postmodernism is freewheeling, narrative-friendly and conformable to any level of realism or departure from realism that doesn't destroy the probability stakes. He has written about rock stars and football players and things from outer space. He has written spy stories in which the enigma of what is going on looks like the validation of persecution mania, but he has always done so in an elegant streamlined prose, admitting of poetry but not allowing it to sprawl and displace the economy of narrative scale.

Underworld, of course, not only looked like a masterpiece, it looked like the kind of

masterpiece someone creates when they have the opportunity to create a cathedral. This huge epical story of baseballs and trash disposal and the portrait of the artist in the vicinity of inadvertent murder looks today much as it did at the end of 1997—like the unambiguous American masterpiece of its era. It had the majestic momentum of a surging original story even when its ambit was Dos Passos-like rather than Joycean: even when the parts did not connect with each other or flow they seemed to because of the inevitability and musicality of De Lillo's narrative. It would be hard to think of another novel in decades where the impulse towards strenuous innovation is matched so effortlessly and so bewitchingly with such a wave of narrative suaveness; its enchantments inhere in the precise pace of its telling.

Underworld is a masterpiece, the shape and music of which nobody could have predicted, which is also a book that became a bestseller because it's a kind of epic of American, and hence of contemporary, life. Now, after a gap of three years, we have new fiction by De Lillo and it could not be more different.

THE BODY ARTIST is a novella of a mere 120 pages. It is low on epic thrust. It has a tiny cast of characters, only three who matter, only one with whom we are inward, and it is written in a style which is 'thin' by De Lillo's standards—sometimes indeed to the point of looking like the Raymond Carver-style realism—gritty and particularised—he is sometimes pitted against.

The Body Artist is a novella that a whole host of De Lillo readers are going to set themselves to hate. It is also a glowing and beautiful work of art, vibrant, disturbing and concentrated to the point of obsessiveness—yet it also has a terrific vivacity and variety. De Lillo has several moves, sometimes tonal and sometimes in terms of the plot, which are surprising and wonderful.

It's the story of a woman (the body artist of the title) whom we initially meet simply as the female voice in a pas de deux of breakfast chatter. He says this, she says that. It is realistic and wry and nudged with poignancy, but written almost to the grid of dirty realist minimalism, except for the faintly weird intimations of how much she can live inside the narratives of a newspaper and of how he cottons on to the unheard melody of some noise coming from the house.

Then, suddenly, he is dead, by his own hand. And the narrative, previously blurred with the brush of the everyday, is suddenly hard, staccato and alienating. Journalistic summary, lacquered and lamenting, tells us the score. And then we are back to her as she sleepwalks through a grief complicated by the rescored memory of their last minutes together. She resists the overtures of her girlfriend and of her husband's first wife who says the suicide was fated. After some time she discovers, like an apparition, that the 'noise' her husband heard was a man—or was it?—in his underwear, who had somehow been living in their sprawling mansion somewhere, not New York, by the sea.

The guts of *The Body Artist* is the woman's encounter with this apparitional figure who appears to be suffering from aphasic dementia but who has the uncanny ability of speaking in the voices not only of the dead husband but of the woman herself. There are moments indeed when the reader wonders if the strange man (whom she nicknames Mr Tuttle) is not simply the emanation of the woman's own grief-stricken mania. In fact this strange *deus ex machina* is a kind of walking symbol (of what we are not meant to know) which allows the woman to fixate on the nightmares of being and of time—the 'frightful, sheer, no-man fathomed' descent that comes from the sinister knife-edge suggestion of some of the most insinuating prose De Lillo has ever written.

At one level of literal and dramatic action *The Body Artist* is preoccupied with the kind of mute extremities of deprived physical and cognitive existence that served Samuel Beckett as metaphors and more than metaphors in his *Trilogy*, particularly *The Unnameable*. Mr Tuttle doesn't understand the continuum of time and therefore has no anticipatory understanding of a rhythm that can render its catastrophes tolerable. This is an abiding fascination to the woman who is experiencing being-in-language with a new and overpowering fragility because of her husband's death. At another level the Strange Man is a kind of tabula rasa with no memory function other than the recording one, and he therefore functions a little as the Artist does according to most post-romantic and modern notions of how the Author is out of the picture. But it's difficult to convey the level of urgency that De Lillo elicits from the sustained encounter between his Mimic Man and his Body Artist. It has a panting, breakneck imaginative reality which is a step away from being harebrained, but which works—triumphantly.

At the very point when the reader fears De Lillo will fall into some pit of pretension, virtuosic display or semi-private artiness, the narrative reconfigures into a new shape with sudden, urbane insertions and with the reassurance of a great world just round the next turn in the twisted staircase. *The Body Artist* is a very fine story, eerie in its fascination with the unearthly and the damaged, but in no way constricted by any literalism. It is full of metaphorical suggestiveness but in the end it is a poignant, not a pessimistic portrait of a woman who looks into an abyss and sees her own face (or is it the abyss's?) smiling back at her. It is, as writing, a magnificent improvisation on piano by a great composer who is also a great musician. It is not *Underworld*, nor was it meant to be, but it displays the same genius. In form and in formal experimentation it is an uncompromising exercise by a great technical master. If there's a classic story that shadows *The Body Artist* it's probably Melville's 'Bartleby the Scrivener', that story of how the pathos of an irresistible other transforms the sense of self.

JOHN BANVILLE is one of those writers who gives the Irish claim to a collective greatness its lustre and continuance. He is a novelist who can make the sentence sing and he is also a master of the articulation of plot so that his novels, which are shadowed with every variety of moral complexity and psychological slithering, are nevertheless engrossingly dramatic and eventful.

His last novel, *The Untouchable*, in which he dramatised something like the dark byways of the spying career of the Queen's art historian Anthony Blunt (while equipping him with a background derived

from that of the poet Louis Macniece) had the shimmer, dapple and sheer readability of a thriller. It also retained the miraculous gravity and reality of real life as we sometimes get it in the work of Banville's enemy Graham Greene (who made a derisory appearance in it). *The Eclipse* is about as opposite to *The Untouchable* as two works of fiction by a fine novelist at the height of his powers can be. It is a fiction without any elaborately animated hook, without anything but the ghostly simulacrum of thrusting incident or cutting action. What it does share with its predecessor, however, is an all but absolute mastery of a narrative voice. Banville is a past master at the art of ventriloquising narrative, of the narration of an action as if it were the merest outgrowth of the voice speaking, a Joycean gradation of syllable and signature whereby character becomes voice, and voice the medium through which action is known, or obscured, or made multiple. So this, like *The Untouchable*, is a novel which works a bit like a Browning soliloquy and where voice is character and character is the only destiny worth naming. Or so it seems.

Eclipse begins in what looks like the moodiest prolongation of self-portraiture, almost plotlessly, but it becomes, bit by bit, a story full of pity and terror. It's the story of an Irish actor, in late middle age, 'famous' but not a household word, who has given up the stage and who returns to the dark, nearly theatrical confines of the grand family home with a head full of spectres. There are the visitations that come to him like a whisper of nameless catastrophe and there are the specific hopes and memories and fears of horror that cling to his image of his disturbed daughter, now grown up, due to visit soon. In the meantime he is distracted by the apparition of a family retainer effectively squatting in the house he owns. There is also his wife, all silvered coolness and shrewish heat, who arrives like a nemesis to give him the rounds of the kitchen.

And then—stabbingly—like the Aristotelian realisation of the thing this nearly lyrical, anti-novel has seemed to intimate, the dreadful does strike: with all its claws, hooded, by nightfall, at the cliff's edge. *Eclipse* is one of those novels in which not much happens and then it does. A book which seems to be all the spinning of the tapestry of a state of mind, though in the end the Great Battle is fought or endured and we are all left darkling.

None of which should make Banville's quite prodigious performance look self-regarding, or aimless, or arty. Long before we have much of a clue about what's going on, Banville convinces us of the authenticity of his method. It involves, as if by some trick of the eye or stealth of magic, the maintenance of an almost funereally melancholy tone which is nevertheless comically vivacious. Through the actor–father's narrative there is the warmth of the charm that he has cast off like a cloak. It is there as the characteristic locution of a voice that would rather not be talking but cannot stop itself. The logic is like the black formal dress of Hamlet, soliloquising and saturnine but residually comic within the tableau of a grief that is held like cut glass.

