EUREKA STREET

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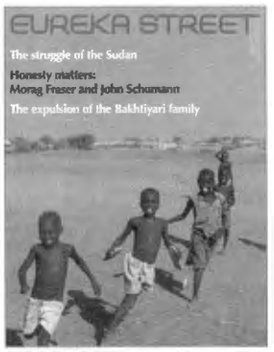
The struggle of Sudan

Honesty matters: Morag Fraser and John Schumann

The expulsion of the Bakhtiyari family



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EUREKA STREET

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VOL 15 NUMBER 3 APRIL 2005

Andrew Hamilton

An evolutionary vision

THIS YEAR MARKS the 50th anniversary of the death of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and the 40th of Winston Churchill's. They never met and had totally different temperaments. But some things they had in common: each came from a locally distinguished family, had significant overseas experience, and found his hour after it had seemed to pass him by. And each now basks in an autumnal absence of interest.

Teilhard's hour came after his death at the time of the Second Vatican Council. He was one of the foundation stones, long spurned by the builders in the Church, that was to become a cornerstone of the post-conciliar Church. Earlier, Teilhard had been forbidden to publish his work, but his manuscripts had a significant influence. After his death, his writings, preserved by the zeal of some fellow Jesuits and other friends, came triumphantly to light.

Teilhard was also an emblem of the Vatican Council in that he embodied in his person its intent to reach beyond the Church in order to engage with the public world. He was of the rural gentry, refined in appearance, charming and sociable, and at home in universities and salons. His personal journey and his palaeontology had taken him to the critical theatres of the 20th century—the trenches of the Great War, and China during the civil war and the Japanese invasion. A Jesuit priest and distinguished scientist, he was involved in the discovery of the fraudulent Piltdown man and the seminal Peking man.

Above all, his vision brought together scientific and theological reflection to affirm an evolutionary view of the world centred on Jesus Christ. Science and evolution, which were seen by many as the enemies of faith, were so reconciled.

The Vatican Council brought romantics out to play. Teilhard's faith was essentially romantic: it rested on a personal and passionate vision that came out of struggle. He walked in a valley shadowed by the absence of God. The rhetoric in which he couched his affirmation that an evolutionary world found its ultimate meaning in Christ was passionate and vigorous. His vision had an imaginative sweep that could be intuited, even if it was not always understood.

Teilhard's evolutionary vision transcended the categories of the classical theology that he inherited. He collapsed boundaries between God and the world, between grace and nature, between church and world, matter and spirit, between present and future. It is little wonder that in a controlling climate he was denied licence to publicise his ideas.

In all these respects Teilhard was the emblem of a new way of being Catholic and of thinking as Catholic. If he is now less read and less noticed, it may be because classical theology no longer has any purchase on the Catholic imagination. It may also be because a large and broad vision does not sit lightly with the current mood of retrenchment, of digging walls, inspecting foundations, and looking inwards. In a time of bombarding the enemy's trenches, of capturing a yard or two of ground, of summoning loyalty, it seems quixotic to make peace with old enemies, to struggle with large ideas, or to proclaim the expansive hopes of the Gospel.

That is why it is important to return to Teilhard de Chardin. He stretched his life, his prayer, his relationships, his work and his faith so tight that they always threatened to fly apart. At a time that is intellectually and culturally less adventurous it is tempting to settle for bombastic affirmations of faith and for a bland and formal reconciliation of faith and culture, matter and spirit, church and world. That the highest human value is neither a quiet nor a regimented life, Teilhard and Churchill alike testify. ■

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

The spirit within

Thank you, Gillian Bouras, for a wonderful piece ('The comforting word', *Eureka Street*, March 2005). I was brought up Greek Orthodox, and have found solace in different churches throughout the world. In my travels, I found that there are great cathedrals from whom all spirit has been driven, only to be found in the most unusual and humble structures. Perhaps, in the end, that spirit is housed within us, and the comfort we receive at times of great crisis comes from our faith.

Helen Noakes
Received by email

Washed back again

Thank you. Your piece ('Out of our depth', *Eureka Street*, March 2005) cuts through the political and personal ways we have of satisfying ourselves of the merits of our actions towards those affected by the tsunami, and so 'freeing' ourselves to move on to other life concerns and interests.

Would that it were so for Acehians.

You certainly cut through my own sense of merit: I spent January involved in the organisation and presentation of a few 'tsunami benefit' events in my central Victorian neighbourhood. I recall feeling personally shocked by the attitude of a friend who, in a mid-January discussion about a forthcoming tsunami benefit, even declared: 'I just feel all tsunamied out, and I just wonder where the money's going anyway.' Outraged I replied quietly: 'Yes, around the Indian Ocean rim they're all feeling tsunamied out too!'

Involved as I was, I could lay claim to a righteous merit there.

Just the other day, however, the proverbial boot laced onto the other foot—mine this time. (Not that I had realised it until I read your article.) We were asked to make up a table for a Karaoke Night, to be hosted by a local amateur theatre club. At a cost of $5 for every song sung. Those proceeds, together with the door sales and other fundraisers, will go to one of the major aid organisations. And my initial, uninhibited reaction, was: 'Haven't we done enough? How deep do they think our pockets are? There'll be nothing left soon to pay our own bills!'

Between January and March something seems to have been washed away in my own heart. Whatever it was, thank you for washing it back again. It's amazing how even those of us who consider ourselves aware and responsive still need to be brought back to reality at times.

Better a hole in the pocket than a hole in the heart!

Frank Donovan
Woodend, VIC

Political pressure

At page 22 of the essay by Fr Frank Brennan SJ concerning recent judicial decisions in Australia and the United Kingdom concerning mandatory detention (*Eureka Street*, March 2005), Fr Brennan correctly states that the UK House of Lords 'declared that the law which permitted long-term detention of suspected international terrorists was incompatible with the European Convention'. Earlier in the article, however, it is said that the House of Lords were 'striking down' that law.

It is worth noting that the UK Human Rights Act does not give the House of Lords power to 'strike down' any law it considers to be incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights. A declaration of incompatibility made by a court under the UK Act has no legal effect on the validity of the legislation in question. Rather, the effect of the declaration is intended to be 'political' in the sense that it will place considerable pressure on the executive government and Parliament to bring the legislation into line with the rights set out in the convention. In the case examined by Fr Brennan, the result to date has been that the legislation remains in force, the detainees remain in detention at Belmarsh Prison and the government has proposed an alternative regime of 'control orders' to restrict terrorist suspects' movements, ranging from tagging to house arrest, which have been widely criticised by civil libertarians in the UK.

I do not doubt that Fr Brennan correctly understands the operation of the UK Human Rights Act and my point should not be taken as any criticism of his scholarly and thought-provoking article. Rather, I wish to highlight the rather questionable practical outcome of the House of Lords' decision, an outcome brought about by the limitation I have described above on the courts' powers under the UK Act. The courts' limited powers mean their declarations have no legal effect and may in fact be disregarded by the government. This does nothing for the 'successful' litigant and potentially some harm to the standing of the judiciary in the community. Australia's courts are indeed isolated from their counterparts in other common law countries by not having a comprehensive human rights framework against which to assess the validity of parliamentary legislation and executive action. But in any debate concerning potential human rights instruments in Australia, such as will soon occur in Victoria and, dare I suggest it, perhaps one day at federal level, the proper structure of any such instrument and the powers given to the courts are questions that are as important as desirability and content of a bill of rights.

Alistair Pound
North Melbourne, VIC

Judicial isolation

Alistair Pound is perfectly right. That's why I made the more subtle remark after saying in the more publicly comprehensible way that the Lords had struck down the legislation.

Alistair and I would agree that the High Court is now isolated in giving universal unreviewable detention the tick while other courts including the House of Lords are able to say that it is inconsistent with the bill of rights regime to which the country subscribes.

Frank Brennan SJ
Boston, USA

Eureka Street welcomes letters from its readers. Short letters are more likely to be published, and all letters may be edited. Letters must be signed, and should include a contact phone number and the writer's name and address. Send to: eureka@jespub.jesuit.org.au or PO Box 553, Richmond VIC 3121

the month's traffic

Into the fray

LIVING HISTORY

I KNEW I WAS in the right place when I exited my hotel room the first morning to find an SS officer adjusting his uniform in the hallway. At breakfast, my coffee was generously poured by a Roman centurion in full body armour.

I had travelled to Corby, Northamptonshire, keen to see 2000 years of British history in a weekend. Every year in August, English Heritage presents its centrepiece, the Festival of History. The two-day event tours the country's crumbling stately homes, and allows 3000 historical re-enactors the chance to fight each other in aristocratic surroundings.

On the battlefield at Kirby Hall, the fun began when the Early and Late Roman societies joined forces to form a century. My centurion friend ordered them into tortoise formation. They then unexpectedly charged the crowd. Other Romans appeared on horseback to slice open cabbages on poles, while artillery units demonstrated the ballista and siege catapult. The latter fired lead projectiles 200 yards into a formal garden, where they bounced around the potted plants like squash balls. Somehow, nothing was broken.

I walked past Saxons and Vikings limbering up for the Battle of Maldon. 'Good morning,' they said to each other, 'ready to die then?' A Viking observed, 'I think we might win this one.' Saxon lord Brihtnoth was arranging his aftermath: 'Nobody dies before this guy stabs me in the back.' None had a problem taking orders from a cockney pub owner dressed as a Saxon lord. But then, war is a serious matter. During the skirmish, a Viking invader picked up a fully armoured Saxon and threw him in a river. I was told that a recent Battle of Gettysburg re-creation in the US recorded more than 500 injured.

The largest set piece was the Battle of Franklin. The blast of a thousand infantry firing at once was debilitating. When the Confederates got rolling cannon fire going it was time to cry. Over all this was an excitable commentator. As the battle swung, he couldn't help editorialising, revealing strong Union sympathies.

I followed the disciplined Federal troops back to their encampment, a canvas city on a hill. They sang as they marched, then dispersed to clean rifles and do drill. The Rebels were not far away, about 20 yards in fact. Quite a few were women. Those who weren't often had frazzled grey beards and sunburn. They whistled Dixie. I hoped that when they spoke it might be 'drawl'. But no; most seemed to hail from the Home Counties.

But a Festival of History must offer more than violence and folk whistling. In a medieval village, intriguing stews were made while black bread was pulled from an earth oven. It all smelt great and from the recipes it seemed everything was healthy too. There was 16th-century dancing to melodies played on forgotten instruments. I bought a booklet titled *Pies (1580–1620)* and another on *17th Century Liquor Laws*. The devotion to accuracy and detail won me over. One soldier from a Jacobite brigade gave a crowd of women a comprehensive presentation on his codpiece.

Re-enactment societies are not just pools of cheap film extras. They are a tremendous source and preserve of knowledge. And an aspect of Britishness—like model airplane flying and bus spotting—that makes this country so fascinating to outsiders.

—**Martin Elliott**

State of the union

TURKEY AND THE EU

TURKEY'S ENTRY INTO the European Union (EU) has been a topic long discussed among international observers. Owing to a decision made following talks in December, this stands as a real possibility. Yet formal negotiations for Turkey's accession will not begin until October and could take up to ten years. There exist considerable hurdles to clear before the process is completed. Nevertheless, the decision is—as Chancellor Schroeder remarked—one of 'immense implications'.

Turkey's accession enjoys the backing of the larger member states. Germany, Spain, Italy and France all support Turkey's entry. Supporters of accession argue that embracing Turkey would show the EU to be inclusive and tolerant of other religions, dispelling the charge that it is a 'club of Christians'. On strategic grounds they argue that Turkey is essential to Europe. Turkey is seen as a bridge between Europe and the Middle East. By bringing Turkey into the fold the EU can help the country become a successful Muslim democracy, strengthen an ally in the fight against terrorism and prove—as Prime Minister Blair put it—'there is no fundamental clash of civilisations'.

It is no surprise that the US is sympathetic to such arguments. President Bush even went as far as commenting, at a NATO summit in Istanbul, that Turkey 'ought to be given a date by the EU for [its] eventual acceptance'.

Opponents of accession—including Austria, Denmark and Cyprus—argue that Turkey is too big, too different and too poor. They worry that in admitting Turkey the EU is overstretching and will detract from the more important task of consolidation. (Former French President Valery Giscard d'Estaing remarked in 2002 that accession would spell 'the end of the European Union'). Rather than admission, this group suggest a 'privileged partnership' as a more viable alternative. This would allow closer economic and security links without the pitfalls inherent in accession.

This issue has interesting implications. In many ways, the future direction of the EU hinges on Turkey's admission. Is it to become an inclusive and increasingly larger union? Alternatively, the EU may decide that the risks apparent are too great, that it should concentrate on integrating existing member states, strengthening EU institutions and addressing the considerable democratic deficit that already exists. What seems certain is that the offer of a 'privileged partnership' would be rejected. (Prime Minister Erdogan has said he will reject anything short of full membership). Having had its 1987 application rejected, while watching former communist-bloc nations 'jump the queue', another rejection would be demeaning to Turkey, as President Chirac has indicated. That raises some important questions. To what extent has Turkey's membership been overlooked due to its Islamic heritage? Will Turkey be overlooked again for this reason? For all its talk of inclusiveness, does the EU have a fundamental bias towards different cultures? And to what extent is Europe's

Christian heritage important for cohesiveness? How these questions regarding Turkey's membership unfold will be indicative of the EU's future direction. What is certain is that the ensuing period will be significant, with substantial implications for all involved. Watch this space.

—Aaron Martin

Race memories

A DAY AT THE MUSEUM

MAHOGANY WAS ONE of the most versatile horses to race in Australia since Malua, a century before. In the 1990s he won the Victoria and AJC derbies, was nutted short head by Octagonal in a Cox Plate, and then sent back to sprinting, winning successive Lightning Stakes. A high rollers' playground at Crown Casino is known as the Mahogany Room (Kerry Packer had a share in the horse). More modest punters can now get aboard a mechanical Mahogany as they enter Champions, the Australian Racing Museum and Hall of Fame.

Originally the Victorian Racing Museum, it was established at the Caulfield Racecourse in 1981. Recently it moved to Federation Square. For $8 visitors get an outstanding audio tour of the eclectic exhibits. The grey background highlights the brilliant racing silks and, as well, the hats and costumes of long-forgotten Fashions on the Field. Turn any corner and there will be video footage—of Harry White guiding us through Sobar's stellar year of 1972, which included his controversial loss to Dayana in the Victoria Derby; of the crowds milling into Flemington on Cup Day in 1930 to see Phar Lap let down at the furlong and win by three with his ears pricked and Jim Pike up in the irons.

The remains of this horse are elsewhere, but Carbine's skeleton is on show and behind it a hologram of the horse galloping with a thumping red heart. Nearby jockey George Moore shares a panel with trainer Tommy Smith. The former opines: 'If there had been no racing, both Tom and I would have been out on the roads digging holes.' Across the way is a shelf with 11 small trophies—won by Bart Cummings as the trainer of 11 winners of the Melbourne Cup. There are old horse paintings, the mounted hooves of Wakeful and

Continued on page 8

summa theologiae

After the parade

THERE IS AN ART to the big event. Anyone who's planned a wedding knows it, and that should be enough to give hives to anyone thinking back and imagining what it took to get George Bush's inauguration off the ground. The US president was sworn in for a second term with great ceremony—A$53 million worth of it. There were nine balls on the one night, some military pomp, the odd arrest and a parade. And there was Bush's speech too just in case anyone's wondering 'what happens next?' Because really, how do you follow up a parade?

At Easter the Church remembers a kind of parade—the deliberately ironic 'triumphal entry into Jerusalem'. Something considerably daggier than what the Bush administration pulled together, but a standout celebration in its context. A borrowed colt's not the kind of thing we've come to expect in parades, but you've got to love the spontaneity of the crowd with branches or coats and all that joyous yelling.

So all that attention on the big events, but has this to do with the life that comes afterwards? The word 'inauguration' itself comes from the tradition of releasing birds (or *augurs*), in the hope of discerning an omen from their flight path. Well, as far as I'm aware there were no birds released at the inauguration, but it is still tempting to read the future of George Bush's influential leadership in the unfolding of the celebrations.

There are no birds in the Gospel accounts of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem either, but the whole thing gives a pretty good insight into the turn things end up taking. When he could conceivably still be on a high from his enthusiastic reception, Jesus weeps for the people—that they do not recognise 'the things that make for peace'. And the joyous shouts turn to 'crucify him' with alarming speed.

So Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, and the Church's Palm Sunday remembrance of it, is inextricably linked to Easter. Partly because, of course, a parade does actually go somewhere. For Jesus, it leads straight into the Temple, where he overturns the moneychangers' tables and upsets an established scam. It leads into days of going into a community's heartland and offering a prophetic vision. And the vision excites the crowds, but moves the powerful to plot against him. While Jesus grieved about peace, Bush focused enthusiastically on freedom. *The Age* reported that his inauguration speech made use of the word 'freedom' 27 times and 'liberty' 15 times. Peace and freedom—not so dissimilar. But the tricky thing is recognising the things that make for peace and freedom. It's the kind of thing a parade might offer an insight into, but it only becomes real afterwards.

And it becomes hauntingly real for Jesus after the celebrations wind up and he's in Jerusalem. Those who plot against him are worried about the trouble he's stirring up. Maybe they're just worried that someone will get hurt. Maybe they think their way will be the best for the most. But their use of secrecy reveals their error. It turns out you cannot trick someone into the ways of peace, or of freedom for that matter. They work against the crowd, quietly, secretly, until they've convinced the crowd to call out 'crucify him' with them.

It was a big night out, Bush's inauguration—glitz and glamour and staggering expense. And maybe we could read something into it. But the real question is, what really happens after George's big parade? ■

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

archimedes

Business contacts

ARCHIMEDES HAS OFTEN BEEN critical of the media for its 'snapshot' reporting of science. Stories are usually brief and irregular and often once-only. Rarely is a piece of useful research tracked over time. Taking a dose of his own medicine, Archimedes takes up a tale he began in June 1999.

The story so far. In the early 1990s Dr Peter Steinberg, a marine ecologist from the University of New South Wales, discovered a small red seaweed in Botany Bay that keeps its fronds free of bacteria. It does so by manufacturing and secreting a compound, a type of furanone, which jams chemical communication between bacteria and prevents them from organising to form films on surfaces. These biofilms are a significant source of contamination, so the furanone acts as a useful antibiotic, and one to which it is difficult to build up resistance.

In marine environments, bacterial films pave the way for the attachment of larger 'fouling' organisms such as barnacles and algae. So, disrupting formation of the films can prevent biofouling, which increases drag on ship hulls by more than 40 per cent and is also a major problem in the aquaculture industry. Steinberg and a microbiologist colleague, Professor Staffan Kjelleberg, established a Centre for Marine Bio-Fouling and Bio-Innovation, to explore the potential of furanones.

About a year ago Biosignal Ltd listed on the Australian Stock Exchange. But its first product, planned for release in 2007, will have nothing to do with biofouling. It will be a contact lens with a furanone coating. And the reason is possibly the same as that which has led to Steinberg's appointment as the new company's director of research, not its managing director: good business sense.

Contact lenses represent a much bigger market (more than $5 billion a year worldwide) than marine anti-fouling (about $1 billion). And the furanone-coated lens is an easier product to develop. About one contact lens wearer in five contracts a bacterial infection known as acute red-eye, and about one in 100 of these goes on to full-blown microbial keratitis, which can result in vision loss. Testing suggests that furanone coatings are effective in preventing this. Because the coating is not actually taken into the body, the necessary safety testing is not as extensive as for a drug, and can be undertaken quite quickly. Also, Australian R&D in contact lens technology is already well respected by the industry.

The Biosignal story is a good illustration of the value of business people involved in the commercialisation of research. Lack of commercial sense is the reason why so many companies founded by scientists either fail or are taken over before becoming profitable.

Elias Zerhouni, director of the huge US research funding agency the National Institutes of Health (NIH) recently banned NIH researchers from acting as consultants to drug, medical and biotech companies, and asked them to limit their shareholdings in these firms. He is concerned about a growing crisis in public confidence in the objectivity of research.

If we continue to encourage our scientists to become involved in the commercialisation of their findings—through lack of funding—then to whom shall we turn when we need objective advice on which technologies to adopt, and what foods and drugs are cheap, effective and safe?

Conflicts of interest and the consequent erosion of public trust in science are serious problems in the US. Let's ensure, by adequate funding of public science and rigorous attention to business ethics, that Australia does not tread a similar path. ■

Tim Thwaites is a freelance science writer.

Malua, and advertisements featuring the Capstan Cavalcade of Famous Winners. No doubt the fag of choice for many trainers and jockeys long gone.

Listen to poetry about the horse in Australia, and to famous race calls. Jim Carroll's 1934 Melbourne Cup is polite and leisurely—until Peter Pan dashes away. Ken Howard bemusedly calls Vain's triumph in the 1969 Golden Slipper when he showed the Sydney hope to be anything but a Special Girl. Then there is the incomparable Bert Bryant, calling the two-horse race in 1970 between Rain Lover and Big Philou. In a tight finish, Bert plumped, rightly, for Big Philou: 'If you got it wrong in a two-horse race, you'd have to give it up forever.'

Sadly the colour and prejudice that Bert brought to race-calling—he was often 'talking through his kick'—have been suppressed. He would have risen an octave when the fine filly Alinghi was run down by Fastnet Rock in the Lightning Stakes, with Cape of Good Hope—placed in Group One in four countries—third. The winner is set to go travelling too, to Ascot, in the hoofprints of Choisir.

Next week the races went to Caulfield. If the Lightning had been the best recent edition of the race, so was the Orr Stakes. Before it, there were two more Blue Diamond preludes. In the colts' event Perfectly Ready ran up to his name, but the big run was from the giant colt The Rhine. Watch for him in the Sires Produce. Langness led up in the fillies' Prelude but weakened badly, while co-favourite Queen of the Hill was never sighted. Doubting was a good winner (and at 8/1, thanks). In the Orr, Regal Roller led and compounded: the class and the track bias against horses drawn near the rails undid him. But the fine horse Elvstroem added this race to a Derby and Caulfield Cup, winning from last year's surprise Cox Plate victor, Savabeel. The latter should have won, but—as Bert Bryant would have said—it 'covered more ground than the early explorers'. ■

—Peter Pierce

This month's contributors: **Aaron Martin** is living in Vancouver; **Martin Elliott** is a freelance writer living in Melbourne; **Peter Pierce** is Professor of Australian Literature at James Cook University, Cairns.

Altered states

The success of Labor at state-government level is often remarked upon, and as something more than voters playing it safe by having governments of different stamp at different levels of politics. It is worth contemplating the converse proposition—the dismal failures of conservative coalitions at state level while John Howard's star has increased, and his own revolutionary shifts in the federal compact.

John Howard has ever been a centralist, even in the Fraser years. He is a political realist, and has at times—in government as an excuse or in opposition as a tactic—accepted the old nature of the compact and its notions of reservation of powers to the states. But he increasingly sees the old division as a significant brake on Australia's capacity to develop as a market economy.

