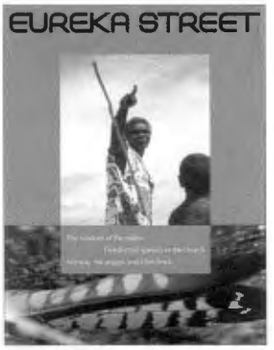
EUREKA STREET

A MAGAZINE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS,
THE ARTS AND THEOLOGY
Vol 14 no 9 November 2004 $7.50 (inc. GST)

The wisdom of the elders

Freedom of speech in the church

Norway, Nicaragua and Chechnya



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VOLUME 14 NUMBER 9 NOVEMBER 2004

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Patrons *Eureka Street* gratefully acknowledges the support of
C. and A. Carter; the trustees of the estate of Miss M. Condon; W.P. & M.W. Gurry

Eureka Street magazine, ISSN 1036–1758, Australia Post Print Post approved pp349181/00314, is published ten times a year by Eureka Street Magazine Pty Ltd,
300 Victoria Street, Richmond VIC 3121
PO Box 553, Richmond VIC 3121
Tel: 03 9427 7311 Fax: 03 9428 4450
email: eureka@jespub.jesuit.org.au
http://www.eurekastreet.com.au/
Responsibility for editorial content is accepted by Andrew Hamilton SJ,
300 Victoria Street, Richmond
Printed by Doran Printing
46 Industrial Drive, Braeside VIC 3195.

This month
Cover: Images by Peter McConchie
Cover design: Maggie Power
Cartoons: Dean Moore p11, p37

Marcelle Mogg

Rights and responsibilities

SOME MATTERS DID escape wider attention during the election campaign. Australia's agreement with Papua New Guinea over the use of Manus Island as an off-shore detention and processing centre for asylum seekers, expired at the end of October.

In September, ABC radio's AM program reported on the changing attitudes of those in PNG to playing host to Australia's unwanted asylum seekers. The facility at Lombrun Naval Base, has laid dormant since May this year, when its sole remaining resident, Aladdin Sisalem was finally granted asylum in Australia.

Speaking to AM, Manus Island Provincial Administrator Wep Kinawe suggested that while local residents had initially opposed the centre, the 7 million kina extended to the people of Manus Island, via Australia's AusAid program (principally to refurbish schools), has gone a long way toward changing their minds.

Foreign Minister Alexander Downer denied that any approach had been made to PNG to negotiate an extension of the contract. The alternative processing centre, under construction on Christmas Island, is not yet complete.

Irrespective of the government's success in negotiating with PNG, the troubling aspect is the government's continued insistence on utilising off-shore, mandatory and indefinite detention as a strategy in dealing with asylum seekers. Such policies contravene the rights of asylum seekers under the UN Convention on Refugees and are particularly punitive in the case of children.

Moreover, the ruling of the High Court on the 7th October supporting the government's right under the *Migration Act* to indefinitely detain children means that it is even more urgent that this law is repealed. The moral imperative is clear. In handing down the Court's decision, Justice Murray Gleeson said that while he was bound to make his judgment under the law, his personal sympathies lay with the appellant.

Speaking in response to the decision of the High Court, Immigration Minister Amanda Vanstone said, 'Our policies have worked, and because of that we don't have kids being put on shockingly unsafe boats, sailing across perilous seas because their parents have paid a people smuggler, and we've put a stop to that'. The cost of such policies is that children, and adults, continue to languish for years in refugee camps in Asia and across the globe.

Whilst Australians readily embrace free trade agreements and happily enter into partnerships with multinational companies, we are slow to acknowledge that we are part of a global human community. We are well practiced at exercising our rights as global citizens, less expert at practicing our responsibilities.

—Marcelle Mogg

Drawing a line

I was puzzled by the statement of the new Monash biography (*Eureka Street*, October 2004) that the corps commanded by Monash in 1918 drove the German Army 'beyond the Maginot line'. Construction of this French border fortification did not begin until 1929.

Perhaps the intended reference was to the Hindenburg line, the German defensive position upon retreat from the Western Front?

Stephen Brown
Forrest, ACT

Stephen you are quite correct. The reviewer and editor apologise for the error. —Ed.

Backdraft

I enjoyed Peter Hamilton's article (*Eureka Street*, October 2004) on elections, but can I draw attention to two factual errors?

First, Arthur Calwell was the member for Melbourne, not Melbourne Ports.

Second, Hamilton refers to the draft in the US. It is my understanding that the US draft was abolished by Nixon and that a recent attempt to reintroduce it failed spectacularly in the US Congress. It is unclear to me what Hamilton means when referring to the possible drafting of his son.

Paul Rodan
Melbourne, VIC

You're right. Arthur Calwell was Member for Melbourne. Apologies for the error.

The draft has been a major issue submerged in the US election campaign. In the second debate, President Bush stated that he has no intention of reintroducing it.

In a discussion at my son's New York high school last week, parents of graduating seniors expressed their fear that President Bush will not keep his word. They said that they are making plans to send their boys out of the country to avoid any draft.

These parents are rightly concerned because the US armed forces are overstretched to the point where the voluntary National Guard is serving multiple rotations in Iraq and elsewhere.

Meanwhile, this administration has revived local draft boards, and all young men are required to register.

At the same time, the Bush administration's architects of Operation Iraqi Freedom have stated that regime change in Iran and Syria is unfinished business. Undersecretary of State John Bolton argues that Iran is a greater threat to US interests and to its ally Israel than was Saddam's Iraq, and that Tehran needs to be confronted after the election. Bolton was a man of his word in the lead up to the Iraq invasion. He and President Bush regard the Iraq mission as a success. There's no reason to doubt their intent to finish their agenda.

Last week, President Bush widened his justification for future pre-emptive American military action against a state, moving from 'poses an immediate threat' to 'intent to build weapons programs in the future'.

In a country where the drums of war are beating again, it is reasonable for a parent to dread the reintroduction of the draft.

Peter Hamilton
Brooklyn, NY, USA

Misplaced empathy

Andrew Hamilton's sincere editorial 'Life, choice, and morality', (*Eureka Street*, September 2004) is welcome, but his use and acclaim of Julia Blake and *My Foetus*, is 'perplexing and confusing'.

Blake's documentary provides more insight into Julia Blake than into abortion. The 'generosity' that Hamilton attributes to Blake is evidenced only by her amount of self-indulgence in this documentary. Blake appeared to be using the documentary to assuage her guilt, although why she would feel guilty for deciding not to have a baby she was unable to care for is 'perplexing'. She is ill informed about the public confession, which only serves the interests of the exhibitionist, not the sincere penitent.

Blake's grizzly pictures were prejudicial and obnoxious but definitely dissuasive. They sickened my hardy stomach, I can only imagine the impact on a morning-sickened one. It is distressing that Blake's scare campaign terrorises women making the wise choice that she once made, i.e. not to give birth to a baby she felt unable to care for. Her use of scare campaign tactics aligns her with the Catholic and other women who vilify those choosing to have an abortion. If Blake's intention was to provide 'health education and information', again she was ill informed. Grizzly pictures are outmoded as educative or deterrent tools.

Hamilton's link between abortion and practices such as 'capital punishment, torture, corporal punishment, going to war, detaining children, restricting TPV's ...' is curious. These examples involve victims and perpetrators. Maybe Hamilton is acknowledging that forcing women to have babies by denying them an abortion perpetrates an injustice? Or is he accepting that the Catholic Church and like-minded ideologues, who campaigned against the legalisation of abortion, conspired to perpetuate the horrific victimisation of hapless women at the hands of unscrupulous 'backyard abortionists?'

If Hamilton had not been blinded by Blake's egocentric documentary he may have discovered that abortion is a complex issue involving a range of conscious and unconscious emotional factors; that women feel relief in having access to legal and safe termination; that women in Catholic and other fundamentalist societies denied that option 'raise a serious moral issue'; and that abortion for many women is a pragmatic decision not a moral issue.

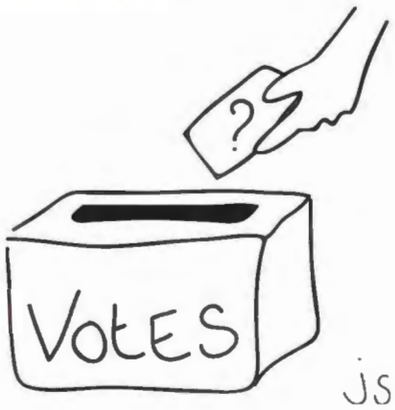
Hamilton, like Blake, determines abortion as if it is an entirety, yet it is just one aspect of procreation. Hamilton makes no mention of sexual intercourse or responsible sexual behaviour in his editorial, despite sex being the precursor for an abortion. Women don't become pregnant on their own. If Hamilton wants to discuss the serious moral issues related to abortion how can he ignore rape, debauchery, non-consensual, unprotected, under-age sex etc?

I suspect that many women would prefer to be thanked, not pitied, for making a wise decision not to give birth to a baby they are unable to nurture. Hamilton's compassion is best kept for the women whose pregnancy has occurred in objectionable circumstances or socio-economic disadvantage.

No woman should be forced to have a baby. Surely a commitment to 'respect for life' includes objecting to bringing babies into the world to be unwanted, unloved, rejected and neglected?

Kerry Bergin
Camberwell, VIC

snapshot



Labour of love

Remember the first time? That moment when your adulthood was more than a licence to drive and a drive to get drunk—it was when you first became visible as a citizen. You were no longer someone's son or daughter but a constituent—a politician's friend or foe. You had a voice and a responsibility to make it heard. You had a passion and belief in democracy; informed decision-making based on lifestyle—an end to terrorism, lower HECS fees, and less red meat—then six weeks of sifting through the rhetoric to find after all the ballot papers had been tallied the bewildering truth ... nothing's changed. Broken-hearted, one such 18-year-old was heard to say: 'I feel like such a jackass, next time I'll just donkey vote'.

Papier mâché

While both parties promised to save the world, if not the forests, little attention was paid to the environmental cost of the election itself. In preparation for polling day, the Australian Electoral Commission utilised 45,500 ballot boxes, 155,800 voting screens and 13,900 recycling bins. The cardboard castles of October 9 comprised some 525 tonnes of cardboard.

The AEC informed *Eureka Street* that prior to the 2004 Federal Election, all polling booths were returned to a central AEC storage for possible reuse. This year, things are different. Any booth that has been used will be sent to a recycling plant. Unused booths will be stored for future use.

In metropolitan areas, an AEC truck will take the material to be recycled to a local depot. In regional and remote areas it is the responsibility of the Divisional Returning Officer. The officer is instructed to dispose of any used material 'sensitively and locally'. This may mean that it is taken to a local recycling plant, or distributed to local playgroups or schools, where the booths may indeed become cardboard castles in a school play.

Eureka Street is also looking into figures for the numbers of sausages sizzled on the day. In addition to sausages we expect to find massive expenditure on pork rolls and pork chops given the pork barrelling of the preceding weeks.

One liners

When Samuel Beckett was once asked to write the lyrics for an opera, he offered a one-line libretto for the soprano: 'I do not want to sing tonight'. At election time, he might be asked to write the same script for other professions: speech writers, for example, economists, and political commentators. And no doubt, caught in underworld investigations, many Mr Bigs would be delighted to hear their minions chortle, 'I do not want to sing tonight'. The practice might even be catching. Might it not be reassuring to hear generals, invited to draw up plans for the next invasion of a resourceless country, to intone, 'I do not want to fight tonight'?

Angelic chorus

Still, there are some nights when it is good to hear enthusiastic song. Particularly to celebrate a nice bit of Jesuit partnership. Recently Christopher Willcock's choral setting of Andrew Bullen's poem 'Etiquette with Angels' premiered at a concert for the Melbourne International Arts Festival. The concert, at St Patrick's Cathedral in Melbourne, honoured the sixtieth birthday of John Tavener, popularly known for his Song for Athene, sung at Lady Diana's funeral.

Boundless gifts to share

There is extravagance and extravagance. A fat-wallet election campaign that promised money to every strategic voter in every targeted seat, concluded with an extravagant gesture of quite another kind. Ben and Margaret Lochtenberg spent big to take

A solution to the drought in Adelaide?
Photo courtesy of **Paul Fyfe** SJ

out full page advertisements in the Sydney and Melbourne dailies, inviting voters to reflect on Australia's treatment of children in detention. After his father died in a prison of war camp in occupied Indonesia during the 1939 war, Ben and his family were warmly welcomed in Australia. Hence the extravagant gesture on behalf of the most extravagantly mistreated people in Australia, meeting the extravagance of a campaign dedicated to keeping and gaining power.

Messages from the gods

The Romans used to foretell the result of battles and dynastic struggles by watching eagles attack other birds, and investigating entrails. Today we rely on opinion polls. But the traditional methods, besides being more interesting, remain pretty effective. If, the day after the calling of an election, you are knocked off your bike by a straying Mercedes; if two weeks out from the election Port Power win the Grand Final followed by the Bulldogs a week later; if, on the day of the election, you seek peace on your bike only for it to leave you a five kilometre walk after the tyre bursts; if, after a movie watched to avoid the counting and commentary, you have to avoid the local lads doing wheelies through the car park—then after all that, you would have to be pretty obtuse not to know the result.

The crucified truth

TRUTH EMERGED AS A PEOPLE'S FAVOURITE in the recent spring election carnival. Formerly sporting the kind of odds that would keep even the most game punters at bay, it suddenly enjoyed the kind of backing that had it at short odds in every race. It's quite possible that the word 'truth' hasn't attracted such attention since the Gospel of John, where it also gets quite a look in. But in John's Gospel it's no Latham-like call for truth in government, and it's no Howard-like blundering about truth being dependent upon what you know. In the Gospel, truth is a person. Jesus says, 'I am the truth'. And so, with truth as the protagonist, the Gospel tells of what happens when truth comes into the world.

What happens, of course, is that truth gets crucified. Well, this is no news to us. Who even remembers the details of the situation that brought about the catch-cry 'truth overboard'? We might recall a vague and grainy picture of a boat adrift, surrounded by blurry shapes. But, of the people and their destiny (aside from the unenviable place they hold in Australian political history) what do we know?

What also happens in the Gospel is that Pilate the politician comes face-to-face with truth. The issue on the table is whether Jesus is mounting a political challenge by claiming to be King of the Jews. Jesus says he has come to testify to the truth, to which Pilate responds, 'What is truth?' Ironically, it's staring him in the face. The Gospel tells us (and imagine it in Jack Nicholson's voice if that helps) that Pilate 'can't handle the truth'. In fact, it's in his interests to relativise truth.

Pilate's words buy into a political strategy. They should give us pause when we wonder at the dwindling interest in questions about the Howard government's honesty. Perhaps Pilate's words make us sit up straighter when we see that further evidence of pre-war intelligence about Iraq's weaponry appears as the fourth or fifth news story, tucked in somewhere behind unfolding sporting dramas.

Despite its new-found popularity, no doubt we are right to continue to be suspicious of an easy use of 'truth'. Recent political debate has it pegged as one-dimensional; a simple question of lying or telling the truth. Like Pilate, confronted by a bloodied truth, our leadership has diverted our attention in an attempt to trivialise the reality of the truth before us. And, in so doing, has set truth on the path to crucifixion.

But if, like John's Gospel, we can imaginatively characterise truth—imagine it as a person with whom we could have a conversation—then we rediscover that there are many more layers to it. To allow truth to be personal is to assert that we cannot avoid being in relationship with it and that we don't have unlimited control over it. To reflect on the biblical story is to be confronted by the rawness of the crucifixion image. It is no cheap debating point to observe truth crucified in the Gospel. Truth makes us expect more of government statements about asylum seekers than that they do not actually lie. We look for some correspondence with the human reality.

AMID THE CROSSFIRE on truth, we might think the question is about who threw the dice that decided who would take Jesus' garment home. Frankly, I want to know how we came to be at Calvary. While we observe the fight about the garment, we forget (as it is hoped we might), that there is a crucifixion in progress. It's the crucifixion of a full-bodied truth and the casualties are innumerable. The question before us as elections give way to the business of government, is how we can re-imagine a more personal truth, and liberate it from the cross. ■

Kylie Crabbe studies at the United Faculty of Theology as a candidate for Ministry in the Uniting Church.

by the way 

Things that go bump in the night

Between 1 January and 1 October this year I slept in at least 19 different beds. It was not, I hasten to add, a case of being, as Hamlet put it, 'In the rank sweat of an enseamèd bed/Stew'd in corruption'—my wife occupied the other side of every one of them. Not bed hopping, just bed lobbing.

This multi-mattress story came about because, like the Bedouin of story and legend, we have never been still in 2004. Travel is, of course, highly instructive. But enlightenment comes from many sources when you journey to different lands and other cultures: from architecture , bazaars and marketplaces; from chance encounters, new friendships; from butchers and cabbies and barmen in small dusty villages; and, we gradually realised, from the serial occupancy of beds ...

When you ask for a double room in Italy, you are offered, with a sort of presumptuous prudery, a matrimoniale. In a posh hotel this might resolve itself into a familiar Queen or King-sized double bed, but in most establishments a matrimoniale is two three-quarter beds pushed together to make a very generous double. Since there is no sheet large enough to cover such an area, each of the two components of the matrimoniale is individually swathed, with the result that a daunting plain of white linen is divided by a fault line where the beds meet in a vain attempt to pretend that they are not separate. Normal nocturnal restlessness often results in this crevice widening to consume an inadvertent leg or arm. Like quicksand, these gaps react to struggle and resistance by swallowing foreign bodies ever more enthusiastically.

The broad, creviced bed is not solely an Italian phenomenon. It's just that Italian nomenclature gives it a moral flick that other nationalities don't bother about. In rural Bavaria, for example, my carefully rehearsed 'Haben sie eine dopple zimmer fur ein nacht, bitte?', not only produced the deflating, Oxford-accented English reply, 'Yairs, I fancy we can help you there', but also failed to trigger any interest whatsoever in our marital status. Nothing different about the bed, though: it was familiarly broad and cracked down the middle.

Forced by an emergency to hire what the French call a gite (a shack to us) in a charming Provençal village called Joucas, we discovered with great joy a standard, unbifurcated double bed. Unfortunately, however, it almost filled the room from wall to wall and front to back. No sooner did you enter the room than you were on the bed. It was like living on a trampoline. And far from acreages of linen, there was none. There weren't any towels either. So we were prickled and scratched and sandpapered all night under shaggy blankets that an army surplus store would have knocked back with disdain. In the morning, having showered our tortured bodies, we had to dry ourselves on a T-shirt, the choice of which, hers or mine, was established by the toss of a coin.

Easily the most challenging of our nocturnal stops was a monastic cell with two minimalist bunks squatting opposite each other and rammed up against the walls. Mattresses about two inches thick laid over slats that the ravages of time and heavy sleepers had buckled into bumps and ridges promised long wakeful nights. Overhanging bookcases awaited the incautiously raised head. When I tried to push these iron juggernauts together I discovered they were bolted to the floor, but not before I'd torn a tendon in my arm with the dogged effort.

No place for romance, this one. Connubial bliss could only be initiated by the kind of explicit, unmistakable enquiry you thought you'd long since left behind in the crass days of your gaucherie. In any case, this overture, even if successfully managed, produced such hip and shouldering against the immovable wall and such cranial attacks on the jutting bookcases, that the whole enterprise dissolved in laughter and farce. Considering that it took great concentration for only one person not to fall out of these slim couches as sleep overcame caution, it was sheer hubris to expect two people to cohabit there, let alone contemplate more complicated intimacies.

Absolutely the biggest bed awaited us in a lovely little hotel called Angel's Home in the old city in Istanbul. In a spacious room, a broad, stylish bedhead gave the impression of one huge bed such as a harem in the city's distant past might have been proud. Plump pillows and bolsters rose from its smoothed surface like a mountain range. Investigation, however, revealed the incriminating flaw down the middle: this was two double beds conjoined. Even more than usually, one's sleeping partner was so far away she was but a deeply breathing rumour in the night and could be contacted only by mobile phone or prior appointment.

'What is a man/If his chief good and market of his time/Be but to sleep?' asks Hamlet. Fair enough. I admit that what we learned from our 19 beds across the nocturnal world probably didn't amount to much more than a few enforced positions undreamed of in our philosophies. The rest is silence.

Nevertheless, I should point out that I'm writing these chaise longue musings on the morning after the recent federal election and that from my point of view—I speak for no one else—bed looks like a good proposition. Hibernation actually, for at least three years. ■

Brian Matthews is a Distinguished Visiting Professor at Victoria University.