What it issues into is terrible beyond belief though its expression is tempered by the purgatorial haze of calm, the serenity of manner which is its medium. This is a novel about love: the love of daughters real and surrogate, the love of the wife as the rock-hard companion, the love that is based on the bonds of common life when the vanity of every other striving has withered. Or that at least is the hope, expressed with great bareness and eloquence. *Eclipse* is a grand book which enunciates the practical impossibility of ceasing to care. It is Banville's critique of the stoical charade which his histrionic narrator attempts to sustain as an accommodating desolation. It issues into something starker and the fiction which contains this makes a fairer fist of staring into the heart of the fire that comes out of the sun than we can easily believe possible in the contemporary novel. Simply as an act of writing, John Banville's *Eclipse* contains sentences, every so often, which are as wiry and as tightrope-walking as any in Joyce (who would not have been ashamed of them).

Eclipse is disturbing, with ghosts that trip through the mind like a suggestion of derangement, but it issues into a simplicity as absolute and as pure as the art of—well, Sophocles. This almost mousey, almost doodling book is the work of a high and mighty master of literary art. It is black and wonderful, full of the pity and wonder of the human face and the endless capacity of the human heart to break and break and break again. I should add that it is in no way a depressing book. It is cleansing, beautiful and, without doubt, the outstanding novel of the past year. ■

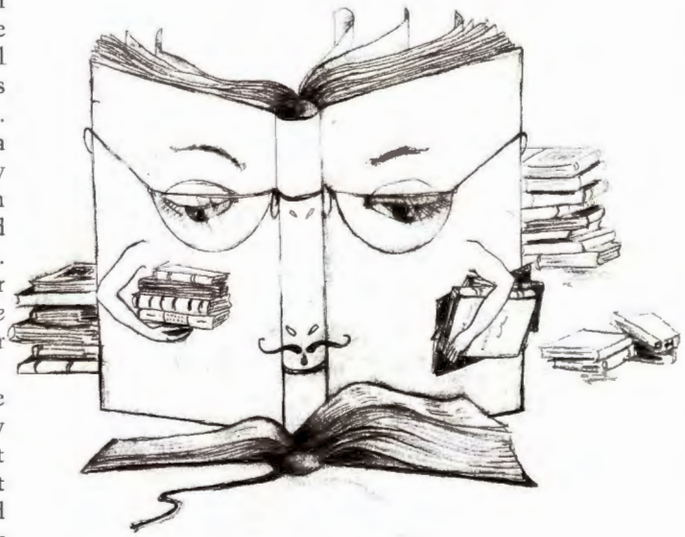
Peter Craven is the editor of *The Australian Quarterly Essay*.

PAUL TANKARD

Reading into it

Into the Looking-Glass Wood, Alberto Manguel, Bloomsbury, London, 2000.
ISBN 0 7475 4593 6, RRP $20.65

A GATHERING OF the occasional essays of a professional writer is sure to be an agreeable blend of practical bread-and-butter writing, and his abiding intellectual preoccupations. Alberto Manguel is best known to a general readership for his timely *A History of Reading* (1996), which was a bestseller and took him around the world on the arts-media circuit. This new book, which has the cover subtitle *Essays on Words and the World*, is an overflow from the earlier work.



The *History of Reading* was one of those books that probably a few hundred people around the planet were planning to write at the time. It represents what have been called *sunset values*—things that we only reflect on when we sense they're about to disappear. In his *History*, Manguel gathered a fabulous range of stories about the sites and experiences of reading, but didn't reflect much on the issues. He reflects more in this book of occasional pieces, most of the occasions having been prompted by the fame of the earlier book and the need to respond to the sorts of anxieties about reading expressed in books like Sven Birkerts' *The Gutenberg Elegies*, which Manguel dismissed summarily in 1996.

Reading extends the bounds of one's life, but as fewer people find their way into the space of reading, autobiography has proven one of the best ways of explaining what reading does. In a number of these essays, Manguel tells us of his own growth as a reader. As a young man growing up in Buenos Aires, he met people who talked about books and politics. He met people who knew writers, and then he met the writers. He had the good fortune as a young man to become a friend of Jorge Luis Borges, a maker of a great number of the most powerful modern and postmodern myths. Thereafter, books and talk about books became a vital ingredient in his life. But we do not get the impression that Manguel's is a purely literary life. Books teach us some things, not everything. In particular, reading makes us reflect, in ways that few other occupations do. As Manguel observes, 'The poor mythology of our time seems afraid to go beneath the surface. We distrust profundity, we make fun of dilatory reflection.' Reading takes us beneath surfaces.

He contrasts this with the one-dimensional character of pornography, in a review of Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho*. Although I agree with the assessment of the book as pornographic, I do not quite agree that it is pornographic *because* it is unliterary. On the basis of Manguel's description, you might describe it as *unsuccessfully* literary. Does most pornography have the ironic, philosophical, chic and learned pretensions of this book? I doubt it. And I certainly don't see why a work cannot be both a work of art and pornographic. Easton Ellis, and other artists like photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, utilise this very possibility *and* the anxiety it generates.

NOW TAKE A writer who could hardly be more different. Manguel's extended reflection on Borges is an account of Borges' rather quiet and confused love-life. Borges comes across as someone for whom real-life experience was a bit of a mystery, and who kept it always at arm's length. He was shy, a librarian, lived with his mother into her old age, and wrote fantasies that seem to be parables. For Manguel, and obviously for many others, Borges' stories are both profound and elusive.

Still, reading other sorts of books might suggest that not everything profound is either elusive or unfathomable. I've recently been reading the essays of Samuel Johnson, in which matters of great and everyday importance are expressed with immense clarity and humour. Reading for mystery is fine, but we can also read for meaning. Manguel has constant resort to an ancient but increasingly common strategy in his defence of reading—insisting that the things of which the world is composed are otherwise meaningless. But surely one can affirm the importance of words and literary art without this assertion.

Throughout the book, but especially in the final essay, 'St Augustine's Computer', he considers the future of books. Just because any number of media technologies (radio, film, television) have been wrongly suspected of spelling the end of books doesn't mean that one day something else won't actually do so. And it's not so much the technology of 'the book' that we ought to be worried about, as the social practice of *reading*, or (to be even more exact) particular kinds of reading. I don't think we need be in any doubt about the future of browsing—the reading equivalent of internet- or channel-'surfing.' But the hour-by-hour consecutive immersion in a text, especially poetry or non-fiction, seems to me to be becoming a difficult and unattractive activity for many people who might in the past have been effective readers. I certainly agree with Manguel that certain genres of

book are more threatened by new media than others. But I worry too that immersion in new media will also disincline us or render us unable to read those others.

In the enthusiasm to ensure that avid reading is not regarded by powerful forces (be they parents, governments, advertisers, or information technologists) as a waste of time, we have promoted, quite properly, the notion of 'active readers'. Modern theorists see reading as a creative act, the assertion being that a text does not exist without readers, and is in some real way a different text to each of its readers. (I hope no-one still sees this as a startling insight.)

These assertions have their uses, but they are partial truths. We ought not to forget that it is also true that, in a traditional context, reading is a rather passive activity, that the writer imparts and the reader receives. Manguel tells us that 'a book becomes a different book every time we read it' (p10), and rounds out the book with the same thought: 'every text is, in a very essential sense, "interactive", changing according to a particular reader at a particular hour and in a particular place.' Well, yes. But it also remains the same book, in the 'very essential' and perhaps more verifiable sense that the same marks are on the pages, whenever, wherever and by whomever it is opened. And this is, I think, just as true and profound an observation about the nature of reading.

As Sven Birkerts argues, the authority of the writer is part of the point (and the pleasure) of reading. I have been reading Alberto Manguel to find out what he thinks. This does not mean (as the passive model might be caricatured) that I read in order to have my otherwise empty mind filled up with second-hand thoughts. I read in order to understand. Reading makes me think, and want to talk (and write). But the peek into the mind and processes of someone else, perceiving their otherness, must come first. Wasn't it the celebrity model, Elle Macpherson, who said that she didn't read books because she didn't want to read anything she hadn't written? (The increasing number of undergraduates studying Creative Writing at the expense of Literature presumably agree.) I see the growing disinclination towards this sort of inquisitive reading, and the attempt to remake reading solely on the active-reader model, as instances of a dangerous kind of solipsism. Or perhaps reading only suits people who are sure of their identity, and these days, few of us are.

