

EUREKA STREET

A MAGAZINE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS,
THE ARTS AND THEOLOGY
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An encounter with **Lewis Lapham**



The continuing troubles of **Haiti**



The darker side
of religion:
Niger's polio victims

Peter Steele:
Art into poetry

Sydney Writers' Festival

**The ethics of
stem cell research**

A new future for Egypt





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Poisonous seeds

FOR MOST Australians, the European Constitution is a boring subject of conversation. A long way from Schapelle Corby, Cornelia Rau, or even the proposed industrial relations legislation. But for those with a feel for European or Australian history, the rejection of the constitution in France and the Netherlands is deeply concerning.

The constitution carries forward a project born out of the great wars of the 20th century. In these many Australians also died. The founders of the project proposed an ideal of cultural and economic union in Europe, hoping this would mute the national rivalries and hostilities which fed catastrophic wars. In the referenda, national antipathies to immigrants, asylum seekers and communities that were ethnically or religiously distinctive, proved stronger than the vision of unity.

Most financial and political leaders in Europe had supported the constitution. They believed that it would extend the reach of economic globalisation. Yet the philosophy that underpins economic globalisation also provokes the kind of popular rejection of cultural accommodation that we have seen in France and the Netherlands.

Economic theory offers us the image of self-reliant individuals who compete in order to advance themselves. The success of the system is measured by increased individual wealth and national economic growth. In this image, groups which offer support to individuals in their economic welfare and advocate policies that minimise competition or criticise government policy have no place. They stand between the government or the corporation and the individual. In an ideal world, national boundaries that protect citizens from foreign competition would also be abolished.

At the core of this image, however, are the seeds that will poison it. Competitive, self-reliant individuals whose overriding goal is financial advancement learn not to trust strangers. When they themselves are not winning in competition, they readily believe that strangers are competing unfairly. They develop a distaste for generous visions of unity and

of a shared good. They judge policies by the single criterion of their own self-interest and that of people like themselves.

In the short term, governments feed this suspicion in order to nourish a narrow nationalism and to direct suspicion against groups like asylum seekers, immigrant workers and the economically uncompetitive. But in the longer term, the movement strengthens a narrow and antagonistic identity, and also undercuts the trust that competition itself demands.

Morality is governed by self-interest and a crude calculus of consequences.

THE CONTRADICTION BETWEEN economic globalisation and the narrow self-interest it engenders underlies the rejection of the European Constitution. It is also evident in Australia. The government supports the project of economic globalisation by targeting groups like asylum seekers, limiting workers' protection, encouraging nationalist fervour in sporting contests and historical celebrations, and by limiting the capacity of groups to support their members or to advocate policies based on a principled public morality. These policies corrode the moral sensitivity even of the good. Many argued for the abolition of indefinite detention, for example, on the grounds that Australia no longer faced a flood of unlawful immigrants. As if the goal of border control ever justified the evil means of punishing innocent and needy people.

The result has been an increasingly sour public rhetoric, a public life without respect for truth, and the targeting of groups that are different. The Schapelle Corby trial has shown how these qualities of Australian public life are mimicked in public opinion. As in Europe, the narrow and antagonistic definition of 'Australian' reveals the poverty of economic individualism. It also discloses how economic individualism erodes the more generous moral values on which global economic co-operation finally depends. ■

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

Indigenous women's rights

Brian McCoy's review of my book, *A Fatal Conjunction*, (*Eureka Street*, December 2004) contains inaccurate and misleading assertions, which seriously misrepresent my work and my beliefs.

McCoy implies that I have been isolated from Aboriginal opinion. He ignores my statement in the preface that it was my contact with Aboriginal women which led me to write this book. McCoy implies that I have not taken account of indigenous women's research or opinions. With one exception I refer to the work and views of all the indigenous women listed by McCoy, and also, among others, Melissa Lucashenko, Lowitja O'Donoghue and Evelyn Scott. While of course there is no one indigenous voice, I only proceeded to the publication of *A Fatal Conjunction* after 'checking' the subject matter 'out' with authoritative indigenous opinion which I very much respected. I do discuss, and acknowledge, women's status and authority in traditional society, and their past and present strength.

Apparently McCoy has failed to completely understand the subject of this book. *A Fatal Conjunction* is about how, between the 1950s and 2003, judges gradually moved from a position of cultural relativism to one of appreciating indigenous women's rights as victims in cases where indigenous men charged with violent crimes against indigenous women have relied on a cultural 'defence'.

Patently, a cultural defence can only be raised if these men were, or are, living in a traditional or semi-traditional life. Hence the terms 'promised marriages', 'payback', etc., are not, as McCoy alleges, 'locating' indigenous people 'within fixed social (pre-colonial) spaces'. These are current issues arising in recent Northern Territory criminal cases, for instance the 1992 authoritative case of *Minor* on 'payback', and the 2003 case of *Jamilmira*, which concerned men's rights in 'promised marriage'.

McCoy wrongly asserts that I 'firmly locate the violence in two domains', being only indigenous society and the Western legal system. He then implies that I separate present violence 'from the multifaceted violence of colonial history'.

In making this assertion he omits considering my chapters on the terrible devastation of Aboriginal law and lore which indigenous people have suffered, and the part played by alcohol in this devastation and violence. I also quote many judicial observations to this effect.

McCoy asserts that I present indigenous society as static. He ignores my discussion of the way indigenous culture has evolved in order to meet the dreadful challenges with which it has been confronted. Or is McCoy really attempting to assert that traditional lore and law have no effect on, or meaning for, present indigenous society? If so, I do not agree with him, and indeed, as it established in the *Mabo* case, nor does the High Court.

A Fatal Conjunction is not a feminist treatise, as McCoy implies; it is about the conflict between competing internationally recognised human rights, indigenous rights and women's rights to be immune from violence.

Joan Kimm
Clayton, VIC

Right of reply

I write in response to an article on the Shop, Distributive & Allied Employees Association (SDA) Victorian Branch (*Eureka Street*, May 2005). The article is substantially based on the views of an ex-employee who left us more than two years ago, and contains serious errors of fact.

The SDA is getting on with the job of representing its members. It is campaigning with the support of organisers and delegates on public holidays, long-service leave, occupational health and safety, WorkCover and enterprise bargaining.

Recently we negotiated a new enterprise agreement with Coles and Bilo, giving members security of wage increases and working conditions for the next three years. More than 8000 employees in Victoria voted in favour of the agreement by a 90 per cent majority. Obviously they think the SDA is doing the job for them.

The article claimed poor morale amongst organisers and delegates.

Organisers heard of this article and made their own decision without my involvement, dissociating themselves from the ex-employee by voting unanimously to support me as secretary.



Eureka Street welcomes letters from our 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

At our last general meeting more than 150 delegates and members attended. The handful of disgruntled members supporting the ex-employee were given 45 minutes to raise their issues at the meeting but refused to speak. When I spoke, the overwhelming majority of members gave me a standing ovation and voted to support the elected officers of the branch, approximately 150 in favour and three votes against. This shows that the overwhelming majority of members reject the negativity portrayed in your article.

The article claims that I support the view that 'men lead, women follow'. This is false. Since I became secretary the number of women organisers has increased from only 30 per cent to over 50 per cent. The majority of state councillors (the committee of management of the branch) are women—nine out of 15. The president and two vice-presidents are women. Since I have become state secretary a woman now holds the position of administration manager for the first time. A woman now holds the position of senior organiser for the first time. The state branch now has a woman as trainer of our delegates and occupational health and safety representatives.

The article implies that the SDA uses Australian Workplace Agreements or Kennett contracts. This is false. The SDA does not and never has used Australian Workplace Agreements or Kennett contracts.

The article claims that the SDA shut down the Women's Bureau. This is false. The SDA has adopted the most up-to-date approach of the International Labor Organisation to equity issues called 'gender mainstreaming'.

Consistent with the ILO approach of retaining a focal point for gender issues while moving to gender mainstreaming,

we continue to have a specialist person in equity and family issues.

The article claimed we have abolished a counselling service for staff and members. This claim is false. We continue to offer the ITIM counselling service for staff and members as we have for many years.

The claim that we have abolished free self-defence courses is also false. We continue to offer free self-defence courses for women members and also for men.

The article claimed we have a high turnover of staff. This claim is false. Seventy per cent of the organisers with the branch have in excess of three years' service as employees and many have a much longer involvement with the SDA as they were previously delegates. Staff would not stay with us if morale was as low as the author claims.

The SDA is getting on with the job of representing our members. The elected officers have the overwhelming support of organisers, state councillors, and delegates and members.

It is disappointing that a completely inaccurate picture of the SDA was painted in the article published.

Michael Donovan
State Secretary, SDA
Southbank, VIC

The place of icons

Recently sitting beside a sick daughter in the emergency department of a Catholic hospital and muttering *Hail Marys* under my breath, I was grateful to see a crucifix on the wall near her bed. But then I began to wonder: what is the place of religious icons in public health facilities? Would I, a practising Roman Catholic, have been equally pleased to see an image of the Hindu God Ganesh? And how would a Muslim, a Jew or a committed atheist feel about the crucifix?

I don't know the answers to these questions, and have had few conversations that might shed light. What I have learned is that we are all individuals. Knowledge of a person's religion does not necessarily predict their attitude towards public display of the icons of another. And the recent experience in France has shown how widely disparate can be the responses to a blanket ban.

The hospital publicly espouses values of compassion, respect for human dignity

and excellence. They mean it. The sense of commitment is palpable, and fidelity to the Gospel explicit. And yet I remain troubled. Australia is a multicultural society, in which Indigenous Australians, immigrants and settlers from many nations, refugees and asylum seekers all endeavour to make a life for themselves and their families. Access to health care is a basic human right. The hospital receives public funding to provide health care to all who need it.

My daughter is now well and has since started working at the hospital. I have every reason to be grateful to the hospital and staff for their dedication and expertise in the care of the sick.

But I worry about that crucifix.

Professor Tim Usherwood
Warrimoo, NSW

*Academic Centre St Mary's College
and Newman College, University of
Melbourne*

*Public Lecture
Creative reconciliation: Aboriginal
histories, empathy and artistic imagination*

*Dr Donna Leslie, of the Kamileroi people
of NSW, is the first Indigenous Australian
woman to be awarded a PhD from The
University of Melbourne. She is also
a talented artist with a distinguished
exhibition record, and hold professional
qualifications in both teaching and art
curatorship.*

*Dr Leslie will discuss the ways in which
the artistic imagination may contribute
to cross-cultural understanding and
how individual creative approaches help
towards reconciling history.*

*Wednesday 27th July
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St Mary's College and Newman College
Academic Centre*

*887 Swanston Street, Parkville
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College Chapel
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information on 03 9342 1614 or via email
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Like water on rock

Eureka Street is delighted to extend our congratulations to Tony Kevin, author of *A Certain Maritime Incident: The Sinking of the SIEV X* (see review p47).

Tony was awarded the Community Relations Award in the NSW Premier's Literary Awards at the recent Sydney Writers' Festival.

The award is long-overdue public recognition for the great service Tony has done the Australian community, through his persistent investigation and reporting of the sinking of the Indonesian fishing vessel off the Australian coast on 19 October 2001. Some 353 people seeking asylum in Australia were drowned as a result. Tony has fought, and continues to fight, for a full public disclosure as to the role of the Australian government in this human disaster; a role largely ignored by the Australian public and long denied by our bureaucracy.

In accepting the award from NSW Premier Bob Carr, Tony was quick to place the associated publicity and recognition in the context of those who lost their lives, and the continuing search for the truth behind what really happened.

'It is about keeping the issue of SIEV X alive, which some powerful forces in Australian government would dearly love to see buried and forgotten.

'Most of all, this award is an honour to the dignity and courage of the people who died and of the people who mourn them. It is also a recognition of the investigative work that I and others have done, to try to bring what I believe was a great crime against humanity to justice. That crusade is not over yet, it is in process, but this award is a very important stepping stone on the road.

'One day a whistleblower will come forward from within the national security system, and we will then know how much of my book is true and how much of it is false.'

Tony Kevin has written of the sinking of the SIEV X, and the continuing investigation, for *Eureka Street* in October 2002, October 2003 and July–August 2004.

Book business

READING THE SYDNEY WRITERS' FESTIVAL

Forget the crowds, the performances, the T-shirts, the book bags; forget the misnomer 'writers' festival'. The business of festivals is business. In restaurants and hotel rooms publishers and agents strike deals and, like models draped across the bonnets at a car show, writers are hired to make books the sexiest commodities going.

This is why, on arriving at Sydney's Walsh Bay to cover the seventh annual Sydney Writers' Festival in May, I headed straight for the bookshop. And there was more to the story. This year Gleebooks, Sydney's esteemed independent bookseller, had the sole franchise. They used to share it with the Dymocks chain, but there was dissatisfaction with that arrangement and the little guys bagged the contract.

The first morning they were just getting started. Piles of crisp new volumes were set out on tables in neat alphabetical order. I approached one of the assistants. Yes, it had been a job, she said, tendering, setting up shops (they'd be wherever the writers were), and, yes, their hopes of sales were high. Some big names were featuring: Alice Sebold, Jodi Picoult, as well as our own Helen Garner.

Having paid my respects to commerce, I left to enjoy the festival. My first job had been to find it. Two-hundred-and-forty writers were performing, in places as far as Byron Bay, Katoomba in the Blue Mountains, Parramatta in Sydney's outer west and Cabramatta farther south. Wollongong got a look-in too. In Sydney's centre, events were at the Town Hall, the Opera House, and the InterContinental Sydney. Most of the action, though, was at Walsh Bay, a ten-minute stroll from Circular Quay. It proved a glorious location. Clear skies, dazzling harbour—Sydney at its sundrenched, hedonistic best.

Yet some very serious people were on the program, the keynote speaker being Lewis Lapham, whose *Harper's Magazine* column, discharged in his blistering, Savonarolan invective, I live for every month. There was Jared Diamond, promoting his latest book, *Collapse*, and Tariq Ali on the two lethal fundamentalisms—enough on the parlous state of the world to entice even a Cassandra like me. And these aside, Gillian Slovo was a guest.

Her novel *Ice Road* was one of my best reads of late, so I focused on stalking Slovo and chasing Lapham.

The question on everyone's lips these days is: does Slovo's kind of novel sell? A writer friend recently announced with a mordant laugh that literary fiction was dead. As it so happened that there was a panel on the subject, with Hachette Livre Australia's Lisa Highton, Judith Curr of the US-based Atria imprint, Iris Tupholm from HarperCollins Canada, and Text's Michael Heyward. All three women publishers waxed lyrical on the health of the industry, with a future rosier still. Only Heyward, it seemed, hadn't been thoroughly deluded by his own marketing hype. I was impressed by his honesty, his resolve to keep producing fine books, and his challenge to the rest of our 'underdeveloped' industry to encourage thought-provoking writers before books get so dumbed-down that there won't be much point in reading at all.

There was more in the sessions where I caught Slovo, who measured her words on politics as the stuff of fiction. 'Politics is life,' she observed, and couldn't imagine writing without it. She discussed the influences on *Ice Road*, from Tolstoy to Serge Leone, the former because his Natasha had been the inspiration for her heroine, the latter because he was planning to make a film on the siege of Leningrad when he died. In *Ice Road* she's tackled his subject, an epic rendition, yet handled with such mastery that I was delighted to hear her say that, rather than being a drag on her writing, motherhood had deepened it and given her the courage required for it.