Tell us a story

When Labor marched to defeat in 2001, it is thought that more than half of the paid-up members of the party voted for the Greens, primarily at disgust at Kim Beazley's shameful, if pragmatic, moral capitulation over refugees. At the 2004 election, the Labor primary vote increased by 0.3 per cent, to 38 per cent, one of the lowest of all time. The Green vote, at 6.9 per cent nationally, increased by about 2 per cent. The greater proportion of these increases came from the collapse of the Democrat vote (down 4.2 per cent to 1.2 per cent), since Labor's vote, in two-party preferred terms, fell by 2.1 per cent. It does look quite unlikely that any of the Labor supporters who deserted their party in disgust to vote Green in 2001 found their way clear to return their first preference vote to the party.

For those who see politics in two-dimensional terms, the problem Labor has is not in recruiting support from its left, but from the centre. The primary aspect of Labor's debacle, indeed, is that it was even less successful in filling the centre than last time, and is now a four per cent—two terms if it is lucky—swing away from regaining government.

Labor's willingness to let as much as five per cent of its core vote go, by default, to the Greens, is at the centre of its disaster. Those core voters represent a big proportion of the old idealistic core of the party—those invested with notions that political Labor is something of a crusade—about better conditions for the workers, looking after others, extending human rights, and the organised power of people to make a difference in people's lives. The sort of people who feel that supporting the party is a sort of crusade, and a positive duty of citizenship. People with passion, and not only passion to share the spoils of office.

By no means necessarily old-style trade union members, or the sort of people whose power in the party stems from their control of the votes that trade unions automatically accrue to themselves by affiliation with the party. The real people who represent an ever-declining, ever unreformed and ever less representative slice of the Australian workforce, now facing further assaults from the re-elected Howard Government. It is not the party machines which have deserted Labor, but the branch membership. The sort of people focused on issues such as Aborigines, or multiculturalism, or feminism rather than the bread-and-butter issues of more money in the battlers' pocket.

Alas those now left in the party—all the more influential for the desertion of the dreamers—are those who know all about the real aspirations of the middle ground. The ones who thought that a Labor campaign crafted on Medicare give-aways, education give-aways (with carefully focused class warfare thrown in), tax giveaways, child care giveaways and welfare restructure giveaways could compete in an auction against John Howard's giveaways. And who think, in their hard of hearts (though, in the humility forced by defeat they cannot really say it) that John Howard 'stole' this election from them in just the same way as he did the last election, this time by a scare campaign on interest rates. By this theory, the electorate was conned, and the voters were stupid.

The evidence suggests that not one of the campaign promises—apart from Labor's forest promises in Tasmania—moved a single voter. If some greybeard voted Labor because he was offered free quick hospital care for a hip replacement, another (probably of similar age) voted against him on the same grounds. Labor lost the election on the ground defined by Howard from the start: trust. It was not trust in Howard's word—a somewhat debased article—but trust in Coalition financial management and mistrust of Labor's economic credentials. It was not a ground on which Latham fought; he lost by default.

He did not campaign on Howard's credibility, on Iraq, on the war against terror, on US-Australian relations, or on Australia's international image. Nor on better welfare policies, on Aborigines, on refugees, on human dignity or on human rights. No fundamental reform of any of Australia's chronic problems, least of all the infrastructure of health care, education or transport and communications.

> Just more money. Howard obliged by not raising these issues either.

In adopting the image of the aspirational battler, himself with a mortgage and young family made good, Mark Latham oozed no sympathy for the underclasses: he reflected the contempt that the 'haves' hold for the 'have-nots': the idea that their disadvantage is their own fault, their lack of initiative, lack of ambition and failure to climb the ladder of opportunity. Splendid tactic. Splendid result.

The man who had promised to be himself, allowed himself to be turned, by the party's 'professionals', into a small target drone. He campaigned well. Yet he lost votes steadily through the campaign. Two of the party's most professional campaign apparatchiks—Stephen Smith and Wayne Swan—were there to keep him on-message and to feed in the focus-group nonsense for the day. In keeping with Labor's suicide drive, each is likely to be rewarded by having more senior positions on the front bench.

Was it ever winnable? The opinion polls showed Labor ahead over much of the past year. If Labor secretly thought the election unwinnable, John Howard campaigned at all times as if he feared he would lose it. But he must have blessed himself at the way in which Labor never sought to inspire, to light a beacon or to tell Australians a story about themselves they wanted to hear. ■

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

the month's traffic

Silent scream

THE MISSING MUNCH

At around 11:10am on Sunday, 22 August 2004, two armed men walked into the Munch Museum in Oslo. They put a gun to the head of the only security guard on duty, took two paintings off the wall as incredulous gallery visitors looked on, and walked outside to a waiting Audi where a third man drove them off into the well-trodden halls of infamy.

Oslo is a staid, northern European city with a patrician air, the sort of place where Sunday mornings are more for attending church than the unsettling disturbances of major art thefts. Having left Oslo a week before the theft, I find it hard to imagine the city being capable of such monumental events.

Architecturally undistinguished and with a pulse that eludes all but long-term residents, the Norwegian capital's saving grace is the fact that it boasts one of Europe's more impressive collections of Western art; a collection distinguished with paintings by Gauguin, Picasso, Degas, Monet, Renoir, Matisse, El Greco and Cézanne. The centrepiece of this superb gathering of paintings is the body of work by the home-grown Edvard Munch.

The stolen paintings were two of Munch's masterpieces. *The Scream*—one of Western art's most recognisable images—is a deeply disturbing work, an 'icon of existential angst' captured in the face of a waif-like girl set against a sky the colour of blood. The other stolen work, *Madonna*, is similarly dark and compelling, the raven-haired woman at its centre a figure of mystery.

But it is *The Scream* which has captured worldwide attention. Painted with pastel on fragile cardboard, *The Scream* formed part of a series called 'The Frieze of Life', a tortuous and haunting collection of four very similar paintings by Munch in his pursuit of love, angst and death. The original painting known as *The Scream* now hangs in Oslo's National Gallery, with the other two in the series held by the Munch Museum and a private collector. Perhaps it is the profound distress and vulnerability of the painting's subject which has crystallised the world's horror at the theft. More likely it is because *The Scream*, albeit the National Gallery's version, has been stolen before.

It was on 12 February 1994—the day of the opening ceremony of the Lillehammer Winter Olympics and when Norwegians were basking in the glow of the world's attention—that a passing policeman noticed a ladder propped up against the wall of the National Gallery. Inside, in place of the painting, was a note, 'Thanks for the poor security'. Norway, and not to mention art lovers across the world, were appalled.

Stolen masterpieces are rarely recovered. There are 551 Picassos, 243 Joan Mirós, 210 Chagalls, 47 Van Goghs, 174 Rembrandts, 209 Renoirs, as well as the odd Vermeer, Caravaggio and Cézanne currently registered as missing. These stolen works most commonly disappear into the shadowy underworld to become bartering tools in the drug trade or to hang on the wall of a reclusive billionaire collector.

Fortunately for the Norwegian authorities in 1994, *The Scream* hadn't disappeared but instead 'fallen' into the hands of an anti-abortion group demanding for its return $US1 million and the screening, during the Olympics, of a graphic film showing a foetus being aborted. One of the thieves, Paul Enger, announced the birth of his son in a national newspaper, with the notice that his child had arrived 'med et Shrik!' (with a scream). Clearly the thieves were not professionals. Within three months of the theft, the amateur thieves were fooled by a British detective posing as a buyer for the Getty Museum. The men went to prison, the painting was restored to its rightful place and, everyone agreed, lessons had been learned.

And yet, a little over ten years later, and on the 93rd anniversary of the theft of the *Mona Lisa* in Paris, new thieves were able to detach the paintings from the walls of the Munch Museum with the greatest of ease. Gallery visitors present at the time of the theft marvelled at how no alarms sounded and that the police took almost 15 minutes to arrive. In the days which followed, the ripples of disbelief spread across Norway and the world, due in no small part to the extraordinary admission by the museum and city authorities that they had decided against insuring the paintings because they were too valuable.

Evidence that not a single lesson had been learned from the previous theft came in the form of an astounding statement by Lise Mjoes, the director of Oslo's art collections, 'We can't see that any mistakes were made. The guilty ones here were those who carried out the robbery'.

Confirmation that the city's cultural authorities had entirely missed the point and were more adept at playing the victim than protecting the city's priceless cultural heritage, came in the form of the Deputy Culture Minister, Yngve Slettholm, who claimed that art works could not be protected 'unless we lock them in a mountain bunker'. He continued, 'It is food for thought that the spiral of violence has now reached the art world. This is a first for Norway and we can only be glad that no one was hurt'.

Apart from the empty spaces on the walls of the Munch Museum, there remains a pervasive sense of disbelief. How could a painting too valuable to insure be entrusted to a museum which, unlike other major European art galleries, requires no security screenings of visitors, contains no alarms, nor any rigorous means of affixing artworks to its walls? The unavoidable answer is that this is, above all else, a story of naiive and scandalous neglect, a betrayal of great art and an abdication of responsibility towards the public for whom such masterpieces are supposedly held in trust.

—Anthony Ham

The long view

SENATORIAL CINEMATOGRAPHY

It is too late of course to offer voters new tools for discernment but since we have made our choice we could do worse over the next few years than attend less to political pundits and more to our leader's language, philosophy of life and religion. In Washington DC recently, I met the retired Senator Eugene McCarthy, ex-Benedictine, who suggested this analytical tool, since all these elements bear on politics. First of all, he said, analyse their grammar. Inevitably, politicians so wear out a part of speech that they assumed its character. Bill Clinton, he had concluded, was a gerund, but only Latin scholars would find that a useful insight.

Senator McCarthy forbore to analyse either George W. Bush or John Kerry, harking back instead to the campaigns of the '70s and the adverbial Jimmy Carter. George McGovern was an adjective, being a Methodist and not much given to emotion. Come to think of it, (the adjectival?) John Howard comes from a Methodist background and George W. Bush is also Methodist, although these days he runs with para-church evangelicals and Southern Baptists. How should we parse Mark Latham?

According to Senator McCarthy's system, a candidate's philosophy of life is judged on his views about creationism versus evolution. On this basis, Ronald Reagan emerged as the least risky option for President, over and against Jimmy Carter and independent John Anderson. 'Anderson said he believed in both of them. Jimmy not only believed in it, he said he could do it. He said, "I will evolve a foreign policy". Ronald said he believed in creationism pure and simple. And I said, "I think you have to go with Ronald because nothing evolved in a four-year term anyway". It's not enough time. But you could have a revolution in four years so Ronald would be a better president because he was working in a proper time frame.'

Similarly, Ronald Reagan's claims for his 'born-again' status are modest compared to the mini-dramas recounted by Carter and Anderson. Reagan could not remember just when it happened exactly or what it did to him. That was reassuring compared to Jimmy Carter's experience in the woods, with his sister, after an earlier electoral defeat and John Anderson's rebirth at the age of 12, which was somehow connected to the beheading of John the Baptist. Anderson described it, said Eugene McCarthy, as 'a catastrophic experience'.

McCarthy himself was only the second Catholic senator from Minnesota in its 150-year history. (The first is best known for having challenged Abraham Lincoln to a duel.) At the age of 88 he lives in Washington DC and maintains his rage about the institutionalisation of the two-party system. Recently published biographies canvass his role as an independent and an anti-war candidate in 1968 in the campaign that saw Richard Nixon defeat Hubert Humphrey.

Back in 1960, Senator McCarthy was the Democrat enlisted by John F. Kennedy to go about the campuses and appear on the TV shows explaining that Catholics were alright. Two issues invariably came up at universities: would a Catholic president stop US aid for birth control information in India, and would he also send an ambassador to the Vatican? McCarthy's response was that he recommended that Kennedy provide funds for equipping all the sacred cows with intra-uterine devices, and that there were 20 or 25 places exerting power over the United States where an ambassador would be useful: the Pentagon, General Motors, ITT and First Boston, for example. 'I kind of left it at that!'

John Kennedy's landmark speech in 1960 to the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Houston is still quoted in debates about the relationship between a candidate's religious faith and his political life. 'It was pretty much the standard Catholic line you know—I'm a Catholic but I'm an American politician and I can make the distinctions.' (The discussion this year, with John Kerry's candidacy, has been about the kind of distinctions Catholic candidates are obliged to make.) Senator McCarthy said, 'I didn't think it was a great betrayal. I just had some doubts about whether he should have done it. You know, sort of a concession to one religion saying, "I'm going to come down and explain myself to you". He could have said, you know what my stand is, you know who I am, I don't have anything to confess.'

—Margaret Coffey

This month's contributors: **Anthony Ham** is *Eureka Street*'s roving correspondent; **Margaret Coffey** makes programs for Encounter, ABC Radio National.

archimedes

Write on

ARCHIMEDES HAS BEEN in Queensland discussing science communication. Can it change society? What about truth and ethics? What is the best way to put scientific ideas across to politicians, business people or Indigenous Australians? How should we educate future practitioners?

It was a lively conference with a committed bunch of colleagues. So much so that the meeting generated support for a team to travel to Montreal to make a successful bid for Melbourne to hold the Fifth World Conference of Science Journalists in 2006. This led Archimedes to reflect that much of this was happening because of the extraordinary creativity of Australian Science Communicators (ASC)—an organisation which since its establishment has become a world leader.

In the decade or so prior to the founding of ASC in 1994, at least two attempts were made to set up some sort of Australian association of science writers. They foundered for a lack of critical mass—there were too few people to keep the organisation operating. By 1994 something had to be done. Two CSIRO staff members, Toss Gascoigne and Jenni Metcalfe, had secured a world conference on the Public Communication of Science and Technology for Australia, and there was no host organisation. Once again the possibility of a science writers body was discussed.

There were all sorts of arguments as to who it should include—whether it should be restricted to journalists or whether people involved in PR should be allowed. Would that be solely print journalists, or should it include electronic journalists as well? How about scientists themselves? Educators? Illustrators? Finally, at lively meetings in Canberra and Geelong, it was decided that Australia was too small and people too isolated for such a body to exclude any interested party. Someone suggested the inclusive term 'science communicator', and ASC was born.

That decision to be inclusive—to throw together TV journalists, museum staff, freelance writers and web designers—has led to activities as diverse as Science in the Pub in Sydney, Fresh Science (a competition which provides media training and achieves worldwide publicity for early career researchers) in Melbourne, and a Science Writers' Festival in Brisbane. It has also underpinned the success of National Science Week, the development of university courses, and has led to the birth of a profession. And it coined a term now accepted globally. The 'science communicator' entered the world from Australia.

In a media release supporting the ASC conference with $10,000, the then Federal Science Minister Peter McGauran wrote, 'ASC has grown to become a significant national voice for science communication … [and] the value of science communication, keeping the general public informed of and comfortable with new developments and discoveries in science, is demonstrated almost daily …' ASC, in turning what was an isolated activity into a profession, is now being replicated in South Africa and New Zealand.

In the era of climate change, genetic modification and commercialisation of research and innovation, governments think science communication is an important enough profession to offer their assistance. The Victorian Government, for instance, actively resourced and supported ASC's bid for the World Conference of Science Journalists, because it could see value in attracting influential international science journalists to Melbourne.

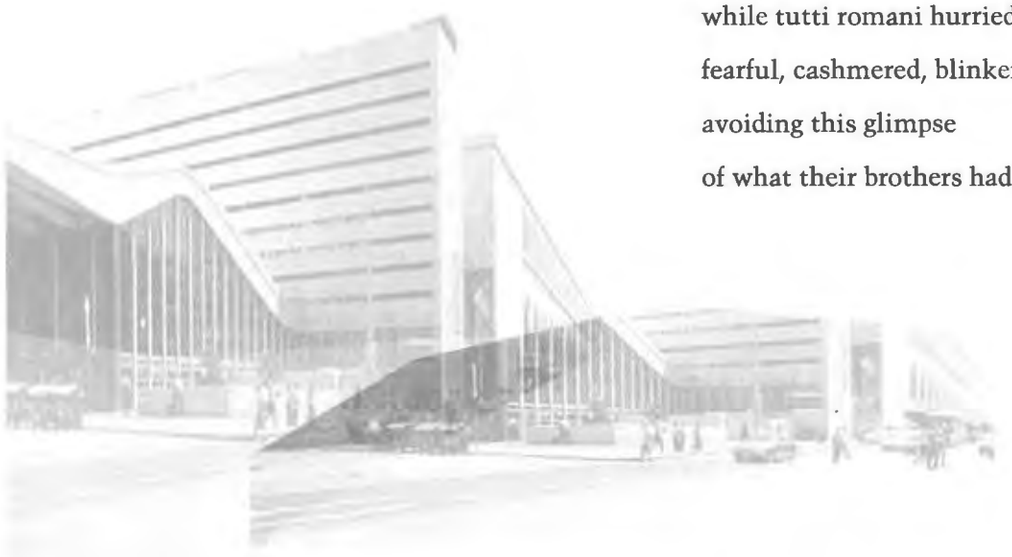
In its way, the ASC has been a testament to how a small bunch of dedicated people can help to change society and influence Government policy. ■

Tim Thwaites is a freelance science writer.

Prelude

Two choruses in a vorspiel of flu:
next door a rock band's
pagan bass invading my flat;
downstairs a sustained 'Yairs'—
a termagant from Patrick White
floating it to hector us.
Traffic rushes past, ignoring the madman
on the kerb, angular as kites.
All day he sobs, 'I am not, not, not',
reminding me of one I saw years ago
at the Rome Railway Station,
banging his head on the machines,
(coffee, condoms, Coca-Cola,
anything commercial), banging them so hard
that blood sprayed down his chest
like spurts of martyrdom,
while tutti romani hurried to their trains,
fearful, cashmered, blinkered,
avoiding this glimpse
of what their brothers had become.

Peter Rose



Mark Raper

Facing the stranger

The following is an edited text of an address given by Mark Raper at the Melbourne Lord Mayor's Charitable Fund in September, 2004

TWO YEARS AGO, I returned to Australia after working with refugees for 20 years. It was after the *Tampa* election. At a public forum, I remember the faces of two asylum seekers. They were asked what they would say to Mr Howard if they had that opportunity. The first was a woman whose two children had been playing in the front of the hall. 'Ask any mother', she said, 'if she would throw her children into the sea to save herself'. The second was a young man who captained the Tigers, a soccer team of young Afghan refugees. 'Mr Howard', he said playfully, 'you won your election because of us. We helped you, now you owe us'.

Echoing both his own Asian cultural value of a debt of honour, and our Aussie sense of fairness,

he hit the mark. Before the 2001 election, the arrival of a pitiful boat-load of refugees altered government policies and the course of the nation. In light of another federal election, that memory may cause us to search our hearts. Portraying asylum seekers as figures to be feared was possible because we were not allowed to know the refugees. We could not see their faces. If we are going to find our way forward as a nation we must know them.

In these past three years, community groups, moved by the faces of asylum seekers, have mushroomed: Rural Australians for Refugees, A Just Australia, Children Out of Detention, the Hotham Mission and its Asylum Seeker Project, church groups, local councils. They have all adopted one simple method, one simple starting point in bringing about change. They know the asylum seekers. They meet them. They know their faces.

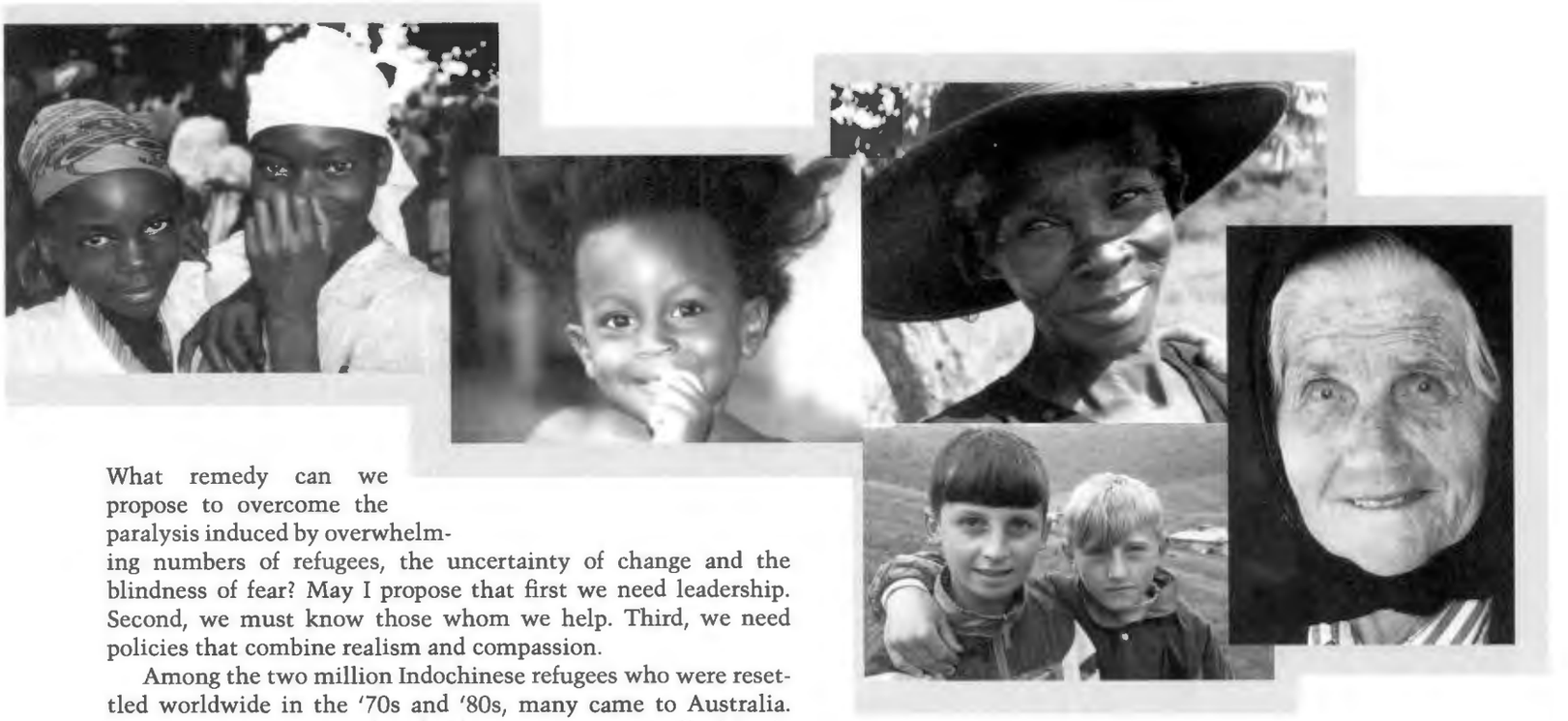
This solidarity has effected a sea change. The Coalition Government has been forced to soften its policies. I wish we could say it has abandoned its policies. I rather fear it has only shelved them. The Australian Labor Party, the instigators of mandatory detention, is also more mindful now. Too timid in the 2001 election to challenge the government on border protection, Labor is forced now to espouse a more ethical and humanitarian line.