Teasing him while in political exile about 15 years ago—at a time when it seemed unlikely that he would return to any sort of political leadership—I commented that *Deo volente* I would probably still be on the game when he died. What would he want me to say in the obituary, I asked. His answer was immediately that he was a centralist and had never adopted any reverence towards the divide.

I must confess a little astonishment, given his background. He first became closely involved in politics during the 1960s, in the NSW machine, and was an observer, if not a participant, in the developing antagonisms by that branch (and Victorian branches) against John Gorton, particularly over Gorton's centralist tendencies. There were a host of reasons, including Gorton himself, why Gorton fell. The primary reason was the antipathy of the NSW Premier, Robin Askin, and Victoria's Premier, Henry Bolte, over federal-state finances and increasing commonwealth reach into areas that the states regarded as their own. Gorton's successor, Billy MacMahon, for whom Howard briefly worked, paid appropriate obeisance to the federal compact. After all, the raging centralism of the Whitlam government in almost all areas was one of the wickednesses to which Liberals would point. It seemed to become accepted wisdom that Labor was centralist, and given its druthers would abolish the states as well as the Senate, while the conservatives saw in the federal division of powers an essential check on the unbridled ambitions of socialists.

There is one respect in which John Howard has helped the states as Prime Minister, even if he is now making it clear that this also gives him power he might not hesitate to use. Howard gave the states goods-and-services tax revenue, in theory to spend as they liked. That suited him in selling the idea of broader-based consumption taxes, and helped the states out of a hole as old state excises were found to be unconstitutional. It also allowed him to demolish an increasingly complicated panoply of financial assistance grants given under Section 96 of the Constitution for particular purposes ('FAGs with tags', as some called them) and to make the states more fiscally accountable.

What is now clear, however, is that Howard actually means to take this accountability further. It is not simply a matter of insisting that states honour their promises of progressively removing or reducing taxes, and of using his residual powers over continuing FAGs with tags to make it happen. He is demanding that states spend other money—for example, the so-called competition payments—in the way he wants, particularly over water reform. He wants more evidence of outputs and results, not mere accountants' acquittals, of commonwealth grants to the states in areas such as education, housing and Aboriginal affairs. He is making more of the extra grant process in areas such as health and education, conditional on premiers agreeing to adopt commonwealth agendas in teacher education, civics, flag-waving and national standards. In state areas such as roads, the Commonwealth now spends significant money without more than casual reference to the states. Quite apart from the pork-barrelling and logrolling (and corrupting) aspects of discretionary commonwealth political treasure chests, is the way in which many of the schemes impinge on traditional state responsibilities.

Meanwhile questions of complete commonwealth takeover of industrial relations, public hospitals, universities, and perhaps the funding of non-government schools, are raised, with significant commonwealth task forces investigating just what would be involved were the Commonwealth to force its way in and freeze the states out. John Howard may encourage talk of such takeovers without necessarily meaning to, but it serves a key political purpose of reminding voters just how badly the states are running such areas, and of responding to state attempts to blame the Commonwealth for all imperfections. It also reflects a view that these are areas of national importance, with less justification for eight separate, slightly different, regimes. If one puts together the rhetoric, rationales and threats of ministers in various areas of these targets, it is clear that Howard is prepared to use all of the constitutional powers at his disposal—including the external affairs power—to force the changes he wants.

The cynic might note that impatience with federalism extends to the federal structure of his party, which has often embarrassed him. Howard sheds few tears for the defeat of his internal party enemies in states such as Western Australia or even, sometimes, in NSW. The realist in him knows that an era of state Labor governments is probably moving towards an end. If fairly lacklustre conservative state governments take their place, it will be in political environments quite different from those in which warlords such as Askin or Bolte ruled. The states will be more akin to provinces in Canada, creatures of the federal will. Though, no doubt, another part of Howard the cynic believes that power accumulates where power is. So long as he's in Canberra, that's where it will be. If he's not, well, who cares? ■

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

by the way 

Far canal

PUNDITS WHO WERE LEFT GASPING by the announcements of Colin ('Cry me a river') Barnett, leader of the West Australian parliamentary opposition until the recent election, would have been less surprised if they'd read the June 2004 (and, sadly, last) issue of the *Okotsk Institute Journal of Research into Inexplicable Public Behaviours*. On pages 721–954 of the *OIJRIPB*, Dr Ilyitch Blok and Professor Natasha Takl describe their uncovering of an obscure, essentially benign, but inconvenient condition they call 'The de Lesseps Incongruence', or dLI.

Blok and Takl suggest that dLI occurs almost exclusively in males, although they cite former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and someone they call Paulinovka Hanchik as examples of possible feminine outbreaks. Symptoms can be activated by intense anticipatory excitement (such as is associated in male vernacular with 'being on a promise'—to translate loosely from the Russian), or by general stress, or, sometimes, as a result of cerebral surges induced by simple mathematical tasks such as addition and subtraction.

Following one or all of these symptoms, the lineaments of the condition become recognisable by the sufferer's desire to engender and carry out massive schemes that require large-scale reorganisation of natural features or forces or socio-political relationships. So entrenched does this obsession become that it cannot apparently be mitigated by even the most logical demonstrations of its impracticality. Hence Thatcher's Falklands War; hence Paulinovka Hanchik's One Nation Party—if that's the *babushka* they have in mind. And hence Colin Barnett's Grand Canal in the west and his dysfunctional finances. Each scheme involves the hubristic aspiration to alter the course of events or nature or historical legacy with a minimum understanding of the forces and ramifications involved.

THE CAREER OF Vicomte Ferdinand Marie de Lesseps (1805–94) is, of course, the example on which the Russian researchers have based their nomenclature. Though well launched as a successful diplomat, de Lesseps—like his 21st-century antipodean counterpart—became obsessed with great big canals. Out from the diplomatic bag would come his portable silver shovel at the first sight of an isthmus, and he'd be carving histh way acrossth it before you could say 'Jack Robinsthon'. This worked fine in Egypt but, with the egotism characteristic of the condition to which he would give his name, de Lesseps attacked the Isthmus of Panama and brought upon himself an intensity of social, political and financial opprobrium that would only be equalled 150 years later in the strange case of hapless fellow sufferer Colin Barnett.

In accidentally drawing attention to the ground-breaking work of Dr Blok and Professor Takl, Barnett has brought this bizarre affliction into focus, making it possible to recognise other outbreaks and other sufferers. The onset of dLI, for example, provides an explanation for the otherwise puzzling decision of Prince Charles to visit Australia. True, he had many good reasons for wanting a brief escape from his mother, his father, an assortment of untrustworthy courtiers, the Church of which he is the putative head, and his younger son's odd sense of humour—to put the best possible spin on what looked like a simple case of another, much better known condition: being as thick as two planks.

But, much as they would no doubt like to, your royals don't normally up and go on ostensibly official swannings just to be shot of the English weather and the awful rellies. Even *they* need a veneer of justification to light out for the colonies and hit a bunch of unsuspecting Commonwealth subjects with a travel and accommodation bill for a million bucks.

Yet as late as when he subsided gratefully into his first-class seat and Heathrow disappeared into the overcast and sleet, Charles could not have said in detail why he was going. It was left to some nameless spokesman for the Australian Prime Minister's Office—a person clearly in the grip of advanced dLI—to come up with a breathtaking answer, as reported on page 21 of 'The Inquirer' section of *The Weekend Australian* for 5–6 March. 'There wasn't a specific event for him to come to,' this spokesman admitted, but '*The planets just aligned at this time* ...' (my emphasis). Not for this anonymous bloke a random isthmus or a casual few hundred kilometres of canal. He's meddling with the cosmos, he's mucking round among the stars. This man is thinking big, he's thinking dLI big. Thus aided and above all given rationale by this dLI-afflicted genius, Charles was able to inspect 'key' industries (a key factory in western Victoria), 'organic' enterprises (an organ tuner in New South Wales) and a 'school' (of salmon in Bass Strait), exuding throughout an air of purpose and planning that he would have lacked without the intervention of that galaxy-dominating spokesman.

Rather in the manner of the woman who, having become pregnant, begins noticing what an amazing number of pregnant women there are suddenly appearing around her, once alerted to the dLI phenomenon, you can spot it immediately—and it's everywhere. Even as I write, the federal Treasurer, Peter Costello, has come down with a clear and severe case. 'Either spend or give me back the billions you've reaped from the GST windfall,' he is telling the states, 'or I'll ...'

The state premiers: 'Or you'll what?'

Costello: 'Or I'll dig a huge canal that cuts through every state.'

And there is, as yet, no known cure. ■

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Football Fiction

A boy living alone keeps things.
A programme with columns of footballers,
names ages heights weights goals games.
Later, he will remember statistics of sportsmen
who must be old, much heavier, or dead.
He invents a team, *Stars*, in a league,
gives it written life, coupling a first name
with a surname from that programme.

Owen Abrahams might play against
Denis Zeunert in the week-to-week world.
Owen Zeunert has Owen's height, Denis's weight,
and *Denis Abrahams* vice versa.
Players with the same surname are brothers.
He writes out the team line by line,
selected by a complicated system
that avoids odd heights with weights.

Big players are in ruck or key positions,
but sometimes a shorter *Star* finds
himself playing an unusual role,
always a chance in week-to-week games.
These surprises animate his new world.
Newsprint is the source of his system,
best players goalkickers injuries scores,
decided by each letter of each word.

Underlining, he works through to the end
of an article. Long words mean many
attacks, grandiloquent goals. Sweat flies.
His system is so fair he and the crowd enjoy
close games, some drawn, the smell of crushed grass.
Those newspapers become dark with biro.
His intricate network consists of multiple
minor systems, patterns of possibility.

Memorising this system tests him, but,
frowning in isolation, he sees the order
of his minor systems without recording them.
His *Stars* begin to take on personalities.
Like the lives of characters in stories
the seasons of his team can be played
over a condensed period of time.
He plays game after game on holidays.

He has discovered a way of fitting
in much more life than he is living.
Stars fade put on weight age retire
although he remains young and thin.
Biros do not last long as systems
interlock with precision. Some games
are like medieval battles fought
on gluey grounds in pounding rain.

Others showcase skills under clear skies
on hard turf when many goals are scored
as his biro moves steadily across
and down sports reports, his exercise
books filling with finely printed details.
He loves to play in dull cloudlight, a chill
in the air, as he resists glancing ahead,
for he wants the future kept a surprise.

—Ian C. Smith

Anthony Ham

The end of the line

The people of Togo will determine their future in democratically held elections this month.

When Togo's president, Gnassingbé Eyadéma, died on 5 February, the story of Togo's future began like an old African folktale with a predictable ending. Africa's longest-serving leader may have passed away, but he followed the old African way, leaving his people impoverished and his son to rule over them.

Death came suddenly for the man who ruled over this small West African state of 5.5 million people, if indeed anything can be called sudden in a country where one man ruled for 38 years and long-promised democratic reforms had always moved with glacial slowness.

Until President Eyadéma's death from a heart attack—reportedly on board a plane which was about to take him abroad for emergency medical treatment—only Fidel Castro, who has ruled since 1959, has been in power for a longer period. Even in Africa, he was the elder statesman of an elite but disappearing clique of rulers-for-life; President Omar Bongo of Gabon came to power in 1967, a few months after Eyadéma, while Libya's Muammar Gaddafi has been head of state for a mere 36 years.

Eyadéma was among the last of Africa's 'Big Men', those rulers who seized power by military means and then remained there for life even as the world around them embraced democracy. Such leaders of African countries were, for many years after independence in the 1960s, the rule rather than the exception.

The death of President Eyadéma was, therefore, a crucial test of African democracy, but a test that few expected Togo to pass.

The man who would become the 'father of the nation' was born in 1935 to a peasant family in northern Togo. Even before he became president, Eyadéma was a man accustomed to distinction—he was a wrestling champion; he rose rapidly through the ranks of the French army for whom he served in Indochina and Algeria; and, in 1963, was the driving force behind independent Africa's first military coup in which Togo's democratically elected president, Sylvanus Olympio, was killed.

Not content with a secondary role he took the top job for himself in 1967. Thereafter he secured his position by stacking the military and senior bureaucratic positions with members of his own Kabye tribe. Eyadéma also had powerful friends who included every French president from Charles de Gaulle to Jacques Chirac. At home, he kept dissent in check by, according to Amnesty International, imprisoning, torturing and even killing his political opponents. All the while he cultivated a cult of personality with the president's portrait adorning the walls of almost every building in Togo.

It took him 26 years to hold the first election which he won so convincingly that the European Union imposed sanctions. At the end of his second 'democratic' term as president in 2003, he announced that he would 'sacrifice' himself and run again for president. The constitution was amended and the previous two-term limit removed. Leading up to the 2003 elections, Gilchrist Olympio, the son of Togo's first democratically elected leader whom Eyadéma had deposed, showed signs of causing an upset. Just to make sure, the electoral commission disqualified Olympio's candidacy on the grounds that his tax affairs were not in order because he lived abroad; Olympio had lived in exile in France since an assassination attempt in 1999.

Not to be outdone, Togo's leader-for-life himself survived at least seven assassination attempts, all of which merely added to his legend.

When President Eyadéma finally died, the Speaker of Parliament, according to the Togolese constitution, should have taken over the presidency for a period of 60 days. Thereafter, elections should be held.

As if they were unable to envisage life without the man known universally as 'the Boss'—he had, after all, ruled Togo for all but seven of the country's 45 years since independence—the Togolese parliament hastened to change the script.

The Speaker of Parliament, Fanbare Ouattara Natchaba, was briefly outside the country when the president died. In his absence, parliament took its lead from Togo's army and sacked Natchaba, installed Eyadéma's son, Faure, in his place and amended the constitution to allow Eyadéma the younger to serve the remainder of his father's term which was to run until 2008.

That was the way things had always been done in Africa, and Togo, if nothing else, stood for the preservation of the old ways.

But Africa has changed. Upon Eyadéma's death, Gilchrist Olympio warned world leaders that 'the situation of Togo is more than just Togo. It is a test for all of Africa. If the leaders do not stand firm, that will mean that they will have no more credibility to speak about freedom and democracy in Africa. They must stand on principle or become irrelevant.'

Almost immediately, while the president's supporters were congratulating themselves on the efficiency of the seamless transition they had engineered, African governments rushed to condemn the installation of the president's son as leader.

Adam Thiam, spokesman for Alpha Oumar Konaré, chairman of the 53-member African Union (AU) warned that 'this administration will not be recognised because it comes from a coup d'état'.

Just as quickly, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)—a regional political grouping which President Eyadéma had helped to create—

similarly denounced the succession as a coup and demanded the restoration of the previous constitution. One of the most influential ECOWAS members, Nigeria, demanded that the new president stand down and threatened military action if he did not.

Former Togolese President Gnassingbé Eyadéma leaves the polling station in June 2003. Photo: AAP/AP/Ben Curtis

It was a far cry from the not-so-distant past when African unity meant preserving the status quo, when military coups d'état were ignored in the name of African solidarity that dared not meddle in the affairs of your neighbours lest uncomfortable light be shed on the illegitimacy of your own rule.

The new political maturity which has come to characterise Africa was exemplified by Togo's near-neighbours Ghana and Niger who both held their second successive and peaceful democratic elections last year. Just prior to President Eyadéma's death, leadership of ECOWAS passed from Ghana to Niger, and together they led the campaign against the Togolese coup.

Perhaps Togo's new leaders hoped that the criticism would prove ineffective and abate, as indeed it has amid the mess that has become the Ivory Coast. They decided that, in time-honoured Eyadéma fashion, they could weather the storm.

Togolese protesters took to the streets, demanding democracy and the right to elect their own leader. Togolese soldiers opened fire into the crowd of demonstrators, killing at least three people.

The new president expressed anger at 'attempts by protesters to call for violence, insurrection and acts of civil disobedience' and praised his security forces in glowing terms:

> We particularly thank the Togolese armed forces and the security forces and congratulate them for their courage and faithfulness and for the calm, order and discipline they maintain across the country ... We call on them to preserve their unity and cohesion, indispensable for their sacred mission to protect our hard-working population and national integrity.

He also made vacuous speeches, mouthing platitudes about peace and security, promising 'discussions towards a consensual electoral framework which will result in the holding of free and fair general elections as soon as possible to reflect the will of the people, as indicated by the father of the nation'. He announced the closure of three radio channels and one television station for supposed opposition sympathies and he banned all political rallies during a two-month period of national mourning. And he promised to serve the remainder of his father's term.

The AU and ECOWAS maintained their pressure and West Africa's newly free press joined the clamour for democracy in Togo. Ghana's *National Democrat* described events in Togo as 'simply pathetic' and said that 'what happened in Togo is a disgrace and shameful' which 'would greatly set back the course of democratisation in Africa'.

Nigeria's *Daily Champion* was similarly unequivocal, claiming that the new regime, like the old, stood 'at the forefront of advancement of anti-democratic tendencies in the African continent'. Another Nigerian daily, *Vanguard*, called the Togolese charade of democracy a 'democratic aberration' and described it as 'criminal and ungodly for the Eyadéma family and their ethnic group to feel they could foist an Eyadéma presidential dynasty on Togo'.

Burkina Faso's *Sidwaya* denounced 'this deadly and destructive foolishness' while its compatriot *Le Pays* asked: 'How can we let the undemocratic rule that characterised the 1960s resurface?'

When none of this worked, ECOWAS resorted to sanctions. Togo was suspended from ECOWAS, ambassadors were recalled from the Togolese capital Lomé, Togo's leaders were banned from travelling abroad and an arms embargo was imposed on the country.

Initially, the Togolese government remained defiant, with Foreign Minister, Kokou Tozoun, claiming that 'we prefer to have sanctions and be in peace and stability rather than descending towards civil war'.

However, surrounded on all sides by democratic governments and howled down by the region's plain-speaking press, the isolated regime soon took the only path left open to it.

Parliament was recalled and duly voted to reverse the constitutional amendments enacted upon the old president's death. The deputy speaker told the special parliamentary session that only a fool never changed his mind. On 20 February, just 15 days after his father's death, Faure Gnassingbé announced that he would resign ahead of elections this month. Although he intends to stand as a candidate, his future now depends on the people of Togo. The parliamentary speaker Abass Bonfoh has assumed the presidency pending the election.

The old president, the father of the nation who held Togo in the palm of his hand for almost four decades, once declared that 'democracy in Africa moves on at its own pace and in its own way'.

Indeed it does. ■

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Steven Churches

Selective evidence

Was the decision to deny the Bakhtiyaris refugee status based on all the facts?

THE SAGA OF THE BAKHTIYARI FAMILY has highlighted many misconceptions about the way Australia's refugee intake and screening system works. These misconceptions are played upon by politicians of both stripes, and are not put to rest by journalists. A story by Russell Skelton in *The Age* of 26 December 2004 (reprinted in the *Independent Weekly* in Adelaide) seriously questioned the family's claim to be Afghans.

I had some limited dealings (as a court advocate) with the claims for refugee status by the father, Ali Bakhtiyari, as well as the claim by the children to be released from detention, and question the vehemence of the political statements and the soundness of Russell Skelton's insinuations against the family's interest.

The father, Ali, and mother, Roqia (and the then five children), arrived in Australia independently of one another, resulting in twin streams of inquiry and appeal into their case. Ali arrived in October 1999 and, on the basis of his written claim, was granted a Temporary Protection Visa in August 2000. However, Roqia arrived in January 2001, unaware of Ali's presence in the country, and applied for refugee status.

In February 2001, Roqia was interviewed by a delegate of the Minister for Immigration. In early May the Government obtained a linguistic analysis which asserted that Roqia's accent reflected that of Quetta, in Pakistan, while she used Iranian words and had some Iranian pronunciations. I did not act for Roqia, and have no knowledge of the linguistic analysis other than that provided by the Refugee Review Tribunal following the delegate's decision, but Iran and Pakistan are on opposite sides of Afghanistan. It seems not implausible that Roqia's language reflected the impact on the central country of the neighbours on either side, rather than that Roqia must have come from Quetta.

In May 2001 the Minister's delegate refused Roqia and the children a refugee visa on the grounds that while it was not clear which country they were from, it was not Afghanistan. Roqia, through her lawyers, appealed to the Refugee Review Tribunal. The tribunal is set up under the Migration Act as the last line of appeal for finding the facts about a refugee claim.

Politicians (most often Philip Ruddock, but more lately Amanda Vanstone) like to talk glibly about how refugee claimants have access to a long line of appeal procedures, but they do not explain that in such court appeals, the facts of the claim are not canvassed. The process is more properly referred to as review, to distinguish it from an appeal on the merits of the case. All the Federal Court, the Full Federal Court (usually sitting as three judges) and ultimately the High Court can do, is examine the process by which the tribunal came to its decision. This results in increasingly refined and, in turn, arid discussion of what is permissible behaviour in the course of executive-branch decision-making (the tribunal is part of the executive, not the judiciary). The courts may not, on any account, examine the merits of the facts of the case. In the rare instances in which they find the process faulty, the matter is remitted to the tribunal to hear again: it is not for the courts to make merit decisions where the function of fact-finding is vested by statute in the executive.

In short, if the tribunal gives the appearance of having listened to the applicant fairly, and appears to have taken all matters relevant into account, and avoided irrelevant considerations, then how it weighs the evidence is entirely its business: no court may second-guess it.

IN JULY 2001 THE tribunal rejected Roqia's appeal, and as Skelton observed, commented on her lack of credibility. I have recently obtained a copy of the tribunal reasons, and was struck by how culturally straight-jacketed the member constituting the tribunal appeared to be. If Roqia's claims have any basis in fact, she had arrived in Australia straight from an existence lived in the style of Europeans in about 1340. On her account she lived in a village in provincial Afghanistan, surrounded by other sub-villages, and knew nothing of the outside world. The tribunal was not having a bar of it.

I merely note that members of the Refugee Review Tribunal should be wary of their own cultural conceptions about how the rest of the world works. On the other hand, Skelton claims that other women of Roqia's ethnic group, Hazara, interviewed by him in her village of Charkh, laughed at her lack of knowledge. And that in turn raises the matter of the inability of some applicants, particularly those from non-Western backgrounds, to trust ministerial

Brothers Alamdar and Montazer Bakhtiyari with school friends in Adelaide last year. Photo: Newspix/TobyZerna

delegates and tribunal members sufficiently to tell them a coherent story.

Translation of the story is another matter. I note that the *Australian Financial Review* (29 December 2004–3 January 2005), raised the suggestion that the translations for Roqia had been performed by Malyar Dehsabzi, an Afghan of non-Hazara background, who with his brother is now under investigation by the Department of Immigration's Migration and Fraud Investigation Unit.

One would have hoped that the department had taken steps to ensure that the translation process had avoided the use of people from whom claimants are fleeing (Hazaras are hated by many other groups in Afghanistan), but it seems this is not so. The antipathy of other Afghans to Hazaras—the very heart of the persecution claims by most Hazaras—ought to be borne in mind by those, such as Skelton, when exploring this sort of story in public. It is not hard to guess where Skelton's snide 'considerable speculation' about Roqia's relationship with her half-brother, Mazhar Ali, or 'the suspicion of some detainees' would have come from.