But still I hadn't managed to catch Lewis Lapham. My last chance was Sunday, where he was scheduled to speak in Parramatta. I caught the rivercat, and to make sure of a seat arrived many minutes early, waiting in the courtyard of the plush Riverside Theatre. To my surprise, not many others came. It was only when the session kicked off that I learned that Lapham had already left for New York. But political economist Susan George was riveting on the world's wealth imbalance and the certain disaster it spelled. Though her outlook was grim—'nature is not going to give us the time we need'—she was determined, and cautiously hopeful.

The festival wrapped up and I talked to Gleebooks to get an idea of the sales. It was too early for an exact tally but the concession was lucrative as expected, and

the month's
traffic



they were ecstatic over not having run out of many books—the perpetual hazard of festival bookselling. Who were the sellers? 'The writers who moved people,' I was told. *Hana's Suitcase*, for one, a Canadian book on the Holocaust; Sam Wagan Watson's poetry volume *Smoke Encrypted Whispers*, winner of the NSW Premier's Prize, another. Both David Suzuki and Tariq Ali sold well. And Gillian Slovo? 'Yes, she did very well, *Ice Road* did very well.' A good sign, perhaps, for the serious literary novel. Like Susan George, I live in hope.

—Sara Dowse

Electoral discontent in Italy

THE VIEW FROM PALLERMO

The United States looks likely to lose its highest-profile supporter in 'old Europe' when Italy holds its general election next year. Italians revealed the extent of their disillusionment with Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi during regional elections held in 13 of Italy's 20 regions on April 3 and 4. Berlusconi's four-party conservative coalition was soundly defeated, losing six of the eight regions it previously held. The depth of concern was also displayed by strong voter turnout despite the elections coinciding with the Pope's death.

Apart from a lukewarm economy and the general realisation that success at running a business doesn't automatically make for success at running a country, discontent was focused on a few specific areas. The most prominent of these was the extent of Berlusconi's media ownership and his continued manoeuvring to further increase his powers.

There was widespread concern over the proposal to repeal the *par condicio* law that guarantees equal media time to the main political parties. Berlusconi owns five of the seven main television channels, and also arguably controls the state-run RAI. His attempt to repeal the *par condicio* law was rightly viewed as an attempt to grant his media empire even greater power.

Other blatant attempts to model himself as a modern-day Caesar Augustus include proposals to increase the powers of the prime minister at the expense of the president, and to reduce the powers and freedom of public prosecution and the constitutional court.

Also troubling the great majority of Italians was Italy's involvement in Iraq. A belated decision by Berlusconi to begin reducing troop numbers there was seen as a grudging attempt to appease public demand. In addition there was general embarrassment at Berlusconi's performance during Italy's tenure as chair of the EU. His numerous diplomatic fumbles caused some friction within the EU, and while they probably did no lasting damage to Italy's international reputation, they certainly damaged Berlusconi's reputation across Europe and within Italy.

Regardless of one's political persuasion, the results of these elections are an encouraging example of a democracy protecting its institutions and resisting the consolidation of too much power in any one individual. There was even widespread disapproval of a proposed tax cut at a time when Italy, with its huge budget deficit, could clearly not afford it. Even the usually safe conservative region of Lazio, the region that includes Rome, rejected this Berlusconi bribe.

I VIEWED THESE ELECTIONS far from Rome, among the rugged beauty and decaying grandeur of Sicily. Isolated from mainland Italy by the Straits of Messina and a history of economic hardship, Sicily is one of the five regions with limited autonomy that did not vote in the regional elections.

The Sicilian capital Palermo forms the bottom point of the starkest geometric display of wealth distribution imaginable. From Milan, with close to the highest per capita income in the world, average income decreases dramatically all the way down through Italy, along a straight line to Palermo. The quality of urban infrastructure seems to suffer an even steeper decline.

The economic divide between Sicily and northern Italy is immediately apparent. Most noticeable is the chaos (especially the traffic) and the urban decay: terrible roads, crumbling buildings, very few parks or gardens, and the poor state or complete absence of the usual social amenities such as sporting facilities and libraries.

As a tourist destination Sicily is very

much the 'authentic experience'. There are no road rules of any sort—well, it appears that way—and not much by way of road signs, public transport or English-speaking locals to offer directions. But neither are there brash American tourists wearing matching tracksuits. The adventurous traveller will eventually discover well preserved ancient Greek temples, beautiful beaches, perhaps the best (and cheapest) food and coffee in Italy, and many scenes of daily life that you would not think still existed.

Assuming you survive, just one visit to Sicily will give you enough traffic anecdotes to last a lifetime. On a recent visit while speeding along a narrow street in Palermo late one evening, I was passed by a car travelling at Schumacher speed. In this case I was overtaken by a shiny new Fiat Uno entirely filled with goats. I counted five, in addition to the arms of what appeared to be a human driver.

Sicily has been occupied almost continuously for more than 2000 years by an incredible diversity of foreign rulers. Beginning with the Carthaginians and Corinthians, these occupations have left the island with a remarkable architectural legacy, from the ancient city of Syracuse—home of Archimedes—to Agrigento's Valley of the Temples and Palermo's fascinating Roman, Norman and Arabic structures. There are also many relatively uncrowded beaches, such as the jet-setters' haven, Taormina—a beautiful seaside resort, with a Greek amphitheatre and view of Mount Etna—and my favourite, the charming coastal town of Cefalu.

That Sicily has so much natural and historical beauty makes it all the more frustrating. So much potential lost in such a chaotic mess. It appears that the only thing Sicily has ever managed to organise is its crime. What seems like comical disarray to the unhurried tourist are signs of a dysfunctional government that has been a black hole for both local taxpayer and national government funds for several decades. The extensive Sicilian diaspora in Australia, the US and other parts of Italy and Europe is a telling indication of high unemployment and a worsening economic situation.

The overwhelming cause of this economic depression and poor infrastructure is the pervasive power of the Mafia. Billions of lire and euros have disappeared as Mafia-controlled contractors have built substandard concrete apartment blocks

at inflated prices. Large, bland apartment blocks ring almost every town and city, while their grand historic centres decay, and basic facilities like hospitals remain in a state of disrepair for want of funding.

The Mafia has deliberately taken a lower-profile approach in Sicily over the past decade, but its continuing power is been widely reported. It is so pervasive, in fact, that much of the reporting has been done outside of Italy.

Also well documented is the role the US played in the resuscitation of the Mafia after Mussolini had virtually wiped it out. (Perhaps the only good thing about the fascist dictator was his willingness and ability to tackle crime.) Faced with the prospect of the communists' ascension following the power vacuum at the end of World War II, the US government supported former Mafia bosses in politics, beginning the long dominance of the Christian Democrat/Mafia alliance.

HOME TO JUST UNDER ten per cent of Italy's population, Sicily votes like a special-interest group, exerting a significant influence on the outcome of the national election. Politics, and football, arouse strong passions on this island. It's a safe bet that the argument between the short, sturdy men gesticulating like crazy in some bar is about one of the two. But while vocal arguments between communists and neo-fascists may make the headlines, Sicily votes in a pragmatic way.

'Pragmatic' at election time generally means voting for the party that promises to create the most jobs and to redistribute the most funds from the north. From this point of view Berlusconi has been a disappointment. Employment continues to decline, and Berlusconi has further angered the south with plans to devolve power to the regions, in particular the north, lessening the north-to-south subsidy. And even Sicilians, usually focused on their own economic plight, are concerned about media concentration and Iraq. Losing the support of Sicily would surely be the nail in Berlusconi's coffin.

Drinking great coffee at a Sicilian bar that typically saw its last coat of paint before I was born, I view it as belated justice that this island could have the final say in ousting one of the US's greatest supporters from Berlusconi's somewhat tarnished office. Nothing will change for the people here. Unemployment will continue

to drive the exodus of the young and educated, and Sicily will remain frustratingly far from becoming the island paradise it could be. But the stand against Berlusconi consolidating too much power is at least one step in the right direction.

—Peter Hartnett

Israel's nuclear whistleblower

OUT OF JAIL BUT NOT FREE

Soldiers know it as the thousand-yard stare—that intense, unconscious focus on the horizon. Mordechai Vanunu has suffered for peace, not war. But he has the haunted, bleak look nonetheless, the product of 18 years in an Israeli jail; 11 of those in solitary confinement.

Vanunu, the former nuclear technician—released in April 2004—was reviled by Israeli extremists as a traitor for revealing that country's nuclear weapons program. There have been death threats. Presumably they were symbolic, for it is simple to meet the man.

His home since release has been St George's Anglican Cathedral in East Jerusalem, an island of English architecture on occupied Palestinian land. We walk through the main gate, across the courtyard to the pilgrims' hostel and ask at reception.

'Vanunu? He's in room three. Just knock.' We don't even need to do that. He comes out to see us as we approach.

If he hesitates to answer our questions, it is only for a moment. As part of his conditions of release, Vanunu is barred from speaking to foreign journalists. He refuses, however, to be silenced, maintaining that he is only saying what he has already told the world. He has no new secrets to spill.

'I'm not allowed to leave the country for one year. I'm here under instruction not to meet foreigners, not to travel freely, but I'm speaking to foreigners, giving interviews.

'For that reason they charge me now in court for not respecting the restrictions. If they let me go I will leave; if not, they can give me another year to stay. I will stay here as long as should be. It's much better to stay here in St George. I'm in Jerusalem, I'm on Palestinian land.'

Shortly after our visit, Vanunu is told he has to remain in Israel for another year.

continued on page 10



Sacred ground

ONE HUNDRED AND NINE YEARS is a long time in football; no really, it is. A Carlton supporter in the Australian Football League, I learned long ago not to expect sympathy. But on 21 May at Princes Park I witnessed—was part of—an act of collective grieving. The occasion: the last game of football at the ground, which has been home to one of the foundational teams of the league since 1897. The AFL, without a trace of irony, had chosen Round 9—Community Weekend—as the moment to lower the curtain on this, the last of Melbourne's 'village ovals' used for competition fixtures. Coverage the following day of Geelong locals celebrating an avalanche of their team's final-quarter goals from the sunny terraces of their new grandstand at Kardinia Park—with its capacity of just over 20,000—had me coveting my neighbours' parochial suburban sporting cauldron.

What struck me most on that melancholy Saturday afternoon, as 30,000 Carlton faithful and 52 brave Melbourne fans watched the inevitable unfold (Carlton lost to Melbourne by three goals), was the pastoral function of ritual. This comes as no surprise to a cleric, but it's always fascinating to see how others do it—a sort of professional curiosity.

The key liturgical elements were all there: preparation of the space (the 50m arc had a fresh line of paint); gathering the people (Gate 1 opened at 8am for those with an acute sense of the tragic—I, of course, arrived much later, at 9.50am); an order of service (a collector's edition of the footy *Record*); storytelling (the club's 16 premiership cups and flags, including the trophy from the 1945 Grand Final played at the ground, were paraded, and past players made the objects of hagiography, if not eulogy); singing (defiant strains of *We Are the Navy Blues*—normally reserved for victory celebrations—rose around the ground during the last quarter despite the score); and oh yes, there was a wake (getting to the bar in the Social Club afterwards required more skill and sheer physical presence than had been demonstrated by several of the Carlton players earlier in the day).

Perhaps the AFL was more prescient than cynical in its timing, for there was a coming together after the match that was—as Bruce McAvaney might have said, were he commentating—'special'. In addition to the usual race to the centre circle after the second siren, and the dangerously congested kick-to-kick exhibition which follows on soon after as kids and their dads wander onto the playing surface, a spontaneous act of reverence took place. Several thousand spectators collected in the middle of the ground—filling much of the centre square area—not quite hugging, but pressed together for mutual comfort. Some stood staring silently straight up into the thin, late autumnal evening sky, as though acknowledging an element of transcendence in what some people think is only a game.

I know that Christians have no abiding city, but the incarnation suggests that particular times and places matter, as, in a sacramental view of the world, do all the sights, sounds, and smells savoured longingly one last time. Pushing tearfully through the turnstiles I appreciated the salty self-indulgence of Lot's wife. And if lukewarmness about the 'postmodern anywhere' of the Docklands stadium as a new home ground represents a lapse of catholicity, then I happily acknowledge that there's a little Congregational revivalist in all of us! ■

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



Light years ahead

IT SOUNDS LIKE a scene straight out of Hogwarts. In the early '80s Australian organic chemist Andrew Holmes and his researchers at Cambridge University were endeavouring to make the active molecule of the venom of the South American poison arrow frog. They produced an intermediate molecule that spontaneously joined together into a polymer, a sticky mess of plastic. They studied it, the result being a light-emitting plastic that looks to be the basis for new-generation, energy-efficient, spray-on, flat-panel displays.

Holmes is now back in Australia, one of the star recruits for the \$100 million Bio21 Molecular Science and Biotechnology Institute which opened in Melbourne in June. Through this and several other projects, he has come to understand the value of a multidisciplinary approach, reflecting precisely the aim of the institute.

The story of the light-emitting plastics is a classic example of multidisciplinary collaboration. It was by chance that Holmes did not consign his sticky chemical failure to the laboratory waste. He happened to discuss his experience in the tearoom with a colleague from another field, a distinguished professor of physical chemistry. You ought to follow that polymer up, his colleague said. Those sorts of compounds have interesting properties to do with light. Holmes ended up talking with physicist Dr Richard Friend, who had become interested in the emerging field of the electrical properties of plastics. Thus began the first ever collaboration between physics and chemistry at Cambridge.

The multidisciplinary experience was such a success that Holmes has been seeking such projects ever since. He has come to the Bio21 Institute with an open mind. 'There are world-class researchers in the biosciences in this area. I want to see what they think.' He is already talking to institute colleagues such as Philip Batterham, who is investigating the genetic basis of resistance and behaviour in insects, and Malcolm McConville, who is studying the molecular basis of diseases such as leishmaniasis and tuberculosis with a view to disrupting them.

Not that Holmes is devoid of ideas of his own. He wants to continue working on the electronic activity of plastics. In particular, he is interested in using plastics to generate solar electricity. The argument is simple. If you can pump electricity into plastics and stimulate them to emit light, what about reversing the process—pumping light into receptive plastics and producing electricity?

Holmes and his new colleagues are working in an environment purpose-built for collaboration designed, for instance, so that people continually meet each other in the tearooms and corridors, the lifts and common atrium. They all have access to the latest and best molecular analysis equipment for pursuing biotechnology. Fifteen per cent of the laboratory space has been put aside for visiting scientists, to foster worldwide collaboration. Attached to the institute is an incubator for biotechnology start-up companies. It already houses three businesses, with space for another 12.

Holmes is also well aware of the challenges of collaboration. 'You must passionately believe that there is better value in working together than in individual rewards.' Perhaps more than any other event, the opening of this institute symbolises the beginning of a new era in Australian science. ■

Tim Thwaites is a freelance writer.

Now he cannot speak about nuclear weapons at all, even about information that has already been published. What's more, he is barred from the West Bank.