In today's world, people are on the move everywhere. Rich nations feel they face a 'crisis' of asylum. Because of globalisation in travel and communications, asylum seekers can now arrive anywhere. They are an enduring reality. No nation today is untouched by refugees, even remote and insular Australia. When asylum seekers are so many and seem so distant it is immensely hard for us to engage with their lives.

And change paralyses. Globalisation generates change. Local banks, local stores and post offices are closed without explanation. The result is uncertainty. The arrival of new people also changes a society, particularly if those arriving are different in appearance, adopt different cultural ways, and practice different religions. In such situations governments have two options: they may either show leadership

and manage change, or they can blame an external threat and its victims and appeal to fear.

Fear is a key factor. The 2001 election, in the wake of *Tampa* and the events of September 11, was driven by fear. A climate of fear prevailed just long enough to win. Now we can see through it. Yet the legacy of 'children overboard' was evident in this most recent election, a hollow and 'dark victory', a debt still to be repaid. The 'children overboard' incident was a flawed executive exercise of power, an appeal to fear at a time when leadership was required, a reversal of the ways in which we want to be there for one another as Australians.



What remedy can we propose to overcome the paralysis induced by overwhelming numbers of refugees, the uncertainty of change and the blindness of fear? May I propose that first we need leadership. Second, we must know those whom we help. Third, we need policies that combine realism and compassion.

Among the two million Indochinese refugees who were resettled worldwide in the '70s and '80s, many came to Australia. Community groups worked hard to overcome initially hostile attitudes, which were no different from the suspicions of newcomers today. The Federal Government at that time demonstrated leadership. It put policies in place to assist refugees, and as a consequence of leadership by government, many social attitudes changed. Even when Australia later moved to slow what threatened to become a migratory movement, community groups offered leadership in making resettlement successful.

Throughout the 1980s I lived in Thailand, working with the Jesuit Refugee Service. Our mission was to accompany, serve and defend the rights of refugees across south-east Asia. We met hundreds of thousands of people in desperate need. Daily we were stretched to the limit. Once when in a state of near exhaustion, I heard that a young Vietnamese woman, who had been taken by Thai pirates, was being held in a remote Thai town. We felt we did not have the knowledge, skills or energy to assist. But since my agency had Thai members and a good network in Thailand, we turned to the delicate task, working together with the Royal Thai Ministry of Interior, the Thai police and the United Nations. Together, we managed to rescue her. Then, with the help of an understanding Australian Immigration official and the ready support of community groups in Australia, she was brought to Melbourne. She is now settled, has a family, and years later we can tell her story.

Then, and many times since, I was proud of Australia. And I am proud of the solidarity offered to refugees by Australians. Having experienced the joy of that woman's liberation, I would do it again and again for the rest of my life.

WE NEED POLICIES that are both compassionate and realistic. The dilemma of international asylum is this: how does a government offer protection to those who have left their homes in fear of persecution or danger, and at the same time preserve the integrity of our state which welcomes them? It would be folly for any government simply to open its doors to the world. Yet it is also a folly to ignore those who seek our help and to hide our eyes from the root causes of their flight. It is a folly not to have an efficient, orderly, and fair way to meet and listen to those who seek our help. It is a folly to abandon, as Australia has been doing, the international set of agreements by which nations work together to assist refugees and to resolve the conflicts that give rise to refugees. Such assistance cannot be offered through pre-emptive military strikes. It can only be delivered via constructive engagements at all levels: in the countries of origin, in the refugee camps along the way, and at the point of arrival.

Even in this new age of global refugees, the basic principle of refugee protection still applies. We must not return to danger anyone who comes to us seeking safety. It may not seem practical in the face of all the demands and needs, but it works. It is artificial to say, 'we will not help these people here, because it will prevent us from helping those other people over there'. We must be consistent. If we wish every nation to work together in meeting the needs of refugees, then we must meet those who come to us face to face.

I am not the first to say that our world will be saved by solidarity, not by isolation; by service, not by egoism; by engagement, not by avoidance. Australians have already learned this whenever we have looked into the faces of those in need, experienced leadership that discerns those needs and sought to act in solidarity. ■

Mark Raper SJ is the Provincial of the Australian and New Zealand Jesuits. He was recently awarded the Australian Council for International Development's 2004 Human Rights Award for his work with refugees over the last 30 years. All images by **Mark Raper**.

Madeleine Byrne

In the shadow of a siege

The siege at Beslan drew the world's attention to a long and bloody conflict

EIGHT DAYS AFTER the Beslan school siege that left more than 300 people dead (half of whom were children), the world's newspapers and TV screens were filled with pictures of students, cowering in front of heavily armed Chechen militants. For many, the graphic images compounded initial feelings of outrage.

Some journalists likened the siege to Pearl Harbor and September 11. 'We have to ask whether the hostage-taking of the schoolchildren of Beslan on September 1, 2004, the 65th anniversary of the outbreak of the World War II, was another of these historic tragedies', wrote *The Times* commentator, William Rees-Mogg.

'There is a blank horror about what they did to the young children that, fortunately, has few parallels in the history of evil', he added. Yet these distressing images of students, parents and teachers crammed into the suffocating school gym, of the 'black widow' holding a Makarov pistol close to her obscured face, or the masked 'terrorist' wiring a bomb, do not provide the full picture of the Chechen conflict.

Since 1999, Russia's authorities have severely restricted access to the war zone. Fears for journalists' safety in a region disfigured by kidnappings have created a near total blackout on reporting the war. Further, as the head of the human rights organisation Memorial, Oleg Olov explains, post September 11: 'Russia's participation in the worldwide anti-terror coalition has given Moscow political cover for continuing the military operation'.

The picture emerging from Chechnya is terrifying. Despite the official end to hostilities in 2001, the US State Department says the situation is worsening. Chechnya's population is estimated at 734,000, down from 1.2 million in 1989. Hundreds of thousands have fled to refugee camps abroad, or are displaced throughout the country. Thousands have been detained in jails where torture and killings are commonplace, or in 'filtration camps' set up to sift Chechen militants from the general population.

'Here people are massacred. You should hear their screams, howls of strong men in whom everything that can be broken is being broken.' This comes from a letter allegedly written by a Russian soldier that *Le Monde* published in 2000. Only seven of the 700 Chechens detained in the camp, the soldier estimated, were militants. Most were arrested because of irregular papers, or after ducking out for a cigarette during a curfew. 'I have trouble expressing in writing the exotic ways in which a man can be broken, or turned into an animal', the soldier wrote.

Human Rights Watch claims that more than 400 Chechens were 'disappeared' by the Russians, or gangs loyal to the Kremlin-installed president, Akhmad Kadyrov in 2003. Despite a law aimed at limiting human rights abuses during Russian 'mopping up' operations in Chechen villages, there is still little security. As Manasha, a Chechen nurse, said in 2002, 'I constantly fear losing my three men: my husband and two sons'.

Both sides, however, are suffering huge losses. In 2002, *The Economist* reported that up to 30 Russian soldiers were being killed each week. The same year, Moscow military analyst Pavel Felgenhauer noted that while the official death toll was 3,000 Russian fatalities (9,000 wounded), the unofficial figure was twice that. Without distinguishing between Russians and Chechens, General Alexander Lebed said that in the war's first two years between 70,000 and 80,000 people had lost their lives.

IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE Beslan siege, *The Australian* carried letters from readers angry at what they felt to be the media's political correctness. Stop calling these Chechens militants or separatists, the readers fumed, they are Islamic fundamentalists, or terrorists. Considering the extreme nature of the siege, where children were forced to drink urine in order to survive, such strong reactions are understandable.

Politicians and the media have, moreover, argued that Beslan is the latest link in a chain of global (Islamic) terrorism. Referring to the 1,000 US soldiers killed in Iraq, the *New York Post* wrote: 'It is they who stand between America and another 9/11, or a Madrid, or a Bali, or ... a Beslan'. Rejecting calls for a public inquiry into the massacre, Russian President Vladimir Putin lashed out: 'Why don't you meet Osama bin Laden, invite him to Brussels or to the White House and engage in talks, ask him what he wants and give it to him so he leaves you in peace?'

Neither approach helps us understand the Chechen crisis. Islam is an important cultural marker for the separatists but this is not a war about religion. Until recently, Putin called the Chechens 'bandits', not terrorists. 'In so far that it has taken a religious colouring, this was mainly because Islam is seen even by irreligious Chechens, as an integral part of the national tradition and of the nation's past struggle against Russian domination', says former Russia *Times* correspondent, Anatol Lieven.

Chechnya declared its independence from the fast disintegrating Soviet Union in 1991. Since then there have been scattered attempts to impose sharia law, culminating

in a push by Shamil Basaev (the accused Beslan mastermind) to transform the nation's legal system in 1999. But when Chechnya's elected president, Aslan Maskhadov, said that Islamic law would be phased in over three years, Shamil Basaev started lobbying for the constitution to be rewritten and Maskhadov sacked.

Unemployment has encouraged some to embrace Saudi largesse and its brand of Islam, Wahhabism. There have also been some sightings of a few hundred Arab fighters in Chechnya. 'They came to the market and they paid in dollars,' one Russian administrator recalls. But few of the key Chechen leaders, despite their extremism in other areas, behave like Islamists. Asked about the religious affiliations of Khattab, his murdered Arab accomplice, Basaev joked: 'Wahhabite? No, he's a Khattabite'. And as terrorism expert Walter Laguev notes, during peace talks, the Chechen chiefs made the most of the free vodka and pork, just like their Russian counterparts.

FOR SUCH A TINY COUNTRY, Chechnya has had a remarkably tragic history. During the 19th century, under the command of the warlord Shamil, the Chechens fought a losing battle for their independence that lasted 25 years.

In 1943, Stalin personally ordered the transfer of the entire Chechen population to camps in Kazakhstan. More than 470,000 Chechens were deported, including over 130,000 people who subsequently died. Memories of this atrocity persist, so much so that it is often called Chechnya's 'open wound'. In 1991, the writer, Abdurahman Avtorkhanov characterised Chechnya's push for independence as a 'revolt of the children in revenge of the deaths of their fathers in deportation and exile'.

History is often used to explain the Chechen war's particular intensity. Gaining access to Caspian Sea oil reserves (allegedly equal to those of the North Sea) is also put forward as a reason. But as the US administration and international oil companies understand: nations like Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan are valuable, not landlocked Chechnya.

In Soviet times, Grozny ranked second to Azerbaijan's capital, Baku, as an oil-refining centre, but by the 1980s, Chechen oil wells accounted for only three per cent of the USSR's output. Russia appears determined to regain control. In September, Russian Rosneft and British-Dutch Shell agreed to transport the 100,000 tons of oil extracted in Chechnya each month to the Russian centre, Kropotkin. In the future, oil extracted from the troubled republic—along with that from the Caspian Sea—will be re-routed north.

WRITERS ON THE CHECHEN wars have emphasised the way the leaders' flaws have deepened the conflict. From this angle, the first war (1994–1996) embodied Boris Yeltsin's hubris and the second (1999–present) Vladimir Putin's ruthless thirst for power. Following the 1999 bombing of Moscow apartment blocks (attributed to Chechen separatists despite the suspected involvement of the FSB, the Russian secret service) Putin's tough stance won him the presidency.

Putin's refusal to seek out, or endorse, a more moderate Chechen leadership has created a situation where terrorism has become the separatists' strategy of choice. 'Young Chechens are growing impatient', says journalist, Anna Politkovskaya, and 'believe only the most painful terrorist methods will win'. This is supported by a view that Basaev's 1995 raid on a Budennovsk hospital forced the Russians to the negotiating table and thereby ended the war.

Although many characterise the war as a David and Goliath struggle, this is not accurate. Ninety three per cent of Russian soldiers are conscripts (in 1999); or as analyst, Pavel

A boy stands in front of a policeman in downtown Grozny, AAP/AFP Alexander Nemenov.

A Chechen woman carries her belongings in Grozny, AAP/AFP.

Felgenhauer says, 'teen-aged former school kids, badly trained and badly commanded'. Recruitment campaigns have, through poor screening, enlisted 'drunks, tramps and other fallouts of Russian society'.

Because of Russia's shambolic army, the military depends on aerial bombardment, and this, Felgenhauer says, leads to 'massive war crimes' (including the use of ballistic missiles against civilians). Anatol Lieven remembers how Grozny's empty streets during bombing raids felt 'like a city stricken not by war, but by plague'. Most of those killed in the raids, Lieven says, were ethnic Russians and pensioners.

On 6 December 1999, Russian aircraft dropped a leaflet on Grozny giving the city's inhabitants five days to escape. 'You are surrounded', the pamphlet read. 'All roads leading to Grozny are blocked. Those who remain will be viewed as terrorists and bandits. They will be destroyed by artillery and aviation. There will be no further negotiations. Everyone who does not leave the city will be destroyed. The countdown has started!'

Five days later the bombing stopped and another leaflet advised the residents of a safe corridor out of the city. Within two days, the shelling recommenced. Photos of Grozny show a city full of spectral buildings, shelled beyond recognition, that look as if they have been eaten away from the inside.

Nothing like this has been seen in Europe since the end of World War II. 'At the height of the shelling at Sarajevo', David Remnick writes in *Resurrection: The struggle for the New Russia*, 'there were 3,500 detonations a day, while at Grozny the (1995) winter bombing recorded a rate of 4,000 detonations an hour'.

The second consequence of Russian military weakness is corruption. Terrorist 'suspects' are routinely kidnapped, then released at a price. And, perhaps most strangely, the Russian army reportedly sells arms and ammunition to the rebels, who use these weapons to fight them. Corruption is not confined to the Russian military.

The Economist claims the Chechen illegal oil trade has become a 'nice little earner'. When the first war ended, rebel commanders allegedly divided Chechnya's oil wells among themselves. Soldiers and police are said to turn a blind eye to the illegal oil trade (and sometimes help transport and sell the petrol). Chechen historian, Jabrail Gakaev, says the profit motive has become 'the major driving force of the continuing violence'.

During the Beslan siege, the militants said they wanted Russia to experience the terror Chechens face on a daily basis. 'Russian soldiers are killing our children,' a hostage remembers one saying. 'So we are here to kill yours.' This objective is nothing new. In 1993, Basaev warned that if the Russians invaded, his followers would 'carry the war to Russia'. This appears to be happening. After Beslan, Moscow police rounded up 10,000 people for questioning and the Russian Parliament is debating anti-terror laws that will restrict freedoms and centralise political power.

In 2002, around 500 writers, human-rights activists and politicians gathered at Moscow's Cosmos Hotel to debate the Chechen war. One observation kept recurring in the speeches: the one million Russians who had fought in Chechnya were bringing the war home with them. Violent crime and torture by law-enforcement agencies, says human rights campaigner Andrei Babushkin, increased in the mid 1990s 'precisely among people who had gone through the school of hatred and humiliation in Chechnya'.

Another speaker mentioned a police captain who had kept both his uniform and weapon from his Chechen service. One day the man opened fire on a Moscow street for no apparent reason, wounding an innocent passerby. During an unrelated court case before the shooting, the veteran said, 'I learned how to break people in Chechnya'. ■

Madeleine Byrne is a Fellow at OzProspect, a non-partisan public policy think tank.

Brian Doyle

How we wrestle is who we are

Brian Doyle considers who we are and what we might become

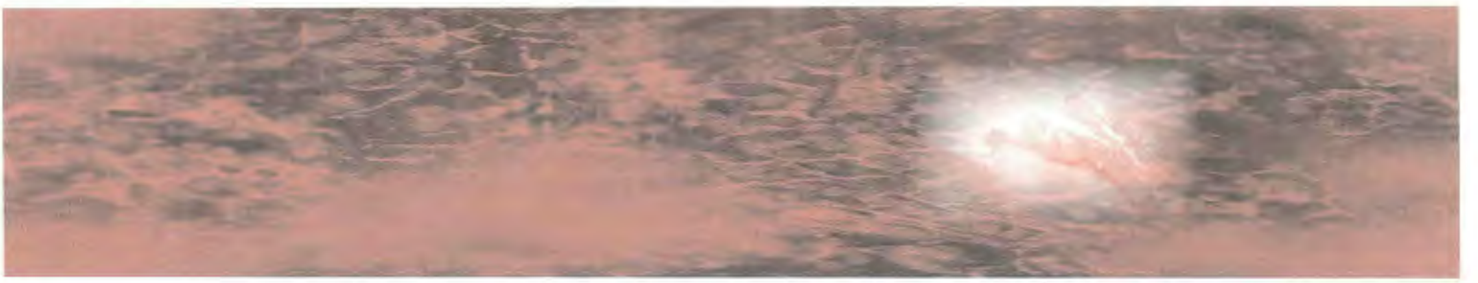
My son Liam was born ten years ago. He looked like a cucumber on steroids. He was fat and bald and round. He looked healthy as a horse. He wasn't. He was missing a chamber in his heart. You need four rooms in your heart for smooth conduct through this vale of fears and tears, and he only had three, so pretty soon doctors cut him open and iced down his heart and shut it down for an hour while they made repairs, and then when he was about 18 months old he had another surgery, during which they did more tinkering, and all this slicing and dicing worked, and now he's ten, and the other day as he and I were having a burping contest he suddenly said, 'Explain to me my heart stuff', which I tried to do, in my usual Boring Dad way, and soon enough he wandered off, I think to beat up his brother, but I sat there remembering.

I remember pacing hospital and house and hills, and thinking that his operations would either work or not and he would either live or die. There was a certain clarity there; I used to crawl into that clarity at night to sleep. But nothing else was clear. I used to think, in those sleepless days and nights, what if they don't fix him all the way and he's a cripple all his life, a pale, thin kid in a wheelchair who has Crises? What if his brain gets bent? What if he ends up alive but without his mind at all? What then? Who would he be? Would he always be what he might have been? Would I love him still? What if I wasn't man enough to love him? What if he was so damaged that I prayed for him to die? Would those prayers be good or evil?

I don't have anything sweet or wise to say about those thoughts. I can't report that God gave me strength to face my fears, or that my wife's love saved me, or anything cool and poetic like that. I just tell you that I had those thoughts, and they haunt me still. I can't even push them across the page here and have them sit between you and me unattached to either of us, for they are bound to me always, like the dark fibres of my heart. For our hearts are not pure; our hearts are filled with need and greed as much as with love and grace; and we wrestle with our hearts all the time. The wrestling is who we are. How we wrestle is who we are. We're verbs. What we want to be is never what we are. Not yet. Maybe that's why we have these relentless engines in our chests, driving us forward toward what we might be.

Eventually my son will need a new heart, a transplant when he's 30 or 40 or so, though Liam said airily the other day that he's decided to grow a new one from the old one, which I wouldn't bet against him doing, him being a really remarkable kid and all, but that made me think: what if we could grow new hearts out of old ones? What might we be then? What might we be if we rise and evolve, if we come further down from the brooding trees and out onto the smiling plain, if we unclench the fist and drop the dagger, if we emerge blinking from the fort and the stockade and the prison, if we smash the shells from around our hearts, if we haul the beams and motes from our eyes, if we do what we say we will, if we act as if our words really matter, if our words become muscled mercy, if we grow a fifth chamber in our hearts and a seventh and a ninth, and become as if new creatures arisen from our shucked skins, the creatures we are so patently and brilliantly and utterly and wholly and holy capable of becoming ...