Skelton makes much of having interviewed Ali as to his claim of having come from 'Uruzgan province, Sharistan district and Charkh village', a claim consistent with that made by Roqia as to her origins. Skelton goes on to write: 'There is only one Charkh in Uruzgan ...' Yet only a paragraph later he writes of having searched the villages of Charkh Nolije and Charkh Chaprasak. Could it be that the village name 'Charkh' is a common one, often used in conjunction with other names? By way of example, I note that in an area of 40 miles by 24 miles an English road map shows 26 villages with 'Aston' in their name, and 11 in the counties of Shropshire and Staffordshire alone: six are simply 'Aston', the remainder having names like 'Aston Magna'. Hell for the mailman before postcodes. Afghanistan, and Ali and Roqia, appear to be definitely pre-postcode. And there are certainly other 'Charkhs'.

But that brings us to the story of how Ali had his refugee visa taken away from him, and was then classified as a non-refugee. It is salutary to note that throughout 2001 Ali and Roqia did not know of each other's presence in Australia. It is apparent from the argument on Roqia's application for review in the High Court (her lawyers took a constitutional point that avoided having to go through the Federal Court) that the Refugee Tribunal hearing Roqia's appeal on the merits knew that Ali was in Australia, but did not tell her. It was argued that this should have been disclosed to her so she could have claimed entry as the wife of someone with a refugee visa (as Ali then had). This line of attack was repulsed as not raising a legal issue, but Australians

might care to reflect on the behaviour of one of their officials who, while interviewing a person seeking humanitarian help, armed with information as to a missing spouse, withholds it. No doubt on orders from the department.

In April 2002 the department gave notice to Ali of its intention to remove his refugee visa, on the basis that he had lied as to his nation of origin. Ali made representations to the department through his lawyers, and in December 2002 the Minister's delegate cancelled the visa. Ali appealed to the Refugee Review Tribunal. The tribunal dealt with five major areas of evidence concerning Ali's refugee claim: a facial-mapping analysis; Pakistani government citizenship documents; a linguistic analysis; eyewitness recognition of Ali; and newspaper articles.

The department put on evidence from a facial-mapping specialist that Ali was one and the same as the person in a Pakistani government registration form photograph, the photograph then 27 years old. Ali's then lawyers, a Sydney-based firm, responded with a report from a scientist in the field who categorically denied that facial-recognition techniques such as used by the department worked, and that such analysis was forensically useless. The tribunal brushed aside Ali's scientist and accepted the department's version.

The documentation fight went off in part on a letter from a widower brother-in-law of Ali's, Teimoor Ali, 'resident of Charkh Bagar', who asked the District Governor of Sharistan to write to the Australian authorities to say that Ali and his family were from Afghanistan. On 6 September 2002 the Governor of Sharistan wrote to the Australian government, stating that Ali and his family (they were all enumerated in the letter) all came from Sharistan district. Of this letter the tribunal said: ' ... the letter does not set out the basis on which the District Governor makes this statement ...' Did he write it of his own knowledge or relying on what others told him? The tribunal discounted this letter in favour of the Pakistani government registration documents, one dated to 1973 and the other to 1982, which showed an Ali Bakhtiyari as the son (and brother) of a family.

The evidence before the tribunal included material from the Pakistani government as to the efficacy of its citizenship registration scheme. Bakhtiyari is not an uncommon name. The best evidence that Ali was a citizen of Pakistan would have come from a search of the Pakistan citizenship register for the year 1998, just before he set off for Australia, to see if he turned up as the husband of Roqia and father of then five children. This search seems never to have been undertaken, and the Australian government's claim to have evidence from the Pakistan government as to the nationality of the family, evidence never publicly disclosed, would appear to rest on the documents now more than 20 and 30 years old respectively, which themselves were internally inconsistent. The tribunal happily plumped for the aged registration forms. And why not? They contained the name Ali Bakhtiyari, and who cares how many Pakistanis might have that name?

The department then undertook an analysis of Ali's speech, performed by a Swedish firm, Eqvator. In a little over a page, Eqvator gave no indication of the identity, credentials or skills of the person performing the analysis, nor any methodology, but, as had been the case with Roqia, referred to aspects of language reflecting both Pakistani and Iranian usage. Eqvator came to the firm conclusion that Ali's 'Hazaragi dialect is Pakistani. His mother tongue is Dari', and that it 'may with considerable certainty be said to originate from Pakistan, Quetta'.

Ali's Sydney-based solicitors tendered not one, but two linguistic analyses of Ali's speech, both performed by specialists who gave their names and credentials as experts, and explained their methodology. Mr Yosufi, an Australian government-recognised translator into English from Persian, Dari, Hazaragi and Pashto, concluded that Ali was 'a Hazara from Uruzgan in Afghanistan'. Mr Mohammad, a speaker of Dari and teacher of Persian, holder of a master of arts degree in theoretical linguistics from Ohio University and a doctoral student in the department of linguistics, University of Arizona, concluded that Ali's speech was 'the same as the speech of other Hazaras living in Afghanistan'.

The tribunal pronounced that Mr Yosufi had not established his credentials to perform linguistic analysis (note that Eqvator had provided no credentials whatsoever), and that as regards Mr Mohammad, it 'prefers the linguistic analysis provided by Eqvator, having regard to greater rigour given by that agency's standards, requirements and operating procedures'. This conclusion represents an extraordinary leap of faith that has no part in a fact-finding exercise.

The lawyers then submitted statements from two men who claimed, independently of one another, to have met Ali in Afghanistan years earlier, and then run into him fortuitously in Sydney. The story of one witness was published in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. The tribunal is not a court, and does not have to operate on the strict rules of evidence, but the tribunal member was not going to accept these statements unless the two witnesses appeared before the tribunal. As they had not appeared, they could not be tested by the tribunal, which was not prepared to accept their assertions.

Finally, the tribunal relied on various Australian newspaper articles written in the course of 2002, particularly by journalists who claimed to have been to the village of Charkh (Skelton being the vanguard of this group) and who found no sign of the Bakhtiyaris ever having been there. The tribunal seemed

to contradict its suggestion that if Ali's eyewitnesses must be available for examination, the same might apply to journalists. The British government sends its own officials to make inquiry in cases such as these, and does not rely on newspaper reports to settle something as important as a refugee claim.

The tribunal concluded that, 'having regard to the totality of the evidence', Ali was from Quetta, in Pakistan, not Afghanistan. This conclusion was reached by the simple expedient of preferring the department's evidence at all points, no matter how persuasive Ali's material. But, the weighing of evidence is a function reserved solely for the tribunal. So long as it indicates it has looked at evidence before ditching it, no court can review its actions.

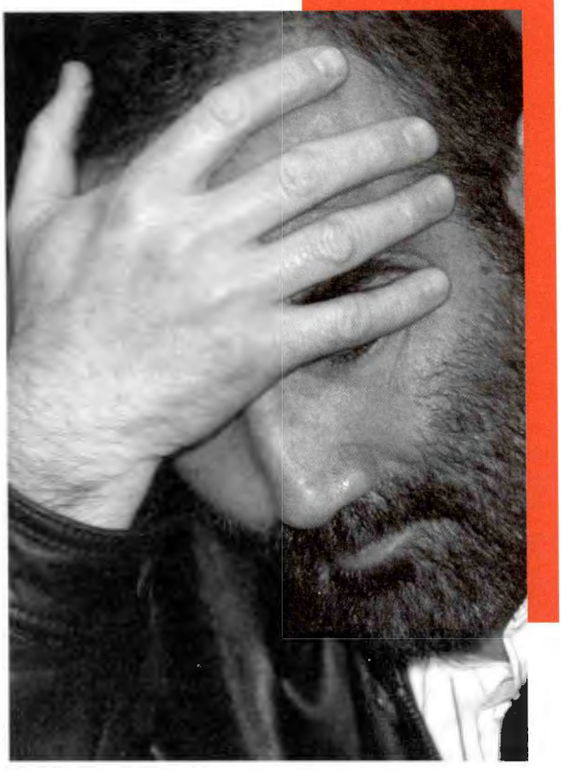
Ali sought review of this decision before the Full Federal Court, where I argued that review should take place at the British 'human rights' level: the decision had not merely to be not 'unreasonable', but had to be 'justified' on the evidence. The three judges gave the argument short shrift.

Ali had yet another trip through the tribunal to determine whether he was a refugee, but after the initial decision that he had lied in order to obtain his refugee visa, the answer was preordained, as were attempts at review in the Federal Court. The final round of reviews in the Federal Court did attempt to introduce 'fresh evidence' gathered since the tribunal hearing, including the material sent back to Australia from Afghanistan by Roqia's brother, Mazhar Ali. Mazhar Ali was removed by the Australian government in August 2003 to Pakistan, and then moved himself back to where he always said he had come from, the Sharistan district in Afghanistan.

Skelton scoffs that this is 'ironically a region of Afghanistan to which the Bakhtiyari family said they could never return'. Mazhar appears to have gone there specifically to obtain evidence as to the family's origins. Ali, Roqia and the children are now faced with the same 'irony', as they have left Pakistan, to which they were removed, and headed into Afghanistan, attempting to prove their origins.

THE DOCUMENTS SENT by Mazhar included a number of testimonies from officials in the Bakhtiyaris' home village and district in Uruzgan province (the officials ranked at the equivalent of mayor and governor) testifying to the family's residence in that province until they fled the Taliban; Ali in 1999, and Roqia and the children in 2000. Under the rules of judicial review, this material was not allowed to be introduced to the reviewing court. But it is remarkable that Skelton can write of these documents: 'The evidence he [Mazhar] has gathered, including a voter registration that can be purchased by any Afghan on the black market for A$25, is inconclusive.' What a cheap shot. There was more material than a voter registration certificate. Still, at least the court and Skelton have seen and commented to some extent on the new material: it was presented to the Minister, who refused to acknowledge its existence.

It is that approach by the Minister, Amanda Vanstone, that neatly encapsulates the Government's position of rigid adherence to structure. Because the tribunal is vested with the task of fact-finding in respect of refugee status, once it has made its decision against an applicant, the Government claims it cannot be swayed by any countervailing or new material. The Migration Act is stuffed full of discretions to be exercised by the Minister: there was no impediment to her looking at the new material from Afghanistan sent by Roqia's brother, and granting the family visas on the basis of that information.



Ali Bakhtiyari shows the stress of his ordeal at a press conference. Photo: AAP/Julian Smith

Skelton opened his account by saying that the Bakhtiyaris' claim to refugee status was 'based on evidence that is patchy, often contradictory, or doesn't exist'. I can only say to him that the evidence from the Bakhtiyaris was consistent as to their origins, plausible as to their claim to be from that part of Afghanistan (see the linguistic analysis, the independent eyewitness accounts in Australia, and the official letters from Uruzgan over the period 2002–2004), and not at all patchy or contradictory. One can only surmise that Skelton's visits to three 'Charkhs' may not have exhausted the villages with that name: a cursory glance through the materials in the review applications reveals a 'Charkh Vanalej Bargar' and a 'Takht i Talag Barger'. Skelton and others, allowing for actions in all good faith, are wrestling with transcriptions from Dari into Latin script, and the vagaries of pronunciation.

I wonder if a family with six children might not have been the subject of reportage with a little less self-justifying swagger than Skelton's. Perhaps they might even have received a sympathetic coverage that pointed out the coherence and plausibility of their claim. ■

Dr Steven Churches works in Adelaide as a lawyer in the field of public law, and in particular refugee claims.

Robert Hefner

Elephants dancing in the rain

IN THE MIDDLE of the night there was a loud clap of thunder, followed by a flash of lightning, and then a heavy spray of rain that drummed on the roof for a good 20 minutes. This shouldn't have been happening. We were in the worst drought in memory; there was no rain in the forecast; there hadn't been a cloud in the sky when we got home at midnight.

'Noah's Ark,' I said to my wife, who'd also been awakened by the thunder. *Noah's Ark* was the name of a song we'd sung with our band earlier that night at the folk club, a song my wife wrote, a song that puts the wombat and the kangaroo in the story, alongside the lions and the lambs.

We had jokingly warned the audience that earlier public airings of the song (and even, on occasion, just singing it in the lounge room at home) had precipitated unanticipated falls of rain. They laughed obligingly but no one seriously thought it would rain. Not on a clear night in summer, in a drought. I didn't really think it would myself.

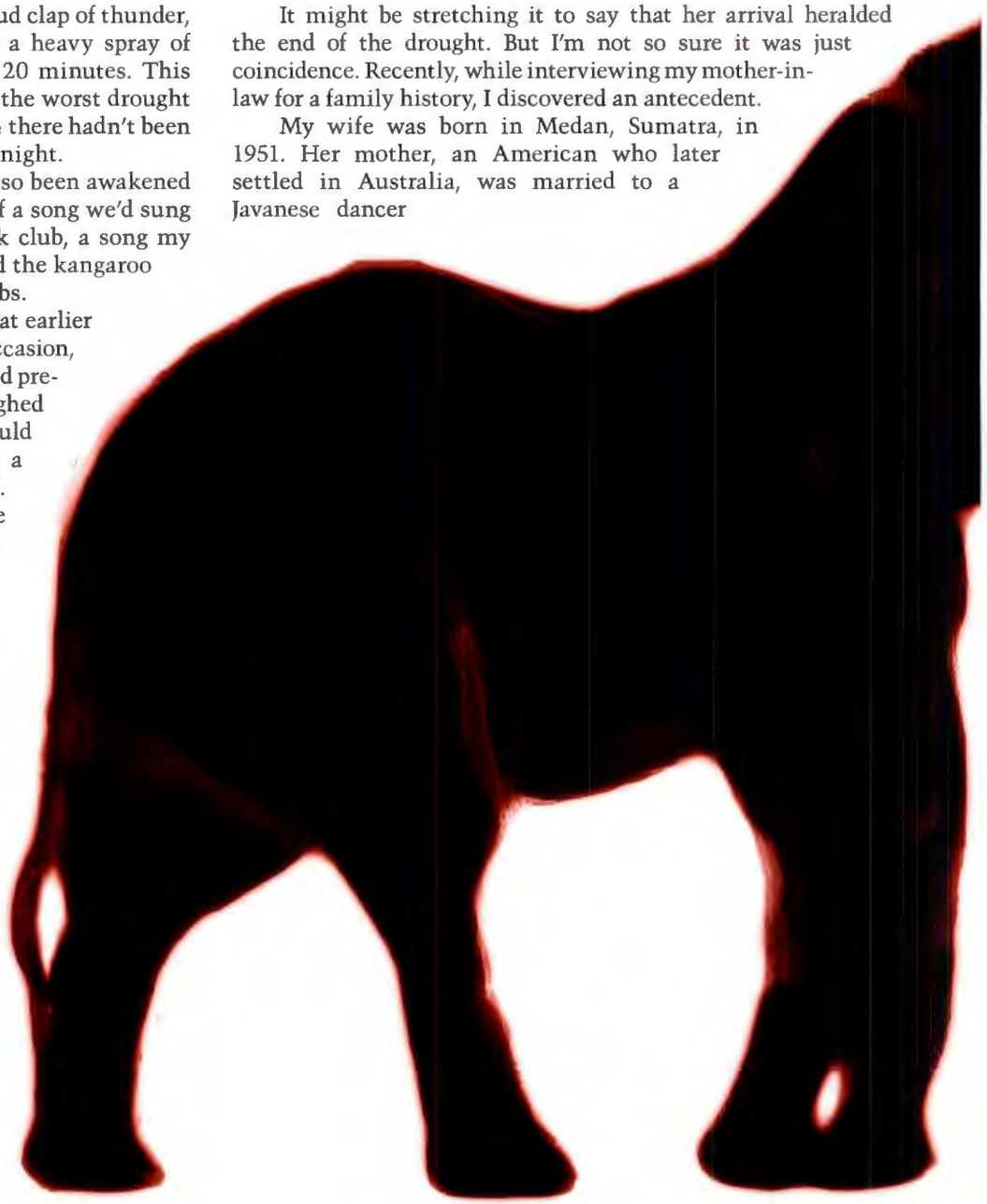
But it did. The coincidences were beginning to look like a pattern, and not just in relation to *Noah's Ark*. There were earlier indicators that my wife had an unusual affinity for drought-breaking rain.

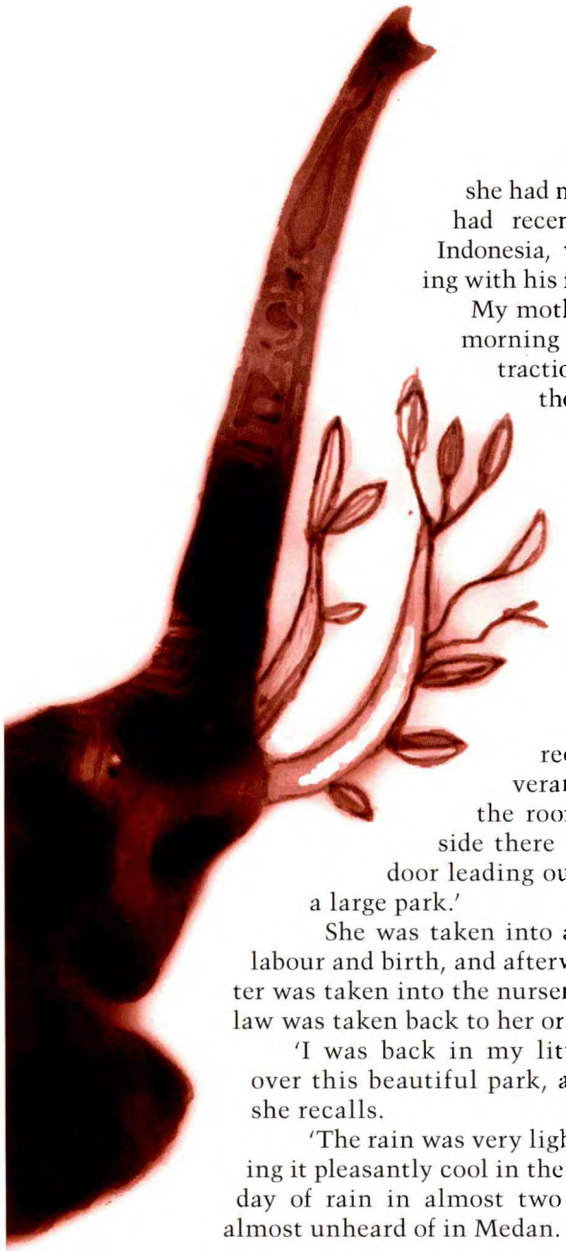
LATE IN 1982 SHE returned to Australia after having lived overseas for five years. The east coast was in severe drought. Her life overseas had been arid too, but in the opening weeks of 1983, in the warm embrace of family and friends, the wellsprings of her spirit began once again to flow.

One evening in February 1983, as she sat on her sister's bed, she began to cry. Nearby, her sister's dog, a canine with uncanny human empathy, licked the tears away. The next day Labor won the federal election, Bob Hawke became prime minister, and it rained, and rained, and rained.

It might be stretching it to say that her arrival heralded the end of the drought. But I'm not so sure it was just coincidence. Recently, while interviewing my mother-in-law for a family history, I discovered an antecedent.

My wife was born in Medan, Sumatra, in 1951. Her mother, an American who later settled in Australia, was married to a Javanese dancer





she had met overseas, and they had recently moved back to Indonesia, where they were living with his family.

My mother-in-law awoke one morning to the regular contractions that indicated the imminent arrival of her second child, later to become my wife. She was taken to St Elizabeth's Hospital, run by Dutch nuns.

'I was put in a very pleasant room with a Dutch woman,' she recalls. 'There was a verandah on one side of the room, and on the other side there were windows and a door leading out and looking across a large park.'

She was taken into another room for the labour and birth, and afterwards her new daughter was taken into the nursery and my mother-in-law was taken back to her original room to rest.

'I was back in my little bed, looking out over this beautiful park, and it began to rain,' she recalls.

'The rain was very light and very fine, making it pleasantly cool in the room. It was the first day of rain in almost two months, which was almost unheard of in Medan.

'I dozed and slept a bit, and then woke up and looked out across that great park. There were trees on the other side, but I could see no houses or other buildings or signs of life until I saw these great grey forms moving up and down and around. I couldn't figure out what they were. I watched intently for quite a long time, and then I realised that what I was looking at were trunks, and that in fact there were a whole lot of elephants out there in that park.

'The nurses hadn't given me any medication, and they hadn't warned me to look out for elephants, but I wasn't the least bit afraid. The elephants weren't approaching, they weren't coming in, they certainly weren't charging. They were just moving elegantly and slowly around the park in the rain. It was like they were dancing—very rhythmic, very slow.

'I'd only been in Medan a couple of months and didn't know anything about an elephant park, but I thought it wasn't utterly inconceivable. This must have gone on for an hour or so until the rain stopped and the elephants just disappeared.'

IT'S A LOVELY AND ENDEARING image: elephants dancing in the rain, the first rain for months, on the day my wife was born.

Not long after the night that we sang *Noah's Ark* and it rained, we moved from Canberra to Melbourne. We haven't sung the song here in public yet, but we've sung it in the lounge room, and not long ago Melbourne had its wettest day on record.

Coincidence? Perhaps. But when the next federal election rolls around I think we'll be dusting off *Noah's Ark* and taking it out on the hustings, which—more likely than not—will be dry and dusty and in need of rain.

And while we're singing I'll be saying a silent prayer, asking Hughie to send her down—not just cats and dogs, but elephants too. ■

Robert Hefner is assistant editor of *Eureka Street*. Illustration by **Lucille Hughes**.

Tim Martyn

A part-time 'working' nation

While Australia enjoys its lowest official unemployment rate in 28 years, it's time to reflect upon the true level of labour-market exclusion and prospects for the unemployed and working poor.

Since the end of the recession we 'had to have', Australia's official unemployment rate has continued to tumble. Ongoing economic growth, coupled with an increased level of labour-market flexibility, has helped create a host of new jobs to service the Australian economy.

In December 2004, the official unemployment rate sank to just 5.1 per cent—the lowest rate in 28 years. However, today's labour market is a very different place to that of 28 years ago.

The ongoing casualisation of the labour force, complicated by the large numbers of hidden long-term unemployed, underemployed and 'demotivated' jobseekers, has left the labour market at a critical juncture. It's important that while celebrating the low unemployment rate, the federal government's employment agenda keeps sight of the big picture: as Australia's full-time employees spend longer hours at work, the ranks of Australia's part-time 'working' nation continues to grow.

The difficulty stems from the way we measure unemployment in Australia. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) counts people as employed even if they spend as little as one hour a week working, and spend every subsequent hour actively seeking a job. If a million Australian employees were involuntarily shifted from full-time to part-time hours tomorrow, there would be no impact upon the official rate.

Official unemployment fell to just 520,000 people in December 2004; however, if we were to take into account the unemployed and underemployed currently excluded by this measure, a lack of work remains a major financial burden for more than 1.5 million Australians. And given that there are a million households living below the poverty line despite the fact that one or more adults in the household works, we start to see the new phenomenon facing Australian workers: a job is no longer a guaranteed path out of poverty.

That 87 per cent of the jobs created in the 1990s paid less than $26,000 a year, or that two out of every three jobs created in the last three years pays less than $600 a week, is perhaps the best illustration of the fact that a job is no substitute for good employment policy.