Reading, books and particular writers are one of the main themes of the book; the other is sex. (Manguel has edited anthologies of erotic and homoerotic fiction.) The trope that links the two themes is an analogy between sex and reading, on the basis of their both being pleasurable. It is an analogy calculated to make reading seem appealing to people who have never got the hang of it, or to make readers feel as if they are doing something groovy and subversive. But really, who needs it? The cartoon character Daria's non-intellectual sister Quinn once observed, 'the only thing more boring than reading is watching someone else read'. The pleasure of reading must remain a closed book to non-readers. However artfully it might be elaborated, the reading/sex analogy doesn't make much sense. Eating porridge is also pleasurable, but it's not like either reading or sex.

The essay called 'The Gates of Pleasure' (written to introduce an anthology of 'erotic short fiction') could have been written as a parodic illustration of the moralistic cliché that the legitimisation of any unconventional sexuality is the 'thin end of the wedge'. Manguel makes a very strong case. People can, apparently, have erotic feelings about (and relationships with) just about anything: bears, vegetables, children, monkeys; and what's wrong with that, he asks, poker-faced. It seems odd to me that he would not realise how perverse this would sound to most people.

'The erotic act is a solitary act,' Manguel asserts (like reading, is the suggestion). Well, some erotic acts are solitary, but to see eros as in essence solitary seems to me to indicate self-obsession, and of a very narrow kind. Yet Manguel, in setting up the body as its own or the sole authority, does not suppose his viewpoint controversial. I cannot feel he is in good faith. The body's desires are undifferentiated, its pleasures indiscriminate, he suggests. It's as if he fears that the exercise of any sort of discrimination threatens to open the floodgates of prejudice, censorship, repression, persecution.

There *is* pre-judice, certainly, but there is also 'judice'—judgment; and to exercise judgment and (fair and intelligent) discrimination is, I suggest, a more uniquely defining human trait than the indiscriminate search for bodily pleasure.

But Manguel is not all that interested in humanity. He doubts the existence of other people, and our ability to have meaningful relationships with them; he is doubtful about the ability of language to convey anything apart from pleasurable illusions of meaning. Most of us have not yet risen to this stage of enlightenment, and will continue, I hope for some time yet, to strive for meaning and relationship through eros, reading, cataloguing, politics, worship, and myriad other human activities.

In two essays on museums and libraries, Manguel frequently rejects as totalising or patriarchal the impulse to give labels to collections. In assembling their own collections, essayists often feel the need to impose a theme on their disparate materials. It is odd, given his comments, that Manguel should also do so—making over-use of the *Alice in Wonderland* figures and parables.

His essays are all made of the same materials: quotes from the same texts, the same rhetorical strategies, the same imposed doubts and ambiguities. The same old tired postmodern orthodoxies. He doesn't argue any of these things; they are just there. All identities are 'constructed'; all reading is 'subversive'; there is no meaning, only interpretation; traditional religion banned eros; desire is the only knowable, unlimited, irresistible good. 'We know', he writes, 'that the world has no meaningful beginning or understandable end, no discernible purpose, no method in its madness.' Well, now. This B.S. (Big Statement) is not argued, merely asserted as a by-the-way in an essay on order in museums. The silly thing is that the human impulse to order and catalogue could as easily be (as Manguel takes it) a response to cosmic disorder, as a reflection of cosmic order. These mantras don't shock me anymore, they merely annoy. And never before have they looked so frankly self-serving.

I think that Manguel has been stretched beyond his skills by the 'history of reading' idea. It's required him continually to have big things to say. When he gets away from the meditative thematic pieces, and writes about favourite writers—Borges, Chesterton, Cynthia Ozick, Vargas Llosa, Richard Outram—he gives insightful and stimulating readings.

I hope that there's no need to say that *Into the Looking-Glass Wood* is a good read. Despite reading for meaning, I don't insist that all writers agree with me. Manguel illustrates a number of states of mind worth coming to grips with. But I don't find him persuasive. ■

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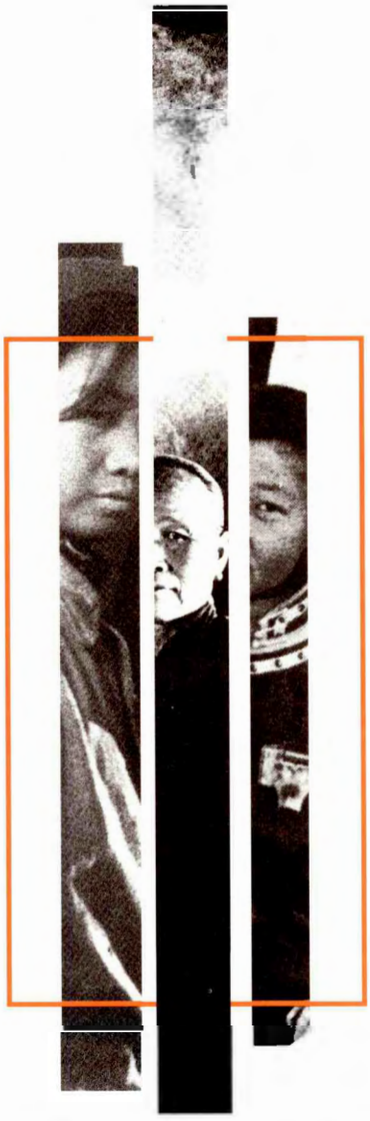
Bred in the bone

The Bonesetter's Daughter, Amy Tan, HarperCollins, 2001.
ISBN 0 0022 5486 7, RRP $39.95



THOSE WHO HAVE read Amy Tan's first novel, *The Joy Luck Club*, will be familiar with her exploration of the guilt-ridden relationship between mothers and daughters; in particular, Chinese-born women and their American-born daughters.

In her new novel, *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, Tan has her central character, Ruth Young, anticipating the needs of her partner, stepchildren, clients and mother to such an extent that she is left with no sense of self, of what she wants or how to say it. Every year she retreats into a week of 'not speaking'—which only makes her voicelessness more apparent.

Forty-six-year-old Ruth is an editor and 'ghost-writer' of self-help books, a task for which she seems to have been destined. As a child, she acted as an interpreter of the English-speaking world for her mother, LuLing. LuLing also called on Ruth to act as a 'medium', providing her with a chopstick and a tray of sand in which to transcribe the ghostly messages of LuLing's own mother, Precious Auntie. These experiences inducted Ruth into a lifetime of anticipating others' needs.

The language barrier separating the mother, whose first language is Mandarin, and the daughter, who speaks English, is only the most obvious manifestation of their inability, or unwillingness, to understand one another.

Ruth's adult relationship with her elderly mother is a claustrophobic mixture of frustration, love and duty. LuLing never lets her off: 'Too busy for mother ... Never too busy go see movie, go away, go see friend.' LuLing has her own history of guilt: she believes she is cursed, haunted by her own mother for a great wrong she did her.

When the elderly LuLing's increasingly erratic behaviour is diagnosed as Alzheimer's, it acts as a catalyst for Ruth: she delves into her mother's history and unearths pages her mother had given her years earlier—'Just some old things about my family', Ruth then finds a translator to decipher her mother's precise and beautiful Chinese calligraphy.

The Bonesetter's Daughter spans three generations, moving between China, Hong Kong and America. The grandmother, Precious Auntie, was the daughter of a famous Chinese bonesetter, and contrary to what is customary for women, she learned the art of healing from him—using 'dragon bones'. When archaeologists discover that the bones are in fact human, the remains of 'Peking Man', their power to heal is deepened, not diminished. The discoveries made about the origins of the 'dragon bones' mirror the layers of history and memory that LuLing and Ruth mine in their efforts to reconcile the past. The story is a process of discovery and laying to rest.

It is also a story about writing, as a means of recording, and translating, events. LuLing's family in China are renowned makers of ink, 'dark, beautiful and smooth flowing'. When we write, our words infuse events with our own meaning. Precious Auntie advises LuLing that, when writing, one should 'think about your intentions ... what is in your heart, what you want to put in others.' Words that cannot be spoken can, and must, be passed on through writing—most of the significant communications between characters in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* are imparted this way. At the end Ruth begins to understand that the role of writer and translator are interchangeable, that one must become a 'free-flowing vessel', the medium through which the story itself acquires meaning.

BUT MEANING and mediums aside, mothers do dreadful things to their daughters in this novel. We are witness to terrible secrets, kept too long, until it is too late. Anxiety about the past looms over the present, guilt and sorrow are cyclic and feed off one another. But then Tan makes a leap: LuLing's Alzheimer's allows her to recreate the past, and change events so that it is *not* too late. And although it's problematic to speculate about why authors write what they do, it's hard not to wonder what Tan is trying to tell herself.

