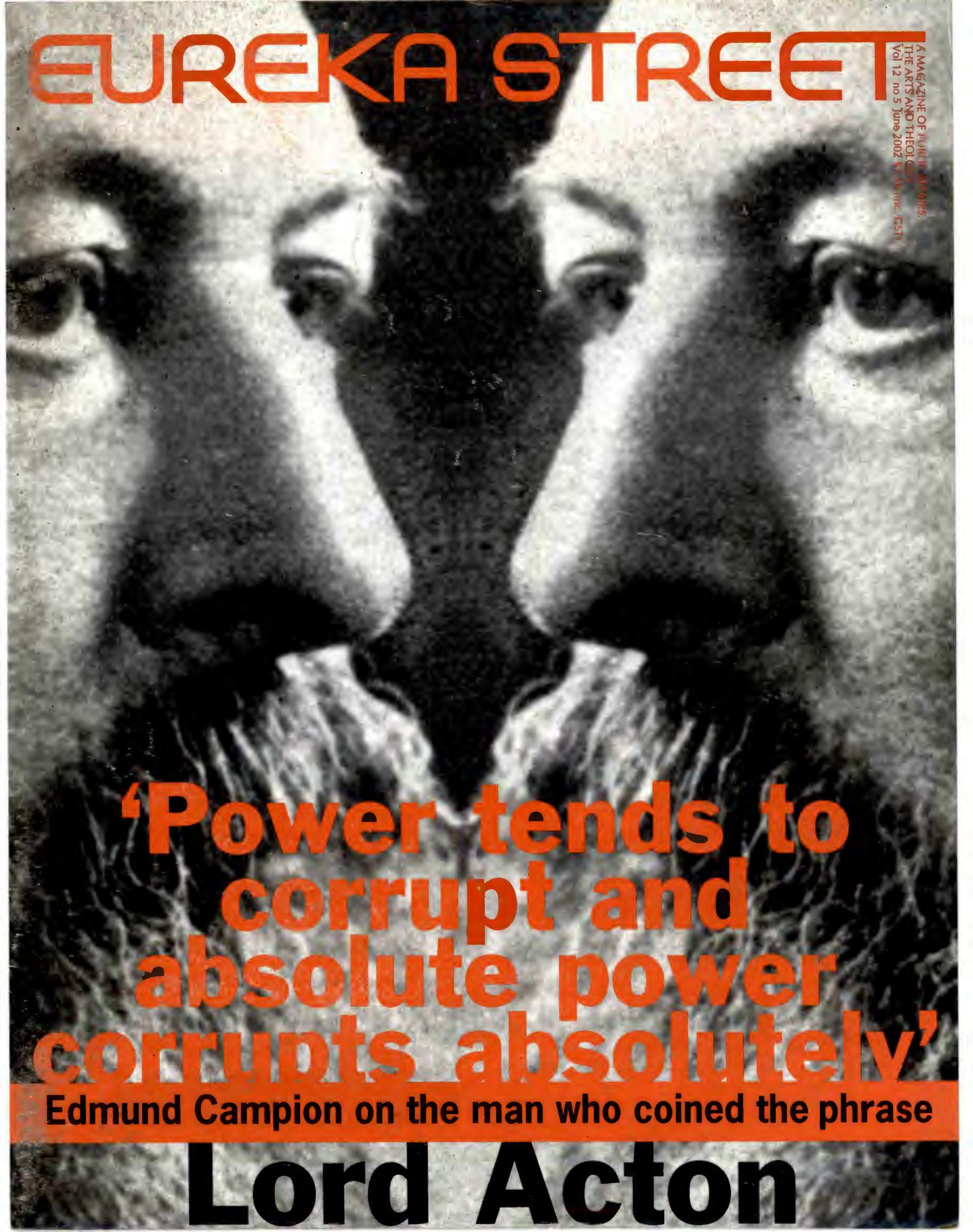


# EUREKA STREET



A MAGAZINE OF CULTURE AND ARTS  
THE ARTS AND THEOLOGY  
Vol 12 no 5 June 2002 £ 10.00 inc. GST

**'Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely'**

Edmund Campion on the man who coined the phrase

# Lord Acton



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A MAGAZINE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS, THE ARTS AND THEOLOGY  
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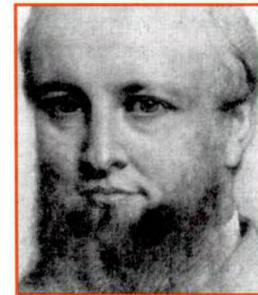
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### This month:

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# The Mabo decade

TEN YEARS AGO, on 3 June, the High Court handed down its decision in the Mabo case. Don Watson in his recent book, *Recollections of a Bleeding Heart: A Portrait of Paul Keating PM*, recalls: 'The historic significance of the decision was obvious to everyone, except all those who either had no history or something else on at the time. As this meant about 80 per cent of the population and up to 90 per cent of the [press] gallery, panic and excitement took some time to set in.' Indeed.

Mabo was the first case where the full bench of the High Court was asked to consider the common-law recognition of land rights. Justice Brennan, who wrote the lead judgment, offered this general comment on the occasion of his retirement from the bench six years later:

The agenda of the courts are defined by the litigants. The courts decide the controversies that the people bring to the courts for decision. They are the people's problems. The Court has no agenda of its own. But, as the issues that arise for decision are contemporary issues arising in contemporary circumstances, the work of the Court in each generation reflects that generation's concerns.

Eddie Mabo was the driving force behind the litigation, having commenced the proceedings ten years before. He'd had to run the gauntlet of Joh Bjelke-Petersen's invalid law that sought to extinguish all native title rights—retrospectively and without compensation. Though the case bears Eddie's name, he actually lost his particular case, being unable to establish the evidence of his claim to land in the Murray

Islands because of his long absence from the Torres Strait. His fellow claimants, David Passi and James Rice, carried the day. Eddie's widow, Bonita, still carries the pain of Eddie's loss and some feelings of rejection as the Murray Islanders celebrate the tenth anniversary.

Although, in Mabo, Indigenous Australians won recognition of their traditional rights to land, the High Court by the narrowest majority (four to three) decided that these fragile rights were readily extinguishable. From 1788 and until 1975 when the Commonwealth

parliament passed the *Racial Discrimination Act*, state parliaments and state governments could extinguish native title at their whim without payment of compensation simply by granting the land to some other person. In Mabo, due process and compensation for native-title holders would be available only to those fortunate enough to have retained their lands during two centuries of colonial dispossession premised on the *terra nullius* mindset. That is why Noel Pearson describes Mabo as the High Court peace plan with a three-part compromise: 'Whitefellas keep what's theirs, blackfellas get what's left over, and there's an area of land in the middle, in relation to which the court has prescribed co-existence. Moreover, in relation to the co-existence, the court's formula is very simple. That is, that the crown title will prevail over the native title if there is any inconsistency.' As Noel says, 'There could be no more peaceful a proposition for peace than the one put forward by the High Court.'

Since Mabo, a newly constituted High Court has had to apply the principles of the decision to pastoral leases in the Wik case and to offshore areas in the Croker Island case. Both the Howard and Keating governments have tried their hands at legislative responses to the High Court decisions. Even John Howard as prime minister has told parliament, 'The substance of [the Mabo] decision, now with the passage of time, seems completely unexceptionable to me. It appears to have been based on a good deal of logic and fairness and proper principle.'

That view is shared by both sides of the political chamber and by most lawyers at home and abroad. So the dust has settled. The original decision is no longer seen as a revolution but as a belated commonsense piece of legal reasoning. Hugh Morgan's 1994 declaration now seems a little melodramatic: 'In Mabo, and all that followed from it, we are engaged in a struggle for the political and territorial future of Australia.' That struggle has focused on our borders and on the few thousand 'boat people' who have turned up in the last year.

The Mabo decision has withstood the test of time and is now seen by most commentators as being in accordance with contemporary Australian values. Universal respect for property and the principle of non-discrimination might even be thought to be 'the vibe of the Constitution'—to quote *The Castle*.

*Eddie Mabo and his QC, Ron Castan, have died. The majority of the Mabo bench has retired. But native title is here to stay, helping to put right what Justices Deane and Gaudron described as our 'national legacy of unutterable shame'.*

Eddie Mabo and his QC, Ron Castan, have died. The majority of the Mabo bench has retired. But native title is here to stay, helping to put right what Justices Deane and Gaudron described as our 'national legacy of unutterable shame'.

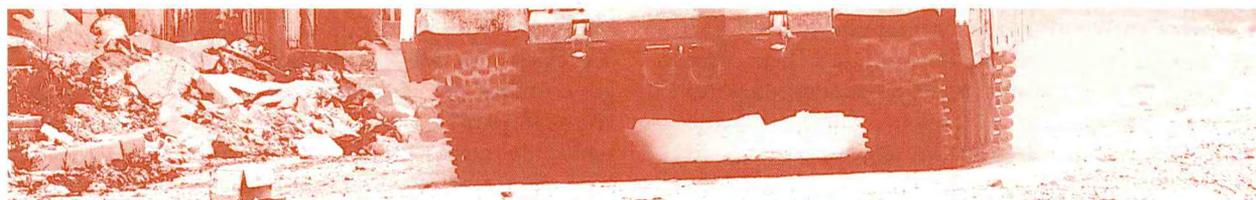
The anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner once reflected on his own contribution to the granting of Aboriginal land rights: 'All I can say is that they seemed to me

the right things to strive for. I am not foolish or wise enough to be certain that Aboriginal tomorrows will really be the better for it.' But as reconciled Australians we so hope. ■

**Frank Brennan** sj is Associate Director of Uniya, the Jesuit Social Justice Centre, Adjunct Fellow in Law at the ANU and author of *One Land One Nation*.

COMMENT:2  
MORAG FRASER

# Too many laws



**V**ICTORIA'S SENATOR Barney Cooney laid it on the line. The federal government's anti-terrorism bills were flawed legislation, he declared. They would 'steer the law in a new and unfortunate direction and away from the fundamental principles which underpin our society'.

He went further: 'They set precedents in the criminal jurisdiction which, if followed, [would] grievously disturb the proper balance between the public interest in suppressing crime and terrorism and the public interest in maintaining a just and democratic society.'

Senator Cooney's objections to the proposed anti-terrorism legislation have been echoed by a Senate committee, chaired by the Liberals' Marise Payne, and by many individuals, lawyers and civil liberties groups.

But in the flurry of pre-Budget leaks and leadership speculation it was hard to find sustained newspaper analysis of the bills and their implications (radio did better). Now, with a stay of execution (the bills have caused such a stir in the parliamentary corridors and committees that they have, for the time being, been taken off the Senate agenda) it might be possible to have informed community debate. But you have to wonder about the contrived air of urgency in which the legislation was drawn up.

It now seems likely that some of the most alarming aspects of the bills—particularly the power to ban bodies judged to be linked to 'terrorist' organisations—

will be given a thorough drubbing. As they should. People who once supported the cause of independence for East Timor by defending Fretilin—sometimes judged a terrorist organisation—would have contravened that proposed law. So would defenders of the ANC in South Africa. There is something anomalous about our considering legislation that would, in another time, have ruled out Nelson Mandela as a fit associate. The distinction between terrorist and freedom fighter is notoriously hard to draw. But it would not be hard, under the legislation as proposed, for innocent Australians to find themselves on the wrong side of the law.

One of the most disturbing aspects of the proposed legislation is its excess. It rides roughshod over liberties and rights and the due process that we properly take for granted in Australia. It smells of political expediency. It de-legitimises dissent and treats Australian citizens like fools who have to be saved from themselves.

There is time and opportunity now, so read the bills. Make your own judgment about what constraints, beyond those we already allow, are necessary to make Australia safe, free and decent. ■

—Morag Fraser

Another thing: by the time you read this you will know whether the US experienced the dire economic downturn predicted to follow nationwide absenteeism and consequent productivity loss generated by the mid-week premiere of *Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones*. Ah, the relief ...

# Aiming high

**T**HE KHAKI FEDERAL Budget had the poor and the hard-pressed in its sights. Rather than introducing far-sighted policies to address the fiscal pressures of an ageing Australia, it opted for soft political targets who have little voice and tenuous public support.

Prior to Budget night, Treasurer Peter Costello made much of his inaugural Intergenerational Report. It was designed to deal with the costs of an ageing population—not a new idea but one currently fashionable in Western democratic countries. On the surface, the report presented a benign scenario, almost too laudatory of the government's fiscal management to take seriously. But lurking in the detail was a cautionary revelation: with an ageing community, advances in technology and increased consumer expectations, the cost of government services is predicted to escalate by at least 20 per cent over the next 40 years. In today's dollars that means a shortfall of \$87 billion between the cost of services and the revenue available through taxation.

Even to the casual observer, it is clear that rising health costs will require policy reform and a more rigorous approach to entitlement and safety-net programs. But the Intergenerational Report notwithstanding, the Budget failed to address these priorities. It chose instead to squeeze low-income people, the disabled and the chronically ill rather than revise the list of those who actually receive public subsidies.

Last year's election Budget placed added strain on federal subsidies. Oddly, many of the beneficiaries were the better-off people. In a blatant grab for the 'grey vote', the government ensured that a single retiree now gets a \$20,000-a-year tax-free threshold, whereas a regular worker receives just \$6000 before the threshold applies. Furthermore, retired couples can receive over \$32,000 tax-free, while a couple earning just over \$26,000 each a year pay over \$9000 in tax. Some financial planners now claim that retired couples can earn as much as \$85,000 a year from different forms of private pensions and still claim the full public age pension. On top of this, couples over 65 have become eligible for the Commonwealth health card if their earnings are less than \$80,000 a year. For singles it is \$50,000 a year. These inclusions added

around 200,000 people to the concessions list. This is the area to which real reform of public entitlements and subsidies should be directed. But it is also the politically sensitive and growing 'grey vote' area, and political minders know their stuff. Better to please everyone on concessions than to discriminate and risk upsetting groups that have demonstrated their acumen and their readiness to agitate.

**W**ITH THE BUDGET changes to drug subsidies, the government hit struggling low-income families harder than well-off retirees. The increased charges for medicine mean that a wealthy retiree will pay \$1 extra for a prescription, but a low-income working family will pay \$6.20 more for each prescribed medication. Hardly fair, and hardly in keeping with the prescription that we must keep an eye on the future.

Yet such is the nature of politics today. Welfare dependency becomes a pejorative. Ministers too easily conjure images of lazy, shifty, poor people draining the public purse, and downplay the real dependency on public handouts of a growing group of the well-to-do.

This Budget continues to allow wealthy couples to income-split for tax purposes, to receive 30 per cent off their health insurance and to become eligible for a series of state-based benefits.

At the same time, the government has imposed harder conditions on disability payments and has reduced benefits for some unable to work. And in another win for the fortunate, the new 'baby bonus' means that a woman earning \$60,000 a year will receive \$2500 annually for five years to stay at home with her child. Compare this to the \$500 annual bonus for a woman on \$20,000 a year—in the unlikely event that she can stay at home.

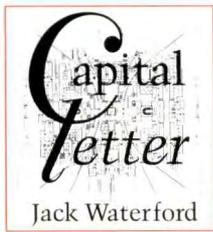
That this Budget has gone soft on the better-off should come as no surprise. In a portent of that night's proceedings, the government earlier on Budget day had to scramble to defend itself against revelations that even people able to buy million-dollar properties are still eligible for the first-home-buyers' grant.

Whatever the pressures predicted by the Intergenerational Report, it seems those with money make money. ■

**Francis Sullivan** is Chief Executive Officer of Catholic Health Australia.

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ent forms of private pensions and still claim the full public age pension. On top of this, couples over 65 have become eligible for the Commonwealth health card if their earnings are less than \$80,000 a year. For singles it is \$50,000 a year. These inclusions added



# The Budget front

**J**UST WHY AUSTRALIA needs a massive increase in the big-brother apparatus of the state is far from clear. But even among those who think that the world changed after September 11, it is not entirely obvious that what we want are new sets of SAS units to rescue hostages from aircraft, a regiment to deal with a chemical, biological or nuclear radiation attack on our east coast, or a substantial increase in the number of police SWAT squads. Almost the only deployments of such groups over the past decade have involved confronting hapless, unarmed asylum seekers at sea, or rounding up criminals (and, sometimes, their hapless neighbours) or harmless people with mental problems.

Apparently, however, the risk of a surprise attack by small groups of terrorists is such that the executive power of our domestic security agencies is to be raised to levels far higher than those believed to be necessary at the height of the Cold War. At airports and government buildings, citizens will now face metal detectors, biometric checks of eyes, fingerprints or DNA and, probably, about ten extra minutes of officious inconvenience in getting anywhere.

Mix that with new moves to build a great wall around Australia using far more aggressive interception and checking of boats approaching our shore, detention facilities at Christmas Island, and arrangements to bribe or blackmail Pacific nations into holding asylum seekers for screening. Add massive extra spending for formal defence, with the bulk of the money going not into the maintenance of troops abroad, or the re-equipping of the services, but into domestic security needs. Clearly there must be a major threat to Australia's security and safety, if not from invasion by an aggressor then from infiltration and sabotage.

But whether life post-September 11 has so changed as to require all this is far from clear. Do SWAT squads and SAS units actually stop suicide bombers? Ask Israel. Would all of the protective security now being installed have stopped the capture of aircraft that were then flown directly into tall buildings? Only if the security apparatus of the state is so extensive that it can actually penetrate small and tightly disciplined groups bent on terror—groups likely to possess valid passports and visas, and from 'respectable' countries. Does a massive increase in surveillance facilities allow greater capacity to predict the acts of such groups? Not if American, British, Israeli and German experience is taken into account. And are there, in fact, such groups who are likely to make Australia a focus of their activities? No-one has yet demonstrated that there are.

There has seldom been such a public investment in defence and security infrastructure with so little rationale. One can bet it has more to do with the government's domestic political needs

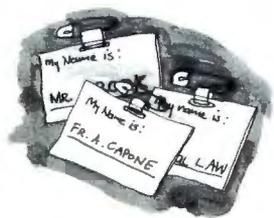
than it has to do with any objective security threat. It's about making Australians 'feel' safer, whether they are or not. It's about a gamble that a new host of minor inconveniences will seem nothing compared with the greater sense of security we all have. And it's not only about protecting ourselves from horrible and alien terrorists, but from ghastly and unwanted refugees. The border-control measures are an integral part of the message—and the more saleable now because they involve not only a lot of political rhetoric, but a vast array of men and women in khaki.

**P**ERHAPS THERE ARE EVEN more political opportunities in all this. We see it here in Canberra, for example. There is nothing like a defence and security apparatus to bureaucratise itself, creating fresh and unaccountable activity in every direction. No-one can say whether it works or not: actual incidents can be used to demonstrate a need for even further investment, a lack of them to demonstrate just how effectively everything is working. At the same time, however, a government looking for some spare cash can declare victory at any time, scrap a host of irritating controls and appear as liberators. Pending that, anyone who objects to any part of the package—even, say, as it applies to immigrants or refugees—can be portrayed as soft on terrorism, or hopelessly naive about the nature of the modern world. And in an environment where, as the children-overboard affair has demonstrated, the military apparatus has scarcely a clue about how to resist being used for purely political purposes, stunts can be laid on at will to demonstrate the Churchillian qualities of our leaders.

Or is it all a big distraction from a very ho-hum Budget which produced indifferent numbers but which tested a few nasties in health and welfare policies for the sick and the disabled? Fancy such people, and their champions, being unwilling to make a few tiny sacrifices when the future of the nation is at stake. Fancy their questioning the advice of the experts, which, unfortunately, cannot be shared because it is so secret.

The hollow truth may be that the Budget was not a rationale for a big-brother state or controls over a few areas of expenditure, but rather a cover for the lack of an economic and social strategy for the next few years. And that may not so much reflect the tensions between a relaxed and comfortable incumbent and an increasingly anxious successor as reveal that neither of them has much of a plan. As least this one's wrapped in the flag and puts the reffos in their place. ■

**Jack Waterford** is editor-in-chief of *The Canberra Times*.



## Name games

One of the lesser arguments for divine providence is based on the power of names to predict futures. Can it have been by coincidence that a bank has Mr Smart in charge of financial services, and Mr Crook for its general manager? Certainly Cardinal Law of Boston must be pondering the power of names to inspire consonant behaviour in their bearers. He faces a parish-based campaign to withhold contributions to the Archdiocese in protest against his handling of clerical child abuse. The name of the instigator of this ecclesiastical heist is Fr Albert Capone.

## Jordan says



On the streets of Jordan, support for the Palestinian cause does not always translate into approval for Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Palestinian Authority. To one Palestinian-Jordanian, Arafat is a man of the past, more suited to the street fighting of 1980s Beirut or the guerrilla warfare of the 1970s. To another, Arafat is a man who heroically ran a small cell of resistance but who is now completely incapable of running a government—every cheque, even for hospital bills, must be personally signed by the Chairman himself, making for massive bureaucratic inefficiency. One budding Jordanian parliamentarian, among the first Jordanians to visit Israel and meet with the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, says that Arafat has paralysed the Palestinian cause by being the symbol of a nation he has proven inept at leading. And yet every man and woman who spoke said that Arafat, as the leader of his people under siege, must be supported in the face of attack. In the words of one

angry young Palestinian, 'Arafat and Sharon, they are both fuckers. They will fight to the death, our death. But unfortunately, we cannot afford to wait for someone else to come along. They are all we have and so we have to believe that peace is possible even if it is not.'

## Go tell it



Fired up about the future? Bemused by the Intergenerational Report? Want to make a contribution?

The Victorian Council of Social Service is holding a Social Policy Congress in Melbourne between 31 July and 2 August. If you, or your organisation, want to air your views on community well-being, human rights, housing, disability, citizenship, health, rural and regional issues, poverty, refugees (and much more), contact Carolyn Atkins on (03) 9654 5050 or carolyn.atkins@vcoss.org.au.

## Saving Ingrid Betancourt



Senator Bob Brown is travelling to Colombia to seek the release of Greens presidential candidate, Ingrid Betancourt, who, along with her campaign manager, Clara Rojas, was kidnapped by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) (see *Eureka Street*, May 2002, p10).

Betancourt, despite numerous death threats, has been an outspoken critic of the oppressive US-backed Colombian government, the rightist paramilitaries, and the drug-financed guerrillas. The presidential election was on 26 May.

Bob Brown travelled twice to Mexico to intercede successfully on behalf of Mexico's environmentalist prisoners, Rodolfo Montiel and Teodoro Cabrera. The two were recently freed, but only

after prominent human rights lawyer Digna Ochoa, who acted for them, was shot dead in her Mexico City office.

In Colombia, Bob Brown will meet with members of the government, human rights organisations, peace activists and victims of violence, including the family of Ingrid Betancourt.