The main reason that these new jobs pay so badly is that the majority of the growth has been in part-time employment. In fact, for every four new part-time jobs, only one full-time position is created.

As a result of this trend towards part-time employment there were, by July 2004, 2.8 million part-time workers in Australia representing 29 per cent of the labour force. Compare this figure to the Australian workforce circa 1978, when 85 per cent of employees—and 96 per cent of male employees—worked full-time.

The effect of the explosion in part-time employment is that huge numbers of Australians are now underemployed: 610,000 of them, according to the latest available ABS figures. The number of underemployed persons has increased more than threefold during the past two decades, with a corresponding increase in the official underemployment rate from 2.6 per cent in 1979 to 6.2 per cent in 2003. Meanwhile, full-time employees are working longer hours than ever before.

Underemployed workers are defined as persons working part-time who would prefer to work more hours plus those who usually work full-time, but who are currently working less than 35 hours a week.

Data collected by the ABS shows that most underemployment is of a long-term nature, with the average duration of insufficient work being 57 weeks. The average number of extra hours that underemployed people would prefer to work is 16.2 hours a week, with most of the underemployed preferring to work full-time.

The policies of consecutive federal governments with respect to labour-market flexibility have contributed to this trend towards part-time work, and the concurrent fall in conditions and job security. While labour-market flexibility has created new opportunities for those seeking part-time employment, this has largely been at the expense of full-time work.

Rural Victoria is one of the areas hardest hit by this trend. Despite Victoria's surpluses and private-sector prosperity, there are fewer jobs in the state's towns and rural areas now than in 1990.

No wonder so many young people are leaving the bush and flooding to the capital cities; the dearth of full-time work has forced them to take flight. The disappearance of full-time work from our regions has driven those who have remained into low-paid, casual and part-time positions, such as in call centres.

The credibility of the official unemployment rate is compounded by the statistical exclusion of an estimated 300,000 mature-aged, long-term unemployed workers that have been shifted onto the Disability Support Pension (DSP). One of the key changes that enabled this shift was the 1991 decision to take local labour-market conditions into account when considering a disability claim by anybody aged 55 or over. Subsequently, those advisers whose job it is to help unemployed people find work (via the Job Network program, at a cost to the taxpayer of $1 billion a year) have been relieved of their responsibility for some of their more difficult cases, as the over-55s have been moved from the unemployment rolls and onto the DSP. Half the people now joining the DSP each year are recruited directly from the unemployment rolls where they have, on average, spent more than 12 months drawing unemployment benefits.

The one remaining undisclosed unemployed group is the 'discouraged job seekers', those jobless individuals who want to work, are ready to start within four weeks, yet who have given up actively looking. The ABS calculates that 80,000 'discouraged' unemployed are excluded from the official rate.

When 85 per cent of those classified as employed were full-time workers, as was the case in the mid-1970s—the last time the official unemployment rate reached 5.1 per cent—such a measure of unemployment was appropriate. However, when someone working for only one hour a week is classified as 'employed' and there are more than 200,000 people working less than ten hours a week but seeking additional hours, then new measures of labour-market performance are desperately required. And when one million working Australians continue to struggle to pay for even the most basic services for their families—including more than half a million who were unable to pay for their electricity or phone bills last year—it's time we reconsider what minimum benefits a job should bring.

Further labour-market reforms are high on the government's fourth-term electoral agenda; once the Coalition takes control of the Senate in July of this year, we can expect the labour market to become more 'flexible' and that the divide between the job-rich and job-poor will grow wider.

IN THE LEAD-UP TO THE Senate changeover and beyond, it is critical that those citizens concerned by the growing evidence that all is not well in the Australian labour market—regardless of whether they come from the ranks of the Coalition, the Federal Opposition, the NGO community, industry or private individuals—call attention to these worrying trends and lobby the Federal Government for the implementation of the 2004 Senate Inquiry into Poverty's recommendations, specifically:

> That the Federal Government introduce a national jobs strategy to promote permanent full-time employment opportunities and better targeted employment programs (Recommendation 1);
>
> That the Federal Government poverty proof the minimum wage by linking it to adequate standards of living (Recommendation 6); and
>
> That the Federal Government, in collaboration with State Governments encourage the expansion of labour-intensive private sector services in regional areas by improving education and training and other public infrastructure and/or providing tax concessions or other subsidies to encourage employers to relocate in regional areas (Recommendation 73).

The truth about the labour market is out there; the strategies for tackling its shortcomings have been well documented; the only remaining task is to ensure that our tax dollars are not directed towards lowering the official unemployment rate, but towards facilitating secure, full-time employment. After all, bad jobs are no substitute for good policy. ■

Tim Martyn is the policy and research officer at the Ignatius Centre for Social Policy and Research, Jesuit Social Services.

Brian Doyle

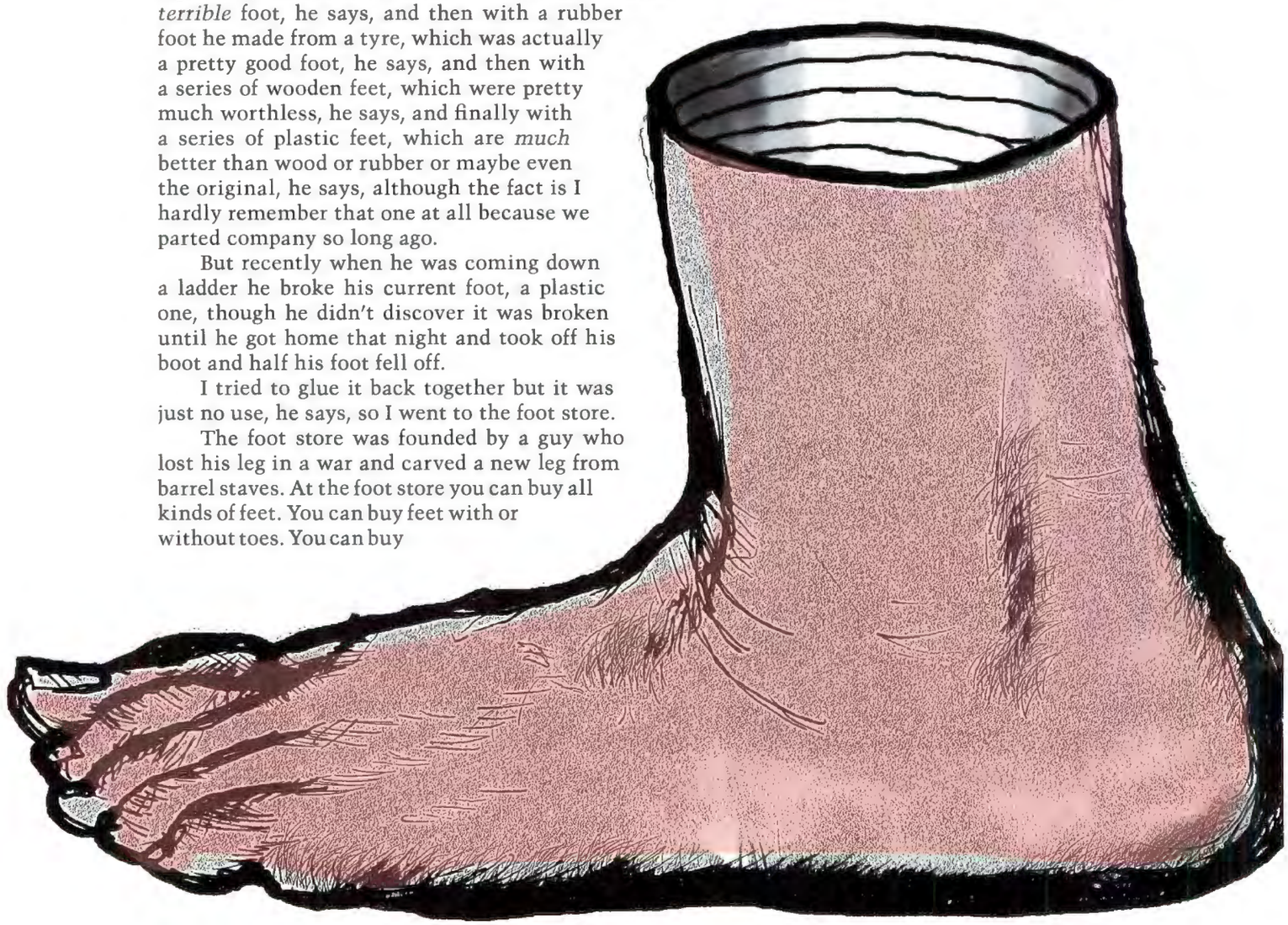
Footloose at the foot store

FRIEND OF MINE WENT to buy a foot the other day. Left foot. He lost the original in a war, and he didn't replace it for a while, being distracted by other things, as he says, but eventually he did replace it, first with a bamboo foot, which was a *terrible* foot, he says, and then with a rubber foot he made from a tyre, which was actually a pretty good foot, he says, and then with a series of wooden feet, which were pretty much worthless, he says, and finally with a series of plastic feet, which are *much* better than wood or rubber or maybe even the original, he says, although the fact is I hardly remember that one at all because we parted company so long ago.

But recently when he was coming down a ladder he broke his current foot, a plastic one, though he didn't discover it was broken until he got home that night and took off his boot and half his foot fell off.

I tried to glue it back together but it was just no use, he says, so I went to the foot store.

The foot store was founded by a guy who lost his leg in a war and carved a new leg from barrel staves. At the foot store you can buy all kinds of feet. You can buy feet with or without toes. You can buy feet made from plastic or steel or wood, although most feet in the foot store are made from carbon fibres arranged in a stunning number of ways.



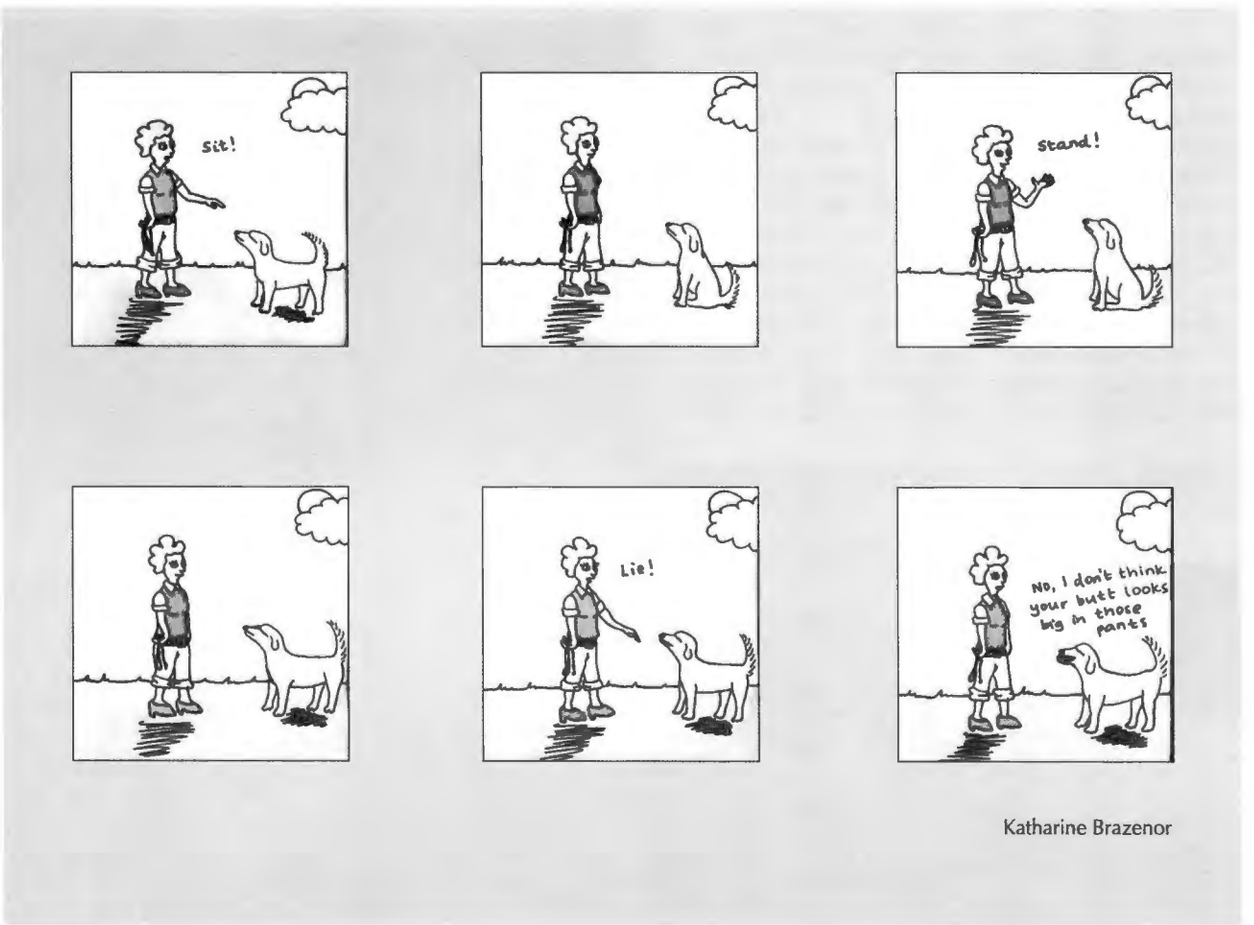
You can buy feet with toe and heel springs. You can buy feet with adjustable heel heights. You can buy waterproof feet. You can buy feet designed for golfing and rock-climbing and swimming and skiing and sprinting and snorkelling and scuba-diving and mall-walking and hiking and tennis, among many other things.

You can also buy ankles and knees and legs at the foot store, and there are foot stores, says my friend, where you can also buy hands and arms and elbows, but this foot store focuses on feet and has by far the best selection of feet in the city.

MOST OF THE FEET YOU can buy don't look like feet at all. They look like the sort of wild modern sculptures you might see in a hip downtown gallery and when you wander in to see them more closely out of sheer curiosity you notice the little white card with the price, which makes you gasp, and the irony there, says my friend, is that a good foot these days is just as shockingly expensive as hip art, many thousands of dollars, but when you need a foot you need a foot, so you buy one.

My friend got the basic model, no frills, size nine, and he's pretty happy with it, especially given the poor left feet he's had over the years, of which the worst had to be that bamboo foot, he says, which was just awful, it lasted about three days, but that was my first try at making a foot, which is a lot harder than it looks, and then I made three wooden feet, one from *camxe* wood, which is red, and one from *go* wood, which is black, and one from *sen* wood, which is grey, but then I made that rubber foot, and that was one good foot. You wouldn't think you could make a foot out of a tyre but you can. I should have kept that one to show my kids but at the time I was distracted by other things and not in a position to think about kids or a wife or anything other than figuring out how to make a foot and get the hell out of where I was, which was absolutely no place to be. ■

Brian Doyle is the editor of *Portland Magazine*, in Oregon, and the author of five collections of essays, most recently *Spirited Men*. His new book, *The Wet Engine*, about 'the magic and muddle and miracle of hearts', will be published next month by Paraclete Press. Illustration by **Lucille Hughes**.



Katharine Brazenor

Fatima Measham

Young artists take the lead

The Rudder Project, an art-mentoring program sponsored by Jesuit Social Services, has helped make two young women's dreams come true.

When one first meets Asha Duggan and Lily Mae Martin, what becomes obvious is that they are two very different young women. Asha, older by three years, is a lot more reticent and speaks in a thoughtful manner. Lily, on the other hand, is garrulous, or, to use her own word, 'opinionated'. What brought such distinct personalities together? Art.

They are the first young people to complete the Rudder Project, an art-mentoring pilot project based at the Artful Dodgers Studios and run under the auspices of Gateway, a Jesuit Social Services' program. The culmination of Asha and Lily's participation in the project was a successful exhibition held in Melbourne earlier this year.

It was a dream come true not only for them, but for artist Sally Marsden, who spearheaded the project. A long-time practitioner of community cultural development, she had been looking for ways to enable young artists, who wouldn't otherwise have the means to establish a career in art, to move into the field.

'One of the hardest things about studio participation is that it is a successful model,' she says wryly. The Artful Dodgers Studios has proven strategies for engaging young people and sustaining their participation in activities that prepare them for employment and educational and community outcomes. The next step, Marsden felt, was to disengage—to help them move out of the program with the skills and confidence to create their own future. She was also concerned with passing on community cultural development skills to a new generation of artists willing to work with marginalised young people. Thus, the Rudder Project was conceived.

Duggan and Martin were chosen from eight applicants and matched to artist mentors Jacqui Stockdale and Laura Woodward. According to Duggan, creating art preceded the mentoring relationship: 'As soon as we get into the same room, we make art. We don't really say, "You're mentoring."'

While Marsden takes a different view, she confirms that what differentiates art mentoring from other models of community-based mentoring is the focus on artistic results. In the case of the Rudder Project, this covered skills required for an art career such as business, research, computer competency and time management.

Duggan was clear on her expectations of the project in this respect. 'I wanted to know if it was possible for me to take a leap out of my structured lifestyle and learn something that I really wanted to do,' she says. 'I wanted to structure an exhibition and document it completely so once I finished the program, I could look over my notes and reapply the situation whichever way I wanted.'

Although Martin also took the project as an opportunity to create a body of work, she had not been certain about what to expect. She discovered affirmation.

'Being part of it made me realise that my opinions, as harsh as they can be at times and as much as I chuck them in people's faces, are valid and important,' she says. 'I do have some good ideas.'

This articulation of ideas is at the heart of community cultural development, Marsden explains: 'What it's really about is working with communities in a way that assists them to articulate social concerns, issues, their cultural life, creatively and culturally to a broader community. Art is language and has equal weight to verbal language. It is important because it operates on different levels.'

Duggan understands what this means. Not a loquacious person, she expresses herself freely in symbol. 'I put teeth in some pictures when I try to make myself aware of the direction I'm going,' she says. 'My experiences come through the surreal imagery in my work. It's like a sheet that nobody else can understand but which I use to reflect on the next picture. It constantly changes.'

For Martin, art is a response to what she observes as being under-represented or undervalued. Growing up in a home dominated by males led her to an appreciation of the strength of women, particularly her mother. 'In society,' she muses, 'a lot of people favour men and I don't get it.' Her penchant for drawing feminine images may thus be seen as an artistic way of correcting the imbalance.

A work called *Bunnies*, on the other hand, is her attempt at drawing out irony from the way people find rabbits 'cute' but might not necessarily look after them properly. 'People piss me off,' she quips. 'That's probably why I draw bunnies.'

Duggan, on the other hand, describes her art as documentation. 'Every different phase of your life can be illustrated,' she says. 'When you have a person's life work at the end of their life, you can see the development of eras and influences. It's like a time capsule.' This is also her approach to portraiture. 'I'd like to do portraits of the people in our time, like Magda Szubanski. I want to create an artistic way of remembering her so 20 years from now, people will see what went on.'

Despite their differing styles, Duggan and Martin have built a solid peer mentoring relationship. 'The big joy, and I think the big surprise for all of us,' says Marsden, 'is the friendship that developed between Asha and Lily. Visual artists often work in isolation and can feel isolated. When you are able to collaborate with another artist, it's really exciting stuff. It's a myth that artists have to work alone.'

Another myth that Martin feels should be broken is the idea that art is necessarily highbrow. 'Art is a form of entertainment as well. It doesn't have to be serious and important all the time,' she says. She deplores the notion that art is inaccessible. 'That's what some art galleries make it out to be. I don't dress "normally", and when I go into big galleries they make me feel incredibly unwelcome. It doesn't feel like art is for everybody. But it is.'

Lily Mae Martin, 'Behind the Door'.

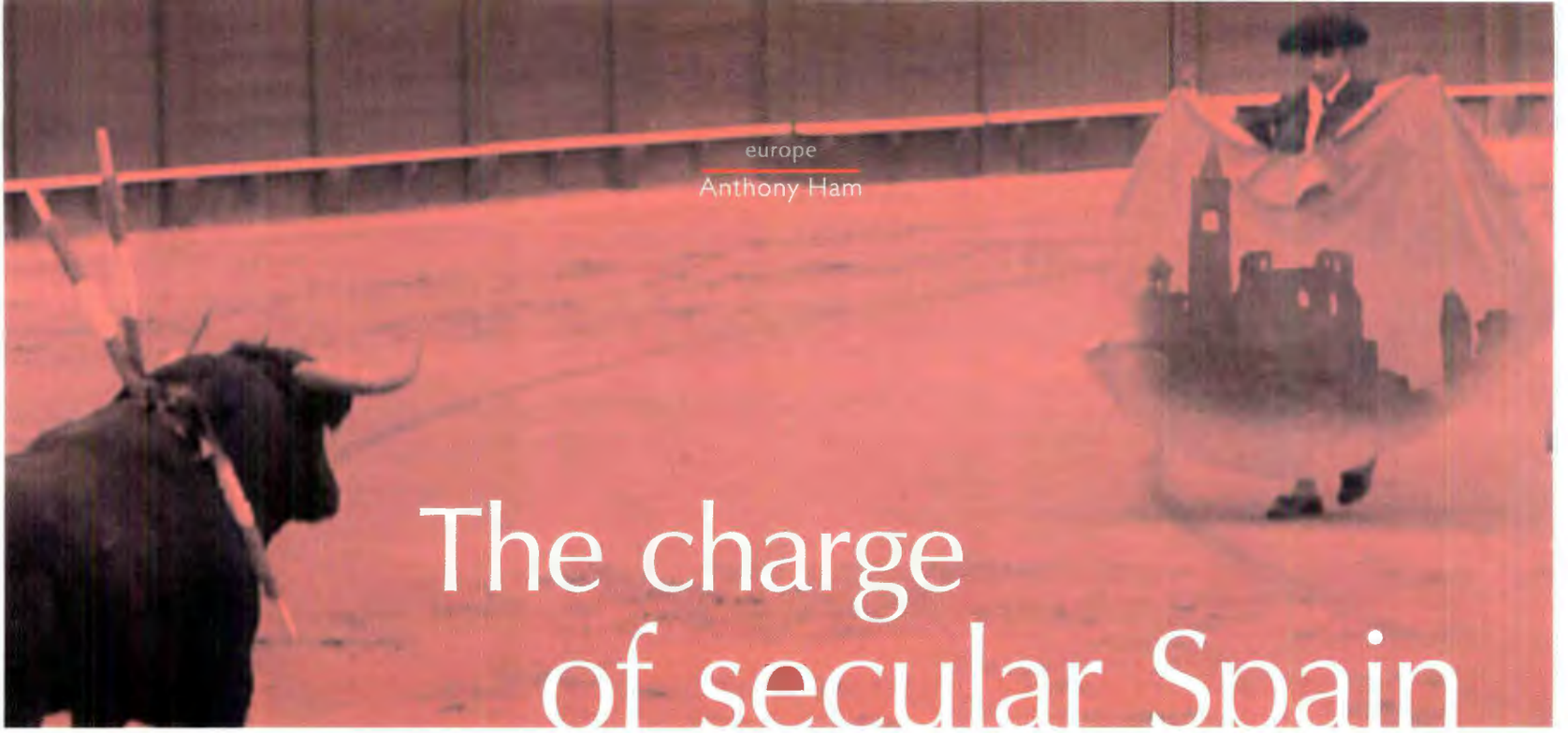
Indeed, this may well be what the Rudder Project and other community cultural development initiatives iterate: that art, in its various forms and as a repository of ideas and values, belongs to the people from whom these emanate. 'The essence of community cultural development,' says Marsden, 'is that it is owned by the community.'