The recent death of Tan's mother, who suffered from dementia, permeates the novel. The novel's detail—an old lady wandering around the street in her nightie, believing she has won ten million dollars from a junk-mail coupon, and keeping decaying vegetables in a cupboard for six months—has the rawness of personal experience.

In *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, Amy Tan has used familiar themes to delve into darker realms than she has previously explored. The novel's end is happy, and while that is structurally satisfying, drawing together the novel's various strands, it also has something of the quality of a fairytale, told to comfort a frightened child. ■

Kate Hird is a freelance writer.

Light on its feet

The Flight of Les Darcy, music by Raffaele Marcellino, libretto by Robert Jarman, production by Music Theatre Sydney.

EVERY INTELLECTUAL venture is a moral activity. The arts and science have that in common: they are concerned to understand the world in which we live—physical, biological, spiritual—and our relationship with it and with one another. That is why artists and scientists alike are so passionate about what they do. People of a cooler Anglo-Saxon temperament—people who, perhaps, can simultaneously believe in language, truth and logic—may see such a philosophy as intemperate or implausible. This dichotomy pervades Australian society: it has done so from our European beginning. The schism is the essence of Manning Clark's great history; a part of it is the 'sectarian strand', to use Michael Hogan's phrase.

Ironically, those Australian puritans who rarely see the arts as the quiddity of the human soul—and who rarely, therefore, perceive their moral dimension—are the ones who most often preach about 'morals', especially moral weakness or decline. It is our national example of the biblical parable of motes and beams in our eyes.

All of this may seem a paradoxical way to think about a new opera, especially one about a boxer, but *The Flight of Les Darcy* (a short new work by librettist Robert Jarman and composer Raffaele Marcellino) is, at its heart, concerned with precisely those aspects of Australia. It is one of those rarities, an opera of ideas and perceptions. But an opera about a boxer? Or, indeed, about any sportsman? Why not, in Australia, renowned more for sporting heroes than intellectual pursuits? In *The Making of Australia's Sporting Traditions*, Michael McKernan wrote, 'Sport not only shaped national development by promoting a sense of national identity; sport was shaped itself by the development of the nation.' It appears in our literature and our art: but in our opera? That is only one dimension which makes Marcellino's new piece so intriguing.

The *Australian Dictionary of Biography* characterises Darcy (1895–1917) as a 'boxer and folk hero' who epitomised Irish Catholicism and its repressed minority status in early 20th-century Australia. 'He neither smoked nor drank and spent most of his income on his family; he attended Mass most mornings, one of his closest friends being the local priest.' These pieties are profoundly reflected in the opera and are touchingly counterpointed against the cold and operational puritan Australian power structure.

Like most of our operatic repertoire, *Les Darcy* has to survive on limited resources; its four singers have to be chameleons, its three instrumentalists hardly less so. Perhaps too many ideas have been compressed into its 80-odd minutes, but the singers' body microphones minimised comprehension problems for the audience in both its recent Music Theatre Sydney premiere season and the performances at the 10 Days on the Island Festival in Hobart (under the musical direction of Warwick Stengards). That was important because Jarman has produced an allusive libretto with an abundance of imagery. Whiteness is the pervasive motif: references abound to Darcy's alabaster skin, the whiteness of paperbarks and forests of white soldiers' crosses. The white stars (especially the Southern Cross) are important, as are the white feathers which complacent wowsers sent to 'cowards and slackers'; an image of the white pages of unwritten biographies is striking, too. One of the characters (securely sung by tenor Tyrone Landau) is Les' Guardian Angel, dressed entirely in white, with large white feathers as wings.

Another important character is the hectoring Recruiting Officer (the affirmative baritone Phillip Joughin) who could be Billy Hughes as he declaims such vacuous rhetoric as, 'Revenge the wounded; replenish the dead' and 'The war cannot be won on points; it must be a knockout blow' and—most chillingly—'Must England give all her men? Must our Mother fight alone?' In fact, the opera interweaves three conflicting and abrading maternal images—'Mother' England (perfidious or supportive, according to your perspective or prejudice), Les' loyally suffering mother, and the Virgin Mary—to give an extra hardness to the kernel concerns of the piece. The two women (here soprano Jane Parkin and mezzo Marit Schl) have to double as boxers, Les' mother, his fiancée, spivs, a tent-show boss: their versatility was a characteristic of the whole venture (and this is, itself, an admirable aspect of the give-it-a-go Australian persona).

Marcellino's score is constantly inventive, with a witty and effective choice of musical participants. Darcy, apparently, played the violin, and one of his opponents is said to have been a cellist, so including those two instruments was mandatory (they even had a little encounter on the boxing-ring stage!). So was a percussion array, not only because modern music is unimaginable without percussion, but also to echo the bells of the boxing ring and the thwack of military drums. The composer uses an abundance of *ostinati* (which propel and intensify the action), florid episodes for violin (a match for the hyperbole of the era, I assume) and much material that sounds like Celtic dance music. The vocal writing operates on several levels—for characterisation, plot development and philosophical underpinning. There are softly chanted episodes from the Rosary, for instance, and background ensemble singing of material worked from hymns, notably *'Adoro te devote'* in an affecting scene where Les' mother has a beautiful solo beginning, 'Wear me like a bruise upon your heart.'

At moments when he wants the effect to be particularly blunt, Marcellino contrasts this pleomorphic melody with plain speech, especially when the Boxing Promoter baldly declares that Les—because of his lack of patriotism—would never again fight in Sydney, or callously announces his death in Memphis. (The Boxing Promoter's character seems to be an amalgam of H.D. McIntosh and 'Snowy' Baker, the 'Mr Bigs' of Sydney boxing, and Darcy's shonky 'manager' E.T. O'Sullivan.) Speech is also employed in one late scene for a highly poetic purpose—the only time that we hear from Les himself.

Taking their cue from the story that Darcy had dancing lessons to enhance his boxing, Marcellino and Jarman have imaginatively made this character a silent dancer (Michael O'Donoghue): there is a lot of elegant and stylised pugilism, therefore, which is dramatically engaging. The effect is, paradoxically, heightened in the late scene in America when, speaking at last, he reads a few of his postcards to friends—we suddenly have a glimpse of a poetic Darcy, another aspect no doubt of the persecuted Australian Celtic dreamer who (authentically, I understand) wrote, 'No doubt about these New York sky-scrapers. A couple of times a year they have to let them down. The moon gets caught in them.'

In the very next (and last) scene, *The Epilogue*, the Angel gives Les another, posthumous voice: 'From the edge of the grave, Les says to me, "I burn; I blaze. I am sleepless nights; I am dancer; I am fighter in dreams".' From that point the voices fall silent; here is no grand dramatic nor instrumental peroration—the temptation to mimic what the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* called 'immense funeral processions in San Francisco and Sydney' is resisted. There is simply a florid drum cadenza, an artistic riposte to the brutish recruiter's drumbeats we had heard earlier.

Those drumbeats have echoed down the Australian generations, but not every drum has persistent resonance for our tribe. The artistic success of *Les Darcy* (in my estimation, at least) raises the question of what are enduringly apt themes for our operatic composers. One answer might be that anything is relevant, so long as it is well handled. I wonder, though, whether by now we have outgrown—or lost contact with—19th-century bush plots, such as those that Dorothy Porter and Jonathan Mills devised for their short opera, *The Ghost Wife*, and whether the recherché last days in London of Sigmund Freud are of any importance to us? Certainly not, I would argue, as Margaret Morgan and Andrew Ford treated them in *Night and Dreams*. Melbourne and Adelaide Festival audiences saw both of those works (respectively) in 2000 and will have come to their own conclusions; Sydney saw them only at this year's Festival.

Porter's libretto—of a badly-treated, lonely wife who is ravished and murdered by a passing swagman, and the transformation of her brutish husband when he discovers the tragedy—was curiously uninvolving for me. The issue is, as I have implied, that we are no longer connected to that past culture—at least city aesthetes are not. Mills' instrumental music is imaginative, notably in the way he integrates the noisy destruction of the woman's slab hut into the musical texture, but he seems to lack the capacity to devise vocal lines which build and develop his drama.