What then? ■



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Kirsty Sangster

Bearing witness

I know the truth

I know the truth—give up all other truths!
No need for people anywhere on earth to struggle.
Look—it is evening, look, it is nearly night:
what do you speak of, poets, lovers, generals?
The wind is level now, the earth is wet with dew,
the storm of stars in the sky will turn to quiet.
And soon all of us will sleep under the earth, we
who never let each other sleep above it.

—Marina Tsvetaeva

Marina Tsvetaeva's poem speaks to us from the hidden and persecuted world of the Russian Revolution. Imagine her sitting in a cold room by a dead hearth and writing this poem. Imagine her woollen fingerless gloves. She knows the truth and asks us, finally, to abandon all other truths. Our clamour of truths, half-truths and lies. From her quiet place she can speak to us: we who are still above the earth.

The world of the cloistered, the persecuted and the starving remains much the same today. It seems that we do spend this brief and restless time above the earth tormenting each other.

For the past few years, I have been reading and listening to the testimonies of victims and survivors of human rights abuses as part of my writing on truth commissions. Truth commissions are extra-judicial bodies designed as an alternative to international criminal courts and war crimes tribunals. There have been more than 20 commissions, or commission-like tribunals, across the world, most recently in East Timor. Unlike tribunals, truth commissions do not usually have the capacity to prosecute the perpetrators of human rights abuses. Rather, the focus is on discovering the truth of the abuse.

One of the main premises of truth commissions is that survivors, in telling their story before a commission, may experience some form of healing through the public acknowledgment of their suffering. The phrase 'Revealing is Healing' was the catch-cry of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The 'truth' here is invested with an almost messianic quality. Truth-telling can free us from our past: 'the truth will set you free' (Jn 8.32). Truth-telling becomes an aspect of justice. Yet as the testimony of survivors indicates, it is not that simple. Ultimately, justice is an embodied concept which truth alone cannot furnish.

Certainly, many survivors feel a desire to bear witness to what they have seen. Survivors speak of their need to tell the story as a way of bearing witness to previously unspeakable terror. Primo Levi structured his poem 'If this is man' around the Jewish prayer *v'haftah* and commanded us to: *Consider if this is a woman/Without hair and without name/with no more strength to remember/her eyes empty and her womb cold/Like a frog in winter*. Telling the story is a way of honouring the dead; a form of prayer. In this respect, the 'listening space' made available by truth commissions may be valuable to survivors, many of whom seek recognition and public acknowledgment of the abuse they have endured. In explaining how important some form of recognition is to him, one man tells me: 'I would really like to meet with the Red Cross workers who came and took photographs of us, we were in chains and starving—a chain gang—going up a muddy hill and they came and photographed us. I would like to speak with them and ask them what they saw. I would really like to see that footage'.

However, this listening space is fragile. Who listens to the story and in what context is critical. Crucially, it depends on the acknowledgment by the perpetrators of the wounds that they have made on the victim's body. Such acknowledgment is rare.

Apart from bearing witness, the other element that appears as essential for survivors is the uncovering and recording of the facts: the names of the dead, the bodies of the disappeared, the history of the abuse, and the names and faces of the perpetrators. These facts, though, are not of themselves liberating for the survivor. The fact of a child's death by burning, for example, is not a liberating truth.

IMPORTANTLY, THE TESTIMONY OF SURVIVORS indicates that truth-telling is not necessarily a healing or cathartic experience for individuals. The story has *gravitas*. As a woman survivor tells her tale of torture and disappearance, she is pulled back down into a diachronic space where the actual events are always taking place. There is no outside and there is not time separate from the narrative, which twists itself, snake-like, and is coiled in her body. Thus, the actual experience of telling the story is not necessarily redeeming. Instead it tends to haul the storyteller back into the trauma that lies waiting: 'to be tortured is like they have placed a cancer—a tumour—on your memory, on your system—on your nervous system—so it will be there forever. Like a tumour in my brain'. Thus survivors often express a reluctance to tell their story; memory appears as a dangerous thing.

It is the nature of these truths that leads to a questioning of the link between truth and justice. Truth-telling alone, is not a form of justice. It fails as a form of justice. This failure is due to the nature of the human rights abuses that have been committed under such regimes. These abuses take the body as central: the abuse revolves around the wounding and marking of bodies. The bodies of the tortured, imprisoned, starved, disappeared and detained all bear the physical inscription, are written upon by the regime: 'I will put my law in their inward parts' (Jer 31.33).

The attempt by truth commissions to erase the writing—to 'heal the wounds'—might in this sense be seen as delusory. Some wounds cannot be healed. As Lawrence Langer writes 'massive social suffering does not lend itself to metaphors of rescue or remedy'. Or as Ernst Bloch (in Moltmann) writes about the incinerators of Maidanek: 'There is undoubtedly a grain of wheat that dies without bringing any fruit, a grain of wheat that is trampled into the ground, without there being truly—let alone necessarily—any positive negation of this negation afterwards'.

In truth commissions, the idea or image of a justice based on response, attention and intersubjectivity through the telling of the story and the discovery of the truth is a justice that has already been claimed by the former regime. Human rights abuse concentrates on all those things that make us human—our physical connection to others, our voice, our sense of hearing, our sight, our touch—and attempts to destroy these.

At the discovery of a mass grave in Chile, one of the mothers of the disappeared tells us: 'they may be dust but they are loved dust'. Perhaps this fragment highlights the dilemma faced by truth commissions as alternative justice responses to human rights abuses. This is loved dust, the ashes and bones of those who have been 'made disappeared' by the former regime. This dust has been a loved person. Although he is now dust, he was once walking, he once was breathing and could sit outside in the evening. He could roll a cigarette or take a bath. Then this person, someone's child, was abducted and murdered. How can such a truth as this dust be recovered from? How can this dust be made whole again? This stands in contrast to the Old Testament story in which the prophet Ezekiel spoke life back into the bones of the dead: 'Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live' (Ezk 37.5). The dead will not return. Survivors continue to ask for legal justice. The truth—the dust—is not enough. ■

Kirsty Sangster has just completed a doctoral thesis on truth commissions.

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Andrew Hamilton

The gift of speaking freely

Teachers need free speech in order to teach with authority

In anxious times, the free exchange of ideas is an early casualty. Lines spun at parties contract to the Party Line.

In some English-speaking Catholic Churches, the last decade has been notable for the sporadic restriction of free speech. Some bishops have excluded from their churches speakers who enjoy good standing in their own diocese. Others have forbidden priests and religious to address meetings of which they disapprove. It is not uncommon to exclude from adult education programs and bookshops material that does not reflect a narrow theological perspective. Diocesan newspapers are often discouraged from treating difficult issues, like sexual abuse by clergy, and sometimes may not carry letters critical of the policy or practices of the local church. In a restrictive climate, it is also common for church groups to restrict the topics they discuss and the speakers they invite.

Critics of the Catholic Church are not surprised by this. They see in it an expression of the totalitarian mind. I see it as a more complex and interesting set of responses to a changing Catholic world. These are some of its salient features.

The Catholic Church today is generally declining in numbers, and the priests and religious who have sustained it are ageing. There are few places in which it forms a sub-culture that shapes its adherents' imaginative world. Those to whom the Catholic Church remains of central importance often have sharply opposed images of what church should be.

In this world of loose association, few Catholics look to Catholic media in order to find an agreed understanding of Catholic faith and life. They more often derive their information about the Catholic Church and its policies from the secular media, and form their judgments on the strength of the reports they find there. These reports naturally emphasise conflict and scandal and offer an outsider's view.

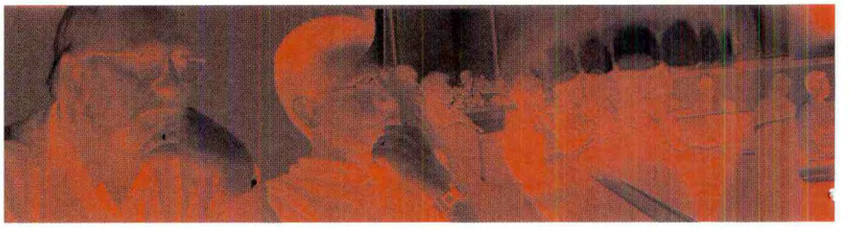
In the face of diminishment and diffusion, one of the strongest resources of the Catholic Church is Pope John Paul II, a recognisable and strong leader. He commends an active, united and renewed church, confident in its faith. Local churches often co-opt his vision, describing their life and pastoral strategies in abstract and idealised terms that do not touch day-to-day realities. Against the touchstone of this enthusiastic rhetoric, questioning and disagreement can be read as signs of mediocrity and infidelity.

Over the last 40 years, the central issue touching the Catholic Church has been the relationship between ordained ministry and laity. It shows itself in arguments about the relationship between authorities, and particularly between the central and congregational levels. Recently, the moral authority of clergy, including bishops, has been much weakened by scandals of sexual abuse, and the claims of consultative and decentralised leadership have become correspondingly attractive.

In such a church, no one could seriously hope to control what Catholics read and hear. The gestures at limiting conversation should be seen rather as having symbolic value. They make statements in response to different aspects of the Catholic Church's predicament.

When you exclude reputable theological books from libraries and speakers of good reputation from church premises, for example, you are saying that only one of the many ways of thinking and acting common among fervent Catholics is truly Catholic. Exclusion reflects and extends polarisation.

If you prevent church newspapers from treating unpleasant or controverted aspects of church life, and decline to publish letters critical of church policy and practice, you usually express the desire for a quiet life. Your preferred conversation about the Catholic Church will be conducted in idealised and abstract terms, perhaps liberally quoting the Pope. In this way you can avoid confronting a messy reality.



When you draw lists of people who may and may not safely speak on church property, and of authorised and proscribed events, you are usually engaged in an exercise of authority. The boundaries drawn are a symbol of clerical authority over Catholic conversation.

Why does this matter? Those who criticise these restrictive practices within the Catholic Church often imply that free speech is an unqualified good. Certainly, in political societies, free speech serves an informed public opinion and fuller participation in decision making. But even there, free speech is not an absolute value. Generally, societies do not tolerate the open advocacy of behaviour that would subvert its foundations.

The Catholic Church famously is a distinctive kind of political society. Catholics receive a faith that is handed down and Catholic conversation about faith assumes the framework of what has been handed down. Bishops are responsible for encouraging the handing on and living of the received faith. These qualities of Catholic life structure conversation and suggest boundaries. In particular, they may justify restricting conversation when it subverts the faith that is handed on. They also demand, however, an active public opinion and the largest measure of free speech.

The heart of the Catholic Church is the living faith of Christians. That is the gift where Christ is understood to be present, and where the Holy Spirit to be working. At this level, there is no distinction between different classes of Christians. At the level of living faith, too, all Christians, teachers and those taught, are weak. In their grasp of Christ's love and their response to it, they are always limited. The Spirit works to encourage a fuller faith and fuller Christian life.

The importance of teaching and pastoral leadership lies in the need to enlarge narrow minds to believe more fully, and constricted hearts to live more generously by faith. This requires both authoritative teaching and open conversation.

Unconstrained conversation is important, because it is the ordinary way in which we are converted to a fuller form of faith and of Christian life. When tinny ideas have license to speak themselves, they may initially be attractive. But their deficiencies soon appear when set against something better. When they are suppressed, they seem daring and attractive.

If they are to encourage people to live more fully by faith, teachers need a climate of open conversation. For you can only encourage people to a better mind if you know how they are living, how they imagine the world, and how they relate their faith to their world. Without the understanding that comes from easy conversation, your pastoral strategies will inevitably be flawed.

Teachers also need to encourage free speech to complement their own limitations. Because of the weakness of their own faith, their responses to people and their pastoral strategies will inevitably be influenced by prejudices and cultural conditions as well as by faith. Conversation is the normal way through which the Holy Spirit leads us to examine our conscience.

Encouragement of open conversation and its authoritative declaration are two sides of the same coin. The risk of marking out authoritative boundaries to conversation is that it suppresses self-criticism. One comes to stand over and not under the Gospel. For this reason, the restrictions on conversation in any church should be as narrow as possible. To remove issues like clerical abuse, Eucharistic hospitality and women's ministry from conversation hinders teachers from encouraging a fuller faith. They fly blind, with answers to questions that are not being asked, but without words to address the questions that are being asked.

Because it so respects living faith as Christ's gift, the Catholic tradition typically celebrates a breadth of devotional expression, of theological perspectives, and of forms of Christian life. Where people whose lives and words are respected in their own churches are excluded from speaking in other churches, there is a breach of universality and of communion. Where the refusal is based on the exclusive preference for one among many legitimate expressions of Christian life, whether radical or reactionary, Augustine's harsh words about the Donatists, the sectarians of his day, form sufficient comment: 'The heavens proclaim the glory of God, and these frogs squat in their marsh and croak, "We are the only Christians"'.

Ultimately effective evangelism demands open conversation. For it invites people to find a deep trust in God by entering a community that lives confidently. In the early church, the gift of the Spirit to which the evangelists appealed was boldness of speech. When we restrict and control conversation in the community, we communicate anxiety and timidity. We may attract those who seek security, but it is not the Gospel of freedom that we commend. ■

Andrew Hamilton SJ is the publisher of *Eureka Street*.

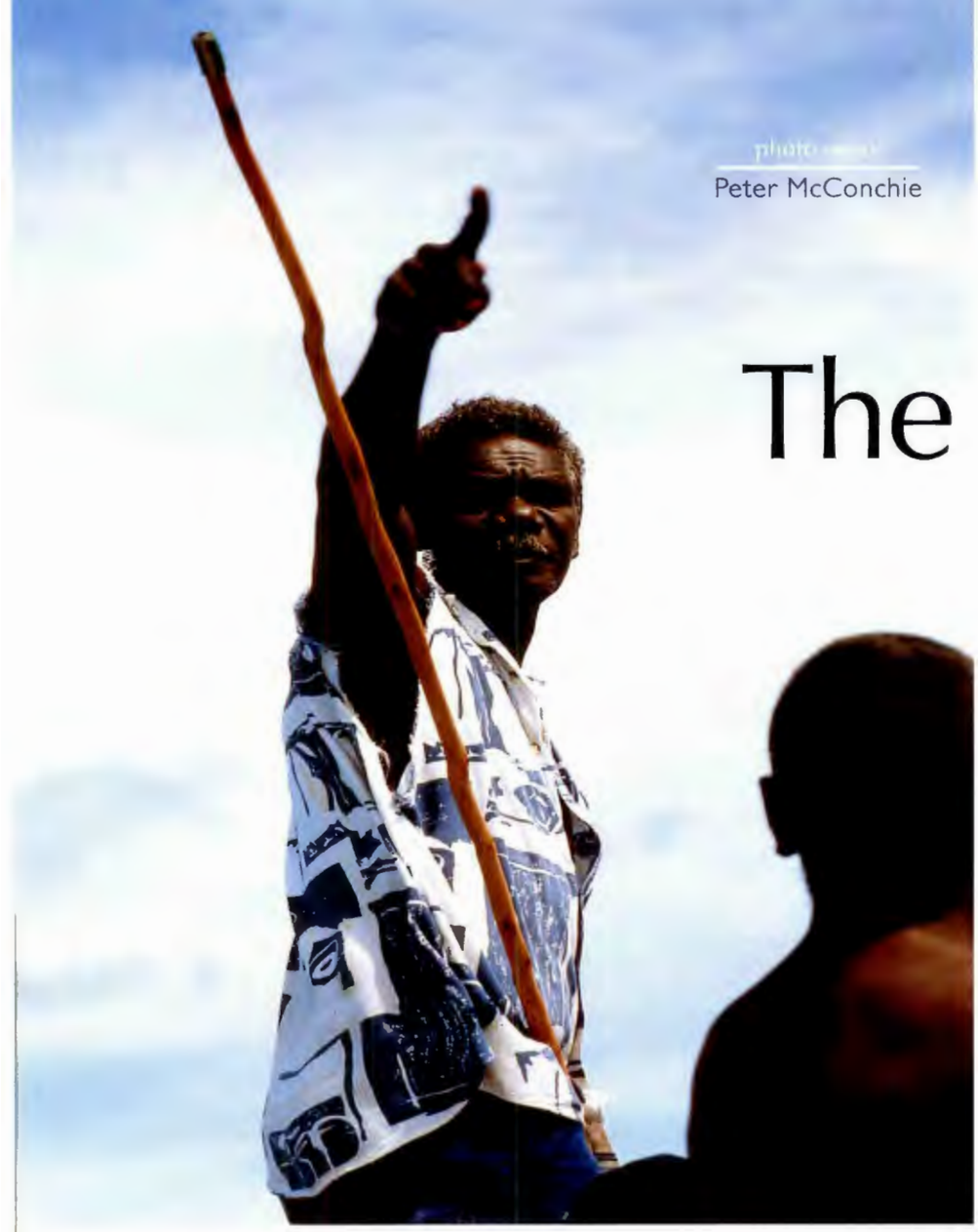


photo essay

Peter McConchie

The wisdom of the elders

AUTHOR AND PHOTOGRAPHER Peter McConchie travelled for two years collecting the stories that make up his unique publication *Elders: Wisdom from Australia's Indigenous Leaders* (Cambridge University Press, 2003). *Elders* is a collection of transcripts of the thoughts of senior Elders and Indigenous community leaders. Peter made the book as a means through which the Elders may share their wisdom and history with non-Indigenous Australians. —**Nikki Fisher**

Hunting

Number one on menu is turtle, kangaroo, the red one. Turtle number one, red kangaroo entrée, then stingray when we get it. For the *gapirri* [white-tail stingray] is from November to February, in between they are plentiful. How we know is the white flowers, we call it *warrkarr* [white one] because it tells us it's stingray season. It's the start of the rainy season. What's on the land tells us what's in the water. What's going on in the forest, same things going on in the sea. —**Nungki Yunupingu**, Gumatj Clan, Yolgnu Nation.

Family

On the papers it had what nationality you were, like it did on most papers, and he put Australian Aborigine. This was in 1918, and he was rejected from the Australian army and came home. He was adamant he was going to fight for his country and change things by recognition being given to Aboriginal people. The only way he could legally be accepted was to sign up as a black American, and so he did. And in 1919 he did two years overseas and came home with medals. The other soldiers knew he was an Aboriginal, they all knew who each other were, they were mates, they were all mates. My Father was in the signal corps. —**Joy Wandin Murphy**, Wurundjeri.

Left to right: Eileen Wani Wingfield, Marth Brown Edwards, Emily Munyungka Austin

The Land

We had big rain, plenty of water laying around. A lot of people think we got no water out here, but we got plenty. We drink out of that sink hole in the desert, drink that nice fresh water, and that's what we're fighting for, the land. We've been everywhere—Sydney, Melbourne—we talk about our land. And they want to bring the nation's nuclear waste site here. That dump's going to affect the water, and we don't want that. We want our water. We don't want the dump here. Don't dig up uranium, leave it in the ground. It's poison to us for a long time, uranium. The old people, Grandmother, Grandfather, they told us and they know. They know it's in the ground—the Aboriginal people—know all about it. It was buried in the ground safe. Now it's all dug up, and when it rains it spreads out everywhere, and it's ruining everything.

—**Emily Munyungka Austin**, Kupa Piti Kungka Tjilpi Tjuta.

Spirit

Most of the forest around here and in our country has got hollow trees that have been burnt out. We believe that the hollows of these trees hold our people, the old people that have passed on. If you're in the forest late at night, that's when the Mumair or the Woodachi wander around looking for a person to go into. Half an hour before sunset you get out of these areas and home and get away from the forces of these spirits.

—**Wonidgie, Wayne Webb**, We-Dandi and Bibbulman Clans, Noongar people.

Anthony Ham

On the edge of Europe

Norway has enjoyed great prosperity but this may not continue indefinitely

Norway is, if the United Nations is to be believed, something of a paradise, a utopian ideal to which the rest of the world can aspire. Not for the first time, in 2004 the UN Human Development Index, which ranks countries according to life expectancy, education and income, decided that Norway was the most liveable country in the world.

In the years following World War II, Norway was the poor cousin of Europe, its patchwork of remote and rural farmsteads eking out a grim subsistence livelihood while the rest of Europe enjoyed a post-war boom of prosperity. However, the discovery of oil off the Norwegian North Sea coast in the late 1960s transformed the country's fortunes in the most dramatic way: Norway is now the world's sixth largest oil producer and third largest oil exporter. Norwegians enjoy the third highest per capita income in the world (between $US37,700 and $US43,350) and the government has created what it humbly calls the 'most egalitarian social democracy in western Europe'.