In this sense, it is not only the artistic outcomes that have made the project a success. According to Marsden, other results are equally positive and tangible. 'From my observation, for example, I've seen Asha not just artistically grow, but personally grow—there is confidence in herself.'

Asha agrees that the experience has had an impact. 'It made me go after things that I wanted but never knew where to find. It created a path that I could follow instead of running around.' ■

Fatima Measham is a freelance writer.

Opposite: The Rudder Project exhibition and 'Bike' by Asha Duggan. Above: 'Keeping it together and taking it apart' by Lily Mae Martin (left) and 'Self Portrait #1' Asha Duggan (right).



europe

Anthony Ham

The charge of secular Spain

EVER SINCE THE ELECTION of a socialist government in Spain in March 2004, this increasingly secular country has found itself on a collision course with the Catholic Church.

For a start, the new prime minister, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, became the first Spanish leader to swear his oath of office not on the Bible but on the Spanish constitution. His first cabinet—widely lauded for containing equal numbers of men and women—was similarly secular in orientation, reportedly containing just one practising Catholic out of 16 members.

However, what has drawn church and state into open conflict is the new government's ambitious agenda of social reforms, a liberalising program encompassing laws relating to euthanasia, abortion, divorce, same-sex marriage, stem-cell research for therapeutic purposes and plans to make religious education a voluntary subject in state schools.

That Spain is a Catholic country is something of an article of faith for the Catholic hierarchy. Indeed, without the unifying power of Catholicism, Spain might never have existed. In 1492, the Catholic monarchs Isabel and Ferdinand captured Granada, the last Muslim stronghold on the Iberian Peninsula. They did so by drawing together disparate regions and peoples, each with their own distinct history and united only by a common faith. Thereafter, Spain's Catholic identity was secured, in large part because the reign of terror of the Inquisition drove adherents of other faiths to either flee the country or convert.

Under General Francisco Franco, who ruled Spain from 1939 until 1975, the Catholic Church was an essential pillar of his power. As long as Franco paid lip service to the Church's primacy in Spanish national life, the Church provided him with critical legitimacy.

The church's support for the dictator did diminish during the later years of his rule as Franco's repression of opposition spiralled out of control. Nonetheless, at Franco's funeral in 1975 Cardinal Marcelo Gonzalez, then Bishop of Toledo and head of the Catholic Church in Spain, delivered the homily, in which he spoke of 'the shining light of gratitude for the immense legacy' that Franco bequeathed to 'Christian civilisation, without which freedom is but a chimera'.

THE SPANISH CHURCH, led by Cardinal Marcelo Gonzalez, even opposed Spain's 1978 democratic constitution on the grounds that it failed to acknowledge the sovereignty of God and opened the path to divorce, birth control and a host of other social evils.

Although more than 80 per cent of Spaniards remain nominally Catholic, the Church's influence in Spanish life has waned, largely due to the fact that many Spaniards cannot forgive the Church its complicity with dictatorship. The Church has also found itself increasingly out of touch with Spanish public opinion. Opinion polls consistently reveal that two-thirds of Spaniards support the government's recognition of gay marriage and 70 per cent would like to see euthanasia laws liberalised. At the same time, an exhaustive poll released by the Centre of Sociological Research (CIS) in September found that 61.8 per cent of Spaniards had little or no confidence in the Church.

In response to its palpable loss of influence and what Vatican sources describe as 'a preconceived offensive plan against Catholicism', the Church has taken the unusual step of intervening publicly in the domestic political affairs of a sovereign nation.

In September, Bishop Juan Antonio Martinez Camino, spokesman for the powerful Spanish Bishops' Conference, said that permitting same-sex marriage was like 'imposing a virus on society', a statement roundly condemned by Spaniards who pride themselves on their nation's tolerance.

Three months later, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, considered one of the Vatican's leading intellectuals, told Italy's *La Repubblica* newspaper that Spain's social reforms were a threat not just to the institution of marriage but to society as a whole. He even went perilously close to advocating civil disobedience by Catholics: 'We must abstain from any type of

formal co-operation to pass or implement laws of such an unfair nature. In this matter, each person can vindicate his right to conscientious objection.'

Similarly, Cardinal Julian Herranz, president of the Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts, has condemned what he calls Spain's 'secular totalitarianism'.

Pope John Paul II has also criticised the Spanish government. In June, he publicly reprimanded the Spanish prime minister, reminding him of 'Spain's Christian values'. In January, the pontiff further warned of Spain's 'increasing contempt for and ignorance of religious matters' and expressed concern that 'new generations of Spaniards, influenced by religious indifference and ignorance of Christian tradition, are being exposed to the temptations of moral permissiveness'.

VATICAN SOURCES POINT to the strength of Spain's Catholic tradition as the reason why the Church's response has been so vociferous. Some also privately admit that the Church is well aware that its influence has dramatically fallen in its Spanish heartland, leading many to fear that it could be a prelude to a loss of influence across Europe and in Latin America.

Although both the Church and the Spanish government continue to say that they wish for good relations based on mutual respect, there is little likelihood that the conflict will abate.

Prime Minister Zapatero, in his bid to remake the nation's laws to reflect what he considers to be a 'modern, cultured and tolerant' Spain, has promised to continue with his reforms, suggesting in October: 'I think that those who oppose this are wrong and it wouldn't be bad if they progressed a bit to the social times that we live in.'

Defence Minister José Bono, believed to be the only practising Catholic in the Cabinet, even went so far as to claim that some of the positions adopted by the Church go against teachings of Christ: 'Today Christ would be more concerned about the 25,000 children who die each day of hunger or in wars.'

The chasm separating the Catholic Church and secular Spain was highlighted in January by the Cardinal Archbishop of Madrid, Antonio Maria Rouco Varela, who criticised the Spanish capital and its political overlords: 'Sinning is widespread in Madrid. Some do it boldly, others with a casual indifference. The major currents of thought and influential centres of economic, cultural and political power are responsible. For a while now they have disregarded any reference to the will of God when it comes to deciding the future of society.'

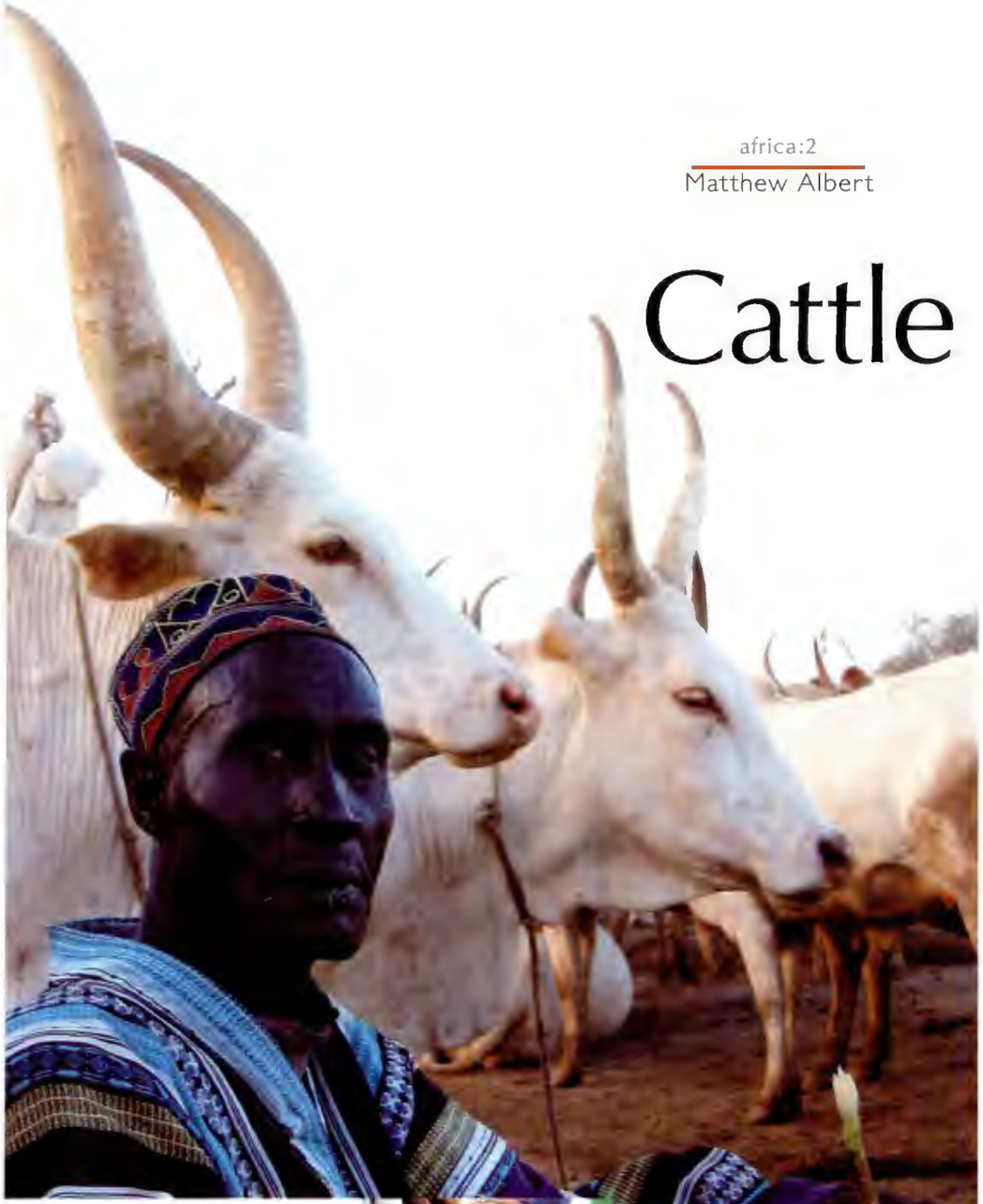
A Spanish government spokesman responded to the Church's latest pronouncements on Spain's morals with these words: 'I do worry that people can say things like this, but each time it happens I worry less. The Cardinal just doesn't represent the Catholics in our country and each day he grows more out of touch.'

The increasing indications that he may be right are leading some to wonder whether Spain can still be considered a Catholic country after all. ■

Anthony Ham is a freelance writer living in Madrid.

Matthew Albert

Cattle currency



When elders and officials in South Sudan are asked about the challenges facing peace in their region they talk of cows.

'We are concerned,' explains Panchol Jongkuc, 'that people will return from other countries to a peaceful Sudan without retaining an appreciation of our cows.' As the secretary of the rebel-led Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, Jongkuc's view reflects popular opinion.

Local resident Paul Tito agrees: 'People will return with the concept of money having value here too. But here cattle pay for many different things.'

Across East Africa the cow is a central figure in society. Cows are not sacred (as in India) but their place in social interaction and hierarchy is pivotal.

Certain tribes are especially famous for their cattle culture, none more so than the Dinka, the largest and most powerful tribe in South Sudan. Dr John Gerang, the founder and commander of the rebel movement the Sudanese Peoples' Liberation Army, is Dinka.

Images of life in southern Sudan by **Matthew Albert** and **Justo Casal**. The images, featured here and on our cover, are part of a touring exhibition, 'Sudan: Waiting for the Future'.

Across East Africa the cow, although not sacred, is a central figure in society.

Dinka families, including Dr Gerang's, keep herds of cattle. Dinka cows are not your average cattle-station variety. They are big. Very big. The largest bull is 170cm at the lowest point on their back. Their long and menacing horns and camel-like hump increase their stature. Such a bull will fetch over US$250 in neighbouring Kenya where the average person survives on $1 a day. In the presence of such impressive animals, it is little wonder they are pivotal to local culture.

The size of the cattle herd owned by a family is a sign of its wealth. A chief will have a large herd of big cows. The cattle are all branded with a seal unique to each family. Keeping these cattle healthy is so important to the Dinka that recent efforts to increase food production by employing the use of an ox-plough for cultivation have been coolly received or rejected outright.

The Dinka use their cattle for numerous social purposes. Cattle and goats are still used as the primary means for the payment of a dowry. The 'bride price' is determined by negotiation.

Dinka families know that a cattle dowry will only come from raising a girl to maturity. As such, finding foster families for girls orphaned by the civil war in South Sudan has been easy. For the orphaned males, the 'Lost Boys', this has been more difficult.

The Lost Boys were resettled as a group to the United States in 2000. As they are now approaching marriageable age, locals note that the offers made by the Lost Men in US dollars to purchase dowry cattle are dwarfing those made by the young men who remained in Africa. Inflation in the cattle dowry payments is another concern to local authorities with the imminent arrival of returnees, says resident Abraham Deng Kuot.

Cattle are also kept for their meat and for milk. On significant occasions they can be ceremonially slaughtered. Dr Gerang's visits to Dinka country are marked with the slaughter of prized white bulls over which Dr Gerang walks.

Cows are so highly valued by the Dinka that many people give their children a cow colour for a first name. The colour used for a name is typically that of the prized bull in the dowry of the parents. Children born of a marriage with a white bull, for example are called Mabior for a boy and Ayen for a girl. One can deduce that the famous Dinka supermodel Alek Wek was born of a light red and white bull dowry. Cow colour names are common and popular among the Dinka.

Unfortunately, the value of the cattle is not only appreciated by the Dinka. Neighbouring tribes, like the Nuer and Murle, also prize them. This has been the cause of the most rampant form of banditry in South Sudan. Cattle raiding, as it is called, is a constant source of conflict and angst. Every year raiders and herders are killed as the looting tribe snatch the most valuable bovine.

To minimise loss, the Dinka convene each night in 'cattle camps'. These clearings are the meeting place for cattle owners as the sun sets and throughout the night. Herds from across a district gather at the central location. Here the Dinka herdsmen and women sleep with their cows. Paul Tito explains: 'The smoke about the cattle camp is from burning cow dung. It keeps the malarial mosquitoes away from the cows and the people.' Everyone is a watchman at the cattle camp. Rifles and spears are always at the ready for raiders.

Cattle is also the chief currency of the traditional court system of the Dinka. A panel of elders punish wrongdoers by a set number of cattle. Elder Athong Ajak Mabiei explains: 'One cow can buy a basket, tools or clothes but it can also get you out of trouble if you break someone's tooth.' Murder costs 50 cows. Adultery, eight.

If you ask the Dinka residents of South Sudan, they agree that the years ahead will be ones of great change. A referendum of the southern Sudanese people is planned for 2010. Southerners will be given the choice of forming their own nation or remaining with the north as the poorer half of Africa's largest country.

But some things will not change. 'It will take time to change this because paying in cattle is still the most important thing,' says Tito.

Whether returnees from the world's longest-running civil war will agree remains to be seen. ■

Recently returned from Sudan, **Matthew Albert** was named Victorian Young Australian of the Year for his work with local Sudanese communities.

Honesty matters

The ethics of daily life

The following essays by **Morag Fraser** and **John Schumann** are edited addresses from the Jesuit Lenten Seminar Series held in February–March 2005.

Truth, politics and the Fourth Estate

Most political leaders talk about truth. Not all are as confident—or as frank—in their view about truth as Joseph Stalin. These are Stalin's words: 'We ourselves will be able to determine what is true and what is not.'

We have known for over half a century what kind of truth Stalin determined for his people, and how catastrophic were the consequences. Stalin died in his bed, but was responsible for the violent deaths of tens of millions of people, many of them his compatriots. Truth finally delivered its summons upon Stalin's regime. But the people of the former Soviet Union are still paying the price—social, psychological, spiritual and economic—of having been forced to live with and through lies. Lies are a contagion. Systematic lying corrupts the body politic. It also taints ordinary people. Ask anyone of German descent, or any South African, black or white, about the legacy of lies in their private lives.

We know what happens to societies that are founded on lies, dishonesty, evasions and 'weasel' rhetoric: innocent people suffer. Institutions, designed to protect us, crumble; the law is made a mockery; education, in schools and universities, is co-opted. We see examples of that in some of the madrasas that serve as training grounds for militant Islamic fundamentalism. We see it in Western academies, even in our own universities, where direct political pressure or indirect financial squeezing serves to undermine institutional independence and integrity.

We can't say we don't know. We can all read. We can watch and listen. Many of us have the internet at our fingertips. We are witnesses, not passive bystanders. Many of us have personally seen the creep of corruption in our own lifetimes: in Richard Nixon's Watergate America, for example. We have seen corruption in the former Yugoslavia, in Rwanda, Cambodia, Chile, in Greece and Argentina under the generals. We have seen it too in Australia, under our mendacious immigration and detention regimes, devised by Labor and developed by the Coalition.

None of this is ancient history. All of it is documented. And, all along, we have been alerted by inveterate truth tellers, like the Russian poet Osip Mandelstam, or by whistleblowers or investigators, like the *Washington Post* journalists Robert Woodward and Carl Bernstein, or the *New Yorker* magazine's Seymour Hersh. Or here at home by Andrew Wilkie, or, most recently, the modest intelligence analyst and weapons inspector Rod Barton, interviewed on the ABC's *Four Corners*. We have been warned, time and again, what happens when we choose, as individuals or as nations, to value power or wealth above honesty, above truth: as nations we become corrupt; as individuals we become complicit.

Here is one inveterate truth teller, George Orwell, from his 1946 essay 'Politics and the English Language':

> In our time, political speech and writing are largely the defence of the indefensible. Things like ... the dropping of atomic bombs on Japan can indeed be defended, but only by arguments which are too brutal for most people to face, and which do not square with the professed aim of political parties. Thus, political language has to consist largely of euphemism, question-begging and sheer cloudy vagueness. Defenceless villages are bombarded from the air, the inhabitants are driven out into the countryside, the cattle machine-gunned, the huts set on fire with incendiary bullets: this is called *pacification*. Millions ... are sent trudging along the roads with no more than they can carry: this is called *transfer of population*, or *rectification of frontiers*. People are imprisoned for years without trial or sent to die ... in camps: this is called *elimination of undesirable elements*. Such phraseology is needed if one wants to name things without calling up mental pictures of them.

Orwell wrote that essay just after the end of World War II. But note how much of it could have been written now, with only minimal word change: 'border control' for 'rectification of frontiers', 'illegal enemy combatants' for 'undesirable elements'. For 'camps', well, Baxter and Woomera spring to the lips of a South Australian like me. Or we can simply say Guantánamo, or Abu Ghraib, or the interrogation cells of Syria, Jordan, Morocco or Egypt.

As George Orwell understood, it is easier to talk about dishonesty, lies, spin and propaganda when we are analysing the mode of operation of the 'enemy', the 'other', the moral foe. I began with Stalin. But remember how we once characterised Stalin. He was a Western ally, just as Saddam Hussein once was. He was 'Uncle Joe'. It's easy to condemn with hindsight; much harder to turn the critical gaze inwards and deal with dishonesty, lies, spin and propaganda when they come not from the 'other' but from our own 'side'. At an individual level, telling the honest truth is hard, and often requires more courage than we can muster. At a political level avoiding telling the truth has become a minor art form. In Western democracies our politicians now call it 'plausible deniability'.

If you have been listening to the Senate hearings in Canberra you will have heard plausible deniability in operation when Senator Hill was questioned as to what he knew about Australians being involved in 'interviewing' or 'interrogating' terrorism suspects. And we will see more of plausible

deniability as the Rod Barton story and his ongoing revelations play out.

We saw plausible deniability most blatantly during the 2001 election campaign with 'children overboard'.

Queensland academic and public service expert Patrick Weller puts it neatly, and dispassionately, in his useful book *Don't Tell the Prime Minister*:

> The prime minister has the largest office in history and it is dedicated to providing him with information. In his initial comment to the media, he used the caveat: 'If these reports are true'. He later said he would ask for checks to be made. If they were, he insists he was never told the outcome. The advisers never told him and he never pressed them ...

Accountability is at the heart of Weller's concerns. 'Perhaps we need a change of attitude,' he concludes, one

> closer to that of the man from whom Howard got his middle name: Winston Churchill. Certainly he was always partisan, blithely opportunistic, and often cynical. But he was prepared to take responsibility. When told of the loss of Singapore and the weakness of its defences, he is said to have commented: 'I did not know, I was not told, I should have asked.' That's accountability. It accepts that public servants should check and tell. It accepts that ministers should ask. I'd like to see that.

Most of us would like to see that, if we are honest. But time passes. We forget, new elections are held and success carries with it a euphoria that can make victory seem synonymous with virtue.

We are now at a historical juncture where the victors of recent elections, in both Australia and the United States, are riding high on success. With success has come increased power. In Australia that means fewer curbs on, and less scrutiny of, government after 30 June, when the Coalition assumes control in the Senate. (Watch for a debate on Australia's compulsory voting.) In the US electoral success means more power centralised in the Bush administration, with implications for the composition of the US Supreme Court. It also means increased assertion of the executive power of the president and further erosion of United Nations' and Geneva Convention rules and norms as they come under question, are denigrated or simply bypassed in the prosecution of the 'war on terror'.

So, who keeps watch? How robust a role will the profession we dignify with the title of 'Fourth Estate' play in keeping governments, and us citizens, honest in this brave new future?

THE MEDIA ARE NOT an undifferentiated lump. It is important to distinguish between media, between television, radio and print, broadsheet and tabloid, between journalists and proprietors and between serious journalism and celebrity reporting. When you are in the habit of seeking out the best, it becomes easier to spot the worst, and to remember what journalism can do. But honest journalism is up against powerful forces. I want also to look briefly at the cultivation of mistrust, that is, the deliberate denigration of serious journalism and journalists for political and commercial ends.

First, let me say up front that it has been possible to read and hear better journalism in the past decade than at any time since the Vietnam War. The quality of reporting—from correspondents in war zones, from investigative reporters on location or in archives, the Russian archives in particular, from many foreign and domestic correspondents, has been outstanding. Think, for example, of the *New Yorker*'s veteran reporter Seymour Hersh, who broke the story of Abu Ghraib. Or Fairfax correspondent Paul McGeough, who has kept us informed about what is happening *on the ground*, not just from official briefings, in Baghdad. Another stellar example: when Yasser Arafat was dying, the London *Independent* journalist Robert Fisk gave to the ABC one of the best first-hand accounts of the man you could ever wish to hear. Fisk was appropriately critical, but having interviewed Arafat, having watched him over many years, in action, working crowds, he could also explain why the man had held sway for so long. While so much of the media was devoted to reflex deifying or reflex vilifying, Fisk helped us to understand. Not sympathise. Understand. You can't successfully change what you don't understand.

> ***The things that will destroy us are: politics without principle; pleasure without conscience; wealth without work; knowledge without character; business without morality; science without humanity; and worship without sacrifice.***
>
> **Mahatma Gandhi**

The English *Guardian* columnist Martin Woollacott recently gave a lecture at La Trobe University entitled 'The journalist as moralist'. It sounds like an oxymoron. But Woollacott's case was persuasive, and a reminder of what good journalism is about and how many fine journalists are still at work, journalists whose professional stance is moral without being politically partisan. Moral outrage often is the spur to great journalism. We've seen that in Rwanda, in Bosnia, Iraq, Cambodia. But journalism is a craft as well as a vocation, and the craft, the experience, the professional concern for detailed accuracy, is what tempers outrage into information, righteousness into revelation.