Ford's opera, a rather tepid mix of Schubertian pastiche with scraps of other 'atmosphere' material and old Freudian odds and ends, seemed to have scant substance; given the state of Gerald English's voice as I heard it, that was probably just as well—serious technical demands would have been problematical. For such writing and performance, solipsistic is perhaps the word. Of course, all art must involve themes and processes which are important to the creators but it must go significantly beyond that limit and reach an audience—to provoke thought, to thrill, to stimulate emotions. That was the lacuna with Mills and Ford's work, the aspect where Marcellino succeeded.

The essential difference, then, is that I would be happy to experience *The Flight of Les Darcy* for a second time. I would be the better for it and would understand my own culture more deeply as a result. ■

John Carmody is concert and opera critic for the Sydney *Sun-Herald* and is in the Faculty of Medicine, University of NSW.

March 2001 Book Offer Winners

The Good Life

J. Ballhausen, Narromine, NSW; J. Briggs, Blackheath, NSW; M. Campion, Maitland, NSW; J. Carr, Elderslie, NSW; J.W. Dare, Horsham, VIC; D.J. Gerreyn, Eastwood, NSW; C. Keegel, Mulgrave, VIC; S. McGushin, Queenstown, TAS; M.L. Moorhead, Kensington, NSW; C. Murphy, Box Hill, VIC; T. Potts, Terrigal, NSW; F. Rogan, East Doncaster, VIC; Y.M. Shaddock, Burnie, TAS; B. Slack SJ, North Sydney, NSW; B. Thompson, Darwin, NT

The Front of the Family

M. Anderson, Silverwater, NSW; M. Ashby, Richmond, VIC; C. Bell, Jamison Centre, ACT; K. Branderburg, South Fremantle, WA; M. Davies, Balwyn, VIC; B. Haneman, Double Bay, NSW; L. Kay, Sandy Bay, TAS; J. Liddle, Collinswood, SA; J. McKinley, Chisholm, ACT; C. Murphy, Box Hill, VIC; U. O'Brien, Narrabeen, NSW; M.L. O'Connor, Canterbury, VIC; H. Peach, Mosman, NSW; C.M. Royal, Mt Eliza, VIC; E.M. Smart, Wheelers Hill, VIC

High water mark

10 Days on the Island (30 March to 8 April) was the island state of Tasmania's first international arts festival and on the strength of my limited experience of it, over the space of just three days, I hope it is not its last.

It's a very different kind of festival from its older and more established mainland cousins in several ways. It is not restricted to its capital city: events took place in more than 16 towns and villages all over Tasmania as well as in Hobart and Launceston, some being site-specific, others touring. It takes the whole notion of isolation and island culture as one of its major themes. Performing arts events from Iceland, Japan, Madagascar, various Pacific Islands, Singapore and the Shetlands were staged alongside works by Tasmanians and some from the mainland. And finally, where most of the mainland festivals throw most of their energy and resources into large-scale, conspicuously expensive blockbusters, this first *Ten Days* is notable for its small-scale and distinctly 'low-tech' pieces.

What all this demonstrates is the bare bones 'magic of the theatre'—based on the fusion of superb material, outstanding performance and the imagination of the audience. And what audiences! Practically every show was packed out. Tasmanians (and a good few tourists, as well) have embraced this festival in a very big way indeed.

What its imaginative programming, style and selection of material also reveal is the extraordinarily diverse taste of its artistic director, Robyn Archer. Anyone who saw the National Festivals of Australian Theatre that Archer curated in Canberra in the mid-1990s knew what to expect—oddly matched pieces fruitfully juxtaposed. What we got here was what we expected—but more.

Therese Collie's *Goin' to the Island* (premièred by Kooemba Jdarra Indigenous Performing Arts in Brisbane in 1999) is a play with songs rather than a 'musical'. At its centre is a young ratbag Murri boy called TJ who has left his family home on Minjerribah (*aka* Stradbroke Island; there's the island connection!) and got into trouble of various kinds on the mainland. However, he is lured back home as much for his 21st as for the possibility of reconciliation with his community. Some deft flashbacks take TJ to his happier childhood days on 'Mother Island', but they also reveal some of the causes of his alienation, especially from his mother.

Collie's script is over-written at times, but the songs (blues to C&W and reggae) are strong and there's no false happy ending. Nadine McDonald's production features a terrific set (complete with Straddie ferry) and excellent performances, especially from the versatile Roxanne McDonald (as Grandmother and juvenile sister), Kirk Page (as TJ) and Laurence Clifford (as Uncle Muddy and a cousin). Rochelle Watson has a marvellous voice and captures much of the poignancy of the hapless mother.

Also in Launceston was Théâtre Talipot, from the Indian Ocean island of Réunion, with a beautiful piece of physical theatre, *The Water Carriers*. Four men of different shapes, sizes and ethnicity enact a tale of drought in the once fertile Monkey Valley, using some spoken word (in English), live music and song, but mostly highly charged movement. *The Water Carriers* is as simple as theatre gets in form, but the series of narratives—of a river dammed for progress, a wedding that can't proceed without water to cook the rice, a lake that could be a mirage that swallows up four brothers before a fifth has the sense to appease a presiding bird figure—is as complex as any orthodox spoken-word drama could be.

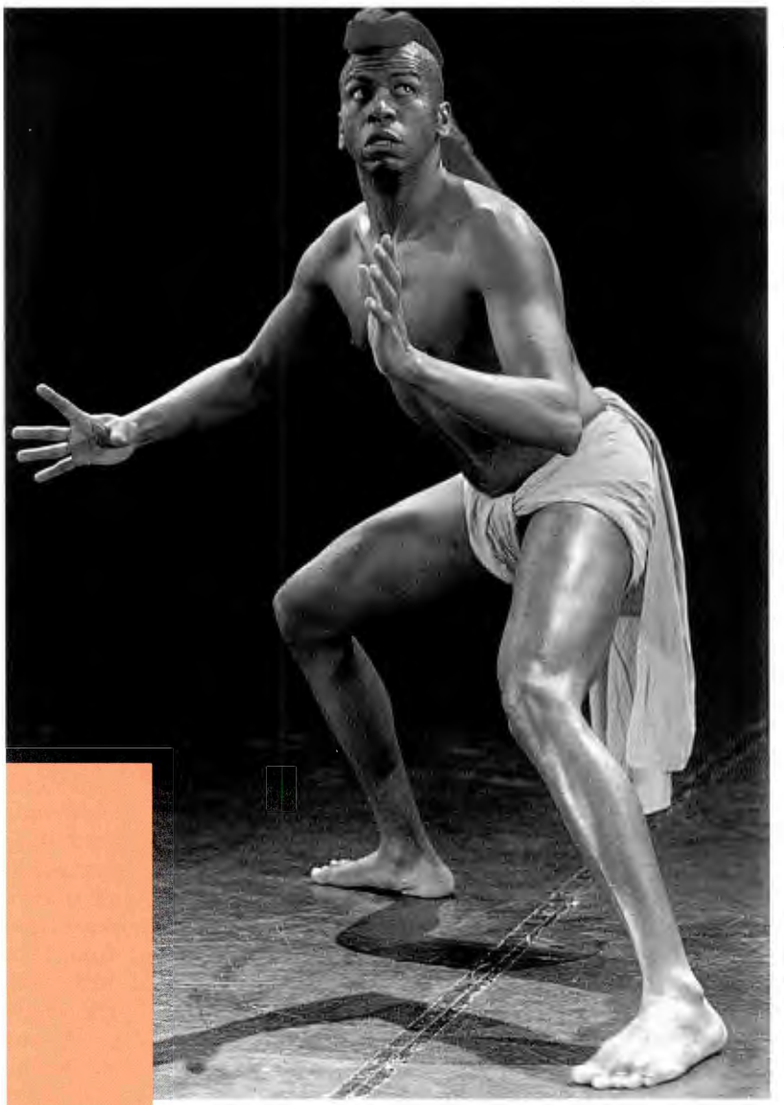
Meanwhile, in Hobart, two Launceston-based dancing clowns, Jonathan Rees-Osborne and David O'Neile, turned on a superb piece of what was billed as 'dance theatre comedy', ironically entitled *Lovely Lovely Days*, as a late show in the Backspace of the venerable Theatre Royal. The two po-faced, besuited performers enact an escape from an Iron Curtain country by hot-air balloon, which deposits them in a Peter Stuyvesant-and-Coca Cola dominated West. The physical image of their mimed drop from the heavens—accompanied by a brilliantly off-key and half-tempo recording of 'Thus Spake Zarathustra'—is as funny as anything I've seen on an Australian stage in years. Once safely landed in the 'lovely' West, they find life just as bemusing, alienating, regimented and ludicrous as in the East—as their appalling slide-night attests.