Vanunu, a Jew of Moroccan background, first told his story to *The Sunday Times* in London in 1986. He was subsequently lured to Rome by Israeli secret service operatives and kidnapped to Israel.

Israel is the world's sixth most powerful nuclear state (after the US, Britain, China, France and Russia), with a stockpile of 100–200 nuclear weapons. While the US demands that first Iraq, and now Iran and North Korea, abandon real or imagined nuclear weapons programs, it is silent on Israel's.

This makes Vanunu all the more certain his actions were justified, despite the personal cost. 'The world has been changed. Nuclear weapons have been destroyed in many states. I paid a lot not because my act was not good; I paid because this government was not prepared to respect such an act. I hope they will give up and let me go and live my life.

'All that the Arabs are demanding is that Israel follows international law to give rights to the Palestinians; their land, to solve the refugee problem, to end occupation in Palestine, Syria. There is no [Arab] state that wants to use the atomic bomb. Only Israel has the atomic bomb.'

He is adamantly opposed to the wall that Israel is building through the West Bank. 'It is destroying any hope for peace. The wall divides cities, families, taking land from Palestinians. Some cities are surrounded by the wall and it's like they are in prison. People cannot work their farm, their land, so the wall takes more land from the Palestinians.

'The new generation [of Israelis] are much more right wing; they don't want peace and they don't believe in peace. So the Palestinians continue to suffer and live under occupation and in refugee camps.'

A day or so later we see him walk past our café, opposite the Damascus Gate. His eyes are fixed on the horizon, a horizon the Israelis seem determined not to let him reach.

—David Glanz and Judy McVey

This month's contributors: **Sara Dowse** is a Sydney novelist; **Peter Hartnett** is an investment banker with a social conscience; **David Glanz** is a writer and **Judy McVey** is a member of the Moreland Peace Group.



Basic necessities

IT IS COMMON KNOWLEDGE that the Dunny School of Philosophy owes little to the medieval philosopher Duns Scotus. Less well known is its debt to his more famous contemporary, William ('No more things should be presumed to exist than are absolutely necessary') of Ockham, the inventor of the razor. Allow me to demonstrate by means of anecdote and inventive memory.

As a very junior teacher in the bush years ago, I led an enviably simple life. I would teach English to Forms 2G and 3H and other amiable bottom feeders, practise cricket or football, and play on Saturday afternoons. During what used to be that hiatus between the two seasons—after we'd missed the finals as usual and before the season's first cricket match—I would participate fully in weekend cultural activities.

These involved getting up about ten on Saturday morning, studying the racing form over the kind of large, eggy, fatty and greasy breakfast that, in later years, marriage would cancel out in favour of muesli, getting some bets on with the SP (this being in the exciting days before the TAB), and arriving at the pub about midday for a few heart-starters and a counter lunch. In the evening, of course, it would be off to the opera or a chamber music concert. Or possibly the local dance.

While enjoying this routine one October Saturday, I had occasion to go to the toilet, as you do. There were two other blokes in there: one, a hefty local farmer in check shirt and overalls, with his chewed-up, sweaty hat firmly planted on his head; the other, a very young man, propped in the angle made by two of the walls, being, how shall I put it, comprehensively sick, heaving his heart out. It took no insight whatsoever to infer that he was a neophyte drinker whom peer pressures had brought to temporary ruin.

As the farmer and I completed our toiletries, he turned to me, nodded towards the regurgitating young man, and said in tones of studied reasonableness: 'I dunno—these young bastards. They're always out and about without a hat and so the sun, beatin' down *mercilessly* on the head, makes 'em sick. Whaddya reckon?'

A saturnine flicker crossed his rugged features as he said these last words and I nodded with equally ambiguous agreement. Then, our fleeting communication concluded, we rejoined all the other ironists in the bar, leaving the young man to the ravages of sunstroke.

Many years later and a thousand or so kilometres south-west, I was camped on an isolated estuary near the western end of Kangaroo Island with three other reprobate philosophers, dedicated to catching whatever fish navigated those wild waters. It was a Saturday morning. A hesitant patter of rain had started

before dawn and by nine o'clock it had set in. At ten, one of the blokes observed, with the kind of prescience that defies analysis, 'Well, they're open.' So we set off for the pub at Parndarna.

The rain, coming in from the south-west, had just reached Parndarna when we arrived around lunchtime, and the bar was filling up with young men in whites (this was November—early cricket season) and much older men in the uniform of the bowling club. There would clearly be no bowling or cricket that day. Well, we played pool, drank beer, told lies to the locals about the fish we'd caught, and so on. At a certain point, *I went to the toilet*, as you do. There was one other bloke in there—a bowling club elder of maybe 70 hard summers.

'Rain's set in,' I said to him, with the sort of brilliant small talk for which I am justly known.

'Where'd you come up from?' he said.

'Right down near Cape De Couedec,' I said.

'Yeah, well you woulda got it early down there. Thing is, I live just a few miles out. I could see it blowin' up. The missus was still in bed. So I went like a cut cat to get ready, y'see. "What's the weather like?" she says "Not looking too good is it?" "No," I says, "It's finin' up nicely down in the south." Actually, it looked like there was gonna be a bloody cyclone. "Better get goin'," I says, and I'm out the door before it starts rainin', y'see. I'm halfway here and Huey chucks it down, just as I expected. No bowls, but I'll have to wait in the pub, case it fines up.'

He allowed a thin smile to reveal his true opinion of this ludicrously optimistic weather forecast. As if in cosmic support, rain lashed across the galvo roof of the pub dunny.

'So I'm free, see. And I'm not goin' home till the normal time. Round six-thirty. Case it fines up late. There'll be hell to pay then, but, well, bugger it.'

We returned to the bar and rejoined all the other rain-bound escapees from domestic bliss and daily responsibility, Ockhamites every one of them, because, in line with the great man's razor, they refused to presume the existence of any more things than were absolutely necessary—like the irresponsibility of drunken youth, or the rage of neglected wives. There was just the 'merciless' sun or the convenient rain, and a glass or two. Entities should not be multiplied unnecessarily—as they would never have said. ■

Brian Matthews is a writer who also holds professorial positions at Victoria University, Melbourne, and Flinders University, Adelaide. He lives in the Clare Valley in South Australia.



GOOD OLD KIM BEAZLEY HAS NOW BEEN Leader of the Opposition again for six months. He gave a great speech after the Budget, even if he, and his advisers, made a complete mess of their tactics in opposing the Government's tax cuts. The Government has been bumbling and stumbling around, and the Opposition has had much the success that one might expect of taking advantage of it, except on immigration matters, where neither the Leader nor the Spokesman had any credibility at all. Over the winter season of party conferences, Kim has been receiving rousing applause. Nothing surprising about that. These things are choreographed—actually in the script. And anyway, he was among friends. Not necessarily among that 37 per cent or so of the Australian population with a predisposition to vote Labor, or that roughly 50 per cent who might at any time prefer Labor to the alternative, but among the ever shrinking number of people who are actually members of the Labor Party. Probably about half of the names in the party books are people who have let their membership (and their payments) lapse, people whose names have been purchased (particularly from ethnic communities) and whose subscriptions are paid by corrupt power brokers, and people who have never existed, or who now reside in graveyards.

The fraud and mismanagement of membership roles is no accident; nor is the dramatic decline in the number of members. The smaller the membership, the greater the opportunities for manipulation of numbers. A high proportion of the senior officers of the party organisation are active participants in the complete corruption of the principles of democratic control of the party. What many do, routinely, would put them in jail were they dealing with a company with shareholders, or were the machinations within political parties subject to inquiries by the fraud squad.

Just as significantly, Kim Beazley (who can afford, thanks to his backers, to be at a distance from the basest frauds) has long been a favoured son of just such manipulators, and his power base in parliament is entirely dependent on the system continuing as it does. Whenever anyone makes an allegation of fraud or corruption, you can expect that Kim Beazley will be piously hoping that it is not true, and scolding the whistleblowers for not taking up their complaints inside the secretive (and totally corrupt) internal party processes. There is no better illustration of the fact that he lacks the moral and physical fibre to be worthy of being prime minister than his refusal to face the crooked farce that is his own party.

For some, the fact that the greater proportion of those who have let their memberships lapse are people who did so in disgust and anger at his craven surrender to principle on refugee policy may ease the burden of the party's shrinking membership and national appeal. After all, some say smugly,

A crooked farce

the loss of primary votes to groups such as the Greens, with some appeal to idealism, is not such a worry; their preferences come back to Labor anyway. The 'real' direction the party must take must be away from this squeamishness about principle and core values, and towards the hip pockets and the aspirations of suburban families, they say. In believing this, they completely ignore the fact that the party no longer sends any sort of positive messages to its primary constituencies, and by itself is not regenerating with the energy and ideas, let alone the ideas, of young people or people who see politics as leading to some sort of light on the hill.

IN PLACE OF A MEMBERSHIP base feeding, and debating ideas, the Labor machine is increasingly substituting focus groups and advertising agencies to tell it what people really think and what clever, but generally meaningless, slogans might appeal. The party's left, which used to generate most of the ideas, is now the most reactionary—and in some states, the most corrupt—section of the party; the right, which once tempered the more silly ideas with pragmatism and a better understanding of how things worked, has become little more than a Tammany Hall sharing out, to its most loyal (but personally unelectable) followers the spoils of office at state government levels. Pity about the federal party, but if the price of the plush chairs from state government patronage is its failure, it seems, to them, a price worth paying.

That there is corruption aplenty in other political parties, or that some other parties themselves have membership bases so small that they too are extremely susceptible to manipulation, is neither here nor there. The corruption in Labor is in a class of its own, and, particularly given Labor's Caucus system, is the more easily able to infect the party at every level. The Liberal Party organisation, to take another example of a party whose processes are corrupted, simply cannot control the activities of members or force policy on the party in the way Labor's organisation and shenanigans can. With Labor, the fear is that the cancer which is killing its membership, and the machinations which are strangling its processes, must inevitably affect and infect everything the party does. Why should we expect that a party leader, too weak and complaisant to interfere with knavishness in his party, will prevent it in the exercise of power in office?

Some might think these purely party matters. In fact, it ought to concern everyone, given that the party, despite its best current endeavours, is the alternative party of government. Particularly while Beazley is there, it will not slide into government because of the Government's shortcomings. ■

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

Voyelles

Arthur Rimbaud

A black, E white, I red, U green, O blue: vowels,
I will tell some day of your latent births:
A, hairy black corset of blazing flies that buzz
around fetid, cruel smells,

Engulfed in shadow; E, whiteness of vapours and tents,
Lances of haughty glaciers, white kings, shivers of umbels;
I, purples, spat blood, laugh of lips beautiful
With anger or the drunkenness of penitents.

U, pulses, divine shimmerings of viridian seas,
Peace of pastures scattered with animals, peace of wrinkles
Alchemically imprinted on vast studious brows;

O, supreme war Trumpet full of weird shrill noises,
Silences traversed by Worlds and Angels:
– O the Omega, the violet ray of His Eyes.

trans **John Kinsella**

Suffer the children

The children of Niger are the innocent victims of religious fanaticism

IN THE CENTRE OF NIAMEY—the capital of Niger, one of the poorest countries on earth—stands a lavish monument to the global reach of Islam. The Great Mosque of Niamey casts long shadows over the surrounding squalor. Its pencil-thin, aspirational minaret, cavernous prayer hall and enormous green dome tower above the rubbish and depressing low-slung houses, where single rooms are home to entire families. The mosque cost around A\$1.25 million to build in a country where more than 60 per cent of the population lives on less than US\$1 per day.

Each time I have visited Niamey, the mosque has always stood empty, as if it belongs to another place, an edifice somehow transported here from a world where money doesn't matter. This substitute for much-needed infrastructure, and reassertion of Islamic credentials, was an act of appeasement by a bankrupt government as desperate to survive as its people. This myopic gesture carried with it echoes of Madame Diiori, wife of former President Hamani Diiori. She was known among the whisperers on Niamey's streets as 'l'Autrichienne' (the Austrian) after Marie Antoinette's famous pronouncement: 'Let them eat cake'. Her husband's sorry government—which had led Niger since independence in 1960—fell in April 1974, after it was discovered that food aid sent to relieve the great famines of the 1970s had been hoarded in the homes of government ministers. The Diiori government stole its people's dreams of an independent Africa.

The closer you get to the border with Nigeria, the more obvious the growing separation between governments (and local manifestations of Islam) and the needs of the people they claim to serve.

Maradi is Niger's third-largest city. Hard up against the Nigerian border and surrounded by enormous sand quarries, which produce clouds of lung-choking sand, Maradi has a reputation for being a politically active and restive city. Its predominantly Hausa merchant classes are the most vocal in Niger, and protests against government policies or unpaid wages invariably start here. It is a transit town. Nigeria is a few short kilometres away and everyone appears to be involved in some form of cross-border trade.

Maradi's sprawling markets straddle the main highway which passes south to Nigeria. The markets, which spread out from the clamorous bus station and are almost invariably awash with people, are surrounded by trucks unloading cargo in a great din of horns and shouts and diesel fumes. Everything is for sale here, from fresh produce to cigarettes and cheap designer clothes, from smuggled petrol to guns.

The only time when the markets and adjacent bus station are not in uproar is during prayer times, when the mosques fill and the streets fall eerily quiet.

The first time I visited Maradi, I met Mona, a sad Lebanese woman. She had just opened a hotel. She avoided my questions as to why she was so far from home, saying simply that this was now home, as West Africa is for so many Lebanese. Beirut was a 30-year-old memory, reincarnated in her hotel with touches of flair and style from a city of grace that no longer exists. Her husband had died the year previously. As she said this, a shadow passed across her face. She clearly did not belong here and knew

it, but was weary of it all and planned to stay anyway. A motherly woman, with only Maradi for company, she smiled benignly at me and her staff with the air of someone resigned to keeping alive a sense of hospitality as her last effort at connection with people.

In the intervening years, protesters had gone on a rampage, heeding the call of conservative Muslim clerics

who denounced as un-Islamic an international fashion festival being held in Niamey. Mobs of fundamentalist thugs roamed the streets targeting businesses rumoured to be engaged in un-Islamic practices. The imams called on men to stone women who were dressed inappropriately. Bars, restaurants and hotels were torched or, if they were lucky, forced to close under threat of arson.

WHEN I RETURNED TO MARADI, two years after meeting Mona, much had changed. Mona was gone. Her hotel, her modest dream, lay abandoned, stripped of every last tastefully furnished detail. Outside what had once been her gate, the footpath was black, the still visible scar of Maradi's night of fire when the mobs came, set fire to the street and demanded that she leave. I asked neighbours and passers-by if anyone knew what had happened to her, this foreigner who had made Maradi her home. Nobody could tell me and nobody seemed to care. Each one cut short the conversation and hurried away.

All around me, pious men walked the streets, parading their dishonourable, grim asceticism, their anger and their disapproval; their simplistic scholarship masquerading as one of the world's great religions. With deeply conservative clerics finding a ready audience in these men of Maradi, there had been a flurry of calls for the Niger Government to introduce sharia law.