At the Global Greens conference in April 2001, a 'Green Shield' program was established, under which Greens from around the world support Greens who are suffering human rights abuses as a result of their stand.

## In a word



Preservation and conservation are contentious topics. So, it became evident during a morning-tea debate, are preserves and preserves. The topic was the nature of marmalade. The range of answers was predictable: some defined it by its being chunky; others as its being made from citrus fruit. The least likely answer seemed that which claimed that it could be made from citrus fruits or quinces. But while quinces may or may not be odd in the marmalade jar, they cannot be removed from the name. For marmalade is derived from the Portuguese word for quince, the first fruit to be made into jam. In the 15th century, citrus fruit was treated in the same way. Whether with or without chunks, it is hard to say.

Marmalade, however, is edible, and therefore has nothing to do with marmite which, like its Australian cousin, was originally a substitute for bicycle grease. A marmite is a French pot with a lid. Unlike the glass through which marmalade, chunky or otherwise, can be seen, the marmite conceals its contents. Its name is appropriately derived from the old French word for hypocrite, one with eyes lidded down who does not disclose her interior. Just like the muttering (*marmotter*) cat (*mite*) who hides in the *marmite*. What cat indeed would not mutter when offered either marmalade or marmite as a substitute for chunks?

## Augustine v. Pelagius

Andrew Hamilton (*Eureka Street*, May 2002) suggests that the paedophilia crisis that is convulsing the Catholic Church is, among other things, making Augustinian attitudes to human sinfulness seem less outdated. Hamilton argues that Augustine's

psychological analysis of the twisting knots of human motivation, and of the darkness and lack of freedom that mark the human condition ... shows as trivial an analysis that sees sins simply as single events that can be repented of and set right. We have learned that, for the abused, an act of abuse is not a single event, but one that roots and metastasises in the human spirit to cause lasting damage.

Fair enough. But Hamilton draws a further conclusion:

... if Augustine's account of sin is serious enough to articulate the hurt and despair of those affected by abuse, it may also offer a better way to relate to abusers than the simple exclusions and rejections that our culture dictates ... we are not to demonise abusers, because we share what seems demonic in them.

It is difficult to respond to this directly, because Hamilton avoids saying precisely what he means by 'simple exclusions and rejections'. But I find his words troubling, given the evasiveness, blame-shifting and, sometimes, outright deception, that continue to characterise much of the official Catholic reaction to clerical sexual abuse.

Is Hamilton taking exception to the demand for zero tolerance of abusers that has been made so often in the US media, in the wake of revelations of abuse in the American church? 'Zero tolerance' is an easy term to find objectionable because of its association with certain controversial American methods of policing. But in the context of the paedophilia scandal it has a very specific meaning: given what is known about the propensity of those who abuse children to re-offend, is it responsible to allow someone who has committed such an offence, *even once*, to resume active ministry? In any profession except the Catholic priesthood, the answer by the relevant authorities would be a resounding 'no', and it would be an uncontroversial



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answer. It is a lamentable measure of how far many of those who wield authority in the church have to go in these matters, however, that in ecclesiastical circles this answer is controversial.

No Christian can object to being reminded that sinfulness is part of the human condition, and that we all require forgiveness. But Hamilton is surely saying more than this. He seems to insinuate, though he does not explicitly say, that zero-tolerance-type calls for vigilance against the consequences of human sinfulness arise from the 'trivial analysis' of sin he is attacking. If that is the lesson of Augustine in the present crisis, then we would be better served by some frankly Pelagian insistence that individuals must acknowledge, and take responsibility for, their own actions.

**Ray Cassin**  
Preston, VIC

## Palestinian Christians

The American Christian Right conveniently forget tales of oppression experienced daily by their Palestinian Christian compatriots. Why conveniently, you may ask? And why has the influential Christian Right never been courageous enough to bat alongside their Palestinian Christian brothers and sisters—not in times of peace, not in war?

Thirty-five years ago, one in five of the 'Arab' inhabitants of Palestine was Christian; now it is about one in 50. Once Bethlehem was 95 per cent Christian; now Christians are a mere 15 per cent.

Christians are leaving Palestine for the same reason that any Palestinian leaves: they see no future. But this does not explain why they are more inclined to leave than their Muslim compatriots.

One reason, it seems to me—a ninth-generation Christian born in Bethlehem—is that Christian Palestinians are treated by the West as non-people. Few outside the

Middle East know they exist. Another is the persistent denial of their plight by a frighteningly influential American Christian Right.

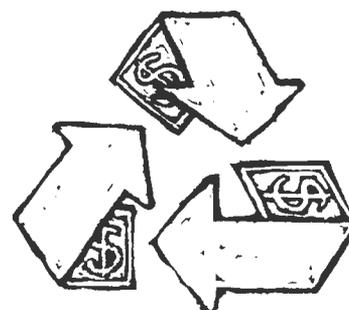
Wake up, Gary Bauer, Jerry Falwell and other setters of religious agendas. A few hundred thousand of us are not made to feel worthy of reference in your prayers, let alone receive the support that you rightfully gave South Africans, the East Timorese and others.

Support for us is no longer considered anti-Semitic, as you have been led to believe. Jews have suffered as we do and we acknowledge this. You need no longer wait for a Palestinian holocaust to happen before you disperse your support unequivocally. It is enough that a million of us are now scattered around this globe with no right of return.

Do let us know how, when or if you plan to address our outcry. When will you start lobbying for us in your Senate and Congress, without being made to feel guilty, ahead of our expiry date?

**Abe W. Ata**  
Heidelberg, VIC

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# THE MONTH'S TRAFFIC

## Open door

TED KENNEDY'S LEGACY

**A** BRIGHT CHAPTER in modern Australian history came quietly to an end a few Sundays ago, when the congregation at St Vincent de Paul's Church, Redfern in Sydney, heard a letter read out, announcing the resignation of their parish priest, Father Ted Kennedy. It was scarcely a surprise, for his health had been problematic—he is currently convalescing after surgery—but after 30 years of his pastorate there, it will be strange to think of the Redfern parish without Ted Kennedy.

Fortunate in having parents whose door was always open to those in trouble, he saw early on that doing justice was a necessary part of the Christian religion. At the Manly seminary he began to read widely and discriminately, something he never gave up. He gained too a comfortable companionship with poetry, so that every Kennedy speech or sermon was studded with quotations from favourite poets.

In his first parish he met one of these poets, James McAuley, who was finding his bearings in the Catholic Church, which he had recently joined. McAuley showed the young priest something he had written and Kennedy took it to another parishioner, Richard Connolly, asking him to set it to music. Thus was born the most successful hymn-writing team in modern Australia, McAuley and Connolly. Kennedy respected artists and intellectuals and won their respect in return.

His years as chaplain at the University of Sydney, when he made close friends among university people, accentuated this side of his personality. He learnt to listen to other people, especially those on strange paths to or from God. In those Vatican II years also, he became a mentor to dozens of young men enduring a seminary system, as he said, 'designed to keep us in short pants forever'. Asked to give the pre-ordination retreat at Queensland's Banyo seminary in 1970, he spoke of the poor, the disadvantaged, and the down-and-out as his brothers.

This was the man who moved into the Redfern presbytery in 1971 with two younger priests. Their first caller was an

Aboriginal woman seeking food. From then on, the doors never closed to Aborigines. On wet winter nights there might be one hundred guests sleeping wherever there was space. Following Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, they cooked food for their guests too. And, however sticky or dangerous things became, Kennedy never, ever called the police.

At Redfern he found the great Shirley Smith—'Mum Shirl' as she was known to all. In emergencies, sometimes five times a night, he would call her for help. From her he learnt the pain and the pride of being Aboriginal, which often led to suicide. He noticed that Aborigines never left suicide notes, as whites do: their own people already knew the pain that had driven them to this. Mum Shirl taught him to be a fellow sufferer, to find Christ in the rejected and accept him there without questioning. She taught him about just anger too and the fight for justice. He called her, at her funeral, the greatest theologian he had ever known.

In Redfern, Kennedy did not see himself as a saviour or an improver. Although he was called on to help in many ways—the Aboriginal Medical Service remains from his early years, and thrives—just by being there, he was saying that Christ hadn't turned his back on them. That gives Father Ted Kennedy his place in our history.

—Edmund Campion

## At Rusty's

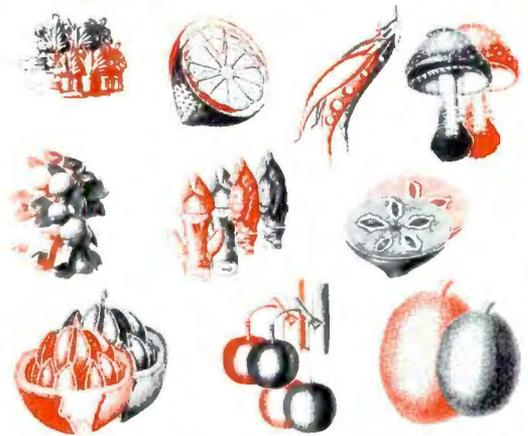
GOING MARKETING

**H**OTELS AND BLOCKS of apartments line the streets parallel to the Cairns mudflats. Sometimes they are separated by old Queenslanders, tenaciously or provocatively unsold, sitting like discoloured teeth in the rows of white buildings. A block or two further back from the foreshore there are stronger reminders of the old country town that began to be erased in the 1960s: streets of ramshackle weatherboard houses that have not yet tempted developers.

Unhappily, that is not the fate of Rusty's market, which is doomed to be built over by just what Cairns needs more of: a car park and a backpackers' hotel. At present the market spreads over a quarter of an inner-

city block, crowded with stalls that are divided by narrow alleys. Most of the enclosure is under a cast-iron roof, creating sauna conditions in summer as it rattles and rolls under torrential rain. Tarpaulins cover the rest, bellying with water in the wet season, dripping on to the punters below. On the edge of the market are caravans from which coconut milk from the shell, hamburgers, pies, hot and cold drinks, are sold. The pineapple-crush man has left though, obscurely dispirited.

On Friday mornings early, when it opens for the week, Rusty's is packed with locals, shopping before work. Later in the day,



shaggy, hemp- and harlequin-costumed 'ferals' (as *Lonely Planet* gives us leave to call them) come down from the Atherton Tablelands, to sell jewellery and clothing. Saturday is the busiest day, but by now the eyes have been picked out of the best of the produce, the herbs especially. On Sunday the wares for sale are more various. Stalls of paperbacks appear, and second-hand stuff. Crowds are thinner. The market winds down for a few days and soon—perhaps—for good.

The site was owned by Russell 'Rusty' Rees, who also ran a motorbike shop, owned property in Grafton Street along the eastern boundary and had the pub next door to the market. After his death a couple of years ago, the pub was fetchingly renamed The Underdog and painted blue. Sad to say it is now dolefully called Shenanigans. Rusty was a 'character' when the label meant funny, cantankerous, beholden to no-one, except that in the end he was—to his creditors. Getting rid of the space that so many have brought alive each week will be

another stage in the sanitisation of Cairns.

And where will the traders go? Judy, the bantering, generous fishmonger, has been here for 22 years, one less than the market itself. And what of the Greek lady who makes spanakopita, the knife-sharpener, the vendors of tea and coffee grown on plantations in the Tablelands and the Daintree, the Lebanese wagon with its dips and felafel, the Australians with the best lettuce, salad mix and potatoes, the Spaniards who sell Mareeba bush-ripened tomatoes, the dealers in 'organics', the Filipina women with their endless arrays of green vegetables? Where will one be able to have red bean paste with sticky rice wrapped in banana leaves for breakfast? Where will one buy betel nut? Or buy fruits with names so exotic that they are mysteries to most of those who live in the temperate regions of Australia—rollinia, longan, black sapote?

Approach the market along Sheridan Street. At the first stall a New Guinean woman and a French man sell cassava, yams, taro, sweet potatoes. In the aisle beside them, a genial busker in a hat and Hawaiian shirt sings songs from the 1950s—Jim Reeves, country and western, 'That's Amore'. Behind him families of Hmong (a Cambodian hill tribe) cluster within the hollow squares of their stalls, eating and selling rice from bowls. The other sizeable group of Hmong refugees who came to Australia (although a few years ago there were only 2000 in the country) found its way far from North Queensland. They went to farms along the Derwent River, north of Hobart. Each Saturday they sell in the Salamanca Market, varying the serried rows of craft stalls there.

Rusty's, by contrast, is a cross between a market and a country fair. For good and ill, the vendors all know one another, and they know most of each others' customers. The market aisles are usually thronged, the ground underfoot is uneven, the air is sweaty, the fruit and human smells are over-ripe, but good cheer prevails. This is a very cheap entertainment of the kind most valued when it is lost. The mix is more medieval than multicultural. The place is starkly indifferent to fashion. Conversation slides macaronically from language to language. The produce of this region is as rich and enticing as anything to be found on the continent. Rusty's will survive, its stallholders believe, even if it is pushed into a horseshoe configuration around the backpackers' emporium. Judy reckons so: 'You'll hear me, my little darling, wherever they put us.'  
—Peter Pierce



## The inclusive life

**T**HEOLOGIANS OF A CLASSICAL BENT refer to it as 'the dreaded P word'. Postmodernism offers them all the combined scenic attractions of a jungle and a mirage, full of pathless theory and of understandings reached that prove to be illusory.

Many true believers are more robust. Without being sure what it is, they identify postmodernism with every miasma that weakens modern culture: relativism, disengagement, hedonism, consumerism and the rejection of tradition and authority, just for starters.

For this reason, a recent speech to a European Bishops Synod is worth noting. The English Cardinal, Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, spoke on the evangelisation of youth. He invoked postmodernism, not as an adversary but as the cultural context in which young adults live, and so as the only context within which we may address them. From this notoriously polyvalent word, he picked out the emphasis on choice and personal discovery, and the consequent insistence on the priority of personal over institutional authority.

As postmoderns, young people will ordinarily accept values and beliefs only when they see them embodied in attractive and inspiring lives. They also must be given space in which they can explore their commitments. Their search, however, is fuelled by some of the weaknesses of the culture, and particularly by the inadequacy of acquisition and of choice to satisfy people's deeper needs. Although the emphasis on individual choice erodes established forms of community, it can arouse hunger for the experience of community. And about community there is considerable stored Christian wisdom.

Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor, convinced that Christian faith knows something about community, concludes by offering suggestions to the bishops. He urges them to meet openly and often with young adults, to encourage the latter to live in small communities, and to share part of that community life with the young adults.

Those working with young adults will find that the speech represents common sense, and that its recommendations are modest and unexceptionable. But the Cardinal's image of a conversational and exploratory church contrasts with more recent images of the church handling allegations of child abuse. On the one side there is open conversation; on the other side, concern for appearances. The desire for discovery meets a passion for concealment. Vulnerable bishops are juxtaposed with controlling bishops. Truth as journey replaces truth as possession. Of the two representations of church, that depicted by Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor is the more attractive.

He addresses the church. But his words will resonate with anyone who tries to commend to young adults a generous life, and hopes to enlist them in the struggle to build social institutions around a moral centre. To rely on inherited traditions, on a liberal tolerance, or on a prescribed way will not be enough. Anything less than a radical vision that is embodied in a radical commitment to community, and makes choices in pursuit of that vision, will turn churches and agencies serenely into eventide homes. ■

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# The explorer

THOR HEYERDAHL 1914–2002

**I**N 1999 the pre-millennial fever to list, mark, note and categorise everything about the 20th century moved Thor Heyerdahl's native country to vote him Norwegian of the Century. On 3 May this year he was given a state funeral in Oslo Cathedral, with Norway's royal family among the mourners.

These were potent accolades for someone who had long ceased to live there: he lived in Tenerife and Italy. Norwegians at their best give globalism a good name, and Heyerdahl embodied their Viking dreaming of boundless adventuring, seafaring and intrepid exploration with a very modern twist of global understanding and tolerance.

Born at Larvik in 1914, he was the only child of older, well-to-do, educated parents. At university he became fascinated by Polynesia, and determined to live as ancient humans had done. (His unfortunate first bride found herself on Fatu Hiva in the Marquesas for a year-long honeymoon in 1937, living on roots, berries and river prawns.)

It was in the Marquesas, studying the animals and plants that had drifted over on ocean currents to colonise Polynesia, that Heyerdahl became convinced—against most other scientists—that the human population had done the same. His conviction was to culminate in the famed *Kon-Tiki* expedition in 1947. Heyerdahl and five others took 101 days to sail a balsa-wood raft 8000 kilometres from Callao, Peru to Polynesia (Raroia Atoll, Tuamotu Archipelago). After *Kon-Tiki*, Heyerdahl became famous and rich, able to test his pet theories, undertaking further exploratory adventures to the Galapagos Islands, to Easter Island, and numerous attempts, many successful, across the Atlantic, up the Tigris and to the Maldives.

His impact was related to his stature as a personality rather than as a scientist. He believed fervently that Easter Island had been colonised by people sailing from

Canada and from Peru. Recent DNA evidence proves otherwise. But his heyday showed his real significance: Heyerdahl was so completely of the 20th century as to embody its deepest impulses. He lived as freely as any human being ever could, a global citizen and atheist untrammelled by institutional religion, going where he would, doing what he wished. He symbolised the century's early optimism about a boundless world full of exploitable resources, a faith in 'civilisation' as well as in noble savages. He was of the enlightened West,

which, having defeated the Nazis, was going to bring equality, knowledge and justice to the world as colonies shook off their masters and peoples joined in greater understanding through education and globalisation in its most benign, UN-style forms. Communism, the only threat, would soon be vanquished, capitalism and freedom would bring lasting peace. Rationalism would replace superstition. Racial prejudice would die out.

But Easter Island became a sign not of cross-cultural hope but, as archaeological research gradually revealed, a terrible warning to the rest of the world. Its inhabitants had colonised the place, overpopulated it, deforested it and exterminated its animals, erecting those huge, strange brooding monuments to their own hubris as they did so. In the end they starved and died,

the memory of their culture lost, resorting to cannibalism in the famine and degradation that ensued. Heyerdahl was very conscious of this in later years, particularly after noticing the increase in pollution of the oceans when he undertook his Ra expeditions in 1969 and 1970. Twentieth-century man that he was, he became a conservationist and joined the governing board of Green Cross International, a prestigious environmental movement begun by Mikhail Gorbachev.

Heyerdahl was still vigorous at 87. Then suddenly, last year, he fell ill and was diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumour. A month before his death on 18 April he ceased all treatment, refused food and water and went to his beloved retreat in Italy to die.



Few people in history will ever have had such control over their own life and destiny as did Thor Heyerdahl. His breadth of vision meant that, despite being sometimes mistaken, he caused us to think about the world in fruitful ways.

—Juliette Hughes

## 'I am I ...'

REVIVING THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM

**D**ALE WASSERMAN'S *The Man of La Mancha* (with music by Mitch Leigh and lyrics by Joe Darion) has been one of Australia's favourite American musicals ever since its first Melbourne season in 1967–68, shortly after the show's very off-Broadway première at New York University in 1965. That legendary J.C. Williamson's production played for almost a year, on tour and back in Melbourne, before being revived in 1970 and 1976. A 1988 production enjoyed less success, but now there's another, in Melbourne and set to tour for some months.

The current production is directed by New Yorker Susan H. Schulman with Australians Peter England (set), Kristian Fredrikson (costumes), Guy Noble (musical direction) and Trudy Dagleish (lighting) making up the rest of the creative team.

I saw one of the last performances of the original JCW's show in Melbourne and remember vividly its huge moody set with a great drawbridge over the dungeons of the Spanish Inquisition, its intelligent lyrics (some of them worked up in richly contrapuntal, almost operatic duets and trios) and, above all, its British-born star Suzanne Steele as Aldonza. Steele really stole that show. English-trained Charles West was a good Cervantes/Don Quixote, but Steele was the ultimate voluptuous kitchen-maid whose feistiness made her a flesh-and-blood evocation of the Don's idealised Dulcinea.

*The Man of La Mancha* was innovative at a time when more typically glitzy Broadway musicals like *Sweet Charity* held the stage. It ran two hours without interval. The orchestra was placed behind the set rather than in the pit. The moral tone was high, and the show didn't squib the pack-rape scene. Its complex plot, character development and distinguished literary source all made it a remarkable musical then. It's still a remarkable musical, its exploration of the clash between idealism and pragmatism achieving even greater resonance today.

The story is familiar. Spanish writer Miguel de Cervantes is thrown into jail for questioning (read torturing) by the Inquisition—not for his writings but because, in a day job as a tax-collector, he has had the temerity to exact tax from the church and to foreclose when it refuses to pay up. His fellow prisoners insist on a mock trial to test what *they* see as his crimes: being a bad poet, an idealist and an honest man. In defending himself, he begins an elaborate dramatisation of a manuscript found in his possession: An elderly gentleman takes leave of his senses and his household to become the imaginary Don Quixote and to embark on his 'glorious quest ... to dream the impossible dream, to right the unrightable wrong'. His duel with the windmill is dealt with early, offstage but with a smart light projection on a dungeon wall. His visit to the inn (which he imagines is a castle), his subsequent investiture as a knight and his falling in love with the kitchen maid Aldonza (his Dulcinea), occupy the bulk of the action.

Later incidents—Quixote robbed by Gypsies and Aldonza raped by muleteers, for example—are all seen by the Don in the same optimistic light that pervades Voltaire's *Candide*. Adversity merely serves to spur him on in his quest ... 'no matter how hopeless, no matter how far'.

Much of the irony in this, of course, comes from Cervantes, but it is smartly borne out in some of Wasserman's and Darion's song lyrics. The idealism of Quixote's notion of 'destiny' (in the opening song line 'I am I, Don Quixote, the lord of La Mancha') and his willingness 'to march into hell for a heavenly cause' (in the show's biggest hit song 'The Impossible Dream') contrast poignantly with the pragmatism of Aldonza's 'One pair of arms is like another / It's all the same.' Likewise, 'I'm [we're] only thinking of him' is also bitterly ironic, sung by the old man's housekeeper, padre and desperate-to-be-married niece Antonia when they plot to recapture their errant dreamer and make him face reality.

Anthony Warlow is quoted in the program as saying 'he considers the dual role of Cervantes/Don Quixote ... to be the musical theatre equivalent of *King Lear*'. The final scenes are complex, certainly. Cervantes, his story apparently ended, is called to go upstairs to face the music, but he now desperately improvises a last rite. His old man renounces his Quixotic charade and goes home to die, only to receive a final visitation from Aldonza—now unmistakably Dulcinea. As the drawbridge descends,

she reprises 'The Impossible Dream', reawakening the spirit of Quixote in the dying man. At this point, we clearly have a simultaneous *triple* character portrayal: Cervantes as old gent as Quixote again. This is brilliant music drama: Schulman's production and Warlow himself capture the moment superbly.