Norwegians are entitled to free medical care, free education (including university), unemployment benefits not far below salary levels, sick leave on full pay for up to a year, five weeks annual leave, up to a year of paid maternity leave (42 weeks of which is on full pay and known as the 'mother's wage'), four weeks paid paternity leave, heavily subsidised childcare and a guaranteed pension. You can also expect to live for 82.22 years if you're a woman and 76.15 years for men, a life expectancy assisted by the fact that there are 413 doctors and 1840 nurses for every 100,000 Norwegians (compared with 302 and 532 respectively in Australia).

When added to the fact that Norway has no external debt and has $US70 billion invested in the Petroleum Fund to protect Norwegians against a future without oil, it is difficult not to envy Norwegians the cradle-to-grave largesse of their government.

Norwegians may pay prohibitive rates of income tax (55.3 per cent for the highest earners, down from 70 per cent in 1992) and a range of service-user fees, but the general consensus is that they are more than compensated. So institutionalised has the welfare system become that when the long-standing reign of the Labour Party came to an end in 2001, even the new centre-right coalition government understood that the welfare system was sacrosanct.

For all of Norway's extraordinary social data, however, the statistics conceal a deep-seated malaise that is at once economic and a signifier of a creeping crisis of identity.

Many Norwegians with whom I spoke were sharply defensive of their welfare system. Their response, which sometimes bordered on hostility, could not be explained only by their awareness of the world's envy. Norwegians have long been rightly proud of how far they have come from the grim early years of the 20th century, a period which fostered a spirit of hard work and self-reliance. And yet, perhaps for the first time, Norwegians themselves, and not just outsiders, have begun to question whether such values have been abandoned.

According to the OECD, Norway in 2003 had the highest rate of work absenteeism in Europe. On an average working day, 25 per cent of Norwegian workers were absent on sick or disability leave (workers only require a medical certificate after eight weeks of absence). The average period of absence was 4.8 weeks, compared to 4.2 in Sweden, 1.8 in Italy and 1.5 in Portugal. When combined with annual leave, national holidays (11 days) and weekends, Norwegians don't work for 170 days in a calendar year at an estimated cost of $US12.3 billion to the Norwegian economy.

Increasing exposure to international markets and, for the first time in decades, a degree of job insecurity, led Finn Erik Thoresen, the Vice President of Norway's Confederation of Trade Unions to state that 'there has been a brutalisation of the work force. Most of the people away from work are on disability leave. That is a result of the working life. People are working and working until they are on the edge'.

Director General of Norwegian Business and Industry, Finn Bergesen Jr, was withering in his response: 'Everything is wrong, yet we are living in the best country in the world. People complain and complain, because we have everything ... We've never had fewer work hours, longer vacations, a better welfare system—everything is better than before'.

Concerns over productivity have furthered a perceptible sense of anxiety surrounding the future of Norway's wealth. The last significant Norwegian discovery of oil came in 1992 and an increasingly desperate industry has begun to explore more environmentally sensitive areas such as the pristine Lofoten Islands.

Such symbols of economic uncertainty have coalesced with an increasing angst among Norwegians over their place in the world. Startlingly for a country of its location and means, Norway has consistently voted against joining the European Union, first in a referendum in 1972 and again in 1994. Although divisions within the government mean that no further referendum is likely to be held until after 2005, recent polls suggest a nation deeply divided and uncertain. A survey in May suggested that 51 per cent of those polled were in

favour of EU membership with just 36 per cent against. By late July, only 42 per cent were in favour, with 45 per cent against.

Arguments against membership have been the domain of leftists who charge that the EU is a rich man's club with no valid purpose. Those to the right, including members of the centre-right government, have also advocated fear at a perceived loss of sovereignty that membership of the EU might entail, not to mention the likelihood that Norway's generous welfare provisions would not survive under EU fiscal guidelines.

Less openly, but with considerable resonance among rural Norwegians, many people also fear that Norwegian wealth would be used to subsidise other, poorer nations, thereby posing a threat to Norwegian prosperity. Key Norwegian constituencies—traditional family farms and fishing interests—oppose membership on the grounds of avoiding competition with their larger and more technologically advanced EU counterparts. As Piers, a long-standing Stavanger resident stated, 'if we join the EU, Norway's money will go to Europe and we will get nothing in return'.

And yet, many younger Norwegians with whom I spoke expressed profound dismay that Norway had hitherto refused to join, arguing that people have forgotten Norway's days of hunger when the outside world provided a lifeline: some 800,000 Norwegians migrated to the United States in the 19th and early 20th centuries due to famine at home. A recurring theme among the young—many of whom have travelled throughout Europe, Asia and Africa—is that Norway is not pulling its weight and is abdicating its responsibility to use its wealth for the benefit of European peace and integration. A few also expressed the fear that no one would listen when Norway's oil was exhausted and Norway needed Europe far more than it does now.

WHICHEVER WAY Norwegians vote at the next referendum, there is a growing realisation that they may soon be left with little choice. Generous free-trade concessions enabling Norway's participation in EU markets are becoming increasingly difficult to negotiate. Norway's restrictions on imports hardly help, nor does the EU's preoccupation with expansion to the east, a process which in turn may limit Norwegian access to many of its most lucrative markets which once lay outside the EU.

Allied to the economic fears is a darker side to Norwegian politics. If you spend any period of time in Norway, you will at some stage be struck by its glaringly visible homogeneity. Indeed it is difficult to imagine a more stark contrast to the multicultural pastiche of London, Paris, New York or Sydney than you will find on the streets of Bergen or Oslo, let alone more provincial centres.

Norwegians were rightly indignant when the Norwegian-flagged *Tampa* and its Afghan and Iraqi asylum seekers were denied entry to Australia in 2001. And yet Norway is a country where asylum seekers are most assuredly not welcome. Immigration is minimal and strictly controlled. Each time that I crossed the border between Norway and Sweden, a handful of Africans were removed from the bus, their papers scrutinised and their luggage painstakingly searched. This in spite of Norway signing the Schengen agreement granting free movement for all travellers between European countries.

Those refugees admitted in recent years by the Norwegian Government—primarily Somalis—are restricted to those already identified and approved in far-distant processing camps. They crowd into the suburbs of eastern Oslo, particularly Grønland, which is, depending on your perspective, a ghetto or refreshingly heterogeneous. Refugees also arrive knowing that the Norwegian government would like to repatriate them as soon as possible.

In international fora, Norway is sometimes portrayed as the model international citizen. The Norwegian Government is, as a proportion of Gross Domestic Product, one of the largest donors of foreign aid and it has been actively involved in peace initiatives in conflict zones such as Sri Lanka and the Middle East. And yet, for many critics, this typifies the Norwegian approach to international relations: spending money to keep the problem far from Norwegian shores.

On 26 January 2001, Norway's first racially motivated murder—the stabbing of a mixed-race youth outside his Oslo home—shocked a nation which had hitherto seen itself as a tolerant and responsible international citizen. In May 2004, the Norwegian Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik rejected a plan by a local Lutheran pastor to turn empty, disused churches into mosques (there are just 50,000 Muslims in a population of 4.5 million). Answering a question by Carl Hagen, leader of the far-right Progress Party, Bondevik stated, 'I think there are other uses that are more natural'. Norway is also one of the few non-secular European states with a constitution declaring: 'The Evangelical-Lutheran religion shall remain the official religion of the State. The inhabitants professing it are bound to bring up their children in the same'.

AGAINST THIS BACKDROP of institutionalised homogeneity, the widespread and dangerously populist argument against EU membership is the fear that Norway would be flooded with immigrants.

Norway's history of poverty—its centuries of occupation by the foreign armies of Sweden, Denmark and Nazi Germany—may have taught its people self-reliance and a wariness of outsiders. It may also have fostered an unwillingness to yet again surrender its sovereignty and become minor inhabitants in someone else's kingdom. But Norwegians are increasingly being asked to consider whether these understandable historical impulses can serve the nation well in the 21st century with a vibrant and troubled multicultural Europe on its doorstep.

Tucked away on the south-western coast of Norway is the lively and sophisticated city of Stavanger with daily departures by air and sea to other European cities. Its delightfully preserved old quarter of white timber houses overlooking the harbour and its 23 museums showcasing Norway's rich past has earned Stavanger the title of 2008 European Capital of Culture. It is also notable for one quality that is rare in Norway. Whether by choice or economic necessity, the home port of Norway's oil industry is home to workers from across the globe. Stavanger is one place in this largely monocultural country where a cosmopolitan, multicultural future seems possible. One cannot help but wonder whether the EU, in choosing Stavanger to host a celebration of European culture, is gently suggesting that it may equally represent an ideal of Norway's future. ■

Anthony Ham is a freelance writer living in Madrid.

Andrew West

Power left behind

On the 25th anniversary of the election of the Sandinista government, Nicaragua is still subject to the machinations of Central American politics

THE FIRST THING YOU NOTICE in Nicaragua are the dogs—mangy, often lame, with fearful eyes, roaming the streets in packs. The writer Robert Kaplan says one way to tell the progress of a country is by the condition of its stray dog population. If this is so, then Nicaragua has always been desperately poor because, for as long as anyone can remember, the dogs have prowled the barrios, and even the beaches, of this Central American nation.

It is 25 years since the revolution that brought the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) to power and 14 years since the controversial election that ended the rule of the Sandinista government in favour of a series of centrist and right-wing regimes. In the past quarter century, Nicaraguans have experimented with left-wing populism and free-market capitalism. Neither seems to have worked.

Arnoldo Alemán

It is still the poorest country in the region and despite four free elections since 1984, no one can seriously call Nicaragua a complete and authentic democracy. 'We have a certain degree of pluralism, but that is it', says Carlos Chamorro, a former Sandinista revolutionary and now one of the country's leading intellectuals, through his daily television program and weekly magazine.

'In a sense, we have two countries in one. On the one hand, institutions work pretty well; the business world, the press. But if you go into the countryside, you will see the role of the state is very small and there is a large segment of the population that lives in poverty and does not enjoy the same rights as other citizens.'

When the Sandinistas assumed power on 19 July 1979, they were welcomed almost everywhere—in Latin America and the Caribbean, in Europe (east and west), even in the United States, which for 40 years, had sponsored the Somoza family and its dictatorship of ever-increasing brutality. As Franklin D. Roosevelt had once said, in a rare moment of candour, 'Somoza may be a son of a bitch, but he's our son of a bitch'.

By 1979, the Carter administration was no longer willing to succour the regime. As the Sandinistas—who had been operating as a guerilla force in the countryside, directed by a government-in-exile in neighbouring Costa Rica—reached the capital Managua, Carter dispatched his Under Secretary of State for Latin American Affairs to join them.

For Carter, the reassuring factor was that, while unmistakably leftist, the Sandinistas were not Marxist-Leninists. Their leadership—principally guerilla commander Daniel Ortega, writer Sergio Ramirez and businesswoman Violeta Chamorro (Carlos Chamorro's mother)—also included several Catholic priests, among them the Maryknoll father, Miguel D'Escoto Brockman, and two Jesuits, Ernesto and Fernando Cardenal.

'We were nationalists', explains Brockman, sitting in the living room of his home in the hills above Managua—the walls lined with books, modern art and Christian iconography, including a large crucifix at one end. 'We were progressive nationalists with a strong ingredient of social justice. We believed in taking the reins of our own destiny and not accepting foreign meddling.'

The Sandinistas certainly planned to reform Nicaragua by breaking up the large estates of the handful of Somoza cronies who had dominated the economy. Yet theirs was more a redistribution of small plots to the peasants rather than any Soviet-style farm collectivisation. Their second major goal was universal education to lift one of the lowest literacy rates in the Americas.

Even such relatively modest changes proved too much for the man who succeeded Jimmy Carter as president, Ronald Reagan. 'Reagan was a completely ideological warrior', says Chamorro. 'Whatever gradualist, nationalist reforms the revolution might have accomplished, he would have rejected.'

The revolution was also bittersweet for the Catholic clergy who accepted official posts in the Sandinista government. Brockman, the Cardenal brothers and two other priests, Alvaro Arguello and Edgar Parrales, were all suspended from the priesthood by Pope John Paul II, a status to which Brockman is still confined, despite being in good standing with the Maryknoll congregation.

For eight years, between 1981 and 1989, Reagan fuelled a civil war, using remnant Somoza loyalists, who called themselves 'contras', to effectively cripple any chance of reform in Nicaragua. 'Initially, the purpose of the war was to overthrow the Sandinistas', recalls Brockman. 'But soon enough, they learned they could not, so they aggravated things, to wreck the economy, so the people would get the point that, if they want things to improve, they should do away with the Sandinistas.'

And so it came to pass.

At the elections in 1990, Ortega and the Sandinistas—who in 1984 had won an election with 67 per cent of the vote, a result recognised as fair by all but those in government in Washington—lost to a 14-party coalition led by Violeta Chamorro, who had broken with the junta early in the Sandinista era. As Carlos Chamorro recalls: 'My mother tried to establish reconciliation but her supporters were not able to build a permanent alternative and when she left power the country swung to the right'.

THERE IT HAS STAYED since 1996, when Chamorro's rightist successor as president, former Managua mayor Arnoldo Alemán came to office. Nicaragua is also deeply mired in the corruption that afflicts so much Latin American politics. Alemán has since been jailed for 20 years for embezzling $US100 million in public money, much of it intended as aid to assist rebuilding following the devastation wrought in 1998 by Hurricane Mitch. For Nicaraguans, it was a sad reprise of the Somozas' appropriation of reconstruction funds after the devastating 1972 earthquake.

Nicaragua is also weakened by the culture of deal-making and 'big man' politics in the post-Sandinista era. After his second election defeat in 1996, Ortega struck an agreement with Alemán to divide control of key institutions, such as the national assembly and the judiciary, between them. 'They have concentrated a lot of power', says Chamorro, 'and this is problematic to the development of further democracy because they subordinate everything to their own traditional politics'.

There are deep divisions within the FSLN, with the modernisers, who believe Ortega's tight grip is holding back the party's revival, coalescing around the Sandinista mayor of Managua, Herty Lewites, as an alternative standard-bearer. 'It would [be] very good for this country for the FSLN to win an election', adds Chamorro, 'but it is difficult for them as long as Daniel Ortega pretends to be the eternal presidential candidate because, whenever he is, the rest of the country unites against him'.

Ironically, Ortega had less power as Nicaragua's president, when he governed as part of a collective leadership. Indeed, the presence of a strong vice-president and other cabinet members, many with their own bases of support, meant Nicaragua under the FSLN never became truly authoritarian, unlike Fidel Castro's Cuba.

The US also continues to intervene in Nicaraguan politics. Just before the 2001 election, when Ortega appeared to be rallying in the polls, Florida Governor Jeb Bush, whose state is home to many of the Somoza cronies who remain in exile, published full-page advertisements in the Nicaraguan newspapers, saying how disappointed his brother, George, would be if the people restored the FSLN to power. 'The people went to vote with a gun at their heads', said Brockman, referring to the renewed threat of civil war. 'You know that when a dog that barks has a record of biting then you have reason to fear when you hear it barking again.'

Carlos Chamorro

In a further irony, Nicaraguans themselves seem to be losing faith in democracy, slipping into the pattern of countries that have toyed with free markets and imperfect elections since the fall of the Berlin Wall 15 years ago. In the latest 'Latino Barometer', published in *The Economist*, Nicaraguans, more than any other Central Americans, said they would be willing to accept any kind of government—democratic or otherwise—that would improve their material lot.

'It is impossible to talk about democracy among people who are starving to death', argues Brockman. 'Extreme poverty does not help to consolidate democracy and poverty is only growing in Nicaragua.'

Still, Brockman and Chamorro agree that, despite their growing ambivalence about democracy, Nicaraguans cling tightly to one enduring legacy of the revolution of 1979, something they believe will ultimately spare the country another dictatorship. 'I think it is something intangible', says Chamorro. 'It is a sense of autonomy, a sense of Nicaraguans no longer being willing to let others impose on them or violate their rights.' ■

Andrew West is a Sydney journalist and author, most recently of *Bob Carr: A Self-Made Man*, published by Harper Collins.

Dorothy Horsfield

The new Jews of Berlin

Dorothy Horsfield visits the fastest growing Jewish community in Europe

Being a Jew in Berlin these days has become very fashionable, an integral part of the city's self-conscious culture of remembrance and reconciliation. From Holocaust monuments, museums and memorials to books, historical studies, Yiddish folklore, food, film and Klezmer concerts, it has also become a profitable industry, one which Jewish cultural critic Iris Weiss claims has more in common with Disneyland than what it really means to be Jewish.

Iris and I have met for coffee in a café next-door to the Berlin's largest synagogue. Bombed almost to rubble by the Allies, its magnificently reconstructed golden-striped dome has become one of the brightest landmarks of the city. We are also in the heart of a Jewish quarter, densely crowded with summer sightseers, which dates back to the Middle Ages. Within a block are the Anne Frank Museum, a Jewish high school and cemetery, an original workshop from the 1930s for blind Jews and a theatre that features Jewish music. All around, on apartment buildings and pavements are brass plaques listing families who died in concentration camps.

A couple of kilometres away on prime city real estate near the Brandenburg Gate and Unter den Linden, the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe is nearing completion. At a cost of around $50 million, the memorial consists of 2751 ash-coloured concrete pillars arranged in rows like a graveyard.

'Germans perceive it as something for Jews,' Iris tells me, a little scornfully. She says she prefers memorials that confront you unexpectedly in everyday life. In the Berlin suburb of Schöenerberg, for example, there is a 1930s plaque on a post outside a grocery store. On one side is a picture of bread, on the other a warning that Jews can only shop from 4 to 5pm.

In her late 40s, outspoken and independent, Weiss moved to Berlin a decade ago to take up a job as executive director of a government research project on women's issues in German reunification. Now, as well as providing a comprehensively-researched tour of Jewish Berlin, she occasionally works as a journalist for the Jewish press. During the past year, her website has averaged 19,000 hits a month.

Weiss's father was one of the few German Jews to survive the Nazis extermination program. In Berlin, out of a Jewish population of 170, 000, only around 6,100 were alive by the end of the war. Growing up in southern Germany, Weiss says one of the first things she noticed as a child was that, unlike her classmates, she had no relatives to share the family celebrations.

Similarly, she says there are simply not enough Jews in modern Berlin to meet popular interest. The results are cultural products supported and administered by non-Jews who have insufficient background in Judaism. Moreover, many of these Germans identify with the Jewish community as a way of assuaging the guilt of the past and developing a sense of belonging. This often means the Jew is portrayed as an exotic stranger or as a perennial victim.

If true, such stereotyping appears to have very little to do with contemporary realities. Although Berlin has the fastest growing Jewish population in the world, the community is ethnically diverse and spans a range of traditions from orthodox to secular. Eighty per cent of the 12,000 or so registered, tax-paying members of the Jewish Gemeinde (community) are from various regions of the former Soviet Union, including the Ukraine, the Baltic, Moldovia, Azerbaijan and Russia. It's estimated up to another 20,000 Soviet Jews have migrated here but have not officially acknowledged their Jewish descent. Israelis too are immigrating in increasing numbers. The German Embassy in Tel Aviv is said to have up to 3,000 inquiries a day. In other words, almost no-one in today's Berlin is a German-born Jew. According to the figures, only 2–3 per cent ever returned.

'Of course, we are generally talking about only two categories here', says Berlin's Chief Rabbi Chaim Rozwarski, poignantly, 'those who chose to stay away and the dead'.

Rabbi Rozwarski's synagogue is a 20-minute train ride from the city centre in the genteel district of Charlottenburg, where a small post-war community of Eastern European Jews also settled. The synagogue is in a side-street just off the Kurfürstendamm, the main shopping drag with its designer-label shops and department stores. At the door is the mandatory security that's a feature of the city's seven synagogues, including armed police guards, video screen, double glass doors and metal detection.

The Rabbi is a short, barrel-chested man with greying hair. Of Polish descent, he grew up in New York and came here six years ago to set up a Jewish school. He appears overworked, a little impatient and deigns to be interviewed in his shabby book-lined office for exactly 20 minutes by his watch.

'Soviet Jews are coming here because it is really more secure', he tells me, 'without the haunting feeling the neighbours could turn against them. Also the German government is still behaving in a contrite

fashion, accepting the migrants are a special minority, extending financial aid, language teaching and so on'.

But why Berlin?

'If Israel was without political and security problems, most would have gone there', he shrugs. 'Many have strong connections and feelings for Israel. At the same time, we must give credit to the Jewish community here for establishing an infrastructure for social and cultural life—a case of the few absorbing the many.'