A cancer of intolerance had taken root. Days after I visited, a woman was to be stoned for adultery in nearby Sokoto, just across the border in northern Nigeria. She fell foul of an

Beirut was a 30-year-old memory, reincarnated in her hotel with touches of flair and style from a city of grace that no longer exists

interpretation of sharia law which considers sex between consenting adults to be more heinous than the unequal poverty in which these people live, punishing women and allowing men to escape for want of evidence.

In Africa, or more particularly in Niger and northern Nigeria, such manifestations of local Islam's bleak and hostile public face seemed a violation of Africa's vibrancy, a reminder not so much of life as of death.

The most dangerous sequel to these pogroms and stonings in a forgotten corner of Africa came later when Muslim clerics in the northern Nigerian states of Kano, Zamfara and Kaduna declared that they would boycott a World Health Organisation (WHO) polio vaccination program. The vaccine was, they alleged, contaminated with oestrogen that could, they claimed, cause infertility. The imams asserted that the vaccine was part of a US-led conspiracy to render Muslims infertile and thereby depopulate the region.

Although tiny traces of oestrogen were found in the vaccine, they were, according to the WHO, the very same vaccines used in every country in the world. Polio, as readers will recall, is a virus that destroys functioning human nerve cells resulting in local or widespread paralysis. It is transmitted through poor sanitation and contaminated water. While the vaccine is highly effective in preventing the transmission of polio, there remains no cure. The availability of the vaccine has ensured that polio has been virtually eradicated from Western countries since the 1950s. Global use of this same vaccine has resulted in the number of polio sufferers worldwide falling from 350,000 in 125 countries in 1988, to just over 1000 people in six countries in 2003.

Undeterred, Datti Ahmed, a medical doctor and president of Nigeria's Supreme Council for Sharia Law, told the BBC in October 2003 that 'there were strong reasons to believe that the polio immunisation vaccine was contaminated with anti-fertility drugs, contaminated with certain virus that cause HIV/AIDS, contaminated with Simian virus that are likely to cause cancers.' He went on to say that reports of an American plot may appear fanciful but must be investigated.

Playing on local people's mistrust of their own public authorities and multinational pharmaceutical companies, the imams called on Muslims everywhere to resist the vaccine. (In 1996, the US drug company Pfizer was accused of using an untested vaccine for bacterial meningitis in Kano, resulting in 11 deaths. Pfizer denies the charge.)

As a result of the imams' boycott, polio again began to thrive. By 2004, the number of polio cases in Nigeria had doubled. The disease then spread, as at least ten previously polio-free countries, including Niger, were re-infected. The imams of Maradi announced their support for their brethren across the border—the same border through which illicit goods and dangerous orthodoxies, not to mention, killer diseases, pass with impunity. Some Maradi clerics argued that even if the vaccine was safe, it was un-Islamic because God's will alone ought determine whether a person lived or died.

In July 2004, new vaccines, manufactured in Muslim Indonesia, were prepared and the imams relented. But by then the damage was done and up to two thirds of the

world's polio cases are now to be found in Nigeria. Across the region, 15 million children—more than half of all polio victims are children under three—were at risk. The WHO's aim to eradicate polio worldwide by the end of 2005 was in tatters.

THAT THE DAMAGE DONE by the imams of Nigeria and Maradi remains was evident in May this year. Eleven men in Mali were sentenced to three years' jail for refusing to allow their children to be vaccinated, claiming that the vaccines would make their children infertile.

In the meantime, in the strongholds of polio and intolerance that are Maradi and northern Nigeria, the children continue to die, withering away under a harsh, repressive vision for the world which has nothing to do with the hospitality, concern for the poor and visions of paradise central to Islam. It is as if the clerics have become as divorced from the needs of their own people as the great mosques which so often lie empty. ■

Anthony Ham is a freelance writer living in Madrid and is *Eureka Street's* roving correspondent.

Up to two thirds of the world's polio cases are now to be found in Nigeria



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MISSION

One island, two nations

The common African past of both the Dominican Republic and Haiti continues to be a wound

HUMAN-RIGHTS ABUSES along the Dominican Republic border zone with Haiti have provoked a war of words in the capital 305km away between journalists and public officials who failed to visit the area to verify the events.

But Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) photographs and testimonies filtered to the public through the press and television in Santo Domingo could not be stifled by the same racist and anti-Haitian paranoia present in many aspects of Dominican politics and public opinion since its separation from Haiti in 1844.

The efforts of JRS and other groups in advocacy, communications and accompaniment on both sides of the border on this Caribbean island, seem to be the only sign of light amid the mass expulsion and repatriation of Haitians, Dominicans of Haitian descent and other Afro-Dominicans in various rural communities. Between 13 and 15 May, Dominican military and immigration officials expelled an estimated 2500 people, the majority being women and children.

Other organisations in both the Dominican Republic and Haiti, such as GARR (Repatriate and Refugee Support Group) and MOSCTHA (Haitian Workers' Socio-Cultural Movement), have also been battling hard to support the legal, social and economic rights of refugees and migrants.

The expulsions follow the machete murder of a Dominican woman on 9 May during a robbery allegedly committed by two Haitians in Hatillo Palma near the northern border. The incident provoked the rage of townsfolk, and subsequently an armed group of Dominicans used death threats to force many members of the local Haitian minority to leave their homes, which were then ransacked. The military took advantage of the situation to initiate the indiscriminate mass expulsion of Haitians under the guise of protecting them from threats by Dominicans.

Public opinion seemed to support these repatriations, fuelled by a fear that poverty-stricken Haitians are flooding the already burdened Dominican economy. But things changed when photos taken by JRS staff started appearing in the press, portraying Dominican citizens of Haitian descent being forcibly sent to the Haitian town of Wanament, where they have no family ties, or other means of support. JRS workers report that among those repatriated are people with Dominican birth certificates, adults with Dominican identity documents, Haitians with valid passports and visas, and migrants with valid work permits.

Expulsion operations are more conveniently carried out on weekends when there are fewer newspapers and less media coverage to create scandal. So it's understandable that a timely Saturday front-page story and photo revealing Dominican citizens among the repatriated Haitian masses would put a damper on military plans that weekend. The public is usually none the wiser to repatriations until Monday's newspaper is out. By then it's merely seen as a solution to the 'Haitian problem'.

Thought to be 'payback' for the murder of a Dominican woman in Hatillo Palma, a band of Dominicans entered a farm in the same town at the start of June and decapitated two Haitian farm workers with machetes, one 42, the other a 72-year-old evangelical pastor. Six other Haitians have appeared dead since the start of the conflict in other locations, but without police investigations.

The current expulsion operations reveal much about national identity and racial attitudes.



These images first appeared in the Dominican Republic's daily *El Caribe*, and were influential in putting an end to illegal expulsion operations at that time. All photos by Gianni Dalmas, JRS Dominican Republic. Used with permission.



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Dominico-Haitianos, people of Haitian descent born in the Dominican Republic, are systematically refused proof of Dominican citizenship, despite the constitutional right to citizenship to all born on Dominican soil. They are thus denied rights to medical treatment, education, legal wages and all other benefits.

Dominican leaders and politicians such as dictator Rafael Trujillo have long tried to emphasise the country's racial and cultural distance from Haiti. As a result Dominicans regard themselves as 'Hispanic', while Haitians are 'black', a distinction based on racial prejudice that ignores the African heritage of the Dominican Republic. The distinction here goes as far as regarding a person of Afro-Hispanic descent as *indio* (indigenous) even though the island's indigenous population was exterminated in less than a century after the arrival of Columbus. So *mulatos* (Afro-Hispanics) who make up the majority of the Dominican population, disappeared, to be replaced by the more socially acceptable Dominican *indio*.

As witnessed by the recent mass expulsion of Haitians, their descendents and Afro-Dominicans along the border zone, the common African past of both the Dominican Republic and Haiti continues to be a wound. And it continues to be a wound resulting from manipulation and corruption by authorities and elite groups with strong interests to defend. In the past the manipulation was the selective interpretation of historical facts to create a false Dominican nationalism, but today the manipulation is the abuse by authorities who profit from human trafficking and extortion on the border. ■

Kent Rosenthal SJ is currently studying theology in El Salvador.



The ethics and myths of stem cells

In the flurry of media reports surrounding the stem cell debate, it can be difficult to grasp exactly what the research involves. **Professor John Martin** of St Vincent's Institute of Medical Research outlines the science and the ethical implications.

THE INTEREST THAT human embryonic stem cells represent to researchers derives from the fact that they are capable of developing into virtually any cell of the body, given appropriate conditions; they are 'pluripotent'. Human embryonic stem cells can be obtained by the in vitro fertilisation (IVF) procedure. Embryonic stem cells can also be derived by removing the nucleus from a cell of a person's body and placing it inside an ovum (egg cell) provided by a donor, and from which the nucleus has been removed. This nuclear transfer procedure—somatic cell nuclear Transfer (SCNT)—has become known as 'therapeutic cloning', as the resulting cloned human embryo is almost an identical clonal replica of the human subject from whom the somatic cell nucleus was taken. Stem cells can be generated from this cloned embryo, and those cells used as the source of specialised cells, which are unlikely to be rejected as foreign if they were to be used in the individual from whom they were derived.

If, on the other hand, the manufactured embryo were to be implanted into a uterus, it would be called 'reproductive cloning'. It is this approach that was used to yield the now famous sheep Dolly. Human reproductive cloning is rejected entirely by scientists, as well as by numerous politicians, and is completely contraindicated for a number of reasons. Where legislation has been passed that permits therapeutic cloning, reproductive

cloning has been unequivocally rejected.

Obviously, these approaches to deriving embryonic stem cells involve destruction of the embryo, and it is here that the major ethical issues arise. These issues are relevant to legislation on this matter by the governments of several countries, including Australia. They relate to concerns of a broad spectrum of the community, embracing virtually all the religions, and those of no religion at all.

MOST MEDIA ATTENTION focuses on embryonic stem cells, and the urgent pressure to use them in medical treatment. The media gloss over an important distinction regarding stem cell research. One branch is embryonic stem cell research, which can only be conducted by using a developing embryo in a process that necessarily destroys it. The other is adult stem cell research, which makes use of the evidence indicating that virtually all tissues of the body contain a number of stem cells that are 'multipotent', that is, they can develop into several different types of adult cell. They can be used without the ethical constraints surrounding embryonic stem cells.

For many years it has been known that the haemopoietic stem cell (HSC) is able to generate all cell types of the blood and immune systems, and this has been put to great therapeutic use.

We know also that a primitive marrow stem cell (MSC), or blood vessel wall cells mobilised from marrow, are able to repair heart muscle after damage from infarction. Such MSCs, or vascular cells, have been injected into immune-deficient rats in which a 'heart attack' has been induced. The infarction results in heart muscle death, but the injected bone marrow stem cells successfully integrate with the affected part of the heart muscle and promote blood vessel formation and healing. In the past year, in addition to these discoveries, multipotent cells have been grown from umbilical cord vein blood, and from cells taken from the lining layer of the nose. These findings with adult stem cells provide every reason to lend strong support to research seeking their eventual application to treatments of certain human diseases. Besides, the science of adult stem cells is moving at a fast pace. There are now many examples in experimental animals that suggest that adult stem cells can be used successfully in medical treatment. Clinical trials in human subjects are being undertaken.

For all the rapid progress, there remain many questions, and much needs to be done in adult stem cell research. In the case of embryonic stem cells the problems besetting this work are so great that one must question the presumption that it is so urgently needed. The promotion attending work on human embryonic stem cells

seems to suggest that it is both essential and urgent in order to discover new treatments for previously untreatable chronic diseases. The usual list of such conditions includes diabetes, Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's, muscular dystrophies, the replacement of dead heart muscle following heart attacks, and of brain tissue following strokes. For several of these conditions there are appropriate experimental models that may be studied in animals. Yet, in no case have embryonic stem cells been shown in animal research to provide a cure that is sufficiently prolonged and free of complications to warrant human studies. This should be a minimum requirement if the urgency of work on human embryonic stem cells is to be accepted in spite of the ethical barrier.

An example is provided by a study in which human embryonic stem cells that have been converted to dopamine-producing neuronal cells were injected into the brains of immune-deficient rats subjected to a chemically induced Parkinson's disease. There were highly encouraging improvements in motility and behaviour of the animals. However, five of 19 animals developed teratomata; tumour formation being a major complication of embryonic stem cell transplantation. This approach to utilising embryonic stem cell research in the treatment of Parkinson's disease recently advanced a step further.

In experiments with monkeys, a form of Parkinson's was chemically induced, and monkey embryonic stem cells transplanted. Some symptomatic improvement was noted, but dopamine production by the cells was low, and the short observation time allowed no conclusion to be drawn about the serious possibility of tumour formation. This propensity to develop teratomas has been a feature of all the animal studies so far with embryonic stem cells.

Also, in the case of embryonic stem cells transplanted experimentally into the heart, serious abnormalities of heart rhythm occurred—a complication not encountered with adult stem cells used for the same purpose. When spinal cord injury has been experimentally induced in rodents, some partial improvement in mobility has been achieved both with adult and embryonic stem cells. In each case a major factor in this improvement has been that the transplanted cells have

influenced the formation of the protective myelin sheath around the nerve fibres. Progress with this condition, however, is likely to be very slow, and dependent upon understanding how the severed ends of nerve fibres join together appropriately. If it becomes apparent that cell therapy is needed, there is no good reason to suspect that embryonic stem cells offer an advantage over a number of alternative cell therapy approaches. Alzheimer's is a global condition of the brain and its causes are unknown. The very nature of this disease makes it virtually impossible to conceive that any form of cell therapy could be helpful. And yet Alzheimer's disease appears almost invariably in the lists of possible curable diseases that are promoted to the public.

At present there is no evidence from animal experimentation with either human or animal embryonic stem cells to justify even the most limited human trial of embryonic stem cells in therapy. Furthermore, some of the proposed cures are highly unlikely, and others are on a very long time frame. An essential requirement is that 'proof of concept' ought be provided for the efficacy of embryonic stem cells in treatment of even one of the suggested targets. The way to do this is to use animal models of disease. Any attempt so far has only illustrated major difficulties confronting the embryonic stem cell approach. If there were no other possible way of finding stem cells capable of adopting functions other than those of their tissue of origin, then perhaps the case for undertaking human embryonic stem cell research would be very much greater.

IF ONE IS ENDEAVOURING to prepare embryonic stem cells for use in medical treatment, it may make much more sense (from a purely scientific perspective) to use embryonic stem cells obtained via the SCNT process, than utilising unrelated embryonic stem cells sourced from IVF excess. The latter are much more prone to destruction by the recipient's immune system.

However, this involves the deliberate cloning of human embryos in order to achieve whatever promise is offered by embryonic stem cell research. This method of producing embryonic stem cells derived by nuclear transfer involves removing the nucleus from a cell—be

it muscle or skin—and placing it inside an ovum provided by a donor, and from which the nucleus has been removed. Although this has come to be called 'therapeutic cloning', this name is inappropriate and misleading. Human embryonic stem cells, obtained either from IVF embryos or through cloning, have never been used in treating human disease, and no trial could be planned based on present evidence.