I had some misgivings about the production. With an introduced interval it's slightly slow and ponderous at two-and-three-quarter hours; the choreography of the pack-rape (called 'The Abduction' in the program) is twee and soft; Sancho Panza's 'fat-suit' seems to constrict its inhabitant unduly.

That it is still a highly enjoyable show is due as much to the outstanding performers



Aldonza (Caroline O'Connor) and Quixote (Anthony Warlow).

as to the complex qualities of the musical itself. If the JCW's version was Suzanne Steele's show, this is Anthony Warlow's. He is by turns authoritative, funny, vulnerable, compelling, pitiable and pitiful (truly a knight of woeful countenance) and, finally, very moving. He is also in great vocal form. Caroline O'Connor worried me a bit at first—she's a rather reedy Aldonza—but her final moments were winners.

Finally, a visual delight: the horse and mule on which Quixote and Sancho first embark on their quest are marvels of 'improvisation' (in that they're fashioned from available materials by the prisoners) but also of the designer's art. Their heads are just bits of rolled cane with straw for manes, but each animal's face projects a sharp sense of personality. This production appeals on practically every level.

—Geoffrey Milne

## In Dili

HEALING WAR WOUNDS

**I**F YOU WALK past the Hello Mister supermarket, past the boys on the corner selling Telstra phonecards, and turn left at the

cluster of buildings and air-conditioned portables that make up the soon-to-be emptied United Nations headquarters in Dili, you will come to a small Indonesian-style *warung*. Inside, a smiling young man fills a plate with rice, boiled eggs and cooked greens—all for one dollar US. This is Dili, and for a foreigner the meal is a bargain. For the locals around me, it is often difficult to meet the basic cost of living.

Despite the usual dusk rush hour, things seem quieter on the streets of Dili, calmer than a year ago when I last visited East Timor, and a world away from the carnage of September 1999. But the impact of the aid agencies and foreign support that flooded into the country in early 2000 is obvious in the congested traffic and crowded Australian-style restaurants. In Dili you can still watch the latest footy game with a VB in your hand and a local prostitute to keep you company. There are fewer foreigners here now, and the Timorese look to a more stable, peaceful life. But some things that once would have been unthinkable in this strictly Catholic society may now be permanent fixtures.

At midnight on 19 May, the UN officially handed over sovereignty to the East Timorese Constituent Assembly, forming the National Parliament. How the elected leadership will deal with the many problems they face is yet to unfold, but they have achieved the long-fought-for aim of independence—East Timorese themselves dealing with the issues that face them. Society here has undergone a radical change. People are more open, the ingrained fear has gone, departing with the last of the Indonesian troops in late 1999. 'We will make mistakes, but at least they will be our mistakes,' one university student told me.

The question three years on is how a society—as a collection of individuals and as a nation—recovers from such widespread trauma. Are the mechanisms to allow for that healing in place?

One mechanism is the recently established Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation. It promotes a process of reconciliation for victims, low-level militia killers and their leaders. 'To reconcile two sides it needs one who can reconsider, can recognise that he did mistakes, and from the other side the willingness to forgive—that is reconciliation,' says the recently elected president, Xanana Gusmao.

Gusmao's principal concerns now lie with the need to rebuild the country. Infrastructure, education, health—this, he says, is what the people are demanding. And in

any case, where would the funds come from to accuse, convict and jail hundreds of people when a large proportion of the population has trouble providing a basic meal for their families?

However, many young, educated East Timorese have grave concerns about the reconciliation process. Many villagers also. They ask, 'How can you bring these people back when, in some cases, we have not yet even found the graves of the people they killed?' It is a situation reminiscent of Rwanda, where everyone knows someone in their community who was killed, and also knows the person who killed them.

Many Timorese see the only solution for true justice and reconciliation to be an international war crimes tribunal, and reconciliation in their own communities. Adrianno do Nascimento, a 32-year-old former high-school teacher from Suai, is one of them. He now works for a non-government organisation called *La'o Hamutuk*, the East Timor Institute for Reconstruction Monitoring and Development.

Adrianno studied in Kupang before returning to Suai in 1997 to begin teaching. There, as a student activist in January 1999, he was at the church in Suai, in charge of registering refugees fleeing from the recently formed militias. On 6 September, around 400 people were murdered in church grounds, along with the priests giving them shelter.

'After they killed them in the church, this militia man came to my village and said, "I have killed your leaders. See my bloody knife and bloody T-shirt. If you do not go to Atambua [in West Timor] this will happen to you."

'He came back in mid-2000, was sent to Dili by the PKF [peace keeping force] and then was released in 2001 and sent back to my village.'

In this way Adrianno explains the inherent difficulty of dumping former killers back into the community with no perceived justice or reconciliation—just the leaders in Dili insisting that the community must accept them.



I am sitting at the back of the East Timor Student Solidarity Council in Dili, home base for many student community campaigners for independence and justice. It is difficult to imagine that this was once an Indonesian military base. Now young men play volleyball where, not so long ago, they might have been interrogated or tortured. This irony is not lost on Joao da Silva

Sarmento, the Council's co-ordinator, who celebrates his 26th birthday on the day of independence.

I first met Joao in July 1999. At that time he was frantically compiling lists of human rights abuses to distribute to the international community and the media. He was one of the few people I knew who accurately predicted the scale of the military reaction to a vote for independence. Now he is very angry about the lack of interest he perceives in the country's leaders for establishing an international war crimes tribunal. There is a strong sense among many young people of being sidelined by their charismatic leader, and it does not sit well.

In March of this year there was a protest by some 20 East Timorese non-government organisations over three issues: the arrival of the Japanese Defence Force without an apology to East Timorese victims of rape committed by forces occupying Timor during World War II; the call for a US apology for its part in supporting the 1975 invasion; and a demand for the establishment of an international war crimes tribunal. Xanana Gusmao told the assembled crowd that such a tribunal was not a priority, claiming it was up to the international community to push for its establishment.

'It shocks many people,' says Sarmento, 'especially the victims.'

A softly spoken, slight man, Sarmento leans over and begins apologising for the dust on the table in front of us. It is a hot windy afternoon in Dili, and he apologises once again for the leaves that blow around my feet. As a young man looking to the future of his country, he asks an interesting question. Is it possible to create a just and democratic society in which the community will have confidence, when the crimes of the past have not been fully addressed?

'If they allow this impunity it is very bad for the rest of Indonesia, for West Papua and Aceh,' he says. And finally: 'It is also about humanity. Crimes against international law. Because crimes against East Timor are also crimes against all humanity.'

—Meredyth Tamsyn

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## Close up

The political rhetoric struts on stilts. Sharon won't be deterred. Arafat mouths the words of a statesman, too late. Netanyahu ups the ante. In Washington the cautionary language might be bold but it has little effect.

Perhaps that is why still images have so much power. There is no compromise or pretence in what they show of daily misery and death in Israel and in what is left of Palestinian territory. Little wonder war veterans are so often silent about their experiences—we learn that anew each Anzac Day. Their heads are still full of horror. Words don't serve their deepest needs.

But, in ways that are almost unimaginable to us here, life has to go on in Netanyah, in Ramallah, in Jerusalem, Nablus, Bethlehem, Jenin. The woman passing through the occupied area of Hebron on the West Bank (top right) still has to fetch and carry, find her way home through the litter of barbed wire and domestic fragments. Who once owned the yellow bucket?

The blue plastic (or is it a nylon sleeping bag?) is no longer just an incidental trapping of modern life. In other images in this series, too terrible to reproduce, it becomes a winding cloth or a cover for people blown apart by suicide bombers.

And the bombers themselves— young men mostly, but now some women too, though they are not shown here—paper the walls in a travesty of fame. Martyrs? The hands waving in front of the posters (bottom right) are the hands of Palestinian children, caught up in the hysteria of protest and fervour. This is what war, terrorism and intransigence teaches children.

The photographs are by Q. Sakamaki/Agence Friends.

—Morag Fraser



# A better way

Universities face yet another government review. **Frank Jackson** argues that funding and policy should be determined by independent experts.

**O**N 26 APRIL, the Minister for Education, Science and Training, Brendan Nelson, announced a wide-ranging review of higher education. Just about everything will be on the table, but the issue that will dominate the review will be the perennial one of how to determine the funding an individual university gets from the government. It is vital for the future of higher education in this country that we change the current system.

From the 1960s to the late 1980s Australia had a very simple way of determining the funding. We divided the tertiary institutions into two groups, one called universities and the other called advanced colleges. Each group was funded on a per-student basis, taking some account of cost differences between subjects, but at a markedly higher rate for the institutions called universities than for those called advanced colleges. The arrangement was justified by giving the two groups different missions. Universities were expected to carry out research and graduate supervision as well as undergraduate teaching, whereas advanced colleges were primarily charged with undergraduate teaching and professional training.

With the decision in 1987 by John Dawkins to abolish this division (known as the binary divide), a new method had to be found. The method that developed has four elements. First, there remains a large funding-per-student component that takes some account of cost differences between subjects; you get more for a medical student than for a fine arts one, for example. Second, there is the funding allocated by government-funded research agencies, of which the Australian Research Council (ARC) and the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) are the most significant. Third, there are allocations driven by formulae devised by DETYA—now DEST

(Department of Education, Science and Training)—with a small input from the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee. Finally, there are ad hoc government allocations. The allocations from the various programs in the prime minister's \$2.9 billion 'Backing Australia's Ability' initiative are good examples of the last.

A new set of DEST formulae came into operation this year, for funding starting in 2002. Three formulae in particular require closer scrutiny. All up, they control the allocation of over half a billion dollars each year, so the incentives they generate are substantial:

- The Institutional Grants Scheme (IGS) allocates funds on the basis of publications (ten per cent); research income (60 per cent); and research student load (30 per cent).
- The Research Training Scheme (RTS) allocates funds on the basis of publications (ten per cent); research income (40 per cent); and research degree completions (50 per cent).
- The Research Infrastructure Block Grants (RIBG) allocate funds on the basis of success in obtaining grants from the ARC, NHMRC and similar bodies.

These formulae cover each and every one of our 38 universities. In a country as large and diverse as Australia, we should be developing a diverse system. You don't get a diverse system when major incentives are uniform across the system.

Further, the major role given to research training in the RTS and IGS means that every university in Australia is under substantial pressure to boost its postgraduate research enrolments. In the US, a number of highly regarded colleges pride themselves on being very good places to take a first degree—examples are Oberlin, Vassar and Smith. There is no chance of our getting an Oberlin in Australia under the present funding arrangements.

The pressure to boost postgraduate numbers is having some harmful effects. One is that some universities are entering into arrangements that border on buying postgraduate students. They are moving substantial funds into additional scholarships, top-ups on existing scholarships, and other financial incentives like housing subsidies and relocation expenses, to attract research postgraduates. Arrangements of this kind have been around for some time and are perfectly acceptable within limits. However, we are in danger of moving outside these limits and entering into a bidding war. This is nice for the postgraduates concerned but not so nice for the parts of the universities that are cross-subsidising the contest. It is widely recognised that the bidding wars between states seeking to attract large companies are a net loss to Australia. I fear we may be facing a similar situation in universities.

Another consequence of the push for postgraduates is that departments are being pressured to take on students who should not be doing a research degree in the first place. Sometimes the right thing to say to someone thinking of doing a research postgraduate degree is—don't. The right degree for them may be a professional doctorate or a diploma or a coursework Masters, or perhaps they should get a job and maybe—or maybe not—think about doing a research degree after a period in the workforce. In this context, it is worth emphasising that the monetary value of a research degree to a university under the formulae is independent of its quality, provided that it is completed successfully. A PhD that is praised by external examiners and that secures a research position at Imperial College London is worth the same as one passed without enthusiasm and never read by anyone except the student, the examiners and the supervisor.

Departments are also under great pressure to hold on to their best undergraduates. Often—not always—it is good for a student to move to a new university to do their PhD or Masters degree. In the US this is standard practice. The current system punishes a department that advises a student to move on and cut the apron strings.

In case you are wondering about the size of the incentive to enrol a research postgraduate student, the return over time to a university for each student is calculated at between \$40,000 and \$100,000. And perhaps more importantly, the return is on a 'share of a fixed total' basis. This means that money going to one university comes from another university. If your university is not competing well, the result will not merely be that it misses out on some extra dollars; it will have money taken away from it. The situation is quite different from that with so-called over-enrolled undergraduates. The dollars for enrolling above one's undergraduate target are an extra in the system. True, it is an extra that comes at no net cost to the government because the extra dollars match the projected

HECS return through the tax system, but they are an extra all the same. By contrast, the dollars for additional research postgraduates come from inside the system.

There are also serious problems with the publication element in the DEST formulae. (Incidentally, it was the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) and not DEST that pushed to have publications included.) Publications are weighted at only ten per cent in the RTS and IGS, but because they appear in both formulae, they move a lot of money. A paper is worth about \$3000 and a book about \$15,000. And, as with postgraduate performance, the funding is on a 'share of a fixed total' basis. If the number of publications from your university drops as a percentage of the system total, funding moves from your university to other universities. In consequence, there is a significant financial incentive to publish a lot. However, it is much easier to publish in what are known as low-impact journals—journals whose papers on average are not cited often—than it is to get a paper into one of the very best journals. So the pressure to publish encourages the publication of run-of-the-mill papers, and recent surveys of publication practices show a clear trend towards publishing in lower-impact journals.

The contrast with practice overseas is marked. In the Research Assessment Exercise in the UK, academics nominate a small selection, four or five, of their best publications over a four-year period.

Similarly, in the best US universities the focus is very much on quality.

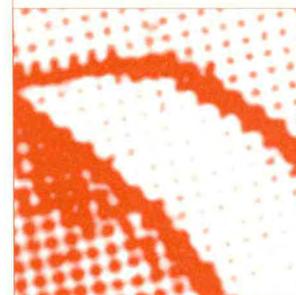
SO WITH THE DEST formulae we have a one-size-fits-all system when we should have one that promotes diversity. We have a system that encourages departments to give bad advice to intending research postgraduates about where they should study, and whether they should undertake a research degree in the first place. It is a system that encourages universities to bid against each other for research postgraduates with dollars taken from, for example, undergraduate education and libraries; a system that encourages the publishing of minor papers and books. The obvious question to ask at this point is, how did this happen?

There is much that could be said on this subject. But I am sure that a major factor is the process by which higher education policy is developed in this country.

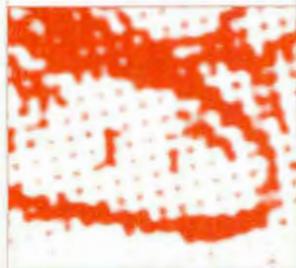
Higher education policies, including the formulae we have just been discussing, are developed through a complex interaction between public servants (especially in DEST), politicians (especially and obviously the Minister for Education) and universities (especially through the AVCC). All three groups are far from ideal sources of policy input.

Many of the public servants involved in formulating research-funding policy are very able, and care

*We need a body charged with providing funding and policy advice on universities whose members have the following characteristics: they are people of undoubted standing; they know a lot about universities; a good number have worked in a university here or overseas; and they are genuinely independent of both the government and the universities.*



*Sometimes the right thing to say to someone thinking of doing a research postgraduate degree is—don't. The right degree for them may be a professional doctorate or a diploma or a coursework Masters, or perhaps they should get a job.*



for the sector, but their knowledge is typically very much second-hand. They have little experience of working and researching in universities. Also, some public servants are too wary of what is sometimes called 'interest-group capture'. Instead of taking advice from people who work in universities and making adjustments for the inevitable self-interest factor, they tend to work largely independently of advice from the practitioners. Also, as has been widely noted, recent and not-so-recent changes to the Australian public service mean it no longer provides the independent, fearless advice to government that citizens would like it to provide. Public servants are under pressure to say what their minister wants to hear.

Many politicians are not well-disposed towards universities. It is said that a senior minister told Nobel Prize-winning scientist Peter Doherty that 'if we gave universities more money, they would only increase the wages of the gardeners'. This may be apocryphal. But I am sure that many senior members of the government regard universities as places that protect mediocrity and resist change in order to look after their own interests rather than the interests of their students and the taxpayer. I think we in universities are partly to blame for this situation. Many senior members of the government, and the opposition if it comes to that, attended universities in the '60s and '70s. Mostly they will have been taught by able, dedicated staff, but the odds are that they will also have had some teachers who were chronically late and disorganised (sometimes proudly so), who had serious personal problems that interfered with their teaching, or who had published nothing of note for ten years and yet had the same teaching load as staff who were writing ground-breaking books. They will also likely recall that the university did nothing about these staff. The situation in universities today is very different and some politicians know this, but many, perhaps most, do not. These bad memories can be very damaging when universities seek extra funding from government.

However, the main problem with politicians is that they are politicians, and I mean this in a nice way. The first question they tend to ask about any funding proposal is whether it is good for the university in their electorate or state or territory. And if they forget to ask this question, a call from the Vice-Chancellor of the university in question will remind them. A major program in 'Backing Australia's Ability' is substantial new funding for Major National Research Facilities. Each and every state and territory received some funding in this program's first round. No-one thinks this was an accident. Also, politicians being politicians, they like media opportunities. This means that they are resistant to increasing the basic operating grants for universities, which is what we who work in universities know is most needed. They much prefer to announce a complex set of new programs, each of which provides a number of media

opportunities: when the program is first mooted, when bids for funding under the program are called for, and when the results are announced.

Finally, I should say something about the AVCC. The AVCC is composed of highly intelligent women and men who care a lot about universities—whatever their staff and students may think from time to time. But they care most about their own university. This makes it very hard for them to speak with a unified voice on major policy proposals. For obvious reasons, in a system as diverse as ours, many major policy proposals move dollars around, and when dollars move around, there are losers as well as winners. Vice-chancellors of the universities that lose under a proposed policy will oppose it more or less automatically. I would like to see more vice-chancellors taking a whole-of-system approach to policy questions, but this is no easy thing to do when your university is in competition with the rest of the system.

Of course, the AVCC does sometimes speak with a unified voice, usually in support of more money for the system as a whole, and often produces compelling figures to back up their claims. But they are so obviously a lobby group, and funding comparisons between Australia and the rest of the world are sufficiently complex to allow government to respond with their own figures in ways that leave the average punter in a state of confusion about whom to believe.

What should be done? We need a body charged with providing funding and policy advice on universities whose members have the following characteristics: they are people of undoubted standing; they know a lot about universities; a good number have worked in a university here or overseas; and they are genuinely independent of both the government and the universities.

If we set up such a body, we would return to the system we had when the Universities Commission (1957–77) and later the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission (1977–87) operated, and we would fall into line with the UK with its Higher Education Funding Council (HEFC).

What are the chances? I am pessimistic. An HEFC involves a transfer of power away from government. True, it would assist the government in making unpopular but necessary reforms by allowing an HEFC to take some of the flak. But governments these days seem to prefer power, and the correlative patronage possibilities, to flak protection. Also, I suspect that some universities would oppose an HEFC. They believe that they do better by lobbying government than by having their funding determined by a genuinely independent body. ■

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# On Elcho Island

When a southern-trained doctor does a locum stint in Yolngu territory, the rules and rhythms of general practice have to adjust.

**F**EW SUBURBS OR TOWNS in Australia could lay claim to having English as a second language, let alone rank it third. Thus, I enjoyed a rare experience on a recent visit to an Australian community where spoken English doesn't even score a bronze.

I was invited to replace a doctor on Elcho Island over Christmas. Elcho, where gum tree meets tropical palm, is just a short swim north of Arnhem Land. You could almost wade across from mainland Australia in the deliciously warm Arafura Sea, except the salt-water crocodiles would take a keen interest. Little wonder the box jellyfish antivenene in the doctor's fridge remains unopened—even the locals keep their toes dry on the pristine beaches.

I chose a safer method of transit, but even flying has its difficulties. It takes two days from Tullamarine and the Darwin-to-Elcho leg is rumoured to be the most expensive public flight in the country, per kilometre. I was determined to get my money's worth, loading up the luggage compartment with two weeks' supply of food for my family (I'd heard the local store sold floppy carrots for three times the price of crisp ones back home).

At the Darwin check-in the attendant's frown deepened with every bag I produced. My four-year-old's Wiggles backpack weighed more than he did, and I was sweating like a drug smuggler. I was asked to step on the luggage scales myself, clocking in with just grams to spare—the perspiration helped.

The first sound I heard as I stepped on to Elcho was a loudspeaker bellowing out one of the many Indigenous languages spoken on the island. The nurse who greeted me

explained that the public address system can be heard throughout the township and anyone can have a go.

Participation is particularly encouraged at 7.30am because many families don't own clocks, so the kids need a reminder to prepare for school. If no-one has anything to say, music is played, much of it recorded locally—this is Yothu Yindi and Saltwater Band country.

Approximately 1500 Yolngu live on the island. My family of five swelled the Balanda (white) population by almost ten per cent.

For centuries before the Dutch ship *Arnhem* explored the region in 1623, Elcho served as a major link in the trade route stretching from Central Australia through to Macassar, in what is now Indonesia. The Yolngu traded vast quantities of pearls and trepang (sea slugs) to the Macassans, in return for metal, cloth

and tobacco. In 1907, the newly formed Commonwealth government banned Macassans from entering Australian waters, and the entire export system collapsed.

The Balandas, whose existence was still only hearsay for many Yolngu, had made their first impact. Worse followed: a number of mass murders in which entire family groups were hunted down and shot. The Yolngu heard rumours that a new 'government' had taken over down south, but they never met these strange lawmakers who allowed lawlessness to go unpunished.

Life on the land became untenable as the pastoralists' fences multiplied, forcing the Yolngu on to the Methodist missions. When Australia's north coast was attacked during the Second World War, and Japanese bombs exploded over Darwin, lay missionary Harold Shepherdson moved his mission east, to the relative safety of Elcho Island.

**H**OW FAR HAS Australia progressed since the days of unpunished human slaughter and stolen children? The Elcho I know has an Aboriginal council and a thriving football competition, and a local Yolngu woman provides the police presence. Although the church mission arguably contributed to the decline of traditional culture, it did provide some shelter against the cruel changes sweeping Arnhem Land. The mission workers lived without luxury among the local people to a greater extent than most Balandas before or since.

However, Richard Trudgen, author of *Why Warriors Lie*



Elcho Island Aboriginal health worker, Rrapa Dhurrkay, takes a patient's blood pressure. Photograph courtesy Justin Coleman.

*Down and Die*, suggests that the health of Elcho Islanders has declined significantly in the last three decades. Ironically, this dates back to the time when 'self-determination' became the buzzword in Canberra.

He compares two health screenings, 35 years apart. In 1957, of 713 Yolngu people examined, only one had hypertension and one was obese. In 1992, a similar screening found 30 per cent were overweight and 50 per cent of adults had some degree of kidney failure.