Since Perestroika more than a million Jews have left the Soviet Union, most of them for Israel. According to a study by social researcher, Judith Kessler, the turmoil in Israel has meant that the USA became the dream country for Soviet Jews. But with America's policy of severely restricted immigration, Germany has shuffled up the list to become the most favoured alternative. It's seen as a country of poets and thinkers, wealthy, stable, open to the world and close-by geographically. As well, many Jewish migrants come from regions that were never occupied by the German army or they're of a generation that's more likely to remember the persecutions under Stalinism.

FOR THESE MIGRANTS, Berlin is unique. The number of ex-Soviet citizens, Jewish or not, who are living here either legally or illegally is conservatively estimated to be around 200,000. As a result an infrastructure has spread—from Russian-language video rentals and computer software to marriage bureaus, restaurants, clubs, radio shows and newspapers. By the late '90s, 75 per cent of Soviet Jews arriving in the city had relatives already here, including children and grandchildren.

Kessler's study also suggested that many of those who were Jewish were not being absorbed by the few in the established Gemeinde. After 70 years of communism, the newcomers appear mostly estranged from Judaism. Equally, there are rumours that the favoured status of Jewish migrants to Germany has led to a thriving trade in false documents in the former Soviet Union.

Whether or not they are officially affiliated to the community, Kessler describes these Jewish immigrants as overwhelmingly highly educated, cultured professionals—civil engineers, teachers, doctors, journalists and economists. And with 75 per cent of them unemployed in a recessionary Germany, not surprisingly many feel displaced and disappointed.

'It takes a long time to integrate,' acknowledges Dr Irine Runge, 'ten to twenty years through the children to grow out of the past. For the younger Russians it's good here—250 to 500 Euros a month is better than what they're used to. For the older generation, not so. A man might be a Professor of something-or-other but no-one wants to listen.'

Runge is the Director of the Jüdischer Kulturverein, (Jewish Cultural Association) in Berlin, a secular organisation which she set up in East Berlin in 1986 to help Jews understand their heritage. A small woman, full of energy and optimism, who looks 20 years younger than her 62 years, she says it can take a long time too to find a way back to a sense of what it means to be Jewish. It's a struggle she believes she has yet to win.

These days she also works as a 'voice' for the immigrant community. 'The Soviet Jews have more in common with bourgeois Germans', she says, 'because they invest a lot in their children. The kids are pushed with music and dance lessons, university education. Culture is their vitamin'. Recently her association organised an outing to the Museum of Modern Art exhibition in Berlin. It was very important to the Russian Jews, Runge says, that they bring their young children along.

'And with no chance of a job, many of them become writers, poets, musicians.'

Runge also questions the commonplace belief that a failure to register with the Gemeinde necessarily means a deep-seated alienation from Judaism. Jewish life often takes place, she says, 'in the kitchens of the new immigrants'. They worship 'in small back-street synagogues which transplant familiar Eastern European orthodox traditions with a male rabbi whose language is Russian'.

Runge and her family are among the handful of German Jews who came back to the city after the war—but not to West Berlin. She describes herself as 'a red diaper baby', born in 'The Fourth Reich'—Washington Heights, Manhattan. Her parents were communists who returned from exile at the invitation of the East German government. Now she agrees that many accounts of the regime underestimate the idealism of its citizens, especially the young.

'Our Jüdischer Kulturverein was never a dissident group', she says. 'Some of us worked for the Stasi. We were part of a system we'd grown up in and we were blind to it because we were too close. We believed we belonged to a unique future.'

At times Runge says they were very critical of the old men who ran East Germany, but no-one imagined their own people were capable of such 'shit': that they were doing what the Nazis did, that the stereotypes went on. But with hindsight it's clear 'idealists should never be in power because reality has no relevance to them'.

For a time after the collapse of the East, Runge says she lost the ability 'to live and fight for social dreams'. But she is beginning 'to build up again' in face of the gradual re-establishment of Berlin's Jewish population: 'No longer is there a survival mentality. These people have made a decision to live here. Fifty years ago Jews were not open, trusting, everything was the cemetery. Now it's schools and kindergartens, two Yeshivas. Look around at the young people, the babies and pregnant women—they mean real change. There is a Jewish future in Berlin'. ■

Dorothy Horsfield is a writer and journalist currently based in Berlin. Her most recent book is a memoir of her late husband, Paul Lyneham.

Beth Doherty

A helping hand

Beth Doherty examines the response by governments and charities to poverty in Australia

In the small, cramped space of a housing commission unit, Denny waits for his next visit from Vinnies. He rang last week for some food vouchers and has just had his social security payment revoked. It won't be reinstated until next week.

Two volunteers climb the stairs to his unit. They have a sheet with notes on each of the people they are to visit today. The well-organised grids are typed with relevant information like: single mother, two children, on a pension. A note is next to Denny's name. It tells the volunteers they must advise him to try ringing some other organisations for help, maybe give him some financial advice. The look on Denny's face as they walk through the door makes the task particularly difficult. The volunteers attempt to soften the blow. They don't know how to explain the situation. Eventually, they follow their instincts, apologise, give him some food vouchers and tell him to call whenever he needs help again.

The reason they have been asked to do this, is that the Society is forced to evenly distribute limited resources. Each week, Vinnies has to try and work out who needs extra support—who is living in poverty and why. The Society spirit cautions against labelling people as 'welfare dependents', and they believe in more than just a handout. They attempt to find what lies beneath people's need, to assess what is causing poverty and isolation. And these values need to be stronger than ever, as requests for assistance in the last year have almost doubled. More and more, the Society has needed to allow for greater distribution of resources in the face of long-term unemployment and increased isolation.

'We're facing a bigger number of people that suffer greater financial deprivation,' says Victorian State President of the St Vincent de Paul Society, Syd Tutton.

Coupled with this demand is a greater expectation of professionalism and indeed a push to 'corporatise' the Society. Corporatisation, while necessary, needs to incorporate the initial vision.

Despite a time of economic prosperity for Australia, volunteers are finding that government agencies no longer provide all the essential services for the most marginalised. Increasingly, governments—both state and federal—have moved to outsource support work to charity organisations.

The alarming increase in reliance on the Society is demonstrated in a 9.6 per cent increase in welfare requests for 2003–04. Further, there has been a 100 per cent increase in requests for assistance with utility accounts.

The reasons underlying these increases are varied. The deinstitutionalisation of the welfare support sector has meant that a rug has been whipped out from underneath many of society's most vulnerable. Boarding houses, aged-care facilities and accommodation for intellectually-disabled people have been sold by governments. This makes centralising care and creating a sense of community difficult and can exacerbate isolation.

A staggering 21 per cent of Australians now live in households that make less than $400 a week, which equates to 3.6 million people living below the poverty line. 852,000 children live in houses where neither parent works; 167,000 children live in working poor households; and one in every six 15–19 year olds may never find secure employment.

Recently appointed CEO of the St Vincent de Paul Society's National Council, Helen Cameron, has come in at a time of upheaval. Part of her job is to work with people around Australia to enact a cohesive plan which allows the Society to effectively lobby government on poverty issues to ensure that they, and other charities, are not placed in a position where they have to turn people away. She faces the task of mobilising resources so the best outcomes can be found to assist the most marginalised.

'I aim to help the Society deliver its services to the poor in a better way', she says. Helen feels that Australia has not done its best to ensure that everyone has equal access to wealth, and that the poorest 30 per cent miss out.

'As to the role Vinnies can play in this area in the future, some of the key areas of effort lie in Vinnies' ability to give a hand-up to people who are disadvantaged either by upbringing or lifestyle.'

Ideally, respecting the dignity of the people they serve is one of the main objectives of Vinnies. Through education programs, they hope to reduce reliance on the welfare system, while recognising that there are many who will always be in need of support.

The situation of increasing need has been brought to the attention of government departments and MPs by a large coalition of organisations including Vinnies, Anglicare, UnitingCare, Catholic Welfare Australia and Jesuit Social Services to name a few. The Christian Community Services Against Poverty (a coalition of the aforementioned organisations) launched a campaign prior to the federal election, urging people to vote against parties whose policies contribute to systematic poverty. Additionally, this year's federal government Senate report into poverty *A hand up not a hand out: Renewing the fight against poverty* received 30 submissions from Vinnies. These recommendations (and those from other service organisations) were collated into the report.

One recommendation is to set up an anti-poverty strategy, examples of which have been enacted in Ireland and the United Kingdom. Such strategies assist in keeping poverty at the forefront of public debate.

In Ireland, in 1986, a Combat Poverty Agency was created, advising government on poverty issues, undertaking research, and setting up projects to deal with unemployment. There is also a public education aspect to their work. The Department of Social and Family Affairs has established a national office for social inclusion, and senior public servants meet twice a year to observe how the anti-poverty strategy is working. In Australia, organisations like Vinnies and Catholic Welfare Australia may play a similar role in monitoring an anti-poverty strategy undertaken by government.

In creating anti-poverty strategies for Australia, the human face of the problem needs to be addressed. Too many children grow up in families where the only source of income is part-time or casual work. If one parent works above the prescribed number of hours, their social security payment is decreased for each hour worked. The casualisation of the workforce means that many workers are unable to secure permanent employment. These 'poverty traps' mean that as soon as any crisis develops, a battling family's ability to make ends meet is crushed. An anti-poverty strategy would, as its main priority, protect those most vulnerable, and consider introducing changes to welfare and social security measures.

A more considered approach needs to be introduced by government in order to alleviate poverty in Australia. Australia has sufficient wealth such that no one should live below the poverty line. A social security system that has unreasonable reporting expectations leaves charities to bridge a gap that is a government responsibility to fill. More concentrated and specific strategies need to be adopted, and those affected need to be included in a consultative process. Because, in a time of economic prosperity, people like Denny still sometimes need a helping hand. ■

Beth Doherty is the assistant editor of *Eureka Street*, and a member of the 2004 Victorian Young Vinnies Community.

Photo by **Bill Thomas**.

The life of Anne

Anne Boleyn, Joanna Denny. Hodder Headline, 2004. ISBN 0 749 95017 X, RRP $35

DESPITE THE RISE OF REPUBLICANISM, the theatre of royalty can still draw a crowd. Here, from the 16th century, is a story that would have been a godsend for the tabloid press. And the tale is told with verve and colour.

This new biography of Anne Boleyn plunges us into the struggle for survival in the world of Tudor England, where life was made precarious by high child mortality and recurrent outbreaks of plague. Court intrigue added a further hazard for the high and mighty. And on the wider stage there were the great religious, political and cultural shifts of the Reformation.

The author also discusses more intimate details such as the reliability of the portraits of her. Anne was the second daughter of one of the rising families in Tudor England. Her father Thomas Boleyn leaned towards the Reformation, while her mother, a Howard, was more sympathetic to the Catholic tradition. A bright future had been hoped for her as a result of some eight years of her childhood spent being groomed at the French court. While perhaps not the greatest beauty, Anne was certainly very attractive and intelligent. She was also deeply committed to the Reformation, which was still struggling to find staunch patrons and a firm footing in England. But Anne enters the pages of history because of her marriage to King Henry VIII. She proved to be no easy catch. It took him several years to win her, unlike her sister Mary who had readily succumbed to his blandishments. Her triumph as wife and queen lasted a relatively short three years. After failing to produce the longed-for male heir, her position became precarious indeed. Anne's eventual fall on clearly trumped-up charges of treason, incest and adultery show her as a victim of court intrigue and the king's mercurial moods.

The most glaring shortcoming of this book is the stark difference between the friends and foes of the author. The representatives of the old order are a pretty horrid lot, seemingly incapable of a noble gesture. Thus the king's grandmother, Lady Margaret Beaufort was a 'fierce mother' and a 'self-righteous woman', Thomas More a 'most unattractive character' and Catherine of Aragon and her daughter (later Mary I) are the most tiresome of grumblers. Modern research would suggest that the truth is rather more complex. However if you want clearly delineated 'good guys' and 'bad guys' then this is your book. ■

Austin Cooper OMI lectures in history at Catholic Theological College, Melbourne.

The Missing Person

A pamphlet droops from the letterbox
like a tongue. Not the usual tarot pack of cheap deals
but a plea about a missing person.
Letterboxes all down the street
are panting the pamphlets.
Missing since June 23. Please contact ...
I crumple it up, cram it into my pocket
with receipts, bills and old shopping lists.
All day the missing person is trapped there.
As night settles and it starts to get cold
she burns against my skin,
my pocket fills with ash ...
I keep an eye on the news. There's
plenty of sport, but no word about the missing person.
My thigh grows blistered and sore.

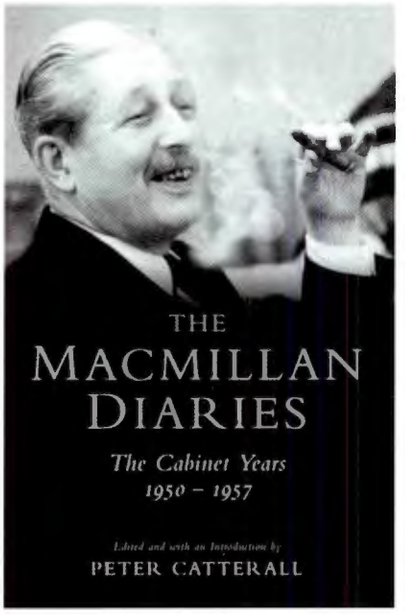
John Foulcher

John Button

Yes, Minister

The Macmillan Diaries: The Cabinet Years 1950–1957, Peter Catterall (ed). Pan Macmillan, 2004.
ISBN 0 330 48868 6, RRP $30

HAROLD MACMILLAN WAS Prime Minister of Britain from 1957 to 1963. He enjoyed the nicknames 'Supermac' and 'Unflappable Mac'. He seemed cool and littered the political landscape with memorable phrases like, 'You've never had it so good' and 'the winds of change'.



Macmillan's career is well documented. The circumstances for this were unique and propitious. He belonged to the famous publishing family. The house of Macmillan published his war diaries, his memoirs (six volumes), Alistair Horne's excellent two volume biography, and now the first volume of his diaries.

This spin doctor's paradise was well controlled. Macmillan chose his own biographer and coordinated with him. There was even 'a certain amount of guidance' in his editing of the diaries.

Macmillan was a bookish man, an avid reader and a prolific diarist and writer. He was also reticent and uptight (he worked at being 'unflappable'). His memoirs are said to be very dull. This is not entirely a surprise. He told his biographer that the aim of the memoirs 'was to keep myself out of it'. This aim is less manifest in the diaries, but not much.

Macmillan suffered all the hazards of an upper-class up-bringing plus a childhood in a strict Victorian household dominated by a strong-minded American mother of Methodist persuasion. She was ambitious for her three sons and particularly Harold, the youngest.

He was a lonely child, his brothers were much older. Afternoon walks with his nanny were a highlight. At nine he was sent to boarding school, then Eton. At Oxford he fell under the influence of a young tutor, Ronald Knox, but his mother, intolerant of Anglo-Catholic nonsense, fixed that by having Knox sent down from Oxford. Macmillan joined the Army. His mother had him transferred to the Grenadier Guards. He was badly wounded in France. Back in England he joined the publishing company and later became a member of parliament.

In 1920 he married Lady Dorothy Cavendish, a daughter of the Duke of Devonshire. His mother approved, but it was a strange relationship, although it began happily. In 1929 Macmillan learned of his wife's affair with his 'friend' and parliamentary colleague Robert Boothby, a charmer of some notoriety. Both Macmillan's marriage and his wife's affair lasted until her death in the 1960s.

Against this background it is perhaps not surprising that Macmillan became absorbed in political life with such determination and toughness. The military moustache concealed a stiff upper lip. Bernard Levin, the acerbic commentator of the *London Spectator*, wrote of Macmillan's 'brutality, cunning and greed for power, normally met only in the conclaves of Mafia capi'.

This volume of diaries reveals little of a personal life. Neither his mother nor his wife are mentioned. Boothby gets an occasional reference as 'brilliant' and 'disloyal'.

The subtitle *The Cabinet Years 1950–1957* makes it sound rather like the story of an apprenticeship. In a sense it was, although Macmillan was already a senior Tory politician. His descriptions of the dreary stuff of politics (lobbying, committees, speech-making) are as interesting as it is possible to make them. The diaries reveal a noblesse oblige and some tolerance, with lapses: a Labour foreign secretary is 'a dirty little cockney guttersnipe' and 'a third rate Tammany boss'.

AS MACMILLAN STEPS up the ministerial pecking order from Housing to Defence to Foreign Minister and Chancellor, the politics become more interesting. Occasionally there are some shrewd insights, which 50 years later remain remarkably relevant.

Thus, technology ('labour-saving devices') means 'no proper time to think ... one can only get away from it by being ill'. Civil servants, 'the new priesthood', 'can only function as a parasite on enterprise and production', and 'it is terrifying to realise how dangerous the Americans can be without good advice. They mean well and their heart is in the right place ... but their head!'

THE FASCINATING DRAMA of these diaries turns on the role of Winston Churchill as Prime Minister. By 1954, aged 80—with his health in decline and his mind tending to wander—he remained reluctant to give up the leadership in spite of urgings from his senior ministers including Macmillan. As the diaries note, '"You cannot ask me", (these are his very words) "to sign my own death warrant", but as Butler [then Chancellor of the Exchequer] observed, "he has no objection to signing ours". All this is a tragic situation. All of us who really have loved as well as admired him, are being slowly driven into something like hatred'.

Apart from politics, the diaries record occasional functions at stately homes as 'a most welcome change from drab political life', and a glittering world with 'all the remaining tiaras, necklaces, etc, out of the banks for one night'. At church Macmillan reads the lessons and notes 'that the children enjoyed Genesis 37'. He has a passion for shooting and there are a number of entries: 'a pleasant little day at home; we got 22 cock-pheasants before breakfast'.

Amidst all this solemn and committed political life Macmillan had time to keep a diary (with some gaps) and to read omnivorously, mainly but not entirely the English classics. How he did it is difficult to imagine. The diaries are matter-of-fact. At the end of the fortnight in which he became Prime Minister, Macmillan notes 'I have read a good deal in recent weeks—some Trollope, some Henry James, three volumes of Cobbett's *Rural Rides* ... I have now embarked on R.L. Stevenson, which I have not read for many years'.

Of all the political diaries written in the last 30 or 40 years, Alan Clark's are the most entertaining. This is because he was outrageously politically incorrect. R.H. Crossman's are the most incisive about the shortcomings of parliamentary democracy. This volume of Macmillan's diaries is very politically correct, but in spite of his reticence it is perhaps the most important simply because of who he was and what he did. It reflects his time, his class, and his achievements. ■

John Button is the author of three books and the prize-winning *Quarterly Essay* 'Beyond Belief'. He was a minister and senator in the Hawke and Keating Governments.

Matthew Lamb

History remembered

The historian's conscience: Australian historians on the ethics of history, Stuart Macintyre (ed).
Melbourne University Publishing, 2004. ISBN 0 522 85139 8, RRP $29.95

THE HISTORIAN'S CONSCIENCE is a companion to Stuart Macintyre's previous book, *The history wars* (re-issued 2004). In his earlier work, Macintyre provides an anecdote which illustrates the context in which he is writing and the purpose of both books.

He tells of a school teacher in the 1990s who was appointed by the Victorian Government to prepare curriculum materials on Australian studies. In order to do so, the teacher recruited a post-graduate student from the History Department of the University of Melbourne. After reviewing the proposed materials, the teacher became disturbed by the gloominess of some of the episodes included. During the 1930s Depression, for example, the wealthy were able to buy more because of deflation. Frustrated at this, the teacher finally turned to the white board, which he divided into two halves. He labelled one side, 'Blainey', and the other side, 'Manning Clark'. He explained that the first, referring to the work of Geoffrey Blainey, is 'good' history, and the second 'bad'.

For Macintyre, this story illustrates two disturbing trends that have dominated Australia's relationship to its own history. The first is how the study and uses of history have been divided into opposing camps. This violates the basic procedures of historical inquiry: the pursuit of objectivity, balanced by the doubt that this can ever be achieved. The second is how this division has resulted in misunderstanding the past. After all, it was Blainey who initially made this point about deflation during the Depression, not Clark.

The purpose of *The history wars* was to understand how these trends surfaced. In *The historian's conscience*, Macintyre, together with 13 other Australian historians, reflect on their profession, in an effort to move beyond the previous narrow polemic of the 'history wars'.

Macintyre opens this collection of essays by stating the two 'divergent obligations' of historians: history as a social science and history as heritage. History as a social science regards the historian as a dispassionate and objective observer. History as heritage sees the historian as an involved custodian of the past. 'One reworks the past to serve the interests of the present, the other attaches the present to a binding past.'

Yet Macintyre admits this distinction is drawn too starkly. Joy Damousi, in her essay, 'The emotions of history', argues that the field of the historian lies somewhere between these two obligations; that it involves maintaining a tension between objective facts and subjective emotion. Alan Atkinson argues that history is primarily a moral discipline; that 'compassion (I leave sympathy aside) is good history's main motive'. Yet he warns: 'Feeling can undermine as well as justify careful thought'.

