EUREKA STREET

A MAGAZINE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS, THE ARTS AND THEOLOGY
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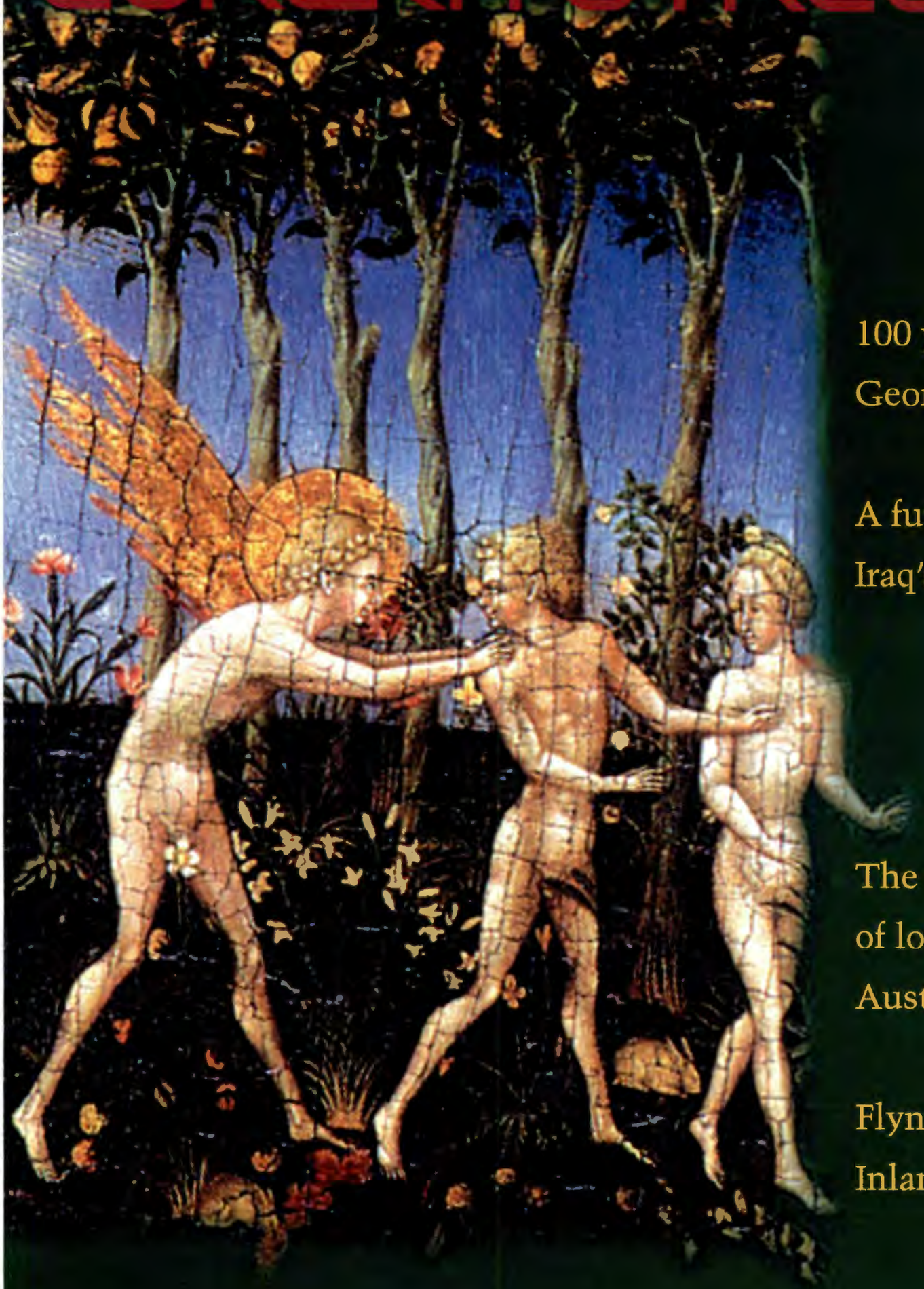
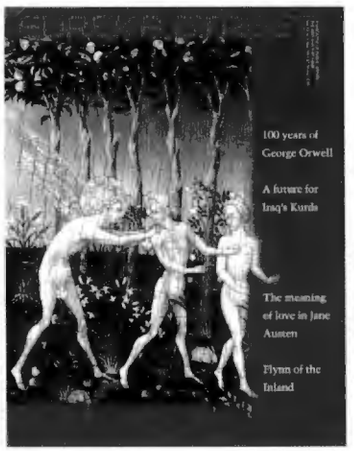


100 years of George Orwell

A future for Iraq's Kurds

The meaning of love in Jane Austen

Flynn of the Inland



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VOLUME 13 NUMBER 4 MAY 2003

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This month:
Cover illustration is a detail from 'The Creation of the World and the Expulsion from Paradise by Giovanni di Paolo, active by 1417, died 1482, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
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Marcelle Mogg

Paper dolls

NOTIONS OF GOOD and evil have become a tradeable commodity in the rhetoric that has enveloped the conflict in Iraq. And the extent of human suffering—the 'collateral damage'—in this war becomes more apparent each day. The war has exacerbated the problems of what was already an intolerable life for a population almost wholly reliant on food aid and enduring what can only be described euphemistically as a health care system.

The images of pre-war Iraq by Mathias Heng (left) are reminders of what life has been like after more than ten years of UN sanctions and a regime that believed that violence was the only language Iraqis understood. Mathias is presently negotiating with a bureaucracy *in absentia* for permission to return to Iraq and document the effects of war.

The urgent need for access to clean water and medical assistance is currently competing with commerce. British Minister for Trade Brian Wilson says he hopes that those who joined the US to form the 'coalition of the willing'—Britain, Australia and Poland—will be entitled to 'their fair share' of trade contracts in the new Iraq. The unseemly squabbling for the spoils of war was well under way even in the early days of the conflict. And the failure of the US to comply with existing international trade agreements suggests that it is not fond of sharing.

In spite of the apparent jubilation of some Iraqis at the removal of Saddam's government, the thin veil of justification thrown over the conflict cannot mask the West's desire to revel in the potential wealth of a fully operational Iraqi economy. One wonders how long ago such designs were drawn.

Meditations on the human condition feature throughout this issue of *Eureka Street*. The cover illustration, a detail from di Paolo's 'The Creation of the World and the Expulsion from Paradise' (page 28) reflects our fascination with questions of origin and existence, and leads quickly—in the Judeo-Christian view at least—to a contemplation of the relationship between good and evil, and meaning and suffering.

Such fundamental questions are often best addressed through art. In his essay on the relationship between poetry and painting, Peter Steele helps us capture that which is just beyond our reach, the place where words fail and our reaction is largely visceral.

Jane Austen knew a thing or two about the human condition. In her first piece for *Eureka Street*, Eleanor Collins shares her insights into the timelessness of Austen and her capacity to dissect, with the skill of a surgeon, our ideas about love and the human condition.

Austen's writing has once again been made fashionable by adaptations for television and cinema, and by Helen Fielding's novel, *Bridget Jones's Diary*. You can find useful and informative websites devoted to Austen's writing and life. Some depict the homes in which she lived and died, quaint in their determination to recreate the 'real' Jane Austen. Others, more curious, analyse Austen's handwriting and offer dress-up dolls of Elizabeth Bennett, complete with a fashion ensemble any middle-class young Englishwoman would have killed for.

Then there are the fan sites, stretching from Tokyo to Vladivostok, that include the bizarre:

> The Jane Austen Evening is a mixture of live music, food, authentic dance, historical discussion, gaming and tea. The event will begin at 3:00 pm, with an afternoon tea. During the tea, the attendees will be diverted by a series of Regency era parlour entertainments [sic]. Following this will be a two-hour, intensive dance class. After the dance class, a light meal will be served and at approximately 8:00 pm, Axworthy's Academy of Music will strike up, and the dancing will begin. Davies Hall is located in Farnsworth Park, at Lake and Mount Curve, in Altadena.

Next year in Baghdad! **—Marcelle Mogg**

Andrew Hamilton

War costs

On an Australian autumn day, the human reality of war intrudes only by stealth. At a demonstration, the sound of an air raid siren evokes the terror of those who wait for bombs to fall. In a riverbank exhibition, photographs of love and tenderness hint at all that war destroys.

These understated images provide a clearer criterion than the daily commentary, celebration of boys' toys and the images of smiling troops to measure the war against Iraq. The air raid siren, with its reminder of the unequal balance of destructive power available to the two sides, suggested that the invasion would end in the occupation of Iraq and the removal from power of Saddam Hussein.

It also reminds us of the human cost of war, which not only maims and kills people but also poisons relationships. The reality of war is neither clean nor liberating. It is about the destruction of lives and human goods, sometimes by design, sometimes by implication, and sometimes by mistake. War inspires in opposing forces an equal determination to kill and destroy in the most effective available ways. It also tears the delicate net of relationships and decent behaviour that shapes a civil society. The loss of the past in the looting of the museum and library of Baghdad will make this war long memorable.

Once war began, it became certain that many Iraqis would not experience as liberation the arrival of the invading army. Why should anyone have expected otherwise? If the capture of Baghdad is to be remembered in the Arab world as an event of liberation and not of colonisation, much that war has destroyed will need to be repaired.

The photographs of human intimacy, too, measure the arguments that supported going to war. Each new bombing of women and children has made more incredible the humanitarian argument in favour of war. If we and our children were offered the peace and liberation that we have brought to the people of Iraq, would we ever have accepted the offer as humane? Of such arguments the Roman historian Tacitus' mordant comment still seems apposite at the war's end: 'They make a desert and they call it peace.'

We are now told that the outcome vindicates the war. It vindicates what no-one doubted, the power of superior military force. But it will also be used to vindicate the use of war for other strategic goals. And that loss of moral sensitivity diminishes and threatens us all.

The siren, and the images of family life made precarious by war, offer a standard for our own response to what is done in our name in Iraq. The choice has been between coarseness and compassion. Coarse responses are a commonplace of war. Australian business leaders and government have expressed concern that they might be excluded from profiting from the rebuilding of what we have destroyed. And for all of us who write about war on either side, there is Ignazione Silone's warning of half a century ago: 'Only by the sacrifice of intellectual honesty is it possible to identify the cause of truth with that of an army.'

One photograph in the exhibition reminds us that this war, too, will come to an end. In the photo, children play exuberantly in a destroyed Beirut stadium, swinging high on a swing made out of tangled steel beams. In the midst of destruction, it is through compassion and not through war that such life is nurtured. **—Andrew Hamilton** SJ

snap

Photo opportunity

This autumn an exhibition has been slowly touring the world. The MILK exhibition has been staged in Australia, first on the forecourt of the Sydney Opera House and then on the riverside walk of Melbourne's Federation Square. The exhibition was attended by enough marketing and merchandising to make the average onlooker suspicious. But it was worth persevering. The exhibition had real substance, even if it sounded a little corny at first.

MILK stands for Moments of Intimacy, Love and Kindness. The project was the idea of a New Zealander, Geoff Blackwell, who was inspired by Edward Steichen's renowned 'Family of Man' project of the 1950s. Blackwell gained the support of a publisher with deep pockets and soon began an extensive collaboration.

The project was looking for images that celebrated humanity, with an emphasis on immediacy rather than on technical achievement. It sounds simple, but the result was quite extraordinary. The competition attracted 40,000 photos by 17,000 photographers living in 164 countries. Three hundred photos were chosen for the final project. A good number of them are of the sick and dying; many of them reveal pain, ageing and poverty. None of them obscures hope.

Vale Bros

On 26 March, Father John Brosnan was reunited with Ronald Ryan somewhere—be it heaven or nirvana.

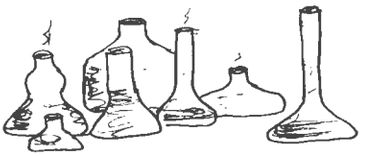
John Brosnan was the Catholic chaplain to Melbourne's notorious Pentridge Prison for over 30 years, and he was with Ronald Ryan when Ryan was hanged on 3 February 1967 at 5pm—the last person to be hanged in Australia.

Brosnan had an extraordinary capacity to 'walk alongside' his fellow man or woman—no matter how flawed they might be. Brosnan also understood that many of those individuals in prison had little choice in the matter.

But Brosnan was more than a strong and compassionate force in the lives of prisoners. He was a brilliant and unrelenting advocate for prison reform. Brosnan knew that prison rarely improves a person's lot in life and in most cases strips the humanity from him or her.

Perhaps the most fitting tribute to Brosnan's work would be for Australia to oppose the death penalty in Indonesia, should those accused of the Bali bombings be convicted.

John Brosnan, better than anyone, knew that because humans run the justice system, it is potentially flawed. He knew that human life is precious, and that revenge serves no useful purpose in civilising a society.

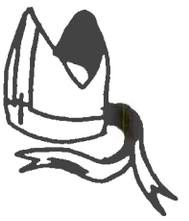


Revenge of the nerds

For those who still think scientists are colourless, white-coated nerds cloned from alien life forms, this year's winners of the National Science and Technology Medal from the Clunies Ross Foundation provide excellent contrary evidence.

The seven recipients of the award come from all over Australia. They include an Iranian immigrant engineer, a profoundly deaf researcher who is the proud owner of a bionic ear, a scientific entrepreneur who mortgaged his house to buy his company back from a multinational, a woman raised in a single-parent family, and an academic who listens to the Universe. They seem like just the sort of people who would struggle to gain support from the Howard Government.

Their projects are equally eclectic but all very practical. For example, Ron Grey's scientific instruments can identify the elemental composition of a sample to parts per trillion in seconds. He exports to 85 countries, but says a lack of government understanding as to the uses of his equipment has meant he can't export to countries like Iran—because of supposed 'defence' applications. He says the ban may eventually force him and his company offshore.



Together man

'Nothing human is alien from me.' The Roman playwright Terence's slick catchcry is personified by the 104th Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams.

Rowan Williams is a participant in life, not an observer beyond contradiction. Fellow of the British Academy, Doctor of Divinity and youthful prelate, he is also an endearing and engaging human being.

Rowan Williams longs to renew the contribution that people of faith, especially Christian faith, can make to our society. He argues that Christians understand secularism; their tradition tests all claims to ultimate perspective and sanctions and fosters independent thought. But they also know the pull of allegiance to God above all else. They must be at the forefront of finding a better way beyond sectarian dominance and rootless democracy. By drawing together groups of differing views and beliefs, including their own, Christian communities can continue to aid the regeneration of politics and public discourse.

At his enthronement on 27 February, Rowan Williams opened his heart. 'The one great purpose of the Church's existence is to share [the] bread of life; to hold open in its words and actions a place where we can be with Jesus and [learn] to be channels for his free, unanxious, utterly demanding, grown-up love. The church exists to pass on the promise of Jesus—"You can live in the presence of God without fear; you can receive from his fullness and set others free from fear and guilt".'

capital letter

A shiny new regime

WE CAN ALL take it as read that various shivers have gone down various spines in the Middle East, Africa and Asia. The real question is whether one is going down ours.

A military victory over Iraq—indeed even a fairly quick one—was always inevitable, even if the initial resistance proved greater than expected. The big issue was always going to be the peace and how the world would be remade. Where does George Bush—or John Howard for that matter—take it from here?

The shock and awe was partly about sending an unequivocal message to the rulers of those states that their days were numbered. It was also a clarion call to the people living under their oppressions that the US was serious about destroying havens of terror, about wanting democracy, the rule of law rather than arbitrary tyranny, free markets and free and transparent institutions, and that US policy—military, diplomatic and economic—was henceforth to be directed to that end.

That's the theory, anyway.

There *is* a case for a new colonialism, and for concluding that most of the people on earth would be better off with a rule of law—and disinterested, paternalistic but benevolent Western-oriented administrators supervising their institutions, and building market economies out of the wreckage of Third World socialism, religious, tribal ethnic violence, and the despotism and opportunism of the current leaders. One has only to think of Zimbabwe, Ghana, Papua New Guinea or Sudan to accept that almost anything else would be better for the inhabitants than the mess their leaders have made of things.

The medicine has been about for quite a while, and any number of US-dominated institutions—the World Bank, for example—have been attempting to force it down various throats, but with little success in making the people more free.

'You will be free—free to build a better life instead of building more palaces for Saddam and his sons,' President Bush told Iraqis in his moment of military triumph. A Bush whose primary recipe for rebuilding a faltering US economy consists of tax cuts for the rich which, by allowing them to build palaces, will create jobs for the poor.

'Free to pursue economic prosperity without the hardship of economic sanctions,' said the leader of the nation that enforced the sanctions. 'Free to travel and free to speak your mind,' from a representative of the three nations working hardest to close the door against economic and political refugees.

'Free to join in the political affairs of Iraq. And all the people who make up your country—Kurds, Shia, Turkomens, Sunnis and others—will be free of the terrible persecution that so many have endured,' as he announced an interim government of Saddam oppositionists with personal records even marginally less attractive than those of the warlords who now rule the liberated Afghanistan.

In Iraq itself, the old tyrant will be little mourned, but the new tyrants, whether of the coalition of the willing or from the various opposition groups, will be scarcely more welcome. The problems will be aggravated by the process of de-Ba'athification: in Saddam's nation, as in much of the Third World, political parties are the actual administrative machinery of the state.

Even the new politicians will know that the first step in assembling any electoral credentials will be to be anti-American—or anti- members of its coalition, particularly if they too rush in with their carpet bags. Iraqi resentment will soon flare at the imposition of an alien order and at the reimposition either of an exile leadership almost as much discredited as Saddam, or of moral and economic colonisation by the United States.

THE RECONSTRUCTION OF a civil society will not only take time and patience, but involve the reconciling of internal and external tensions that even Saddam himself, with a reign of terror, could scarcely control. Just as loosening the grip of a centralised Yugoslavia produced atomisation, civil war, and genocide—not to mention interventions by interested neighbours—so too is there a risk of implosion in Iraq. And when the ripples reach Syria, Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia, the effect will be more, rather than less repression—if only to keep communal violence in check.

It's equally frightening that many of the coalition's strategists simply do not get it, so far as any understanding of the forces that produced September 11 are concerned. One does not need the shelter of a rogue state to run a terrorist network. Nor, generally, is it despots who can produce the ideas for which people will commit suicide. A fresh wave of Muslims, and not only from the Middle East, share the sense of humiliation that Iraqis now feel as a result of the feat of Western arms. Their response will be to conclude that conventional military confrontation is a waste of time. It is the tactics of the guerrilla, particularly the urban guerrilla, and tactics against Western citizens, such as at Bali and on September 11, that will most demoralise and hurt the new colonisers. In such wars, which can only be lost, never won, massive technological superiority counts for little—and free institutions can even prove a handicap, if fresh Western security legislation is any guide.

The peace, if there is to be one, depends on the greater battle of ideas. It cannot be won in councils of the coalition, but only among the world community and among the people who need to be liberated. Don't hold your breath. ■

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

the month's traffic

Any excuse

EXPLOITING THE WAR ON TERROR

The most obvious consequence of the 'war on terror' has been more wars. First Afghanistan, now Iraq. Proponents of the wars argue forcefully that wars are necessary to protect (and project) Western values of democracy, freedom and the rule of law.

To achieve this, civilians have been killed—in greater numbers than those who died in the attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Centre in September 2001. It is increasingly apparent that these ongoing wars have been used as smokescreens to conceal attacks on those same freedoms within Western countries.

Batasuna is one of the largest Basque political parties in Spain. In August 2002, Batasuna was banned in a joint manoeuvre by judicial authorities and the Spanish Parliament—with 90 per cent of MPs voting in favour of the ban. Batasuna stood accused of links with the terrorist group ETA, which has waged a 30-year struggle for independence. Seven hundred people have been killed in that struggle. All offices of the party, which attracts just 10 per cent of the vote in Basque regions of northern Spain, were declared illegal and forcibly closed in violent police raids. Ordinary Spaniards—a people with a love of street demonstrations, including protests in Madrid by two million opposed to the war in Iraq—scarcely batted an eyelid. The main newspaper, *El Pais*, a bastion of liberal good sense, strongly supported the move. The right to freedom of association was never mentioned.

In February 2003 Marcelo Otamendi, editor-in-chief of *Egunkaria* (the largest, if not the only Basque-language newspaper in Spain) was arrested along with nine colleagues. The newspaper was, like Batasuna, outlawed and closed. Upon his release, Otamendi made detailed allegations against the police of torture, including death threats, claiming that 'they twice forced a plastic bag over my head, made me crouch naked, and pointed an unloaded pistol against my temple, whilst constantly hurling insults about Basque culture and Basque politicians'. With cross-party support, the Spanish Interior Minister, Angel Acebes, pointedly refused to investigate the allegations. Acebes seemed not to have heard of freedom of speech and stated simply: 'In this country, the only ones who violate basic human rights are ETA, who torture and kill.'

Spain is not alone in winding back the clock on human rights.

In February 2003, it was revealed that the Deputy Commissioner of Police in Frankfurt, Wolfgang Daschner, had signed a written order instructing subordinates to extract information 'by means of the infliction of pain, under medical supervision and subject to prior warning'. Torture or the threat of torture is punishable by a ten-year prison term. But conservative politicians expressed sympathy for the deputy commissioner's dilemma, as he struggled against time to track down a kidnapped boy. The head of the German Judges Federation, Geert Mackenroth, stated that, 'There are situations that cannot be resolved by legal means, and in which legally protected rights have to be weighed, the one against the other'.

Elsewhere in Europe, police in France and Austria have been accused by Amnesty International and other human rights agencies of mistreating detainees as a matter of course.

In post-September-11 America, nearly 1200 people were detained and held in conditions of the utmost secrecy. They were detained mostly on minor immigration charges or flimsy evidence such as a person having a similar name to a 'known terrorist'. Were this to happen elsewhere, it would be described as arbitrary, unlawful imprisonment. The 598 prisoners at Camp Delta (formerly Camp X-Ray) have been designated as 'enemy combatants', not prisoners of war. They have therefore been denied access to any form of legal protection under US law and the provisions of the Geneva Convention. Leaks from Washington strongly suggest that there are no al Qaeda members of any importance among the prisoners.

The arrest of alleged al Qaeda mastermind, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, on 4 March 2003, indicates what may be happening behind closed doors. US officials promised that he would not be tortured but would be subjected to 'extreme pressure' in the form of round-the-clock interrogations, sleep deprivation, psychological manipulation, exposure to bitter cold or intense heat and truth drugs. Three days later, it was revealed that American soldiers in Bagram, north of Kabul, beat to death, over the course of weeks, two Afghan prisoners.

In the lead-up to the war in Iraq, the United Nations was much maligned by the United States for being ineffective and unwilling to enforce the resolutions of the Security Council. UN inaction, the US claimed, would fatally damage the credibility of the world body and persuade rogue states that they can flout UN resolutions with impunity. The US has said nothing of binding UN treaties that declare the inviolability of human rights.

—Anthony Ham

Privatise or perish

THE END OF MEDICARE

Recent Medicare statistics indicate a ten per cent decrease in the number of bulk-billed consultations with GPs since the election of the Howard government. Kay Patterson, the federal Minister for Health and Aging, is planning a major overhaul of the system, promising a more equitable and accessible system. The Opposition and the Doctor's Reform Society believe it represents the 'end of Medicare'.

I work in a busy outer-suburban emergency department. I am inclined to wonder why many patients with minor ailments (coughs and colds) choose to wait up to three hours for a two-minute consultation with me, rather than seeing their local GP.

The answers: 'They're booked out for a week'; 'We've just moved to the area and can't find a doctor who is taking new patients'; 'My doctor doesn't bulk bill and I can't afford to pay.'

The problem of access to GPs in outer suburbia is due both to insufficient doctor numbers and skewed geographical distribution of GPs. Changes in vocational training also mean that doctors are encouraged to spend more time with patients, addressing preventive issues as well as the immediate problem.

Medicare rebates have not kept up with these changes, nor with inflation. It is impossible to run a practice reliant only

on bulk billing without reducing consultation times or working extraordinary hours. Care is compromised and errors become more likely.

Kay Patterson does not believe that increasing the Medicare rebate will fix the problem. The government plans to make co-payments directly to doctors and to permit health insurers to insure 'gap' costs. Incentives are promised to encourage doctors to bulk bill low-income earners, though there is talk of restricting this to outer-suburban and regional areas. The government promises that no matter where you live you will have access to a doctor you can afford. But it all sounds suspiciously like another step towards a 'user-pays' system.