My brief snapshot of the clinic mirrored my past experience in Aboriginal health elsewhere—the diseases of 'old age' were occurring two decades earlier on Elcho.

In my mainstream GP practice in Victoria, men in their 30s are probably the population group I see least often. On Elcho, 30-year-olds were regular attendees, if only to pick up their diabetes, blood pressure and cholesterol medication. I had to call in the Darwin Hospital plane twice each week to evacuate people with life-threatening pneumonia. Alcohol was not a significant factor, as the island was dry, but unemployment was the rule, not the exception. Ironic, then, that the one local store was incredibly expensive—and its vegetables were limp.

**D**RIVING TO WORK ON my first day I swerved off the road to let the sleeping dogs lie, and turned left, as directed, at the dead bat swinging from a power line. The morning clinic meeting was held on the wide verandah above the rustling mango trees. The conversation, in English and *Yolngu matha*, centred on a crocodile that had been threatening dogs on the main beach.

We got down to business. I'd read that Elcho had an ambulance and asked who the local officer was. 'You are!' they

laughed. It took a while to get used to using a fully functioning emergency vehicle to take the family shopping.

In the afternoon I met Rrapa Dhurrkay, the Aboriginal health worker who would be sharing the on-call roster with me that night.

Rrapa has spent her life on Elcho except for a few years at secondary school in Darwin. While working as a filing clerk at the health centre she studied for a year to gain a certificate as a health worker. She describes the job as an opportunity to help her people.

'I go and talk to young girls at school about contraception and domestic violence. We go out bush and tell them the story about what is good food for pregnancy and about coming into the clinic for checkups. The older women talk about bush foods because people eat too much take-away.'

'In the olden days,' Rrapa explains, 'Yolngu used to live in a shelter and move to another shelter, camp to camp. Now Yolngu live in the same house all the time, and we are getting sicker and sicker. A lot of young men smoke marijuana, and we have a lot of suicide.'

Under these conditions, the clinic staff doubly impressed me. The coolly efficient working style of the three nurses, all Balandas, reminded me of the way Michael Long plays football. They seem to move a few paces slower than the surrounding chaos, but then, suddenly, the complex job is done. It's a natural selection thing—the remoteness of the clinic soon weeds out the incompetent clinicians and the heat penalises those who move too fast.

The job of the Aboriginal health workers is equally demanding. They are healers, translators, medication dispensers and founts of local knowledge. Rrapa even manages to do on-call overnight despite not owning a phone.

The patient's family knocks on the door of whichever house has the on-call clinic car parked outside. In Rrapa's case, this wakes up the 15 extended-family members sleeping inside her three-bedroom tin house, and she goes to the clinic to treat the patient. If all goes well I get a courtesy phone call from Rrapa, who describes her management. I congratulate her on her medical skills, then roll over in bed. It really is a functional system.

Well, maybe the system doesn't always run so smoothly, but it underscores the rule that a local health worker is always going to have more impact on a needy community than a temporary doctor. I had no illusions that I was any more than a minor player on the team.

In fact, the only short-term visitor who made his mark while I was on the island was an obese man, clothed completely inappropriately for the climate. When Santa landed on Elcho, courtesy of the local air service, the reindeer were nowhere to be seen—perhaps they took the day off when the humidity hit 95 per cent. But I won't forget the sound of 400 Yolngu kids at the airport delightedly screaming, 'ho, ho, ho' in unison. Some words transcend all languages. ■

**Justin Coleman** is a general practitioner and writer on medical issues, with a particular interest in Aboriginal health.

#### March 2002 Book Offer Winners

J.P. Castley, Artarmon, NSW; T. Cooney, South Perth, WA; C. Dalton, South Caulfield, VIC; D. Jenkins, Kurri Kurri, NSW; E.D. Johnston, Rowes Bay, QLD; V. Luke-Fitzgerald, Trevallyn, TAS; P. McArdic, Melbourne, VIC; J.R. Moulay, Rydalmere, NSW; M. Roberts, Strathmore, VIC; M. Shelley, Ballarat, VIC.

#### April 2002 Book Offer Winners

F. Andersen, Keilor, VIC; A.M. Aujard, Brighton, SA; J. Ballhausen, Narromine, NSW; J. L. Creati, Belmont, VIC; A. Gayford, Abbotsford, VIC; W. Heggarty, Yagoona, NSW; M.L. & H.M.P. Kain, Prospect, SA; E. F. Kenny, Myrtle Bank, SA; M. Kerby, Lakes Entrance, VIC; D. Kojc, St Albans, VIC; P. McNamara, View Bank, VIC; M. Poole, Kew, VIC; M. Ramundi, Greystanes, NSW; H & F van der Heide, Carindale, QLD; M. Wright, Mt Lawley, WA.

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Against the odds,  
Bougainvilleans are  
rebuilding a life  
for themselves.



## Carving out the peace

**T**WO RECENT happenings in Canberra augured that the Bougainville conflict could end constructively and that Australia may have learnt a profound lesson about non-punitive peacekeeping in its Melanesian 'arc of instability'.

One was the visit to the Australian National University (ANU) of two obscure traditional or 'Custom' leaders, Damien and Cecilia Dameng (pictured above), to tell their life stories. The other was the launch of a small book, *Without a Gun: Australians' Experiences Monitoring Peace in Bougainville, 1997–2000* (Pandanus). The latter was performed before an atypical crowd in the tearoom of the ANU's Coombs Building by Lieutenant General Peter Cosgrove. The well-lathered listeners were not just the staid and tidied scruffs from academe, but sartorial and—for the cocktail hour—scented public servants notably from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Department

of Defence, AusAID and the Federal Police, justifiably proud of a unique achievement.

However, at the launch on 12 March we were not quite sure that the Papua New Guinea parliament would rally the two-thirds majority needed to ratify the constitutional changes that, on paper at least, would break the impasse in negotiations on Bougainville's future. Sure, the changes had already sailed through the first of the two separate scrutinies required by the constitution, but PNG is in election mode. This is the year of the glittering prizes. Would enough MPs turn up to vote on a now-tiresome issue? Bougainville, to the reps from the boon-docks, was now merely geographically peripheral, where before, with a great copper mine providing 17 per cent of revenue and 36 per cent of export earnings, it had been economically central as well. Mercifully, Prime Minister Morauta had

a prime ruse in his locker: the MPs' opulent slice of the rural development slush funds would be available *after* the session. The task of the whips was also made easier as the major parties were mobilising conventions at the time and could shunt members home via Port Moresby.

In the event, 87 of the legislative complement of 109 turned up and, on 17 March, voted unanimously. Bougainville is to have high autonomy within the PNG constitution; it can have a referendum on independence within ten to 15 years of implementation; and a three-stage plan for the disposal of weapons by ex-combatants is to be expedited.

Breaking from PNG had always been on Damien Dameng's mind. He and his 4000 or so supporters had done this in the 1960s in the Kongora montane forest south-east of the Panguna mine site, where he set up his Bauring Association (*bauring* means 'the/his child' in Nasioi),

now referred to as Meekamui Pontoku Onoring (*Meekamui* means 'sacred land'). It has been popularly known as the *Fifty Toea Government* (*toea* means 'cents') because of its subscription fee and refusal

thought regressive. In the 1960s and later, they were persuaded that ethnicity was something that would be absorbed during modern 'nation-building'. So in Bougainville the multiplier effects of a great mine

Solomons (to emphasise its 'natural' location in the Solomons archipelago) followed on 1 September 1975, a fortnight before PNG became formally independent. However, this was not an armed revolt, and what seemed to be a permanent settlement occurred in August 1976 when PNG adopted a national system of provincial government. The North Solomons province became the most prosperous and best-governed in PNG.

Discontent smouldered over the next decade, however. The glaring desecration of the ancestral lands—with a four-square-kilometre crater and millions of tonnes of overburden sludged into the Jaba river system and Empress Augusta Bay—was a continuous affront. The influx of 'redskins' from other provinces was irksome when they were gainfully employed, threatening when they were not. Compensation payments were to prove inadequate, particularly when they had been one-off and unproductively spent. There was intergenerational conflict as population growth reduced benefits that were, in any case, inequitably distributed in traditionally egalitarian clans. Although the mining agreement had been renegotiated in 1974 with provision for seven-year reviews, these did not occur, owing to the negligence of the national government. Neither it nor Bougainville Copper Ltd (BCL) was alert to the ominous mood developing at the mine site.

Violence, led by a former BCL surveyor, Francis Ona, erupted in late November 1988 after the company failed to respond to a demand for ten billion kina of compensation (equal then to US\$10 billion) although total revenue from the mine to that date had been less than two billion kina. Damage to infrastructure led to incompetent and brutal police action and, when that failed, to the call-out of the Defence Force (PNGDF) in April 1989. By that time, secession, urged by Dameng or Ona, was back on the agenda. It was not modified by Prime Minister Namaliu's generous offer of greater autonomy, increased revenue and half the national government's equity in the mine, which now ceased to function. Ethnic cleansing began; the 'redskins' fled the province.

By early 1990, the PNGDF had clearly failed to defeat what had become the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA). In March, in an attempt to minimise bloodshed, Namaliu declared a ceasefire,

## If Canberra had listened to Dameng and his like, the worst catastrophe in the south-west Pacific since World War II would have been avoided.

to acknowledge other governments, not even the Bougainville provincial one. Its aim was 'to fasten' their land and culture against alien intrusion.

Educated to fourth-grade primary level, Dameng, now aged 70, had been a Catholic catechist but retained, syncretically, only the rules and rites that could be blended with customary beliefs and practice. His association ran its own 'schools'. He saw Conzinc Riotinto of Australia's (CRA) prospecting from 1964 as a dire threat to his culture. Although his clan's land was not required, he resisted all blandishments and became the bane of the company and the Australian administration. On my first visit to Bougainville in the late 1960s, his was a name to conjure with, but he was not on general exhibition.

As was usual with such 'nativistic' movements, Dameng's had to be dubbed 'cargoistic' and 'cultic', as no doubt many of his followers were. In his *Black Islanders* (1991), Emeritus Professor Douglas Oliver, doyen of Harvard and Pacific anthropologists, seems sure of it. However, if the basic meaning of those terms is a belief in the supernatural provenance of money and goods, then a couple of lunches and social events with this passionate and reflective man are as disabusing as they would have been in the 1960s with principals of the notorious Hahalis Welfare Society on Buka Island, with which Dameng had 'bush correspondence'. Aside from his surprise on seeing that whites actually grow their own vegetables, and some naivety as to cash flows, he was eminently rational. So was Cecilia, a dignified mother of ten (grandmother of 49), with the carriage of one honoured in the matrilineage system that prevails in most of Bougainville.

Dameng had an obdurate idea of his people's welfare, which civil administrators and their academic consultants

and decolonisation would eventually overwhelm 'Custom' and be accepted as beneficial—or at least inevitable. In 1968 Professor Oliver, in the *CRA Gazette* (16 August), told shareholders that, while the impact of the mine might be traumatic, the local people 'will probably get used to the Company's presence'. As for secession, in the first edition of his best-selling *Bougainville: A Personal History* (Melbourne University Press, 1973), Oliver would have gone to press without mentioning it if, at the last moment (as a sort of 'STOP PRESS'), riots against the killing of two Bougainville public servants in the PNG Highlands had not blazoned it.

Oliver was justly noted for his outstanding pre-war ethnography of the Siwai in Bougainville's south-west. If expert humanist opinion was so impercipient, what chance did hard-hatted mining engineers have of understanding the context of their environmentally destructive, although nationally essential, labours? Yet, if they, or rather Canberra, had listened to Dameng and his like, the worst catastrophe in the south-west Pacific since World War II would have been avoided. Ironically, landowners on mining prospects in other parts of PNG welcomed this sort of 'development'. It was beyond Canberra's imagination that Bougainville could be 'a special case', and in the late 1960s its mine seemed to be essential to what it was hoped would become an economically viable, decolonised Papua New Guinea.

**E**ARLY PROTESTS against the resumption of village land from 1964 to 1974 were controlled by police action, improved rents, elaborate tables of compensation and the prospect of decentralised government. An impasse over the funding of the region's interim provincial government in 1975 led to its abolition. A declaration of secession as the Republic of the North

to take place under the supervision of a team of international diplomats. He withdrew the PNGDF and riot squads from Bougainville and Buka Island but, without instruction, the routine police also withdrew. A farcical show of handing in arms followed. Namaliu's next recourse was a sea and air blockade of supplies and services. The rebel response was another unilateral declaration of independence, this time by a Republic of Meekamui, with Ona as president and former premier, Joseph Kabui, as vice-president.

A period of anarchy followed during which rebels attempted to purge opposition. Educated and prosperous people were targeted; old enmities surfaced and payback was rife. The reaction on Buka Island in the north was the initiation of a Bougainville Resistance whose leaders invited the PNGDF to return. Gradually, in 1991–92, the PNGDF re-established itself at key centres in the province without defeating the guerrilla BRA. Atrocities occurred on both sides. BRA sympathisers and some journalists have exaggerated the number of deaths caused by violence and lack of medical supplies. Estimates of 15,000–20,000 are too high, although now accepted by Australian Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, perhaps to swell the magnitude of his later achievement. A range of 5000–8000 would be closer to the mark. Villagers, unlike the PNGDF, were only occasionally without adequate nutriment and sometimes healthier without processed foods. Their medical situation was hardly worse than that of many areas of PNG, deprived as they were of medicines, particularly after revenues from Panguna were lost.

Futile attempts to bring peace began in mid-1990. The Honiara Declaration of 1991 called for a Multinational Supervisory Team to oversee the destruction of arms and the restoration of services. The Bougainville Interim Government (BIG)/BRA wanted UN involvement, in the hope of gaining international recognition, but it never eventuated. After the elections of 1992, a new government under Highlander Prime Minister Pias Wingti, influenced by ill-informed carpetbaggers, imagined that aggression might enable the mine area to be sanitised and reopened. Some sensitivity was again restored with his replacement by Sir Julius Chan, who sponsored a peace conference at Arawa in

Bougainville in October 1994, under the surveillance of a South Pacific Peace Keeping Force with personnel from Fiji, Tonga, Vanuatu and New Zealand, and only a surreptitious Australian presence. Although this force performed creditably, the BIG/BRA did not attend, hoping for a conference with a UN mandate rather than one bound to be influenced by Australia.

This development coincided with the emergence of a former acting judge, Theodore Miriung, from the obscurity of his North Nasioi village. Although by conviction a secessionist, he could see the futility of the current armed struggle. Assuming leadership with Chan's approval, he became the Acting Premier of a Bougainville Transitional Government (BTG) comprising representatives from eight 'interim authorities' around the province. Its aims were to unite Bougainvilleans and negotiate a new political status within PNG. Suspicious of Miriung, following some military misadventures, rogue army elements assassinated him.

Desperate for a decisive victory but finally aware that the PNGDF could not achieve it, some members of Chan's government looked to mercenaries. The Sandline fiasco (in which the government

for territorial sovereignty where Bougainville was concerned. There was also popularity to be won in forestalling body bags and the drain on resources.

A truce was agreed to in October; a ceasefire at a further meeting in Lincoln (New Zealand) in January 1998. Proposals were made for a UN observer mission, a 'phased withdrawal' of the PNGDF as civil authority was restored, and a Bougainville Reconciliation Government (BRG). Supplement arrangements had to be made because a BRG ran counter to Chan's 1995 reorganisation of the provincial government system, which reduced autonomy. A consultative Bougainville People's Congress (BPC) without a legal basis was elected in May 1999, with Kabui as president. It was to co-exist with the officially reduced and now-appointed provincial government. Their ultimate rapprochement reflected concern that the province could be irremediably divided. With the constitutional changes of 27 March this year, the problem was resolved.

**T**HROUGHOUT THE attempted reconciliation, emphasis was placed on instilling confidence in the immediate process

**A creative communal spirit is in evidence and it owes something to the return of old leaders like Dameng to public life and to the irenic example of the monitoring groups working without guns.**

contracted the mercenary group, Sandline International, to conduct offensive operations on Bougainville) followed in March 1997. This affair at least alerted both sides to the peril of escalating the conflict. The reaction of the PNGDF to Sandline also improved its image in Bougainville. A New Zealand initiative coinciding with national elections in mid-1997 brought the Bougainville adversaries to neutral ground at Burnham (New Zealand) to discuss a ceasefire. The new PNG prime minister, Bill Skate, perhaps because of a streak of fecklessness, had been opposed to the PNGDF campaign. Skate was a native Papuan and, with Bougainville no longer subsidising Papua, he was not burdened by intense concern

rather than outcomes. An unarmed Truce Monitoring Group (TMG) had been set up at Lincoln, consisting mainly of military personnel from Australia, Fiji and Vanuatu but necessarily commanded by a New Zealander until Australians established better bona fides. By May 1998, and having to bear the logistical costs, Australia was able to assume leadership of the Peace Monitoring Group (PMG) which replaced the TMG. The PMG consisted of some 300 members: 242 military and 16 civilians from Australia, 29 from New Zealand, 10–12 from Fiji and 12–15 from Vanuatu. In mid-2000 it was thought safe to reduce to 195, still a more protracted and expensive venture than Canberra had envisaged but, as A.J. Regan



## When dry means drought

**I**T HAS BEEN DRY IN MELBOURNE for the past five or six years. Each Friday, residents keep a wary eye on advertisements showing the city's water reserves hovering at about half full, just a few percentage points above the trigger point for water restrictions.

Of course, the restrictions would only be temporary. After all, this is Melbourne, and for more than a century and a half the average rainfall in the catchments has been dependable. So things are bound to return to normal soon. Or so we hope. But what if the change is permanent? That is one of the prospects held out by global climate change.

Until now, city water engineers worldwide have designed their systems to cope with extremes that are forecast using past records of water flows, floods and droughts. But climate change would make it impossible to depend on history. That's exactly what Mark Buehler of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California told the third World Water Congress of the International Water Association in Melbourne recently: 'The past no longer predicts the future.'

What's more, change could be sudden. The most recent research suggests that even if the build-up of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is gradual, there is no reason to assume climate change itself will be gradual. Just ask the people of Perth.

Graeme Hughes, of the Water Corporation of Western Australia, told the conference that, for the past 27 years, a 12 per cent decrease in rainfall in the catchments supplying Perth with water had reduced flow to the dams by 50 per cent. The change was so dramatic and prolonged that planners may as well throw out the 100 years of data collected prior to 1977.

The city has been able to meet an increasing demand for water, Hughes said, through a combination of conservation, reservoir development, and private tapping of ground-water supplies. Even so, there have been times of severe water restrictions.

'Perth is not an outlier,' says Mark Buehler, 'but a forerunner of what will become common.' Nearly all global climate models have predicted that the southwestern part of Australia will become much drier.

Graham Harris, from CSIRO, told the conference that in Australia we already use more surface water and bore water than is being replenished annually. We are tapping into our reserves. 'We must seriously think about water reuse in ways we haven't before,' he warns.

Developing larger storages simply will not do, as global warming directly affects the supplies of surface and ground water. Mark Buehler has come to the conclusion that the most reliable sources of 'new' water will be non-traditional ones, such as conservation and recycling—and we better start looking at them seriously. But it's all a bit difficult when you have federal governments in both Australia and the US who do not want to believe in climate change. ■

**Tim Thwaites** is a freelance science writer.

(constitutional lawyer and adviser to Bougainville and PNG leaders) has pointed out, a complex conflict and complex dynamics necessitated an equally complex peace process.

The combatants had kept their arms, so there were serious risks. Ona had not accepted the PMG. He had declared large areas a 'no-go' zone, and in 1997–98 he had once again proclaimed his Republic of Meekamui and changed the name of his Bougainville Revolutionary Army to the Meekamui Defence Force. It remains unpredictable although isolated.

Moreover, there were still conflicts to be resolved, not only between the PNGDF and BRA and between BRA and the Resistance, but also within those groups and between provincial leaders. Violations of the ceasefire did occur, with even a few pot-shots taken at the peacemakers. And there are still uncertainties to be resolved. The new constitutional laws do not take effect until the UN team has verified the second stage of the weapons-disposal plan, and this may depend on acceptable arrangements for an amnesty. If verification is delayed, a new post-election PNG government could oppose implementing the constitutional changes, although such an action could not remain legal once verification occurs, and would overturn the unanimous bipartisan support of 27 March. And just as the BRA revolt spilled over into the Solomons, so a reverse impact could occur. The provinces of Choiseul and the Western Solomons have strong affinities with southern Bougainville and secessionist aspirations of their own.

Finally, we need to ask whether Bougainville has the necessary administrative capacity to cope with the rebuilding of its infrastructure with fewer financial resources than it used to have. With a legacy of violence and anarchic divisiveness, a failure to use its new powers effectively would be disastrous.

A creative communal spirit is, however, in evidence and it owes something to the return of old leaders like Dameng to public life and to the irenic example of the monitoring groups working without guns. ■

**James Griffin** is emeritus professor of history at the University of PNG.

*N.B. I am grateful to A.J. Regan for access to his voluminous writings.*

# The man of conscience

'In modern history the single most creative idea has been the idea of conscience, which began as a religious concept and fanned out into anti-imperialism, anti-slavery, democracy, federalism and generic political realities.'—**Edmund Campion** on Lord Acton

**E**VERYBODY REMEMBERS one thing about Lord Acton, who died 100 years ago, this month, on 19 June 1902. He coined the phrase, 'Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.' Only their memory shortens the phrase to 'Power corrupts.' Such is the way of phrase-makers, to have their words misquoted or misused—Donald Horne has spent a lifetime hearing people get 'Australia is a lucky country' wrong. The key to Acton's thinking lies in his next sentence: 'Great men are almost always bad men.' Notice: *almost always*; power *tends* to corrupt. There is nothing necessary or inevitable about the way power may spoil its users, they have a choice in the matter. Yet the potential is always there, it cannot be denied.

Acton's sentences occur in a long letter to Mandell Creighton, whom he had helped to found the *English Historical Review* and who would later become an Anglican bishop. Creighton was also the author of a five-volume history of the papacy at the time of the Reformation, early volumes of which Acton had reviewed trenchantly. A major complaint of the reviewer was that the author had been too lenient on the papacy, which believed in killing its opponents. He accused Creighton of a watered-down morality that excused the crimes of the great simply because they were great and powerful. A true historian should go the other way, he argued. Thus Calvin, whom many revere as their best religious teacher, is rather to be damned because he had Michael Servetus burnt as a heretic. Historians would hang common murderers;



but what of Queen Elizabeth I, who (they say) asked the jailer to murder Mary Queen of Scots, or William III, who ordered the massacre of Glencoe? And what does one make of the medieval papacy, which set up a system of persecution handing out death and damnation to its opponents? It may have done many good things but this one fact should condemn it. If we judge our great ones by special lenient standards, then we have debased our moral currency.