In saying this, most historians gathered here admit that history shares a family resemblance with literature. Several contributors refer to the fact that historical narratives were originally a form of literature, but with reservation. They still uphold a notion of objectivity, like a guardrail. Yet it has only been recently—with the rise of the social sciences—that historians have adopted the style of scientific discourse. And what none of these historians have said is that while the writing of history stems from early forms of literature, science has its roots in religion. The constant danger here, of course, is that history—like its earlier counterpart, religion—may slip into some form of fundamentalism. And it is here that you start getting into an area which initially contributed to the 'history wars', which became in Australia a kind of national religious war.

For 'objectivity', 'detachment' and 'truth'—the hallmarks of scientific discourse—are often used to promulgate their opposite number. The guardrail quickly becomes a barrier. Behind every dispassionate and impressively academic apparatus sits an individual historian, in a particular time and place, who—as John Hirst argues, in his revealing and important essay, 'Changing my mind'—may 'write from the evidence, but also from [his or her] understanding of how the world works and how they would like it to work'. It is more honest and beneficial if these concerns are clearly evident, rather than lurking beneath, as this latter often acts as a short route to ideology.

But how to counterbalance fiction and ideology? This book suggests that the balancing force is to be found in the reader. Yet this also requires a certain type of history writing, which is not closed, or monological, but open and engaged. Macintyre points to the role of the footnote as an important device in this exchange. Penny Russell argues that footnotes empower 'readers to make different conclusions, rendering the historian vulnerable to continued reinterpretation ... they inspire most trust when they signal the historian's refusal of ultimate authority'. This creates an ongoing conversation between historians and the public.

'It's this conversation', Graeme Davison writes, 'that separates history from ideology or fiction'.

Matthew Lamb is a Brisbane writer.

Richard Dent

Against the odds

Just Passions: The personal is political, Rhonda Galbally. Pluto Press, 2004.
ISBN 1 864 03296 0, RRP $29.95

WHETHER YOUR GENERATION is pre-boomer, baby-boomer, X or Y, *Just Passions* is an eye-opening account to which Australians can relate. Rhonda Galbally's autobiography chronicles her important and often behind-the-scenes contributions to community, social justice, and health.

Recounting an upbringing both characterised by disability and fiercely *not* characterised by disability, Galbally presents a decidedly un-rosy view of Australia's rosy '50s and '60s. This was a time when inclusion for people with disabilities was unheard of, when women's rights were barely nascent, and when households, lungs and public places were full of carcinogenic tobacco smoke.

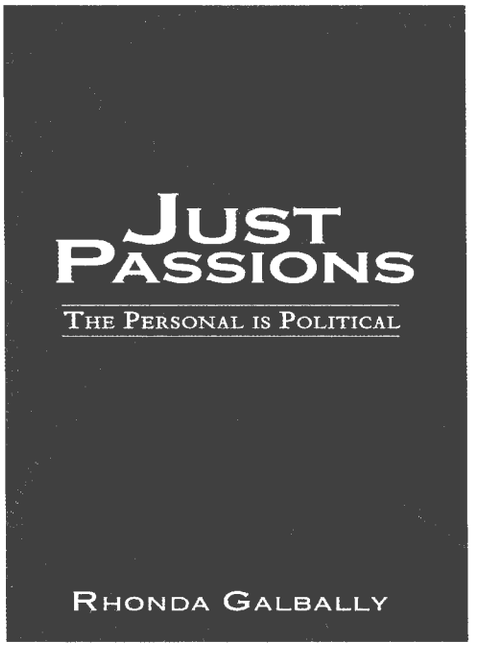
Galbally's life includes leadership of the Myer Foundation, the Sidney Myer Fund, the Australian Commission for the Future, VicHealth, and ourcommunity.com. Her achievements and contributions are sometimes so strategic as to be invisible to those who have not lived through the fights and struggles: promoting women's rights; shifting the focus of community organisations from 'charity' to 'change'; and recognising the rights of people with disabilities. Of course there is the exquisite irony too of using a tobacco tax to fund health promotion initiatives and undermining the tobacco companies' ability to promote their products.

In *Just Passions*, Galbally shares some of her innermost thoughts and fears. Despite her public profile, she presents her life and achievements in very human form. In one paragraph we read of her public successes, in the next we read of her acute embarrassment at borrowing a bizarrely oversized jacket from Winsome McCaughey to wear to a job interview. We read of her tenacity in battling the tobacco lobby, then we read of the earth-opening mortification of accidentally overturning her wheelchair in Parliament House.

In addition to offering insights into how one person can achieve so much, *Just Passions* highlights the relationships between high-profile Australians. Galbally describes her professional and personal relationships with people such as Nugget Coombs, Phillip Adams, Barry Jones, the Myer family and many others. She describes how Jones would 'bellow at the top of his voice like Thor raining thunderbolts', and how Phillip Adams once called her 'purring into the phone, seducing me as only he could' to head up the Australian Commission for the Future.

More than just an autobiography, *Just Passions* is a personalised Lonely Planet guide for aspiring community leaders. Galbally takes her own passions and makes them politically and publicly persuasive. Yet she is never condescending or pitying, and she never portrays herself as heroic or as a dynamic leader: she is always merely part of a community of like-minded people working often disparately for a common cause.

Just Passions is not a linear book, and not always easy to read. Throughout, we are treated to a sense of Galbally's restlessness: a feeling that getting comfortable in life must presage a new adventure. And yet as she moves into the present there appears a certain sense of resolution. Content with ourcommunity.com (for now), Galbally turns down high profile international positions in favour of the difference she is already making at a local level.



Just Passions offers a human perspective on how much an individual can achieve. This book is as complex, deep and inspiring as its author and her myriad of achievements. Readers are left with the hope that today's aspiring activists and leaders might draw strength and motivation. Any individual who achieves half as much as Rhonda Galbally, will be deservedly proud.

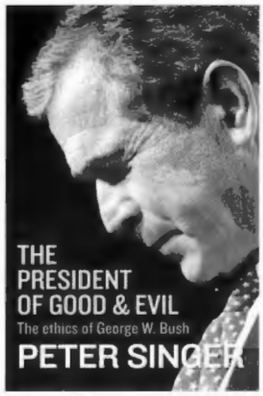
Richard Dent is CEO of the E.W. Tipping Foundation, a disability and social justice organisation.

Godfrey Moase

Ethics in a time of terror

The president of good & evil: The ethics of George W. Bush, Peter Singer. Text, 2004. ISBN 1 920 88508 0, RRP $30
Reigns of Terror, Patricia Marchak. McGill–Queen's University Press, 2003. ISBN 0 773 52642 0, RRP $39.95

IRAQ WAS INVADED in the name of democracy and freedom. Yet the Bush administration supported the ill-fated right-wing military coup in Venezuela against the democratically elected Venezuelan president, Hugo Chávez. The invasion of Iraq was supposed to be a humanitarian intervention. Yet, George W. Bush ignores the more pressing Sudanese situation, and he opposed intervention in Rwanda where hundreds of thousands of innocent people were massacred. Bush's failings, inconsistencies and blunders are well documented. We don't need history to tell us that the invasion of Iraq was an unadulterated error.



Hence, if Peter Singer's *The president of good & evil: The ethics of George W. Bush* were just a book detailing Bush's ethical failings and hypocrisies, then it would not cover new ground. Moreover, such a book may be the intellectual equivalent of a slaughter as one of the world's most influential philosophers tackles the inconsistencies of a man who can barely string two words together.

While *The president of good & evil* is an analysis of Bush's ethics in relation to a few defining issues such as international relations, taxation, and the environment, it is also an examination of a dominant current of opinion running through American public life. A strand of thinking that guides the world's only superpower, that is, the distinctively American conservative Christian perspective that divides the world into black and white, and that places the United States on a pedestal of inherent goodness above other nations. When Singer dissects Bush's ethics he also dissects that world view.

The Christianity that Singer analyses is an idiosyncratic and literal variety, rooted in the dualistic battle between good and evil that will culminate in the Apocalypse. This view holds that as America is the promised land and therefore inherently good, the enemies of America must be 'satanic' or 'evil', and the projection of American power and values can be justified as God's work. It is this perspective that acts as the ideological driving force behind American hegemony, and allows 3,000 American lives to be worth more than tens of thousands of Iraqis and Afghans.

Singer's style is succinct and clear and his utilitarian approach make his arguments easy to follow and enthralling. It would be unfair to characterise *The president of good & evil* as simply one more book in a long line of anti-Bush literature. It is not Singer versus a man that—as depicted in *Fahrenheit 9/11*—read *My Pet Goat* in a classroom for seven minutes after being informed that his nation was under attack. Rather it is a deconstruction of an American world view that Bush personifies.

It is easy to see why the Bush administration characterised the invasion of Iraq as one campaign in the long running 'war on terror' against America's 'evil' enemies. In reality the 'war on terror' serves a useful distraction from, and justification for, the general trend in the erosion of civil liberties, and the increased authoritarian powers of sovereign states. However, Patricia Marchak's *Reigns of Terror* draws the focus away from the 'war on terror' and back to state-sponsored terror.

Reigns of Terror spans nine outbreaks of state-sponsored terror in the 20th century, delving into the political, social, cultural and economic context of each. From the Armenian genocide during World War I through to the Rwandan massacres of 1994, Marchak, a Canadian academic, attempts to find out if the societies where the crimes against humanity occurred, share any common features. This contextual analysis forms the foundation of Marchak's theory of state-sponsored terror, which functions as a general early-warning guide to the occurrence of crimes against humanity. *Reigns of Terror* is a deeply theoretical book that serves a practical end. Marchak sets out to identify the conditions that lead to incidences of crimes against humanity, in order to build a clear and coherent doctrine of humanitarian intervention.

Reigns of Terror has an unusual structure. It is split into two parts, the first is devoted to Marchak's theory of state terror, and the second contains the historical background to each of the mass terrors and murders. It is not a book that is meant to be read from cover to cover in a linear fashion, otherwise it would seem quite disjointed. Rather, the case studies serve as a factual supplement to Marchak's argument. Nonetheless they are interesting in their own right.

One can feel *Reigns of Terror*, in some respects, is a reaction to the invasion of Iraq as it attempts to build a clear doctrine of humanitarian intervention. Such a clear doctrine would decrease the likelihood that acts of aggression—such as the invasion of Iraq—are characterised as humanitarian intervention; as well as hopefully preventing the occurrence of crimes against humanity in the first place. *Reigns of Terror* is definitely worth reading.

The president of good & evil and *Reigns of Terror* both deal with the ethical and unethical use of power. *The president of good & evil* deconstructs the ethical view that unilaterally dominates the world. On the other hand, *Reigns of Terror* creates a new moral framework for humanitarian interventions (and one that does not necessarily involve armed conflict), a guideline that, if followed, would actually make the world a more peaceful place. ■

Godfrey Moase is an Arts/Law student at the University of Melbourne.

Matthew Lamb

Long road to peace

Herzl's nightmare: One land, two people, Peter Rodgers. Scribe, 2004.
ISBN 1 920 76931 5, RRP $22

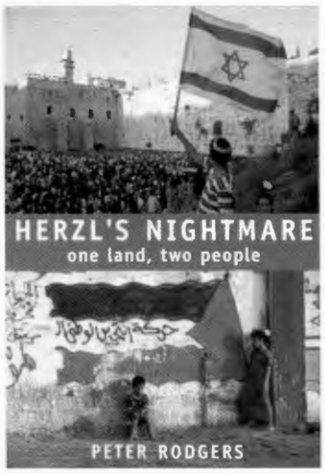
Political Zionism was initiated by Theodor Herzl in 1896, with the publication of his pamphlet, *The Jewish State (Der Judenstaat)*. Inspired by the Dreyfus Affair in France a few years earlier, when Herzl was reporting on the case for a Viennese newspaper, this pamphlet argued that the rise of anti-Semitism in Europe necessitated the forming of a new state, to provide security for Jews in the diaspora.

The ideal location for this state was Palestine. 'Palestine', Herzl wrote, drawing on biblical sources for support, 'is our ever memorable historic home'. He died eight years later. By 1917, supported by Britain in the Balfour Declaration, an ever-growing Jewish population had come to settle in Palestine. And then, in 1947—in the aftermath of the Holocaust, which went some way toward legitimising Herzl's initial fears—the State of Israel was formally recognised by the newly created General Assembly of the United Nations.

The problem with all of this, of course, is that a large population of Arabs already lived in Palestine. In fact, shortly after the Balfour Declaration, a census accounted for 760,000 people in Palestine, of which only 97,000 were Jews. The rest were Muslims and Christians. These proportions changed dramatically, with Jews accounting for almost a third of the population by the time Britain withdrew from the area in the 1940s.

Relations between Jews, Muslims and Christians in the area were never amicable, and were becoming increasingly violent. Within one year of the UN's 1947 resolution, the first official Arab–Israel war had already occurred. The violence has escalated ever since, reaching a dramatic peak during the 1967 Six Day War, which saw Israel treble the land under its control. This level of violence has persisted to the present day.

Peter Rodgers, former Australian Ambassador to Israel, examines this situation in his new book, *Herzl's nightmare: One land, two people*. In a clear demonstration of La Rochefoucauld's maxim 'Disputes would not last long if only one of the parties were in error', Rodgers writes:



> 'The story of Palestine in the past century has its share of political and military and human triumphs. But too often the dominant, recurring themes are those of lies and hypocrisies, myth-making and mutual demonisation; of a determined, energetic refusal to contemplate what it must be to be the other.'

Rather than simply cataloguing the violence and bloodshed which has been the consequence of this refusal, Rodgers' book attempts to clear away the semantic dust which often clouds the grim reality which has resulted. He does this in an effort to better understand the situation. 'The violence of the other side', he writes, 'was "terrorism"; one's own was legitimate "self-defence": both positions often resting on a bedrock of hypocrisy.' It is this mixture of the 'growth of a semantic conflict as well as a physical one' which is perhaps partly responsible for the continuation of the Palestinian–Israeli situation. It is certainly this hypocrisy which has negated any possible legitimacy that either side may have claimed at its origin.

In adopting this approach, Rodgers is clearly concerned with the present and the future. His overview of the past century or more is designed to re-insert the current situation into its historical context, not in order to take sides with one state over the other, but rather to show how both states share a common destiny.

The publication of *Herzl's nightmare: One land, two people* at this point in time serves a dual purpose. The book serves its stated purpose, which is to provide a fresh analysis of the situation in Palestine and Israel. It also serves the purpose of demonstrating how we might analyse other conflicts facing us at present, both in Australia and abroad. Conflicts ranging from the 'war on terror' through to the faltering reconciliation process in Australia between its Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations.

On this last point, Rodgers himself specifically spells out the parallel. In discussing a 'revisionist' historian's defence of Israel's dispossession of the Palestinians, Rodgers states:

> 'Palestinians, no doubt, will be relieved to know that the distress of being driven from their homes in 1948 was serving a noble cause. Those few American Indians whose ancestors escaped "annihilation" will be similarly reassured. As will the Aboriginal people of Australia and all Indigenous peoples who inconvenienced the settlement and civilising plans of those with a higher "moral" purpose. If this is an example of the "light unto the nations" at work, it will, for many, be much safer to stay in the dark.'

Fortunately, books like this by Peter Rodgers may go some way toward providing alternative sources of light. ■

Matthew Lamb will soon commence a PhD on the life and work of Albert Camus.

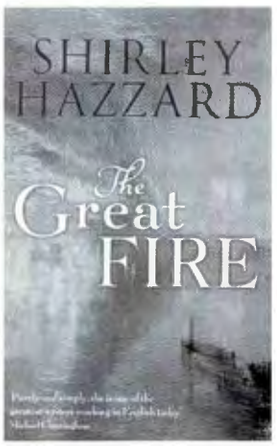
Daniel Donahoo

Filling in the space

The Great Fire, Shirley Hazzard. Virago, 2003. ISBN 1 844 08139 7, RRP $28

It is after the war and after the bomb, but before the recovery. A space *The Great Fire* fills with love, letters and Aldred Leith. Not too far from Hiroshima, and after walking across China, this decorated war hero comes to document what he sees and to find out what is left to feel.

It is a time when soldiers are sending the spoils of war home to America and Britain, as their families are still rationing. Communication is largely via mail, often unreliably delivered. The world is taking shallow breaths. Shirley Hazzard describes a space left empty. In ruined cities the rubble has been removed, ready for rebuilding. The most significant structures are temporary military bases. People's lives are still dominated by the war.



Love is *The Great Fire*'s great understatement. Quietly discussed in private, barely muted in public. The value of the companionship in relationships is evident in the late 1940s, a time when so many people didn't return. Love is interspersed with the loneliness of those who have lost love, or simply failed to find it.

Aldred Leith is surrounded by love. As our leading man he deals with it always: an absence of love from his father, as an object of worship by a dedicated friend, and as part of a misplaced love, lost somewhere in war and ending in divorce. His new love is of the forbidden kind. Hazzard uses Leith, an enigmatic protagonist, to explore the spaces created by different relationships. The book is poignant, questioning the significance of relationships, and how they relate to the rest of our lives, leading us to ask what our responsibilities might be as an employee, a parent, a lover or a friend.

Leith is staying at a military base, run by a hardened, aspirational couple from whom he keeps his distance. Especially as he finds himself so close to their children, two capable young adults who have travelled widely and able to share in his experiences and stories. There is safety in the space created by romantic imaginings, especially following so closely the destruction of the atomic bomb. Benedict is the elder and has a terminal illness. His sister, Helen, provokes in Leith a longing and tenderness behind his stoic demeanor. Leith consciously removes himself to other countries and other business, uncertain of his own motives. The space between them is excruciating.

Relationships are bridged across Japan, Hong Kong, Australia and England through correspondence. The letters, the waiting for their arrival, and their delicate preparation counterpoint the instant gratification of today's text messages and email. Hazzard succeeds in slowing us down and bringing an awareness of the speed and complexity of our world.

Hazzard fills the gaps decisively. She lets us in on the secrets, the desires shared but unspoken in a civil and resigned era. Still, the book feels sparse.

Our world is compressed through the accelerated growth of the past 50 years. We are only minutes from any experience or event via television or the internet. *The Great Fire* encourages reflection on whether an instant society allows for the full gamut of emotional experience. What is more noble: the pursuit of technology for its own sake, or the pursuit of love?

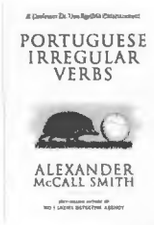
This book deserves the Miles Franklin award. More importantly, we deserve this novel. We need its romantic look at a harsh and unforgiving time. We need to be reminded that the world we know is tenderly held together: by compassion and relationships that hold more importance than we credit them. We are a different world to that portrayed in *The Great Fire*. Yet, the people are much the same and their internal struggles not dissimilar. Perhaps we are due for some rebuilding of our own. ■

Daniel Donahoo is an OzProspect fellow. OzProspect is a non-partisan public policy think tank.

We were wrong

In last month's edition of *Eureka Street*, the details published in relation to Doug Henwood's *After the New Economy* were incorrect. *After the New Economy* is published in Australia by Scribe, the RRP is $26.95 and the ISBN 1 920 76918 8. We apologise to readers for the inconvenience.

the shortlist



Portuguese Irregular Verbs, Alexander McCall-Smith. Polygon, 2003. ISBN 0 954 40756 3, RRP $19.95

The misleading title of *Portuguese Irregular Verbs* is the beginning of a frolic through the banal world of Professor Dr Moritz-Maria von Igelfeld. The novel follows the professor through his life as the author of a highly praised philology treatise, entitled 'Portuguese Irregular Verbs'. Praised by his peers and flattered by his own ego, von Igelfeld convinces the reader that his academic success was 'a work of such majesty that it dwarfed all other books in the field'. The story follows von Igelfeld's journeys to Dublin, Goa and Venice on an insatiable quest to discover language and to promote his prowess in the knowledge of, amongst other things, irregular verbs in Portuguese.

Portuguese Irregular Verbs is an addictive work of fiction. While the triviality of Dr von Igelfeld's life may seem tedious, the vernacular in which the story is told is delightful. As a result, the narrative drifts without any real climaxes or pitfalls, leaving the beauty in the detailed descriptions: 'He stared at his roll. Had the honey been evenly spread, or was it too concentrated on one side?'

The story does not invite the reader to empathise with von Igelfeld's profession, but more with his personal endeavours to make sense of a world in which he cannot quite fit. Von Igelfeld's musings are hilarious, and his oddball observations of language and personality are more than enough to keep turning the pages.

—Kate Stowell

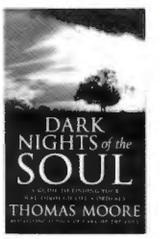
Golden Threads: The Chinese in regional New South Wales 1850–1950, Janis Wilton. Powerhouse Publishing, 2004. ISBN 1 863 17107 X, RRP $34.95

Golden Threads is a visually captivating, beautifully presented insight into the lives and experiences of Chinese immigrants in our nation's recent history.