Prior to the 1996 election, John Howard promised to maintain Medicare 'in its entirety'. Yet the 30 per cent rebate for those joining a health fund, and the one per cent Medicare surcharge for high-income earners who don't, suggest that this was not one of Howard's 'core promises'. The current co-payment proposal will cut through the red tape. Yet if private health funds cover 'gap' insurance, doctors will then be free to charge increasingly higher amounts for co-payments—all of which means that there is greater pressure to take out private health insurance.

The government seems intent on dragging us into a wholly user-pays system. Many Australians are familiar with horror stories from the US health care system. But, one might argue, such a system has its good points. Theoretically, a user-pays system encourages greater independence among patients—compliance with medications and preventive strategies, for example—resulting in fewer recurrent presentations to the doctor. One country emergency department in Victoria charges a $10 'door fee' on Saturday night to dissuade those who don't really need to be there. There are times on a busy shift when I have wished we could do the same.

Dr Gwen Gray, lecturer in health policy at the Australian National University, urges caution. She points to the Rand Health Insurance Experiment, which looked at the impact of such systems in the US. The study found simply that the well-off used more services and the low-income earners used less. Preventive services were particularly affected. And higher mortality rates and incidences of disease were found among the 'sick-poor'.

The Howard government promises to look after the poor with incentives for

summa theologiae

Small consolations

Like Simpson's donkey, small consolations can sometimes be seen through the smoke of war. In the midst of the divisions in Iraq and the region, there have been reconciliations in the even more ancient divisions of churches. The Roman Catholic Church has approved a small but notable form of hospitality between the divided churches of the East.

The dominant religion in Iraq is Islam. But among its population are also Christians with a history that stretches behind the rise of Islam.

In the early years of Christianity, Persia was the great kingdom that Rome could never master. Although Christians found their way there very early, the church in Persia grew significantly in the 5th century. Christians from Antioch fled there after being vilified as heretical in a bitter dispute about the nature of Jesus Christ. The history of the Assyrian church is rich and little known in the West: monuments along the trading routes testify to the Christian communities stretching into the heart of China.

In the 16th century, a section of this church was reconciled with the Roman church, and became known as the Chaldaean church. Both it and the Assyrian Church had their own places of worship and ministers, and neither church's members received the sacraments from the other group.

The recent dispersal around the world of more than half a million Christians of both churches has disrupted this separate existence. In the places where they settle, they are lucky to find a community of either church, let alone churches from both communities. The only way in which many can worship in their own way is by sharing in the liturgy of the other church.

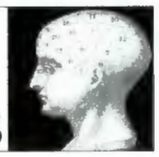
After Vatican II, this step was accepted as normal for Western Catholics and Eastern Christians caught in similar circumstances. But hospitality between the Chaldaean and Assyrian churches raised questions of boundaries for the Roman Catholic church. It had to revisit convictions that had seemed unshakeable.

The difficulty lay in the Eucharistic prayer of Addai and Mari, used from the beginning by the Assyrian church. This prayer does not include the narrative of what Jesus did at the Last Supper. As a result, it omits Jesus' words, 'This is my Body and This is my Blood'. According to Western theology, grounded in one of the medieval Councils, it is through these words that Christ becomes present in the Eucharist. So, on the face of it, the Assyrian Eucharist was fatally flawed at its heart.

But hospitality stretches boundaries. On the grounds of the antiquity of the prayer and of the Assyrian church, the Roman church encouraged the isolated Chaldeans to share the sacraments with Assyrian Christians when appropriate.

This seems a small concession. But it is large in its implications. The readiness to see heresy in difference of outlook and practice created the divisions between the Assyrian and other churches. Hospitality led to a better appreciation of the blessings of difference. The principle has broader relevance. ■

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

archimedes 

Creating evolution

We are so used to the astonishing applications of genetics these days that a milestone has passed almost unnoticed. Researchers at the University of Manchester have managed to turn one species of yeast into another simply by moving genetic material around. They have shown the origin of species.

Perhaps the lack of fanfare is as it should be, typical of the progress of science. After all, it's just one more step along a long path. But this event is noteworthy—it is the ultimate sign that creationism has no value as a practical, scientific theory.

More than 140 years ago, Charles Darwin published *The Origin of Species*, in which he outlined a theory of evolution by natural selection which has become the cornerstone of modern biology—and much else besides. His ideas were instantly attacked, particularly by the church.

But the book never actually dealt with the origin of species at all. And while it proposed natural selection as the driving force of evolution, Darwin had only a vague (and erroneous) notion of why individuals within species varied for this purpose. The beginnings of the answers to these questions were to be found a decade later in the genetic experiments of the Austrian monk, Gregor Mendel. The significance of Mendel's work was only recognised at the very start of the 20th century, which makes the discipline of genetics just over 100 years old.

There was a major advance 50 years ago when James Watson and Francis Crick published the structure of DNA, the molecule that stores and reproduces genetic information. That milestone will be celebrated at the 19th International Genetics Congress in Melbourne, which will be attended by no less than eight Nobel Prize winners (including Watson) from the field of genetics.

Over the past 50 years, genetics has become a powerful force to be used for good or ill. We now know so much about how heredity works that we have plotted the genetic plans for our own species and several others, and we can manipulate genetic material to the point of creating and destroying species or turning one species into another.

Science is all about making sense of the world around us, so that we can predict and shape the pattern of events. In this context, genetics has been very successful. It works, and in a very pragmatic way. We can transform life forms using the knowledge genetics puts at our disposal. And what we know of genetics makes evolution inevitable, regardless of how life was initially created.

While creationism is now irrelevant in a practical sense, it remains an important force politically, socially and theologically. There are still people in the world who insist on teaching creationism as science (which it is not), even though they live in societies that benefit from biotechnology informed by modern genetics. On the other hand, plenty of those who understand and accept evolution also have no problem in believing in a creative God who motivates the Universe. *Archimedes* is one such. ■

Tim Thwaites is a freelance science writer.

The 19th International Genetics Congress will be held at the Melbourne Convention Centre from 6 to 11 July.

doctors to bulk bill patients with health-care cards. The danger is that if 'poor' means only those patients with health-care cards (who have an annual income of less than $30,000), those just above the cut-off may suffer significant financial hardship if they become ill. And if the incentives apply only in regional and outer-suburban areas where doctors are scarce, what about low-income earners and pensioners in cities? Aren't we creating a two-tier system, as suggested by Annette Ellis, Shadow Minister for Health and Aging—a barrier between rich and poor where access to a GP is based 'not on health but on wealth'?

The Rand Experiment suggests it is dangerous to view health as just another commodity. Despite this, our government continues to push for a fully privatised system. I expect that the number of patients presenting to emergency departments will continue to rise if these changes to Medicare are put in place—until the hospital system is pushed to the edge and forced to privatise or perish.

—Kath O'Connor

Clear and present danger

THE AFTERMATH OF IRAQ

It may be years before we know the full story about the US-led war on Iraq, and are able to sort the truth from the half-truths, disinformation and war propaganda.The issue now is: will this Western invasion of Iraq unleash new demons to torment us for years to come?

Disturbing questions remain about the justification for the war. The US, British and Australian governments failed to provide transparent proof that there was a just cause, that war was undertaken with legitimate authority and as the last resort, and that the costs and suffering involved were proportionate to the goal.

Mr Howard warned about the danger of weapons of mass destruction falling into the hands of terrorists, a circumstance that 'would present a clear, undeniable and lethal threat' to Western nations like Australia. The prime minister conjured up fearful images of what Saddam might do. This was not cogent proof.

The prime minister's arguments flew in the face of the just war criteria, which

insist that the burden of proof lies on those proposing war.

The moral case for war was never made. First, containment did not fail. Saddam's weakened forces were surrounded by one of the most powerful armies in history. Even without that, had Iraq threatened anyone militarily, the UN, including the United States, would surely have intervened decisively.

Second, the coalition invaded Iraq on the pretext that Iraq's weapons of mass destruction posed an imminent threat to the West, even though no-one knew whether Iraq still had such weapons or if they were usable (most have a short shelf-life). Weapons inspectors had already destroyed the overwhelming bulk of Iraq's weapons, and assured the UN that it had no current nuclear capability.

As long as the inspections continued, it was highly unlikely that Saddam would have been able to develop or deploy them, even if he had them. It would appear that concern about these weapons was exaggerated for political effect.

Third, Mr Howard claimed to be worried that Iraq's possession of weapons of mass destruction would encourage others to acquire them. At least 15 nations in Asia and the Middle East already have them. Is Mr Howard intending to follow this logic, and intervene militarily against such nations—Syria, Iran, North Korea, Libya, Sudan, Pakistan perhaps?

Fourth, Mr Howard said he feared that the spread of such weapons increased the risk of their falling into the hands of terrorists. But Saddam was not likely to hand over such weapons unless, as the CIA warned, he faced a terminal attack. How paradoxical. What's more, as we know, a terrorist can turn an airliner into a weapon of mass destruction. Why go to all the trouble of acquiring chemical weapons?

Fifth, the most affecting of the coalition's arguments was that Saddam was responsible for the hunger of children in Iraq. Certainly he shared the responsibility, but the UN sanctions were also culpable and were deliberately kept in place for many years despite protests that they were costing hundreds of thousands of lives. Pope John Paul II, in 1998, called such sanctions 'biological warfare' against an innocent population.

What did the Australian government do to ameliorate the savage effects of these sanctions? Responsible commentators have talked of the sanctions in terms of 'genocide', yet when will we see an independent Australian inquiry into our involvement with these policies? Australia helped police and enforce the sanctions. Do such actions implicate Australia in crimes against humanity? **—Bruce Duncan**

Keep left unless undertaking

SIGNING OFF

THE SIGNS ARE worrying. The sticker affixed to the rear window of my Toyota Crown identifies me as the recipient of an award for 'Excellence in Driving'. I know what's what.

But despite my exemplary skills behind the wheel, I just can't keep my eyes on the road. It's all the road signs. Sure, they're difficult to read as I hurtle past them at a frightening speed. But that's not the problem. Even the ones I do manage to read are completely incomprehensible.

There's the one that says 'Drowsy Drivers Die'. Is that a directive? Like 'Die Yuppie Die' was for the '80s? Or is it a statistical concept: 'Drowsiness is more likely to make you smash yourself and your fellow road users into a million little pieces.' Evidently, the latter.

Further down the road there's another placard offering free tea and coffee compliments of the local constabulary. And that's without even being arrested.

I keep my foot pressed flat to the boards. The speedo wobbles up past 90 km/h. KEEP LEFT UNLESS OVERTAKING zips past my right shoulder. Big sign that one. Looks like it should be read. Wants to be read ... I know I've seen it before ... there are a few of them on this road ... colourful, too ... What the hell did it say again? If I just stay here in the right lane maybe I'll be able to read it next time it comes around ...

By the time the sign reappears, there's a decent convoy of trucks, vans, buses and cars trailing me at an affectionately close distance. Some have been kind enough to acknowledge my presence with a friendly toot on their horns.

But you know my type—there's no way I'm gonna budge. It's a matter of principle. I no longer acknowledge the idea of 'left' and 'right'.

Our road etiquette logically reflects

an advanced state of evolution: Victorian motorists will *never* obey a sign that implores them to keep left, no matter how many coffees the cops throw at us. The existence of these futile road signs proves that somebody out there is still having difficulty getting a handle on the concept.

I'll try to state this as simply as possible: right is right and left is wrong.

You can have what's left, be left behind, get left in the lurch, get leftovers ... You can be a left-handed ten-percenter southpaw criminally insane genius. You can be left out completely: exiled.

Or you can be right. You can have the right, the Bill of Rights, while you're doing the right thing, thinking right because it's the right time for everything to be all right. (Apologies to the multitude of pop-song writers whose copyrights I have no doubt breached in the previous sentence.)

So I'm staying firmly planted here in the right lane. I'm not going near that sinister left lane. I don't care who's behind me.

By gluing my vehicle into the right lane I can insist that other drivers do the right thing, stay on the right side of the law ... you know I'm right, don't you?

—Clive Shepherd

This month's contributors: **Anthony Ham** is *Eureka Street*'s roving correspondent; **Kath O'Connor** is a freelance writer and emergency doctor; **Bruce Duncan** CSSR coordinates the social justice studies program at Yarra Theological Union in Melbourne, and his 54-page booklet, *War on Iraq: Is It Just?* is available from ACSJC, (02) 9956 5811, $6.50 including postage; **Clive Shepherd** is a freelance writer.

Andrew Vincent

Winners or losers?

Iraq's Kurds continue to face an uncertain future

Safe in their northern no-fly zone where they have prospered quietly for over a decade, the Iraqi Kurds are now playing for very high stakes indeed. To optimists among them, at the very least the war seems to offer an opportunity for enhanced autonomy within a federal Iraqi state. Maybe, if they are particularly lucky, they will be able to gain an independent mini-state of their own. Some of the dreamers, thinkers and activists among the Kurds feel that they may even hit the jackpot and finally see a state of Kurdistan—a state which would unite all 30 million of the region's Kurds under a single flag and within safe and secure borders. The Kurds are the world's largest national grouping who still lack a country of their own, and now the dream of independence appears to be in reach.

But the war presents the Iraqi Kurds with threats as well as opportunities, and if history is anything to go by, the optimists should temper their hopes with a strong dose of reality. By almost any estimation, the Kurds are among the greatest victims of the 20th century's grisly history.

Led by powerful but scheming friends, they were first offered a state by the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres, signed in the aftermath of the First World War, when the Ottoman Empire was broken up. This was in accordance with US President Wilson's widely publicised promises of independence for subject peoples. But this offer was later withdrawn, and the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne saw the Kurds dispersed between Turkey and Iran, and the new states of Iraq and Syria. Localised revolts were crushed and national aspirations were thwarted—especially in Turkey, where for generations the Kurds were forbidden to use their own language, and were even described as 'mountain Turks'.

In the early 1970s the Kurds of northern Iraq rose up in revolt against the Ba'athist government of Baghdad. They were armed and supported in this revolt by the Shah in neighbouring Iran, and by extension the Shah's superpower patron the United States, and were holding their own against Baghdad. But in 1975 the Shah decided to make peace with Iraq in return for a border readjustment involving navigation rights on the Shatt al-Arab waterway. The Algiers Agreement was signed by a much younger Saddam Hussein who had not yet assumed the Presidency. With the signing of the Algiers Agreement, the Kurds were deserted by their erstwhile backers and left, once again, to their fate at the hands of the Iraqis.

In 1988, in the aftermath of Saddam Hussein's eight-year war with Iran, Iraqi Kurds who had supported Iran were ruthlessly suppressed by Baghdad. The best known example of this was the gassing of about 5000 Kurdish men, women and children in the town of Halabja. At the time, Saddam's use of weapons of mass destruction against the Kurds received little condemnation in the West. He was our valuable ally in the struggle against the spread of Islamic militancy from Iran. But much has been made of the horrors of Halabja in more recent days, and we have been constantly reminded by the likes of Bush and Blair of Saddam's use of weapons of mass destruction 'against his own people'.

At about the same time, the Kurds of Turkey were in the middle of a long campaign against the government in Ankara—under the rather eccentric leadership of Abdullah Ocalan, or 'Apo', and his Marxist/Leninist PKK. Eastern Turkey became all but ungovernable. A mini civil war ground on year after year, affecting all around it. The Turkish military often entered northern Iraq in 'hot pursuit' of PKK forces who sought haven with their fellow Kurds. Turkey's human rights abuses in pursuit of this war became notorious and delayed Turkish entry into the European Union. An uneasy calm was restored when Turkish agents, aided by Israel and probably the US, captured Ocalan in Kenya and spirited him back to Turkey, where he remains imprisoned in an island fortress.

The first President Bush, after his victory in the 1991 Gulf War, called on the Iraqi people to rise up and overthrow their dictator. The Kurdish people of northern Iraq duly rose, along with the Shi'ites of the south, but for a variety of reasons Washington failed to follow through and support the revolt. As he had done so often in the past, Saddam Hussein retaliated with the ferocity that has become his hallmark. The humanitarian catastrophe in both northern and southern Iraq became so great that the US and Britain imposed unilateral no-fly zones. These have remained in force until today and have enabled the Kurds to develop their semi-autonomous region beyond the reach of Baghdad, financed by a share of Iraq's oil-for-food money and the proceeds of lucrative smuggling. Yet once outside threats were removed the Kurds began fighting among themselves.

In the light of this sorry chronicle of betrayal and sell-out, it would be a brave Kurd who would once again trust the promises of outside players. Washington, Ankara, Baghdad and Teheran all see the Kurds as expendable pawns. Turkey in particular will not tolerate Iraqi Kurdish moves toward independence, fearing that they would galvanise the separatist ambitions of Turkey's own Kurds. And Turkey, despite the current tensions with the US, is a NATO member and a valued ally

whom nobody wishes to see destabilised.

The Iraqi Kurds may be valued players in the US war against Iraq, but despite the current rhetoric they seem to be headed for another fall. In many ways the Kurds have proved to be their own worst enemies—if history is any guide, any small success will see them fighting among themselves. But it will probably not come to this. The Kurds do not seem destined for even a small success. They are more likely to become one of the many casualties of the 21st century, continuing the patterns of the 20th. ■

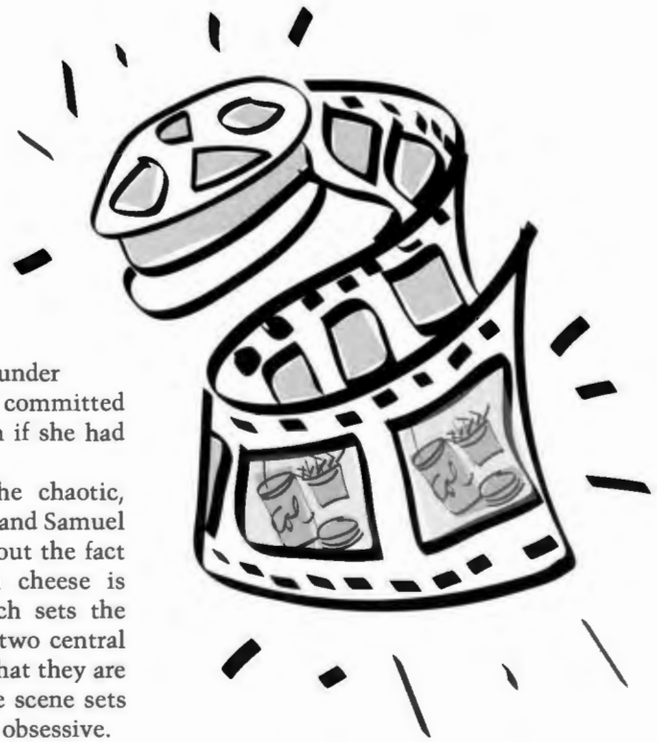
Dr Andrew Vincent is Director of the Centre for Middle East and North African Studies at Macquarie University.

food

Catriona Jackson

A cinematic feast

Some images are good enough to eat



DON'T KNOW MUCH about film, but I know what I like ... to eat. Those whose interest is with the culinary rather than the celluloid have noted, often with distress, the more and more frequent coming together of these two great consumables. The foodie film is apparently on the rise, often with less than satisfying results.

Don't get me wrong—those who spend close on every waking hour thinking about the next meal are not unhappy to see their obsession take its rightful place as part of the world's most powerful communication medium.

In Ang Lee's *Eat, Drink, Man, Woman*, the blanching of the Peking duck, the stuffing of the delicate dumplings and the chopping of odd-shaped vegetables into a rippling tide of ingredients in the legendary opening scene are all a joy to watch. The fact that the master chef, and widowed father of four girls, is losing his sense of smell adds to the pathos and to the surreal domestic chaos that makes this film memorable.

But not all experiences are so good. For a start, it is hard to make food look good on film and lights make things melt in a most unattractive manner. But the critical problem is that a film-maker cannot make you smell or taste things, so the key sensation evoked by food is absent.

After all, food is just a consumable, like sunglasses and dresses and shoes and pop culture. Film-makers who rely on 'nosh for meaning' are treading on dangerous ground. We want to hear and see stories about people, not things. Food and eating are only useful if they help drive the story, help us connect with the characters.

What and how a person cooks says more about them, and the way they live, than almost any other public act. The act of eating strips us bare. It can make a character noble, pathetic, courageous or craven. The old woman who—in an otherwise forgettable art-house flick—plucks a single underarm hair, and places it under her husband's fried egg, has committed a much more violent act than if she had bashed him.

The exchange between the chaotic, murderous duo (John Travolta and Samuel L. Jackson) in *Pulp Fiction* about the fact that a quarter-pounder with cheese is called a Royale by the French sets the tone for the film and for the two central characters. We soon find out that they are deeply amoral, but the Royale scene sets them up as human, funny and obsessive.

In *American Beauty*, the film-makers show us how tight-arsed the wife (Annette Bening) is when, in a moment of high passion, she throws caution to the wind and takes her lover to the burger drive thru. It is impossible to imagine a bigger dampener on her executive affair than what happens next: her husband (Kevin Spacey) serves the shocked pair at the dispensing window.

In *Big Night*, one of the best loved 'foodie films', immigrant brothers Primo and Secondo struggle to make it in the restaurant trade in 1950s America. Secondo sticks to his culinary guns, and refuses to pander to the 'spaghetti with everything' view of Italian food so they go broke. After the film's climax, which includes a fistfight on the sand, the brothers reconcile over a shared omelette in the final scene. It is simple and quiet and lovely. And it works, because food is integral to the story.

Mostly Martha, however, is a very good example of how not to make a food film. Martha is a control freak head chef—all directional asparagus spears and three different sauces. Guess what? She doesn't have much of a private life. Enter a free-spirited Italian cook, who teaches her to live and love. The problem here is simple. The characters are dull, and no amount of close focus on dinner plates is going to fix that.

So take my advice, suck the marrow out of the current crop of foodie films, and hope that they will lead to better things—but go to dinner before the flicks. ■

Catriona Jackson is a freelance food writer.

foreign correspondence

The widening circle of fear

Anthony Ham returns to the Ivory Coast and looks at its efforts to achieve democratic civilian rule

At my Abidjan hotel in January 2000, Pascal was keen to reassure me that his country was not spiralling towards conflict. 'We are not like our neighbours. As Ivorians, we are proud that we are a stable country. We have many problems, but we shall never be like them.'

At the time, Abidjan, the commercial capital of Ivory Coast, was a nervous city. Three weeks before, on 24 December 1999, soldiers loyal to General Robert Guei had deposed the president, Henri Konan Bedie, in a *coup d'êtât*.

Nevertheless, Abidjan seemed peaceful enough. The risk of violence came from poverty-driven crime in Treichville or Adjame: two suburbs separated by Le Plateau, a startling edifice of skyscrapers and conspicuous wealth, and the centre of business for the world's largest cocoa producer. Such threats as there were to the city's stability lay less in military conflict than in the perennial issue of deprivation amid pockets of relative plenty.

For decades, Ivory Coast had been a magnet for economic migrants from across West Africa, drawn by abundant employment opportunities and a climate of relative tolerance. Many of the country's inhabitants came originally from Liberia, Mali, Burkina Faso and Ghana, and had lived in Ivory Coast for generations, considering themselves proud citizens of what had become their country. They formed the backbone of Ivory Coast's agricultural workforce.

But in the 1990s, falling world cocoa prices and currency devaluations cast a shadow over the Ivorian economy. In this climate Bedie, who'd come to power in 1993, had put the demonisation of northerners and foreigners—he made little

distinction between the two—at the centre of government policy. Known as *'ivorité'*, the policy openly favoured those residents who could claim a 'pure' Ivorian heritage—defined as having two 'purely' Ivorian parents.

In a country where up to 35 per cent of the population claimed an immigrant heritage, such policies were hugely divisive. It became commonplace to speak of an Ivory Coast divided between the largely Muslim north and Christian south.

Bedie's rule was widely viewed with unease, as a distasteful echo of the xenophobia that had destroyed so many of Ivory Coast's neighbours.

Thus the December 1999 coup—Ivory Coast's first—was viewed as a worrying sign, but rationalised as a necessary corrective measure. Three weeks later, things had settled down, soldiers were nowhere to be seen and the upheaval caused by the coup was experienced only in highly localised areas. The remainder of the country remained calm.

In such surroundings, Pascal's words to me seemed to have a ring of common sense. Ivory Coast *did* seem different. It was an Abidjan problem and had been solved through the maturity of a country that knew how to avoid the mistakes of its neighbours.

The presidential elections of October 2000 were supposed to return the country to civilian rule. However, a leading opposition figure, Alassane Ouattara, was barred from standing in the elections because one of his parents came from Burkina Faso. In all, 14 out of 19 opposition candidates were excluded. In the days after the elections, General Guei halted counting and declared himself the winner. Massive street protests followed. Guei was deposed and Laurent Gbagbo was installed as president.