Given the pressure that Archer's programming has placed on the capacity of the actor/performer to carry the impact of dramatic narrative, it's not surprising that the *absolute* highlights of this performer-driven festival were two more plays with multiple character transformations but with minimal sets, costume-changes or any other technology bar clever lighting and some sound effects.

One of these was the very young New Zealand playwright Toa Fraser's layered family drama *No 2*, premièred by Compania Segundo in Auckland in 1999.

Its premise is that Nana Maria—matriarch of one of the many Fijian/NZ families living in South Auckland—has an inkling of her imminent death, at 4am one hot sleepless morning, and wakes up the entire family and neighbourhood to prepare a final family banquet in her honour. She wants curries, a pig on a spit, kava, bottled wine—the lot, as seen on Dolmio ads on TV, and the village priest as well! And she wants only the grandchildren in attendance. There are to be no outsiders, aside from daughter Charlene (who will bear the brunt of the cooking) and Fr Francis. Some nine characters are thus galvanised into frenzied day-long activity, including the lively kinds of interaction that have—in Nana's opinion—been so long missing from this 'useless' family.

Apart from the specifics of the Fijian/New Zealand community in which it's set, this sounds like typical dysfunctional family drama from practically anywhere. And so it is, except for the fact that it's a *monodrama* in which a brilliant 21-year-old (Madeleine Sami) portrays the entire cast—male and female, young and old—in a seamless performance that rightly drew standing ovations from all who saw her. Her male characters, especially, are shown with such accuracy and sharpness of observation that I could hardly persuade myself there weren't ring-ins on the stage.



Above left: Goin' to the Island. Above: The Water Carriers

To cap this, Archer also brought to Hobart Yew Tree Theatre's production, from Co. Mayo in the west of Ireland, of John Breen's *Alone It Stand*. The play is a fictional reconstruction of the actual day in 1978 when lowly, amateur, regional rugby club Munster beat the all-conquering NZ All Blacks 12–nil ... and everything else that happened in Limerick on that fateful day.

An astonishingly versatile cast of six (five men and one woman, breathtaking in ensemble) enact the entire story with nothing but their own bodies, a couple of benches, a few lighting changes and one costume change. In the first act, they're all dressed as the All Blacks; in the second, as Munster. Thus we see the whole mighty NZ team, the scrawny locals, two groups of fans in the terraces (plus cut-away scenes showing how they got or failed to get tickets to the game), a funeral wake, a dog, a mother giving birth to twins while her rotten husband is at the game and a group of kids who'd rather have a mighty and memorable bonfire than waste their time at a forgettable football game. There are at least seven separate narratives in the play.

This is for the most part side-splittingly funny stuff. And Breen does not ignore the issues of national pride (and disenfranchisement) with which this momentous event in recent Irish history has been invested through the powerful agency of community memory. It's just that none of this is laboured in a play that deserves to be seen all over this country.

But that is true of all of the events Robyn Archer has brought together in this remarkable festival. If my taxi-driver's verdict (that the event should become a biennial fixture) is right, I'll be back for more. In the meantime, Melbourne can expect a treat from Archer's two International Festivals, beginning in 2002. ■

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FLASH IN THE PAN

Simplistic gifts

The Gift, dir. Sam Raimi. Sam Raimi came to fame directing *Evil Dead*, a gross-out B-grade horror flick that is still popular among adolescent boys having pizza and video marathons in the school hols. *The Gift* was written by Billy Bob Thornton and Tom Epperson. The formula is Small Southern Town whodunnit crossed with X-Files grue, and *Twin Peaks* déjà vu, resulting in the perennial American ghost story problem of heavy literalism, an absence of mystery. *Sixth Sense* and *The Blair Witch Project* were the exceptions that prove the rule: neither of those films had the typical Hollywood genesis.

Cate Blanchett is impressive as Annie Wilson, a widow with three children, who supports herself by doing psychic readings and some amateur psychology. Blanchett has a good ear for the accent and a good face for noble angst. She tackles the leaden script with professionalism, but her only really good bits (and they are really good) come quite early in the film when she is partnered closely by Keanu Reeves, Giovanni Ribisi and Hilary Swank.

Reeves has a great time playing a baddie. He has one of the classic screen presences, like the old movie stars; some sort of vivid energy always emanates from him, and here he uses it to become menacing, nasty, seeming physically huge. Swank plays his battered wife with panache, sporting a very bright purple black eye at the start. But Ribisi, the least-known of the four main actors, takes the acting honours. He has a range that encompasses quiet helpless suffering all the way through to murderous rage and back. He conveys the kind of courage displayed by those with nothing left to lose, and if his end is too neat and far too literally conveyed, he has acquitted his task well: any problems are in the text.

In the end you see, American ghosts are too, too solid flesh to scare you for long. *The Gift* ends up with the feeling that being a psychic is nothing mysterious, nothing like *The Innocents* (now *there* was a movie to keep you awake afterwards!), nothing is left unexplained. Its world has no enigmas, not even theories, because everything's so durn simple, so explainable. My companion and I began laying bets on who did what and what was likely to happen, and we were mostly right because everything was as well-flagged as the course at Augusta. Or perhaps, say, an aerial map of the coast of China.

—Juliette Hughes

Ace stuff

Croupier, dir. Mike Hodges. *Croupier* was made three years ago and has already gone to TV in Europe. Despite this and despite minimal publicity, I had to battle for a seat at the public sneak preview.

The reason is quality. Quality in the direction, screen-writing and performance (particularly Clive Owen as Jack Manfred). Manfred is an aspiring writer who tries to come to terms with writer's block by taking a fill-in job as a croupier and dealer at a less than luxurious London casino.

Owen, who has built a loyal following after performances in several British TV series, gives a stellar performance as the honest croupier who has seen it all—the man who knows the odds on everything, but not their emotional cost.

Croupier is a stylish, intelligent film. A screenplay by Paul Mayersberg (*The Man Who Fell to Earth*), direction by Mike Hodges (director of the 1971 gangster classic *Get Carter*) and the superb performance by Clive Owen, guarantee an absorbing 91 minutes. A streamlined movie with bristling dialogue and, for once, a voice-over which enhances rather than detracts.

We are told little or nothing about Manfred's background save that he has had some experience as a croupier in South Africa and has an interfering father who seems to have fallen on hard times.

Treating his job as a means to an end, Manfred is someone hooked on watching other people lose everything while risking nothing of his own.

Although *Croupier* is taut and suspenseful, for total enjoyment it is necessary to suspend disbelief at times, particularly in the climactic sting towards the end. Based on the information we are given, the story's twist is utterly illogical and doesn't stand up to scrutiny. But in a film as stylish as this, who cares?

—Gordon Lewis

Good dog I

Best in Show, dir. Christopher Guest. Every year the Mayflower Kennel Club Dog Show is the scene of high drama as man and his best friend pursue the Holy Grail of canine excellence. *Best in Show* is a bitingly funny 'mockumentary' which takes us backstage to witness the pain and the passion of big-time dog breeding.

The film has an enviable pedigree. Director Christopher Guest is also responsible for *This is Spinal Tap* and *Waiting for Guffman*. As in those two classics, Guest has assembled a strong cast of comic actors, supplied them with a basic script, and then let them improvise—but in an absolutely deadpan manner. Despite their best efforts, the doggy stars of *Best in Show* must have felt pretty disappointed with their performances—the humans steal every scene.

The lonely Harlan Pepper, a would-be ventriloquist and believer in animal ESP, has his hopes riding on Hubert the bloodhound. Gerry Fleck, a man with two left feet (literally) and a wife, Cookie, who in a past life could have bonked for America, desperately wants his Norwich terrier, Winkie, to win. A yuppie couple, Meg and Hamilton Swan, place their dog, Beatrice, in therapy to gain that extra poise for the big day. Sheri Ann Cabot, a makeup 'artiste' and gold-digger trapped in a loveless marriage worth millions, pours her heart into 'Rhapsody in White', a part bouffant–part poodle groomed to perfection by handler Christy Cummings. And finally Stefan Vanderhoof and Scott Donlan, a gay couple from Manhattan, pray that their adorable little Shih Tzu, Miss Agnes, brings home the winner's sash.