The practical difficulties associated with using cloning as a source of cells for medical treatment are overwhelming. The earlier enthusiasm for this approach has waned substantially. The currently favoured application of cells obtained by the SCNT procedure is to use them in studying the mechanisms of specific diseases. For example, a clonal cell line could be established by transferring a somatic cell from a subject with a particular chronic and unsolved disease, into an enucleated donor egg. The molecular controls of cloned cells developed from the embryo, might then be studied during differentiation. The hope is that this approach might lead to a better understanding of the molecular mechanisms, thus providing clues to possible prevention or treatment of disease. As a result, the ethical question associated with the SCNT approach to cloning has changed. Rather than arguing for its use to provide for medical treatment, the aim would then be to undertake research that might help in understanding disease. So, should this method be used to generate embryonic stem cells that might be utilised in research into the treatment of a number of diseases?

The SCNT method is not permitted in Australia, although permission under licence can be obtained by scientists in the UK. The birth of Dolly the sheep proved that this procedure was capable of generating an embryo. Yet Dolly was the only successful embryo resulting from 277 attempts. This reproductive cloning has been carried out with other species including mice, cows and pigs. In all cases the method is highly inefficient, requiring a large number of eggs for each success, and is accompanied by a very high abnormality rate in the animals that have been born. In recent months much publicity surrounded the publication in a prestigious scientific journal of the success of Korean research group in developing cell culture lines from 11 human subjects,

using the nuclear transfer procedure. It was hailed by several commentators as a 'stunning' scientific achievement. As a scientist this author rejects this assessment—all that had been done was to repeat what had been done some years earlier in animals, with some minor technical changes to improve efficiency of what remains a very inefficient and expensive procedure. Although use of the nuclear transfer method to generate embryonic cells has been called therapeutic cloning, the name should best not be used. Such cells have never been used in clinical studies, and the practical difficulties associated with their preparation for therapeutic purposes are presently insurmountable.

THERE IS WIDESPREAD AGREEMENT that there is an ethical issue involved in experimenting on cells obtained from human embryos. Sufficient agreement, in fact, that the topic is one that receives major attention by the governments of many countries, including the UK, USA, EU and Australia. As is always the case in medicine and related research when a certain procedure requires that ethical barriers be surmounted, the more formidable the barrier, the greater must be the benefit of the proposed work. While it can be agreed that from the time of fertilisation the human embryo should be treated with respect because of what it can potentially become, it is the timing of application of that respect, and its level, that is argued. This issue presents serious ethical problems for a significant proportion of the population—to virtually all the Christian denominations and to people of the Jewish, Hindu and Muslim faiths. It is

also a view shared by people of no religious proclamation.

This ethical difficulty needs to be taken into consideration when formulating public policy. In Australia, at present, scientists can be licensed to undertake research on embryos that are maintained frozen in excess of requirements for IVF therapy, and made available with permission of the parents. That is our legislative *status quo*. It gives those interested in that research the opportunity to pursue it. The Federal Government is currently considering whether to approve the production of embryos specifically for research, using the process often referred to as therapeutic cloning.

When the UK's House of Lords' Select Committee considered this question, it concluded with a recommendation that accorded with the British Government's approval of human embryonic stem cell research, including the generation of embryos specifically for research purposes. This is something no other government had done. It is interesting that their document contains a very clear statement that '*if there were no morally serious reasons for undertaking research on human embryos, then the mere possibility that the early embryo is a person would be sufficient reason not to do such research.*' What compelling, morally serious reasons provided the House of Lords with the necessary imperative? The main stated reasons appeared to come from evidence given by people suffering from previously untreatable chronic diseases, who believed that cures might be provided from embryonic stem cell treatments.

In all branches of medicine it is man-

datory that 'proof of concept' be obtained through extensive preclinical experimentation in animal research before human studies are performed. Such proof of concept has not been obtained in any of the diseases so commonly invoked for the use of embryonic stem cells in medical treatment. Further, it is abundantly clear that much more animal experimentation is required, even to establish in the first instance that any human clinical trial would have any chance of success. If its proponents could prove, in even one experimental disease model, that transplantation with embryonic stem cells results in a prolonged cure, free from the currently expected complications (such as tumour formation), this would go some distance toward meeting the House of Lords requirement of 'morally serious reasons' for supporting embryonic stem cell research.

Just as much has been learned about the biology of development in studying mouse embryonic stem cells, it would be of great scientific interest to study developmental processes in human embryonic cells. The public arguments of scientists in favour of embryonic stem cell research have shifted significantly in the last year. The arguments have moved away from talk of cures for disease, to the pursuit of knowledge, particularly by generating embryonic cells that provide for the study of mechanisms of specific diseases. The pursuit of knowledge of nature, and of disease, from the study of human embryonic stem cells is an attractive scientific prospect. What has to be decided is whether doing this with human embryonic stem cells, on the basis of the pursuit of knowledge alone, provides sufficient good to overcome the major reservations held by a significant proportion of the community.

There is an ethical problem in dealing with human embryos in these ways and so there needs to be a very compelling case for working with them. A minimum requirement is that extensive animal experimentation must establish the validity of this approach, especially given the fact that adult stem cells have to date been superior in performance in experimental and clinical therapeutics. ■

Professor **T. John Martin** AO FAA FRs is Emeritus Professor of Medicine, University of Melbourne, and John Holt Fellow at St Vincent's Institute of Medical Research.

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Michael Farrell



The doyen of dissent

READERS OF *Harper's Magazine* are fiercely loyal. One Australian author put it to me this way: 'I will go without coffee, I will go without shoes, but not without my *Harper's* subscription.'

The independent, liberal-minded monthly journal of literature, politics and culture has been published continuously in the United States for 150 years, and is regarded, along with *The Atlantic Monthly* and *The New Yorker*, as among the best. The man who redesigned the magazine in 1984, introducing innovations such as the 'Harper's Index' (since copied by many other magazines), editor Lewis H. Lapham, delivered the keynote address at this year's Sydney Writers' Festival.

The morning after, I passed along the subscriber's compliment, and Lapham laughed appreciatively. 'We have a strong circulation renewal rate, close to 70 per cent,' he said, 'and since 9/11, in part because of the stand the magazine has taken, the newsstand circulation has gone up, not down.' (*Harper's* has about 200,000 subscribers, with another 30–50,000 in newsstand sales each month, making it 'the second dog in the race' against *The New Yorker*, which, says Lapham, has a circulation of about 800,000.)

We were on the 23rd floor of the InterContinental Hotel in a room overlooking Circular Quay. Close to here, nearly 200 years ago, unrest was growing over the repressive policies of Governor William Bligh. Eventually, an uprising known as the Rum Rebellion, led by John Macarthur and others, resulted in Bligh's recall to England. Lapham, ever alert to historical parallels, pointed out that the current publisher of *Harper's*, John R. Macarthur, is a direct descendant of the man who inspired the 1808 rebellion.

'I'm fortunate,' said Lapham. 'Macarthur is as independent-minded and courageous a publisher as can be found anywhere in New York, so he is entirely supportive of the point of view.' Here is a sample of 'the point of view', from Lapham's keynote address: 'The war on terror is a futile enterprise, like having a war on lust'; 'Ignorance is viewed as a natural resource far more valuable to America than oil or timber'; 'The media is content to tell fairy tales'.

After the 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, Lapham was one of the few public figures in the United States to openly criticise American foreign policy, in his monthly 'Notebook' essay in *Harper's* (three of which

won him a 1995 National Magazine Award). In 'Notebook' he has persistently expressed alarm over such trends as declining standards of American education and literacy, the rise of celebrity worship, the widening gap between rich and poor, the growing unaccountability of the military, and the creeping complicity of the news media in the whole malaise.

In his keynote address, Lapham surveyed these and other themes, opening by reading a series of quotations from exam essays written by American high school and college students. Among them: 'A myth is a female moth'; 'Archimedes made the first steamboat and power drill'; 'The Davy Jones Index crashed in 1929'. The quotations brought laughter, but the humour, as always with Lapham—who has been compared to Montaigne, Mencken and Mark Twain—was merely the frosting on a much darker satirical cake.

LAPHAM'S BOOK OF ESSAYS *30 Satires* (published by The New Press in the US in 2003 and available now in Australia through Palgrave Macmillan) was written mostly during the 1990s, that decade when the beast of al Qaeda was slowly slouching towards Gotham. A later book, *Gag Rule* (published in the US last year), focuses on what Lapham sees as the Bush administration's crushing of dissent since September 11, and the relentless shift to the right in religion, politics and foreign policy, with its attendant encroachment on civil liberties.

'I've gotten less optimistic,' Lapham said. 'I don't see where the good news is coming from. The Bush administration continues to force legislation through the Congress that is ... intended to enrich the oligarchy and further impoverish the poor ...

'There's an old American expression, never give a sucker an even break, but ... you could actually say that that was the policy of the Bush administration: never give a sucker an even break, because they obviously think of the American people as the sucker.

'They stand up in front of microphones and tell outright lies about weapons of mass destruction, about social security, about the medical prescription bill, about the energy policy, about our

state policy that approves of torture, and nothing happens ... there are a few voices of objection but not many.'

Cropping up throughout *30 Satires*, usually in a scathing context, are the names of many contemporary American celebrities, two of whom—businesswoman Martha Stewart and CBS



Harper's Magazine editor Lewis H. Lapham

News anchorman Dan Rather—have fallen from grace since the essays were written.

'Martha's recovered, and who knows, somebody may bring back Dan Rather,' Lapham said with a laugh. 'It's like the set of stock characters in the Italian Comedia del Arte of the 14th and 15th centuries where they had the old fool and the young buck, the clown and the pompous scholar, the vixenish woman and so on.

'It's a repertory company, the American celebrity circus, and it's remarkable how many of them manage to stay in the limelight over long periods of time ... The glory of the American public is the willingness to believe in what isn't there.'

Compounding this, in Lapham's view, is a news media that has, since September 11, 'become much more timid, much more willing to take instruction from the Pentagon or the White House'. He gave, as an example, a *Newsweek* magazine report that guards at Guantánamo Bay had flushed a copy of the Koran down a toilet. According to Lapham the item had been sent to *Newsweek* by the US government, but when at least 15 people died in riots in Afghanistan afterwards, the Bush administration claimed the *Newsweek* report was wrong and the editors 'fell on the grenade and took one for the team. That's the proper way to behave in a make-believe democracy.'

Another example was the 2004 presidential election. 'When the reports came in right away in November about the probability of the election in Ohio having been rigged or stolen, the tone of the established media—the *Times*, the *Washington Post*—was one of mockery: this is crazy conspiracy theorists; this is the work of the blogosphere, the cretins of the internet; this is a story so repulsive that we won't even consider it.'

Lapham's was one of the few public voices of dissent against the invasion of Iraq in 2003. His essay 'The Road to Babylon', published in *Harper's* December 2002 issue, is one of the great political essays on the folly of going to war, and compares the debate in the US Congress over whether to invade Iraq with the debate in the Athenian assembly in 415 BC over whether to invade Sicily.

'Much of the story I'd long forgotten,' he wrote, 'but I remembered that Athens corrupted its democracy and brought about the ruin of its empire by foolishly attempting the conquest of Sicily, and when I found the relevant chapters (the debate in the Athenian assembly prior to sending a fleet westward into the Ionian Sea), it was as if I were reading the front page of that morning's *New York Times* or the Pentagon's Defense Planning Guidance ...'

One of the only voices of objection in Congress was Robert Byrd, the senator from West Virginia. 'He made a very eloquent speech prior to the invasion against the war,' Lapham said, 'shaking the Constitution and saying, "Fie, fie"—he actually said that—and *The New York Times* on page one wrote a mocking report saying here's this fuddy old man who's practically lost his

mind ... They discredited him because he was not blowing the bugle.'

LAPHAM THINKS THE 2004 electoral vote in Ohio was rigged, giving Bush the presidency, but that John Kerry had not offered an alternative. After receiving the Democratic nomination Kerry had gone on 'to present himself as an at-heart better Republican than George Bush ... Bush proved to be a bigger hit in the role of Batman than did Senator Kerry in the role of Flash Gordon.'

Lapham, as to be expected of someone who cuts so sharply against the grain of the status quo, is not without his critics. Google his name on the internet and you'll find plenty of detractors pointing out what they say are errors of judgment and fact. Lapham admits he's not flawless. A letter pointing out an error in one of his essays is posted on the *Harper's* website (www.harpers.org) along with his response and apology.

But, at the age of 70, he's not about to change his tune or give up his position as America's doyen of dissent, although 'there are a couple of books that I wish I would have time to write. I've published eight or nine collections of essays over the years, most from *Harper's Magazine*, but I would like to write one big long book about the history of my family in the United States.'

It's an illustrious family. Lapham's grandfather was mayor of San Francisco, where Lapham was born, and his great grandfather was a founder of the Texaco Oil Company. In Sydney Lapham told a story about his great-great grandfather, Henry Dearborn, who was Secretary of War in both administrations of Thomas Jefferson but who, in 1812, at the age of 65, was enjoying the good life as Collector of Customs in the Port of Boston when President James Madison ordered him to move an army north 'and take Canada by September 10'.

Dearborn failed abjectly in that campaign and returned to Boston to his 'warming pot of rum'. As with most Lapham stories, there was a moral. In this case, it was that despite the Bush administration's claim that Americans will happily go abroad to fight for 'all who live in tyranny', the American attitude in reality is quite different. It was General Dearborn's men who refused to push on to Montreal, and today, according to Lapham, the Bush administration, despite the Pentagon's sales pitch, 'is having a great deal of trouble finding recruits' for Iraq.

Later on the day that I interviewed Lapham, I read a report from *The Guardian* newspaper that Walter Jones, the Republican congressman from North Carolina who led the campaign to change the name of french fries to 'freedom fries' because of France's refusal to join the war in Iraq, had now turned against the war.

Has somebody turned up the heat, or is it merely out of the frying pan and into the fire? ■

30 Satires, by Lewis Lapham (The New Press, 263pp, \$26), is available in Australia through Palgrave Macmillan.

Robert Hefner is the assistant editor of *Eureka Street*.



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Or this from the competition up the dial:

Got a story idea? Click here ...Would you like to appear on *ACA*? Simply tell us a little bit about yourself and we'll let you know when we're looking for extras or people to road test products!
—*A Current Affair* website

SOMEBODY SACK THE NEWSHOUND! The viewers are on the scent! Perhaps my memory is clouded, but I seem to remember a time when the 6–7pm slot on commercial television was a genuine news and current affairs hour. Hardly the stuff of McNeil/Lehrer, but at least an attempt to marry news and current affairs, to grapple with the issues of the day, to steer the flagship of the network.

No more. It appears that quality has long since conceded the fight to ratings in the battle for the

Dumbing down the news

coveted 6.30pm current affairs audience. The familiar diet of miracle cures, consumer rip-offs and celebrity puff pieces continues to be refried and repackaged, despite an upsetting groan of familiarity. What the viewer is dished up fails to stretch beyond the trite, the speculative and small, self-satisfying victories over local councils and shady entrepreneurs. Instead of robust *live* interviews, and the pursuit of important and influential talent from here and abroad, *A Current Affair* and *Today Tonight* love nothing more than doorstep stoushes backed up by lashings of outrage and condescension. Memo to the producers: the use of current affairs teams as pseudo crime units is not only dramatically absurd, but also inflammatory and irresponsible journalism. Station bosses remain unperturbed, however, reminding affronted critics that they are only dishing out what the public wants. But how true is that? Is the public's appetite so unquenchable? And is journalistic integrity so shallow?