It was an imperfect outcome, but democracy in Ivory Coast had nonetheless won a battered victory.

However, the underlying tensions between north and south remained unresolved. President Gbagbo, also from the south, took up where Bedie had left off, using xenophobia as a political tool in order to shore up his power base.

On 19 September 2002, 700 soldiers loyal to General Guei revolted. The soldiers, brought into the army by Guei, were

protesting against government efforts to demobilise them forcibly. Some 300 people were killed in the first night of fighting. Among the dead was the iconic General Guei and his family.

The government's reaction spoke of an obsession with threats from within and from external enemies, whether real or imagined. Government officials eagerly announced that in Guei's pocket when he died was a speech about taking over the country, and business cards belonging to senior officials of the Burkina Faso government.

Burkina Faso was suddenly to blame for all of the country's ills. In response, an entire district of Abidjan, known as Agban and predominantly home to immigrants from Burkina Faso, was razed. Through such tactics, the rebels, along with many refugees, were quickly expelled from Abidjan. Just six weeks after fighting began, the Patriotic Movement of Ivory Coast (MPCI) was formed in the north.

AROUND 30 OF the uprising's ringleaders fled into Burkina Faso, where they were reportedly armed and funded. The strategically important northern cities of Bouake and Korhogo fell to the rebels. The French army intervened to protect its nationals and to set up a buffer zone to prevent the conflict spreading south. Accusations of massacres proliferated, but the most credible reports were of a mass grave at Monoko-Zohi in central Ivory Coast, left in the wake of a government offensive.

Soon the Ivorian government found itself fighting not just the MPCI in the north, but also the Movement for Justice and Peace (MJP) and The Ivorian Popular Movement of the Great West (MPIGO) in the west of the country. The cities of Danane and Man were quickly overrun by fighters proclaiming their loyalty to the Guei faction.

The two new rebel groups were filled with fighters from the region's other wars—Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone. In the western areas under rebel control, there were credible allegations of widespread looting, rape and summary executions. Taking advantage of the resulting chaos, one rebel group, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), launched attacks against the Liberian government from Ivorian soil.

President Gbagbo accused Liberian President Charles Taylor of aiding the rebels, while Burkina Faso was denounced by the Ivorian government as a meddling conspirator. A wave of attacks took place on Burkinabe people and interests, including the embassy, which was burned to the ground. Burkina Faso retaliated by threatening to indict the Ivorian leader for war crimes.

The rebels for their part accused Ghana of collusion with the government, but reserved special anger for the French for their perceived support for Gbagbo.

It quickly became clear that the government of Laurent Gbagbo was floundering. Controlling just 40 per cent of the country, his government limped to Paris and signed a power-sharing accord with the rebels in January 2003. The agreement granted the highly sensitive interior and defence ministries to the rebels. Upon Gbagbo's return, angry mobs roamed the streets, attacking French interests—army barracks, the embassy, departing French citizens at Abidjan's international airport—claiming that the French had coerced Gbagbo into an unacceptable agreement. Gbagbo duly reneged on the agreement after the army refused to accept it.

In the meantime, the human toll was catastrophic. Up to one million people were displaced in the first five months of the war. At least 180,000 people of Burkinabe origin have now crossed the border into Burkina Faso, inundating villages and the southern city of Bobo-Dioulasso. Some 2.5 million Burkinabes remain in Ivory Coast.

In the west, Liberians, Guineans and Sierra Leoneans who had fled their own civil wars are now being forced back to the war zones of their homeland. In Ivory Coast, it is now as dangerous to be from Liberia as it is to be from Burkina Faso. Many are presumed guilty of colluding with rebels because of their nationality. Over 100,000 have already crossed the border into Liberia and to an uncertain fate.

Accurate figures are impossible to come by. Anne Dolan, UNHCR's field officer for western Ivory Coast, recently stated that 'we know there are 8000 Liberian refugees missing in Grabo Zone. We're assuming they're being killed up there.'

One Ivorian official warned the world, 'If we don't stop the war in Ivory Coast it is certainly going to continue moving on—to the east there is Ghana, Togo, a little further Nigeria and then Cameroon.' President Gnassingbe Eyadema, Togo's leader for the past 36 years, expressed similar concerns: 'After Ivory Coast, whose turn will it be next?'

ABIDJAN IS AGAIN a nervous city. At the time I write, there is a widespread belief among the international community that if the French withdraw their troops, Abidjan will fall to the rebels within hours and the conflict will come full circle.

Long-standing residents of the city, alienated by the country's new xenophobia, are being driven north as refugees. They are being replaced by occupying forces moving south, with revenge on their minds—the politics of fear played out as a tragic self-fulfilling prophecy.

Recently, I made attempts to find Pascal. At the hotel owned by one of his friends, they claim never to have heard of him. Like the idea of a tolerant Ivory Coast immune from the conflicts of its neighbours, it is as though he never existed. ■

Anthony Ham is *Eureka Street*'s roving correspondent.

March 2003 Book Offer Winners

K. Baldini, Eltham, VIC; J. & M. Connolly, Paynesville, VIC; T. Errey, Fern Tree, TAS; Sr L.Gaffy, Windsor, VIC; J. Gardiner, Viewbank, VIC; H. Kane, Surrey Hills, VIC; G. Kennedy, East Bentleigh, VIC; A. Madden, Engadine, NSW; S. McGushin, Queenstown, TAS; Br Q. O'Halloran, Malvern, VIC; J. Quilter, Canterbury, VIC; Refugee & Immigration Legal Centre, Fitzroy, VIC; Rev A. Stevenson OSA, Mawson, ACT.

Apologies to the winners of the January–February Book Offer, who have not yet received their copies of *Hell's Gates*. We will get them to you as soon as they become available.

Eleanor Collins

Learning love from Jane Austen

The Regency spinster's novels have never been more popular

'Sunday 15 October

9st (better), alcohol units 5 (but special occasion), cigarettes 16, calories 2456, minutes spent thinking about Mr. Darcy 245.

8.55 p.m. *Just nipped out for fags prior to getting changed ready for BBC* Pride and Prejudice. *... Love the nation being so addicted. The basis of my own addiction, I know, is my simple human need for Darcy to get off with Elizabeth.'*

—*Helen Fielding*, Bridget Jones's Diary

EXPLAINING TO NEW acquaintances that I am writing a thesis on Jane Austen almost invariably brings forth confessions of Austen affection. Rare is the social gathering at which no-one is prepared to launch forth on the particular merits of *Persuasion* or to gush about Colin Firth's Darcy. Austen is widely loved, but her novels are inevitably loved differently at different moments in time, by each successive wave of readers. My own late-marrying, thirty-something generation is identified with a particular pattern or pathology of appreciation made plain by Helen Fielding's 1996 rewriting of *Pride and Prejudice, Bridget Jones's Diary*. It would seem that we revel in screen adaptations of Austen novels, and (often only subsequently) the novels themselves, because we are seduced by the promise of the love story genre: the guarantee that 'perfect matches' can, and will, be made. Like Bridget, we are gladdened by the certainty that all will end in the ambivalent realm of 'Smug Married' rather than the (equally ambivalent) world of the 'Singleton'.

Early 20th-century critics like Mary Lascelles read Austen novels for their 'artistry', for their finely structured sentences. In the mid-century, F.R. Leavis and Lionel Trilling elucidated the complex moral balances weighed by each work. But when blockbuster crowds head for cinema multiplexes throughout the Western world, looking forward to the next Austen rom-com period drama, we can be sure they are not drawn by the prospect of elegant sentences or elegant ethics. What holds us at an Austen adaptation is the tension generated when Gwyneth Paltrow shifts her attention from Ewan McGregor to Jeremy Northam, or the satisfaction of seeing Emma Thompson finally united with Hugh Grant. The element of Austen's novels that the adaptations grasp is plot, and the aspect or interpretation of the plots they reinforce—indeed that they advertise—is the love story.

The love story, or 'romance', or 'romantic comedy', is not a genre of literature or film that garners great intellectual respect. Other populist and predictable forms of narrative fare far better: the western, the thriller, and the detective novel all generate pages of earnest cultural analysis. These comparisons suggest it is not the aesthetic weaknesses of the love story that prevent us from taking it seriously. Rather, serious analysis of the genre can feel uncomfortable because its particular attributes and associations—femininity, sentimentality, 'coupliness'—are culturally constructed as outside, even averse to, the realm of analysis and the intellect. (Gun violence, manipulated fear, and contrived mystery somehow manage to be more compatible with the world of the mind. Such are the arcane operations of culture.) Yet the love story is a genre with incredible longevity, reach and power. Rather than criticise the inevitability of its conclusions, or its customarily saccharine, anodyne content, it is worth pondering upon, and indeed revelling in, its magnetism. Austen's plots provide a socially sanctioned opportunity for such indulgent inquiry.

A love story tells of two characters becoming a couple. Attraction between the pair is gradually intensified during the narrative, despite being thwarted by misunderstandings, family disapproval, past misdeeds, or the interference of a third party. At the story's conclusion all barriers are overcome, all miscommunication is unravelled, and the desired union is achieved. The plot lines pivot around scenes of dialogue. Love stories show us two different discourses—two ways of seeing and two ways of speaking—merging or coming to agreement.

Austen is jaw-droppingly superb in her handling of love story plots: she is past mistress of this art. Her timing is exact; her development of obstacles to union is always credible; her delineation of feelings is precise, never squelchy. Her characters have exquisitely distinct voices and rhetorics that are maintained even as they shift from discord to harmony. If we distinguish love story plots from those in novels of sentiment and novels of seduction (and I believe we should, because the reader-response demanded is so different), then Austen's books are among the first love story novels, 'romance novels', in English. While Shakespeare's comedies are the archetypal love stories in English drama, Austen writes the essential love story novels. Her six complete works (perhaps *Mansfield Park* less so, but especially *Pride and Prejudice*) are templates for innumerable later authors, scriptwriters, and hacks.

For a love story to work, the reader must be cajoled or schooled into accepting its fundamental premise: that couples and the process of coupling are matters of primary import. Further, the reader must be seduced into desiring the fulfilment of a love story's reigning promise: that 'a good match' will be made before the narrative concludes. Our yearning for

the ever-delayed union must build alongside that of the characters. A love story that does not persuade us to care about who ends up with whom, or indeed about whether anyone ends up with anyone, has failed its purpose.

The marriage of Marianne Dashwood and Colonel Brandon at the end of Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* has been heavily criticised on these grounds. Critics claim that the reader has been swept up in the passion between Marianne and her dashing cad Willoughby, and cannot then accept her change of heart towards the older, quietly meritorious Brandon. This is not the union we have come to desire, say these critics—therefore either our desire or the final union have been mismanaged by the author. Such criticism fails to read Marianne's plot next to her sister Elinor's. Elinor's plot *is* a quintessential love story, with all the heartfelt satisfaction at its conclusion that anyone could wish for. Marianne's story stands as a contrast, a counter-narrative, that draws attention to our genre expectations. Our romanticism is challenged just as Marianne's is. None of this prevents us from thrilling at Elinor and Edward's concluding joyful felicity, but alongside this pleasure it offers a more distanced position from which we can observe and ironise this love story and our own reactions to it.

Even *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen's classic love story, contains its own counter-narrative. Charlotte Lucas accepts the grating, prating, preaching Mr Collins for the economic security and comforts of married life: 'solely from the pure and disinterested desire of an establishment'. Charlotte clearly has no faith in the premises and promises of love stories, but her anti-romantic decision is not punished with an unhappy outcome. Elizabeth Bennett's fairytale romance and the story of sensible Charlotte sit side by side, their differences forcing us to acknowledge the fictionality of both.

The main plots in Austen novels are brilliant love stories that inspire our complicit faith in, and desire for, 'a good match' with apparent effortlessness. But this faith and desire is interrupted, complicated, and gently mocked by minor counter-narratives. My generation of Austen devotees is not wrong in being seduced by adaptations that cut out the counter-narratives and reduce the novels to pure and simple love stories. Love stories *are* seductive, Austen's particularly so. Those who scorn being captured by her handling of the genre, who insist on premising their appreciation on other grounds entirely, are missing something vital. But if we are learning love from Austen, I believe we extend the delights of this genre by returning to, and reflecting on, the counter-narratives. A narrative that is inside the novel, and yet outside the love story plot, enables us to appreciate that plot in the abstract—to read it as participating in a genre, in a set of conventions, that we and our narrator are playing with together.

The counter-narratives within the novels may appear to be confirmed by Austen's biography. Austen lived her adult life with her sister and widowed mother. She died in her early forties without apparently having made 'a good match' for

herself. Her life story will not confirm the premises and promises of the love story. However, the 'reality' of Austen's personal history is like the 'reality' of 'reality TV' in that it is utterly manufactured by the forms in which it is transmitted. Her first biographer was a nephew who unsurprisingly characterised his subject as a benign, demure maiden aunt. Popular representations of Austen have maintained this construction ever since. In the mainstream imagination, the defining feature of this author is her singleness, her uncoupliness, her 'spinsterhood', and this state of being is envisioned, as 'spinsterhood' so often has been, as sexless, cloistered, limited. Yet Austen's narrator, whose voice is often read as her own, is knowledgeable, flirtatious, witty and often rude. Even 'real life', it seems, contains irreconcilable contradictions.

To use Austen's biography to confirm her love stories as 'false' and her counter-love-stories as 'true' or 'realistic' means giving great emphasis to her marital status. This is a contradictory acceptance of the basic premise of love stories: that couples and coupling are of primary import. Instead of searching for a point of simple correspondence between Austen's life or opinions and the world of her novels, we need to come to terms with the complex fictionality employed throughout her writing.

We cannot know whether Austen's single state was a matter to which she gave much thought. What we can be certain of is her complete intellectual and emotional engagement with novels, fiction and stories. Austen was a reader. She was intimately familiar with all the major fictional works of the 18th and early 19th centuries. The Austen family read novels aloud to one another in the evening. They had in-jokes about fictional characters and about ridiculous conventions of plot or language. Austen's letters and novels are saturated with references to, and plays upon, other novels. Her early writings all satirise popular fictional forms.

When Austen discusses the books she loves, her tone is both admiring and knowing. This balanced dual-vision is the stance she seems to recommend for reading her own love stories: not credulousness, nor slavish absorption, nor snide dismissal, but playful enjoyment that is both engaged and detached. It is simultaneously inside and outside the story.

If Austen's love stories teach us anything, it is not so much 'love' as love for stories. Austen's plots are not messages from the author about 'life'—they are frolics with the conventions of storytelling. The novels do not guarantee us 'a good match' for ourselves; they do not offer instruction in how to captivate our own Darcy or deserve our own Emma. Rather they share with us the fun of reading a love story. As the narrator of *Northanger Abbey* tells us about our heroine Catherine Morland: '... provided that nothing like useful knowledge could be gained from them, provided they were all story and no reflection, she had never any objection to books at all.'

It is this vital aspect of Austen novels that the screen adaptations and rewrites lose. They give us *a* story, not stories about stories. In grasping the very marketable tension and seduction of the novels' love story plots, they miss their distanced irony, the narrator's knowing tone, and the outside perspective offered by the counter-narratives. The adaptations don't play with the love story genre; they deploy it. They invest it with the realism of apparently complete and concrete depiction. Some keep their tongues in their cheeks more consistently than others. (Surprisingly, the American teen movie *Clueless*, which uses the plot of *Emma*, is filmed with greater irony than many more 'faithful' adaptations.) Yet none of the recent attempts to redo Austen have the complexity and plurality of narratives, and the well-read love of stories we find in her novels.

The most intense, intimate relationship in Austen novels is not the developing tension between the heroine and hero, but the intelligent, affectionate exchange between the reader and the narrator. The narrator flatters us with irony, and charms us with wit. It is the admiration we develop for this confident, knowing voice that teaches us about love—most importantly about love for reading and for stories. ■

Eleanor Collins is completing a PhD on gender and choice in Austen at the University of Oxford. She is getting married in July.

by the way 

Little voice

FROM THE AGE of five or six, I knew that I should be a writer. Between the ages of about seventeen and twenty-four I tried to abandon this idea, but I did so with the consciousness that I was outraging my true nature and that sooner or later I should have to settle down and write books. I was a somewhat lonely child and I soon developed disagreeable mannerisms which made me unpopular throughout my schooldays.

Although I didn't make it clear at the start—well, all right, I deliberately omitted tell tale quotation marks and ellipses—those are not my words. They are George Orwell's, in 'Why I Write'. I sort of hoped you'd immediately recognise that, even if you didn't know the writer in question. 'That's not Matthews', I fancied you saying. 'Lonely child?' I imagined you expostulating. 'Disagreeable mannerisms? Never!' Far from being disagreeable, once I recovered from a broken jaw, caused by the over-zealous application of forceps to overcome my reluctance to enter this vale of tears, I was particularly lovable and nice. As no-one knew I had a broken jaw, however, my incessant howling lasted for about 12 months until, presumably, the old jawline painfully settled into the lopsided orientation it has borne ever since. This made it difficult for anyone in the vicinity to recognise that lovableness and niceness lay beneath what appeared to be a small bundle of acoustic catastrophe.

More seriously, I would never have owned to Orwell's opening sentences. I did not *know* I would be a writer and I would not have regarded being prevented from writing as *outraging my true nature*. I might have *thought* roughly along those lines at times but I would never have admitted to them.

I grew up among people who were full of rich vernacular, of story, anecdote, florid rumour, hyperbolic speculation. If I did know anything at that early age, it was that these stories were worth telling, but I had not the faintest idea how to go about it. At university, ambushed by an exquisite range of attacks on my lushly romantic temperament, I became a bad poet. I would have qualified for Spike Milligan's 'Worst poem ever written in English' competition (though no doubt would have conceded the laurels to the eventual winner, a poem by an 'Indian gentleman' entitled 'On The Death of Queen Victoria', which ran: 'Dust to dust/Ashes to ashes/Into the grave/The Great Queen dashes'. Nor could I have matched a swooning student's offering, entitled 'Love Poem': 'Ever since Autumn/I have loved you from the bottom/Of my heart'. But all that's another story.)

Infatuated with, but spurned by, the Muse, I abandoned the divine afflatus. I stopped writing poetry not only because I had no idea where I was going with it and every idea that it wasn't any good, but also because I became a university teacher of literature and I began to write books and essays of criticism or literary history.

Unlike Orwell, I did continue to write, but I wrote within clearly delineated textual and critical boundaries. All the time, though, I felt a pressure, a kind of yearning to become what Peter Goldsworthy used to call 'a primary producer'—not a commentator on, but an originator of, literary work. That I went on and on, year after year, *not* doing so I blamed on the requirements and nature of academic responsibilities. But the fact is, I came to know that that was not the answer.

There was some more important obstruction, some primal interference.

IT WAS A species of diffidence that looked from the outside to be a pleasing modesty, an unassuming character, but was, when seen and felt from the inside, crippling; silencing. Diffidence is not—or is not necessarily—lack of self-esteem. It is a personality trait that comes to have an almost moral dimension. Diffidence seems proper because humility is proper, modesty is proper. Diffidence is a kind of puritanism that afflicts the intellect and not the soul. I might have grown up among spruikers and yarn-spinners but they were also people who regarded 'story' as indulgence, mere embroidery: life was much too tough and unpredictable to allow storytelling to be anything other than froth, rare icing on scarcely graspable cake.

As if to prove this to me, my brief flirtation with poetry at university seemed the very essence of dilettantism. So, though I had become accustomed to, and quite skilled in, academic discourse, I could not credibly imagine myself having something to say outside its safe and structuring boundaries, and I couldn't imagine how I should justify spending time on 'story' even supposing I managed to write some. Thus diffidence edges very close to the idea of 'knowing your place' and imagination appears subversive.

Suspicion of the unbridled imagination is a recognisable cultural phenomenon in 21st-century Australia. It has had the beneficial side effect of bringing about a boom in the writing and reading of literary non-fiction, especially biography. But it is a subtext of the growing official dismissal of artistic endeavour and creativity and of humanities scholarship, and, conversely, of the insistent promotion of 'outcomes', 'bottom line' philosophy and vocationalism. The decline of public language into obfuscation, meaninglessness and empty pomposity—a process spectacularly intensified by the unpalatable truths of wartime—is one of the more persuasive reminders of the contemporary retreat from the imagination. ■

Brian Matthews is a writer and academic.

Peter Craven

on stage 

New beaut theatre

AUSTRALIAN THEATRE IS one of the great heartbreaks of Australian cultural life—when it's bad it's so very bad. It was Ingmar Bergman who said that if you thought life was going too fast, go to church, go to the theatre. Well, if Australian theatre is getting better at the moment, it is because it has taken stock of its own existence in a world where it can sometimes seem irrelevant or incapable of equalling the 'best practice' of Australian film or television. It has decided to give the public what it wants by showing off its stars.

When Sigrid Thornton (with Marcus Graham) did *The Blue Room* for the Melbourne Theatre Company (MTC), and subsequently at Her Majesty's in Perth, she broke all records. It makes sense that famous faces from film and TV should be seen on our stages, not least when they are legitimate sources of national pride because they are fine performers.

So the spate of 'star' productions at the MTC—featuring Geoffrey Rush, Guy Pearce, David Wenham, Wendy Hughes and Phillip Quast—has been a step up. Fame is not necessarily a testament to talent, but it is harder to miscast a star, and there is also pressure to ensure that the supporting cast is good.

Cabaret may be an exception that proves the rule, though the worst thing that can be said about Lisa McCune as Sally Bowles is that there are other people in the cast who are much better.

When Christopher Isherwood saw the great Julie Harris in John Van Druten's adaptation, *I am a Camera*, he said she was more like the original of Sally Bowles than anything he had got on the page. Sam Mendes' production is restlessly energised, with sexual decadence less an insinuation than a rich rank aroma in the auditorium. There are lightning changes of mood and a good deal of cheek without losing a sense of how portentous this pantomime world is. It is, at one point, a world with a swastika on its bare bottom, but it gets away with this because the enormity of what's happening is never allowed to recede.

A good number of people will have seen *The Goat*, even though it played in MTC's small theatre, the Fairfax. This may have had more to do with Wendy Hughes' casting as the wife and mother than with either the abiding reputation of the author of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* or any general interest in bestiality, but who knows?

The bestiality motif (husband in love with goat) perhaps carries both too much and too little weight, but this does not stop *The Goat* from being a tough, viscerally intense play about a happy marriage—betrayed or immeasurably complicated by a love that does not seem human and that therefore seems to degrade all human things.

Wendy Hughes and Philip Quast are excellent as the husband and wife, but it is Kate Cherry's production that gives *The Goat* its ring of authenticity.

THERE WERE TIMES during Simon Phillips' production of Hannie Rayson's *Inheritance* when one longed for the austerities of Cherry's approach. It was Cherry who managed the ambitious, freewheeling structure of Rayson's previous play, *Life After George*, with its time and locale shifts and its different rhetorics. Such Shakespearean flights on invisible wings are not for Simon Phillips, who invests in on-stage cars and outback sets that look like something from an 1950s amateur light opera production of *Oklahoma*.

Some approximation of this was probably inevitable. Rayson's play was conceived of as a rural epic of quasi-novelistic sprawl. It's the story of two bush families, connected by two sisters, now matriarchs and grandmothers. One family has inherited the farm and the other has bought a pub with its inheritance money and now finds itself going broke. The pressure to edit the material into two-and-a-half hours may have lost some of the circumstantial texture, and made the play look melodramatic and fraught with coincidences. It needed a more leisurely telling.

With the 'big' characters, who push along the action like a cartwheel to the scaffold of execution, the results are mixed. That grand trouper Geraldine Turner is arresting no matter what she does, but she's all on one or two notes as the wife/Pauline Hanson figure. Steve Bisley, on the other hand, is consistently terrific as the bushie. He has a leathery power and a wound-up reasonableness behind it that make his final terrible freakouts absolutely credible. This is a fine, dangerous performance.

Inheritance remains an ambitious play even when it's given this kind of hit-and-miss half-life. We can only hope for the film or the telemovie, or that someone should direct *Inheritance* who has enough balls to trust Rayson when she's good. ■

Peter Craven is the editor of *Quarterly Essay* and *Best Australian Essays*.

Edmund Campion

Wintry conscience

George Orwell's take on language has an increasing contemporary relevance

THE WAR AGAINST Iraq reminds us that thugs in office have had their way with the English language. Killing women and children becomes 'collateral damage'. Their guerrilla fighters become our 'terrorists', and foreign occupation is rechristened 'liberation'.