Clearly, not all journalists are Robert Fisk or Martin Woollacott or Paul McGeough. Some are venal, lazy or simply inadequate to their task. Others are cowed or constrained or suborned by the corporations for which they work. Some are straightforwardly corrupt. In the US, journalists are employed, not by some ratbag right- or left-wing pressure group, but by the White House itself, to give stories the required slant.

In Australia we have our homegrown practitioners of cash for comment. And we have them endorsed and used, by politicians of both stripes, from the rank of prime minister down.

We have reached a stage when reporting the truth, as honestly as possible, can be interpreted as an unpatriotic act. A climate of fear and resentment has been generated and exploited for political ends and for media marketing purposes. Rupert Murdoch's Fox News is the highest-rating news program in America. Is it any wonder that more than 50 per cent of Americans believed, before the last election, that Saddam Hussein was involved in the September 11 attacks?

Dark times. But let me conclude in hope:

It is ten years and ten months since South Africa voted in free elections. Ten years and ten months since the world saw the fall of a regime, apartheid,

which enshrined racial discrimination, sanctioned torture and murder, and co-opted the law, judiciary and the police force to keep it in power.

Individuals, like Nelson Mandela, and, extraordinarily, his white friend and one-time foe, F.W. de Klerk, were brave enough to speak honestly and to require honesty about their country and its history. No one could have expected such a dramatic and fundamental turnabout. From high politics to private individual lives in South Africa, truth again became a byword. Honesty became possible.

No one pretends that South Africa has solved its problems, but then no one expected that it might be brave enough to take the chance, or to offer the legacy of honesty to South Africa's children. We all have children, of our blood or in our care, and children offer us a similar chance of renewal. We can teach them to be brave enough to take the chance, to risk honesty in their daily lives, and we can provide the example by doing so ourselves. We can demand honesty and truth of ourselves first, and then of our leaders, our politicians, imams, bishops, rabbis, teachers and journalists. That is my Lenten resolution, and one I'd commend to everyone.

Morag Fraser is the former editor of *Eureka Street*.

Truth? You can't handle the truth

THE NATURE OF TRUTH and honesty and their roles in daily life is a topic of awesome breadth and depth. And the consideration of truth and honesty, specifically in the conduct of our national affairs, is a fascinating exercise in which naivety and reality contend.

In an attempt to eat the elephant one mouthful at a time—and given my own limited experiences—I've chosen to consider truth and honesty in the arena of public life, specifically, the conduct of our national affairs. I make my remarks from the perspective of one who, for good or ill, supervised all the communications that emanated from the political party that held the balance of power in the Australian parliament from 1998 until 2001.

The topic of truth and honesty is of tremendous importance but, I regret to observe, of seemingly little consequence to an increasing number of Australians, certainly if the results of the 2004 federal election are anything to go by.

I shall argue that truth and honesty in public life require a great deal of those who live public lives, those who report on them and those of us who sit back reading, watching and listening. Certainly, honesty in public life is as much the responsibility of the public as it is the responsibility of our elected leaders.

Further I shall argue that if we, as members of the electorate at large, are to expect truth and honesty in the conduct of our national affairs, we have a responsibility to face up to the truth, whatever it is, with courage and maturity.

In preparing my remarks I consulted the dictionary, and the various definitions of 'truth' were instructive. There was the predictable stuff about truth 'conforming to reality or actuality'; as 'a fact that has been verified'; as 'being a true statement'. However, I suspect, to the eternal gratitude of politicians, spin doctors and journalists everywhere, truth is also exemplified in several reputable dictionaries as 'having the quality of nearness to or close correspondence with reality or actuality'. Cutting to the chase, according to these reputable dictionaries, truth is not absolute and 'near enough is good enough'.

Nor, upon reflection, does truth appear to be objective. What is true for one might well not be true for another in that one person's truth, as derived from a set of facts and/or events, might well, and quite reasonably, differ from another's. This scenario, I'm sure, is familiar to those of us who are married and is of immense consolation to our political leaders and their minders.

I've also heard historians argue that there are 'many truths'. This is a fascinating notion and one which, I hope, is not subscribed to by medical researchers and the aviation industry. But in all of this, one thing is true: there's nothing as unpalatable to the general public as the truth.

ON THE ABC's *Four Corners*, a senior and well-qualified Australian, Mr Robert Barton, admitted to being involved in, and had raised concerns to his superiors about, the interrogation of prisoners in Iraq. True, this was well before the Abu Ghraib atrocities came to light. However, despite ministerial statements to the contrary, we now have reason to believe the Australian government, at department level at least, was aware of Australian involvement in the interrogation of prisoners—in Iraq certainly, if not at Abu Ghraib specifically.

More importantly, we learned that the same person was among a number of United Nations weapons inspectors convinced that Iraq did not have weapons of mass destruction or a WMD program. Further, he repeatedly told this to Australian authorities. When his advice was ignored or overridden, he felt compelled to resign—as did inspectors from other countries.

If Mr Barton's claims in this regard are true, there is even more compelling evidence to suggest that Australia joined the Coalition of the Willing in Iraq on what it knew to be a false premise.

However, if truth and honesty in public life were to prevail, I invite you to consider that a press conference on the matter given by John Howard at Parliament House might have gone something like this:

> Ladies and gentlemen, here's the story. President Bush wants to invade Iraq for a whole host of reasons, none of which make a lot of sense to us. But he wants Australia to go along for the ride. He'd like everyone to believe that Iraq has WMD and a WMD program but the truth is there's not a lot in it—if anything.
>
> So our dilemma was this: do we go into Iraq with the US just because we're mates and we might need a mate in the future? Or do we decline politely? One upside of going in is that we'll be helping to knock over Saddam Hussein—and one thing, I think, all Australians agree on is that Saddam is a serious piece of work.

> Anyway, we are the elected government for the time being and we are charged with making decisions, some of which are not easy. The reality is we had to make a call here and we did. Today, as Prime Minister of Australia, I am here to announce that Australia will join the Coalition of the Willing. Are there any questions?

How would the Australian public have reacted to the truth, as baldly stated as that? What would it have meant for Australia's capacity to participate productively in international affairs? Is such a scenario hopelessly naïve or refreshingly idealistic?

I don't have the answers. However, the main point is this: if we, for whom decisions are made by our elected representatives, expect to be told the truth, we have to be able to deal with it. We have to be prepared to shoulder the responsibility and accept the consequences of knowing the truth. And we have to resist the temptation to shoot the messenger. Too many honest politicians are hounded or voted out of office—though it does not follow that being hounded out of office presupposes honesty.

Just before Mr Beazley was re-elected to the leadership of the ALP, I wrote an article for the *Independent Weekly* which comprised the sort of speech I wanted to hear from whomsoever was going to lead the ALP. With regard to the issue of truth and honesty in public life, I wrote this:

> I undertake to tell the Australian people the truth, however unpalatable. If you don't like it, vote me out at the next election if you want. As far as my fitness for office is concerned, this is a decision for you, the Australian people, not my opponents or the nation's journalists. Like all political figures on both sides of the divide, I freely admit my past is not blemish-free. However, if you want a saint with a pristine past to be your leader, look elsewhere. This is not about the past. It's about the future.

I am also reminded of the response of Col Jessep (Jack Nicholson) to Lt Kaffee (Tom Cruise) in the film *A Few Good Men*, when Lt Kaffee asks for the truth. 'You can't handle the truth,' says Col Jessep.

Truth and honesty in public life can only be sustained if we can handle the truth; if we have the courage and maturity to accept, value and nurture truth-telling in our elected leaders.

The reality is, however, that our political leaders have little incentive to speak the truth and every incentive to dissemble and spin. Our national affairs are, more often than not, conducted according to the 'near enough is good enough' definition of truth. Trade in half-truths and obfuscation—and the ill will that inevitably follows—might sell papers and advertising but it will not improve the health of indigenous Australians, it will not solve our aged-care crisis and it will not restore the Murray-Darling Basin.

In 2001, I attended a private forum convened by a major Australian company to which the three major players (as they were then) on the political field sent a senior elected representative. The forum was conducted under the Chatham House Rule:

> When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed; nor may it be mentioned that the information was received at a meeting of the Institute.

I was struck by the vigorous but courteous debate and I was also struck by the extent to which the three 'antagonists' agreed. I remember thinking how much better it would be for us all if our national affairs could be conducted like this. Back in Parliament House a few days later, two of the three were back in the ring, slugging it out with all the desperation of Jimmy Sharman's boxers. My question was then—and is now—why could they not bring the honesty and maturity displayed under the Chatham House Rule back to Parliament House?

It's also important to reflect on the media's role in truth, honesty and the conduct of all our affairs, national, state and local. With a number of notable exceptions, the role is not an entirely glorious one.

Rather than an ongoing, intelligent and unbiased discourse, too often political journalism is about getting a 'story' or running an agenda. Ensuring a front-page story or securing the lead spot in the news bulletin will, fairly often, involve a little manipulation of the facts, some selective reporting, a judicious choice of words and the application of sanctimony on a grand scale. While this doesn't happen all the time, it does happen with monotonous regularity. Interesting too, that when teachers (usually reviled as 'lefties', whatever that might mean these days) attempt to equip their students with the skills and knowledge necessary to recognise manipulation by the media, there are howls of conservative outrage.

During Lent, Christians reflect on the life of a bloke who trod the Earth as a humble carpenter and who surrounded himself with other average blokes, fishermen and the like. I'm pretty sure that among the Apostles there were no stockbrokers, government ministers, merchant bankers or real-estate developers.

Regardless of one's position as to whether Christ is the Son of God, his life was an exercise in truth, honesty and the courage that goes with them. In the course of his life he told his mother to get off his back, as he had more important things to do. I invite young men everywhere to consider the sort of courage that takes. He told people he was the Son of God when he knew that, in saying so, people would either think him insane or accuse him of blasphemy. In the certain knowledge of an incredibly painful and drawn-out death, Christ told Pontius Pilate and the Pharisees the truth when it would have been easier to lie. His own community nailed him to a cross and left him to die of asphyxiation on a hillside, in the sun, surrounded by criminals. Hardly an incentive to tell the truth.

But 2000 years later, more than 33 per cent of the people in the world claim to be Christians and at least half that number again have heard of Christ and know in broad terms what he stood for. Entire civilisations, including their literatures and their arts, are constructed on the principles he espoused.

Whether one is a believer or not, the message here is clear for our political leaders: truth equals market penetration, a loyal customer base and brand longevity. ■

John Schumann was the lead singer and a songwriter for the Australian band Redgum. He has acted as chief of staff for then leader of the Australian Democrats, Senator Meg Lees. In the 1998 federal election he took Foreign Minister Alexander Downer to postals in the hitherto safe Liberal seat of Mayo. He lives in Adelaide and runs his own strategic communications company.

Paradise gained and lost

Luther's Pine, an Autobiography, John Molony. Pandanus Books, 2004. ISBN 1740 76126 X, RRP $45

JOHN MOLONY DESCRIBES his childhood and education in *Luther's Pine*. The book closes in 1950 with his ordination in Rome as a priest. He was then 23. Luther's Pine was a tree under which the Australian students at Propaganda College used to gather. Propaganda was established in Rome for students from mission countries. The pine tree was later cut down.

As you would expect from a historian of Molony's distinction, his autobiography is written chastely, elegantly, self-critically and charitably. He describes a young man of exceptional decency and courage, whose journey towards self-knowledge takes him from the Mallee to the cosmopolitan, if sheltered, world of Rome.

He has a gift for vivid description. Through simply told stories, people significant in his story live in the imagination. They range from his parents to his cousin Bill, who is a Footscray boy, to the cold but just Jesuit Henry Johnston, his passionate and encouraging mentors Charlie Mayne and Felice Cenci, and his malevolent lecturer, the future Cardinal Pietro Parente.

Molony had to overcome many obstacles to achieve what he had always wanted, and on the way he discovered his intellectual gifts. But his book breathes a deep and pervasive sadness. Luminous stories of people living with great vitality are followed by a note that the light later failed or was extinguished. The book also becomes more edgy as it draws to its conclusion. Not that the writing ever loses its grace and control, but its melancholy becomes exquisite. In one memorable paragraph he describes his re-reading of the letters that he had written to his mother:

> The boy, the young man full of ideals and dreams who wrote them, has long gone and the realms he lived in have become another world. The shape of the boy and his world remain, but in some measure only as listless ivy hanging on the outline of a building that once had its own beauty. With few exceptions, the people whom the boy knew and loved in the distant past are now dead. The writer, his youth and his manhood spent, has yet to find his own peace. The world of the early 21st century is young. It also strives for peace.

The tone of *Luther's Pine* is elegiac. Although its theme is a young man's arrival at a longed-for destination—Paradise gained—the writer now experiences this journey as Paradise Lost. That young man, most of his friends and his world have all passed away. What is true of the whole journey is also true of its mileposts: Molony had to leave the Mallee because in hard years the farm could no longer support the family. For his father, Melbourne meant exile from ancestors, land and clan. It was an exile bravely borne. The son experienced exclusion more diffusely.

MOLONY'S EDUCATION WAS EPISODIC. At the one school where he flourished, he left after being brutally assaulted by a teacher. The following year he had to return in humiliation. The seminary authorities made this a condition of his acceptance. When he began to feel at home in this new world, his Bishop sent him prematurely to Rome.

But the story hints that the major exile lies beyond the horizon of this volume. Molony refers often to his resignation from priestly ministry as a source of pain. He also hints, however, that the path to priesthood, that included initiation into a clerical culture, also contained exilic aspects. His readers will hope that Molony will return more explicitly to these themes later.

Molony has a keen sense of the relationship between past and present. He comments incisively on a modern adage:

> I could never accept that 'The past is a foreign country. They do things differently there'. The people of my past did what their present told them to do and those things will ever remain as they were. The present is the other country in which we do things differently.

He substantiates his observation in his description of the world and the church in which he grew up. They are instantly recognisable, even in their difference. Contrary to ideological accounts that present the changes in the Catholic Church as revolutionary, and the period before Vatican Council II as either paradisal or infernal, Molony depicts a human world in which the same mixture of humanity and inhumanity, faith and power, attention and inattentiveness are to be found. Generous and mean-minded people contended before the Second Vatican Council; they would contend after it. Cenci and Mayne would be ahead of the game in any period. Molony's Rome, too, was riven by conflicting visions of the Church. One thing, however, has changed. From the moment he sets his path towards priesthood, no women appear in the story. One would hope that the experience of candidates for priesthood today would be different.

Molony, however, alludes to a crucial change within the Catholic Church. It has to do with the way in which priests have viewed priesthood. His early vision of the priesthood was simple: he identified it with celebrating Mass. His view of the Mass was, and continues to be, sacrificial: he emphasised the decisive significance of Christ's offering of himself on the cross, and its representation by the priest in the Mass. The priest is associated with Christ in the act that joins heaven to earth, God to humanity, the act in which our sufferings are brought before God. In the spiritual language of the day, the priest was an *alter Christus*, another Christ.

This is a vision of great power that gives an enormous importance to the priest and invests sensitive men with a high sense of responsibility. In narrower men than John Molony, it can also emphasise the priest's difference from the laity on whose behalf he offers the Mass, and his authority over them. But it requires great support from the Catholic community. Placed in that high position between heaven and earth, the priest is like Moses in battle: he requires people to hold up his arms. They must share precisely this view of priesthood, and relate to the priest accordingly.

THE POWER OF THIS UNDERSTANDING of priesthood can be seen also in the stories of Catholic priests who refused to accept the changes in the Mass. The heart of their complaint is that the sacrificial character of the Mass has been lost. So, they continue to celebrate the Latin Mass in its old form. Their sense of loss is poignant. But Molony's evocation of the world in which he was educated makes it clear how limited was this imaginative view of the relationship between Christ, community and priest.

Paradise is elusive on all journeys. Its intimations only sharpen the sense of exile. John Molony's gift is to describe the journey honestly, without using the hints of paradise along the way as an excuse for recreating a historical theme park. ■

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

D. L. Lewis

Suds and duds

Super Aussie Soaps, Andrew Mercador. Pluto Press, 2004. ISBN 1 864 03191 3, RRP $34.95

THE GOINGS-ON in a small cul-de-sac in Melbourne's suburbs have been captivating audiences, more or less, for 20 years. The small country town of Wandin Valley once had the then Prime Minister, Bob Hawke, visit. A block of units in Melbourne (again) was subjected to serial killers, rapists, stalkers, peeping toms and a bomb. A smaller country town's goings-on kept ABC viewers, particularly country ones, entranced for many years. A family's travails during World War II were melodramatically presented week after week.

Many of those hours we wasted watching Australian soap operas are documented in this valuable social record. I must confess to having watched some of them voluntarily and some of them involuntarily (the little diplomacies we make with those with whom we live). Some of them I denied watching (but had an uncannily accurate 'guess' as to what was happening each episode the next day). Most were beneath even my standards.

For better or worse, television was the major medium of the 20th century and retains a strong foothold in the 21st (though as time passes and new technologies come to the fore, we will probably see its decline in popularity). The mix of news, information and entertainment changed home life forever, and the new medium trounced nearly all other entertainment. Vaudeville reappeared on television. Radio lost its vast audience, being a dominant social force for really only one generation. Cinema survived, but not without new approaches to movie-making. Theatre struggles on. Television is the dominant info-entertainment paradigm.

AUSTRALIAN SOAPS ARE among the highest export-dollar earners. Since *No. 96*, Australian soaps have been exported and franchised. And many of Australia's top stars (Mel Gibson, Russell Crowe, Nicole Kidman, Kylie Minogue) and most respected local actors and actresses (Charles Tingwell, Michael Caton, Lorraine Bayly) appeared in soaps. Sometimes they were serial soap-performers.

Of course, soaps were and are often ridiculous, inconsistent and exaggerated. That is part of the point. Where once we spoke of the capricious acts of the gods, we now speak of the capricious goings-on of Ramsay Street residents or 'those flamin' kids' of Summer Bay. There has been this tendency for popular, trite entertainment for centuries. Most of it is ephemeral. Some of it turns out to be more than it seemed. I doubt we'll see *Sons and Daughters* turning up in literature courses in 150 years, or being published as 'a classic', though you never know.

The book is arranged initially by soap. Not all the soaps are here. *Always Greener*, for example, is mentioned but not dealt with. The pretentious *Secret Life of Us* gets its own chapter. Minor soaps such as *Kings* (with Ed Devereaux) and *Medical Examiner* (with Paul Cronin) are missing (though they were short-lived, anyway). Towards the end, there are thematic chapters. The reality soap *Sylvania Waters*, with its controversial matriarch Noeline Donaher, gets examined and contrasted with *Big Brother*, which executive producer Tim Clucas correctly divined, not as a reality show or a contest, but as a soap opera. There is also a chapter on soap spoofs, from Norman Gunston's *Checkout Chicks*, to the sketch show *Full Frontal*'s 'Dumb Street', to the *Ray Martin Show*'s 'A Town like Dallas', to *Kath & Kim*.

Written with a fond nostalgia, and with just enough tongue in cheek not to disappear in post-modernist theory, this is not a book for those who believe culture is in decay. It is a celebration of low culture, and an interesting chapter at the end attempts to work out what makes one soap successful (for example, *A Country Practice*) and another die out (*The Secret Life of Us*). The reader will be reminded, repulsed and then rejoice as old friends and nemeses reappear. I commend this book to those with an interest in popular culture and television. I do not recommend it to uninterested parties. It's preaching to the choir, and I doubt it will gain any converts, though waverers be warned: you may be pushed into the crevasse.

Whether the soaps phenomenon is malignant, benign or beneficial is a matter for your personal reflection. I imagine they don't do much harm, and at times they can capture some part of the *zeitgeist*, as well as documenting how some Australians (sometimes a *lot* of Australians) were entertained. ■

D. L. Lewis is a historian based in Sydney.

Daniel Donahoo

Returning to place

Tales of Two Hemispheres, Peter Conrad. ABC Books, 2004. ISBN 0 733 31515 1, RRP $22.95

Peter Conrad's 2004 Boyer Lectures transfer beautifully to the page. His affection for puns and wordplay (which, he notes, 'don't work on the radio, you need to see the way the word is spelled') may inspire some wry smiles in readers of *Tales of Two Hemispheres*.

Conrad, a Taswegian who went to Oxford on a Rhodes Scholarship in 1968, now divides his time between London and New York. He has taught English literature in Christ Church, Oxford, since 1973 and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

Tales of Two Hemispheres is the work of an expat with an eye that has been critical of this nation at times. It is this facility that allows criticism of Australia with depth and without malice.

Conrad doesn't completely reject the comments of Henry Kingsley in 1865 when he called Australia '[a] scentless cesspool for a vast quantity of nameless rubbish'. His response to Victorian Britons who 'saw Australia as a sphincter' is to note that 'the violence of such language articulated a metaphysical dread'.

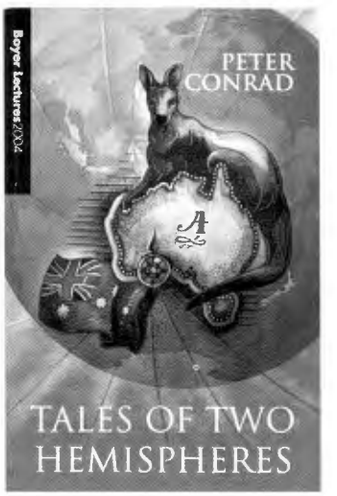
It's a dread he likens throughout the piece to his own Tasmanian experience in the 1950s and '60s—a fear of being at the arse end of the earth. For Conrad does wonder, '—blushing a bit—if I entered London for the first time on bended knees'. Conrad's experience was one of awe and worship of the northern lands.

Tales of Two Hemispheres are the tales of a man who would prefer not to choose between the two. Conrad describes the alluring smell of eucalypts that have buried their roots in foreign shores. His intellect longs for European legitimacy, but his body longs for the Australian sun and soil.

This is a collection in which the author tries to locate Australia's position through history and in the world. You sense he is also trying to locate himself in his home country. The Australian bush holds a familiar scent, but the people and who they have become—can an expat know that? Conrad certainly applauds it.

There is a feeling of solace in the 2004 Boyer Lectures. Conrad, one senses, wishes there wasn't the need to leave. In *The Age* on 16 November last year, Gerard Henderson suggests that there never was. He refers to the fact James McAuley and Gwen Harwood were teaching at the University of Tasmania when Conrad took his Rhodes Scholarship and pursued education abroad.

Henderson takes offence at Conrad's description of Australia as 'vacuous and vacant' during the 1950s and '60s. And the sentiment is probably echoed by those who were not fortunate enough to get a scholarship and catch a boat to Europe.



Yet, his criticisms of his country aside, the academic stands and delivers, using his knowledge and wit to defend his country against the derogatory comments and snide remarks from the diaries of colonisers and the media banter of Hollywood stars. In Conrad, we have a prodigal son, returning home, saying, 'I can make it up to you.'