A clear-eyed study in American neuroticism, *Best in Show* is sharply satirical but rarely cruel. Guest obviously loves these characters and their objects of misplaced affection. As St Bernard once said: 'Love me, love my dog'.

—Brett Evans

Good dog II

Amores Perros (Love's a Bitch), dir. Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu. *Amores Perros* is a terrific film, the acting is powerful, the

direction is sure, the writing is layered and the soundtrack is great.

What more is there to say? Plenty. The characters have real density, and there are no good guys. Instead of offering the audience personifications of human frailties—the selfish character, the kind character and so on—most characters demonstrate, and often in graphic ways, monstrousness, kindness, vulnerability, cruelty, altruism and selfishness. It is refreshing to see such time taken over characterisation.

The film opens with a car chase and crash. The accident ties the three stories together, and it is to this accident that the film returns to orient the audience through the tapestry of time and plot. There are three main stories—Octavio, Valeria and Chivo. Octavio, in an attempt to run away with his sister-in-law, finds a temporary cash flow by taking his dog to the local dogfights and betting on him. Valeria is the most beautiful woman in Latin America until the car accident cripples her. And Chivo is a hit-man, undone and in some ways saved by Octavio's dog Cofi.

The dislocation of time and eliding between stories bears some comparison with *Pulp Fiction*. Despite the difficulties of weaving such disparate stories with fractured time, Inarritu never loses his audience.

Amores Perros also provides jaw-clenching suspense, generated from simmering violence. There is plenty of actual violence as well, a lot of which is directed at dogs. Dogs are the second link between the stories. They sit tight as 'man's best friend', offering the characters everything from hope to despair. The dogs offered me something too. I had to confront being more moved by the plight of the dogs than I was by the humans. I am going to see this film again. It is as good as that. **—Annelise Balsamo**

Goddesses in machines

The Goddess of 1967, dir. Clara Law. *The Goddess of 1967* opens with a beautiful series of vignettes set in Tokyo. We watch JM (Rikiya Kurokawa), a Japanese man, living a life more like a surreal ad campaign for high-tech electronic gizmos than your regular mix of work, rest and play. JM's life appears seamless but cold—moving between a wordless love with a reptile wrangler, noodles in polystyrene tubs, single line electronic communications and exotic snakes curled in glass spheres. But his cool postmodern armour has a chink—JM desires a 1967 Citroën DS ('Déesse' or 'Goddess') and via the internet finds a red one for sale in Australia.

And so he flies in to close the deal, only to find that circumstances for purchase are not what you might describe as ideal. JM meets BG (Rose Byrne), a young blind girl in possession of the car keys. Embarking on a test drive that soon looks like covering half the country, JM and BG move through landscapes (see below) which trigger memories and emotions that shape the

remainder of the film. The narrative leaps about through time, exploring damaged pasts, misplaced love and fearful solutions.

The film's 'big' moments (incest, burning buildings, opera and rotten rats) were its least satisfying. They were bulky and stiff—like ball gowns on a Hill's Hoist. It was the rare and tiny moments that felt clearest in *The Goddess*—when an orphaned child gleefully pours a glass of orange cordial over her head, the blind touch of BG learning to dance against JM's body and the wrinkly old guy's chilling exclamation, 'and I screwed 'em all!'

While *The Goddess of 1967* is strikingly photographed by Dion Beebe (*Praise, Holy Smoke, Floating Life*), by the end of the picture I was wearied by its highly strung colour manipulations. Byrne and Kurokawa's performances worked beautifully together, ironically leaving the other acting combinations looking a little flat.

But despite these minor flaws, *The Goddess of 1967* had a robust, sad and beautiful heart. **—Siobhan Jackson**

Presidents and vices

The Contender, dir. Rod Lurie. Films about American politics have had mixed success. *Primary Colours*, *The Seduction of Joe Tynan* and *The Candidate* were all well made and did good business in the US but not elsewhere.

The Contender is a quality movie. The story contemplates a unique situation: the US Vice President has died and the President (Jeff Bridges) chooses a liberal woman, Senator Laine Hanson (Joan Allen), to be the first woman to hold the office.

Apparently a political Pollyanna, Hanson has switched parties in the past, meaning there is no shortage of political opposition to thwart her appointment.

Her foremost opponent is senior Congressman Shelly Runyon (Gary Oldman), an old enemy of the President, who is also the Chairman of the Congress Committee inquiring into Hanson's credentials. Shortly before that hearing, explicit photographs purporting to be of Hanson participating in a university initiation orgy, find their way into Runyon's hands.

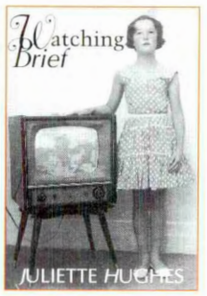
Confronted with the photographs at the Committee hearing, Hanson refuses to answer questions about their authenticity, and as a result her political ship heads for the rocks.

The performances of Bridges, Allen and Oldman lift this movie above the ordinary. Allen was nominated for Best Actress at the Academy Awards and it was a worthy nomination. As Hanson, she is dignified, charming and controlled, but ever watchful. It is a convincing but sombre performance—only in the closing minutes is she given lines with any hint of humour.

Bridges makes the President a veritable bear of a man. Powerful and ruthless, he cloaks his menace in good-natured banter. This is a man who crushes your fingers while he shakes your hand with a smile.

Oldman, as the manipulative moralising Congressman Runyon, gives a teasingly equivocal performance. Presented as the 'bad guy', everything he does is arguably justifiable if it truly stems from his concern about the welfare of his country.

The Contender is worth seeing if only for three of the best performances in a movie this year. **—Gordon Lewis**



Let them eat cable

MY PHONE ENABLES ME, for quite a small sum, to keep up with loved ones overseas. It is one of the undeniable benefits of modern life. But the downsides are all around. 'It's surreal,' said one loved one, in the middle of the foot-and-mouth disaster, and after giving me a run-down on the farcical state of British railways post-privatisation. 'You go into Tesco's and the meat is all rotting unsold. They can't give it away. Everyone's eating beans or fish, and that's a worry with all the over-fishing. And anyway, since the BSE thing only the poor eat T-bones.'

Yes. You know about the foot-and-mouth catastrophe: it's on the news all the time, but without much analysis to make sense of it. So you turn from the news film of burning carcasses to cable, another postmodern benefit, if you've nothing better to do than watch TV. Cable can be a trap if you're supposed to be commenting on the state of things in the networks and their masters' empires. Of course the media emperors own cable as well as the networks and all the newspapers and most of the magazines, but cable is their garage sale, so you can find interesting things if archaeology-of-sorts is your thing. You could switch on Foxtel or Optus and end up thinking that it's all CNN, BBC, stunning wildlife documentaries and reruns of *The Antiques Roadshow* and *Monty Python*. But it's not. The ceaseless flow of information coming through the news channels might make you feel very informed, but you aren't. Investigative reporting is now a man in a burnous offering one a dynamic business opportunity that turns out in fact to be his opportunity to tape one's undefended remarks about one's in-laws.

The moguls set their minions on to the celebrities that they have a beef against, making everyone feel that goodness me, nothing is sacred now since Tom/Russell/Prince Charles has had his dustbin/mobile phone/loo bugged and the results sprayed all over the media. The moguls can't lose because 1: they sell papers/get ratings and 2: defamation laws could get tightened up because of public disgust. This latter doesn't worry them because 1: a huge loss in the courts is a fleabite to them and can even be a tax write-off and 2: they themselves have their multifarious skulduggeries protected by the law against small independent publishers, ordinary people and reporters who can't afford even to undertake a major court case, let alone lose it, and certainly can't claim such costs against their tax. Keeping your house isn't a business expense, you see.

So thank God for the *Sydney Morning Herald*'s Margo Kingston and her Web Diary, for Stephen Mayne and his crikey.com.au and for all the real reporters who really report really important things. In March, Kingston published the research of Tim Dunlop into the deregulation of the dairy industry and titled it 'Pull the udder one'. I recommend it highly as a good and public-spirited dig. And before your eyes glaze over and you zone out, muttering things about dairy industry dereg and paint drying, let me assure you of a riveting read. Phillip Adams brought up the subject on ABC Radio National's *Late Night Live* and it was fascinating listening.

Here's a sample of Dunlop's writing on Web Diary: '... it shows how ideology can simply overcome common sense in that, even if deregulation worked exactly as they say it should, the net benefit to consumers is so bloody small that you have to wonder what the point is. I show in the article that even if it reduced the price of milk to ZERO, on average we would be only $3.20 a week better off. And this against the loss of 4000 dairy farms and $2 billion out of communities.'