Better than anyone, George Orwell, born 100 years ago (25 June 1903), alerted us to the ways in which politics can twist language to suit its purposes. Reprinted in many standard anthologies, his essay 'Politics and the English Language' (1946) was one of the most read essays of the past half-century. Trouble is, the thugs on their way to power read him too, and turned his lessons on their heads. They learned to throw dust or dazzle into the air, to disguise what was going on, or else they lied sincerely so that people thought they must be telling the truth. The spin masters, alas, are all graduates of Orwell's school.

Nevertheless, George Orwell remains a necessary read for anyone wanting to be a worthwhile citizen, because honest political writing encourages good citizenship. Bad prose makes it harder to think straight. His main aim, he said, was to develop political writing into an art. Hard thinking about language lay behind the popular success of *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, giving us expressions like 'thought police' and 'doublethink' and 'Big Brother', as well as satirical mock slogans such as 'All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others'.

In his least regarded book—ignored by many biographers—*The English People*, he boiled the rules of good writing down to two: concrete words are better than abstract ones, and the shortest way of saying anything is always the best. Then he expanded this advice a little:

> Whoever writes English is involved in a struggle that never lets up even for a sentence. He is struggling against vagueness, against obscurity, against the lure of the decorative adjective, against the encroachment of Latin and Greek, and, above all, against the worn-out phrases and dead metaphors with which the language is cluttered up.

You can add to this list of advice Orwell's liking for sharp similes, a hallmark of his prose style. In 'Politics and the English Language' there are four similes that pull you up with their freshness. Example: an accumulation of stale phrases chokes a writer 'like tea-leaves blocking a sink'.

This particular simile is a window into Orwell's world. It's an affirmation of his contact with the experience of everyday people, who would sluice the remains of their pot of tea down the kitchen sink, sometimes blocking it. Ordinary people did this every day. But dukes and duchesses, members of posh clubs and those with servants *never* did it. So Orwell's simile, which they would barely understand, was a blow against them and for the people they lived off.

Orwell's writing always had a hunger for equality, or classlessness. You can see this best in *Homage to Catalonia*, his growing-up book written in 1938 about the Spanish Civil War. Faced with the challenge of an armed, triumphal fascism, he responded by going to Spain and joining up against Franco. In an anarchists' militia, he experienced the pure joy of equality. It was almost mystical, a vision of socialist paradise that sustained his politics for the rest of his life:

> One had been in a community where hope was more normal than apathy or cynicism, where the word 'comrade' stood for comradeship and not, as in most countries, for humbug ... General and private, peasant and militiaman, still met as equals; everyone drew the same pay, wore the same clothes, ate the same food and called everyone else 'thou' and 'comrade'; there was no boss-class, no menial-class, no beggars, no prostitutes, no lawyers, no priests, no boot-licking, no cap-touching. I was breathing the air of equality, and I was simple enough to imagine that it existed all over Spain. I did not realise that more or less by chance I was isolated among the most revolutionary section of the Spanish working class.

You might argue that anarchists couldn't run a chook raffle, or a state—no matter, he had once seen the glory. He had seen hellfire there too, the criminal assaults and murders by Soviet hitmen as they took control over the anti-Franco side. Such experience made Orwell the

most acute critic of Stalinism in the West, without drawing him to Trotskyism. (Trotsky had a better mind, he said, but would have been as bad as Stalin.)

Orwell's politics were without a program or theory or ideology—apart from the decencies of the common man. On the left? Yes, but a socialism without doctrines. He might have liked the old Australian phrase, 'socialism is just being mates'. Attempts to make a theory of socialism from his writings are a waste of time. The latest attempt, by the *New Yorker*'s in-house literary historian, Louis Menand, makes a hash of Orwell's 'socialism' by stringing together bits and pieces of his occasional writings as if he had written political programs. Silly. The man was a moralist, not an ideologue, whose point of departure was the common decency of common people. Which is why he was often a celebrant of ordinary, trivial things: cups of tea, fishing, roses, off-colour postcards, vegetable gardens, roll-your-own fags. He didn't like saints because they were a cut above the rest of us, or so he thought.

For all that, this Old Etonian was well looked after by the old-boy network, which found him work and kept him going between episodes as a down-and-out. In dosshouses he tried to cover up his toff's accent but it kept creeping out and winning him favours. To get to Spain, he pawned the family silver. In *Homage to Catalonia*, his Old Etonian's culture still intrudes. Half a dozen times, searching for a word to describe something that irritates him—the water, or sandbags—he fixes on 'beastly'. 'Beastly'—it's a word you expect to hear from Billy Bunter or Alexander Downer, not a socialist. Well, no-one escapes his or her background entirely. Orwell made the effort more than most.

However, there was one part of his heritage he did not struggle to correct—anti-popery, the residual religion of many Englishmen. From an early age, George Orwell disliked Catholics and their church, a dislike confirmed by Spain. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the evil O'Brien is so named as a hit against Catholics. In Spain, everyone he met thought the church 'was part of the capitalist racket'. He said he never saw anyone there make the sign of the cross, and that perhaps anarchism was their make-do religion.

Most of the churches he saw were closed or wrecked. Gaudi's Sagrada Famiglia cathedral in Barcelona appalled him: 'one of the most hideous buildings in the world ... the anarchists showed bad taste in not blowing it up'. (Orwell is an uncertain guide to architecture: he called Christopher Wren's Greenwich Observatory 'the ugliest building in the world'.)

Although Orwell had church weddings and a church funeral and burial, he wasn't interested in religion. He once told a friend that 'he liked the Church of England better than Our Lord'. It wasn't the theology of Anglicanism that attracted him, rather the dotty vicars, choirboys, harvest festivals and prayerbook prose—that over centuries had made the C of E an enduring part of the folk culture of English village life. The anti-popery, too.

V.C. Pritchett's description of him—'the wintry conscience of a generation'—is the subtitle of Jeffrey Meyer's recent biography, one of the best of the dozen so far written. In this centennial year, it is a reminder of the challenging side of this uncomfortable moralist who still has much to teach a world of collateral damage, terrorists and liberation. ■

Edmund Campion's *Lines of My Life: Journal of a Year* (Penguin) is published this month.

Michele M. Gierck

Remembering well

Michael Lapsley and the Institute for Healing of Memories

On 28 April 1990, a letter bomb mailed to Michael Lapsley's Harare home destroyed both of his hands and one of his eyes. Years of anti-apartheid involvement and active African National Congress (ANC) support had come at a price.

Like so many other anti-apartheid activists, New Zealand-born Anglican priest Father Michael Lapsley SSM, based mostly in South Africa, was on a hit list. That letter bomb was designed to kill. The price paid in burnt skin and missing body parts was high, but during the hospitalisation and healing process, Lapsley had to deal as much with the premeditated and systematic nature of the violence as the physical wounds. The bomb had been packaged between religious magazines.

When we meet, Lapsley puts out his arms, with their prosthetic hands, and hugs me. He asks me to sit on his left—his vision is better on that side. I position my back support (the consequence of a prolonged injury) in the chair and within minutes we are joking about disability, as only those so often boxed in this category can do.

Michael Lapsley is director of the Institute for Healing of Memories in South Africa. He is in Australia at the invitation of Bishop Freier from the Northern Territory. Lapsley explains he has been asked to use his 'Healing of Memories' approach in meeting the spiritual pain of stolen generation members. He offered two workshops in Alice Springs: the first to a group of Aboriginal women, the second to a mix of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

'In some ways Alice Springs was the most challenging assignment I've ever

had,' says Lapsley. 'I've been interacting with this country since 1967 in different ways for different lengths of time. I was conscious ... that Indigenous people are such a minority, are so oppressed, and have such a level of dysfunctionality as a consequence.' Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures are dramatically different, he says. 'In some ways it's an apartheid society. There are two different worlds which don't often meet.'

The two-day workshop took place at the Irrkerlantye Learning Centre. On the first day, 13 Arrente women attended. As an ice-breaker, Lapsley described his experiences, then asked each woman to draw her story. 'I'd hardly got the words out and everyone was busy drawing.'

The participants were also given clay to work with. Once more Lapsley was amazed. 'We hadn't actually got to the exercise with the clay and they were all busy moulding. It was wonderful.'

The women must have thought so too, because there were more people on the second day than on the first. Not the usual procedure, but in this case most welcome. Lapsley plans to return soon. The hope is that Aboriginal Christian leaders might participate, and perhaps train as facilitators.

The 'Healing of Memories' methodology does not presuppose any particular belief system. Lapsley has worked with people around the world, including Buddhists in Sri Lanka, doctors, NGO workers and those affected by war. He keeps being invited back.

Lapsley visited Xanana Gusmão in prison, a meeting that made a deep impression on the East Timorese leader. In the lead-up to independence, Gusmão invited Michael Lapsley to share his experiences with the future leaders of East Timor.

Lapsley recalls that the seeds for this work were first sown in tough terrain. 'First of all it was my own healing after I was bombed. A key part of that was that my own journey was acknowledged and recognised by people around the world. It was given a moral context; people saying that what had happened (to me) was wrong. That's the context in which God enabled me to make my body redemptive ... and move from being victim to survivor to victor.'

Lapsley also realised he was not the only one dealing with the wounds of apartheid. 'When I returned to South Africa I noticed just how many people were damaged, in their humanity, damaged by what we had done, by what had been done to us, and by what we had failed to do. It seemed to me we all had a story to tell. We all carried within us feelings about the past, the guilt, the shame, the bitterness, the anger, the frustration and hatred as well as the joyful stuff, the strength and endurance.'

'Healing of Memories' was conceived as a parallel process to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Only some were invited to tell their stories to the commission, and Lapsley saw a need for all those who wanted to come forward to deal with their past—an issue he impressed upon Gusmão at their first meeting.

The workshops developed over time. Lapsley stresses that they are not quick fixes. There is no magical solution. But often the first step is the most difficult to take. While Lapsley began his work through the Trauma Centre of Violence and Torture in Cape Town, the Institute for Healing of Memories is now a separate entity. 'We have always sought to create a network of relationships across the world and to train people.'

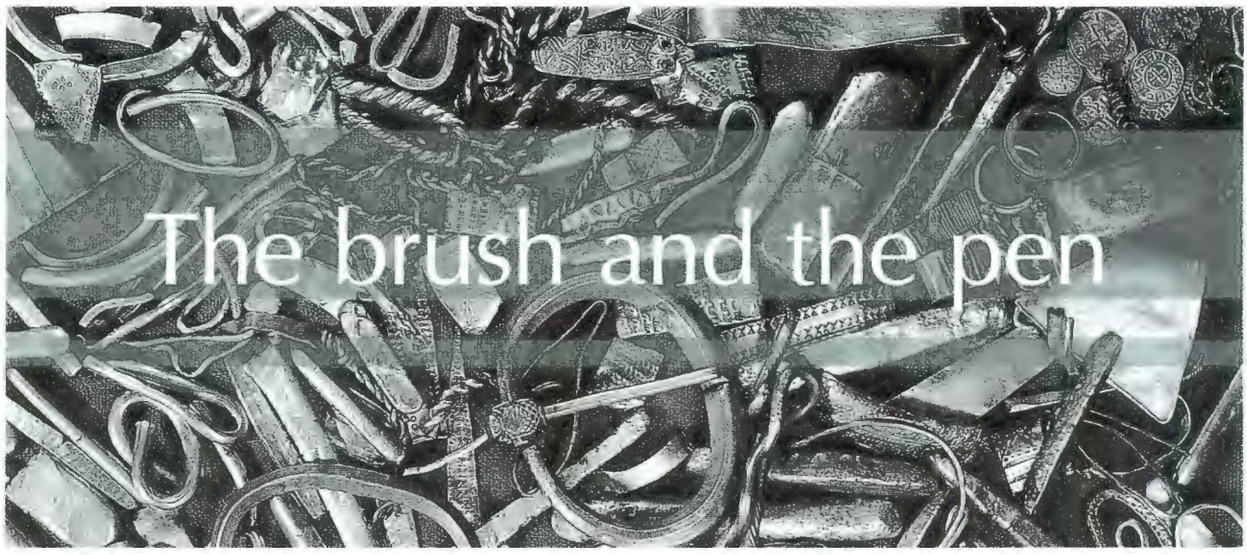
Following our meeting, Lapsley is due to deliver the second annual Peninsula Human Rights Lecture, at Mount Eliza, Victoria. I ask for a copy of the lecture and he laughs. 'There's no text for the speech.' Like the speaker, I will have to wait and see.

The transformation from 'victim' to 'victor' is an enormous challenge. Michael Lapsley does not say the process is simple, but his life proves it is possible. ■

Website for information on the Healing of Memories workshops: www.healingofmemories.co.za

Michele M. Gierck is a writer, educator and public speaker.

Peter Steele



The brush and the pen

Art speaks, but we sometimes need translation

FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS, in what we call, rather quaintly, the Western world, people have been writing poems prompted by paintings or sculpture, and it would be strange if this were not so. After all, different though the art forms may be, they all trade in transformation—in the seizing of something that the artists know to be in large degree unseizable, and in its rendering in a medium which keeps a kind of faith with the original, but which constantly acknowledges that the thing seen or said has gone to an utterly different country. Painter or sculptor on the one hand, and poet on the other—they are at one in their launching magic carpets which, bedraggled or seamless, take the observer somewhere else. Art which declines to do this has simply lost its nerve; and when a poet decides to write in response to a visible work of art, he or she is acknowledging that the nerve has been kept, and shown.

The technical word for writing, especially poetry, that 'renders' a work of art is 'ekphrasis', which means literally a 'speaking forth' of the thing seen. When Homer, in the *Iliad*, described the shield of Achilles, or Keats collated various Grecian urns to give us a poem, or Emma Lazarus wrote her famous lines about the huddled masses and put them in the mouth of the Statue of Liberty, or Auden produced the death of Icarus from this picture and that, they were all in the ekphrastic line of business whether or not they knew it, or cared. And certainly for the last three at least a swarm of companions might be named. What John Hollander has called 'Poems speaking to silent works of art' must exist in their thousands, if not in their tens of thousands.

Hollander's expression is a good one, in that the 'speaking to' may imply a range of ways in which poems address the artworks seen. The transaction may be intimate, and perhaps affable, so that the element of homage is prominent, and in some cases all-important—as Keats, for example, gives his imagined urn the reverence which in other circumstances he might have given to the God in whom he did not in fact believe. But the 'speaking to' may also have all of the latitude implied when a parliamentarian 'speaks to' a motion: on the floor of the House, what is offered is supposed both to be prompted by and to be at the service of that motion, but it is up to the speaker to make the case for his own relevance, and his own cogency. The ekphrastic pursuit has a wide span of ways in which it can go about its business.

AS IT HAPPENS, I have recently finished writing a bookful of ekphrastic poems, about 50 of them. And it occurs to me that there may be some interest in a few reflections on some particular poems produced along the way. I have rummaged around among the notions and reports provided by others who have thought about the matter, and something must have rubbed off on me in the process: but I cannot blame anyone else for what is said here, and perhaps nobody would want to be given credit, either.

Firstly, then, a poem prompted by some 'found objects'—those which make up a hoard of silver fashionings and fragments, found at Cuerdale in England, and dating from the 9th century. Random assortment they may have been when buried for safety's sake,

but they make something much more like a work of art when displayed and photographed at the British Museum. The poem is called simply 'Hoard'.

At the bright clip of hack-silver, the bushel
of draggled wire and burred ingot:
at glinting weights that show on burnished faces
now the storm-god's frigid hammer,
now the southerners' crux: at the whole slurry
of pincered buckle, punched band,
chain sleeking its riddled way to a circle—
at this, bidding for meaning, we pause.

Gone, for sure, the jarl's tallying fingers—
amber and pelt, beeswax and slave
hung in the pan against armlet and gleaming penny:
no reek comes up from the small change,
the slugs of bullion in from Kiev or Bukhara,
the brooches long clear of their blooding.
The dust that falls with brightness from that air
might be caking itself on the moon.

'A sitting raven starves', they said, and lifted,
craft by craft a black wing,
riding the water as if through so much air:
who now come out of the darkness, heard
in a massy press of word on minted word,
their gold a river-fire, their blade
the saddle of the whet-stone, and the heart
known if at all by the look of a shore.

For all the variety of their styles and conventions, paintings showcase their medium, as do photographs and sculptures. Famously, or infamously, theoreticians of the visible may overstate this, with the subject of a given work supposedly dwindling away ignominiously: but such excesses are no excuse for the viewer's failing to notice how astonishingly, for example, pigment can come up in the world on the small tract of a canvas. By the same token, a poem is among other things always showcasing the language which is both its body and its soul. This may happen in austere fashion, as if parsimony were the determining factor—as with, by now, millions of barely-breathing poems which seem ready to blanch away to the whiteness of the pages on which they occur: but great poets too have gone the purgative way, and will no doubt do so again, intent as it were on making silence audible. Still, much memorable poetry instead goes in boots and all, determined to insist on language as the offspring of abundance, and its witness.

This last course is the one adopted, for good or ill, by 'Hoard'. One of the first things that any student of the history of the English language is likely to remember is that the language has been called a 'word-hoard'. This archaic expression is more potent and touching than it may at first seem. The very young hoard expressions as a way of making their way in what would otherwise be a largely impenetrable intellectual and social forest: and the elderly, or those 'stricken' as we might as well call them, are often humiliated and infuriated by the way the words slip through their fingers. In between, everything between villainy and sanctity, between flourishing and perishing, takes much of its sense from the way in which it is characterised verbally: the word-hoard is a life-hoard.

So when to my delight I saw a picture of the Cuerdale hoard, I found a match of sorts between this precious stuff—the silver buried because prized—and language as a hoard of meaning. At one point in the poem, 'no reek comes up from the small change, / the slugs of bullion', I was thinking of the traditional saying that money does not stink, that its having been part of this or that transaction makes no difference to the stuff itself: but of course I did not regard that as the end of the story. It is not for nothing that we talk about 'blood money', and not for nothing that Judas wanted to rid himself of the silver: and 'ethical investment' would have no meaning if treasure had no historical trace to it. Similarly, for the thousands of years that people have been writing either satirical attacks or love-lyrics, one aura of association or another has been invoked: language carries its scars as well as its splendours.

It might be supposed that, whereas language is clearly a mutable thing, where a syllable or a tone can make a great difference, something like items of silver from the first Christian millennium would be straightforward enough. But it is not always so. There exist ancient moulds that could be used by smiths to produce on request either an image of Thor's hammer or a version of the Christian cross. This was probably good business, but it may also be the equivalent of what happens in (more or less contemporaneous) Anglo-Saxon poetry, where, in defiance of theological coherence, the word for providence and the word for fate both find lodging. It is not only in what we say that we give ourselves away: the fingers have their own equivocations.

Several northern languages are or have been rich in what are called 'kennings'—expressions used as code for a seemingly simpler entity, as a boat might be called a 'wave traveller'. These can appear mere quaintnesses, but they seem to me usually to be pieces of insight—the kenning as cunning. 'Hoard' concludes on the assumption that this is so, and welcomes the fact that the Vikings did 'mint' language so that they called gold a river-fire, and the sword-blade 'the saddle of the whet-stone'. As I see it, these famous travellers and explorers were also making their way mentally, pressing in as they pressed on. In a small way, the fact that each of the three stanzas here has a somewhat different agenda from each of the others is an attempt to keep faith with that spirit of investigation and mutation.

The second poem is a response to a little painting by Giovanni di Paolo which shows both the creation of the world and its surrounds and the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise (see this month's cover). If the good news and the bad could be encompassed by the one word, it might be 'Beginnings', which is what the poem is called.

To the high Lord fledged with angels, Earth
nests in a roundel propped at the butts
of nothing at all. He taps it gently for soundness.

Ocean is here as required, its plenty salted
with void and fear, the mappemounde
a squinched island riding the green plain:

and air's blue bowl, the haven of wind and lung,
where light goes bunting out from cliff
to mote or clod, and makes a pyre of darkness.

And here's fire, done at the fling of a wrist,
mind's trace and sun's trail,
that sends the giddy world around, and sears it.

All to the good, as are the wheeling agents—
lion and fish, virgin, caprice
and the rest of the band. Time for home, apart

from that huddled business, amid the little wood,
a bossy angel playing keeper
to the man and woman bewildered among flowers.

In his *The Geography of the Imagination*, the acute and ingenious writer Guy Davenport has an essay in which he remarks, variously,

> It is always difficult to know how much of the world the artist has taught us to see; once we see it we are quick to suppose that it was always there. But there were no waterfalls before Turner and Wordsworth, no moonlight before Sappho. The apple has its history. For it is not things which poets give us but the way in which they exist for us,

and

> About 2500 years ago poetry detached itself from the rituals of music and dance to go into the business of making the invisible visible to the imagination. This seeing where there is nothing to see, guided by mere words, is the most astounding achievement of the human mind.

Giovanni di Paolo's painting might have been done as if to foreshadow such words. There it is, of course occasioned by the Biblical account, and nourished by an array of pictorial conventions: but its fusion of comedy and tragedy, of present beauty and imminent desolation, of omnipotence and impotence is something to take the breath away. The whole painting, tempera and gold on wood, is only about 47cm by 52cm, but it is as if all the harsh utterance, and all the pursued finesse, of far larger and more celebrated murals have been brought, here, into definitive focus. The imperial seraphim on the one hand and the angelic sheepdog on the other span realms of the imagination which I have not seen handled in this way elsewhere.

I suppose that there is by now a small library of writings on the iconography of the circle, and if so I know only some of its leavings: but to the amateur eye, Giovanni di Paolo is having a field day with it here. To perceive the cosmos (with its zodiacal beings thrown in) so thoroughly in terms of cycle upon cycle, with earth's continents mapped lumpily into the centre, can have an engrossing effect, as if shape itself could speak, and design have the last word. In the painting it is of course the Creator who commands all, but it is only the uncommonly pious or (I imagine) some of the mad who feel all the time that this is so, or who can conduct their affairs by that light: for most of us, in practice, the world tends to absolutise itself. The last thing one could call Giovanni di Paolo's painting is manichaean: but as it stands it makes the cosmos as much a claimant as a creature.

Giovanni di Paolo was active by 1417, which was two years after the battle of Agincourt: it was a time in which continental Europe could often be preoccupied with archery, for civil as well as for military purposes. The portrayal of the cosmos here looks like nothing so much as an archery roundel, and the descending Creator is impinging upon it. I don't know whether the artist may also have had in mind the Greek philosophical notion that morally unkempt behaviour is in effect 'bad shooting', ineptitude with the spirit's bow and arrow: but even if that conjecture is itself a long shot, there is a manifest pathos in the painting in the contrast between Creator as 'supremo' and the bungling Adam and Eve.

PAINTINGS EXIST IN SPACE, poems in time: but a given poem may in effect adopt 'stations' in time, points at which to stand and inspect the visible as if through a spyhole or a spyglass. Different resources can be adopted to effect this—rhyme may serve it, and so may rhythm. The individual stanzas of 'Beginnings' are partly about that business; as I see it at least, in this case the choice of three-lined stanzas tends to enhance a sense both of brevity and of completeness at each 'station'. The poem notices the anciently-named elements of earth, air, fire and water—a taxonomy which implies both steadiness and potential mobility. When Giovanni di Paolo makes these his own pictorially, he increases the drama of his work, in that his concentric bands attest the wheeling of the seasons, which is benign in movement from station to station, whereas the expellees, rebels against their 'proper station', are now being destabilised. They also share a panel in which the

cosmos itself might roll over them in a kind of theological black farce. Giovanni di Paolo never heard Samuel Beckett's Mrs Rooney, of *All That Fall*, say, 'Christ what a planet!', but seen in one way the painting invites Eve to say something of the sort.

The poem concludes with 'the man and woman bewildered among flowers', a line which I hoped would itself induce a little reflection. Johnson's dictionary says that to bewilder, literally, is 'to lose in pathless places, to confound for want of a plain road', and this is what the Genesis account foreshadows—as do the last words of *Paradise Lost*. Nowadays we take it that bewilderment is confusion of mind, as if we had been 'driven wild', slid into a beast's bemusement in the face of a human challenge. That this should occur is always matter for regret: that it should take place among the emblems of beauty and vitality is confusion worse confounded. But so it often goes in life, and so it goes in Giovanni di Paolo's painting.

Guy Davenport once again:

> Art is the attention we pay to the wholeness of the world. Ancient intuition went foraging after consistency. Religion, science, and art are alike rooted in the faith that the world is of a piece, that something is common to all its diversity, and that if we knew enough we could see and give a name to its harmony.

The qualifying footnotes which could straggle after such a claim are pretty well endless, but Davenport is right of course, right as to the historical facts of the case, and right as to aspiration. Art is, or at least participates in, that 'attention we pay to the wholeness of the world'. This is as true of Picasso's 'Guernica' as it is of Edward Hicks' portrayals of his 'Peaceable Kingdom', as true of *Tristram Shandy* as of *Remembrance of Things Past*. The questing and hankering mind which engenders such works may be endowed with irreducibly ironic elements, but even irony can turn its coat and display one lucidity after another, provided the circumstances are dark enough and taxing enough.