PREDICTABLY, THE STORY content of both *ACA* and *TT* is virtually indistinguishable. Despite *ACA*'s former executive producer John Westacott's assertion in *The Australian* in March that '*Today Tonight* has always modelled itself as a more down-market version of *A Current Affair*', both stations seem to trawl the same depths and emerge with what looks like an identical catch. This game of unprincipled one-upmanship, largely in response to the spectre of ratings, has remodelled the nature of how the news is sourced. It needn't be 'current', 'today' or indeed 'tonight', but it should be carefully marketed to rattle the opposition.

The tactic of 'spoiling', in which rival networks run the same story head to head to deny exclusivity, is particularly belittling to the viewing public. This is not two programs grappling with a headline story; rather, it is petty network sniping sold off as current affairs. Why investigate the news when you can pilfer from your neighbour?

This folly was exposed some years back by the infamous 'dole army', a group of young activists claiming to rot the welfare system, while living clandestinely in Melbourne's underground drainage tunnels. Both current affairs programs were lured hopelessly into the trap and broadcast their stories on the same night, decrying the abuse of taxpayers' money by this pack of bludgers. Of course, the hoax was exposed the following morning with the dole army explaining the ruse as a calculated attack on the networks' brand of moral indignation and self-righteous reporting. As the dole army press release noted, 'Last night the big guns of tabloid TV fell victim to their own sleazy set-up tactics.' Seemingly there is no reason to doubt that such shoddy journalistic efforts couldn't be employed again. *ACA*'s and

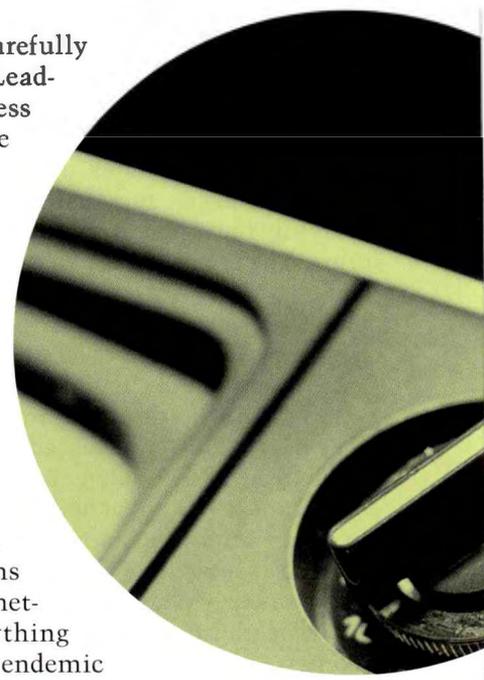
TT's bugbear, the ABC's *Media Watch*, recently gave both stations a dressing down over a 'Bravabra' breast enhancement advertorial piece, which both networks had recycled from older versions of their own stories, and run competitively. Mimicry at its worst in a good old-fashioned ratings scrap.

So is this really what the public wants? Waning viewing habits suggest not, but a shortening of the margins between *ACA* and *TT* indicate that neither program is willing to make a false step or subvert the formula. Regardless of the impetus behind the dumbing-down of commercial current affairs (I vote infotainment), it cannot be solely blamed on tawdry viewing habits. I hardly think the switchboards would be overrun with irate calls if topical, well-researched reports were to occasionally supplant the usual tabloid fodder.

Importantly, both shows are carefully marketed as cross-promotional tools. Lead-up programs and lead-in promos buttress the crossover audience, credits fade seamlessly into the following program. Rarely a story passes without an obligatory phone or SMS poll, commercially laden story contacts and fact sheets or links to the network website. Both the *ACA* and *TT* websites spruik the same tried-and-true approach to news gathering. Thematic headlines such as Relationships, Health, Lifestyle and Money encourage users to make their gripes more actionable, compartmentalised for the networks convenience. This endless self-endorsement seems designed more towards shoring up network allegiances than delivering anything fresh or stimulating. This process is so endemic that when these programs occasionally do get it right and do justice to a story and their audience, it is barely noticed or recognised under a critical eye.

The overall effect of this open casting call for stories and snide network rivalry is the loss of any sense of originality or objectivity, killing the essence of news reporting. My beef is not simply distaste for the tabloid and the overarching consumer bent, but rather the disingenuous manner in which this brand of current affairs is sourced, manipulated and marketed. Undoubtedly current affairs needs light and shade, and perhaps there is space to debate the musical integrity of the Wiggles versus Hi-5 and the magical health benefits of water from an artesian well, but give the public some credit. And maybe a hint of newsworthiness for old times' sake. ■

Ben Fraser worked in Afghanistan for national and international NGOs from 2002–2004.



Stark images in black and white

Australian film-makers have to date been much better at reflecting the often ugly reality of racial relations than at imagining a different future

THINK OF ALL THE AUSTRALIAN FILMS you've ever seen. How many of them feature good—that is, lasting, nurturing and mutually satisfying—relationships between Aboriginal and white Australians? I can think of only two.

Reconciliation between black and white Australians is a cultural and artistic, as well as political, process. As director George Miller put it, films in particular are our modern 'cultural dreamings'. Films are like collective dreams. They bring to light the deeper, often dark and repressed aspects of our culture. Like dreams, they can also give us glimpses of different futures.

Where race relations are concerned, however, screenwriters and film-makers in Australia have been much better at reflecting the often ugly reality than imagining a different future. The problem goes back as far as Charles Chauvel's *Jedda* (1955), the first Australian film shot in colour, and a critical and commercial success. *Jedda* is an orphaned Aboriginal girl who is raised by a white farming family, only to be abducted by Marbuk, a tribal Aboriginal. Chased by the white family and rejected by Marbuk's tribe for breaking marriage taboos, the deranged and desperate Marbuk clutches *Jedda* and jumps off a cliff.

Sixteen years later, English director Nicholas Roeg's *Walkabout* (1971) opens with a white boy and girl stranded in the desert after their father's botched murder-suicide attempt. Lost and thirsty, the children are befriended by an Aboriginal youth famously played by David Gulpilil. He is attracted to the girl and performs what looks like a mating dance in order to woo her. She, however, rejects him. Next morning he is found hanging from a tree.

Fred Schepisi's *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1978), based on Thomas Keneally's book of the same name, drew on real events in the late 19th century. The film tells the story of Jimmie, a half-caste who is taught the ways of whitefellas by a Methodist minister. Jimmie rejects his tribal past and eventually marries a white girl. Betrayed by her and exploited by his boss, he goes on a killing spree before being shot, captured and hanged.

After a lean patch in the 1980s, the past decade has seen a plethora of films exploring black-white relations, beginning with Nick Parsons's *Dead Heart* (1996). Set in a remote Central Desert community, this film revolves around the difficulty whites have in understanding Aboriginal law and customs. An Aboriginal teacher's aide has an affair with the wife of the white schoolteacher, and takes her to a sacred site where they make love. He is later found dead, setting off a chain of events that ends with the whites abandoning the community to the Aboriginals.

Set in the Flinders Ranges in the 1930s and also based on real events, Rachel Perkins's *One Night The Moon* (2001) begins

with a young white girl being entranced by the full moon and wandering into the hills from her family's isolated farmhouse. The local police sergeant suggests they get a black tracker, Albert, to help search for her. But her father declares, 'No blackfella is to set foot on my land.' The local white men can't find her, and in desperation the girl's mother turns to Albert for help. He finds her too late. The film ends with the farmer wandering into the desert to shoot himself after being rejected by his wife.

Phillip Noyce's *Rabbit Proof Fence* (2003), based on Doris Pilkington's book of the same name, doesn't explore race relations in any new way so much as confirm the impossibility of overcoming the gulf between black and white Australians.

Rolf de Heer's *The Tracker* (2003) turns the historical tables by having a black tracker murder his white tormenter before escaping into the desert to rejoin his own people. But it's a revenge fantasy that assuages white guilt without any hint of reconciliation other than in a brief moment of complicity between a young white policeman and the tracker.

These films share a depressingly familiar landscape of misunderstanding, hostility and resentment between black and white Australians. Perhaps this reflects the dominant history of race relations in this country. But there have been at least two films that show signs of hope.

HENRI SAFRAN'S *Storm Boy* (1976) is about a young boy, Mike, who lives with his widowed father Tom in a shack behind a windswept beach on the Coorong Peninsula in South Australia. The boy raises an orphaned pelican, Mr Percival, and is befriended by an Aboriginal man, Fingerbone Bill, who seems to live in the bush behind the dunes. Their idyllic life ends dramatically when hunters shoot Mr Percival and Tom moves into town so Mike can go to school. Fingerbone Bill finds Mr Percival's body, and he takes Mike to the place where he has buried the bird. The film ends on a positive note, with Fingerbone Bill showing him the nest of a newly hatched pelican. 'Mr Percival all over again, a bird like him never dies,' he assures the boy.

One more recent film explores race relations without ending in disaster—Paul Goldman's *Australian Rules* (2002), based on the book *Deadly, Unna!* by Phillip Gwynne. Old prejudices surface in a South Australian fishing town after the local AFL grand final. The brilliant Aboriginal player Dumby Red is denied the prize for Best on Ground. Tensions escalate, resulting in Dumby's death. His white mate Blacky, the accidental hero of the match, is falling in love with Dumby's sister Clarence. Blacky finally stands up to his father, a brutal man who was Dumby's killer (symbolic of patriarchal, racist Old Australia?). The film ends with Blacky telling us in voice-



Lisa Flanagan as Clarence, in Paul Goldman's *Australian Rules* (2002). Used with permission of the director.

over that his father has left town and that he is also going to leave—with Clarence.

Storm Boy was based on Colin Thiele's children's book of the same name. It is the boy who becomes friends with the Aborigine. His initially suspicious father only later appreciates their relationship and its role in his son's growth. The child is a central character in many of the films mentioned, but only in *Storm Boy* does a positive, nurturing interracial relationship develop. Perhaps in 1976 it took a child to be open to the friendship and wisdom of an Aborigine. And perhaps the bush setting was easier for whites to accept than a city as the natural domain of Aborigines.

BY 2002, *Australian Rules* was able to further the process of developing good race relations in several ways. The main character is a teenager rather than a child, and is dealing with the usual teenage concerns of forging identity, separating from parents and discovering the opposite sex. The film is set in a town rather than the bush, and the Aborigines live in their own community, The Point, rather than being isolated and unattached as was Fingerbone Bill. And there is regular interaction between the cultures—on the football field at least.

Australian Rules is getting closer to the complexities of contemporary reality. And through the new relationship of Blacky and Clarence (explored more fully in Gwynne's next book, *Nukkin Ya*), there may be hope for a shared future.

Twenty-seven years passed between the release of *Storm Boy* (about a boy) and *Australian Rules* (about teenagers). Perhaps as a culture we are slowly growing up, and might look forward to seeing a film before too long in which black and white Australians not only live in relative harmony as adults, but grow old and die together.

Before we can look forward to this, there is a pervasive theme in these films that needs more attention: grief. It is most obvious in a film like *Rabbit Proof Fence*: the grief of children separated from their mother and home, and vice versa.

It surfaces in the other films discussed, too, but it's often unresolved. People seldom come out the other side sadder but wiser. Instead we tend to get revenge, bitterness, alienation, denial, or a return to the status quo.

Grief features in *Storm Boy* and *Australian Rules*, too, but in different ways. In *Storm Boy*, Tom is sad when Mr Percival dies, and is heartened when Fingerbone Bill shows him the pelican egg he's found. We learn nothing of the grief of the apparently solitary Bill.

Australian Rules, by contrast, has a pivotal scene in which the shy, awkward Blacky crosses a road and climbs a fence to turn up to Dumby's funeral—held among his people, on Aboriginal land. While white cops watch from a distance, Blacky is initially challenged but is eventually allowed to join the family in grieving. The shared expression of grief brings the two cultures together, if only temporarily. Sharing grief is something Australians have struggled to realise in the political arena. Notably absent from our history is an apology to the stolen generations by a federal government.

Film-makers are storytellers. As increasing numbers of Indigenous, as well as whitefella, film-makers tell the stories of the interracial and interethnic relationships more prevalent in contemporary Australian society, we can expect our films to reflect not only the ugly side of Australian racism, but stories of people of differing races and cultures living, loving and dying together.

Reconciliation isn't the responsibility of film-makers any more than it is of politicians. Each of us is a storyteller in our own lives. Each of us has the opportunity to fashion new narratives about our identity and culture while honouring our past. How can I, like Blacky, summon the courage to cross the road, climb the fence and join those whom I experience as 'other'; or stand up, as Blacky did, to the forces of oppression? ■

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Winds of change in Egypt

GEORGE W. BUSH wants to see democracy in the Muslim world. He would not have relished the pro-democracy demonstration that gathered on the steps of the journalists' syndicate in central Cairo. As the crowd chanted, demonstrators raised the symbols of their dissent: the Holy Qur'an, portraits of Gamal Abdel Nasser (Egypt's first independent president), and the red flag—signifying the three strands of a growing movement that unites Islamists, nationalists and socialists.

When Bush talks of democracy, he talks of its power 'to secure justice and liberty, and the inclusion of men and women of all races and religions in the courses that free nations chart for themselves'. But the growing democracy movement in Egypt has bigger ambitions—ambitions that may run contrary to those of the White House.

As Hany Tarek, an activist with El Karama (a Nasserite party) put it: 'We're saying "no" to our government because it's with Israel and the US. We want the Palestinians to be able to return to their homes, both from the 1967 and 1948 invasions.' Amr Fahmy, a member of Islamic Trend (the youth wing of the Muslim Brotherhood) at Cairo University, added: 'No change is possible without unity against imperialism, Zionism and dictatorship.'

Democracy has emerged as the leitmotif of the US's adventures in the Middle East. Weapons of mass destruction and Saddam Hussein's supposed dalliance with al Qaeda are exhausted as justifications. Now invasion, occupation and pressure on recalcitrants like Iran are proffered in the name of elections. As Bush says: 'Freedom is on the march, and the world is better for it. Widespread hatred and radicalism cannot survive the advent of freedom and self-government.'

This line may play well on domestic television, but it is at odds with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's praise for Pakistan, a military dictatorship that

backed the US's invasion of Afghanistan; and White House silence on the massacres in Uzbekistan, a dictatorship that buys US acquiescence by hosting a military base in the strategic corner between Afghanistan, Russia and China. For most in the Middle East, the idea of Western intervention leading to freedom is laughable: the occupation of Iraq is salt in a very deep and old wound called Palestine.

THE REGIME IN EGYPT, headed by Mubarak since 1981, and buttressed by emergency laws which ban demonstrations and political parties, is facing rising domestic pressure. *Al Ahram*, a liberal Egyptian paper, reported: 'As the number of street demonstrations in Egypt increases, 2005 may well turn into a year of major political upheavals.' Pro-government journalists complain about protests disrupting the already chaotic Cairene traffic system. More significantly, even the conservative and cautious Muslim Brotherhood has felt pressure to act, bringing its supporters on to the streets. This is confirmation that the opposition rallies, albeit small, reflect a deep displeasure within the Egyptian masses.