It is a worthwhile collection of essays in a climate where the Aussie expat community is mobilising. There are calls for a senate seat to represent the million or so Australians abroad. The development of the website www.southerncross.com.au is trying to link expats and create a space where they can return their knowledge and experience to Australia. While Conrad does not refer to this, it is an environment of which he would be aware.

These lectures romanticise the Australia of today, in the way only an expat can. In his fifth lecture Conrad turns to Australia's obsession with America. He laments our involvement in American wars and the impact of American culture. Yet, he does not address the role Australians themselves play in the darker aspects of Australian social and political life: immigration policy, overwhelming levels of personal debt and rampant consumption.

The country that Conrad left behind developed into a place he now longs for, a 'wonderland' that is his 'home'. He has enjoyed watching his country grow up from abroad. My fear is that his glasses are tinted with a little too much rose.

This book is a message to our country about how it should treat its future thinkers and public intellectuals. Their contribution will be greater if they are fostered on this island, connected to these ancient soils and involved in our political debate. Their bodies are not made for European winters. They ache for Australian sun.

Reading *Tales of Two Hemispheres* I couldn't help but desire a little bit of ocker. A little less Patrick White and some more Tim Winton. The experiences and stories we hear are of the Murray Bails, the Germaine Greers, and the Christopher Kochs: particular people of a particular place and time. A very different Australian experience.

We get more of an intellectual construct of our country and its journey than we do an emotive one.

Perhaps this says something about the difference between the two hemispheres: the refined European versus the passionate Antipodean.

Conrad has learnt to desire this country from afar. Lucky are those who can make this discovery without having to leave. ■

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

Robert Hefner

Great leap forward

Country, Tim Flannery. Text, 2004. ISBN 1 920 88544 7, RRP $32

Mention Australia in many places around the world and the first image that's likely to hop into people's heads is the kangaroo. It is our most identifiable symbol, but just how much do we really know about this remarkable marsupial? For most of us, I suspect, very little. For us, then, Tim Flannery's book *Country*, with its magnificent cover image of boxing kangaroos, will be a great leap forward.

Country is Flannery's most personal and passionate book yet, a homage to the land, the people, the past and the most famous animal of Australia. It is also a personal odyssey that offers humorous and often intimate insights into the shaping of a controversial scientist whose work has changed profoundly the way we look at life on our continent. And it's highly readable; Flannery presents a lot of scientific data, but the science never gets in the way of the story.

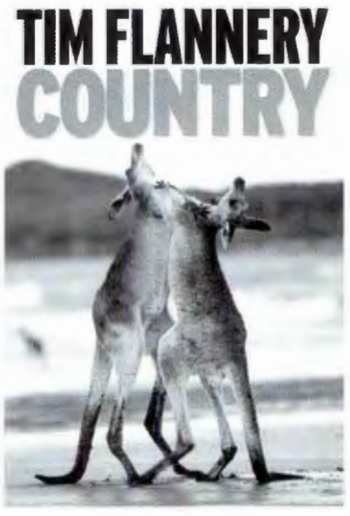
Director of the South Australian Museum in Adelaide and the author of numerous books including *The Future Eaters*, Flannery recently described *Country* as 'sort of a patriotic book, but patriotism is a word that gets so befouled now ... it's a book about love of country, really. I do feel very intensely that this is my country. The message I wanted to get through was that you don't have to go to exotic places to have real, amazing adventures.'

Flannery's own adventure started in the Melbourne suburb of Sandringham, where he grew up little more than a stone's throw from Port Phillip Bay, whose environment fired his imagination for the natural world. He dreamed of thylacines at a time when new kangaroo species were still being discovered just hours away in Gippsland.

In 1975, aged 18 and restless for adventure, he set out on his Moto Guzzi 750 sportster with a friend, Bill Ellis, on a cross-country motorcycle journey that began to open his eyes to the essence of his country. The year before he'd been given a job cleaning kangaroo fossils at the Museum of Victoria by his 'true friend and mentor' Tom Rich, and decided to collect the bones of any specimens that he found on his motorcycle trip for the museum.

In the South Australian outback he came across a recently killed male western grey, and got off his bike to take a closer look. Hugging the huge carcass against a rock while separating its neck muscles with a knife to retrieve the skull, he was so preoccupied that he didn't hear a car approaching.

'As the car accelerated past,' he writes, 'I glimpsed the family inside, horror-struck, mouths agape, staring at the frenzied bikie who was waltzing drunkenly with a disembowelled kangaroo on the side of a lonely country road.'



To this day he recommends overcoming your squeamishness and stopping to take a closer look if you see a fresh kangaroo carcass lying beside the road. 'There is not an ounce of fat or wasted muscle on their perfectly proportioned frames,' he writes, 'and even in death their grace and beauty ... is sublime.'

Kangaroos, in Flannery's opinion, are 'the most remarkable animals that ever lived, and the truest expression of my country—not because they appear on everything from the coat of arms to the national airline but because they have been made by Australia. They are, in short, the continent's most successful evolutionary product.'

From hopping—'as marked a departure from running as the orbital engine is from piston and crankshaft, and every bit as efficient'—to 'absolutely astonishing' reproduction, to the 'worm farm' that is a large grey or red's stomach, the kangaroo is so extraordinary that 'if it did not exist we'd be unable to imagine it'.

Flannery's particular fascination is for Australia's giant ice-age kangaroos that became extinct about 50,000 years ago. Unearthing their bones in Victoria's Western District in 1978 was, he writes, 'as energising as sex'.

As much as Flannery has learned about kangaroos, and shares with us in *Country*, there is still much more to discover about them, including the fossil record that links the ancient, extinct species with those 70 or so species that survived to modern times (although about seven of those have become extinct in the past 100 years).

The book ends with an account of attempts to establish a colony of endangered banded hare wallabies on Faure Island off the coast of Western Australia.

'Those wallabies and their ancestors have been a part of my country for over 10 million years,' Flannery writes, 'but now, without human assistance, they might not even see out another decade.'

In the vast sweep of time encompassed by *Country*, a decade is not very long. But it could be all that we've got to make a difference—not just for the banded hare wallaby, but for ourselves as well. ■

Robert Hefner is assistant editor of *Eureka Street*.

Madeleine Byrne

Elusive justice

Getting Away with Genocide? Elusive Justice and the Khmer Rouge Tribunal,Tom Fawthrop and Helen Jarvis. UNSW Press, 2005.
ISBN 0 868 40904 9, RRP $39.95

Only days before Vietnamese forces over-ran Phnom Penh in 1979, the Khmer Rouge leadership urged the last of the Cambodian god-kings, Prince Sihanouk, to argue its case before the UN.

After being installed in a luxury suite at the Waldorf-Astoria, the prince denounced the invasion as a violation of Cambodia's sovereignty before the UN Security Council. Then one night he made a short-lived dash for freedom, seeking political asylum in the United States.

Bowing to Chinese pressure, the US declined. This remarkable story is one of many to be found in this account of the 25-year fight to bring the Khmer Rouge to justice.

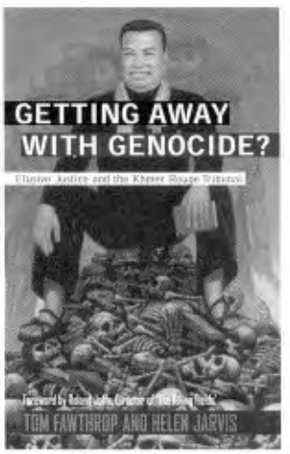
By August, Prince Sihanouk was lobbying member states to leave Cambodia's seat in the General Assembly vacant (thereby reversing his earlier plea).

'You have never protested,' said Sihanouk's open letter to the UN, 'let alone asked those responsible who were sitting among you for an account of this genocide worse than the one committed by the detestable Nazis.'

In the end, 71 countries—including Australia, the UK, the US and Canada—backed the right of the ousted Pol Pot regime to be represented at the UN.

'I was told to engineer the result on the Credentials Committee,' said US delegate Robert Rosenstock before the vote. 'I think I now know how Pontius Pilate felt,' he later said.

Getting Away with Genocide? catalogues the 'frustrations, the delays and dashed hopes' of those closely aligned with the Cambodian fight for justice, alongside the shifting Cold War *realpolitik* in the UN and the US State Department that has meant that not one Khmer Rouge leader has answered for the murder of two million Cambodians.



Written by Tom Fawthrop, a British journalist who has reported on south-east Asia since 1979, and Helen Jarvis, an Australian academic and adviser to the Cambodian government's Task Force on the Khmer Rouge trials, *Getting Away With Genocide?* presents its case with great urgency.

This is not surprising, as the few witnesses who survived the killing fields have died, or are ageing fast.

The book includes profiles of the key Khmer Rouge personnel, most of whom are now aged in their late 70s or 80s.

Pol Pot, for example, the man from a well-off background (his sister was one of the king's concubines) who returned from studies in Paris armed with a revolutionary brand of Marxism-Leninism, died seven years ago.

One of the priorities of the Vietnamese after 'liberating' Cambodia was to set up a court to try the Khmer Rouge, but it faced many obstacles. According to Hun Sen, Cambodia's long-term prime minister, when the army rattled into Phnom Penh only 70 residents remained.

The devastation was total. 'Hundreds of thousands of gaunt and diseased people, dazed as if returning from hell, wandered shoeless among dusty roads,' recalls a Vietnamese adviser to the SPK news agency. They were 'reduced to a state where they did not speak or smile any more'.

So-called 'new people' from cities and newly captured areas (alongside Buddhist monks and ethnic minorities) were targeted by the Maoist guerrillas in the Khmer Rouge's bloody three years in power.

In August 1979, the People's Revolutionary Tribunal under Vietnamese auspices convicted Pol Pot and second-in-charge Ieng Sary of genocide. But it made little difference, as Cold War rivalry between China and Vietnam meant that the US and its allies continued to fund the Khmer Rouge.

Between 1979 and 1989, China provided $80–100 million a year, while the US-influenced World Food Program gave millions to the Khmer Rouge camped on the Thai border. These hungry, malaria-ridden refugees soon became the public face of Cambodia's plight. Seven years after Pol Pot's fall, the UN gave $142 per head for the tens of thousands on the border, and only $1.50 for each of the seven million inside the Vietnamese-occupied territory.

Singapore's former ambassador to Cambodia, Verghese Mathews, has criticised this book for its 'almost evangelical criticism' of the refusal by the UN and international community to recognise Cambodia's post-Khmer government.

'In their disappointment that no Western country so much as sent a fact-finding mission following the ouster of Pol Pot, they have failed to give adequate expression to the complex international and regional dynamism which drove the then bipolar world,' he says.

It is true that impatience seeps into the authors' account of recent events, especially the way the UN and NGOs such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have resisted aspects of the 'mixed tribunal' put forward by the Hun Sen government. Serious concerns about breaches of international law are not given much space, but this is a minor flaw in terms of this vivid, timely and well-researched book's overall importance. ■

Madeleine Byrne is a former SBS journalist. She is a fellow at OzProspect, a non-partisan, public policy think tank.

Troy Bramston

Birth of a nation

Inventing a Nation: Washington, Jefferson, Adams, Gore Vidal. MUP, 2004. ISBN 0 522 85138 X, RRP $29.95

It seems America's founding fathers have never been more popular. Americans have often been filled with patriotic nostalgia about the birth of the republic and the figures that toiled to make it so, but there is a renewed interest, fuelled by new research and fresh interpretations.

In recent years, new biographies of George Washington, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin and Alexander Hamilton have featured in the national bestseller lists. Stories of the founders, the revolution and the creation of the constitution are a staple of the Pulitzer Prizes. There have been many new exhibitions, lectures, documentaries and movies about these men and the other principal founders, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison.

The nature of the scholarship has swung from sentimental and undiluted praise, to condemnation, charges of hypocrisy and ridicule. But the finer historians have sought a balance: respecting their achievements while not being uncritical about their shortcomings. The search to truly understand them, in all their complexities and contradictions, is what drives the interest.

Among the recent books examining the founders and their legacy is the distinguished writer and political activist Gore Vidal's *Inventing a Nation*. Vidal recalls a 'bright morning' conversation with President John F. Kennedy that provided the motive for his book. Kennedy asked how a '... backwoods country like this, with only three million people, could have produced three great geniuses of the 18th century—Franklin, Jefferson and Hamilton?' Vidal answered, flippantly, 'Time. They had more of it ... They read. Wrote letters. Apparently, thought, something no longer done—in public life.' Now, some 40 years later, Vidal provides a more detailed reply to Kennedy's question.

Vidal approaches the birth of the republic principally through three figures: Washington, Adams and Jefferson. In his examination of the founding, he describes Washington's 'passive eminence', the truly 'great collaborators' Hamilton and Madison, and the 'godfathers' Adams and Jefferson. From here Vidal travels back and forth visiting the revolutionary wars, the continental congresses and the early years of the republic.

Vidal describes the competing ideas and values in the creation of a national government, the relationships between the protagonists, and the infighting that characterised Washington's two presidential terms. He reminds us that none of it was inevitable or easy; it was a long struggle that required not only wisdom but compromise.

This is not a misty-eyed portrayal of the greatest of great men. Vidal does not ignore their collective arrogance or the political skulduggery that characterised the new nation's early years, nor does he forgive them their hypocrisies, flaws or contradictions. He seems to enjoy reminding us that Washington did not win many battles, that Hamilton favoured the 'rich and wellborn' over 'the mass of the people', that Madison was a pawn in Jefferson's political games, that Franklin enjoyed too many 'joyous affairs', that Adams saw virtue in monarchy, and that Jefferson, in addition to his immorality, was in awe of the French Revolution.

Most critically, despite the clarion call echoing from the Declaration of Independence that 'all men are created equal', four of the first five presidents were slave-owners. Indeed, the founders chose to compromise on slavery, leaving it for future generations to resolve. It would take a civil war to do so.

Vidal makes the story dramatic, yet realistic, and ultimately compelling. He is motivated not 'by dramatic contradictions in character', but rather 'in those consistencies wherein lie greatness'.

Those wanting a more scholarly approach might consult the eminent American historians Joseph Ellis, Ron Chernow, David McCullough, Gordon Wood, Richard Brookhiser or Andrew Burstein. Vidal's tract invokes the image of an informative dinner conversation, with Vidal holding court at one end and perhaps his friend, NSW Premier Bob Carr (who has written a foreword) at the other, agreeing about the greatness of these men, yet drawing different conclusions about their legacy.

Unfortunately, Vidal's pet subjects, ranging from the imperial presidency, public corruption and the power of corporations, to the reach of the American empire and the war in Iraq, all weave their way into the narrative. In so doing, Vidal enlists the founders to support his arguments. There is Franklin railing against the inevitability of 'despotic government' and 'corrupted' people, and Jefferson's call for new revolutions every generation to keep 'the tree of liberty' refreshed.

This book is layered with Vidal's lament that America, once great and full of promise, has withered and been transformed into a corporate, repressive, oligarchical state. At its core the book is a polemic, written by a disgruntled and disillusioned American, hoping that America may yet fulfil its founding ambitions.

Though unconvincing in that, it is more than an anti-imperialist rant. Rather, it is a wise attempt to answer Kennedy's question which has intrigued scholars and students for centuries, and will do so for many years to come. ■

Troy Bramston is co-editor of *The Hawke Government: A critical retrospective* (Pluto Press, 2003), works for a Labor senator, and holds a master's degree in politics and international relations from UNSW.

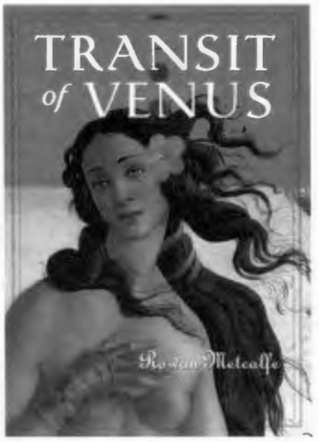
Peter Pierce

Piety parodied

Transit of Venus, Rowan Metcalfe. Pandanus Books, 2004. ISBN 1 740 76144 8, RRP $29.95

THAT THE PEOPLE of the Pacific islands were not passive spectators in the face of European imperialism has long been established by Greg Dening, Nicholas Thomas and numerous others. The exchanges—political, amorous, sometimes violent—of Polynesians with British and French seafarers were complex, and not one-sided. The late Rowan Metcalfe's *Transit of Venus* is the story (historically based, but cast in the form of a novel) of her ancestors: Mauatua, a young woman from a chiefly Tahitian family; and Fletcher Christian, with whom she sailed to Pitcairn Island along with the other *Bounty* mutineers. The story begins much later, in 1831, when Mauatua—now a grandmother—is being repatriated to Tahiti on the missionary ship *Lucy Anne*.

This is a tale of cultural incomprehension, and curiosity. The Tahitians marvel at the animals and equipment of the expedition of Cook (or Tute) in 1774. However, one who has been to Britain informs them of the hypocrisy and cruelty there: 'I saw strangled men hanging from poles, and women too.' Hard to manage is the registering of Tahitian wonder at the strange people who have come among them and who might be a source of power (in intertribal warfare, perhaps) or of destruction. But when does the initial naïve response become a mockery of itself? Indeed, that question points to the central problem of the novel, and one that Metcalfe did not have the prose resources to resolve, for all the patent, and portentous, earnestness of her intentions. How can piety avoid the slide into parody?



To write from the point of view of a people who could be colonised, but are at the stage where they believe in the possibility of their continued independence, is a signal challenge. To a vital extent it must be met at the level of the language given to these people in the narrative, in this case the Tahitians. In her attempts Metcalfe is sometimes sententious: 'The white men will be back. With all their trouble.' Many Polynesian words are used, but the effects can be coy and contradictory. In one sentence the phrase 'stomach and ure' translates one word into English but not the other, which happens to mean penis. Why not both, or neither, since a glossary of Maohi words is part of the apparatus of the book? This is unhappy, especially when there are a couple of unfortunate 'tool' double entendres elsewhere. Too often the native language sounds comically synthetic, as the author strives too hard to make it dignified: 'Does the spirit of Tautoia return? Is he released at last from the sorcery of Vahiatu's evil doers?'

There is much more in the same vein—'Hiti a Reva Reva, Border of Passing Cloud, we set foot upon you at last.' Metcalfe, writing of the confusions inherent in cultural collisions, commits the fallacy of imitative form by bringing her own confusions to the task. Too often *Transit of Venus* cajoles with proper nouns rather than quickening with verbs. The book's failure is salutary in showing the need for, but the creative limits of, cross-cultural sympathy in acts of the historical imagination. ■

Peter Pierce is Professor of Australian Literature at James Cook University, Cairns.

Francesca Beddie

The politics of aid

Facing Asia: A History of the Colombo Plan, Daniel Oakman. Pandanus Books, 2004. ISBN 1 740 76086 7, RRP $34.95

DANIEL OAKMAN TOLD Radio National recently that he thought the assumptions behind the Colombo Plan may sound fanciful today. These included the idea that aid would stimulate economic development and that such growth would in turn promote stability and moderate political conflict. Also that exposure to the Western capitalist system and values would act as a deterrent to communist influence.

I'm not so sure things have changed. We still expect miracles from tiny commitments of aid. That those miracles don't occur fuels the arguments from skeptics about waste and corruption and the ineffectiveness of aid, yet the money keeps flowing, particularly in times of threat: communism then, terrorism now.

Government-sponsored aid then and now is about politics. It is never purely humanitarian but must accord with broader foreign-policy objectives and with the so-called national interest. Yet the taxpayer's dollar can do good: not always by achieving the outcomes desired of a particular project; indeed more often by building trust and understanding in donor and recipient countries. Certainly, Oakman shows that it was the effect on individuals that reaped the largest returns on Australia's investment in the Colombo Plan.

Facing Asia is a meticulous study of the Colombo Plan, the first comprehensive aid package for Asia. The plan involved convening a regional consultative committee, made up of donors and recipients, to discuss the overall direction of the plan, while programs of assistance were decided upon and delivered bilaterally. This unique form created an institution that has lasted 50 years and is seen by its Asian members as their own, rather than something imposed by the West.

Australia had an important role in the plan's conception mainly, as Oakman portrays it, because of Percy Spender, the then Foreign Minister, who pushed hard for the scheme in a manner that got results. But his heavy-handed approach also alienated people and saw what was first termed the Spender Resolution evolve into the Colombo Plan, adopted in London in October 1950.

Spender's successor, Lord Casey, latched onto the plan's propaganda value. He insisted that projects be clearly identified as Australian and serve to build Asian goodwill. Badging its aid was again a priority for the government in the late 1990s. This was insisted upon even in face of the fact that some projects will turn out to be white elephants, given the risky nature of the development game.

OAKMAN SPENDS considerable time discussing the effectiveness of aid. He describes a few white elephants but more importantly shows how Australian diplomats were reluctant and ill-equipped to monitor and evaluate the aid programs. Even in the 1950s, the Secretary of the Department of External Affairs, Arthur Tange, wanted only to retain policy control of the aid program and to 'offload the administration'. Oakman also points out how the lack of coherence between aid and trade policies has undermined aid's impact on economic growth. Today, the debate continues about which agencies should determine aid policy and how best to administer the program. Similarly, the issue of policy coherence remains high on the agenda of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee.

The Vietnam War was the clearest manifestation of the flaws in the theory that the Colombo Plan would avert the communist threat, its prime function in the Cold War period. It also highlighted the minor role aid plays in foreign policy. When the crunch came, military responses were seized upon.

Chapter Six is an interesting discussion about the effect of the presence of Asian students in Australia. I was surprised to learn that only a fifth of these were Colombo Plan students, with the rest paying their own way. As Oakman points out, that is a measure of the effectiveness of the publicity campaign that permeated Australia's management of the plan.

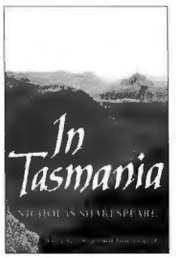
While the number of scholars was small—by 1966 some 12,000 had been in Australia—Oakman concludes that 'they marked a watershed in Australia's cultural development and their appearance on university campuses and in private homes across the country provided a sustained challenge to the Australian insularity' embodied, of course, in the White Australia Policy.

The other contributing factor to the demise of restrictive immigration policies was the effect of Asia on visiting Colombo Plan technical experts. They encountered 'intelligent, courteous, English-speaking counterparts with plenty of ideas and welcoming hearts'—as well, at times, as criticism of Australia's racist policies and of the tokenistic size of its aid program (albeit in the 1960s about three times the proportion of GDP than it was in 2004).

While the arrangement of the chapters in *Facing Asia* is somewhat higgledy-piggledy, overall this is an easily read history of an important feature of Australia's engagement with Asia. It brings to life the processes surrounding foreign and aid policy by quoting many of the players within government who, in the days before the Freedom of Information Act, were less reluctant to put their views on paper. For those writing the history of the next 50 years of Australian aid, the archives may not be so revealing.