I have always supposed that the *Odyssey*, for example, came out of just such a stable: and when I looked at Pintoricchio's 'Penelope With the Suitors', it seemed a vindication of that view. The learned argue, as is their business, about the personnel in this fresco—crucially, as to whether the last man coming into Penelope's weaving-room is another of the string of vexatious suitors, or is Odysseus himself. I plumped for the second view—hence the poem's title, 'The Return'.

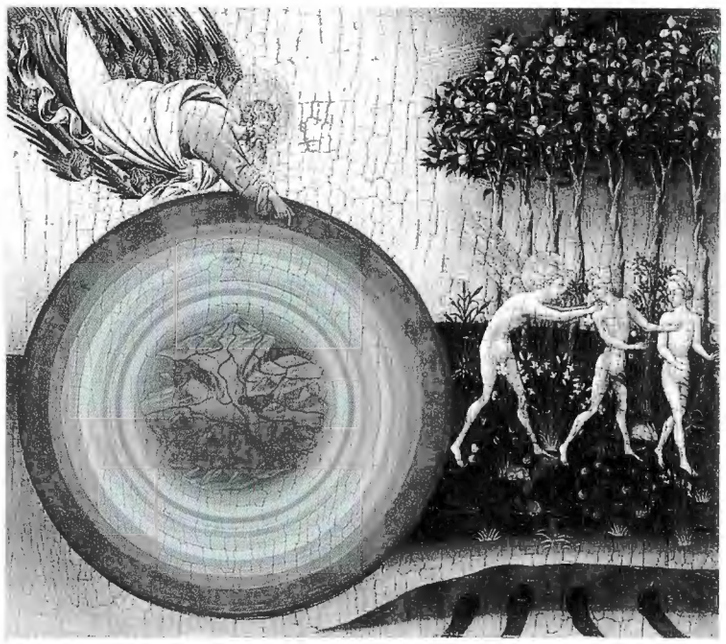
> To hang like a bat from the great fig tree until dusk,
> your gulped ship whirling below you:
> to bemuse into blindness the hulking son of Poseidon,
> his anger an ocean, his mind a cliff:
> to grow wild at the mast as the Sirens, rapt in their song,
> resolved it chord by chord in death—
> these were your ways, hunter and liar and yearner,
> the rockfast acres winding you home.
>
> So come in, gaunt for a while, your beggar's rig
> our truest costume, whatever you think,
> to Penelope's room, all yarn and frame and shuttle
> and textile plied and picked apart:
> come in, ignoring the window's magical staging
> of Circe and swine and riptide ship,
> to the cat with an air of sitting her portrait, the bird
> waltzing a strut, and the maid, and your wife.
>
> As for these others, three from the pack of her suitors,
> something will come to you. Falcon at wrist,
> hand in a pucker of pleading, a dancer's footwork—
> they are here for the gamble. And soon will know,
> when the harper falters and elegant boasting wanes
> and the bright blood chills in its course,
> a bronze instruction from the swag of arrows,
> a crazed song from the heavy bow.

By now, whether for painter or for poet, there is no beginning and no ending where Odysseus is concerned: even his transmutation into the Latinate 'Ulysses' is in effect a tribute to his main feature, as far as Homer is concerned, which is his commanding mutability—he is the human equivalent of the god Proteus, for whom shape-shifting is the very name of his particular game. From the countless redactions of Odysseus-in-action—they would include everything from the Fathers of the Church seeing him as an emblem of Christ the quester to the 20th-century

Illustrations: p24 Silver Hoard, Cuerdale, England, 9th century, British Museum;
p27 'Penelope with the Suitors', Pintoricchio (Bernadino di Betto), c.1454–1513, London, National Gallery;
p28 'The Creation of the World and the Expulsion from Paradise', Giovanni di Paolo, Italian (Sienese), active by 1417, died 1482, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

versions provided by Joyce, Kazantzakis and Walcott—Pintoricchio has underlined the version of him as the one who returns.

Etymologically, 'nostalgia' means 'the ache to be making the journey home', and this prepotent nostalgia comes to determine everything in the *Odyssey*. But the tragic irony of Homer's poem lies in three facts: that Odysseus declines the good-faith offer of immortality made him by a goddess who wants him to stay, and as a result is to be at the last one of the 'homeless' shades after death; that the Ithaca of his memory and desire has in his absence been polluted and in large degree alienated; and that Odysseus has been told that he will in any event have to rove again, and must do so into a milieu in which his sailor's oar will be unintelligible. It is, to put it mildly, a rich brew.



Like Giovanni di Paolo dealing simultaneously with creation and expulsion, Pintoricchio freeze-frames earlier stages of Odysseus' fortunes while he displays a graphic moment of encounter between Penelope the bond-keeper and the would-be-violating suitors. The 'old days' of Odysseus under threats to his life, days of which Penelope as yet knows nothing, are being recapitulated outside her window, through which we the viewers can look only on condition that we take account of her weaving-frame, that emblem at once of coherence and of vulnerability. The chequered design of the flooring leads the eye of the viewer towards the sighted port and beyond, but it is also a stylised version of a maze to be negotiated—the world as chessboard—under the tensional conditions of which chess, the war game, is so eloquent an expression.

'The Return' is not short of nouns, some of them—'mast, swine, beggar, harper, song'—with claims on spontaneous attention. But it seems to me that the spirit of the whole is determined in large degree by the first couple of words, put as we say 'in the infinitive', 'To hang'. I am of that party which believes that much of the vitality of poetry—and of prose, come to that—lies in its deployment of grammar and of syntax. These mediate information, but they also mediate energy: they are the vectors of feeling as well as of insight. So, 'To hang', here, is not only a way of putting down a key piece in the little jigsaw of the sentence: it implies as well a spirit of suspense which, all going well, will inform the whole poem.

I did not consciously design it in this way, but as things turned out the three stanzas accommodate the past, the present, and the future. So, as I see it, does Pintoricchio's painting. Any reader of the *Odyssey*, seeing the bow and the quiverful of arrows hanging on the wall behind Penelope, may think of the ways in which Homer blends allusions to poetry-making, weaving, archery, and Odyssean ingenuity: and certainly will think of that moment, perhaps the most famously dramatic in all of Western secular writing, at which Odysseus finally bends the bow.

Others must judge whether it is warranted, but I confess to being fascinated by that Latin form known as the 'praeteritio'—the verbal strategy by which one emphasises something allegedly unsaid, the 'I pass over in silence this, that, and the other' gambit. It seems to me that this blend of conceding and withholding corresponds to virtually everything of moment in life, the best of things and the worst of things. Life does not usually so much divulge significances or deny them outright, as insinuate and intimate, whether agreeably or disagreeably. It is perfectly proper for an artist in whatever medium to go for attestation, bright or dark: but much can be done better by inducing cross-veined tensions, as happens with a bow, a harp, or a strung fabric; a text is a kind of textile, and is often shown off to best effect when that is remembered—hence, for example, the last four lines of the second stanza of 'The Return'.

Joseph Brodsky used to say, when his poetry was admired, that the poems were all waiting there in the Russian language to be discovered, to which the appropriate reply is that they were and they weren't. For Pintoricchio—Bernardino di Betto to his mother—his 'Penelope with the Suitors' was and wasn't waiting in the *Odyssey*, was and wasn't on the wall soon to be frescoed. How it was, and how it wasn't, may really have been what he was trying to find out. And perhaps it was that way with the poem, too. ■

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Mary Manning

On the train

THE TRAIN COMES in through wisps of autumn fog. The doors open and puff out warm air that smells of stale takeaway food. Passengers alight. The train will be leaving again in ten minutes.

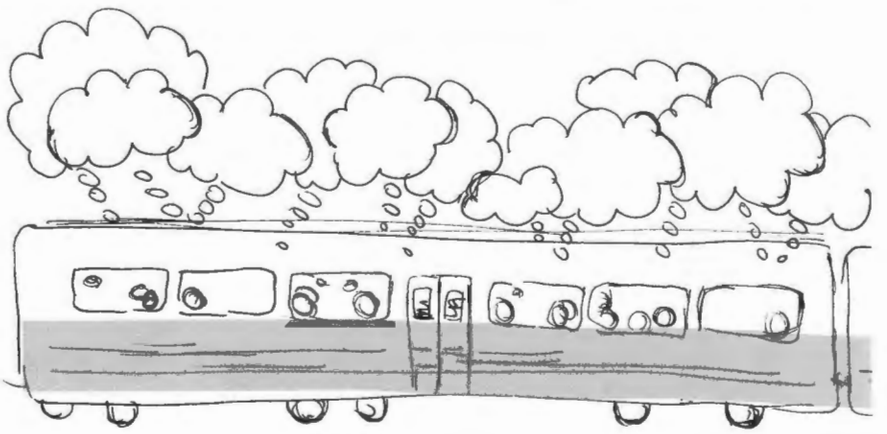
Zelda is leaning against an iron pillar in no hurry to board the train. She cannot see the man leaning against the other side of the pillar, nor does she know he has had a dull headache all day, that he doesn't feel all that great and is hoping he won't have a fit on the train.

She can see a young man and an older man sitting on the iron bench. She knows they'd sit further apart and rearrange their bags for her if she walked towards the seat purposefully. But Zelda sometimes prefers to look at people rather than talk to them because people give her much to think about.

She follows the two men onto the train and turns with them into the left part of the carriage. They sit apart on the seats backing onto the window and she takes one of a pair of seats to their left and at right angles to the window. From this position she can watch them without turning her head.

She can see that the young man is turning the pages of a book and sneaks a look at the cover—the *Lonely Planet Guide to India*. From where she is sitting she can make out the page headings and the names of the cities. The man is in his twenties, very thin and dressed in a tartan shirt and faded jeans. He doesn't look like a book reader to her, more the sort of person who'd grab a free *MX* from the PICK ME UP bin and open it at the sport section. Probably on his way home to eat as he watches the footy replay. Not much of an eater, either, she thinks, looking at his thin arms and wrists. She doesn't know his name is Mick.

The middle-aged man is called Bob, although Zelda does not know this. He is wearing cords and a hand-knitted navy pullover and looks to her like the sort of accountant who has piles of manila folders on his desk in a little shop-front office in a suburban street. He looks dejected, his arms clutching an over-full plastic carry bag as if to stop its contents spilling out. Zelda thinks there are clothes in the bag, nighties and dressing gowns that he's taking to his wife in hospital where she's had an operation that needs several days to recover from. He's bringing her clothes home to wash and he'll return them tomorrow. Now he has to go home to his children who have been minded by their grandmother who is not too well herself and does not really like minding children.



She still hasn't noticed the man with the headache, and he's out of her line of sight now, having turned right when he entered the train and taken a seat at the end of the carriage. Now he picks up a discarded *MX* and flips through the pages to take his mind off his headache.

Bob, the dejected, slumping man, clutches his carry bag and leans back swivelling his eyes left to read what he can of the *Lonely Planet Guide to India*. He assumes the young man plans a trip to India but, as he's not in the habit of inventing stories about people he sees on the train, that's all he thinks about him.

Mick is aware of Bob looking at his *Lonely Planet Guide to India* and wonders why he doesn't bring something of his own to read on the train. Mick considers thrusting the book into the man's hands and saying something rude like, 'Why don't you have a proper read of it', or better still, 'Why don't you buy your own bloody book?' Mick, as you can tell but the others don't know, is at the end of a long, tiring day.

The man with the headache looks at a photo in *MX* of a derailed Indian train lit by a red sunset, a chaotic scene of twisted metal, people crying, trucks, ambulances, even a camel. The man once had a fit in a city street and pedestrians walked around him, eyes averted, as he lay on the pavement. But as he never remembers anything about his fits he does not know about the pedestrians.

Now she knows what Mick is reading, Zelda changes her mind about him. She decides he is a student and has travelled lots, backpacking around Asia and Europe. Maybe even Afghanistan or Palestine. He is planning to go to Nepal or Bhutan, the sort of places young people with backpacks go. Places where even old people are offered drugs in the street. She thinks of her travel photos arranged in boxes with index cards labelled Argentina 1982, Alaska 1976 and so on. At night she sometimes chooses a box to look through, Norway 1992 or California 1985 before she goes to bed.

On the other hand, she thinks Mick might not have been to India or anywhere else much. He might be the sort of person who usually reads the sports pages in the *MX* and that's what he'd be reading now if the PICK ME UP bins hadn't been empty. He might be reading the *Lonely Planet Guide to India* because someone left it on a seat at the station and it seemed silly to leave it there for someone else to take. Perhaps he works as a builder's labourer and he's on his way home to his wife and the baby that came as a surprise and a burden to them both. He probably has dogs, big dangerous dogs that bark all day when he's at work and that will get out one day and attack a small child in the street.

Zelda's also had time to have a good look at Bob so she's decided he's a salesman on his way home to chops, potatoes and a green vegetable, probably frozen peas, followed by apple charlotte and custard. She knows his teenage children need this sort of food to keep up their energies for sport and social activities like sex or spraying graffiti on buildings along the train track. He probably works somewhere in the suburbs and had to go to town today for an appointment to do with renegotiating the mortgage payments he cannot afford with all the costs of putting teenage children through school and supporting his wife who does not go to work and hardly leaves the house apart from shopping and driving the children around. He didn't bring anything to read as he hardly ever goes on the train and is not in the habit of taking things to read when he does. That's why he reads other people's books over their shoulders.

Passengers get on the train at Richmond and take spare seats near the man with the headache who is leaning back now, eyes closed. One woman moves up the carriage away from him as she thinks he's on drugs. The man's headache is getting worse and he's thinking about lying down on the spare seat.

Bob has left the train at Richmond and gone home to his wife who is not in hospital. Nor does she stay home all day waiting for him to return. Bob thinks she works part-time in a small supermarket where she enjoys sharing street gossip with the regulars, but in fact she spends her days at the casino gambling away an inheritance she has never told him about. She makes sure she is always home to tell him about the supermarket where she does not work and to prepare him a meal like tonight's curry from *Gas Cooking for the Whole Family*, made from leftover roast lamb and served with boiled rice she shapes into little mountains in eggcups and tips onto the plate. There are side dishes of sliced banana dipped in desiccated coconut and sultanas from the packet.

Bob hasn't thought about the train since he left it, and as he never noticed the man who is about to have a fit, he does not think about him either.

Mick finds a map of the Rajasthan area and thinks of Hanna, that deliciously scented girl with her straight-as-a-ballet-dancer's back. Beautiful Hanna who'd worked with him in the clinic and promised to come to live with him in Australia. There had been two phone calls then an email to tell him she'd married a builder in her cold town 500 kilometres north of Stockholm. He never heard from her again. He has a photo of her drinking orange fizzy from a bottle, sitting on the wall of the deserted palace that an emperor built for his concubines. Beautiful Hanna with her sweet smile, her small face, her tiny, high breasts.

He tries to stop thinking about Hanna as it makes him too sad. He thinks instead about dinner. He'll probably buy Chinese takeaway when he gets off at Gardenvale.

He doesn't feel like cooking scrambled eggs again.

Zelda sees Calcutta on the top of the page and thinks of the beggars fenced off at Howrah Station lying across each other, some with fingerless hands reaching out between the bars. Of stepping around the man lying naked on the platform, his brown penis resting softly against his leg like a little creature. She thinks of her work there helping beggars to die with dignity and love when their lives had neither, and of her own brown baby, born in Calcutta one month, dead the next. She wonders if her baby was buried in a grave, burnt in a floating ghat on the Ganges or placed on top of a tower to be pecked at by vultures.

She felt too lost in Calcutta's chaos to find her baby's father, to find anyone to ask what had happened to her baby. Now she thinks she should have tried harder and that it was a cop-out to come home and not tell anyone about her man and her baby. She should have tried harder.

She considers getting off the train at Prahran and walking to Borders to buy a new novel to read in bed but decides she's tired of fiction. Instead she'll buy takeaway beef vindaloo with rice and a lime to squeeze into her gin and tonic, then she'll go to bed early with a medical journal.

Mick and Zelda are jolted back into the present by a commotion in the next part of the carriage.

'Is there a doctor in the train?' someone calls. 'This man needs medical attention. Can anyone help?'

Mick and Zelda stand and look at the man who is lying on a seat twitching, throwing his arms and legs about, writhing, his eyes closed. He is dark-skinned, maybe Indian, thinks Mick, thinks Zelda.

'He is having a fit,' she says.

'I'll call an ambulance to pick him up at the end of the line. That should give them time to meet the train.' Mick takes out his phone.

They move towards the man as they speak. She puts her hand into the man's mouth and pulls his tongue forward. Mick puts a folded coat under the man's head and straightens his twisted legs.

'I'll stay with him until the end of the line,' Zelda says, sitting close to the man's head as if to comfort him with her presence.

'Can you get home from Sandringham?' Mick asks. 'Is that where you get off?'

'I have got home from places much further away than that.'

'So have I,' he says, sitting at the man's feet.

It is dark now as the train waits at Sandringham for passengers. It will leave in ten minutes. A young woman gets on and takes the seat by the window. She picks up the *Lonely Planet Guide to India* and wonders who would leave a book on the train. She flicks through the pages thinking how much more expensive India has become. She checks the cost of the toy train to Darjeeling and wonders why she had ever thought it would be fun to crawl up those mountains for hours in a train like Puffing Billy. Like a bloody kindergarten kid on an outing. She would have done better to share a taxi. ■

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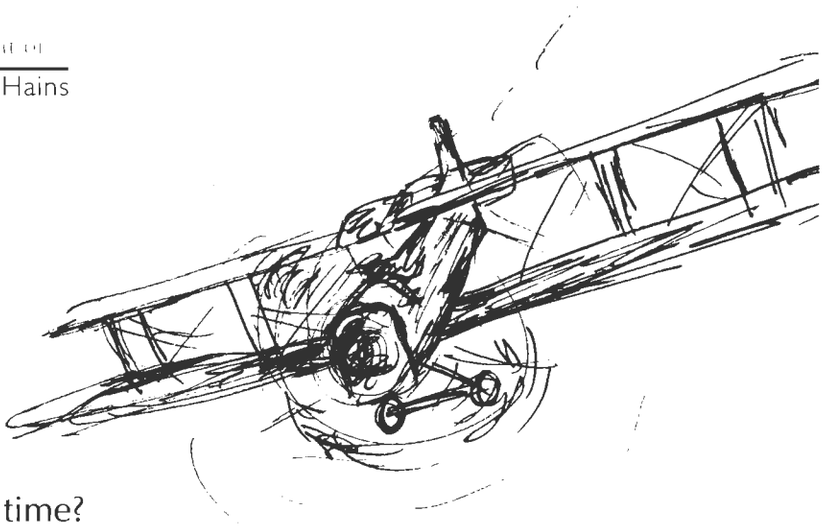
Brigid Hains

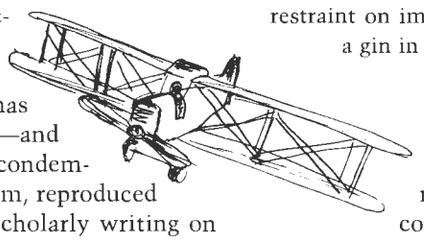


Inland Flynn

Pioneer? Racist? Or product of his time?

FLYNN OF THE Inland is remembered as a missionary who called Aborigines 'damned, dirty niggers' and refused to have them treated by his hospitals and Flying Doctor Service. The 'niggers' remark is compelling, powerful and repugnant, but is it true? What were John Flynn's own views on race? To ask this question implies a broader inquiry into what it means to be 'racist' and how we might own, or disown, our racially charged past. Flynn was born in the 1880s and died in 1951. His lifespan encompassed the shift from brutal colonialism to paternal assimilation. It is difficult to 'place' him in the context of his time, and to understand what it means to judge his attitudes from the perspective of our own time.

In 1972 Charles Duguid published *Doctor and the Aborigines*, a memoir of his years of Aboriginal missionary work. He recalled a conversation from the 1930s in which Flynn asked Duguid why he was 'wasting his time on those damned, dirty niggers'. A year later Sir Mark Oliphant (who wrote a foreword to Duguid's book) said in a speech that he had been shocked to realise that Flynn 'refused absolutely to have anything to do with Aborigines and thought they should be allowed to die out as rapidly as possible'. Despite frantic efforts by Flynn's successors within the church to retrieve his reputation, this has stood as a thorough—and eminently quotable—condemnation of Flynn's racism, reproduced in both popular and scholarly writing on the history of the Inland.



When Dr Duguid first attacked Flynn in the early 1930s, he was aiming at a very large target. In 1932, Ion Idriess had published his runaway bestseller *Flynn of the Inland*. Flynn married around this time, and a friend wrote of his fame: 'no engagement other than that of royalty could have caused such a stir'. Flynn referred ironically to the Idriess story as 'my mythic self'. He was a hero to a Depression-weary nation. In his philanthropic work for the outback he performed a great service for the metropolis: he crystallised an image of Australia as a pioneering nation, whose frontier vitality was undiminished.

In 1912 Flynn had travelled through the Northern Territory, producing a report for the Presbyterian Church on the welfare needs of white settlers, and eventually setting up the Australian Inland Mission (AIM) as an organisation devoted to those needs. Aboriginal missions were separately administered and, remarkably, were administered by the 'Foreign Missions' branch of the Church. However, in 1914 Flynn's friend J.R.B. Love wrote from the outback urging him to reconsider this split:

> The questions of white and black are wholly bound up in each other. We cannot deal with one apart from the other. It is perfectly futile to talk of morality in this country where there is absolutely no restraint on immorality ... While there is a gin in the land, she will be at the disposal of every man who wants her ...

Flynn remained adamant that his mission could not tackle the racial problems of the frontier—that was work for others. He had little taste for racial and sexual melodrama; certainly much less than most missionaries. Yet in his lifelong dedication to the cause of the Inland's white settlers he was inevitably implicated in questions of race—how could he have thought that the fates of white and black in the outback could be neatly demarcated?

Whether he consciously acknowledged it or not, Flynn's reading of the desert as the 'wide open spaces' and his passionate defence of the interests of white settlers in the Inland were part of the implicit racism of the romantic frontier. And Flynn's mission to make the Inland safe for white women and their children was the product of his racial beliefs in the eugenic importance of the white bushmen—whom he called 'our A1 human stock'. The implication is that 'half-caste' children were a waste of such potential, and that sexual liaisons with Aboriginal women were a poor substitute for the 'nation-building' of white families.

The frontier myth was not merely indifferent to Aboriginal presence. The frontier landscape was considered deeply primitive—'country that is raw and strange', Flynn wrote. White imagination feared the primitive power of that landscape on its settlers. One of Flynn's correspondents expressed a concern that white children of the Inland were 'reverting to the blacks'. Flynn himself worried aloud about the frontiersman alienated from civilised society, who was 'living like a blackfellow' and becoming embittered in the process. Aboriginality was a convenient stereotype of wildness, isolation, primitivism—but an ironic one, since it was isolated white settlers who were stranded in the landscape, not its Indigenous inhabitants, for whom there was no unsettling wilderness, but a lived and living landscape home.

The romantic frontier, which Flynn consolidated as a national myth in the 1920s and 1930s, had deep racial undercurrents. It skated across Aboriginal presence, which was elided into the landscape as a dark and primitive force. Yet Flynn rarely wrote about Indigenous people explicitly in this way. In fact his writing on Aboriginal affairs is marked by other factors, including a sense of compassion for the dispossessed. In 1915 Flynn wrote a long article in *The Inlander* called 'Our Aborigines', which had searing photos of Aboriginal prisoners in chains. In it Flynn condemned both church and government policies on Aboriginal health and welfare as 'terribly amateurish. Our benediction to the blacks has been like the curate's egg—good in parts. Our efforts need to be increased, improved, systematised'. Flynn was blunt about European culpability: '... we are all to blame. We are all more or less ignorant into the bargain.'

Flynn clearly did not subscribe to a simple Social Darwinist vision, which looked forward to the eclipse of Aborigines by a supreme white race. As he said in 1915:

> It should be quite unnecessary at this late day for us to point out that the black man as a member of the human family has a right to increasing opportunities of self-development. We who so cheerfully sent a cheque for £100,000 to Belgium to help a people pushed out of their own inheritance by foreigners—surely we must just as cheerfully do something for those whom we 'clean-handed' people have dispossessed.