This movement predates the US's newfound love of democracy. The first (and dangerous) street protests began in 2000, in solidarity with the Palestinian intifada. Activists expanded into small rallies against neo-liberalism, and then against the war in Iraq. Against all expectations, the floodgates broke on the day the Coalition of the Willing invaded, in March 2003. Some 60,000 people packed Tahrir Square in the heart of Cairo, in a protest that lasted 12 hours. The confidence of the opposition, much of it now under the umbrella of the Egyptian Movement and Popular Campaign for Change—known as Kefaya (Enough)—skyrocketed. As Hany Tarek put it: 'We are going on to the streets. We have

demonstrations planned in three places. If they are a success then we'll do them in ten.'

The change was evident at the third Cairo Conference, held to build solidarity with Palestine and Iraq and to strengthen opposition to the Egyptian regime. At the second conference in December 2003, only one voice was raised against Mubarak. This time, dozens spoke against him, debating not just the method of his political passing but options for a new Egypt. Professor Hossein Esaa, a Nasserite, surmised:

There can be no free elections while the National Democratic Party [Mubarak's party] is in power. The media should be opened up to all parties. If the fear goes, the NDP will fall. Nobody believes Mubarak any more. In true free elections it would be reduced to five per cent. Having more than one candidate isn't democracy—not while being a member of a political party is [a] crime and political activity is treated like a vice.

Remarkably, the professor was challenged from the floor by a young NDP member; remarkable that a member of the government party would attend an opposition conference; remarkable that the others present, many of them jailed or beaten for their activities, dealt with his points with such cool contempt.

Opening up a dictatorial regime, in order to build a new and stable base, is a risky affair. When Mikhail Gorbachev tried it he didn't just lose his job but an entire empire. A regime like Mubarak's runs the risk that weakness becomes licence. The liberal intelligentsia can seize on minor political reform as the chance to renovate official structures. The poor can see a loosening of the political straitjacket as an opportunity for revenge after 30 years of neo-liberal experimentation. If Mubarak does nothing, anger could boil over; if he loosens the reins, the population might bolt.

This conundrum explains the current contradictory flavour of Egyptian politics. In late May, Mubarak won a referendum for constitutional change to allow contested presidential elections—until now, one candidate has been selected by the parliament for popular approval. On the day of the vote, security forces terrorised opposition protesters. As one account reported, the riot police stood by as minibuses of young men arrived. ‘The demonstrators had already been encircled by the police. The rest of the street was cleared for the hooligans, who started moving towards the encircled demonstrators, after the police had opened a small path for them to enter.’

What followed was a series of systematic assaults, focusing particularly on

manufacturing plant, 55km north of Cairo in the industrial city of 10th of Ramadan, 79 union members are on the sparse grass, sacked for demanding, among other things, access to workers’ compensation. Said Abdel Latif, the workplace delegate, said the workers had been handling blue and white asbestos without safety equipment.

By 2002, eight workers had died from cancer, without realising it was connected to their work. Now more workers have asbestosis, as have at least two of their wives. To receive compensation, without which the workers’ families will be

policies has sharpened popular frustration. The Arab mood is for freedom from US intervention, both military and economic. As Reem, a woman active in the Egyptian socialist movement, said: ‘Imperialism is a manifestation of the capitalist system, so fighting it isn’t separated from fighting the regime that is opposing people in Egypt.’ In other words, democracy means nothing without land for the huge peasantry, workplace democracy, and an end to subservience to the US.

The battle between Mubarak and the opposition, and the jostling for influence

‘We are going on to the streets. We have demonstrations planned in three places. If they are a success then we’ll do them in ten.’

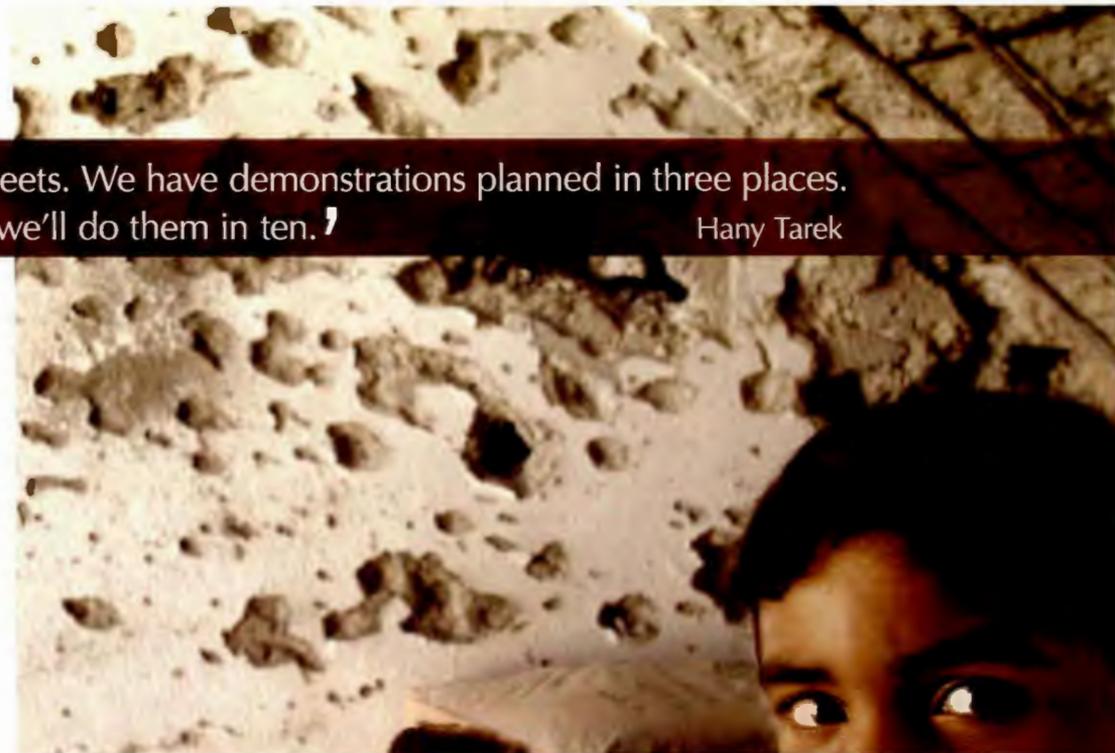
Hany Tarek

women protesters. Dr Magda Adly, a doctor at the El Nadim Centre, said: ‘The men hit us, pushed us around and tried to strip us of our clothes. This took place in the presence of police officers, some of high rank.’ Adel Wassily, an engineer, said: ‘I saw a woman journalist. They beat her and tried to open her trousers to strip her. Another pregnant women was kicked in her abdomen.’ And Rabea Fahmy added: ‘Those men attacked me and beat me brutally and tore my clothes and underclothes until I was naked. The police were standing there, watching. The streets became an Abu Ghraib prison.’

As student Amr Fahmy concludes: ‘We are not very optimistic about Mubarak’s statement on allowing many candidates in the next presidential election—it’s the security forces who really rule us.’

While the Muslim Brotherhood would settle for the legalisation of its party, which already has parliamentary representation under the guise of ‘independents’, and free elections, which it would be favoured to win, the Egyptian Left wants to go much further. Many activists are painfully aware that victories over dictatorships—in Eastern Europe in 1989, in Indonesia in 1998, in the Ukraine this year—can turn to social defeat, as the new democrats rush to fulfil World Bank requirements.

The nexus between political and social democracy in Egypt is revealed in the fight by its poor. At the Ura Misr asbestos



cast into absolute poverty, means securing the signature of a senior government health official. Yet the government works hand in glove with employers. Despite the most compelling evidence, no signature has been forthcoming. It is a sharp reminder that the absence of political democracy means an absence of social justice, and that the fight for one must be linked to the other.

BUSH’S TALK OF DEMOCRACY IS a double-edged sword. Given a free vote, Egyptian workers and peasants would reject pro-US and pro-Israel politicians. Saudi voters have done so, backing Islamist municipal candidates earlier this year. A generation of unhampered pro-market

within the opposition, has a broader significance. Egypt is the pivotal Arab nation, with a population of 72 million, a large working class, and a history of leading the region, politically and culturally. If popular anger explodes and sweeps away Mubarak, it could sweep away a loyal ally of the US and Israel, throw open the Palestinian question and tilt the balance within Iraq more heavily towards the resistance. That is why Egyptian progressives refuse to cede the question of democracy to White House speechifying. They are hoping that the times are changing in Egypt, and not in the way George W. Bush intends. ■

David Glanz is a Melbourne writer. Image by Rusty Stewart.

Art into poetry

Peter Porter is one contemporary poet who breathes new life into existing works of art by letting them speak in the language of poetry



Above and at right: August Friedrich Albrecht Schenck, Danish 1828–1901, worked in France c.1857–1901, *Anguish* (detail) c.1878, oil on canvas 151.0 x 251.2 cm. Purchased 1880, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

FOR MORE THAN A COUPLE of thousand years, poets have been embedding works of art in *their* poems. The ancient Greek word, recently revived, for this kind of behaviour is *ekphrasis*, which means literally ‘speaking forth’, the idea being that the poem puts to language, and thus in a sense publishes in a new way, the painting or sculpture or other artwork which has existed previously in its own right and on its own terms.

The strategy adopted by the poet may be that of a describer or annotator; or it may be, for example, that of someone giving voice to a figure in a painting; or the artwork may be addressed in one fashion or another as though it were alive; and a number of other strategies are available.

You will quickly recognise, too, that the work of art being ‘spoken forth’ need not have prior existence after all: Homer would not have been chastened if someone had established for him that there had never been an Achilles, let alone his marvel of a shield: and Virgil, contriving his ‘shield of Aeneas’, would probably have rejoiced the more at the news that his emulation of Homer had no foundation other than their joint genius.

Happily, in the last couple of centuries, many ekphrastic poems have been written, and more recently much good academic reflection on the art has taken place. In this article I hope to contribute in a small way to the discussion, encouraged to a degree by the fact that I have already published a book of ekphrastic poems myself, and have recently completed the text of another.

The Australian poet Peter Porter, who has been based for most of his life in London (though with frequent visits home),

often brings to Australian scenes, practices and holdings a starker gaze than is customary in his native country—starker, and more tenaciously reflective. The poem below, from Porter’s *Collected Poems Vol II* (Oxford University Press, 1999) is called ‘Basta Sanguè’ (Enough Blood).

*In the National Gallery of Victoria
Is a nineteenth-century genre painting
Showing a ewe on guard beside the body
Of her dead lamb while all around her sin-
black crows stand silent in the snow. Each time
I pass the picture I find I shudder twice—
Once because good taste is now endemic
And I cannot let the sentimental go
Unsneered at—I have gone to the trouble of
Acquiring words like ‘genre’ and will call
Them to my aid—but secondly I know
I’ve been that ewe and soon will be that lamb,
That there’s no way to love mankind but on
The improvised co-ordinates of death,
Death which rules the snow, the crows, the sheep,
The painter and the drifting connoisseur.*

*Enough of blood, but Abraham’s raised knife
Is seldom halted and any place for God
(Even if he didn’t give the orders)
Will be outside the frame. A melody
Can gong the executioner’s axe awake,
A painting take away our appetite
For lunch, and mother-love still walk all night*

To lull a baby quiet. Whatever gathers
 Overleaf is murderous: we move
 On through the gallery praising Art which keeps
 The types of horror constant so that we
 May go about our business and forget.

The work in question, which is called *Anguish*, was painted in about 1878 by the Danish-born artist A.F.A. Schenck, who spent most of his career in France before his death in 1901. A recent catalogue entry by Laurie Benson on *Anguish* (in *Nineteenth Century Painting and Sculpture in the International Collections of the National Gallery of Victoria*, edited by Ted Gott), says in part:

In this painting, Schenck has given his distraught ewe an expression suggestive of despair mingled with stoic determination. Recognising these decidedly human responses, the viewer might be expected to identify immediately with the animal's grim predicament. The ewe's bravery in the face of the threat posed by the murderous circle of crows is perhaps, however, somewhat overstated in her defiant stance above the bleeding lamb. There is little subtlety evident in this work.

All of this may be so, but a poet may write at least half of the terms of any covenant with a painting, and this seems to be so with Porter's poem. Take for instance the form of 'Basta Sangue'. The whole consists of one stanza of 16 lines, followed by another of 12 lines, each of them a pentameter, with a hinge of argument between the two stanzas. It is as if what we have here is a sonnet in slow motion, in which the air of inevitability which that form usually courts is

Bruce Bennett reported in his book *Spirit in Exile: Peter Porter and his Poetry* (Oxford University Press, 1991), Porter heard a "massive directness" in confronting difficult emotions' and 'Non Piangere, Liu' is at least in part about the impingement on Porter of his own wife's suicide.

PORTER'S FIRST LOVE, as he has often said, is not poetry but music, about which he knows an enormous amount and has often written, not least about opera. And I would suggest that in the case of 'Basta Sangue' (as in many other instances) his title is not simply a resonant verbal fragment but is an adducing of the imaginative authority of opera as such—its largeness of reach, its deliberate intensification of emotion, its partial framing of experiences which still resist enclosure. And I believe that this reference to *Turandot* (as much collusion as allusion), coupled with that dramatic retardation of a sonnet's natural movement which I mentioned a little earlier, is a crucial determinant of the poem's nature. When Porter writes 'about' a painting, it is as if the enterprise of poetry itself is re-envisioned each time. He has for a long time now been a virtuoso, but more often than not he writes as though surprised, even disconcerted, at the fact that, life being what it is, anything at all can get said properly.

This is so even though, as I have tried to establish elsewhere, he is also a poet singularly gifted in the deployment of 'sententiae'—what we might call 'distillations of truth'. His repertoire includes, prominently, an aphoristic style, but for him an aphorism is as often a plank out into the unsayable as it is the edging of a plot which has been levelled out. In 'Basta Sangue', if one remembers the fact that his wife's



allowed to deepen and darken in its own time. One of the things that has been fortified in Porter's practice as a poet by W.H. Auden's example is a readiness to remodel traditional forms so that they go by new ways to old ends, and I think that this is a case in point. It is not a move which could be generated by the painting, but it pitches attention more acutely upon the painting than the catalogue entry would suggest was likely.

And then there is the title. 'Basta Sangue' is taken from Puccini's opera *Turandot*, at the moment when the old Emperor cries out to the Unknown Prince: 'An atrocious oath forces me/to keep faith with the grim pact. And the holy/sceptre that I clasp streams with/blood! Enough of blood!/Young man, go!' The Prince does not co-operate, and there is more blood to be shed in the opera, though it is not his but that of the little slave girl Liu, who first is tortured and then stabs herself to death. Another of Porter's poems, 'Non Piangere, Liu', also takes its title from *Turandot* in which, as

death left him with their children, two girls, to bring up, the line 'I've been that ewe and soon will be that lamb' is straightforward, if terrible: but the succeeding '[That] there's no way to love mankind but on/The improvised co-ordinates of death,/Death which rules the snow, the crows, the sheep,/The painter and the drifting connoisseur' seems to me of a different order of mystery.