In the interests of simplicity and coherence, the book is organised by theme; work, language, leisure, food, beliefs, leaving and staying. A heavy reliance on objects, photos and paintings throughout only enhances the work and provides a focal point for the text. Within each theme, Wilton weaves factual information, immigrants' recollections, museum collections, and the 'fluctuating attitudes of white Australia' into a seamless account of life for early Chinese immigrants in colonial Australia. Skilfully done, it is the recollections of the subjects themselves that bring the book to life. From long hours spent labouring to weekly cricket matches, each story captures the tone and voice of its speaker providing the reader with a point of reference and adding an air of authenticity unachievable through facts and statistics alone.

Author Janis Wilton became involved with the Golden Threads project in 1997. The team's task was to work 'with local communities across New South Wales to research their objects, memories and other records of the Chinese presence in Australia in the 19th and early 20th centuries'. This book is a testament not only to the researchers, but to those members of the community who offered their time and memories in an effort to chronicle a crucial, yet little recognised element of Australia's history. *Golden Threads* provides a compelling and insightful read for anyone with an interest in our history.

—Lauren Hunt



Dark nights of the soul: A guide to finding your way through life's ordeals, Thomas Moore. Hodder and Staughton, 2004. ISBN 0 749 92557 4, RRP $34.95

There are some books you read under the stars. Others, you read in prison. It was the election campaign and its promise of more of the same that drew me to *Dark nights of the soul*. Moore deals with the long lasting conditions of life which are difficult to bear and do not yield to easy consolation.

This book bridges the worlds of spirituality and psychology, offering the wisdom and experience of others to illuminate a variety of predicaments. It is well organised. Seeking consolation for the plight of being Australian in the Time of Election, I was able to read briskly through the categories of Passages and Disturbances, and so arrive at the apposite section dealing with Degradations. No easy comfort there: Moore suggests that hard times are not for instant healing, but for living through with courage and irony. After all, his homophone, Sir Thomas More, composed his best philosophy in the Tower, and then addressed his best line to the headsman, requesting him to leave his beard alone, since it had not offended.

A very reasonable book. But at the end, afflicted in the Time of Election and enduring its Aftermath, you may need more desperate remedies than books. You need role-models. Diogenes wandering through Canberra with a lamp, perhaps, or Simon Stylites sitting out the next four years on an outback pillar.

—Andrew Hamilton

The people next door: Understanding Indonesia, Duncan Graham. University of Western Australia Press, 2004. ISBN 1 920 69409 9, RRP $38.95

Duncan Graham's *The people next door* is founded on the premise that the desire for Australians to understand their nearest neighbours it at a low ebb. Graham's aim is to introduce Indonesian society in a way that illustrates its vastness and complexity without getting too dense. He argues against patronising cultural judgments of the Indonesian way, but equally accepts that many things stand in the way of complete mutual acceptance. As a result, the book falls somewhere between travel advice and a sociological portrait.

Graham is anxious to promote a considered examination of culture, history and society in a climate where the 'war on terror' increases the chances of irrevocable divisions between people.

For a 189-page book, the topics may seem overly ambitious: geography, history, culture, cultural differences with the West and language are all covered in 34 pages or less. However, the book isn't meant to be the last word on any of these subjects and manages to treat them quite well within the limits imposed. Unfamiliar and fascinating concepts like Indonesian mysticism and the 'national ideology' of *Pancasila* (basic principles of an independent Indonesian state within the preamble of its 1945 constitution) are introduced in an engaging style. Graham's dry sense of humour is a welcome feature.

Above all, Graham's portrayal of everyday life and people is what stands out. It highlights the many differences between our societies, but also makes it easier to empathise with the people of the archipelago, leaving a strong desire to meet them in the flesh.

—Vincent O'Kane

flash in the pan

Flipping out

Somersault, dir. Cate Shortland. Australian writer/director Cate Shortland's first feature, *Somersault*, has been garnering high praise of late. It's been nominated for 15 AFI awards in 13 categories, received a standing ovation at its premiere in the *Un Certain Regard* section of the Cannes film festival, and seems to be carrying the hopes of the moribund Australian film industry for a revival of its waning fortunes. The local industry has been regarded as being in something of a crisis since its successes of the '90s, and funding bodies, filmmakers and critics alike have been flailing about for reasons (and solutions) to account for the paucity of decent films.

A common response to this issue has been to note the lack of script and project development in many Australian films. One of the solutions (of which Shortland and her film have been beneficiaries) is a 'hot-housing' approach. Promising directors take their scripts and projects into intensive development and mentoring workshops with experienced writers, producers and directors. On the basis of Shortland's film, it appears that the experiment is worth continuing.

The film itself is driven by the internal lives of the characters, in particular Heidi (Abbie Cornish), a young woman struggling (and often failing) to negotiate the minefield of youth, love, sex and power in a world of often predatory and exploitative men. Attempts to convey an interior life through the visual medium of film all too often results in films where the expressive possibilities of action are lost, and nothing really takes its place. Nothing happens and nothing is felt—apart from the boredom of the audience. *Somersault* manages to avoid this risk, drawing on the expressive possibilities of the film form, especially colour rather than action, to express and articulate the lives of its characters.

This results in what is often described as a 'European' sensibility, as opposed to 'American' action. In Shortland's case this is a sensibility mediated through Asia, and in particular, her admiration for Australian cinematographer Chris Doyle's work with Hong Kong director Wong Kar Wai. It is to her credit that Shortland largely achieves her goals in her first feature. In particular the secondary characters are intriguing and engaging in a way that Australian films all too often lack. The film's most moving scene belongs not to Heidi, but to the motherly owner of the hotel she makes her temporary home. Real care has been taken with the integration of formal and thematic elements throughout.

Nevertheless, it *is* a first film, and betrays the influence of Shortland's greater experience in short film and in TV (she directed for *The Secret Life of Us*). Its fragmented and inconclusive narrative will frustrate some viewers. It does seem that the praise being heaped on the film is out of proportion to its achievements. It *is* a fine start, and Shortland shows great promise for the future, but it's hard not to worry that her next film, and her development as an artist, may be swamped by the excessive expectations with which both are being burdened.

—Allan James Thomas

Feline fizzer

Catwoman, dir. Pitof. America's worst fears about WMDs and terrorism have been reflected in Hollywood's recent obsession with super heroes. Is it the need to escape to a place where all it takes to save America's ails is a man with some kind of super power? Female super heroes seem few and far between. Enter Halle Berry with super feline abilities and a nifty leather S&M outfit. And yes. The WOM (word of mouth) is true.

The story should be engaging. Imagine killing off your main protagonist, have her then resurrected by a rare Egyptian Mau cat which leaves her confused and with cat-like abilities and a thirst for revenge.

Meek graphic designer Patience Phillips (Berry) is transformed and walks a fine line between villain and hero. Like most super heroes, she lives two lives.

Patience, the shy and sensitive failed artist who has sold out to a large multinational, as Catwoman, becomes first a petty thief (think catburglar) before seeking revenge on her would-be killers.

Like a dopey puppy following Catwoman around, detective Tom Lone (Benjamin Bratt) falls initially for Patience but is mesmerised by her new alter ego. It also seems odd that detectives work alone, but that is apparently the case here. Maybe the writers realised that if they gave Tom Lone (geddit?) a partner then his partner would tell him the bleeding obvious. Underneath the funky leather gear slinks his new squeeze, Patience.

In a thinly veiled swipe at Botox and the beauty industry, Patience discovers the multinational cosmetics company (Hadare Cosmetics) that she has been working for has some serious problems with their latest miracle skin care product. Side effects seem to include headaches, disfigurement and death, but boy does your skin look good!

Sharon Stone as Laurel Hadare seems to rise above it all and is intriguing and almost brave as an older woman desperate to maintain her beauty at any cost. Laurel is driven to extremes when her husband decides to use a younger model as the face of Hadare's new anti-wrinkle cream. Ending in an inevitable catfight, you can't help but compare the veteran

Stone to the younger Berry against a Hollywood backdrop of ageing and being usurped by younger beauties

The strange thing is, there seems to be no particular trigger for Catwoman to emerge. Similar superhero scenarios such as the Hulk or Jeckle/Hyde are transmuted by external forces, usually anger and provocation, which unleashes a superhero/villain from within. Catwoman/Patience just seems to decide to don the gear and strut her stuff.

Directed by former visual effects director Pitof, this film is lame. It won't even satisfy escapist pop status. Maybe if you had a particular obsession seeing Halle Berry prance around in skin-tight leather, but its hollow story and simplistic overbearing exploration of the female/feline nexus is laughable. Fhiiisssss

—John Brawley

Heavy metal

Metallica: Some Kind of Monster, dirs. Joe Berlinger and Bruce Sinofsky 'I just ... I wanna go out and not be famous,' avers Metallica frontman James Hetfield in pre-rehab mode, as he burns down the road in a painfully low-to-the-ground hotrod emblazoned with orange flames stark against its black metal frame.

Flash-forward to Presidio, an ex-military barracks the band has acquired for a recording studio. The idea was to take the band out of their comfort zone, setting up a spartan recording environment watched over by 'group therapist' Phil Towle. Towle earns $US40,000 per month to act as mentor and mediator for the ailing music industry super-beast that is Metallica. Directors Berlinger and Sinofsky (Brother's Keeper) transform hundreds of hours of raw video footage into a cogent three-act rock 'n' roll psychodrama.

The stars of this intimate documentary are the very mortal Metallica rock gods themselves: on vocals, James 'I can only work from noon till 4pm' Hetfield; on worried lead guitar, Kirk 'Leaving out guitar solos would make the record too trendy' Hammett; and Lars 'I hope we all feel like Phil is an investment in our music' Ulrich on drums.

Shortly after production starts at Presidio, the band nicks off for a two-week holiday. A nervous, fidgeting Hetfield returns from Russia with bear-hunting stories, and explains how he toasted his son's first birthday in absentia and in vodka.

A frustrated Lars Ulrich rages daily at Hetfield through the wordy veil of psycho-babble—unintentionally hilarious. During these exchanges their faces betray the inner struggle to repress egotism, resentment, fear and the desire to shout expletives loudly and often. Storming out, Hetfield leaves for rehab, leaving the recording in limbo.

Hetfield returns nearly a year later, almost unrecognisable in horn-rimmed yellow-tinted designer shades and slicked-back hair His demons seem dormant, and though self-absorption still rules his agenda, the creative process restarts. Metallica auditions bass players from other acts with rock cred. After several jams they choose Robert Trujillo, (the bassist from Ozzy Osbourne) whose mastery of the instrument inspires Metallica to share with him the iconic status they enjoy.

In one sense, the real story is of human interaction, struggle, and pressure, both commercial and personal, to make another number one album. The camera shows truth, rife with character flaws and complexity. The music video for the single of their return album St Anger, is shot at San Quentin maximum security prison in front of the inmates. It is a triumph contrasted with the fading role of therapist ('I feel like I'm in the band') Towle as he moves to protect his job, when Metallica is most focused, least receptive to his buzzword machinations, and finishing the album. The millions of Metallica followers are 'legions of die-hard fans' personified, but you don't need to have worn a flannelette shirt and headbanged to heavy metal to appreciate *Metallica: Some Kind of Monster*, because this is a fine piece of work.

—Gil Maclean

watching brief

Jeb Bartlet for president

'We live in the time where we have fictitious election results that elect a fictitious president', said Michael Moore at the 2003 Academy Awards. Nothing has happened yet. This is limbo time, the time of pregnant, swirling maybes, the time between the axe's lift and its fall. I write these words in this time and you will read them with me in that time, the time when all the maybes will be done-and-dusted. The television has been full of photo opportunities and party political puffery. Radio ripples with sound bites, each talkback caller more phoney-stoogey than the last. The politicians all want us, unless we're in a safe seat. (One possible variant of the Chinese curse 'may you live in interesting times' is 'may you live in a safe Labor seat'. Punished by one side and ignored by the other, your roads will crumble, your schools will fall down and your member will sit comfortably till eternity.)

So I have started watching *The West Wing* on DVD and cable. I missed it when it first came on Nine, and I regret that, because it is great. Terry Pratchett, that novelist-magician, talks of alternate universes, and in another universe, one that is looking increasingly attractive, the President of the United States (or Potus, as the staffers call him acronymically) is Jeb Bartlet, or perhaps more compellingly, Martin Sheen. He is the veteran of *Apocalypse Now*, the Method actor who did drugs and wigged out generously for us, all on Coppola's merciless camera. Having taken the uneasy ride with the rest of the babyboomers, Sheen has now become their comfort zone.

The first episode of *The West Wing* is utterly satisfying. Potus doesn't appear until close to the end, where he has one of the most effective entries ever accorded a lead role: he charges into a room full of hubristic religious righters bullying his people and corrects their recital of the First Commandment. We learn that when he fell off his bike at the beginning of the program, it was because he was angry with the lobby group that is in 'real life' one of the 'real' Potus puppeteers. *The West Wing* is as comforting as a cuppa, a meditation on proper governance and a world that though imperfect, is at least not a warmonger's playpen. The fictitious President Bartlet is a clever statesman capable of reflection and magnanimity; he even repents and changes his mind about over-punishing Syria for an act of terrorism. Unlikely to happen with the real fictitious President.

Which brings me to that final bastion of local political larrikinism, *The Chaser Decides* (ABC, Thursdays, 9:30pm). It was uncomfortably funny to see one of the cast, resplendent in cardinal's garb, attempting to persuade menacingly mute Tony Abbott into a shared photo opportunity as a reminder in case Tony 'forgot' another meeting with an archbishop. I'm pleasantly surprised that the Chaser is even allowed these days: it takes me back to the halcyon days of satire when people like Max Gillies reigned on the box. John Clarke still holds up the unspeakable to some form of condign ridicule on Thursdays in *The 7.30 Report*, (is Thursday understood to be the day that the lefties are allowed a small run off the leash?) but the atmosphere at the ABC has been too scared-careful for too long. With boards full of inquisitors waiting for every form of bias to be 'balanced', journalists are pretty much stifled, no longer taking the kind of mickey that a real democracy allows.

It reminds me of the time I worked in a very posh school. It was the 1970s. The nuns were good people, but the school board was infested with racists who demanded that a South African government propaganda film had to be shown to the students every time they saw an anti-apartheid documentary called *Last Grave at Dimbazi*. You might remember it: it was about those fictitious Bantu 'homelands' that had scandalous rates of infant mortality. There is a way of dealing with this: you show the propaganda video and halt it at every lie, correcting it with the facts. It was an exhaustive and exhausting process. It hampered a good social studies curriculum.

Liars and bullies prevail by simply wearing out the good people. It has been one of the most dishonourable victories of the economic rationalists over the last 20 years: to make decent folks reinvent the wheel over and over again, forcing them to return to first principles all the time so that the public conversation never becomes visionary and hopeful. To many, truth is certainly now stranger than fiction: it has been transmogrified into alienness by the reiterated fictions of those whose interests are served by lies. Jeb Bartlet is the ideal President, both for those who wish George W. Bush were more like him, and for those who believe that he is. The fictitious presidents intersect at so many points that the cosmos must be laughing. Or crying.

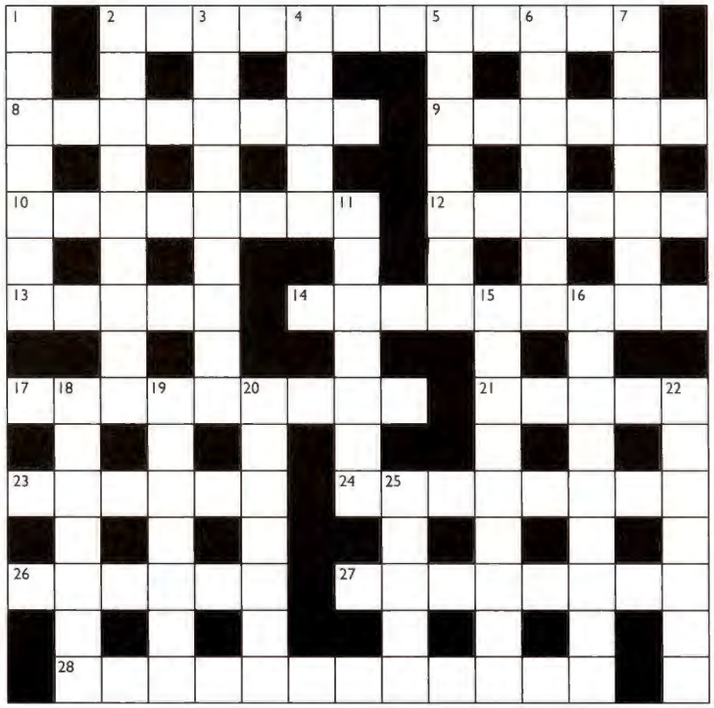
And here in Australia it is Spring—windy, thundery, unsettled, just like people. Time seems to hold its breath for a moment. When I read this again, the axe will have fallen, maybe even (God forbid) on the Tarkine.

Juliette Hughes is a freelance writer.

puzzled

Devised by
Joan Nowotny IBVM

Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 128, November, 2004



ACROSS

2. Do they celebrate this in St Kilda football club? (3,6,3)
8. Come shortly to the paper and abridge it. (8)
9. Professorships that can be comfortable. (6)
10. I was rendered mute. Lend me a voice so that I can praise the state of the ice-cap. (8)
12. Could be dangerous for international organisation to have a strongbox. (6)
13. Name the French bird first. (5)
14. One might blame Ella, perhaps, for being easily influenced. (9)
17. Casual worker, possibly, who is a bit on the watch. (4–5)
21. The saltpeter's ruined; bury it. (5)
23. A little squirt from the sea? (6)
24. Noises abroad? Could be in the orchestra! (8)
26. Checks the extremities. (6)
27. Perhaps I cast my leading light in a visionary way. (8)
28. City vessel attracts the betters? (9,3)

DOWN

1. Tell the story about what to do in a close vote. (7)
2. Girl and her mother have memories about their old school, where they studied Latin. (4,5)
3. Lie on small road in lost condition? Such a noble person would be least likely. (9)
4. Did you hear that I'll be in the passage? (5)
5. The diplomacy you'll show is audible—and tangible! (7)
6. Scrolls were found here once—lately wet? 4,3)
7. How much is there in the enclosed area? Plenty of detectives? (7)
11. Clock face et cetera out of order, in the local lingo. (7)
15. Supposedly imagine gutted cat—that's cryptic! (9)
16. Flower of the field—if you left and 'e came, it might be a better one than 28-ac. (9)
18. One who professes this would not celebrate 2-across, nor would his mate, probably. (7)
19. The sort of things pursued in games are often inconsequential. (7)
20. I'm finished with love for this painting technique. (7)
22. Decide to do this crossword again. (7)
25. Material for a beam to land on? (5)

Solution to Crossword no. 127, October, 2004

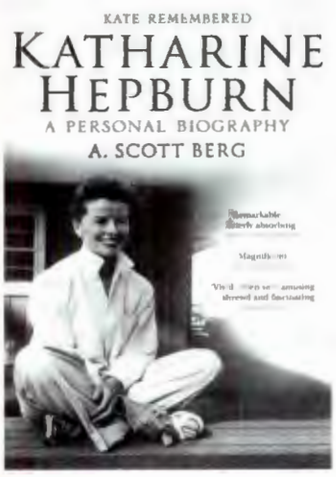
A	C	T	S	■	F	R	A	N	C	I	S	C	A	N
N	■	A	■	E	■	U	■	O	■	R	■	O	■	I
I	N	C	I	D	E	N	T	S	■	I	O	N	I	C
M	■	I	■	U	■	A	■	T	■	S	■	V	■	E
A	N	T	I	C	■	W	O	R	T	H	I	E	R	■
L	■	■	■	A	■	A	■	U	■	■	■	R	■	H
F	I	R	S	T	L	Y	■	M	A	T	I	S	S	E
A	■	E	■	E	■	■	■	■	■	R	■	E	■	A
R	I	P	O	S	T	E	■	P	R	E	S	S	E	D
M	■	U	■	■	■	L	■	L	■	V	■	■	■	M
■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

EUREKA STREET BOOK OFFER

SIMON & SCHUSTER AUSTRALIA

Kate Remembered: Katharine Hepburn, A personal biography

by A. Scott Berg



In writing his biography of Katharine Hepburn, Scott Berg happily abandons any attempt at objectivity. His initial attempts to interview Hepburn for an anniversary issue of *Esquire* magazine, escalated into a friendship spanning 20 years. This is a memoir of an intimate encounter with one of the 20th century's most remarkable women. *Kate Remembered* is an honest portrait of a public figure and a window on a fascinating era.

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ISSN 1036-1758 09
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