In these statements we see Flynn's humanism, and we also sense its limitations. Flynn, like most of his philanthropic contemporaries, had no respect at all for 'tribal' life: he shared Hobbes' view of 'primitive' life as 'nasty, brutish and short'. He was particularly critical of what he saw as the violent and exploitative attitudes towards women in Indigenous societies, and had little patience for 'romantic' ideas, as he saw them, of traditional culture.

Flynn's inclusion of Aborigines as members of the human family came at a significant price: assimilation to white models of respectability and community. He was pleased to report donations from Indigenous people to the mission, exclaiming, 'That's unity'. Like other sympathetic but assimilationist writers he was particularly keen to welcome respectable, acculturated Aborigines into the national family. So he published stories in *The Inlander* of Aboriginal shearers, farmers and builders, 'happy' as he saw it 'in self-realisation'—that is, in realising themselves as simulacra of white people, becoming more authentically human, as they became less traditionally Aboriginal.

How did his enemy, Dr Duguid, champion of Aboriginal missions in the church, compare? As Rani Kerin says in her compelling work on Charles Duguid, he treated the Ernabella Aboriginal Mission, which he founded, as his 'baby'. Duguid literally acted as a surrogate father to a number of Aboriginal children, whom he took into his home, both 'full blood' and 'half-caste'. He was deeply involved in the 'rescue' of half-caste children from their Aboriginal mothers. The rationale of Ernabella was not, of course, the preservation of Indigenous culture, but the 'education and evangelisation' of the Aborigines. A letter from Duguid, which Rani has kindly shown me, describes an Aboriginal mother who had managed to rescue her two older daughters from abusive positions on stations. When they were taken away by missionaries, 'she begged that the baby should not be taken from her and, even after giving her consent, broke down and wept bitterly'. Despite documenting her grief, Duguid wrote with equanimity of these 'rescues' in the name of a higher ideal: Aboriginal 'improvement'.

Flynn and Duguid were schooled in the same progressive, reform-minded world view. Flynn had been a slum missionary in Melbourne and rural Victoria before turning his attention to the outback. In a climate of eugenic ideas that condemned the poor as defective, and doomed to hereditary inferiority, Flynn was part of a brave new wave of reform-minded churchmen, who regarded human nature as essentially flexible and adaptive. These people saw the degradation of the 'slums' as a natural outcome of an environment of poverty and hardship, rather than a confirmation of the feckless and criminal nature of the poor. Their key ideals were efficiency and uplift, and the practicality of the 'Social Gospel'. As a theological student, Flynn once proposed that his fellow students should establish settlement houses, like those in the United States, where they would live and work with the poor and be of practical service. He was laughed out of the meeting.

The dark side of this humanitarian impulse was a patronising assumption that white, middle-class values were to be universally applied and aspired towards. This was as much a cause of resentment among the poor as among Indigenous people. The assumption underlies Flynn's lack of interest in Aboriginal cultures, as it does Duguid's collusion in the removal of children. In both cases indifference or even brutality wore the mask of reform and uplift. But it is also true that both men represented a profound advance on the Social Darwinist views of some of their contemporaries. In 1928, when Flynn had been writing of Aborigines as 'members of the human family' for over a decade, more than 30 Indigenous people were massacred by police and settlers at Coniston in Central Australia, and Ion Idriess, Australia's most popular inter-war writer, continued to write of Aborigines in animal terms—as dogs or monkeys.

How did Flynn's humanitarian ideals square with his adamant separation of Aboriginal and white missionary work? Dr Charles Duguid visited Alice Springs in 1934. He was shocked by the attitudes of the Australian Inland Mission staff, who apparently told him that 'the nigger never was any good and never will be. The best he has any right to expect is a decent funeral'. Duguid was further appalled that the large and comfortable AIM nursing hostel in Alice Springs was reserved for white settlers only, despite the terrible health problems of the Alice Springs Aboriginal population. On his return to Adelaide Duguid met with Flynn, who apparently told him that the hostel was not intended for 'the hobo white, the half-caste or the nigger'. Duguid would later say that it was at this meeting that Flynn had said 'you are only wasting your time among so many damned dirty niggers'. In a letter to the Minister for the Interior in 1935, Duguid argued, 'It was my experience to find the native more condemned by John Flynn and Kingsley Partridge than by any policeman, administrator, station owner or manager whom I met'. This was severe criticism indeed when you think that it was only seven years since the Coniston revenge killings.

By 1936 Flynn and Duguid had become

sworn enemies in a bitter competition for loyalty and money in the church. One of Duguid's supporters described Flynn at the 1936 Assembly as 'the devil incarnate' for his ability to argue for increased Aboriginal missions, while undermining Duguid's own work at Ernabella. It was, Duguid wrote, 'just another example of the Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde nature of the man'.

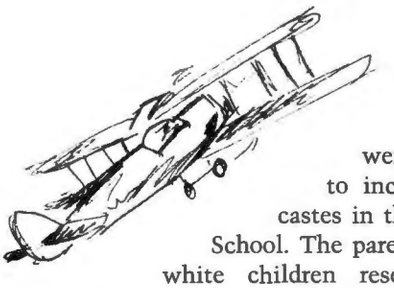
Duguid was right about the AIM hospitals: Aboriginal people were not admitted as in-patients until the 1930s, although they were treated as out-patients. In fact, Flynn argued to Duguid that no Aboriginal person had ever been refused out-patient treatment at an AIM institution. The AIM argued that it had never set out to provide an Aboriginal medical service, and therefore such treatments that it did provide were a bonus. Duguid argued that the treatment of Aboriginal patients was a Christian duty. The Flying Doctor Service was, officially, always open to Aboriginal patients—reliant of course on the patronage of a white wireless operator to call the service—and one of Flynn's early Flying Doctors leapt to his defence in the early 1970s, stating that when he worked for the Aerial Medical Service in the late 1930s Flynn had personally instructed him that 'there was no restriction on medical flights on the basis of race, colour, or creed'.

The doors of the AIM hostels remained closed to Aborigines partly because Flynn and the AIM had forged an alliance with a deeply racist white settler culture. Flynn spent the greater part of 1926 living in Alice Springs, literally building the Alice Springs Hostel—his flagship—on a kind of sabbatical from his administration of the AIM. He was tremendously proud of the hostel, and became deeply involved in every aspect of the design. He was equally deeply involved with the white community who sponsored it, and which it served—a white community whose commitment to racial separation was entrenched. The hostel came to embody his vision of domestic warmth allied to scientific efficiency, with its ingenious natural ventilation systems, economy of space, and inventive storage. It was, said Flynn, a 'real haven for those who come in weak from illness and that subtle depression sometimes joined thereto—which we may call "bush shock". Our idea was a spot, in the very heart of the bush, where all might come at times *to forget that they are in the bush*'.

Ernest Kramer, an eccentric individualist missionary to the Aborigines of Alice Springs, wrote to Duguid in 1936 that, 'I personally remember a time when Rev John Flynn's heart was moved to consider the possibility of a special ward for the Aborigines at the back of the Alice Springs hostel—during the time of its completion—but public feeling in Alice Springs was so against it that he had to abandon the idea'. Kramer also noted in a letter to Andrew Barber, an AIM administrator, that 'during my association with the workers and nurses of your mission, chiefly Oodnadatta and Alice Springs, I much appreciated instances of co-operation by the latter in dealing with acute sickness among the full-blood Aborigines'.

In his passion for relieving the 'bush shock' of his white settlers, Flynn inevitably became complicit in the deep racial conflict and tension of towns like Alice Springs. Flynn's old friend, J.R.B. Love, thought this was endemic to the AIM's patrol padres too, who 'tend to follow the lead of the station people in their attitude to the blacks'. Although Love understood why AIM padres did not want to alienate white pastoralists, he thought they lacked moral courage in their acceptance of the racism of the frontier.

Duguid recognised this problem himself when he wrote of the hostel at Oodnadatta, where: 'the Sisters told me of the fight they had with the white people before they



were able to include half-castes in the Sunday School. The parents of the white children resented the inclusion of the half-castes bitterly and it was only firmness on the part of the Sisters that overcame the deep and ever present prejudice of the Interior.' I think it is likely that Flynn's own views hardened in some ways during his time in Alice Springs—or at least he became adept at pandering to the racism of the Inland, while playing the humanitarian elsewhere.

Flynn always argued, however, that he supported Aboriginal missions by both church and government, while believing that the AIM was not the right vehicle to tackle issues of Aboriginal health and welfare. I suspect that this actually reflects Flynn's own temperament: a lack of focus on Indigenous welfare, mixed with a broadly humanitarian outlook. Flynn was largely uninterested in responding to the distinct needs of Indigenous people, but he was by no means incapable of recognising those needs. In 1932, two years before his supposed 'damned dirty niggers' comment, Flynn wrote a letter to the Board of Missions arguing for the establishment of a dedicated Aboriginal hospital in Alice Springs:

> As regards the care of the blacks. In my opinion a 'public hospital' would not be satisfactory for the blacks. If they are to be treated with due consideration their patients must be permitted to be visited by their friends. If they are to be made comfortable they should be given special beds, practically on the ground. In fact for 'Camp Blacks' their hospital while truly sanitary, should be designed to serve children of the open air ... The staff too, should be mission sisters specially devoted to Aborigines—devoted enough to study their language and habits of thought ... I hope you will agree with me that the Aborigines of Central

> Australia deserve specialised care in their own institution at the hands of sisters who are consecrated to their particular care.

My own writing about Flynn has been haunted by race: not only his indifference to Aboriginal issues, but also his entangled anxieties about white vitality and regression. Yet in a letter like this one, where Flynn tentatively imagines a dedicated hospital for Alice Springs, there is a hint of some prescience. He had neither the will nor the inclination to do anything serious about it, but it is clear that Oliphant's characterisation of Flynn as a man who 'refused absolutely to have anything to do with the Aborigines and thought they should be allowed to die out as rapidly as possible' simply should not stand.

It is easy, of course, to read such recognition of different needs as simply a rationalisation for neglect. Certainly Alice Springs was a town founded on segregation and intolerance. In this period no Aboriginal person was allowed within the town limits unless employed by a licensed employer, and the cinema was restricted to Aborigines with individual permits to attend, issued only to the 'clean' and 'respectable' (Rowse, *White Flour, White Power*, 1998). Flynn's own position is difficult to elucidate fully. He did condemn the failure to create a dedicated hospital for Aboriginal people, in a confidential memo he wrote in 1936: 'There does not seem to be sufficient enterprise among professed friends of Aborigines to face up to obligations implicit in their own fierce declamations.' He later regretted that he had not offered the AIM's practical support to Duguid in setting up such an Aboriginal hospital. He thought that Duguid would have refused the challenge of diverting resources away from *his* own pet project, Ernabella.

Did Flynn actually describe Aboriginal people as 'those damned dirty niggers' in 1934? The word 'niggers' occurs most often in Duguid's accounts of the AIM: I have never seen it in any AIM files, and Flynn's personal correspondence. It is impossible to know what Flynn said in private, but his own writing some years earlier contradict Duguid's account:

> We Australians who, light-heartedly, for four generations, have been reading to Aborigines the 'move aside' clause, will surely be called up to render an account of our stewardship—God only knows how soon.

Flynn was a humanitarian, a visionary of modern medical care, a mythologiser of the frontier, a man who was quick to point out injustice to Aboriginal people, and slow to do anything about it in his own institutions. At times his racism is apparent and repugnant, but he was capable of simple compassion and acute criticism of his racist peers. How is history to judge such a man? How many of us would have had the imagination and boldness to do more, were we children of his time?

In every culture there are people whose suffering is considered obviously deserving of compassion (for Flynn it was the lonely white settlers, especially women with children). But every culture also has its shadowlands—inhabited by those who suffer no less, but who are cast as disturbing 'others' who are marginal, threatening, uncontained. It is striking, for example, how disturbing the public presence of the mentally ill can be in our culture, provoking uneasy tolerance and a desire for flight. Flynn's humanitarian vision was incomplete and corrupted by that incompleteness, but this should do more than encourage moralistic historical judgment. The gaps in his mission would serve justice better were they to remind us to search out our own shadowlands, and the people who inhabit them. ■

Brigid Hains is a Melbourne writer interested in the intersections of biology, race and history. She has recently published *The Ice and the Inland: Mawson, Flynn and the Myth of the Frontier* (MUP, 2002). She would like to thank Rani Kerin, PhD student at the ANU, for sharing her unpublished work on Duguid, and Tim Rowse, also at the ANU, for his response to a seminar paper on this topic.

the shortlist

Just Another Little Murder, Phil Cleary. Allen & Unwin, 2002. ISBN 1865 087 890, RRP $29.95

Vicki Cleary, the author's sister, was murdered as she arrived for work in suburban Melbourne in late 1987. Two years later, in the Supreme Court of Victoria, she was portrayed as somehow responsible for her own death. The murderer was released less than four years afterwards.

Phil Cleary links his investigation of the violent history of the murderer with an exploration of the dominant ideas about women and violence. He demonstrates the appalling consequences of outdated notions of male dominance over women. The law of provocation promotes such injustice. It is absurd for a court to conclude that a 'reasonable man' would react to his ex-girlfriend's arrival at work by killing her.

I hope Phil Cleary will be successful in his campaign to change both attitudes and the law. **—Kieran Gill**

Willie's Bar and Grill: A rock 'n' roll tour of North America in the age of terror, Rob Hirst. Picador Australia, 2003. ISBN 0 330 364 12 X, RRP $30

As Midnight's Oil's drummer, Rob Hirst co-wrote most of the band's hits over their 25-year career. Always known as a political band, Midnight Oil have supported countless social and environmental causes locally and internationally. Their opinions, voiced through the imposing figure of Peter Garrett, favour the green and the left, but this rarely alienated them from the mainstream. *Willie's Bar and Grill* catalogues their US tour, begun just weeks after the multi-pronged terrorist attacks of 2001.

Blending travel writing, humour, rock and roll and social commentary, the book is conversational in style and rich in anecdotal observations. As they travel through the major cities, Hirst shows an enthusiasm for idiosyncrasies of his band, the roadies and the fans. He describes the daily grind of playing and travelling with a full rock 'n' roll entourage and its personalities—from wise-cracking band mates to irascible and fastidious bus drivers.

Hirst has an impressive vocabulary. If he's trying to negate years of dumb drummer jokes, he has succeeded. His writing is florid—LA freeways are a 'Macadamised mayhem of an unconscionable burden of traffic'.

Willie's Bar and Grill offers insight into the jittery American psyche, post-'war against terror'. The band encountered hyperventilating customs officials on the Canadian border, airport security at unprecedented levels and a near-deserted Disneyland. Yet the people are as defiantly proud as ever. US flags are omnipresent, as are aggressively patriotic bumper stickers.

The literal and practical jokes of the band—and tales of such oddities as advertisements for body enhancements in LA—are told with bright humour. This book is not the definitive Midnight Oil confessional. Hirst clearly likes his group, and there is little gossip, especially about Peter Garrett. However, his opinions on environmental degradation and the social inequities within the world's most powerful nation are eloquently expressed—surprisingly, without the strident invective for which Midnight Oil is famous.

There is plenty of 'muso' talk for Midnight Oil and rock autobiography fans, but despite occasional rambling this book has wider appeal. **—Ben Wells**

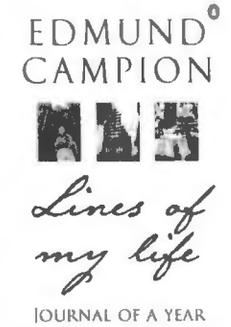
Islam in Australia, Abdullah Saeed. Allen & Unwin, 2003. ISBN 1 865 088 641, RRP $19.95

Abdullah Saeed, Head of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Melbourne, set out to 'contribute to our understanding of one of the most misunderstood religions in the world and the complexities associated with the Muslim community, its diversity and unity, its struggle to remain an element of the Australian fabric of society'. This was always going to be a difficult task. Imagine attempting 'Christianity in Australia'—trying to cover in an accurate and fair way the Catholic Charistmatic Renewal, the Salvation Army, the Maronite Eparchy, Rev. Fred Nile and everything in between.

As an introductory reader, *Islam in Australia* is helpful, easy and open. Saeed challenges a range of common myths and stereotypes, often unnamed but familiar and unmistakable. However, I expected the book to speak a little more to my own experience of Islam in Australia: living as a Christian in Melbourne's Brunswick, shopping at halal butchers, socialising with Iraqis and Iranians together, observing the deep respect my Afghan friends have for women, watching my Kurdish friends enjoy a stubbie of VB in the back yard, trying to understand why I am not allowed to see a photo of my Palestinian friend's wife.

Aspects of this book—its organisation, its simplifications and its omissions—are more than a little frustrating. But if you are confronted by the ignorant and ill-informed, give them a copy.

—Joshua Puls



Lines of my Life: Journal of a Year, Edmund Campion. Penguin, 2003. ISBN 0 14 3001 52 3, RRP $22.95

To write a journal for a year, particularly one beginning in September 2001, and to publish it might seem a little self-regarding. And when your life is gregarious, and your natural communities filled with people well known in their own right, you run the risk of being gossipy or of name-dropping.

Edmund Campion's journal manages to be none of these things, and avoids them stylishly. In any good sense of the word, his writing is priestly: he is interested in all the people he meets and wishes them well. As I came across the names of friends in *Lines of my Life*, my first inclination was to urge them to read what was written about them, knowing that they would be encouraged by it.

This quality has nothing to do with flattery. For all his lightness of touch, Campion's book is also priestly in representing uncompromisingly the claims of a richly conceived humanity. He is distressed by smallness of vision and puzzled when he meets the absence of appropriate pain or shame. **—Andrew Hamilton SJ**

Peter Pierce & Catherine Pierce

in print

Worth a fatwa?

Has Michel Houellebecq earned the criticism that has come his way?

On 3 September 2001, Moroccan newspaper *Libération* menacingly declared of the French writer Michel Houellebecq, 'This Man Hates You'. Who is he?

Houellebecq's career follows a classic trajectory. Up from the provinces, he sought fame in the capital. It is a career inflected by the mores of the 1960s, whose damage to the West is his prime subject. Houellebecq was born on 26 February 1958 on the island of Réunion, off the east coast of Africa. His father, whom he described in the poem 'Non Reconcilié' (from his first collection of verse *Rester Vivant*, 1991) as 'un con solitaire et barbare' (a solitary and barbarous old bastard), was a mountain guide. The loathed father of Michel in *Platform* is a mountaineer. Houellebecq's parents abandoned him to his much-loved paternal grandmother when he was six. This is the fate of Bruno in *Atomised*. Houellebecq's mother, to whom he has never since spoken, followed the hippy trail in the 1960s, as did the mother of the half-brothers Bruno and Michel of *Atomised*.

Each of his three novels—titled, in English, *Whatever* (1994), *Atomised* (1998) and *Platform* (1999)—draws with plaintive energy on his life. Houellebecq took a degree in agricultural engineering, married, had a son, was unemployed, divorced, was admitted to a psychiatric clinic for depression (like a male character in each of the books). His literary career began, improbably, with a book on the occultist and novelist H.P. Lovecraft. By the early 1990s he was a prize-winning poet. *Whatever* became an underground hit, and was later filmed. *Atomised* was a European-wide best seller and led to his being ejected from the editorial board of the left-wing journal *Perpendiculaires* as reactionary and misogynist.

That is the kind of prescriptive judgment that his fiction reprehends. Houellebecq has written a witty poetic manifesto, 'Dernier Rempart Contre le Libéralisme' (last stand against liberalism), from his second volume of verse, *Le Sens du Combat* (1996). Indeed, in verse he is most often at play, even as the grimmest themes of his fiction are rehearsed. The books of poetry—the third was *Renaissance* (1999)—parallel the progression of the argument of the novels. Far from being a reactionary, Houellebecq more closely resembles the paradoxical figure of a romantic nihilist in the manner of Henry Miller. He sang his poems to the music of Bernard Burgalat on the CD *Présence humaine*; he features doomed, poignant love stories in *Atomised* and *Platform* and seems to endorse the view that 'the future is female' (a curter version of Louis Aragon's prediction 'la femme est l'avenir de l'homme'). No French author has been so audacious, avid for publicity or won more prizes since Jean-Paul Sartre. No novelist since Salman Rushdie has so recklessly courted the ire of Islamists.

In *Whatever*, published nine years ago, there is a casual reference to a bomb planted in a Paris café by 'Arab terrorists' that kills two people. At a crucial moment in *Atomised*, when scientist Michel Djerzinski has just outlined to a colleague, Desplechin, his plans for a biologically created, posthuman future, the latter remarks—in passing—about false expectations of what the future may be. He judges this way: 'I know that Islam—by far the most stupid, false and obscure of all religions—seems to be gaining ground; but it's a transitory phenomenon: in the long term Islam is doomed just as surely as Christianity'.

For those who paid attention, here were the seeds for the public and legal controversy that would embroil Houellebecq. The climax of *Platform* is an attack by Islamic militants on a Western-run sex resort hotel in Thailand. The book was published in English not long before the Bali bombings of 12 October 2002.

Not for such prescience, but for the offhand remarks of an Egyptian character in the novel, and for comments in his own voice in the journal *Lire* in September 2001—'the stupidest religion of all is Islam'—Houellebecq was charged with inciting religious hatred. He was acquitted in late October 2002 after the state prosecutor advised the judges that it is legal in France to criticise a religion but not its followers. The notoriety that he had long sought by such provocations, complemented by a well-advertised retreat to the western verge of Europe (to Ireland, like Michel in *Atomised*), have obscured Houellebecq's achievements. So too his felicitous depictions of sex, joyless and joyful, have masked the sobriety and conservatism of his imagining of the way we will live soon Probably that is a result to content him.

His novels are three panels of a triptych. Together with his poetry, they constitute Houellebecq's analysis of the 'suicide', the 'decline' of the West, and of France in particular, as well as his intimations of a posthuman future. *Whatever* was published in France under the less laconic title *Extension du domaine de la lutte* ('extension of the struggle'). It opens with a sardonic epigraph from Romans: 'let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light'. Cut from there to a party where the narrator is disgusted by two women he has met who seem to represent 'the last dismaying dregs of the collapse of feminism'. He vomits discreetly and goes home. A middle-class Frenchman, he is an 'analyst-programmer in a computer software company' who writes animal stories, anti-fables for his own amusement. To the degree that anything engages him, he is a theorist of fiction: 'the pages that follow constitute a novel; I mean, a succession of anecdotes in which I am the hero'.

Houellebecq is joking—now as later—about how traditional forms of the novel are being rudely dismantled. Soon the hero of *Whatever* will declare that 'We're a long way from *Wuthering Heights* ... The novel form is not conceived for depicting indifference or nothingness; a flatter, more terse and dreary discourse would need to be invented'. But for the moment, *Whatever*: it gestures at a new narrative form-to-be. In *Atomised*, Houellebecq confronts more expansively the forms that might be adopted for an account of an impending apocalypse. He decides not to choose between, but abrasively to mingle, them. The novel is a fable; its moral that cloned, immortal creatures will supersede humankind. It is also a saga, harking back to conventional narratives that are interested in the lineages of families. But this is done with a desperate nostalgia, because, in the future that the novel imagines, these roots will cease to matter. *Atomised* is not a satire. For example, the depiction of the sex and alternative lifestyle club Lieu du Changement ('place of change') is deadpan. Essentially *Atomised* is an anatomy of Western society, laying open its deceptions, degradations and despairs.

In *Platform*, the fossilised elements of 19th-century European realist novels are lovingly and ostentatiously preserved (its epigraph is from Balzac). We learn where the main characters have come from, and the way they live now. Yet Houellebecq disdainfully breaks narrative rules. He shifts at whim from Michel's perspective to those of the other characters. At the same time his melancholy solicitude for all his principal characters controls the unravelling of his tale.

In the simpler, shorter *Whatever*, the narrator is a disconsolate and unillusioned analyst of himself: 'I have had many women, but for limited periods. Lacking looks as well as personal charm, subject to frequent bouts of depression, I don't in the least correspond to what women are usually looking for in a man'.

The novel ends with the main character's breakdown, as do two of its successors. The modern world cannot be survived by the male protagonists of Houellebecq's fiction, let alone by their lovers and associates. Emotionally disabled, the narrator of *Whatever* does not understand 'how people manage to go on living'. He finds himself in a clinic among others 'not in the least deranged; they were simply lacking in love'. These might sound like the poignantly plain last words of *Whatever*, but are not: Houellebecq's coda tests the possibilities of a healing, Romantic epiphany in the Forest of Mazan, over the hill from the source of the Ardèche river. Instead of solace, the narrator finds 'the heart of the abyss'. The 'sublime fusion' will not take place. Abandoning his character to a desolate but unresented fate, Houellebecq has bleakly opened the way for his next novel.