Australians are comfortable with the idea that great men are almost always bad men. Medieval writers, who taught the reverse doctrine, have had few followers here. Inheritors of Machiavelli's 'whatever it takes' science of politics, we know that power is won by untruths, doctored photographs, mendacious denials and putting the boot into those who cannot kick back. In the debate about an Australian republic,

the most compelling contrary argument was that you could not trust politicians to act squarely. Great men are almost always bad men? We know that.

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The old papal states maintained a prison for priests outside Rome, at Corneto. One day in 1866, Acton gained admission and what he saw shocked him. There were 16 prisoners, dirty and dressed in rags. In squalid conditions, some of them had gone mad; or perhaps they had gone mad before they were locked up. Their jailers could punish them for infringing the rules by denying them exercise, putting them on dry

Above: The Regius Professor of Modern History at the University of Cambridge, c.1896. Photo by Elliott and Fry, London, in *Lord Acton*, by Roland Hill (Yale University Press, 2000).

Below: A specimen of Acton's unchanging handwriting.

bread or making them sleep on the floor of an empty cell. They were not allowed to say Mass but they could recite the Divine Office together. There was a small prayer group under the leadership of a fallen Jesuit. The prison had no library but the inmates earned a little money by book-binding and copying music and manuscripts. Their crimes were various: some were sexual offenders, others heretics; one priest had tried to poison a papal servant in order to get his job for a relative, another had suborned a child to steal money from his father; some were prison escapees, recaptured; one, a suspected schismatic, was imprisoned without trial.

The young English Catholic wrote to the Pope's secretary of state, the vulpine Cardinal Antonelli,

questions. It was an absurd sophistry, he wrote, to say that it would mean only that the Pope would be free from error when teaching *ex cathedra*. Acton suspected that it would force on believers the Catholic Church's then rejection—as taught in the papal *Syllabus of Errors* (1864)—of liberal principles such as free speech, religious liberty or the separation of church and state. There might also be retrospective ratification of papal misdeeds over the centuries. 'The most flagrant and obvious contradiction of papal infallibility is the conduct of persecuting popes,' Acton wrote in his journal. (When the journal was published, in 1975, by the Catholic Institute of Sydney, then the Theological Faculty of Sydney, a papal diplomat remarked that it was sad-making that



asking permission to send the sacerdotal prisoners a box of books. For three weeks he heard nothing. Then running across the secretary of state one day, he was overwhelmed by the suavity of the cardinal, who assured Acton that he was very grateful for his intervention and that the priests would soon have some books. Back at the office, however, Antonelli ticked off the responsible bishop and told him never, ever to allow people like Acton into their prison again.



One evening during the first Vatican Council, Acton went to dinner with Olga, Queen of Wurttemberg, at her hotel in Rome. By now, he was widely known as a fierce opponent of the proposal that the council should declare the Pope to be infallible. For weeks he had been working hard to strengthen the hand of the bishops who opposed this definition of infallibility, as well as gathering news for the German press, which he slipped through the net of the papal post office. Queen Olga asked him, what do you people want? For myself, answered Acton, I want to keep papal authority out of scholarly questions and confine it to discipline and administration. From such an energetic activist, it seems quite a mild reply. If that's all papal infallibility was about, why the fuss?

But Acton and his circle thought that papal infallibility was about much more than this, which is why they fought it. Acton's lieutenant, the British MP Sir Rowland Blennerhassett, wrote to his fiancée that it would be used to control Catholics on political

the faculty should publish such an anti-papal Catholic as Acton.)

The more he thought about it, the more Acton became convinced that the push towards papal infallibility was part of a larger campaign to centralise church power in the hands of the Roman curia. One could date the beginning of the campaign at 1801, when Pope Pius VII, with Napoleon's help, sacked the entire French episcopate in one night, as if the bishops were his curates. Other episodes included the condemnation of liberal Catholics, the univocal declaration of Mary's Immaculate Conception, and the *Syllabus of Errors*. Well, the 19th century was a century of empire-building and throughout much of the world Catholics were a depressed civil entity and thus susceptible to strong ecclesiastical leadership. The trouble with such imperialism, Acton thought, was that it led to historical window-dressing, defending the indefensible. There were people who would gloss over or even lie about the murderous deeds of the past because to give them their proper weight might reflect badly on the institution. The name of this movement was Ultramontanism and he thought that to be an Ultramontane was to be in sin. It was tantamount to colluding with criminals. An unrepentant Ultramontane could never get to heaven, he thought. 'I understand the movement for the glorification of the papacy as a scheme for the promotion of sin,' he wrote to Blennerhassett's wife in 1884.

By 1884, however, it was clear that Acton's reading of the infallibility doctrine had been haywire.

Above and page 27, far right: Fragments of the John D'Alberg, Lord Acton portrait, from *Lord Acton and his Circle*, ed. Abbot Gasquet O.S.B (George Allen/Burns & Oates, London, no date given).

Blennerhassett's 'absurd sophistry'—that it meant only that the Pope would be kept free from error when teaching *ex cathedra*—was beginning to appear in catechisms and to be taught as the universal understanding of the doctrine. By that date, too, it was clear that Ultramontanes, such as Henry Edward Manning and William George Ward, had got it wrong also. They had wanted it to cover the widest variety of papal acts, day in and day out. Such an interpretation was unsustainable. Nevertheless, Archbishop Manning went after oppositionists like a shark after a school of fish. He was one of those bishops who believe that the Kingdom of God is somehow advanced by denying the sacraments to those who disagree with them (i.e. bishops); and he was keen to excommunicate

himself. Then a stray sentence of Newman's caused offence and, to defend it, he wrote an essay on the role of the laity. The essay is today seen as the first text in the modern theology of the laity; at the time it was regarded as heretical, and a bush bishop delated it to Rome. For years Newman was under a cloud, suspect and overlooked. Still he went on defending and encouraging Acton. Then, when Manning was hot in pursuit of the young lord in the aftermath of Vatican I, Newman, teeth on edge again at what Acton was writing, nonetheless refused to desert him.

No good deed goes unpunished. Acton was ungrateful for the support Newman gave him. He wanted the older man to come out and say publicly the sorts of things he himself was saying. But Newman



Acton, if only the young man would give him an opening, which he never did.

Wiser heads waited to see how history would receive the new doctrine. Would it unleash maximal papal pressures on each Catholic's everyday faith life, as Manning and Acton predicted? The experience of history has answered: no. Indeed, in the nearly 150 years since it was debated and then defined, it has been so rarely employed that the question must re-emerge: was it a strategy in a wider game plan? In the centennial year of the definition, 1970, there was a noticeable silence throughout the Catholic world, broken only by the eminent US Protestant historian Martin E. Marty, who discussed in the *National Catholic Reporter* the eclipsing of infallibility during recent decades. As well, a US bookshop threw a party for Protestants, perhaps to celebrate how good for business the controversial RC teaching had been. Since then, increasingly this phantom dogma has been of interest only to historians and professional ecclesiologists.

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John Henry Newman was more than 30 years older than Acton yet he was remarkably sympathetic to the younger man. This remained true even though many of the things Acton wrote set Newman's teeth on edge. When the English bishops wanted to close down Acton's magazine, *The Rambler*, for its cheeky tone, Newman agreed to stay their hands by taking over the editorship, which meant writing much of it

did not share Acton's intellectual position on this—he thought (rightly) that time would give a milder interpretation of infallibility than Acton was prophesying—and also he had a duty of care to his institutions, the Birmingham Oratory and the Oratory School, whereas Acton was an entirely free spirit, unencumbered by responsibilities of that order. So Acton soured against Newman.

The wisest of Acton scholars, Owen Chadwick, has suggested that Newman's acceptance of a red hat, in 1879, enraged Acton against him, as someone who willy-nilly had become a damnable Ultramontane. By 1882 Acton was writing to his revered professor, Ignaz von Döllinger, of the new cardinal: 'Here is the brutal liar, and the artful deceiver, who seems so scrupulous, and certainly does his work, the devil's work, best.' By that time, Acton had retreated into an interior solitude, which had its own punishment; soon he would break with Döllinger and write, 'I am absolutely alone in my essential ethical position.'

One evening after Newman died, in 1890, Acton sat by his fire, collecting his thoughts about 'that splendid sophist', as he now described his old defender. Perhaps he would write an article about him. As usual, Acton jotted his thoughts on record cards, which he then put into a box and forgot about. The article was never written but the notes for it survive at Cambridge. Reading them now, one can see how Acton got madder and madder as the night wore on (was there a decanter of port at hand?). He recorded, for instance, an episode about his colleague on *The Rambler*,

Above, centre: Gladstone family group at Tegernsee, 1879, with Acton and Döllinger together at right.

Above, left: reverse detail of Acton and Döllinger.

From *Letters of Lord Acton to Mary Gladstone*, ed. Herbert Paul (George Allen, 1904).

Richard Simpson, who liked to tease ecclesiastics. He had written comically of Pope Pius V and Newman reported that a Dominican friar had said he would like to burn Simpson at the stake ... Newman adding slyly that he quite knew what the friar meant. A passing comment, not to be taken seriously? One would think so. By the end of the evening, however, Acton was noting that Newman himself wanted Simpson burnt.

Yet Acton's mind was too capacious to deny Newman his place in history. A few years later, he gave his favourite daughter the complete works as a Christmas present and some months later told Gladstone that Newman was the best English Catholic writer since the Reformation. Characteristically, he added in that letter to Gladstone that Newman's work was 'a school of infidelity'. In that, at least, he shared ground with Manning, who once listed ten heresies to be found in Newman's books.

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When Richard Acton was 19 or 20, his father, Lord Acton, took him for a walk near their family property in Bavaria and talked to him about religion. Afterwards the young man recorded in his notebook what his father had said. It makes interesting reading. He told his son that a Catholic should live and die with Christ's words to Peter ringing in his ears: 'I will give

you the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven.' They establish, he said, the notion of the papacy: 'A church, therefore, without a pope is not the church of Christ.' Further, he told Richard, in modern times we attain salvation by using the same methods as a ninth-century monk or a 13th-century friar. Don't think of the church as an ancient manuscript needing inter-



pretation, he said, it is 'a vessel carrying Christ in person'.

The religion of this fierce opponent of Roman centralism, once something of a mystery, has become better understood in recent years. Newman's more public experience affords a window on to what was going on in Acton's inner world. Over his painful years as a Catholic, when many hands seemed turned against him, Newman fashioned for himself a theology of suffering: it was the tax God levied on his followers for the sacramental benefits of being a Catholic. Acton came to that position too. When people were seeking his excommunication, he wrote candidly to *The Times* that membership of the church was dearer to him than life.

His religion was simple—childlike, some have said: daily prayer, regular at Mass and confession, giving to the poor. He was an *Imitation of Christ* Catholic who recited the entire Jesus psalter each Friday. When he came to Cambridge as the first papist professor since the Reformation, the parish priest, at Cardinal Vaughan's urging, invited him to take a leading part in the Blessed Sacrament procession; which he did, wearing his academic dress. (Acton is a suspicious omission from Archbishop Couve de Murville's book on Catholic Cambridge.)

Two quotations catch the reality of Lord Acton's spirituality. The first are the words he whispered to his dying daughter, Elizabeth, in 1881: 'Be glad, my child, you will soon be with Jesus Christ.' The second, applicable to himself, is a note he jotted down for a lecture on Erasmus but never used: 'He did not despair of the church.'

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Lord Acton never vulgarised himself by writing a book. When he won the Cambridge chair, in 1895, the university library, somewhat embarrassed that their new professor had published entirely in periodicals and weighty newspapers (the 'go-ahead work', he had told Gladstone, is in magazines), hunted round and found an open letter he wrote to a German

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bishop after Vatican I. The library had this slim fascicle bound and at last felt content: they could say that the new professor had a book to his name. It was a subterfuge, of course, and Acton never delivered himself of a book, although he proposed many a title—indeed, it became a joke among friends that the most learned man in England knew too much to be able to

plunder; and then historians come along and rub this out. But fortunately they lived at a time when all over their world archives were being opened. Soon, therefore, they would be able to get behind official versions, to go into the kitchen and see how state banquets were cooked. He once said that no secret lasts more than 36 years; now he said that soon there would be



finish a book. Döllinger was on the money when he said that if his star pupil didn't do a book by the time he was 40, he would never do so.

After Acton's death, however, disciples found his lecture texts, written out in full in the Cambridge manner, and made them into three stout volumes. They are not an easy read: too delphic, too allusive, too demanding and rather more dense than the simple narratives his predecessors in the chair had considered to be adequate history teaching. Nevertheless, *le tout* Cambridge crowded into his lecture room to hear the cosmopolitan sage. He took a glass of egg and vermouth beforehand, to strengthen his delivery; and nibbled marshmallows and biscuits at the rostrum, to keep his energy up. Young women were noticeable among his audiences—Acton was women-friendly, wanting them to be admitted to degrees, something the university would not agree to until after World War II. On undergraduate males his influence may be measured by enrolments in the history school, which tripled during his time at Cambridge.

The Australian undergraduate, who devoted his first day at Cambridge to making a pilgrimage to Acton's residence in Chaucer Road, wasn't far wrong. These autumnal years were Acton's happiest. Like Manning Clark, he discovered his primary vocation in teaching students. He loaded them with books on loan, some in languages they didn't know, gave them access to his collections of manuscript materials, and answered their questions with patience. You cannot teach history without reading voraciously; Acton's pupils were beneficiaries of a lifetime's preparations in a mountainous library. His books were for use, not display. Brought to the university library after his death, some 14,000 of them were found to need binding. They went on doing his work, although he was removed from the scene. 'Fellow students'—the opening words of his inaugural lecture—had been not a formulaic greeting, but, rather, a teaching program.

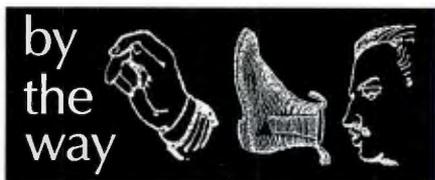
What did he teach them? Above all, to be critical. Trust nobody. The bad great men of history kill and

no more secrets. Behind this brave confidence in the ability to correct official histories lay a hope that his historians would become a hieratic caste pursuing history as chastely as mathematicians their mathematics. Such confidence energised his plans for the *Cambridge Modern History*, which he hoped would be written without revealing whether a page's author was French or English, German or Dutch, Catholic, Protestant or Jewish.

Ideas make history—that was the heart of Acton's teachings. He was always tracing the transmission of ideas, writing lists of names on his record cards, which have puzzled those who fail to see them as genealogies. This is why he thought highly of Newman's theory of the development of doctrine: it imported Darwinism into the world of ideas. In modern history the single most creative idea has been the idea of conscience, which began as a religious concept and fanned out into anti-imperialism, anti-slavery, democracy, federalism and generic political realities. He thought things were getting better, and censured Newman for his lack of faith in progress, which Acton considered to be a denial of God's action in history. Yet within a half-century of Acton's death all Europe from the Urals to the Atlantic, with a few exceptions on its fringes, knew the truth of his saying that absolute power corrupted absolutely; not much progress then, nor room for conscience.

Acton wanted his pupils to become hanging judges. 'If we lower our standard in history,' he told them in the famous inaugural lecture, 'we cannot uphold it in church or state.' We are the conscience of the human race about its past. In his notes—perhaps for this lecture—he tried out an idea that the study of history empowers you to choose your own ancestors or, as we should say, your own role models. This suggests a more humble career for the historian, one in which he takes off the black cap and is himself or herself judged and corrected by the study of the past. ■

**Edmund Campion** is found at the Catholic Institute of Sydney.



# Fingers and the pies

**W**HAT WITH ONE THING and another, it's probably been quite a while since you perused the Honour Roll of the Battle of Agincourt. I've been pretty slack in that regard myself recently, but a strange, even eerie, experience at Melbourne Airport a few days ago moved me to wonder about Henry V's gallant and outnumbered troops. Who were they that faced the French on a saturated foreign paddock on 25 October 1415?

The eerie experience went like this: I was heading for the check-in queue when an announcement had me faltering, disorientated, to a halt. It was not *what* was said—something about a late flight—but the voice. Those articulate, confident tones, the engagingly Aussie lack of pretension—it had to be Eddie McGuire. I would have doubted my own judgment had it not been for the reaction of all the other would-be passengers, or customers as they are called these days. Everyone had stopped. Some tilted their heads as if to hear the voice more clearly; others looked up towards the ceiling seeking confirmation of something they could not easily credit.

And then the voice came again and there was no doubting it: the ubiquitous Eddie McGuire—known to Victorians as the Collingwood Football Club president and face of Channel Nine footy and to people everywhere as the genial, cheque-signing compere of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*—was calling the planes at Tullamarine Airport.

'Qantas flight 725 to Sydney,' announced Eddie, and everyone hung on his words, 'will be delayed owing to the late arrival of the connecting aircraft. The new boarding time will be—we'll take a break and be back with more in just a moment.'

Everyone relaxed. Who cared if the plane was late! Eddie had it all under control just as he had Channel Nine, the AFL, the Collingwood Football Club and numerous other enterprises, small and large, at his dancing fingertips and twinkling toes, or rather the other way round, though not necessarily, as either way will work and that's the McGuire touch. Everything works.

In a state of confused excitement and baseless euphoria, as if I had made it on to the podium of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* then couldn't remember for \$100 that it was Ned Kelly not Ben Hall, Mad Dog Morgan or Chopper who wore armour, I hurried to the departure gate expecting every moment Eddie's next announcement. It came soon enough.

'Qantas flight 942 will depart from gate lounge 11 for (a) Cairns (b) Sydney (c) Darwin (d) Townsville.'

'Lock in (d) Eddie!' someone shouted and doubtless flight 942 duly set off for Townsville.

As I sat there waiting for Eddie to announce my flight, hoping to lock in (b) Sydney since, by and large, that was where I wanted to end up, it suddenly struck me that there was no

limit to Eddie McGuire's reach and influence. Here we were at Tullamarine marvelling that his voice should be directing us to our aircraft but failing to realise that somewhere else, mere hours ago, he was calling the footy in the box at Colonial having just arrived, not breathless, from speaking to a luncheon of the 'Save Struggling Victorian Football Clubs so Long as Collingwood is Not Disadvantaged Society', and before that he'd been at Crown Casino with the high-rolling Sheik Ali Ahrami Faqutu, Grand Bludgeon Extraordinary to the Sultan of Ouazarzat, workshopping a plan to recruit from the Tuareg and Berber Arabs of the Sahara, who would more easily withstand the northern heat when playing the Brisbane Lions.

**B**UT IT'S USELESS TRYING to keep up with genuine, 21st-century ubiquity. Eddie McGuire's capacity to live inside his many compartmentalised heads (on each of which, as he often notes, is a different hat) was nowhere better demonstrated than at half-time during the Essendon–Carlton game a few Friday nights ago. Fronting the camera with that prince of malaprop prolixity, Sam Newman, a sombre Eddie explained that he was about to wear his Collingwood president's hat to deal with a serious allegation and therefore Sam would have to chair the segment. If you're inclined to ask what other club president would have access to such a forum to defend his team and break or embellish sensational news, don't bother. The answer is: lock in (q) shut your face or (z) *what* conflict of interest?

Such confident yet breathtakingly uncomplicated omniscience, I reasoned, must have originated way back in Eddie's lineage. Don't bother testing this by seeing if the McGuires were in the First Fleet. Of course they were. But what about proving grounds more distant in space and time? Was there a McGuire at Agincourt?

Well, Shakespeare's Henry V was surely previewing one of Eddie's most recent presidential exhortations when he said, 'he which hath no stomach to this fight / Let him depart.' Not to mention the unmistakable reference to Sam Newman in '[who] sheds his blood with me / Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile.'

More to the point, though, Eddie Macwilliam and Tom Magson, Agincourt soldiers both, had names at least reminiscent of our man's. But Edward McWhyre sounds like the best shot—especially as he had to abandon the muddy chaos of the battlefield temporarily to nick into Calais 'for purposes of ye busyness and ye trade'. Conflict of interest? Lock in (a) not ye bloodie chance, my coz. ■

**Brian Matthews** is a writer and academic.

# Fine discriminations

Women, babies and questions of rights.

**Y**OU'VE COME A long way, baby! That's how the peddlers of Virginia Slims tried to con 'liberated' women into smoking dainty little cigarettes more than 35 years ago. Freedom has a market price. And so Australian women have found since the Commonwealth *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (SDA) was passed with eventual bipartisan support. Discrimination is harder to eliminate than to prohibit.

The SDA's basis is Australia's ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The Convention explicitly acknowledges that 'mainstream' human rights instruments do not reflect or protect the special vulnerabilities of women, particularly their exclusion and disadvantage outside the 'higher' status of marriage.

Discrimination against women because of their gender, pregnancy or marital status has been unlawful for nearly 20 years. Yet we are still seeing challenges to 'women's rights'.

The Australian Treasury is very worried that Australian women aren't having enough babies. Attorney-General Daryl Williams and Prime Minister John Howard, on the other hand, are very concerned that the wrong kinds of women want to have them: middle-aged, unpartnered or gay women. They have spent millions trying to change the balance of the Sex Discrimination Act.

There may be an agenda here. Financial boffins have told the government in the lead-up to the Budget that Australia's greatest economic and social challenge is the drop in the number of women having babies, with a birth rate among the lowest in the Western world: just 1.75 babies per mother recorded in the year 2000. They are not creating the next generation of young workers to bear the burden of caring and paying for the rapidly ageing, ailing retirees, and their chemist and accommodation bills. There will not be enough

migrants to fill the vacancies. Australian women, it seems, are engaged in a 'baby strike'.

Pru Goward, the Sex Discrimination Commissioner, associates the dropping birth rate with the brave new world of women's employment. When she released her *Valuing Parenthood* report, which canvasses options for paid maternity leave for women, she noted that 'the fertility levels of women appear to be inversely related to their attachment to the labour force, educational attainment and income', particularly among younger women.

These are the facts. More than 70 per cent of women aged between 20 and 54 work. This is now the norm. The majority of those who are holding down a job when they become pregnant go back to those jobs even if they have one, two or three children, and most of them within a year



of the birth of their youngest child. According to the Australian National University's Peter McDonald, more than half of our fecundity is attributable to those 27 per cent of women who have more than three children. In other words, the current level of fertility depends on small numbers of women having larger-than-average families. Women in de facto marriages tend not to have large families, but young women whose first pregnancies were unplanned are more likely to have several children (1.6 times more likely). Young women with less education have larger families—and by and large much poorer ones. Has anyone noted, recently,

that a lot of these women are Indigenous women in the less populous parts of Australia?