HIS ANALYSIS IS COMPELLING, particularly when you consider that what the TV news and the papers have been showing recently is the foot-and-mouth tragedy, a catastrophe that is not about to go away any time soon. And the farming practices that broadcast this disease and also brought CJD through meat and salmonella through eggs are going to be brought to Australia under the umbrella of greater operating efficiency so that huge agricultural corporations can make more money by employing fewer people to look after the animals. We've had battery chickens in Australia for a long time, but what the dereg frenzy in the dairy industry is going to mean is battery cows.

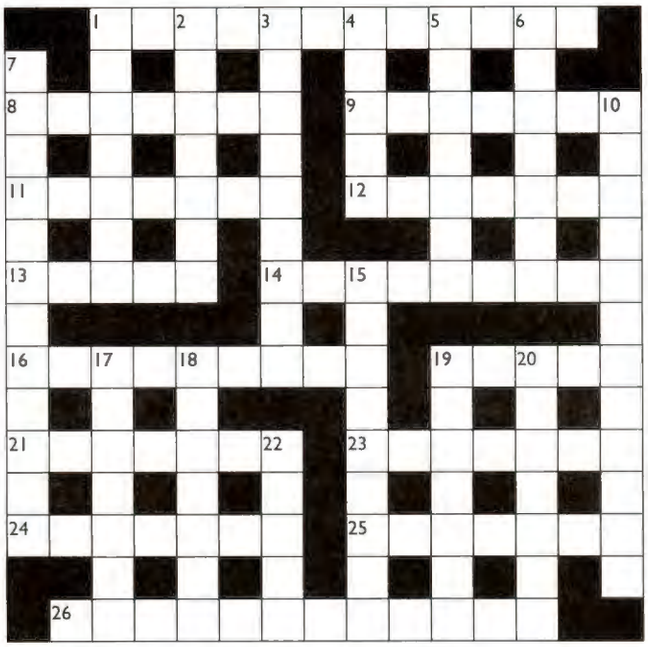
Whether we're prepared to accept this depends on how informed we are about it.

Before I heard all this I watched 'A Conversation with Koko' on National Geographic. Koko is a female gorilla who has been taught to communicate in sign language. She is as wise a creature as anyone you're likely to see. Koko refuses to mate until the time and partner and social framework are right, and the two male gorillas who live with her respect that. I reckon if Koko were a farmer she wouldn't feed cows meat or chickens their own faeces, for sheer grace as well as perhaps the possible consequences to their health and everyone else's. Who are the primitives here? I'm voting Gorilla in the next election. ■

Juliette Hughes is a freelance reviewer.

Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 93, May 2001

Devised by
Joan Nowotny IBVM



ACROSS

1. Must I reach two notes somehow, to satisfy her about the scales? (5,7)
8. Sounds like cutting off a syllable, for instance, in describing as so delightful. (7)
9. According to revered sources, we should not put our trust in them, no matter their rank. (7)
11. Put an embargo on the fellow lest he desert. (7)
12. Meaning you'll hear that's not intellectual? (7)
13. Arab, perhaps, sounding croaky. (5)
14. Pledge amounted to about 2,101 total. (9)
16. How extremists may go back to their roots? (9)
19. Influences of southern manners. (5)
21. What you are doing—in secret? (7)
23. Roman law I study—may be useful for 21-across! (7)
24. Prevent drop? On the contrary—possibly be indiscreet with one's words. (3,4)
25. This war produced many such apparent spectres. (7)
26. Ari's to commission, initially, returning sailor to be in charge. Hardly upper-class! (12)

DOWN

1. A fete this month, but not in Park Lane! (7)
2. Put lid on the news, perhaps, to cover this up? (7)
3. Regulation I name, briefly, according to recognised law. (9)
4. Show cut short—to see the shows? (5)
5. Met my old mate, befuddled, at the place for wine. (7)
6. Run sect so as to form hard coating against public criticism, perhaps. (7)
7. Have you read the new translation of Homer? Capital stuff, but not to be taken as literal. (12)
10. Loss of identity? Or a benefit to others? (12)
15. Bloomer about transport of pilgrim fathers. (9)
17. Time for celebrity with heavenly body to enjoy the sun—how poetically expressed! (7)
18. Deliberately ignore the girl with the weapon. (7)
19. Navigation instrument still in use after Sothebys initially ditched it, perhaps. (7)
20. Medical case suffering with twitch; it's enough to make one an abstainer. (7)
22. In small room, love to play an instrument. (5)

Solution to Crossword no. 92, April 2001

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

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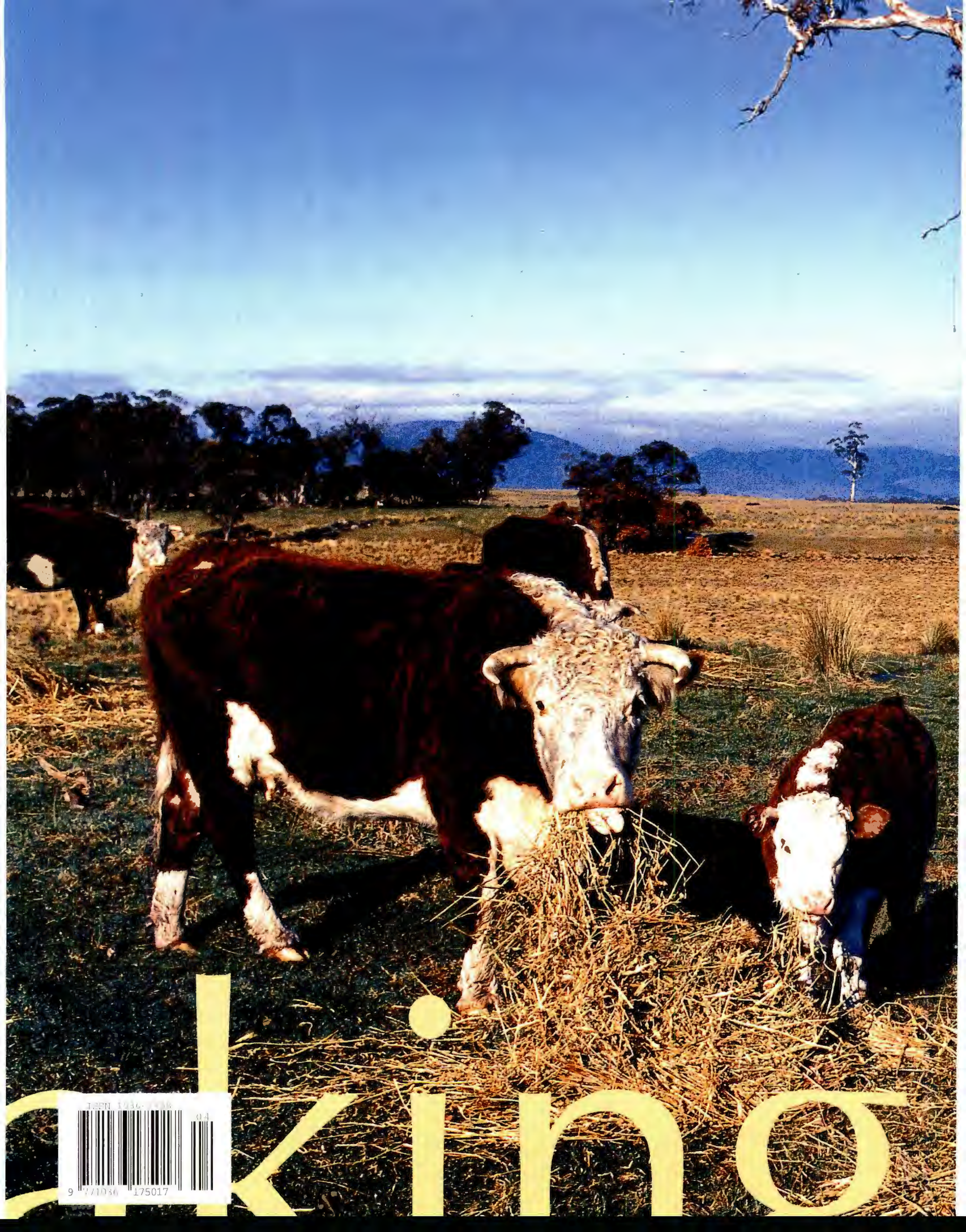

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