Les Particules élémentaires (elementary particles) more exactly indicates the pseudo- or semi-scientific underpinning of the novel than the translator's (Frank Wynne's) preferred title, *Atomised*. Yet Wynne has fun with his choice. Bruno, one of the half-brothers whose parallel lives are at the blighted heart of the book 'found he loathed what the sociologists and commentators called "the atomised society" '. That which Houellebecq depicts is not so much *fin-de-siècle*—as was too easily suggested by some critics—but engrossed with the end of human history. The book's dedication (ironic or not?) and its last words, are 'to mankind'.

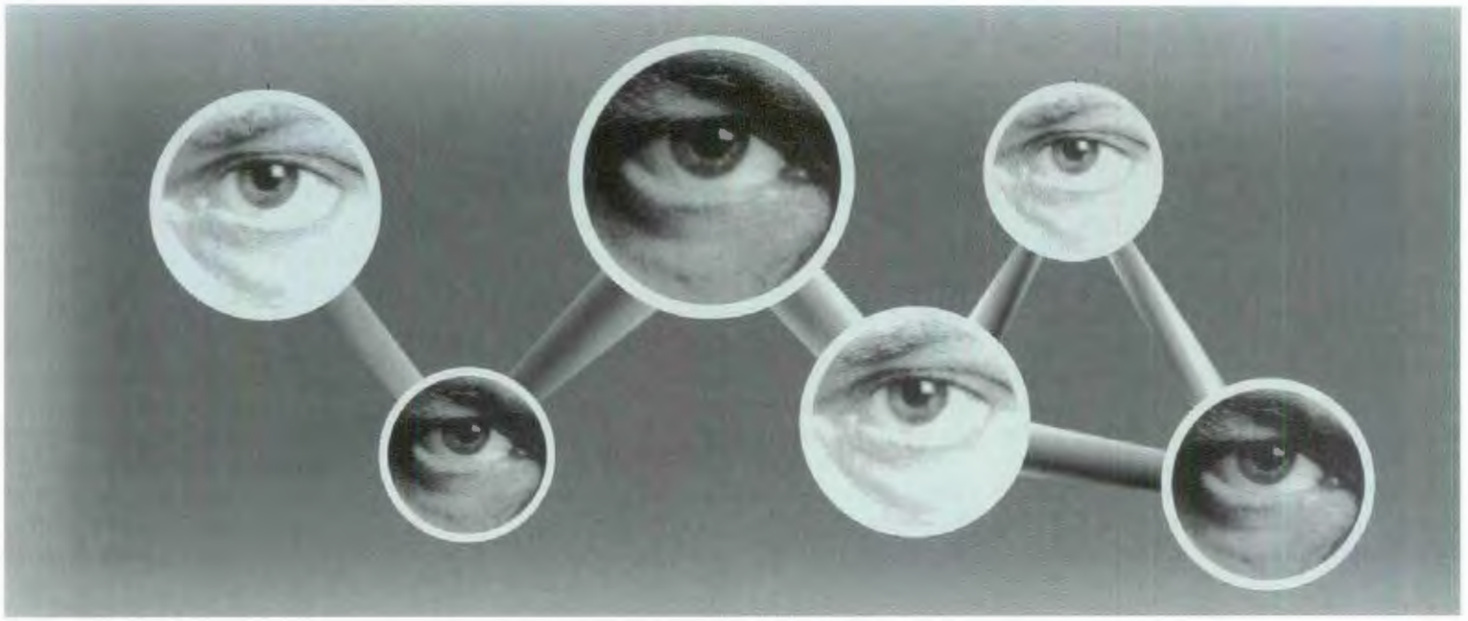
Atomised begins with a musing on 'metaphysical mutations', or paradigm shifts. After the rise of Christianity as the first of these, and then as the second its vanquishing by modern science, we have reached the third and most radical mutation, 'which opened up a new world order'. (There is an extended debate between the half-brothers concerning Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), and Huxley is an acquaintance of one of the novel's fanatical libertines.) From a perspective in the near future, a generation away, the author (seemingly Houellebecq, intervening in his own person) reassures us that 'We live today under a new world order'. The novel, however, is more occupied with the death of the old order. The advent of 'a new species which was asexual and immortal', 'this new intelligent species made by man "in his own likeness" ' that began on 27 March 2029, is the matter-of-fact detail of the book's last pages. The dire human comedy here and forever superseded is Houellebecq's obsession.

Thus he traverses a landscape of brutal boarding schools (where Bruno suffers especially), Californian communes, peep shows, sex clubs, thrill killings. It is not altogether a morally or emotionally arid series of experiences. The author reflectively, if mournfully, intervenes and at one point notes that 'Tenderness is a deeper instinct than seduction, which is why it is so hard to give up hope'.

Houellebecq's love and admiration for women is the unabashed core of his work. Michel's grief at his grandmother's death reduces him to a howling ball at the foot of his bed. These were the author's words a page earlier: 'Human beings who have no sense of having made any sacrifice; who cannot imagine any way of life than giving their lives for others—out of love and devotion ... such human beings are invariably women'.

At the same time Houellebecq is always mindful of a self-imposed duty to social documentation, to a calendar of radical social changes, particularly the moral wasteland created by mature capitalism. He cites the cult of the body beautiful and divorce by mutual consent. Conscientious chronicler of his age, he exhibits his credentials in order to write a jeremiad, prophesying its end.

Two unexpected love stories develop, one for each brother, each ending in the shocking death by suicide of the women. Houellebecq's men may be surprised that mutual love happens for them, but will not resist, much as they suspect the mordant outcomes of such attachments. The brothers' ends are desolate. Bruno declines



into the haven of a mental clinic, while Michel—his life's work completed ('As soon as the genome had been completely decoded ... humanity would have complete control of its evolution')—perhaps commits suicide in Ireland.

The fate of the next of Houellebecq's Michels, and of his lover Valérie in *Platform*, is no less terrible, although the 'asexual and immortal' species foretold in *Atomised* is nowhere glimpsed. Instead, the decline of the West, frantic and brutal, lives itself out in opposition to each of those terms. In the intense, vulnerable love story in *Platform*, a solution (ultimately unrealised) to the problem of a posthuman future is ventured. The Michel of *Platform* is closer in temperament to Bruno—a cultured man (public servant in the Ministry of Arts; Bruno was a Kafka-reading schoolteacher who wrote poetry and right-wing polemics in the manner of Céline) addicted to sex, yet readily prompted into tenderness. The opening scene after his father's death—murdered by the Arab brother of his lover as it turns out—is an eerie revision of Camus's *L'Etranger* (*The Outsider*, 1942). In that novel the French Algerian protagonist is improbably executed not so much for killing an Arab but for failing to show emotion at the death of his mother. The springs of such apathy is one of Houellebecq's key inquiries.

Platform is another anatomy of a society in collapse where, for instance, 'compared with speculative investment, investment in production brought little return'. The focus is on the individual as well:

> It is in our relations with other people that we gain a sense of ourselves; it's that, / pretty much, that makes relations with other people unbearable.

The hinge of the plot is strikingly less grand than the experiments in *Atomised*. Here the future is to do with tourism and with hedonism. Valérie is a highly paid travel entrepreneur. Michel sells her and her boss the notion of travel explicitly for sex. This leads them to the grand opening of a resort in Thailand where many are massacred by Islamist terrorists. Michel ends, like Bruno and the hero of *Atomised*, in catatonic retreat from the world, grieving for his lost love.

The anti-Islamic remarks that gave such offence, however histrionic, come in the main from an Egyptian whom Michel encounters, who laments that the great achievements of that civilisation were lost when it converted to the religion of 'the losers of the Sahara'. In a blunt juxtaposition, the novel cuts to Michel and Valérie in a foursome with a black couple (yes, he is a drummer). But there is neither racial nor colour prejudice here. Indeed, not long before, Michel has theorised airily that 'white men were repressed Negroes searching for some lost spiritual innocence', and further, that 'all humanity instinctively tends towards miscegenation'. The exemplary figure for him is a type of posthuman in whom the Michel of *Atomised* might have been interested: 'Michael Jackson: he's neither black nor white any more, neither young nor old and, in a sense, neither man nor woman'.

Michel's last words in *Platform* are 'I'll quickly be forgotten ...'. Is this self-pity from Houellebecq, or a challenge to contradict him? A few pages earlier Michel expresses, not hatred, but contempt for the West. He adds: 'I know only that every single one of us reeks of selfishness, masochism and death'. It is a conclusion to which his travails have led him, but the evidence of love briefly achieved, of lucidity in the face of horror, make one wonder whether the protean Houellebecq is not after all the most perverse and coruscating of French humanists in exile. ■

The reviewed books by Michel Houellebecq are: Whatever, *Serpents Tail, RRP $24.95 (originally published 1994, as* Extension du domaine de la lutte*);* Atomised, *Vintage, RRP $22.95 (originally published 1998 as* Les Particules élémentaires*);* Platform, *Heinemann, RRP $35 hardback (originally published 1999 as* Plateforme*);* Rester Vivant, *1991;* Le Sens du Combat, *1996;* Renaissance, *1999.*

Peter Pierce's most recent book was *Australia's Vietnam War* (Texas A & M University Press, 2002). **Catherine Pierce** is an articled clerk in a Melbourne Commercial Law Firm.

Mike Ticher

Cultural divide, family tie

The Speckled People, Hugo Hamilton. Fourth Estate, 2003. ISBN 0 00 7148706 2, RRP $29.95

I HAVE TO DECLARE an interest in this book. My father was brought up in 1930s Dublin, the eldest son of driven and emotionally distant German parents. His name—slightly altered from the original by my grandfather to sound less obviously German—reflected an uncertain status. My father never wanted to be German, but was certainly not Irish either.

His problems with identity, however, were nothing compared to those endured by Hugo Hamilton 25 years later—if the story of his childhood in *The Speckled People* is to be believed. (There is no reason not to believe it, but you just never know with autobiography these days.)

Hamilton's father is portrayed as a fanatical nationalist and propagator of the Irish language; his mother Irmgard is German, with an impeccable anti-Nazi background. She arrived in Ireland after the war, fleeing a personal horror as well as a national catastrophe.

Hugo grows up in the south Dublin district of Dun Laoghaire. His childhood is dominated by the extraordinary lengths to which his father Jack (or Sean as he insists) goes to enforce his idea of Irishness on his children, and the violence he uses to that end. Hugo's brother Franz has his nose broken for speaking English; the father burns the poppies given to the children by a neighbour on Armistice Day; if an English song comes on the radio it is instantly switched off. 'In our house it's dangerous to sing a song or say what's inside your head. You have to be careful or else my father will get up and switch you off like the radio.'

Hamilton's father changes his surname too. In his job and his personal life he refuses to deal with anyone who cannot or will not use the Irish version of Hamilton, the morphologically challenging O'hUrmoltaigh. The town of Mullingar remains without electricity for weeks because he sends back all their letters addressed to 'John Hamilton' at the Electricity Supply Board where he works. As part of his personal and uncompromising language war, he bombards the Dublin Corporation with letters insisting they change the names of the streets into Irish (in this, at least, he was successful).

But while English is not tolerated in the O'hUrmoltaigh household, German is welcomed. The father is a fluent speaker and enthusiast for German culture, as is his brother—the all-but-silent Jesuit priest, Onkel Ted. So Hugo and his steadily increasing band of siblings are doubly ostracised outside the home, where few others speak Gaelic and where, to the Dublin kids of the 1960s, 'German' is synonymous with 'Nazi'.

THIS IS A long way from the fruitful blending of cultures we have become used to celebrating in Australia. Rather, it is the forcible and unhappy joining of two traditions with the specific and perverse aim of demeaning a third: the English language and everything associated with England or Britain.

Not that Hamilton despises either the Irish or German sides of his upbringing (although inevitably he yearns for the forbidden fruits of English). There is the wonder of the family's German-style Christmases and magical holidays to the Connemara Gaeltacht. More importantly, his mother's quiet heroism acts as a counterpoint both to the conflation of Germany with the Nazis, and to the father's devastating furies. In a world divided between what she calls 'the fist people and the word people', she makes sure the latter tendency takes root in her children, despite the psychological chaos around her.

The facts of Hamilton's upbringing are fascinating and appalling. They're also frequently funny, though the comic scenes are almost invariably laced with tragedy or fear. He tells the story in remarkably bold prose, whose apparent simplicity masks an intricate structure. Telling the story from the point of view of the child risks self-indulgence, but this is the opposite: spare and even brutal sentences convincingly replicate a child's thought processes.

Ghastly histories dominate his parents' lives. 'My father talks about people dying on coffin ships going to America and my mother talks about people dying on trains going to Poland'. These are only a grim backdrop to their personal nightmares, which become clearer to the reader in the same way they do to a child—gradually, in a jumbled and often terrifying manner.

As with any childhood, we are left with a mass of unresolved contradictions and hanging threads. Most concern the tragic figure of the father, whose secrets gradually leak out of the papers and memorabilia of his wardrobe. He suppresses the treacherous memory of his own father, who not only could not speak Irish, but served in the British Navy. Hamilton's two grandfathers fought on opposite sides in the First World War, as did mine. Nor can he reconcile the uncomfortable positions that an infatuation with Germany in the 1930s invited, namely a lingering anti-Semitism.

It is an extraordinary achievement for Hamilton to portray this often monstrous man honestly, yet with empathy and even tenderness. His mad business ventures (such as importing hand-carved wooden crosses from Oberammergau) fail pathetically. As he grows older even he recognises that his devotion to restoring the Irish language is doomed. 'My father had lost the language war, and everyone knew it.'

Onkel Ted, who tries to soften the edges between his brother and Irmgard, gives him a book to translate from the German on 'training children without sticks'. The father is trying to curb his manically controlling nature. But it is all far too late, even before an awful and symbolic death strikes him down.

The Speckled People is an important book for Ireland, as well as a remarkable personal testimony and a vivid snapshot of 1950s and '60s Dublin. Irish nationalism, so relentlessly romanticised, has always had its vicious, narrow-minded and racist strains, and these are exhibited with no restraint by the father (he is an

admirer of the Portuguese dictator Salazar and thinks Cardinal Stepinac should have been made a saint).

The family was rescued from his bloody-minded fanaticism by a tolerant and courageous German. That could almost be a metaphor for the current debate on Irish identity, as it struggles with the first major influx of immigration in the country's modern history. As in Germany's dark past, there has been too much easy acceptance in Ireland that national identity is a natural and unchanging product of blood and soil.

'Maybe your country is only a place you make up in your mind,' Hamilton comes to realise. He had to learn that the hard way, and maybe Ireland will too. ■

Mike Ticher is a Sydney-based writer and editor of no fixed nationality.

Books: 3
Terry Lane

Hacking the parties

The Andren Report: an independent way in Australian politics, Peter Andren. Scribe Publications, 2003. ISBN 0 908011 92 X, RRP $30

YOU'LL NEVER START an argument in the pub by saying that politicians are space-wasting, self-serving, unprincipled scallywags. They generally rate lower on professional respect surveys than insurance salespeople and door-to-door evangelists.

By and large our cynicism goes unchallenged, but occasionally we get a shock. Ted Mack, Phil Cleary, Bob Brown, Brian Harradine or Peter Andren come along.

Peter Andren is the former television journalist turned member of the House of Representatives for Calare in the federal parliament. Calare is a 25,000 square kilometre New South Wales electorate taking in Bathurst, Orange, Lithgow and Cowra. It has traditionally been held by the party in government, so after several ALP years Calare was ready to fall to the coalition in 1996.

But Peter Andren came along to spoil the party. Not content to do what every other sensible citizen does—sit back and moan about the cupidity of our elected representatives—he reckoned the time had come to break the stranglehold of the parties on the system. He stood as an independent and, with less than 30 per cent of the primary vote, he won.

Peter Andren is an unusual politician. His electorate is not populated with inner city, left-leaning greenies. So what is he doing supporting gun control, opposing mandatory sentencing, supporting Aboriginal land rights and damning the government's border protection legislation? And then, would you believe, going on to increase his vote so that by the time of the *Tampa* election he carried the seat with an absolute majority of first preference votes and now has, at 70 per cent two-party preferred, one of the safest seats in the parliament.

Andren's success is an indictment of the moral turpitude of the Labor party that believed it could not win the 2001 election if it appeared soft on asylum seekers. The Coalition has no moral credits to lose on this issue and so it threw its dirtiest tricks against Andren, putting out flyers during the campaign claiming that, 'A vote for Andren is a vote for illegals'. And his National Party opponent said: 'We've got a situation where Australia is going to war but Peter Andren wants to let them in to shoot us.'

Who is this strange man who won't accept campaign donations larger than $200; who doesn't do preference deals; who rails against the perks and privileges that politicians routinely vote themselves, including an obscene superannuation scheme; who says he represents no-one but his constituents, but is not afraid to be out of step with them if his conscience dictates? *The Andren Report* is Peter Andren's personal and political memoir, and it gives one or two clues about the man.

There is no overblown rhetoric in *The Andren Report*. It's all very matter of fact, including the advice that he got from another fine politician, Ted Mack. Mack told him to get a distinctive vehicle and paint his name on the side in big letters.

Andren's account of polling day 2001 is profoundly moving. He begins the day in Cowra, the One Nation end of the electorate, thinking that his stand on *Tampa* and border protection has probably brought his short parliamentary career to an end. By nightfall, and with counting barely under way, he has already won with a thumping majority. The electorate doesn't just respond to nudges in the hip pocket and appeals to prejudice, as we thought.

Calare has enjoyed the full benefits of globalisation, economic rationalism and competition policy. Factories have closed and jobs have been exported to Asia. The banks have left town and the telephone system is unravelling. Orchardists have been squeezed out of business by the Coles/Safeway buying duopoly. There might not be much that an independent MHR can do for them, but the voters know that whatever he does will be a damned sight more than they can expect from a party hack.

Andren now faces the same moral dilemma as Ted Mack: how does he get out of this system without taking the spoils—the superannuation payout that will give him an indexed pension for the rest of his life? Mack solved the problem by retiring from parliament twice, once state and once federal, before being eligible for the pension. Andren doesn't care for that solution. ■

Terry Lane presents *The National Interest* on Radio National, Sunday at 12 noon, Monday at 4pm, and is a columnist for the *Sunday Age*.

Paul Tankard

Being about thinking

101 Experiments in the Philosophy of Everyday Life, Roger-Pol Droit, trans. Stephen Romer.
Faber, 2002. ISBN 0 571 21201 8, RRP $26

I WONDER HOW MANY people, intrigued by this book, have actually carried out any of the experiments. It misses the point to see them as 'thought experiments', as if they are interesting just to think about. They are real experiments and only achieve anything if one actually does them. But they are experiments *about* thought, in that they attempt to alter or modify the ways we think.

Most of the ways in which we think are unexamined and automatic. Roger-Pol Droit has written a series of short essays, suggesting exercises that might change our view of reality. It's amusing, imaginative, wryly sceptical. Droit has no cosmology; rather he concentrates on the minutiae of daily life. It reminds me of another book of essays by a Frenchman, Philippe Delerm's *The Small Pleasures of Life*.

But that book was about ordinary things, like having a glass of beer. This book recommends rather odd activities. Only profoundly unimaginative readers will not have done a number of these experiments already. For example, experiment no. 2, to 'empty a word of its meaning'—I can remember repeating, with my sister, the word *door*, and being surprised at how arbitrary it started to sound, and how quickly. It's the surprise that illustrates how accustomed we are to not examining everyday things, such as words.

Or take experiment no. 5: to look up at the night sky and imagine that you're looking down on the stars. Haven't most of us done that, or something like it? I lie in my backyard and look up at the sky through the branches of trees, and without much effort find myself looking not up but out, aware of gravity holding me in place as if I were clinging to a light on the ceiling, looking down into an enormous room.

It's possible, perhaps instructive, to see the world differently; this is the point of many of the experiments. But it is also possible to see the world wrongly. A former teaching colleague of mine claimed that one of his Year 10 students knew the world was round, but thought that we lived on the inside. A harmless misapprehension? Or something only a step away from loony conspiracy theories?

Why are the words 'the philosophy of' in the book's title? 'Experiments in Everyday Life' would do as well. Droit is identified on the jacket as a philosopher, but I doubt whether this material is what he teaches and writes professionally. Philosophy has always covered a multitude of discourses. Years ago I heard a TV interviewer describe Shirley MacLaine as 'an actress *and* a philosopher'. I was studying Berkeley and Hume at the time and found that a bit rich. Philosophy is now a highly-specialised academic activity, but the earliest philosophers taught the love of wisdom by asking strange questions and making people think unexpected things. Droit belongs to this tradition, but even taking a very liberal view, Shirley MacLaine probably does not.

BUT I WONDER how these experiments differ from some of the amusements of university undergraduates (at least, Arts students)? When I lived in the big house on Dandenong Road, Armadale and we dragged the couch and the stereo into the front garden; when we executed a rancid limburger cheese on the tram track; when we spent all morning at home barking instead of talking—was this what we were doing? Conducting experiments in the philosophy of everyday life?

One difference is that most of Droit's experiments are solitary. For many of them it is vital that no-one else be within hearing to embarrass the experimenter. If you're pretending to be an animal (no. 34) or saying a word over and over (no. 2), embarrassment is likely to get in the way. But in no. 26 (watch a woman at her window), no. 28 (look at people from a moving car), no. 67 (watch someone sleeping), or no. 72 (smile at a stranger), other people are treated as objects, as if they are unreal or irrelevant. Doubting the existence of everything except the self is a venerable starting point for French philosophical reflection. But these experiments do not move us far beyond solipsism.

Take no. 78 (tell a stranger she is beautiful); how very Gallic. Again, who hasn't though of doing this? Whether it's an experiment, or a chat-up line a few steps removed, doesn't matter. Droit tries to persuade us to conduct this experiment by promising, 'You will never see her again'. No. 11 invites us to dial phone numbers at random. Droit says the purpose, when we connect, is 'experiencing the *density* of the human world'. But if we become disoriented, he advises, 'just hang up'. In other words, it's better if you don't actually make meaningful connections with other people. Ditch the experiment if the world bites back.

I used to know a guy who did things like no. 61 (rant for 10 minutes), and no. 27 (invent lives for yourself) and even no. 25 (play the fool for 30–40 years). He thought he was making a point, teaching people salutary lessons. We stopped being friends when he started conducting other experiments—not in this book—such as 'make false denunciations of your friends at their workplaces'.

But these are experiments, not a way of life, and that was my friend's mistake. Droit's little book is, he says at the start, an entertainment. Perhaps I'm taking it too seriously, when its lesson seems to be that it's a mistake to take anything seriously. To the postmodern mind, the world is no longer framed by meaningful narratives or belief systems. The best we can do is to interrogate and disrupt the trivia and conventions that make up most of our lives, and see what we might discover. Droit is not sure that there is anything much to be discovered, except that 'the world is liable to ... an absence of certainty'. We might achieve the reassurance that we exist, as in no. 9 (hurt yourself briefly). ■

Paul Tankard is part of the Australian academic diaspora, lecturing in English at the University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand.

Joshua Puls

The way of Rome

The Sant'Egidio community challenges ideologues on all sides of politics

Claudio Maria Betti does not want to belong to anybody, he says. Not to the Left, not to the Right. It shows.

Betti was in Australia in February, as the United States and Australia began to marshal forces in the Gulf. Iraq's deputy prime minister, Tariq Aziz, had been in Rome to see the Pope. The Pope's envoys had carried pleas for peace to the East and to the West: Etchegaray to Baghdad and Laghi to Washington.

With a tall, imposing figure and a deep smoker's voice, Claudio Betti's presence, energy and good humour belies the gravity of his mission. Since 1998 Betti has been the Director for Special Operations for Rome's Sant'Egidio Community and is personal assistant to the founder and president, Professor Andrea Riccardi. Betti's CV reads as a chronicle of global peacekeeping for the last 20 years: Lebanon, Mozambique, Iraq, Algeria, Guatemala, Burundi, Kosovo and Serbia.

Riccardi began the Community of Sant'Egidio in Rome in 1968, in the renewing spirit of the Second Vatican Council, and Betti joined shortly afterwards. At that time, brokering international peace deals was probably the farthest thing from Riccardi's vision or Betti's plans. Riccardi and his small group of high school students began with visits to the slums on the outskirts of Rome. The next step was an afternoon school for children. They founded a community which now, 35 years later, has 40,000 members in more than 60 countries. The Church of Sant'Egidio in Rome's Trastevere district is still the administrative and spiritual home of the movement.

Why has Sant'Egidio thriven when so many other peace movements have failed? It is the poor, Betti says, that have saved them 'from becoming one of those ideological entities, which sooner or later lose their reason for existing'. One quickly discerns in Betti a typically Italian suspicion of ideologues.