Seventy-three per cent of Australian women bear fewer than two children, and more than 70 per cent of women are in the employment market. Perhaps some better-educated women choose not to have babies because they do not trust in the ability of their communities to provide a decent life for them. Uncertainty does not breed confidence. Neither does inadequate, unpleasant or unaffordable child care; scant maternity-leave provisions; or financial, social and emotional insecurity.

**Y**ET SOME WOMEN will go to great lengths to become pregnant. These, it seems, are not the sort of women we wish to encourage.

In 1999 a Victorian gynaecologist specialising in IVF, Dr McBain, went to the Federal Court to test the constitutional validity of Victorian laws that prohibit such treatment if the woman is neither married nor living de facto with a man. He wanted a declaration that the legislation was invalid because it was inconsistent with the Commonwealth SDA. If the Commonwealth intended to 'cover the field', section 109 of the Australian constitution invalidates an inconsistent state law on the same area. McBain wanted to be able to treat his single patient, Ms Meldrum, who was desperate to conceive but distinctly single, without fear of prosecution.

Justice Sundberg heard the case, which was not defended by the state of Victoria. At their request, the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference and the Australian Episcopal Conference of the Catholic Church were permitted to put arguments as *amici curiae* (friends of the court) rather than as parties to the proceedings. They sought to uphold the Victorian laws on moral and 'rights' grounds.

The bishops chose not to become 'parties' to the litigation. But that also meant they were not able to appeal. When Sundberg upheld McBain's argument, the bishops then went to the High Court, claiming the right to invoke the ancient prerogative writ of 'certiorari' instead. They said Justice Sundberg was wrong, and sought to argue that the rights of the unborn child or children required that the SDA prohibitions did not 'cover the field'.

This caused an enormous stir. The Women's Electoral Lobby sought to be heard on the matter, as did the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, the Australian Family Association and the Australian Government Solicitor. Daryl Williams had given his fiat to the Catholic bishops to argue their case, but then sought to argue on his own behalf as well. It was set to be a battle royal. It turned out to be a skirmish. The bishops and the Attorney were defeated.

Nobody got to argue the 'ethical' point about the rights of the children, or potential children. The High Court found that neither the bishops nor the Attorney-General had the right to argue the point. The case in the Federal Court was

between private parties. They simply had no standing. Possibly the High Court had no jurisdiction to entertain their application, and in any event the public interest would not be served by allowing third parties to seek to overturn an inconvenient view of the law that resulted from private litigation.

Pru Goward's maternity leave report is getting a reasonable reception from the government, though hardly an enthusiastic one. Her personal friendship with Prime Minister John Howard perhaps

accounts for this, and those who feared that her appointment would be a 'disaster' should be eating their words.

But how strange it is that, once again, the human rights of women should be reduced to an economic assessment of the worth to the nation of the fruit of their wombs. We haven't come such a long way, baby. ■

**Maira Rayner** is Acting Commissioner for Equal Opportunity for the state of Western Australia.

VIEWPOINT

JULIETTE HUGHES

# Looking after

Other times, other ways.

**W**E'LL CALL HER Mother Hildegard because that was not her name. There were, however, certain traits that she shared with Hildegard of Bingen: obstinacy, vision, rigour, passion, obsessiveness.

Afternoon, early '60s, Australian city, convent school. The sun was something we weren't used to, stinging through the freshly cleaned classroom windows making freckles on our blue-white Pommy skin. My sisters and I had been welcomed into this school by an order of nuns who seemed to be pleased to see us: fees were reduced, help with uniforms was offered, such a big Catholic family as we were.

Mother Hildegard was the headmistress who made us so welcome; a woman who was often described as 'eccentric', a 50-ish, stocky woman whose false teeth gave her endless trouble. Whenever she was ranting about the turpitude of females wearing trousers, girls going out with boys before leaving school, or *anyone* missing Mass to go to the beach, little nodules of white foam would collect at the corners of her mouth. Her jaw was perpetually clenched as she spoke, something I began to see as a caricature of Australian speech delivery, long before it was ever parodied by Strop and Shirley Purvis. My Northern

English ears grew used to the weird diphthongs and eventually incorporated them in my own accent, which became a mongrel thing; but the mouth-foam was ever yucky, inimitable and really special. We soon ceased to marvel—after all, Mother Hildegard was a nun, had to be a bit strange. Our mother hinted darkly at The Change's drastic effects on middle-aged religious when we eagerly recounted some of the classroom invasions. M. Hildegard would swoop into a dull maths lesson, a black-and-white tornado of nemesis. 'Stand Up Any Girl Who Is Hanging About With A Boy!' (No takers there: you'd have to be mad to admit it.) 'Stand Up Any Girl Who Owns A Pair Of Trousers!' Everyone stood up for that last. Unable to marginalise the whole class, she thundered about the destruction of Sodom, and bounced out again to affright Form Four. This new country was anything but boring.

On the day it happened it was my turn to do some job after lunch in the school hall, which overlooked the playground. There were no spare shillings for professional cleaners in those days, but I enjoyed missing maths although I hated sweeping and stacking benches. A movement

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caught the corner of my sight, and what I saw drew me to the window like a tractor beam. Mother Hildegard was about 15 yards away and she was talking to a teacher whom we'll call Mr Blot. (Mr Blot was an English teacher, a non-Catholic, in his late 50s, I think, who was also a Pom. However, there was no sense of camaraderie between him and my sisters: his background was in the south of England, in institutions far more illustrious than a poor convent school in the Antipodes. It had never before occurred to us to wonder why he should choose to work here.) He was harrumphing and jerking his head like an angry horse; Mother Hildegard was talking, shouting, waving her arms, wagging her finger. He turned on his heel and strode away to his car. The dust in the playground was creamy white, quartz-pebbled, and it scuffed up in gritty clouds as he gunned his motor out of the school gates. We never saw him again.

Later my younger sister's classmate (we'll call her Yvette) told us why. He had told her to stay back at lunchtime to look over some of her work with him, and had tried to feel her and kiss her. She ran away, revolted and sick, and told her best friend, who said, with a confidence we would all have shared, 'You've got to tell Mother Hildegard.' They went over to the convent and Yvette, shamefaced and embarrassed beyond all imagining, told what had happened. 'Can you swear to me on the honour of God that you are telling the truth?' said Mother Hildegard. When she got her answer, Mother Hildegard rang Yvette's parents and then the police. Then she went to Mr Blot, told him what she thought of him and sacked him on the spot. No-one was sorry to see him go.

It couldn't happen now. Industrial relations would demand a process that gave the accused the right to defend himself; the prospect of untrue allegations is too dreadful to contemplate. Yet, what Mother Hildegard did gave every girl in that school a feeling of being safer. The presumption of innocence, when it comes to sex crime, has signally failed over the years to protect thousands of truly innocent girls (and boys) who were not as lucky as Yvette. Then again, Mother Hildegard was a woman who really took seriously what she thought God would want her to do: protect the young girls in her charge. ■

**Juliette Hughes** is a freelance writer.

## Dandelion clocks

They sometimes bring flowers  
a milky hand of broken dandelions  
as you stand at the porchrail  
demanding their path from the dusk

Sometimes broken hands  
fingers kinked bloody spanners in their work  
Or looking for needles and your cool eye  
to fetch out splinters from their under thumbnail

Journeywoman whatever your mastery  
whatever you hack or add on your own account  
they expect you webbed to your loom  
attending your world only by mirror

Sons brothers lovers  
they sometimes bring flowers  
and after the long stems clatter appropriate vases  
and nosebags primp and settle into saucers

with respect to all that's proffered and arranged  
when your last work is emptied from your house  
they'll track the whiff of mouldering petals crammed  
in hasty cobbled pillows

**Aileen Kelly**

## The right to remain

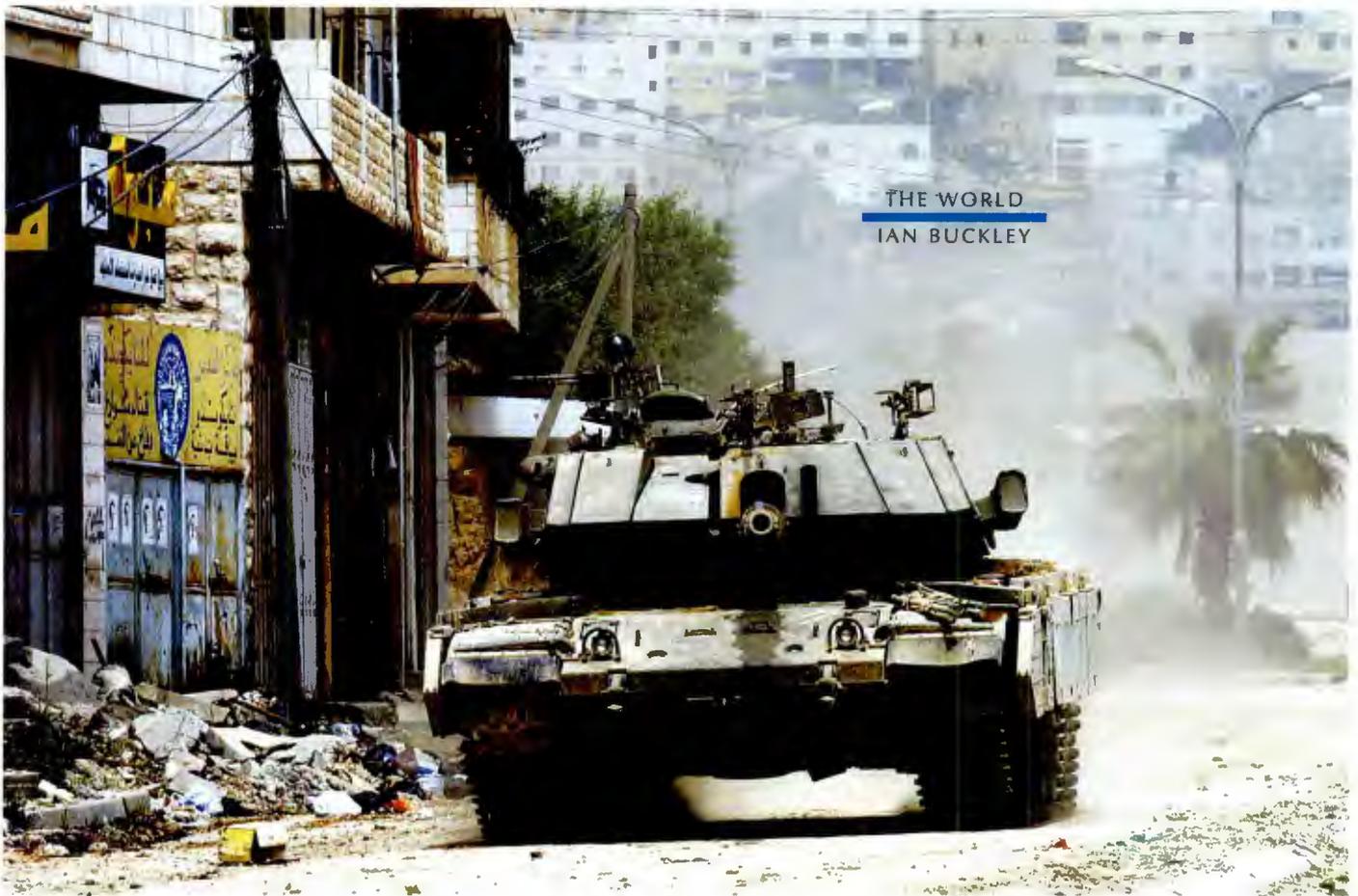
Not moment but instant: the folding of paper is stilled into origami  
or the twining of lovers' hands shapes into shadowplay,  
the bird comes to itself silent on the lit wall or at stilt on the table  
and everyone breathes 'heron' and laughs in delight.

Which may be enough as chunerring time is never enough  
for lovers even made young again and again till they look  
together, laugh in delight 'Do you remember when all these  
stars were over there?'

Yet they shiver, holding hands into the questionable night.

**Aileen Kelly**

*These poems will be included in Aileen Kelly's City and Stranger,  
due for publication by Five Islands Press in September 2002.*



THE WORLD  
IAN BUCKLEY

# The question of terror

What is terrorism? What causes it? Can we prevent it?

**I**N ACTIVELY SUPPORTING the United States in its war in Afghanistan, the Australian government claims that we too are there 'to fight terrorism'. But what is terrorism? Do we always recognise it? And what can we do to stop it?

Historically, although individuals or groups have engaged in terrorist activity, terrorism has more typically been the preserve of governments. Not that it is ever named as 'terrorism'; it is action 'essential for good government', or force used only 'to maintain order'. In the 1930s, when Japan invaded Manchuria (Japan at the time was facing trade barriers and attempting to emulate the West's colonial success in the East) the invasion was 'to restore order' and to combat the 'terrorism' of the resisting Chinese.

Terrorism has a long history: think of the Roman Empire's siege and destruction of Jerusalem, certain Crusades, the Thirty Years War, 'the Terror' of the French Revolution. Or a more recent, even more terrible instance: the Holocaust. Whenever governments have used terrorism to coerce whole populations (their own or those of other states) it has been enormously destructive—of people and of their life-support infrastructure.

Siege, blockade and starvation have been common features of terrorism, along with the threat and use of physical violence. Terrorism has been the prime instrument used to force surrender during wartime. In World Wars I and II and in subsequent wars, terrorism has been systematically employed against the military and civilians of both sides. Mechanised war amplified the horror endured by soldiers in the front lines, while food blockades and other sanctions, along with aerial bombardment, sought to break the will of civilians.

It is this attempt to coerce populations through systematic and extreme violence that is the essence of terrorism. And since all such population-directed terrorism is evil, unjustified, and in defiance of international law (as agreed by all states under the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and 1972), there is an urgent need for terrorism in all its forms to be identified—whether in our history or our present.

Contemporary examples are all too real. We immediately think of the terrifying attacks on New York's Twin Towers and their occupants on September 11. That immense tragedy can seem totally perplexing: clearly it was a deliberate act, yet no

*Above: Quotidian violence on the West Bank. An Israeli tank in Nablus, with palms, and power lines. Photographs here and p35 by Q. Sakamaki/Agence Friends.*

responsibility was claimed at the time and no demands were made. What was the point? We are not even certain that it was 'state-based terrorism'. Nevertheless, even if its precise source remains unclear, at least by implication this horrifying example of modern-day terrorism may involve 'demands', not only on the population of the US but on all of us. So whatever the difficulties in understanding the event, we have to ask ourselves: what was it all about, and how should we respond in order to prevent repetitions?

To date we have little direct evidence of the exact causes of September 11. But the world has seen many other examples of modern-day terrorism, of equal or greater magnitude, which might provide clues. That most of these examples have been insufficiently recognised as 'terrorism' by the West does not negate their occurrence.

There was, for example, the US cruise-missile bombing of the Sudanese pharmaceutical factory in August 1998, allegedly in response to two horrendous terrorist attacks on US embassies in Africa. The US eventually retracted its original claim that the Sudanese factory was a cover for chemical weapons production, but that retraction did not alter the outcomes. The US also claimed that the number of deaths caused by the attack was not great. To the extent the matter was understood in the West, the incident could have been interpreted as an honest mistake of no great consequence.

For the people concerned, however, the reality was different. The factory was Sudan's sole source of immunising and other agents for preventing diseases,

including malaria. No apology was offered and no reparations paid that would have enabled the factory's replacement. And adding to the human cost, sanctions that remained in place ensured Sudan could not import the life-saving preventatives, such as chloroquine for malaria. As Jonathan Belke put it (in the *Boston Globe*, 22 August 1999), the factory's loss caused not just the immediate deaths, but the 'downstream' deaths of tens of thousands of Sudanese, many of them children.

If we pause to reflect on the human consequences of this bombing 'mistake', we should not be surprised if some parents, or brothers, or sisters of these victims, having no recourse through international law or other means, volunteered themselves into a bin Laden or other terrorist network, in order to draw attention to that attack on Sudan.

**T**O MAKE SENSE OF what has happened to transform and destabilise our modern world since the end of the Cold War, it helps to look at what has been happening to the people of Iraq. We need to ask how it came about that a brutal leader like Saddam Hussein for so long received military support from the West and how even now, when out of favour, he has been permitted to remain in power while the Iraqi people continue to be subject to bombing and long-term debilitating sanctions. A better understanding of these events may well shed light on the recent terrorist attack in the West.

Throughout the 1980s, Saddam's Iraq, a major oil producer, was at war with Iran, a country seriously at odds with the US after deposing its pro-Western Shah. The Western powers (with Russia) sold tens of

*Below: After one of the Palestinian suicide bombers was found to be a woman, all women have become suspect. In Hebron, an Israeli soldier does the routine inspection of Palestinian women's passes.*



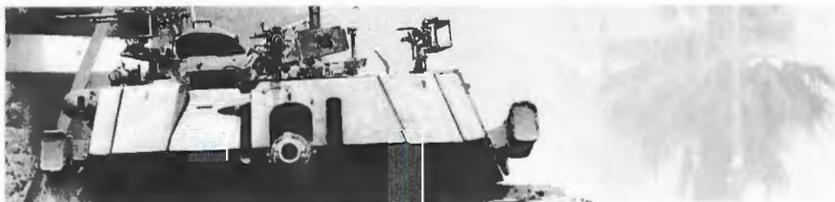
millions of dollars worth of arms to Iraq as well as Iran. Saddam gained all the high-tech weaponry he wanted plus US support in the form of space-based military intelligence. But once the Iran–Iraq war ended (at enormous human cost—so many lives lost in both countries), and once Saddam, embarking on an ‘independent’ oil policy, invaded Kuwait, his usefulness and popularity came to an abrupt end.

Tragically, however, no appropriate international response followed. Instead of consideration, via the UN, of effective action to bring Saddam to order, the US (backed by Britain and Australia) proceeded to a highly destructive military ‘showdown’. Central to that action was a savage campaign of aerial warfare, which obliterated several hundred thousand young Iraqis, mostly conscripts, dug into bunkers on the Kuwait border (see Mark Baker, *The Age*, 8 March 1991). The attack also destroyed Iraq’s civilian life-support infrastructure—its factories and its plants for power generation, water purification, sewage treatment, and so on. Those acts of terrorism against the Iraqi people were followed by economic sanctions that severely limited oil export income and prevented repairs to the damaged infrastructure. Together, these measures ensured that Iraq’s economy remained severely crippled, the country reduced to a largely pre-industrial condition.

To some, the result of the Gulf War seemed a satisfactory solution. But to the Iraqi people it has

**ORIGIN** late 18th cent.: from French *terroriste*, from Latin *terror* (see **TERROR**). The word was originally applied to supporters of the Jacobins in the French Revolution, who advocated repression and violence in pursuit of the principles of democracy and equality.

**terrorize** (also **-ise**) ► **verb** [with obj.] create and maintain a state of extreme fear and distress in



meant ongoing deprivation, humiliation and stark tragedy, especially for their health and well-being. Decline in comfort and living standards aside, the incidence of what were formerly preventable or treatable infectious diseases rose sharply and has remained high since the original attacks. The toll in disease and death has been great, especially among the children. UNICEF and other UN agencies report child deaths averaging some 5000 every month. The Iraqi people have endured this situation for ten years, with aggregate civilian deaths estimated to be over half a million.

Here in the West we have been informed that the original infrastructure bombing and the ten-year sanctions were necessary to control Saddam; but we should have known that Saddam, with or without his weapons of mass destruction, was in reality a spent force. Moreover, we should have recognised that terrorising Iraqis not only does nothing ‘to control Saddam’ but is inhuman, and unjust in the extreme. If we put ourselves in the place of the grieving mother, father, sister or brother, we may understand why some of those so tragically affected, lacking other means of drawing attention to their plight, would want to take part in some terrorist activity. How else might they

hope to engage the consciousness of unaware Westerners?

**W**HAT OF ISRAEL’S 34-year military occupation and the expulsion of Palestinians? Four-and-a-half million Palestinians remain refugees, including 1.3 million jammed into the Gaza Strip. And what of the other remnant Palestinian territories, 63 non-contiguous cantons patrolled by Israeli troops, overflowed by helicopter gunships and F-16s, with their road users delayed or detained at military checkpoints? Through today’s media exposure, most of us are well aware of the situation in Palestine—or, rather, its Israel-occupied lands. For many decades, Israel, strongly financed and armed with advanced weaponry by the US, has systematically intruded into what was agreed Palestinian territory, for the purpose of establishing new Israeli settlements, often using the weapons and methods of terror to do so. This is contrary to prior agreements and in defiance of several UN Security Council Resolutions—yet it has had the blessing of successive US administrations.

Throughout this long conflict there has been much violence and much terrorism from both sides. No just resolution is in sight. Indeed, it seems clear that the present Israeli government is determined to continue its takeover of Palestinian territories—currently with the added ‘justification’ that such violent incursions are the only way to combat terrorism directed against Israel. Having long lost confidence that the rule of international law will be upheld by the Western powers, Palestinians clearly feel extreme desperation and many young Palestinians are queuing to join the list of suicide bombers.

There is no doubting or condoning the terrorism carried out by young Palestinians, but we need not be hoodwinked by Israel’s denial of its own terrorism—a terrorism strikingly displayed in such places as Jenin. Clearly such tit-for-tat terrorist responses will continue endlessly until the international community intervenes.

But there is more at stake even than considerations of justice and the urgent humanitarian needs of Palestinians. The two world wars of last century developed out of uncontrolled regional conflicts. Indeed, the United Nations organisation was largely

set up to avoid a repetition of exactly that kind of escalation. So the UN (which partitioned Palestine for Israel's birth in 1947) should be encouraged now to intervene, not only to preserve lives and Palestinian territories, but to head off the wider regional conflagration.

**O**NE TERRORIST EVENT never justifies another. Those attempting to explain the New York calamity are not aiming to justify it. To 'justify' one terrorist event by a preceding one is the formula for endless payback, for never-ending terrorism—no solution whatever.

The point to be stressed is that terrorism is *never* justified, not even if it comes from 'our side', not even if it is used to control some supposed 'rogue state' or employed as part of the strategy of war. The targeting of civilians and/or their life-support infrastructures by aerial or other means is absolutely prohibited in international law. But the problem is that, while we in the West can readily recognise terrorism directed at us, terrorism directed towards Middle Eastern, African or Asian people has all too frequently not been recognised for what it is. Bombing and sanctions directed at distant 'foreign' populations have been accepted as 'necessary', as 'justified' in some grand scheme of things better understood by others—the politicians and the generals.