Francesca Beddie is a former diplomat who also worked in the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) in the 1990s.

the shortlist



In Tasmania, Nicholas Shakespeare. Random House, 2004. ISBN 1 740 51271 5, RRP $39.95

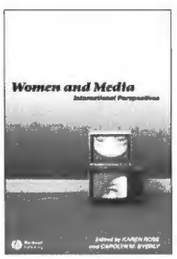
In Tasmania is a passionate exposé of one man's desire to embrace the Apple Isle and explore his genealogical link in its historical context.

This quest for English author and biographer Nicholas Shakespeare contributed to the unearthing of a fortuitous link to his ancestor and 'father of Tasmania', Anthony Fenn Kemp. Readers soon discover the irony of such a title—Kemp was a tyrant and loathed for his cruelty both in Tasmania and in his country of birth, England.

One question arises in the attempt to document Kemp's journey: does Shakespeare use conjecture loosely to surmise the sequence of events around his distant relative? If so, he can be excused for the narrative sounding more like folklore than transcribed fact. It's an intriguing historical account.

The debates about Aboriginal identity, Truganini as the last Aborigine and the documented genocide of the late 1800s were topical while Shakespeare was writing *In Tasmania*, and he juxtaposed the debate with his research on Kemp.

Finally, the charm of Shakespeare's anecdotes encompasses a sincere desire to elevate the heritage of the people of Tasmania and to re-create a bona fide sense of pride for their links to the earlier penal colony of Van Diemen's Land. **—Lee Beasley**



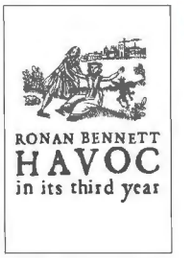
Women and media: International perspectives, Karen Ross & Carolyn M. Byerly (eds). Blackwell Publishing, 2004. ISBN 1 405 11609 9, RRP $59.95

To any woman who has ever felt oppressed, repressed or suppressed, *Women and the Media: International Perspectives* is a must read. This insightful text explores women's relationship with the media—in particular, the media's stereotypical and negative representations of women who work in the media industry or as citizens ignored in some societies.

Written by six international female scholars including the text's editors, the topics cover women's place in politics, movies and online. Karen Ross describes how female parliamentarians are judged by their appearance rather than their policies while Ellen Riordan confronts the reality that perceptions of women are masculinised when cast in roles with male-like qualities (*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*).

The international perspectives studied by Dafna Lemish and Ammu Joseph are eye-opening. And all of the authors resist the temptation to adopt a feminist tone. Lemish reveals that because of the participation by men in the continuing conflict in Israel, the media focuses on the activities of men, ignoring the stories of women. Consequently, this has sustained the perception that women are 'invisible' or only seen as 'sexual objects' as the reality of their lives is largely ignored.

This book helped me to appreciate the freedoms I enjoy as a female living in Australia and increased my awareness of the issues involved with women's relationship with the media in other countries. Those of us who have the power of the voice owe it to our sisters in other countries to learn about the media's misrepresentations of women and initiate change. Sisters, unite—and read on! **—Kathryn Page**



Havoc, in its third year, Ronan Bennett. Bloomsbury, 2004. ISBN 0 7475 6441 8, RRP $29.95

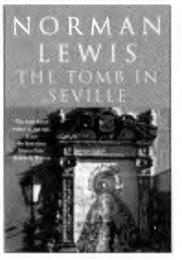
Havoc, in its third year is a historical novel set in a Puritan northern English town in the 1630s, during the reign of Charles I. In an afterword, author Ronan Bennett acknowledges that 'when conflicts arise between historical fact and the demands of the novel', novelists working with fiction 'tend to settle them in favour of the latter'.

As true as it is that the author is removed from the era of which he writes, it should also be said that it is far more difficult for readers to remove themselves from the concerns of the present. This is probably why this, Bennett's fourth novel, the one after his best-selling *The Catastrophist*, has been described by critics as an allegory for our current international political atmosphere—specifically, Christian America (and Britain, and Australia) versus a Muslim Middle East, and more generally, our more prolonged 'war on terror'.

I think this largely misses the point, which is that the novel is a study in hypocrisy. And perhaps one we all need to read, but only if we apply its message to ourselves, before we apply it to others.

'I see you very plainly, sir,' says one of the characters to one of the governors of the town, 'I see you for the hypocrite you are. You make your voice solicitous and sympathetic but your heart is hard and unforgiving. You have won men over by saying they can be better men and love one another, but better men for you are ... the rich and mighty ... These are the men who have your love. Those who are truly in need of love and grace and pity, they go disregarded and reviled.'

—Matthew Lamb



The Tomb in Seville, Norman Lewis. Macmillan, 2005. ISBN 0 330 43538 8, RRP $25

The Tomb in Seville sees Norman Lewis in his final book return to territory visited in his first—his journey through Spain in the autumn of 1934. Lewis, accompanied by his brother-in-law Eugene, sets out to discover the location of a family tomb in the cathedral of Seville. His father-in-law bankrolls the expedition. Throughout their meanderings, most of what they observe is beyond their experience and expectation—lush forests, 'golden steppes' and extreme poverty. The historical context imposes its presence—they dodge snipers in Madrid and are forced to detour via Portugal as the states of alarm become more frequent. While Eugene is caught up in the revolutionary fervour, Lewis remains dedicated to the notion of the quest and the neutrality of his observations.

What distinguishes this effort from similar accounts (notably Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* and Gerard Brennan's *South of Granada*) is the perspective provided by the passage of time. Lewis is writing in the last stages of his life about events that occurred almost six decades earlier. This distance, coupled with the fact that he has previously tackled the same events, allows him to select the sharpest of images with the confidence that they will speak for themselves. The story is revealed with detached elegance, still bearing all the urgency, colour and wonder of the moment. A remarkable achievement.

—Steve Gome

A world of brutal grace

Oldboy, dir. Chan-wook Park. Drunk in a police waiting room, Dae-su Oh (Min-sik Choi) sings, falls over, is handcuffed to a bench, ties his shirt tails like a girlie pop star and slurs his way through a variety of drunken wisdoms. Pathetic and hilarious. When finally a friend picks him up, he stumbles out into the rain, and disappears into a sea of umbrellas—for 15 years.

Park opens *Oldboy* beautifully, introducing his characters in pieces—snatches of flashbacks and flashforwards, drunkenness disguising reality and violence blurring niceties. Park drops you, with a brutal grace, into a world that is part adult fairy tale, part children's nightmare.

Dae-su Oh wakes in a small room. There is a TV, a bed, a picture of a window and a locked door, under which food is pushed. The TV is his only company, his window on the world. It tells him who's tops in the celebrity-TV-chef world, what pop songs are riding the charts and that he's murdered his wife—all with high-key, popular TV enthusiasm, working as both comforter and torturer.

For every year he is held captive he tattoos the back of his hand with a line. A mark of remembrance. A map of vengeance. Until finally on the eve of the 15th stroke he finds himself in a suit on a roof with a mobile phone and a heart as black as anything Edgar Allan Poe could have imagined.

Despite the bleak premise of Park's second film in his vengeance trilogy (the first being *Sympathy for Mr Vengeance*) it is wonderfully funny and has a twisted sense of play. Park moves deftly from gut-wrenching, physical confrontation to playful love-making in a single intake of breath. As often as not you'll find yourself laughing in the midst of the most visceral nastiness. And it works.

Reminiscent of Takeshi Kitano in his 1997 masterpiece, *Hana-Bi*, Park has the same finesse when it comes to combining art and violence. Not to mention that they share a laconic pacing that messes perfectly with the audience's expectations—casually tossing you little crumbs of information, and then, *bang*, into the jaws of the lion.

Oldboy plays nimbly with time—moving through great swathes of it with unexpected edits and a wily structure. The cinematography (Jeong-hun Jeong) reflects perfectly the film's surreal, noirish edge, mixing extremes of contrast with an almost comic-book palette. *Oldboy* doesn't baulk at the strange and unnerving. It has huge ants sitting cross-legged in train carriages, ungainly teeth extraction and foodstuffs so lively as to be stomach-turning.

Why imprison a person for 15 years without explanation? Well, Park gives you explanations aplenty. Greek tragedy? Loads of it, with just the right smattering of farce.

—Siobhan Jackson

Truth universally acknowledged

Bride and Prejudice, dir. Gurinder Chadha.

Dearest sister,
It is a Truth universally acknowledged among film-makers that my novels must be in want of a script-treatment. Accordingly there has been a large number of kinematic renditions of my Plots, ranging from the commendable to the *execrable*. These extremes are rare, and the greater part of the efforts have tended towards worthiness without brilliance. Some had the unfortunate quality of inspiring mirth without any intention of so doing: I must confess that the spectacle presented by Miss Paltrow as Emma (ever my Fav'rite heroine) caused me to laugh unkindly. Driving Hatless in the sunlight, in a Yellow Dress whose *décolleté* would excite comment at an evening dinner party, she was as unlike my white-clad, elegant Emma as it was possible to imagine. Others have been worse: they have attempted to add elements to my plots that would never have found their way into my imagination, let alone a work to which I would put my name. The Dreadful Mansfield Park adaptation that so vilely slandered Sir Thomas as a *slaver* who behav'd immorally with the *wretched prisoners* is a Slur that a Lady possess'd of any elegance of mind could Never forgive.

Bearing all this in mind I feel that the recent attempts of Miss Chadha to render my novel intelligible to the denizens of the *Vast Subcontinent* are quite commendable. The costumes and music are colourful and amusing. The actress selected to play Elizabeth (Aishwarya Rai) is a lively Young Person of considerable looks and accomplishments; I understand she has won prizes for her beauty.
Yrs, etc.

Beloved Jane,
Little did we expect that your delightful *histoires* would reach a world so much wider than our select family circle, providing gainful occupation for so many! Am I betraying a selfish partiality for the Dear Original, in detecting a thinness, a sense of quoting the quote, in *Bride and Prejudice*? For besides *abundant entertainment*, is there not also a *depth of philosophy* in your wonderful words that build a little world of such *crystalline* clarity in the mind of the reader? Yet one might try, but try in vain, to induce a member of the Stronger Sex under thirty to read them. I have even heard a Young Freind describe yr books as 'chunky chicklit'! Jane, reflect on the compliment to your *oeuvre*, that it may *outlive literacy*.

One has to admit that transporting the Bennets to India as *the Bakshis* was prettily *apropos*. The Bakshi sisters, it would seem, have lives quite similar to our own; living at home until marriage, subject to their parents, maintaining their ... accomplishments. But I will endeavour to banish every painful thought, and think only of Bright Raiment, endless Musical Interludes and *Choc-Tops*.
Yr affectionate sister,
Cassandra

—Lucille Hughes and **Juliette Hughes**

A bleak prognosis

The Illustrated Family Doctor, dir. Kriv Stenders. There is a tendency among Australian critics to pull their punches when they discuss Australian films. With the industry in tatters and little hope on the horizon, our practitioners need encouragement, not tough love.

What is too often omitted from the equation is the Australian audience—how are *we* to feel when *The Illustrated Family Doctor* is, for all its excruciating

dullness, actually above average for any film made locally?

Young Gary Kelp (Samuel Johnson) works for a small publishing firm where he's developing a new medical reference book—*The Illustrated Family Doctor.* Following the death of his father, Gary develops an array of physical symptoms, much like those he's researching for his book, and watches dispassionately as his relationship with virtually everyone breaks down. Why do they break down? We're not sure. Why doesn't he go to see his GP? There is no reason. The film mistakes symbolism for character motivation; Gary's physical symptoms represent his psychological problems; *that's* why he can't go to the doctor. Never mind how frustrating it is to watch the suffering of a man who won't help himself.

Gary is a passive character and passive characters make for tedious films. The great outsiders of Robert Bresson or Hal Hartley are only passive on the surface—underneath a purpose burns. But we sense no such purpose in Gary. There is little suspense generated as to whether Gary will finish his book, or recover from the death of his father. In fact, his father's death is all but forgotten after the first ten minutes.

The actors carry the film with at least their integrity intact. Samuel Johnson's punch-drunk charm engages us despite the best efforts of the script. Colin Friels does fine as Ray, Gary's colleague and substitute father, but you can almost hear him crying out for a decent role to prove his worth to a new generation of filmgoers. The stand-out performance goes to Paul Sonkkila, as a character loosely based on Chopper Read, if only because he gets the role with the two funny lines.

Visually, director Kriv Stenders attempts to relive the glory of *Sweetie*—Jane Campion's first feature, also a black comedy—minus the budget and imagination. Like Campion, Stenders has produced some of Australia's best short films, and *The Illustrated Family Doctor* does demonstrate his abilities; the compositions are intelligent, the editing patient, but these elements hardly conspire to shock the audience out of its indifference. A flat, barren aesthetic is a worthy goal only if it complements the action, rather than rendering dull events even more dull.

Australian audiences have every right to boycott a film that doesn't work. Like so many before it, *The Illustrated Family Doctor* will drift into obscurity, and no amount of AFI awards will alter its fate. Australia has the ambition and the diligence; what's missing is the writing. I beg the funding bodies to take some advice from this enthusiastic filmgoer: if you're bored when you read the script, we will be bored when we watch the movie.

—Zane Lovitt

Ambushed by the absurd

House of Flying Daggers, dir. Zhang Yimou. There are plenty of contemporary Western films and filmmakers influenced by Asian action cinema, and it's not uncommon for films like *The Matrix* to bring in a specialist martial arts choreographer like Yuen Wo-Ping to direct the fight scenes. What's interesting about Zhang Yimou's *House of Flying Daggers* is that it's succeeding in the mass Western market using a specifically Asian popular genre—the *wuxia,* or 'chivalrous martial arts' film. There's long been a cult appreciation of *wuxia* and of Hong Kong action cinema in some parts of the West, but with Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon,* and Yimou's previous film, *Hero,* this interest seems to be moving beyond the cult and into something like the Western mainstream. Or, more accurately perhaps, into a truly global marketplace.

Oddly enough, although I thoroughly enjoyed both *Crouching Tiger* and *Hero, House of Flying Daggers* left me cold. It is no less sumptuous and the actors no less beautiful or virtuosic in their flying and leaping and spearing and stabbing. And the absurdity of the plot twists really shouldn't be an issue in a film where daggers seem to be able to fly around corners.

But the storyline is a little convoluted. Local officials/police are trying to infiltrate the rebels, the rebels are infiltrating the police, a love triangle inspires everyone to pretend to be someone they're not (sometimes several people they're not), and

Top: *House of Flying Daggers.*
Above: Gary (Samuel Johnson) and Ray (Colin Friels) in *The Illustrated Family Doctor.*

all this to the beat of seduction, betrayal and revenge. The plot switchbacks seem so abrupt and arbitrary that it's hard not to laugh. Apparently the literal English translation of the title is something like 'Ambush from Ten Directions'—which is not a bad description of what it felt the film was doing to the audience.

The final, climactic fight scene is a case in point. It begins as a love scene, in a glorious autumn afternoon, and as it turns into a murder and revenge scene the skies cloud over and the fight takes place in a full-blown blizzard. This *could* work as a potent metaphor for the hardening of hearts that takes place across the arc of the scene, but it doesn't. It just plays like it sounds, arbitrary and operatically absurd. (Speaking of opera, Kathleen Battle sings the theme song over the closing titles, which seems a sign of how self-consciously *global* this film is trying to be.)

—Allan James Thomas

watching brief

Debates and discourses

'J-Lo alert! Give me that bloody remote!'
'Don't be a telly Hitler, Mum.'
'Am not. Can't blame me for having taste.'
'Tu sei molto cattiva, e molto antipatica. E molto bassa.'

PETER IS ENJOYING LEARNING Italian for a trip to Italy. He can call his mother wicked, grumpy and short in two languages now. I return the epithets in a more operatic accent, but forgetting to put the male ending on the words, he gets to gloat. Most of our altercations are about his calm assumption that the remote is his domain. I suppose he keeps me from fossilising by putting on MTV with *Jackass* and *Dirty Sanchez*, as well as the kind of music they play on that channel. Young blokes also seem to love cartoons, so in our house we also get a lot of *Simpsons*, *South Park* and *Family Man*. I like some of these and loathe others, especially *Family Man*. Where is the bridge over the generational taste-abyss? I am, despite slanderous aspersions from my offspring, a reasonably broadminded and curious person for my advanced age, so I find myself enjoying MTV when Gwen Stefani or Queens of the Stone Age come along. But I draw the line at 50 Cent and J-Lo and indeed any video clip that has herds of subservient ho's waggling their reproductive facilities at arrogant, drug-fuelled males. This puts a lot of hip-hop and R&B outside my pale, because as Kath and Kim would say, they get up my goat.

But there are things we can all watch together without fighting. In March on the ABC there was that gorgeously grotty program *The Bodysnatchers*. Maggots being popped out of scalps and necks; tapeworm dramas; cautionary tales for the young fellers about the reason why you should never pee in the Amazon. It was all pity and terror with a lot of fear and loathing and EEEK! thrown in. Now that was good telly, there should be more of it: the whole family watched, spellbound, with only the weak-stomached protesting. One of my dearest friends, an 89-year-old retired missionary, and veteran of numerous bouts of malaria, loved it. It reminded him of his salad days in the tropics, helping people overcome these things. (Good missionaries were always just as concerned for their flocks' bodily health as for their spiritual wellbeing.) *Bodysnatchers* was the perfect cross-generational program: something to disgust and delight, all without offending. A rare one, that.

There are things I'd rather not watch with the son, and it's heartily reciprocated: stuff about sex mainly. We've never been prudes in our family, but neither are we the sort of people who wander round the house in the nuddy, chatting casually about their latest sexual encounter. If that makes me a repressed product of my upbringing, then good. Whoopee. There are things that a lad does not wish to share with his mum, nor she with him, unless they're in a French movie or a play by Aeschylus.

So I was glad when he was out with mates when SBS showed that documentary about the author of *The Story of O*. It was depressing viewing, because it seemed to be saying that true eroticism was about self-abasement, and about submitting to bullying of the crudest, most schoolyard type. (School bullying is something that should warn us about people who like to ritualise cruelty and make little games of it.) The horrible degradations that were the products of Dominique Aury's imagination were intended to give her lover pleasure. These tortures involved stuff that was outlawed in the Geneva Convention, so what makes it OK to define it as love? What on earth ever happened to female emancipation? The very thought of a beloved enjoying raping, humiliating and whipping would end the relationship for anyone who wasn't nuts, surely. Real lovers fall in love and are ravished by the sheer sweetness of touching each other.

THE WHOLE IDEA THAT A woman's ultimate rapture is to be controlled, enslaved and degraded is so damned old-fashioned, so bloody criminal. (Perhaps it's because I was born in a town in England that spawned the Moors murderers that I don't find the whole SM caboodle funny or even vulgar, just evil. That pair romanticised De Sade and read his books.) So how is it that the generally accepted definition of erotica these days always seems to involve the dreary leather-costume party of SM? Or is it that the really edgy stuff that people find hard to write about, to depict artistically, is tenderness and joy? Real sexual love, between enraptured equals, is perhaps as difficult to render convincingly as religious experience. The ritual crudities of fundamentalism and of sadomasochism are similar in the relation they bear to the real experiences of God or of sex. The horrors of Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo Bay involved sexual degradation and the infliction of pain and fear, and were the product of the fundamentalist Christian Bush administration in horrible intercourse with the fundamentalist Islamic al Qaeda.

Strange, really. The most suppressed discourses in the world right now are the gentle message of Vatican II, the language of liberation, conservation and peace, and the celebration of loving, equal, mutual sexual attraction.

In the meantime in our house, we'll continue to tolerate each other's programs up to the point of nausea or embarrassment. We'll be able to watch the animal documentaries, *Media Watch*, and Roy and H. G.'s new *Memphis Trousers Half Hour*. We'll watch the news, some food programs and from time to time we'll even turn the damn thing off and learn more Italian insults.

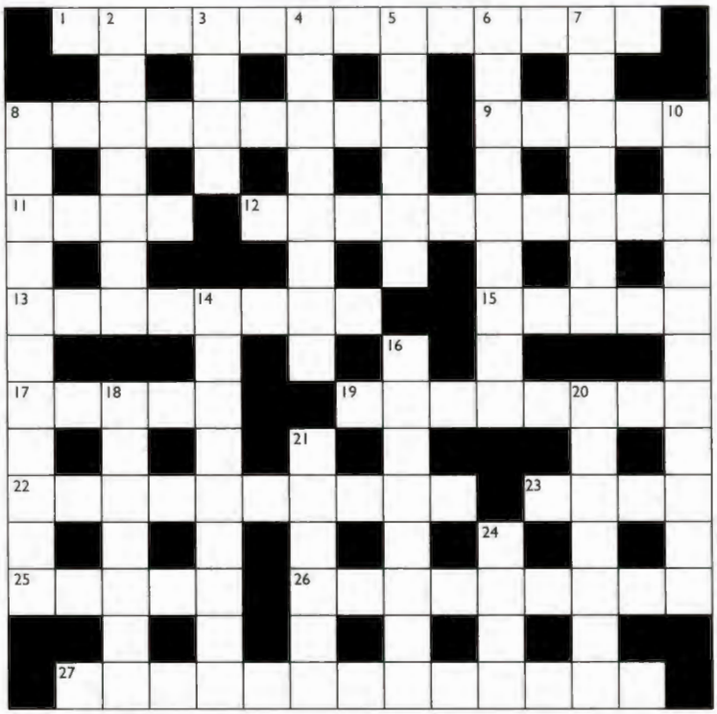
Ciao.

Juliette Hughes is a freelance writer.

puzzled

Devised by
Joan Nowotny IBVM

Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 132, April 2005



Across

1. One would be stupid to celebrate this occasion so early in the month. (5,5,3)
8. Crazy Cole boasts when he does them up. (9)
9. Opera showing in Christo's café. (5)
11. Avoid, without a change, the Roman poet. (4)
12. In a side street, curiously, we celebrate this season of rejoicing. (10)
13. Such brightness follows the dawn of 12-across? (8)
15. Listen! I'll follow you down the passage. (5)
17. It's a heavy burden, you hear, that I expect. (5)
19. A ripping account, causing tears, perhaps. (8)
22. I cheer Pete raucously for having this gentlemanly sort of suit. (5-5)
23. My good-looking date in Paris. (4)
25. In modern times in a Brazilian port, we can listen to this. (5)
26. A small piece of metal to press. (5,4)
27. The first woman, left angry in the heather, finds a road over the railway, perhaps. (5-8)

Down

2. Ring somebody called Leigh in a hypocritical manner. (7)
3. On strike, or just lazy? (4)
4. Is it a painful tooth that makes her so unpleasant to look at? (8)
5. Might one sit around at the location. (2,4)
6. Times of sport or relaxation when you're feeling, maybe, sturdy as a steel post. (9)
7. Sailor sets forth, reportedly, to go down cliff? (7)
8. Sower who's heard on 25-across. (11)
10. In each circumstance you meet, constantly have a go! (2,5,4)
14. Where Norman, for example, aims to putt the ball. (2,3,4)
16. At the Troc, once, unusual piece of music was played. (8)
18. Shorten a game of skill. (7)
20. Conclusively defeat the spreading swarm. (7)
21. Windbag must have an extension of the lungs! (3,3)
24. Drink up round this great literary work, using a magnum perhaps? (4)

Solution to Crossword no. 131, March 2005

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