When Betti joined the community, the first thing he was asked to do was to help a child with his homework. Twenty years later he was brokering peace in Mozambique: 'in a very Roman way—by flattering, by shouting.' The people of Sant'Egidio persuaded the Mozambique government to engage in talks with rebels. They then persuaded the rebels to talk to the government. Betti and his colleagues intended simply to bring the factions to the table. Someone else would take over the mediation. No-one did, and Sant'Egidio was 'stuck with a process'. After 27 months of negotiations, the parties established a peace that is still holding after ten years.

Betti's answer to Saddam Hussein is a pragmatic one. Bring soldiers to the region, and then invite the Iraqis to the table. 'Say—we are ready to fight, but we don't like war.' According to Betti, Saddam Hussein had to be given a reasonable way to leave. He was cornered, with no way out. 'You know that wherever you go you're going to be hit. But in a situation of dialogue, everything is possible.' Is brinkmanship always the answer? 'Not in general, but in this case especially.' Troops had to be deployed, he believes, otherwise the American people would not be satisfied. 'Rhetoric has a life of its own,' he says, referring to a 'mentality of revenge'. 'They have to prove to the world that they're the strongest. I think the strong man is the one who sits at the table. I'm not against the military as such, as long as they don't shoot.'

Betti has little confidence in the United Nations, who are 'prisoners of their own structures, of their own ideologies'. The UN structure, he believes, is 'an immense juggernaut that feeds itself'. Opposed to the power of veto in the Security Council, he points out that it leaves no possibility of sanctions against the powerful. 'The UN can only sanction the poor and the weak.' According to Betti, 'sanctions are never an answer', serving only to strengthen the government in power. 'They are totally useless. They only touch the poor. Very cruel.' Betti repeats several times that war is the mother of all poverty. He adds that poverty is also the mother of a lot of wars.

When the Pope received the Sant'Egidio Community leaders to mark their 35th anniversary, he exhorted them not to 'be hindered by acts of terrorism or by the threats that are gathering on the horizon. We must not be resigned as if war were inevitable'. Short of a miracle, war was indeed inevitable. Betti's only hope now was that, even though it might be too late for Iraq, 'we may be able to lay the foundation for a different understanding of war in the future'.

Betti looks to a day when war will be abolished as a means to solve international conflict. For those who would dismiss this as fanciful, he invokes the Italian activist priest Luigi Sturzo. Sturzo reminded his detractors that it was once said that slavery would never be abolished. Betti, like Sturzo, believes passionately that peace and justice are possible. But he is not encouraged by the signs. 'During the Cold War, everybody was talking about nuclear disarmament. Today, nobody talks about it any more. It almost assumes that it might happen. So I'm really scared.'

John Paul II has spoken and written a lot about peace and justice, most recently in relation to Iraq. But those who preach the message of justice do not always cite Rome as their inspiration, even as their ally. The Sant'Egidio Community, however, places itself squarely in the heart of the Church. This is part of its paradox: a spirit of renewal deeply immersed in the tradition. ■

Joshua Puls practises as a lawyer and psychologist, and is Chaplain of Newman College, Melbourne.

on disc

The John Butler Trio Living 2001–2002 2-CD set, Jarrah Records, JBT 004, RRP $29.95

This is John Butler's fourth release, on his own Jarrah label, and is a compilation of live tracks that make you envy those audiences. Listening to Butler's fiery playing on a range of guitar types and styles, you are forced to reflect on the extraordinary potential of three instruments: guitar, bass and drums. Three basic instruments can sound, in these master hands, like smoky-simple blues that hark straight back to Robert Johnson and the Delta. Or again, complex layered impromptus that recall Cream at its most oceanic, most monumentally symphonic. Then there is more contemporary legato electric wailing that floats over deep acoustic bass punctuated by bongo staccato. Butler's voice is baritone, but clean and flexible with a Hendrix darkness. His vocal obbligati have a lyricism that rivals the counter-tenor keening of the late Jeff Buckley. The Trio are very Australian, with lyrics that are strongly political, with a bolshie load of pro-conservation, refugee, reconciliation baggage that never weighs the music down. If you were wondering who was going to fill the gaping hole left in Australian music by Midnight Oil's retirement, here is one answer.

—Juliette Hughes

Stephanie McCallum, The Liszt Album. ABC Classics ABC 472 763-2, RRP $29.95

McCallum is a pianist of formidable technique and musicality. Yet Liszt's fireworks can seem strangely thin at times, and that is puzzling. Is it that the melodious nature of his improvisations is too sweet for a 21st-century ear? Or are we so jaded that we can't cope with a bit of sheer 19th century? Horowitz and Gould have trodden the same measure without making one uneasy, but perhaps it is almost impossible for a young player to do 'On Wings of Song' today without invoking the memory of it muzaked in lifts and supermarkets. McCallum—whose career overseas was notable before she returned to join the permanent teaching staff at Sydney Conservatorium—does negotiate Liszt's rapids with great fluency, making it all sound so easy. Sometimes it comes with layered surprises: McCallum's reading of Liszt's reading of Schubert's 'Auf dem Wasser zu singen' is an example of how far one can travel. The CD is good value: over 78 minutes of terrific playing. This is absolutely a CD to play when you're having the in-laws to dinner. It goes with Double Bay dining rooms stocked with Riedel goblets and serious large white plates. Put it on and have a dry sherry.

—Juliette Hughes

Australia's Religious Communities: A Multimedia Exploration (on CD-ROM for IBM or MAC). Editor, Philip J. Hughes; Research Assistant, Sharon Bond; published by the Christian Research Association (Australia). ISBN 1 875223 20 7, RRP $110

This CD-ROM is a wonderful reference tool on Australia's religious communities for those engaged in tertiary, secondary or primary education. It will also interest a general audience, with a sensitivity to the diversity of communities under discussion, as well as to the different expectations of those who use it. For those hesitant about technology, be assured: this multimedia tool is user-friendly.

The statistical research on around 30 major religions, and approximately 100 religious groups in Australia, is based on 1996 census returns. However it is possible, using the professional version of the program, to register with the Christian Research Association and receive two year's free access to the database.

The section 'What is Religion?' opens with substantive definitions and descriptions, followed by the history of religion and a time chart from 40,000 BCE to the present. There is an interactive history and an extensive examination of Australian religious identity, practices, beliefs and organisations of outreach and welfare.

There are some intriguing emphases: for example, a contrast between the strongly clerical imagery in the section on Anglicanism, and the Catholic section, which has a bishop engaged in foot-washing. The expected historical and doctrinal content and statistics about changes taking place in the Australian Catholic Church are noted, but so is the 'explosion in the number of people taking on roles in ministry', which has been 'paralleled by increasing numbers undertaking studies in theology, religious education and pastoral ministry, either at tertiary institutions or at adult education centres'. This observation is from *Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus: Report on the participation of women in the Catholic Church in Australia* (Harper Collins), which indicates that a primary source of energy in the Catholic Church is women's increasing interest in further study and active ministry.

Mainstream religions such as Judaism, Buddhism and Hinduism in Australia can be studied distinct from their global origins, and the exploration of their Australian identity and development is helpful to the researcher. Some unexpected headings—neo-paganism, for example—lead to enlightening details about neo-paganism's history, complexity and expansion in recent years.

The section 'Other' contains a diverse group of religions and cults, from the 3HO Foundation, Acharya's Yoga & Meditation Centre, and Ananda Marga to Worldwide Church of God and Zoroastrianism.

Islam is represented as 'the world's fastest-growing religion', challenging the prevailing anglocentric Australian mindset. *Australia's Religious Communities* deals primarily with the Australian experience of Islam, so perhaps it is understandable that an irenic rather than divisive approach characterises the entry.

The Aboriginal section offers a wealth of content—text and art—to illustrate the origins of Indigenous people in Australia, their beliefs and practices, their stories and rituals. There are biographies of key religious leaders, women and men. Links between this section and sections on churches show the importance of theological education and community service in Australian society.

This is a fine venture—a boon for schools, libraries and indeed for anyone with an interest in religion in Australia.

—Maryanne Confoy

Nothing is all

All or Nothing, dir. Mike Leigh. From the opening shot down a slippery nursing home corridor where a flat-footed girl mops with dark dedication, to the radiant closing sequence at her fat brother's bedside, this is consummate film-making. Every movement, every image, every flicker of human experience counts.

All or Nothing has the raw humanity of Leigh's 1996 Palme D'Or winner, *Secrets and Lies;* its characters might live on a squalid 21st-century English housing estate but Leigh invests them with the depth and vulnerability that distinguished the 19th-century characters in *Topsy-Turvy*, his cinema biography of Gilbert and Sullivan. He uses his extraordinary ensemble of actors rather as Ingmar Bergman did, gratifying audience expectation (yes, it's Timothy Spall again, but even better than last time. How can a hangdog slouch with bad teeth be so mesmerising?). But then Leigh goes further, extracts more.

Phil (Spall) is a taxi driver. Life passes through his mini-cab in a Chaucerian shuffle (remember the photo sessions in *Secrets and Lies*?—this is even better). His pretty, sour wife Penny (Lesley Manville) has lines on her face that signify forbearance turned to contempt. Their mop-wielding daughter Rachel (an heroic performance from Alison Garland) is stolid and withdrawn. Their son Rory (James Corden, also splendid) is overweight, hyperaggressive and stuck in a dead end of expletives.

Phil and Penny's friends and their kids are equally stymied in life—sporadically employed, alcoholic, hopeless, violent, perverse, defensive (the children especially). But Leigh's great gift is his ability to peel through layers of predictability to the core of ordinary people (he restores integrity to that much abused adjective 'ordinary'). Never sentimental, never easy in his explorations, he is chronically alert to signs of life and love—a fine addiction for a film-maker—and he has the technical wits and gifts to render them on screen. *All or Nothing* is true to its title. It's risky, dark, triumphant, and even better, I'd hazard, than *Secrets and Lies*. Don't miss it.

—Morag Fraser

Punching the rough

Punch Drunk Love, dir. P.T. Anderson. Adam Sandler is best known as a comedian. (Well, I'm sure that's what he puts on his tax return, anyway.) In a string of box office hits, he has perfected an unvarying comic persona: the nerd as hero. The classic Sandler character is an infantile man, struggling with suppressed rage, but who is nevertheless sweet natured.

Punch Drunk Love finds Sandler trying to adapt this stock-in-trade act to create a performance with real emotional depth. In this sense, P.T. Anderson's film is really just another 'Adam Sandler vehicle'—despite the pedigree of its director. Anderson is the acclaimed director of the sprawling, Altmanesque hits *Boogie Nights* and *Magnolia*, but in this relatively short and beautifully made film he has chosen to concentrate almost totally on one character: Sandler's Barry Egan.

Barry has issues. His seven sisters have taunted him all his life, he is crushed by loneliness, and at moments of emotional extremis he will lash out violently. He sells bathroom equipment for a living, occasionally uses a phone sex line, and is busily buying thousands of Healthy Choice Puddings as a means of acquiring frequent flyer points.

Despite these eccentricities, Barry manages to attract the attention of Lena Leonard (Emily Watson), a beautiful and sophisticated woman. It's probably the film's greatest flaw that we never really get to understand Lena. If she's attracted to Barry she must have a story of her own.

As in all his pictures, Anderson's framing of shots, use of music and storytelling ability are idiosyncratic and breathtakingly effective. But whether the film works for you or not will probably depend on your response to just one line. When the operator of the phone sex line, Dean Trumbell (played magnificently by Philip Seymour Hoffman), attempts to blackmail Barry, our hero sets out to confront him. Standing face to face with his potential nemesis, Barry tells him he now has the strength of ten men because he is in love.

If by this stage of the film, such an apparently cheesy line resonates for you, then Anderson and Sandler have made a film that works. If it merely sounds like a cheesy line being said by a comic actor way out of his depth, then *Punch Drunk Love* will have hit the canvas. For me, the film just manages to win on points.

—Brett Evans

Bean meets Bond

Johnny English, dir. Peter Howitt. The Johnny English character is well known to British TV viewers because of a series of commercials done by Rowan Atkinson (above) for a bank. Their theme is Mr Bean meets James Bond: an English version of *Naked Gun*. Some bright spark decided to make them into a movie and here it is. The plot is a veritable lace curtain of holes, but works because everyone seems

to be having a rather good time. John Malkovich does a thorough job of the villain, Pascal Sauvage, billionaire private-prison proprietor with an execrable French accent and designs on the British throne. Sauvage's fiendish masterplan to make Britain into (gasp!) a convict colony for the rest of the world carries irony that will not go unnoticed here of all places. Natalie Imbruglia is quite good as Lorna Campbell, a nubile karate-kicking Bond heroine. But the focus is ever on Atkinson: even as the camera lingers on Imbruglia's lovely face, we're hypnotised by the rubber-faced vulnerabilities of her acting partner, scene-stealer extraordinaire. And that, strangely, is sufficient. You can have an amusing and harmless evening because you can indulge in a bit of Francophobia, the only PC prejudice. You can laugh at British royalty and pomp—in fact this film has barrels full of political fish to shoot. Atkinson's magnetic bumbling keeps you in your seat through this most feather-light of plots. And some of the send-ups are really funny, in a *Naked Gun, Fast Forward* sort of way. To describe them would deprive you of the small surprises and wincing embarrassments that are so essential to daft comedy, so I won't. If your chosen films are all dark, serious and complexly intelligent, don't waste your money. But if you want a painless laugh or two, take the kids. **—Juliette Hughes**

Amnesia man

The Man Without A Past, dir. Aki Kaurismaki. There are few film-makers who can handle small stories with the grace of Aki Kaurismaki. His ability to find meaning in the merest breath of life is his great and rarely matched talent. *The Man Without a Past* is a fable about strange, unanchored people, negotiating the rickety but promising world around them.

An unnamed man (Markku Peltola, above right with Kati Outinen) sits on a train heading for Helsinki—he smokes, he sits, he smokes. Like the smoke gently blowing around the carriage we drift into Kaurismaki's tale, without words, without overbearing direction. Nothing is laid out for inspection: rather, we are nudged into the story.

Once in Helsinki, the unnamed man is badly beaten and left lying in a park. The muggers rifle through his bag. They find a welding mask. Leaving the man for dead, they put the mask over his face and lay his suitcase across his chest. Like a man fallen from space, the hero lies dying. But miraculously, the unnamed man rises from death and finds himself, historyless, among a community of fringe dwellers, living in shipping containers rented to them by a gruff night watchman.

Amnesia is not a new device in the annals of cinema history. But Kaurismaki's idiosyncratic style squeezes something richer and more exacting out of the idea than has been seen in a long time. It is not just a metaphor for a new beginning—rather it enables his characters to trace the simplicity of their deepest, unspoken desires. The unnamed man does not stumble upon euphoric revelation, rather he discovers a sublime melancholy. At one point he says simply, 'I've had misfortune', and we believe him.

This film is not neat; it moves around unexpectedly and with a mad disregard for any kind of Hollywood slick. But if an unnamed man falling in love with a withdrawn Salvation Army Officer—played with deadpan perfection by Kati Outinen—can be communicated by his holding her hand on a sofa in a shipping container, I say throw slick out the window. **—Siobhan Jackson**

Eureka Street has 10 in-season double passes to give away to *The Magdalene Sisters*, a new British film directed by Peter Mullan.

The Magdalene Sisters has been described as a semi-fictionalised account of what life was like for many young women sent to the Magdalene Laundries in Ireland. The Magdalene Laundries were run by an order of Catholic nuns, and took in 'fallen women' who were thought to have brought shame upon themselves and their families.

The film follows the compelling story of four women who live in a Magdalene laundry in Dublin, and is a powerful drama about their survival and victory against an oppressive, outdated system that treated women with little dignity.

The film has been acclaimed internationally, and won the Best Film Prize at the Venice Film Festival in 2002.

To enter the draw for a double pass to *The Magdalene Sisters* please forward an envelope with your name and address on the back to: *Eureka Street* May 2003 Film Offer, PO Box 553, Richmond VIC 3121.

watching brief 

Cooking up a storm

I WAS UNDULATING around the kitchen, getting all deep and intense and sensuous about a piece of lemon meringue pie left over from last night's birthday party, when my sister asked me if I needed to visit the chiropractor again.

'No, I'm fine,' I said, puzzled.

'Well, you're walking with a limp.'

'No I'm not.' I advanced, waving a mug of tea. 'Look. No limp.'

'I know what I saw. Were you being Nigella again?'

'Oh shut up.'

Lots of women are Nigellaing around their kitchens as I write; she has a lot to answer for. It gets confusing for the fellas, who are hard pressed to remember any of the food she cooks because all they notice is her ample bosom poking over the pots. When their womenfolk start wearing their hair over one eye and sloshing heavy cream onto everything, the men tend to get nervy and start at strange noises, fearing the bedroom performance message underlying all those oysters. Nigella says she's about gastro porn, but to men that simply means a meat pie and *Penthouse*. Food means more than nourishment now: it's one of the new religions, complete with sects and dogmas, Epicureanism become orthodox. Jamie Oliver is all about accessibility, and lately has become quite the social activist, campaigning for cheaper organic food and starting a non-profit restaurant in order to create employment opportunities for deprived teenagers. He could be a Uniting Church type; Nigella would be High Anglican, all bells and smells, unless she decided to go all Maharishi. Keith Floyd was more your whiskey priest type, while Graeme Kerr, the Galloping Gourmet who still turns up on cable, really did get religion, and changed all his recipes to godly ones that didn't give too much pleasure but undoubtedly kept the bowels of compassion open.

At the moment there's a rather boring one, *The Best* (the three cooks are rather like joyous rosy-cheeked young evangelists), on ABC at 8pm on Wednesdays where once Jamie Oliver and Nigella gloried and drank deep. Three clean-cut youngsters compete for points awarded by a group of food fogies who have developed the kind of bossiness that so affects focus groups. Becoming a judge is such a test of character: assume authority and feel your attitudes hardening. Anyway, the dialogue is all rather stilted and the competition is kinda phony, because they're all professional cooks anyway. There are so many TV cooks out there that catering colleges will soon need to offer acting classes and publishing courses.

While it's quite easy to entertain an idle minute with such musings, it's not always so easy to see the programs that inspire them. Nigella has moved from the ABC to endless recycling on cable, but there are others. The very best of all TV cooking programs, the Rolls Royce to Delia Smith's Volvo, is the Lifestyle Channel's *The Innchef*. It's just finished for a while but was fantastic while it lasted. New York born, but now based in Prince Edward Island (yes women, Anne of Green Gables land!), Michael Smith makes extraordinary food from scratch, using haute cuisine techniques and making them look easy, or at least possible. If he has a fault, it's that the food is all very uncompromising, very luxurious and he tends to stack it all in towers. But if you did one of his potato-wrapped monkfish fillets with herbed oil on a leek tart for a dinner party, you'd be a legend. Of course you could be history too, because it does help to be actually familiar with a kitchen that consists of more than a microwave and a jaffle iron.

ITS VERY QUALITY means that we're unlikely to see *The Innchef* in prime time on network telly here. Prime time is full of *The Bill*, *The Best*, *The Bachelor* and, God help us all, *Big Brother* is on its dreadful way again. In the meantime, you can watch *Buffy* and *Angel* on Seven on Tuesdays and Wednesdays—that is, if you haven't a job to go to in the morning, because they're buried at around the same time Nine used to inter *Six Feet Under*. We should be grateful Seven has kept them at all, I suppose, since they got rid of the very promising *Chat Room* after only three weeks. But then Seven has a problem with valuing its treasures: it let *Neighbours* go to Ten and Nicole Chvastek go to the ABC.

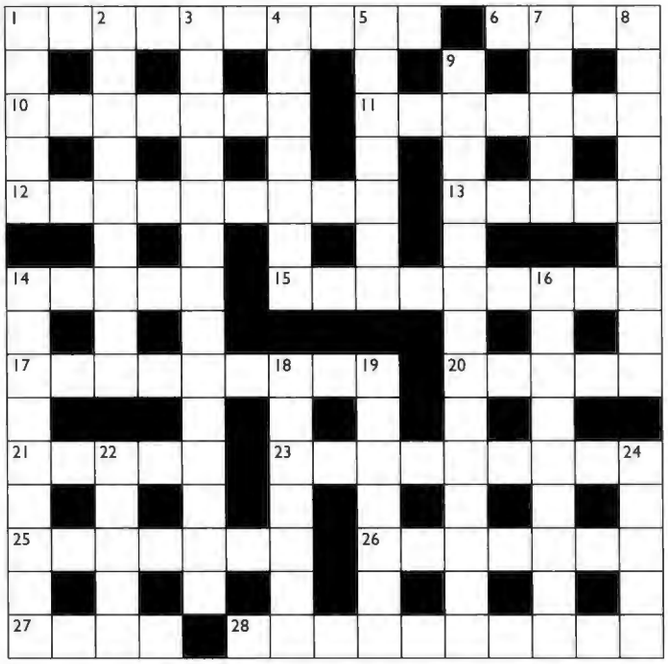
In the end the programmers aren't there to entertain us: it's their job to make us want stuff. They have to deliver us to their advertisers, who in turn try to reinvent their products to get into our processes, to find out where we really live so they can get all our money with our consent. One of their clients, Magnum ice cream, having dangled the seven deadly sins at us, has obviously discovered that its main customers are people who remember the '60s and want a lot of chocolate with their memories: not young, not male, but needing some sort of three-dollar fix to deal with a world that contains Rikki Lake and the Shopping Channel, *Burke's Backyard* and MTV, *Compass* and *South Park*. And Al-Jazeera and CNN. ■

Juliette Hughes is a freelance writer.

puzzled

Devised by
Joan Nowotny IBVM

Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 113, May 2003



ACROSS

1. Possibly its new side will play a 6-across there. (4,6)
6. In part, state statistics for the experiment. (4)
10. Figures that could make one lose sensation? (7)
11. By means of smoke, message was purportedly sent. (7)
12. He has, perhaps, many chats on board. (9)
13. God bless the Army man, affectionately so called, on discharge. (5)
14. Spicy dish for the 'Little Sparrow'; she's about fifty. (5)
15. Determine beforehand that when in awful pain, order medicine. (9)
17. Stubbornly holding on to promissory notes? 'E can't! (9)
20. Pilot has leaflet about risky business transaction. (5)
21. Severely criticise cook. (5)
23. During drought, probably, shoddy straw diet of the poorest quality. (9)
25. Little devil on the wander to get better. (7)
26. Soldier returns with duke to base. (7)
27. American jerk! (4)
28. On the psychiatrist's couch, chose a slur, perhaps, to describe the experience. (10)

DOWN

1. A member of the 1-across team in the draught. (5)
2. Half a canal brought to a stop! (9)
3. Establishment of one's credentials—with a card, perhaps. (14)
4. Handy kitchen item found in dim shop. (7)
5. Wipe former partner with damp cloth, we hear! (7)
7. Commensurate amount—fifty-fifty. (5)
8. Proverbially the better, if one goes quickly! (3,6)
9. Angry allusion that could be of help to a student. (5,9)
14. Authorship in which some issue could be produced. (9)
16. In a democratic club, for instance, the right to vote is held by no matter which person belonging. (3,6)
18. Ceaselessly active about the turn. (2,3,2)
19. Noticed Millicent, briefly, at the timber depot. (7)
22. Popular without you, reportedly, quivering like the tree. (5)
24. At 19-down, projecting parts of implements could be found with bite. (5)

Solution to Crossword no. 112, April 2003

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

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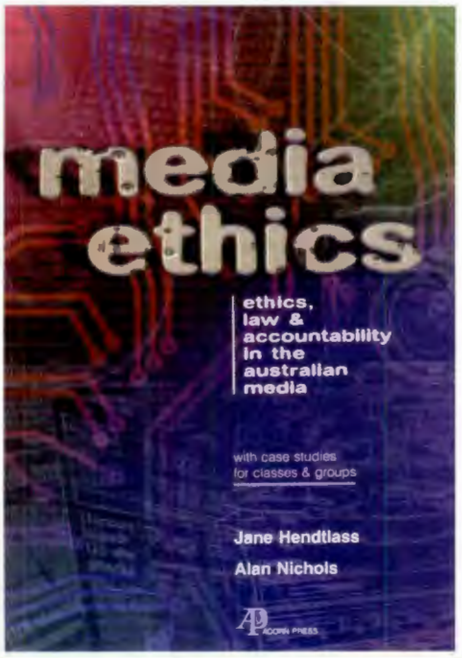

Media ethics

ethics, law & accountability in the Australian media

By Jane Hendtlass and Alan Nichols

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