It is plain not only that the recent US bombing of Afghanistan was morally flawed, but that it yielded adverse results for all concerned. It was a 'show of force' in which the targets included Kabul and other cities, mud-brick villages, hospitals, Red Cross warehouses and mountain-tunnel networks—indeed any location that could be a stronghold for Taliban personnel, whether senior or not. Such attacks might have killed Osama bin Laden and other senior al Qaeda members, but could never have brought them to face justice. In the event, the attacks did not lead even to the apprehending of bin Laden and his close associates. Instead, they killed and wounded several thousand innocent Afghans as well as destroying many of their life-support facilities. And worse, the bombing set in train vast movements of people who, due to past conflicts and disorders, were already on the point of starvation. We have this on the good authority of the non-government organisations and UN agencies that were forced to stop trucking urgently needed food when the bombing began.

Some may assume that the Afghan toll will not be 'too bad' and that in any case serious international efforts are under way to 'rebuild the country'. But the US and NATO powers did not repair the bomb damage to Serbia's civil infrastructure, and failed to remove landmines and depleted uranium fragments scattered throughout that country. It therefore seems highly improbable that the US will remove its cluster bombs and other unexploded ordinance in Afghanistan, or repair bomb damage, or provide shelter, power and water supplies, or rebuild the country's subsistence

agriculture. This is not to say that investment in Afghanistan will not occur: the country sits astride the most direct pipeline route through which central Asia's vast oil reserves can reach Indian Ocean ports (note Richard Butler in *The New York Times*, 18 January 2002). But while it may assist the West's



*terror*, from Latin *terror*, from *terrere* 'frighten'.

**terrorism** ► noun [mass noun] the use of violence and intimidation in the pursuit of political aims.

**terrorist** ► noun a person who uses terrorism in the pursuit of political aims.

'oil interests', such investment will provide benefit to only a handful of Afghans.

The UN should have been the key organisation involved in investigating and dealing with terrorism, and this should have applied from the end of World War II. But the major powers have long relegated the UN to a subsidiary role, a tool in the big power game. That was the fate of the League of Nations in the '20s and '30s—shamelessly abused, with the result we know too well. There is an urgent need, therefore, to give the UN a new lease of life, to take it seriously and make it work in solving the very real threats of terrorism.

Clearly there has to be a very serious response to terrorism. But the response must be specific to the event. It must identify those responsible for the planning and execution of specific acts of terrorism. It must gather the evidence, and it must, with the assistance of the UN, bring the alleged perpetrators to trial in an international court of law. The US government has refused to participate in the International Criminal Court, just as it has rejected so many other responsible international agreements. Australians should insist that our government desist from any involvement in arbitrary military actions outside international law, and instead do its utmost to ensure that all cases involving terrorism are brought to justice in a properly constituted international court. Sidelining the UN while supporting military havoc overseas is a recipe for disaster, our own along with everyone else's. We ignore the inevitable consequences of the present course at our peril. ■

**Ian Buckley** is a retired medical scientist and long-time member of the Medical Association for Prevention of War (Australia).

# THE SHORTLIST



**Words in Action: Speech Act Theory and Biblical Interpretation**, Richard S. Briggs. Continuum/T&T Clark, 2001. ISBN 0 567 08809 X, RRP \$79.95  
During my boyhood, I used occasionally to open my father's surgery door for workers from the local Tom Piper factory. In putting meat into tomato sauce, and cooking and canning the mixture, they had become too intimately involved in the process.

This experience flavoured, perhaps jaundiced, my approach to literary criticism and literary theory. Like sauce, which usually masks the taste of food, literary criticism is to be avoided unless it titillates your jaded taste or inspires you to try something new. And literary theory, which disciplines reading, corresponds to the quality control that gives the diner confidence that people have remained outside the cans. Each process is necessary, but among people of taste, neither forms a suitable topic for dinner conversation.

*Words in Action*, it must be said, is good quality control. Briggs shows that many Scriptural texts seek to involve the reader in appropriate response, and illustrates how the language of the texts models how we should act. He explores this insight, which has a good philosophical pedigree, in looking at teaching and confession within the church.

Because this is a philosophical enquiry, it makes demanding reading for the general reader. But it is an encouraging book, for Briggs is modest. He does not identify a universal grid, a mincing machine through which all texts can be squirted. He contents himself with exploring the variety of ways in which religious texts and rituals can be self-involving and can model commitment.

—Andrew Hamilton SJ

**Children of the Shadows: Voices of the Second Generation**, Kathy Grinblat (ed.), University of Western Australia Press/Benchmark Publications, 2002. ISBN 1 876 61507 9, RRP \$34.95

In *Children of the Shadows*, descendants of Holocaust survivors examine their relationships with their parents and with Australia. Edited by Kathy Grinblat, the collection of essays, stories and poems is painfully honest and bears witness to ongoing trauma. The book is written against the background of Holocaust literature, and some words—'Bergen-Belsen', for instance—conjure specific terrible images. This extra dimension is made more powerful by understatement.

Certain themes recur: love, admiration, protectiveness on both sides, irritation, guilt, the migrant experience, overfeeding. The descendants did not have grandparents. Their extended families were ghosts and photo albums. Anti-Semitism bares its teeth: on her first day of school, a child is racially taunted because her food is 'different'. The repetition works well on an emotional level, but can blur one story into another.

Many survivors remained silent about their experiences—to avoid damaging their children, or because it was too painful to talk about, or too humiliating. The descendants clearly find this intolerable, describing a 'wall of silence' separating the generations. One woman writes: 'if I felt that pain, then maybe it would make our relationship stronger'. Another: 'If I don't know your story / who will tell it to my children / so that our history / will continue to be heard?' and 'I have lost you.' The passing on of stories is symbolic



and powerful. But what happens when the histories are too damaged to pass on?

Direct Holocaust literature has a basilisk stare, and can induce numbness. *Children of the Shadows* stands one generation away, just far enough to look honestly at the Holocaust without falling in. We're presented with one damaged person at a time, often in breathtaking writing, and with the warm sympathy of a daughter or son.

—Susannah Buckley



**Gifted Origins to Graced Fulfillment: The Soteriology of Julian of Norwich**, Kerrie Hide. The Liturgical Press, 2001. ISBN 0 814 65093 7, RRP \$69.95

*Revelations of Divine Love*, written by the Norwich anchoress in the late 14th century, is an unusual book. Its simple and apparently artless English style encourages nostalgia for an age of a more simple faith in the same way as do Fra Angelico's murals. But at the same time, it seems modern in its directness, inviting the reader to

forget centuries of complex and systematising spiritual teaching.

Australian scholar Kerrie Hide has written a detailed study of Julian of Norwich, which penetrates beneath the deceptively simple surface and finds there a considerable theologian. Julian differed from professional theologians in that she explored contemplative experience, but she grounds her exploration in a subtle and deep understanding of God as Trinity. Her reflection on the Trinity put relationships and love at the heart of the world and of her understanding of it. So, as any serious thinker must, she weighed suffering and its challenge to meaning, but her characteristic note is one of confidence. We see this in the best-known quotation from her work:

I may make all things well, and I can make all things well, and I shall make all things well, and I will make all things well, and you will see yourself that every kind of thing will be well.

The repetition plucks hope out of hesitation and brandishes it.

—A.H.

**Some Conclusion in the Heart**, Grant Fraser. Black Willow Press, 2001. ISBN 0 939 39412 X, RRP \$20

The images in Grant Fraser's first book of poems are rich and varied: one asks us to stand close to a draught horse; another describes the twilight years of an old-man murderer named Pol Pot.

Fraser is not afraid of *gravitas*: the full weight of the world. He has chosen to look towards the dark, in poems about Primo Levi, or the starving Simone Weil. This takes both creative and moral courage. Yet he does not leave us alone in the dark. In the horses' eyes and 'as they nod their huge consents', we are reassured by the 'resting of their massive gentleness'. Levi does not exclude joy, and the book is filled with poems on the flight and rest of birds. Spirit inhabits this place in the smallest things. The poet observes this, and his poems show his kinship with others who have done the same. In a poem about Theo and Vincent van Gogh, Theo's final reply to his poor, mad brother is: 'shy friend, brother / I shall watch with you / in the great feast of the sun.'

Grant Fraser accompanies the reader; these poems are all heart stuff, heart logic.

—Kirsty Sangster



# Knockabout bloke

**John Gorton: He Did It His Way**, Ian Hancock.  
Hodder Headline Australia, 2002. ISBN 0 733 61439 6, RRP \$50

**O**N 9 SEPTEMBER 2001 John Gorton celebrated his 90th birthday, some achievement for a man who'd suffered serious wounds in the Second World War and later the knives of politics. Et tu, Malcolm.

I've always taken a passing interest in Gorton's longevity. During the 1984 federal election campaign Bob Hawke asked me to go to Canberra and represent him and the government at the funeral of Dudley Erwin, the former Liberal Member for Ballarat and for a short period a minister in Gorton's government. I sat through the funeral service in a mood of some detachment. I'd not known Erwin personally. The congregation seemed an ageing and alien lot. I studied the stained-glass windows and wondered if it would end in time for me to catch the plane back to Melbourne.

After the funeral service I chatted with Gorton in the churchyard. 'You know John,' I said, 'when you die I'll come to your funeral because I want to, not because I've been sent.' Gorton, old enough to be my father, looked at me with an impassive face and twinkling eyes, and replied in that characteristic drawl (by Geelong Grammar and Oxford, out of the bush), 'On the contrary John, when you die I'll come to your funeral because I want to.'

There is something extraordinarily attractive about 'knockabout blokes' like Gorton. In spite of the silver spoon of Geelong Grammar and Oxford being stuck in his mouth by an indulgent and remote father, he was much more influenced by his experiences of a lonely childhood, the war, labouring on the family orchard, a passion for sport and a few drinks with the mates. It was these experiences which made Gorton an interesting politician and prime minister, together with his ability to see the funny side of life, even in adversity. At times he gave the impression of not giving a damn about anything, a kind of cultivated existentialism which was reflected in an attitude of 'I've seen worse things in life. What are you worried about?'

Gorton's distinguished headmaster at Geelong Grammar, Sir James Darling, thought him 'an interesting character—great



Betty and John Gorton, on board ship between Fiji and Sydney, returning from a London conference

amount of "guts" but contrary and rather difficult'. The 'guts' part was admirable and so was his passionate Australianism. As Hancock puts it, 'He was above all, an Australian to the boot heels. For him, every other country was a foreign country.' No globalisation for John Gorton.

I've always enjoyed a certain narrow-minded bias against Liberal prime ministers, but, try as I might, I could never bring myself to dislike John Gorton. This was not, I think, because of his qualities as a prime minister, but because he was a colourful, unpredictable character and a knockabout bloke. There are no 'knockabout blokes' in Canberra any more, which is one of the reasons why parliament is so excruciatingly boring. So one looks back in sadness.

Gorton returned from the war a 'closet' conservative, but too busy with other things to be preoccupied with politics. His philosophy, largely based on his wartime experience, emerged at a 'welcome home' dinner for local ex-servicemen at Mystic Park on 3 April 1946. It was a moving speech to which Gorton had given considerable thought. It reflected on why servicemen had gone to the war. One reason was to secure economic freedom for all men, which meant raising standards of living and removing the 'fear of poverty as the result of illness, or accident, or old age'.

These words might have been uttered by any one of the numerous servicemen returning from the war who embraced the politics of the left. But there are other words in the speech that distinguished the conservative view from the radical view. Those who embraced the left believed in the making of a better world, a world influenced by socialist principles. Gorton said, 'We did not go to war to make a new and better world ... We fought only to preserve, for ourselves and our children, that conception of political freedom and justice which was being attacked ...'

**B**EN CHIFLEY, an influential man, brought Gorton out of his political closet in 1947 with the proposal to nationalise the banks.

Gorton saw it as an attack on economic freedom, as 'undemocratic and un-Australian'. In 1949 he was elected as a Liberal senator, in an election that saw the demise of the Chifley government.

Sir James Darling wrote him a letter of congratulation prophesying that Gorton was destined to be prime minister. Gorton replied that he was 'not nearly ready enough for it' (subsequent events led some to believe that he never was) and, with a strange prescience in light of the end of his prime ministership, observed that he might 'turn down the offer because of conditions I shall not choose to accept'.

As a politician, Gorton enjoyed steady upward mobility in the ranks of the Liberal Party. He seems to have been a hard-working and sometimes impressive minister in various portfolios. The chapter on his ministerial career is the least interesting in Hancock's biography because it least explains Gorton's own views on the policies he implemented. There is too much of Gorton preparing a submission and Gorton delivering second-reading speeches, most of which emanate from the bowels of the public service. They were not vintage Gorton. Nonetheless, in policy terms there were undoubted achievements.

Hancock's description of the intrigue surrounding Gorton's election to the office of prime minister following the death of Harold Holt makes fascinating reading. For the Liberals, accustomed to the gravitas of Menzies and the decent ordinariness of Harold Holt, it was something of a gamble. Menzies was appalled.

When Gorton became prime minister, the Liberal Party of Menzies was in decline and Whitlam had the political ascendancy. Gorton came suddenly to office insufficiently prepared and without time 'to plan and implement his ideas for a better Australia'. He had fractious colleagues and offended a number of them by his desire to increase the powers of the Commonwealth at the expense of the states. His engaging qualities, identified by Hancock as including 'irreverence', 'candour', 'charm' and

'informality', appealed to a wide section of the public but not enough to many of his parliamentary colleagues. There was much tut-tutting. As his biographer concludes, 'Gorton *could* have been a great Prime Minister, only by ceasing to be himself.' This is a sad commentary on Gorton and on the nature of politics.

In a biographical essay, Paul Hasluck, who disliked Gorton, referred to him in his early years as 'plain speaking about the things he was against, communists, blackfellows, Africans, "no-hopers" (persons who did not work hard enough), the United Nations, those who opposed him and those whom he disliked because they were "ratbags"' (see *The Chance of Politics*, Text Publishing). Hasluck coyly observes that some of these opinions 'may sometimes have made him seem a fascist'. But that would be unfair.

One had to counter that view with Gorton's strong belief in a fairer deal for the underprivileged. But there was of course much more on the positive side of the Gorton ledger than that. He believed strongly in an independent Australian foreign policy. He doubted the wisdom of committing troops to Vietnam. He was against 'union bashing'. He believed strongly in better educational opportunity and the importance of Australian creativity, science and technology, was a strong supporter of the Australian film industry, and as a politician he was not too bad on the hustings.

Perhaps his greatest achievement as a prime minister and a public figure was his strange ability to make Australians feel good about themselves. This has been rare in Australian political life.

Ian Hancock's biography is an important book, nicely written, well researched and frequently entertaining. It captures the spirit of this quintessentially Gorton quality and because of that it is refreshing as well. An old warrior deserves such a book. ■

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

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# The Arcadian

**Keeper of the Faith: A Biography of Jim Cairns, Paul Strangio.**  
Melbourne University Press, 2002. ISBN 0 522 85002 2, RRP \$49.95

**D**R JIM CAIRNS was once the revered conscience of the Labor Left in Australia. For two decades after 1955 he defended the gospel of democratic socialism in federal parliament. But following the dismissal of the Whitlam government a different message came out of Canberra. In 1976 thousands of converts flocked to a nearby bush reserve when Cairns summoned Australia's first counter-cultural festival. The participants, he declared, were planting 'the seeds of a change that will ultimately transform humankind'.

This epiphany in the Australian bush, while incomprehensible to almost all of Cairns' prosaic ALP colleagues, was wholly in character. Cairns' image as a cerebral socialist was a venter. At a deeper level he was excited by a different myth. His idealism was focused on the notion of regaining happiness in a rural paradise. This was the faith that Cairns kept.

The depth of this Arcadian bent, while perhaps coming as a surprise, is undoubtedly the key finding to arise from a reading of *Keeper of the Faith*, the third and very latest Cairns biography. Its author, Paul Strangio, has put together a readable and reliable presentation of an Australian quest for enlightenment. He leavens scholarly diligence with acumen and deft commentary.

The venter of inner-city intellectuality is easily peeled off. Cairns was born in Carlton in 1914 but his mother settled on a Victorian farm with her parents after her husband left her. Cairns did not live in Melbourne until the Great Depression when the mortgage on his grandparents' farm was rudely foreclosed. Thus was paradise lost at the instigation of the banks.

Cairns was recruited into the Victorian police force by the seriously unlovely Thomas Blamey, and then became an earnest mature-age student as he sought to understand the reasons for his family's dispossession. At Melbourne University in the 1940s, where he studied and then taught economic history, he steeped himself in the ideas of Karl Marx and the radical historian Brian Fitzpatrick. His political hero was Aneurin Bevan.

Cairns embraced socialism easily enough. It was far harder, though, for him to

get excited about left-wing political parties in post-war Australia. The Labor Party in Victoria was too enthralled by Bob Santamaria to act as a vehicle for Cairns' ideas, while an attempt, not of his doing, to enrol him in the Communist Party failed because he was seen as far too free a spirit. A seat in the House of Representatives only came his way after the ALP split and needed to exorcise the influence of the suddenly demonised Santamaria.

The Petrov election of 1955 marked the fourth victory in a row for Robert Menzies. Cairns arrived in Canberra determined to cure Labor's despondency. Defeat was an opportunity to rid Labor of Cold War attitudes. Radical product differentiation was the order of the day. Cairns advocated a clearer commitment to public ownership and disowned Gough Whitlam's modish faith in the doctrine of equality of opportunity.

There were, however, other Labor shibboleths that Cairns was keen to ditch, notably the White Australia Policy. He pressed for a fearless engagement with Asia, insisting that the post-colonial discontent to Australia's north was the product of legitimate nationalist grievances, not Marxist manipulation. Inevitably, the Liberal Party tried to portray him as dangerously soft on communism.

Strangio's account of the years in opposition is relevant to current political concerns. He ably delineates the divergent pressures on Labor as it sought to deal with a Liberal Party buoyed up by atavistic fears of border penetration. Whitlam had a pragmatic desire for victory but Cairns, ever concerned about the corrupting effect of political power, was prepared to settle for defeat provided it was accompanied by left-wing honour. The two men were equally frustrated by Labor's old guard. Labor after the split was a party of resistance, not initiative.

Whitlam was prepared to put in the hard work required to modernise the ALP. He deserved to become leader in 1967 and prime minister in 1972. Cairns took a different path. He looked beyond conventional party structures once the Vietnam War took off as a political issue. The anti-war activists

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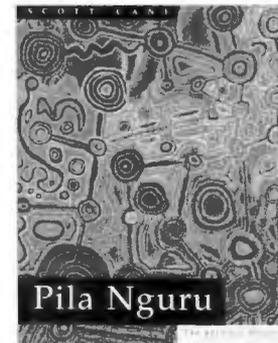
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## NUMBER 2 HOME

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who were associated with Cairns in the Vietnam moratorium campaign in the early 1970s evolved into a dynamic and popular protest movement. Cairns warmed to New Left notions of participatory democracy and consciousness-raising. His success in promoting a non-violent form of mass protest marked a decisive break with the fear and timidity of the Menzies years.

**C**AIRNS, SOMEWHAT contrarily, remained a senior politician even as anti-war activism made him increasingly dubious of the value of traditional parliamentary politics. He became a key member of the Whitlam government and was surprisingly effective in the trade and industry portfolios during its first two years. Criticism by younger radicals in the moratorium movement had sobered him up. His democratic socialist notions having become muddled, he could concentrate more easily on the daily ministerial grind of administration and policy development.

Disappointment set in even before Whitlam was dismissed by Sir John Kerr. During 1975, rising inflation and unemployment ended Australia's post-war Keynesian consensus. Disciples of Milton Friedman in the media and public service were offended because Cairns, Treasurer for a few months, refused to accept higher unemployment as the cost of fighting inflation. His sacking made it easier to introduce deflationary measures. Strangio portrays him as one of the earliest Australian victims of what became known as economic rationalism.

Labor's implosion set Cairns off in a new direction. The option of pursuing radical change through parliament and political office, problematical at the best of times, was killed off. Encouraged by his assistant, Junie Morosi, Cairns sought emancipation through Reichian psychology. Apolitical utopianism beckoned. The quest for an individualised form of liberation culminated in those few days of bliss near Canberra; but the shining vistas were soon clouded over. A second counter-cultural festival was far less euphoric. Held in a more realistic rural setting at the foot of the Snowy Mountains, it was blighted by drought, dust and disease. Dissent and factionalism, which had likewise marred the moratorium campaign, re-emerged, and in time the counter-cultural movement was rendered poisonous by litigation.

Cairns, on severing his association with wider counter-cultural activities, could finally return to his true home. He bought a farm in Victoria where, self-contained as

ever, he produced a stream of self-published books. Perhaps haunted by his lost father, he singled out patriarchy and its discontents as his doughty last enemy.

The public's response when Cairns left his rural study and went down to Melbourne to market his literary wares was one of indifference tempered by good-natured

tolerance. This gap between rural innocence and the knowing ways of the wider world remained a constant. Everything else in Cairns' world of faith, as a candid response to the Strangio biography indicates, was ephemeral. ■

Stephen Holt is a Canberra author.

BOOKS:3

MICHAEL MCGIRR

# Hazard lights

*A Map of the Gardens*, Gillian Mears. Picador 2002. ISBN 0 330 36346 8, RRP \$21  
*Moral Hazard*, Kate Jennings. Picador 2002. ISBN 0 330 36340 9, RRP \$28



**I**T'S HARD TO KNOW if the characters in Gillian Mears' new collection of stories, *A Map of the Gardens*, are getting better or getting worse. They are nearly all afflicted. In many cases, their physical afflictions serve as windows into some deeper malady, a sickness of the soul. This is a risky tactic for a writer to employ. It is hard to describe the relationship between physical and spiritual healing without running to cliché. But Mears' stories are quirky and original. They are also labyrinthine. They may give the reader a good workout but they are worth the sweat.

Many of the characters are, indeed, getting worse. They suffer from multiple sclerosis, creeping paralysis, breast cancer, food obsessions, stubborn grief. In one story, 'The Friendship Garden', the reader is invited into the alien world of a small, regional Australian community. The invitation is extended formally and the reader advised that such towns can 'heal or maim a city stranger passing through'. Whether you end up in either happiness or unhappiness depends on chance. Suddenly, the story shifts from that of an outsider to that of an insider. It wants to guide you to one of the secret places of healing in the town, a place that someone passing through would see as just a 'tiny old man, under a hat, stiffly reboarding his tractor'. The reader is brought

close to Ron Reilly on the day he is finally to weep for the loss of his wife. He has carefully avoided this up to now. He steeled himself at her funeral by imagining what it would take to make a church pew.

Ron's wife, Muriel, had deteriorated slowly. One day she came home and put on her gardening dress. Then she went out and ripped up the 'friendship garden' that she and Ron had planted over a period of 40 or more years. She found remarkable energy for the task. But the next morning she was devastated. She thought that vandals must have been in the garden. In a way, the episode typifies dementia. It also typifies a range of Mears' characters, from prostitutes to dutiful daughters, who find that anything they treasure, anything of value they have made, is fragile. And the most likely destroyers are themselves.

Kate Jennings' novel, *Moral Hazard*, also deals with dementia. The storyteller, Cath, is in her 40s and describes herself as 'bedrock feminist, unreconstructed left-winger'. Her husband, Bailey, is 25 years her senior and has been an artist. He contracts Alzheimer's disease and, slowly and inexorably, begins to suffer the loss of his abilities. He will only get worse. Early in the piece, the doctor tells her, 'You will have to say goodbye to the man you love.' Shortly before becoming sick, Bailey happens to do a

charcoal drawing of a sick man looking at Death. Beneath it he has written: 'There are times at their very beginnings when you wish for their end.'

*Moral Hazard* is an account of one such time. It actually documents a disease: visits to doctors, attempts to join support groups, reactions of friends, removal to a residential care facility. Jennings' prose is beautifully controlled. She is telling you facts. Point blank. Then, occasionally, she lets slip a phrase that is truthful in a deeper sense and reminds the reader that, for the most part, the prose is wearing the mask of someone who looks like they are coping. 'Bailey would erode like a sandstone statue, becoming formless and vague, reduced to a nub'; 'This sense of failure was growing larger by the day. He carried it with him, shouldering it like a sack of coals'; 'I had consigned him to a place where behaviour was infantile, instincts animal. A place of last things.' Cath refers to the kinship she feels with the situation of Iris Murdoch and her Bayley.

You expect a novel about dementia to be moving and this one certainly is, all the more so because it is so pithy. But it is also intelligent and searching. In order to pay the rent and meet enormous medical bills, Cath takes a job as a speechwriter with an investment bank on Wall Street. It's a world where only the fit survive. It demands a high level of performance. In so many ways, it appears to stand in contrast with Bailey's diminishing world. Here again, Jennings is well served by her lean and precise prose. She creates a complete picture of a greedy workplace but never says too much. She never rants about the behaviour she encounters, just lets it speak for itself and allows Bailey's story to rub against it. The two stories should be foreign to each other. The moral dilemma Cath comes to observe at work ought to be of a different kind from the one she ultimately confronts with Bailey. But they aren't. At least not entirely. Wall Street, like Alzheimer's, doesn't care whom it afflicts. It is a place without memory.

The final story in *A Map of the Gardens*, 'I Shall Not Pass Along This Way Again', is the most beautiful in the collection. It is about a woman returning to the town to visit the grave of her mother, a woman who baked cakes in tins 'as large as baby's [sic] graves'. The returning woman still has people in the town but doesn't look them up; she does happen to run into a bloke who once asked her to marry him. The woman is spiritually well resourced. She is familiar with Hildegard of Bingen, parts of whose

writing she has committed to memory, and practises yoga and shiatsu with a guru. The story is a reminder that even the most elaborate resources of heart and soul may not be enough to cope with such a commonplace experience as loss: 'In a big family, a mother's passing is like a forest tree falling down; swathes of destruction unveiling those things

most hidden, which then must face the great arcs of light sweeping in through the gap.' Wall Street and a hush cemetery have this much in common. Nobody there has much to call their own. ■

**Michael McGirr** is the author of *Things You Get for Free*.

## Oysters

There is nothing better than good clean dirt  
to compost the internal waste  
and add fibre to your gluttony.  
Admit it: food is only fuel  
but it enhances the sense of self  
when you accept the dozen oysters  
with that particular slice of lemon  
and the buttery triangle of wholemeal bread  
with the crusts cut off.  
Pity about the crusts but food is only etc  
and besides, someone had handed you  
a wide glass of stout with a froth  
like the edge of a muddy pool but,  
admit it also, the flavour across the tongue  
brings its own library of associations  
(mock-Irish pubs and bad fiddle playing)  
and, besides, stout they say induces lactation  
if that is your ambition. For myself  
I always said that tits on men were  
'just in case' but I don't want to pursue the matter.  
Everything has its other side  
and good clean dirt is enough to get filthy in.  
The question is: I have appetite and I have cynicism.  
Which one will I murder first?

**Thomas Shapcott**

# FLASH IN THE PAN



## Up there

*Beneath Clouds*, dir. Ivan Sen. *Beneath Clouds* is Sen's first feature film. You'd never know. It's rhythmic, uncluttered and straight as a die.

Sen is a Gamilaroi man, and grew up in small-town NSW. *Beneath Clouds*, at least in part, is a look at life for Indigenous teenagers out of the big cities, but well within the confines (I use that word advisedly) of white society—and like all teenagers they struggle wearily to find the secrets of happiness and purpose.

Lena's (Dannielle Hall, above left) mother is Aboriginal and her father Irish. She has fair skin and blue eyes. She has never really known her father—he is just a face in photos and a few words on the back of a picture postcard of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Lena lives in a state gently detached from the world around her—and you can see why. Her little brother is hauled off to juvenile detention for stealing a couple of cartons of cigarettes, her best friend is pregnant to a lad who still rides a BMX and her mum is so unhappy she seems to have stopped loving anyone. Retreating into dreams of her father and his homeland, Lena imagines him as her only way out of a life she hates. Armed with a photo album

and very little money, she boards a bus to Sydney.

Outside a roadside restaurant, Lena meets Vaughn (Damian Pitt, above right), a young Aboriginal man who has just broken out of detention by hiding in the back of a Dairy Farm truck. His mother is dying. Having missed her bus because she is vomiting in the toilet, Lena reluctantly hooks up with Vaughn and they begin the long walk to Sydney.

*Beneath Clouds* explores both landscape and the figures within it with equal intelligence. Like a great sprawling map, the land rolls out in front of the characters as they move closer to understanding why the hell they care about anything. Vaughn and Lena are drawn with a sober honesty and given hypnotically plain language to communicate the most complex, aching emotions.

Sen gets superb performances from Hall and Pitt (neither of whom had acted before). The only complaint I have about Hall receiving the award for best young actress at the Berlin Film Festival (at which Sen was the winner of the Premiere First Movie Award) is that Pitt didn't win the young actors' equivalent. Sen wanted his lead performers to have a great vocal presence—and boy, did he get what he wanted. But for me it was in the moments when they didn't speak—when there was simply nothing to

say—that their performances were most startling.

Sen will make lots of good films in the future, I am sure, but don't miss this one. It has an energy and a clarity that is rare.

—Siobhan Jackson

## Auteur! Auteur!

*Storytelling*, dir. Todd Solondz. The films of director Todd Solondz (*Welcome to the Dollhouse*, *Happiness*) have always had an unremittingly bleak view of the world at their core. His characters, almost without exception, lack the self-awareness to recognise their own cruelty and selfishness, their facile motivations, or their complicity in their own failures. All relationships are abusive; all communication about the exercise of power; all success, however illusory, is achieved through the exploitation of others.

*Storytelling* is no exception. What's interesting, though, is that this jaundiced lens is here turned upon itself: ultimately it seems to suggest that the relationship between film-maker, film and audience may be as soured and abusive as the relationships in the film itself.

The title is our first clue. *Storytelling* is quite directly about the telling of stories as an exercise of power in which we attempt to shape and reshape our own lives and the lives of others around the stereotypes, self-delusions and self-justifications that make our own personal narratives. The film itself is broken into two asymmetric and unconnected sections, 'Fiction' and 'Non-Fiction'. 'Fiction', the first and shorter of the two, explores a series of sadomasochistic exchanges between a Pulitzer Prize-winning black author and his talentless white creative-writing students. Telling and writing stories is defined here as an exercise of power: the one who can assert authorship over events, and force others' stories and self-narratives to serve his or her own, is master.

However, as the second, longer, section ('Non-Fiction') makes clear, the author/director can be as much at the mercy of his or her own stories as the subjects who appear in them. Here a wannabe documentary-maker Toby (Todd Solondz lookalike Paul Giamatti) persuades the suburban family of a high-school slacker to be the subjects of a *verité*-style exposé. The obvious issues of exploitation and distortion that this sets up are tempered by the way Toby's own self-narrative leads him to manipulate

and mock his subjects for the entertainment of his audience.

Solondz is clearly inviting us to consider his role as director, and ours as audience, in similar ways—asking us to consider what both he and we get out of the mocking cruelty that seems to underpin so much of his aesthetic. Of course, that ‘invitation’ is exercised *through* the very authorial power he draws our attention to. The relationship between film-maker, subject and audience is marked as exploitative and distorting in every direction, with no way out. As complex as Solondz’s conception of these issues is, it’s hard not to feel in the end that it’s all a bit too neatly tied up in despair. Isn’t unremitting bleakness just as distorted a perception of the world as unexamined joy?

—Allan James Thomas

## Peace strain

*No Man’s Land*, dir. Danis Tanovic. Bosnian director Danis Tanovic survived the siege of Sarajevo and worked as an official cameraman with the Bosnian army. He has obviously drawn on these experiences for his debut feature, *No Man’s Land*, a brilliantly plotted black farce set in war-torn former Yugoslavia.

On a beautiful summer’s day in 1993, a couple of enemy soldiers find themselves marooned in a trench located midway between two opposing armies. Ciki (Branko Djuric) is a Bosnian, and Nino (Rene Bitorajac) is a Serb. They hate each other on sight and go on hating each other to the end. But they are trapped together by circumstance and a shared desire for self-preservation. And to further complicate matters, a second Bosnian soldier, Cera (Filip Sovagovic), has been booby-trapped with a landmine capable of killing them all. It’s *Catch-22*, Balkans style.

Luckily for the men in the trench, the UN’s Sergeant Marchand (George Siatidis) ignores orders forbidding him to intervene and rides to their rescue in his armoured personnel carrier. Then with the willing connivance of a British TV journalist, Jane Livingstone (Katrin Cartlidge), he turns their predicament into an international media event—much to the annoyance of his cynical commander, Colonel Soft (Simon Callow). The Colonel would rather play chess with his mistress than actually try to keep the peace. Eventually, however, courage goes unrewarded, and cynicism is vindicated.

When recently discussing his film, Tanovic remarked that ‘disharmony and

hate are unnatural, they bring no solution’. Fine sentiments, indeed, but this isn’t the lesson of the dark parable he has created. To me, this superb film delivers a harsh and universal homily: war is hell, and hell is other people. Its final image will remain fixed to your retina for days afterwards.

—Brett Evans

## Flicked flic

*Baise-moi*, dir. Virginie Despentes and Coralie Trinh Thi. There was a security guard at the Lumière cinema in Melbourne. I could not buy my wife’s ticket in advance. Her personal appearance was necessary to guarantee that she was over 18. Thanks to the attentions of the Attorney-General, the queue snaked into Lonsdale Street in the rain. The occasion: *Baise-moi*, co-directed by Virginie Despentes and Coralie Trinh Thi and based on Despentes’ novel about the murderous spree of two women across grim and grimy French cityscapes. In its snapshots of urban cruelty and despair, the film recalls *La Haine* and last year’s masterpiece *La Ville est Tranquille* (along with much else, the best explanation for Le Pen).

Separate killings and a chance encounter bring Manu (Raffaella Anderson) and Nadine (Karen Bach) together. Theirs is an almost sisterly association and as near to tender as anything the film shows. They continue to kill, and to rob. The first victim is a woman. They are not exclusively man-haters, although they put a number of vile men to death. Rather, they are nihilists. Beyond belief or hope, they take what they know will be a short time to exercise a violence that their society has to some degree sponsored. This is the suicide wish so bleakly intuited in Michel Houellebecq’s outstanding novel, *Atomised*.

The come-ons/warnings to the film mention ‘real sex’, but one is left unsure what that means. ‘Real’ sex involves acting, after all. There is vaginal and oral penetration, anal too, but this with a pistol and one of the funniest scenes in *Baise-moi*. It takes place in a ‘fuck club’, where blurring the distinction between the real and the staged is presumably part of the point. *Baise-moi* is nonchalantly unerotic. By numerous recent comparisons, its violence is muted. The music is loud, clothes bad, dialogue droll: ‘Where are the witty lines?’ ‘We’ve got the moves, that’s something.’ And the words are abrasively to the point: ‘There is no work in France,’ Manu tells her brother. There are, however, an impressive number

of anatomies of French society, in film and fiction, with which *Baise-moi* takes an honourable and in no way salacious place.

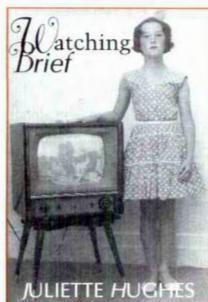
—Peter Pierce

## Types hyped

*The Majestic*, dir. Frank Darabont. There is a rash of clunkers coming your way and *The Majestic* is one, probably not the worst but definitely of that ilk. The others include *Life as a House* and *Va Savoir*. *Life as a House* can be summarised as: troubled middle-class white American teenaged boy doing part-time prostitution to get drugs turns into one of the Bradys because divorced dying dad gives him some tough love. *Va Savoir* is so French, so cool, so narcissistique zat you wohnt to parle frog tout le temps as soon as vous gettez le circulation going encore dans vos legs at ze end because eet eez soo longue.

*The Majestic* is set in the McCarthy era and, in these toey post-September 11 days, is mildly, politely critical of such naughtiness. It wastes some good actors: Jim Carrey (fast turning into an ex-funny person like Robin Williams) stars as Peter, a rising young Hollywood writer; David Ogden Stiers, a terrific actor, is awfully underchallenged here as the wise small-town doctor and father of Peter’s love interest; Martin Landau has to deliver lines about The Hollywood Pantheon that would choke an Oscar presenter. (The *Majestic* itself is the town cinema that has fallen into dilapidation since the war.)

It’s a thin plot: in the early 1950s Peter gets named by McCarthyites and, going for a drunken drive to clear his head, crashes into a river and is coincidentally washed up alive and amnesic near a small town, where everyone thinks he is The *Majestic*-owner’s dead war-hero son Luke, his double. It’s a time-dishonoured device compounded by the types that abound in the cast, including a token black janitor and a sprightly old piano teacher called Mrs Terwilliger. The film, ironically enough, opens with Jim Carrey’s wonderful, expressive face as the single visual, reacting to the voiceover consisting of horrible producer-types destroying his script. Then it all turns into *Mr Smith Goes to Washington* meets *It’s a Wonderful Life*. The press kit claims that it is some sort of homage to Frank Capra. There’s also a line that asks reviewers not to give away the ending, but why would I weary you with yet more derivative, predictable dreck? —Juliette Hughes



## Laugh? I nearly ...

**L**AUGHTER MULTIPLIES in company, leaping from brain to brain like a crown fire. But so can its opposite: there is a kind of anti-laugh-matter that, generated from enough party-poopers, can cause coolness, that enemy of mirth, that neutraliser of humour. Once long ago I went to see *Ruthless People* down in the depths of the now long-dead Australia cinema in Melbourne. It was late in the run, and so there were only about two dozen in the audience apart from my beloved and me. It was funny, so we laughed. But we were the only ones to do so, and soon, in the dark, cavernous silence, even the self-conscious laughter of defiance gave ground. I wonder about that audience now. Who were they? Perhaps they'd just popped in to try to cheer themselves up after a funeral. Maybe they were German nihilists out to experience the void. Maybe they were French.

You would have to be a member of that audience not to laugh at the new ABC comedy series *Kath & Kim* (Thursdays, 9pm). Jane Turner and Gina Riley have written a series that expands on the *Fast Forward* characters. The venture was risky: was there enough substance in the skits? I would say yes, resoundingly. You could say that it's a very sharp Australian version of *Absolutely Fabulous* and just as funny, with memories of Edna Everage added. The dialogue is acid, bitter and witty. *Kath & Kim* is a closely observed soap-opera send-up with the confidence to go without a laugh track. Watching, you see how the speech rhythms of middle America have become ours now. Kim, a spoilt drama queen straight out of *Home and Away* or *Neighbours*, can say the contemptuous 'Hello?' as authentically as any Val girl; Kath, in a pastel-track-suited time warp fashion-wise, is nevertheless right up with Pilates, pump and pop-psycho life management. Magda Szubanski is brilliant as the sport-victim second-best friend.

Like *Ab Fab*, the plot could be tragedy with just a twist in the emphasis or delivery, but it is not. It screens before that sadly underrated series, *Backbender*, which continues to excoriate the very unfunny joke that is our polity at the moment. And John Clarke and Brian Dawe still can make you laugh on the *7.30 Report*, even if you grit your teeth as you get their brilliant synopsis of, say, the collapse of the domestic airlines or perhaps of the public service's ethics when faced with giving unwanted information to a minister.

Just before *Kath & Kim*, however, is the wonderful, fantastic *Kumars at No. 42*. It's British at its best, crossing boundaries between real life and fake life and making us look forward to Thursday nights. Sanjeev Bhaskar, aka Kumar, went

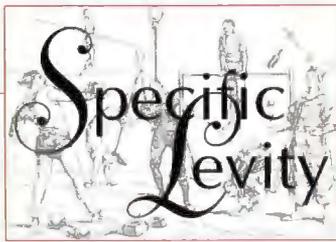
on *Parkinson* in early May, and told how he went to a Hindu funeral in London: one old chap said sadly that the deceased had 'become a hamster' before finally dying. 'Guinea pig,' corrected Bhaskar unwisely, setting off a hilarious chain of recriminatory argument. When Ali G arrived, the tone was lowered, but our household has low tastes. As to the commercial networks, *Malcolm in the Middle* is good; in fact Monday on Nine is a bit like Thursday on ABC, with *Sex and the City*.

**B**UT THE BIG TREAT that is coming your way via Nine will be *The Osbournes*. It is reality TV at its doubtful best, with Ozzy Osbourne, lead singer of Black Sabbath, welcoming the world into his home. At the moment we're watching it on MTV through Optus on Thursdays at 7pm. I think Nine is waiting for Ten to finish with *Big Brother* before launching Ozzy at us. *BB* has unfortunately blitzed the ratings and I think that the others don't even want to try launching a new series before that blasted blight of *BB* is over for the year.

Ozzy entrances: at 52 he is the happily married, loving father of two spoilt, bratty but not unlikeable teenagers. Very *Brady Bunch*; in fact this is sent up in the opening credits. But any resemblance finishes there. Ozzy shuffles around his huge Bel Air mansion like an old man; years of substance abuse have damaged him in divers ways. His wife, Sharon, is a bright, cluey woman who manages him well. There are dogs and cats, most of them incontinent. The language, delivered in flat Birmingham tones, is basic: MTV must use their bleep ten times a minute. Yet they are quite nice, and completely unworried about cameras; they're showbiz, it's money, they're not effing daft enough to knock back some more even though they've got plenty. Their problems are probably not ours: when he is arguing with his 17-year-old daughter Kelly about her acquisition of a small tat on the hip, he must take into account that he has very little untattooed space on himself. However, when arguing with 16-year-old Jack over the lad's use of dope, he is able to point to himself as an awful example of what can go wrong, even though he's clean now.

And while we're on what can go wrong, I'd like to thank the kind people who *didn't* ring, email or write to point out my appalling laxness in naming the *Sydney Morning Herald* as the perpetrator of the 'Chris Aurora' stunt instead of the *Daily Telegraph*. It's nice to know you care. All fourteen of you. ■

**Juliette Hughes** is a freelance writer.



## Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 104, June 2002

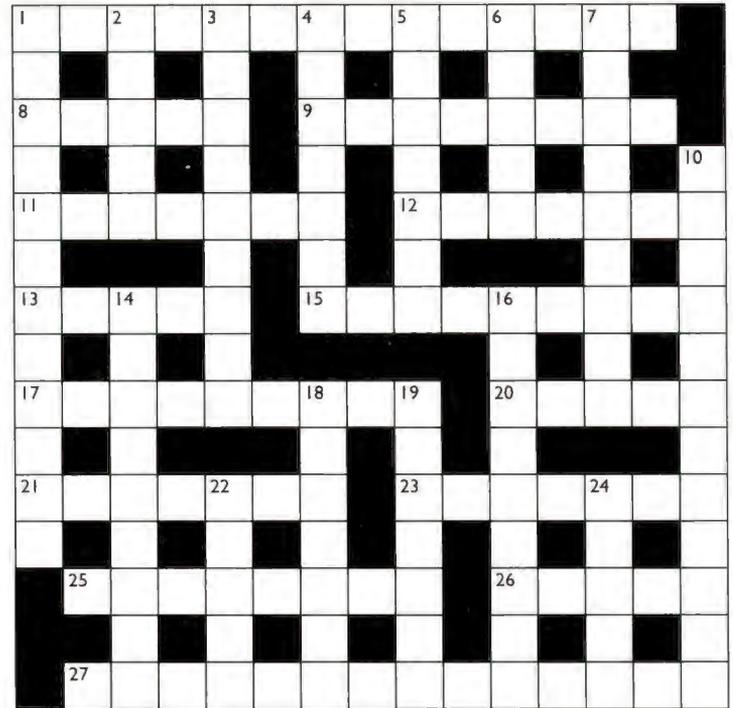
Devised by  
Joan Nowotny IBVM

### ACROSS

1. Spends cold months disconcertingly lost on ice—on the shortest day. (6, 8)
8. Edward, using peculiar nut, adjusted the instrument. (5)
9. What servant was paid in advance. (8)
11. About spy—did he take chemical substance for analysis? (7)
12. It seems that Reginald, in short, was at a yacht race—by the sound of it. (7)
13. Ten of these could bring you to the position of 14-down in numerical order. (5)
15. Sycophantic followers put their clothes on them. On? Yes. (7-2)
17. Catching large, lumpy fish is very satisfactory! (5-4)
20. Where racing cars stop and say thanks for the Middle Eastern bread? (5)
21. Sideways sort of thinking, like 5-down with a change of end. (7)
23. Headwear for the not-quite queen? (7)
25. About the Eastern Mediterranean coastal region, I'll tell you what's pertinent. (8)
26. Am able to listen to long section of the poem. (5)
27. Rome? Or heaven? The never-ending metropolis! (3,7,4)

### DOWN

1. A pub where there's drink for animals? (8,4)
2. Grandma often minds the children. Why not? (5)
3. Would one stay in 27-across for so interminably long? (9)
4. Pull out of shape, perhaps—to such an extent? (7)
5. A Council took place in 27-across—at the basilica, perhaps. (7)
6. Object to strange night. (5)
7. Exceptional EC artist expatiates initially on what he does when making his work of art. (7,2)
10. The losers pray to him, especially this month on the 13th. (5, 7)
14. Found one's position somehow, i.e. in tenth place. Considerably lower—or higher? (9)
16. Based on experience of primal ice treated and observed. (9)
18. A novel 'e perhaps read when away from work. (2,5)
19. Treated any cut a person sustained when visiting the Mexican peninsula. (7)
22. Old-time official I revere outright. (5)
24. Fijian airport sounds like this when it makes a din for better spelling? (5)



### Solution to Crossword no. 103, May 2002



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