As, in French cuisine, a *bouquet garni* of parsley, bay leaf and thyme is a customary resource, Porter's poetry often looks to a tincture of four elements, namely God, Art, Love and Death, all of which are to be found in 'Basta Sangue'. Of course each of these is a traditional 'topic', a traditional claimant upon attention, in poetry, as Porter knows better than most. But he writes as though sensing that they both wear well and stay formidable—whether or not they are welcome. So, in this poem, while each stanza has its own component both of self-knowledge and of world-weariness, each too is in effect overtaken by refreshed insight, little comfort though that may bring.



August Friedrich Albrecht Schenck, Danish 1828–1901, worked in France c.1857–1901, *Anguish* c.1878, oil on canvas 151.0 x 251.2 cm. Purchased 1880, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

I had wondered about the words 'Whatever gathers/Overleaf is murderous', but as soon as one does grant the potency of the 'Death which rules ...' of a few lines earlier, one is sobered into agreement. It is possible, too, that the fact that Puccini could not finish *Turandot*, combined with the fact that, as he said, 'I have the great weakness of being able to compose only when my public executioners come on the scene' broods tacitly over this poem. Porter has a poem, its title borrowed from Auden, which is called 'And No Help Came'; it might be the name of many of his poems—as, of course, of Schenck's painting.

Forty years ago the same Auden published a book called *The Dyer's*

Hand and Other Essays (Faber & Faber, 1975), a brilliant, quirky and often wise set of reflections on prose, poetry and music—an enduring favourite so far as I am concerned. There is an epigraph to the whole, Nietzsche's dictum 'We have Art in order that we may not perish from Truth', a saying which, as often with that Wild Man of the Mind's Woods, can be as haunting as it is maddening.

When Porter concludes 'Basta Sangue' by saying '... we move/On through the gallery praising Art which keeps/The types of horror constant so that we/May go about our business and forget', he may be revising this site: certainly, in any case, he gives us in this poem, as in many others, an example of what Nietzsche

called 'unruly thoughts', upheaval rising beneath a disciplined surface—the sort of thing we associate with the tragic spirit. And that may be the best way to characterise the spirit of 'Basta Sangue'. ■

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Faithfully

(for Peter Nicholls)

Each little pronoun is a cutting knife,
Verbs want to be in the race
Rushing or dithering all over the place,
But worldly adverbs dwell with you for life.
In time your nouns will all get up and go,
The flash ones first, with poncey capital letters
Designating them among our betters.
An adverb nods, murmuring I told you so.

Syntax hangs in there to the bitter end.
Fumbling in bed, you have your clauses still,
Word-order and mental punctuation:
They do not falter in your situation.
Healthy as vitamins or chlorophyll
Your adverb is the uncomplaining friend.

Chris Wallace-Crabbe

Avid

Avid for language
with real bite in it
my mouth is stuffed again
mumbling over a tongue
through which my teeth have met.

Aileen Kelly

Grinning and bearing it

I'LL TELL YOU THE FUNNIEST STORY from my undergraduate years at a University to Remain Anonymous. One morning I was abed and the phone rang and after a long while I answered it, snarling, and it was a friend of mine in another dormitory.

'You hafta help me,' he said, tensely.

'It's only noon. Go away.'

'I really need your help.'

'No. Go away.'

'Please.'

'What's the matter?'

'I'm sewing my bear suit,' he said, 'which is really laborious, this is my bear suit for the Costume Ball tonight, and it's a hell of a good suit, but I really should have been working on it for a few days before today, which I didn't, which was a mistake, because the design is remarkable, this is absolutely the greatest bear suit you ever saw, this suit would make you proud if you were a bear, I mean I *really* worked on this, I studied bear musculature and all, how their fur rolls over their shoulders, you know, which is really fascinating, and how the claws emerge from sockets in the paws and feet, and believe you me that was a real engineering coup to design retractable claws, but the problem right now this minute this morning is that it's a hell of a lot of work, and another problem, an additional problem, is that I was worried about my concentration lapsing, so I took some ... medicine, and now I'm all rattled and I need your help.'

'No. Call someone else.'

'I did call three other guys but they won't answer their phones.'

'OK.'

'Don't even get dressed,' said my friend, tersely. 'Just put shorts on and run.'

My friend was a really bright guy, and as generous as the day is long, and deviously funny, and I should say that today, many years after the event I am reporting here for the first time in public, he is a successful businessman, worth many dollars, a pillar of the community, a chieftain of the clan, but at that time, the day

of the Costume Ball long ago, he was not at all a pillar of the community, by no stretch of the imagination could that be said, and when I arrived at his room in the other hall he was one very addled bear. He was wearing the bear head, which was a remarkable head, incredibly accurate and detailed, pretty much the greatest bear head I ever saw, but otherwise he was wearing boxer shorts and a shirt from a nearby women's college, a shirt which he said he had obtained in a panty raid, for when we were undergraduates a thousand years ago there really were such puzzling and inexplicable things, although mostly they consisted of a lot of aimless running and shouting in the dark, and many confused young men unsure as to where exactly and why exactly we were running, and what exactly we were to do when we arrived at our destination, but you didn't want to drop out of the pack for fear of being razed, which is, I have come to think, most of the source of trouble with men, young or old.

Anyway, my friend was so addled he could hardly see, which he said was actually very accurate bearwise as bears can hardly see, but I pointed out that bears in general make up for their virtual blindness with incredible senses of smell, which he didn't have, and he conceded the point.

'The actual technical problem of the moment,' he said, 'is that I can't see the needle or the thread, so if you could possibly stitch the arms onto the chest we will be making some progress.'

'Do you want some coffee?' I asked.

'Oh no no,' he said. 'Coffee is bad for you. Too much stimulation.'

I stitched the arms onto the chest and then stitched the legs onto what looked like a sort of large, very hairy diaper, this being the bottom half of the suit, and all the while my friend provided incomprehensible running commentary at high speed. And then I attached the claws to the hairy slippers of the feet and the hairy gloves of the paws—and I really must note here the terrific engineering of

the claws, my friend had devoted serious thought and creative juice to those claws, you could pull them in and push them out by means of a wire attached to the middle finger of each hand—and then I helped my friend into the bear suit, which took quite a long time also because it was a complicated thing with many buttons. In fact, I think he went seriously overboard on the attachment devices, although he made the point that the very last thing you wanted to have happen when dressed as a bear was to suddenly lose a paw or something, which was a good point.

BY THE TIME HE WAS fully dressed and had stopped playing incessantly with the claws and was unaddled enough to walk properly, it was dusk and I told him I had to get to the dining hall for my dinner shift.

'Do you want dinner?' I said.

'Oh no no,' he said. 'It'd take us forever to get the head off. Let's go right to the ball. Can you walk me there? My eyesight isn't what it used to be.'

Thus I found myself at age 20 walking across campus arm in arm with a bear, something that had never happened before and has never happened since, although many amazing things have happened to me, and I have seen many miracles, first and foremost my children emerging mewling from the sea of my wife.

When we got to the door of the building housing the Costume Ball my friend hesitated.

'Maybe this isn't a good idea,' he said. 'Maybe I've made a mistake. Maybe bears are not welcome at the Costume Ball. It's way too loud in there. It's violently loud. I feel like my head is going to explode. I don't feel at all well. Do you think you could walk me home and stay with me awhile until I come around?'

But by then I was tired of bears, and tired of my friend, and tired of the very words Costume Ball, and I am ashamed to say here that I wrenched open the door, and winced at the howling caterwauling

disco roar from within, and grabbed my friend by his hairy shoulder, and crammed him into the Costume Ball, and slammed the door, choking off that awful throbbing music, and ran away, and all these years later I still wonder if that was a sin.

I HAVE DONE SHABBIER things in the 30 years since that moment, many small thoughtless things, selfish things, greedy things, and it is the great work of my middle years to be more attentive and open, and less judgmental and critical, and to talk less and listen more, but oddly that moment by the door still bothers me a little, all these years later. I was tired and

impatient and I fled, leaving my friend alone, and leaving him assaulted by disco, too, which is unforgivable.

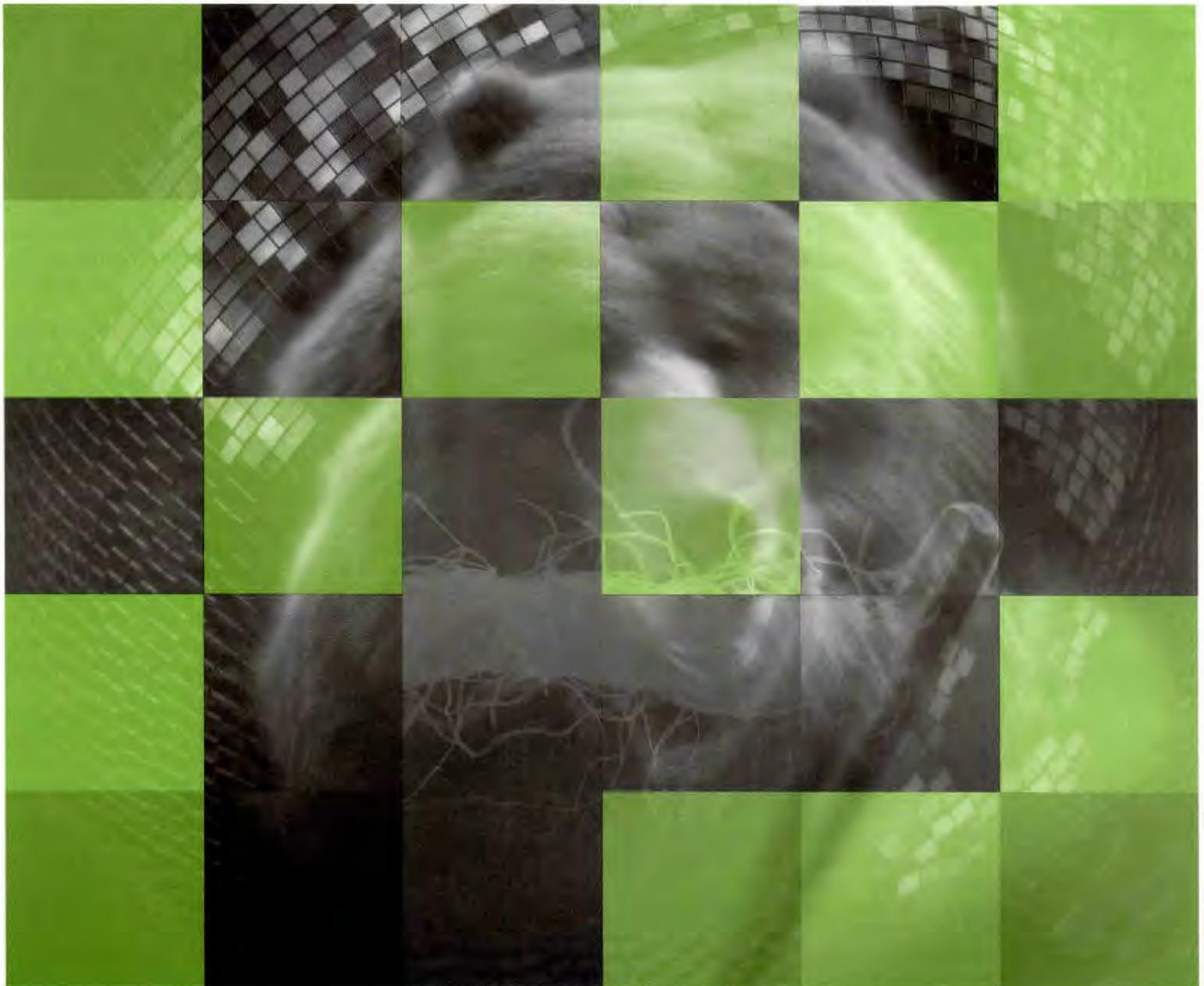
You will say, as I have said to myself many times, hey, it's totally understandable, six hours with an addled bear is plenty, anyone would have had enough, don't sweat it, plus obviously your buddy clearly survived the Costume Ball to eventually become a pillar of the community, plus a thousand years have passed and time wounds all heels, but still I think about that moment, always with a smile, but also still always with a wince.

So many times have I run away.

There was a Macedonian woman once named Gonxha who said *to be faithful in*

little things is a great thing, and I think of that remark from tiny old Mother Teresa whenever I grow weary. I grow weary often, as we all do, as we all must, that being the nature of the world; but then I remember that there are uncountable small things that need to be done well, and I set myself again to sit and sew, there being so many bear suits, so many friends, so many wounds to heal. ■

Brian Doyle is the editor of *Portland Magazine* at the University of Portland, and the author of six books, most recently *The Wet Engine*, about 'the magic & muddle & mangle & music & miracle of hearts'.



Straight from the heart

From humble peasant beginnings in rural China to international success as a dancer and author, Li Cunxin has achieved a destiny that few dared to dream

WHEN LI CUNXIN WAS writing the first draft of *Mao's Last Dancer*, he questioned whether there would be much interest in his autobiography. Now, with the international bestseller in its 25th reprint in Australia and recently published in a condensed Young Readers' Edition, he has his answer.

Li now works in a Melbourne stockbroking office. The plush reception area, and the meeting room where we chat, is not the place one would expect to find a man whose life began humbly in rural China. But there have been so many dramatic moments, so many unexpected transitions in Li's remarkable life.

When we first meet Li in *Mao's Last Dancer*, he is a peasant boy, born into a family rich in love, pride and dignity, but struggling to meet their meagre material needs.

Born a peasant, die a peasant—that may well be the lesson to be drawn from one of the fables he is taught as a child. But this is not to be Li's destiny.

A visit to his school by a team of Madam Mao's cultural delegates will change the 11-year-old's life. They are looking for children with particular physiques and high levels of flexibility to take to the city, to train to become the best artists and dancers in China. Naturally, in this process they will learn to become loyal servants of Mao.

Li is chosen.

In Beijing, at Madam Mao's Dance Academy, he undergoes extreme difficulties, but he also experiences a world no peasant child could ever imagine: eating fresh fruit twice a week and meat almost daily, becoming a student of ballet and, through years of rigorous, highly disciplined training, acquiring an understanding of the nature and essence of ballet, of movement and music, and the joy of performing for an audience.

Ballet becomes his obsession. He sets his course. He will become one of the best. And there are mentors and teachers at the dance academy who see that he has what it takes, who guide him, who recognise how to bring out the best in him, who believe in him.

When Li first sees a video of Baryshnikov dancing, it dawns on him that there is so much more to be achieved through his art form.

Li is soon offered coveted solo roles. He becomes known. With each taste of success he becomes more determined. Obstacles will not deter him.

Ballet continues to open up the world for Li. Not only China, but eventually the United States. He travels the first time on a two-month scholarship to the Houston Ballet Academy, returning soon after that for 12 months.

He has treasured memories of these times—his first time on a plane, seeing an ATM machine—and anxieties too. Yet he revels in the creativity, the freedom—of speech, of movement, of expression in dance—that being in the West offers him.

Li soon realises that he cannot return to his restrictive life in China. One of the most dramatic parts of the book is his defection to the US—he has secretly married another dancer.

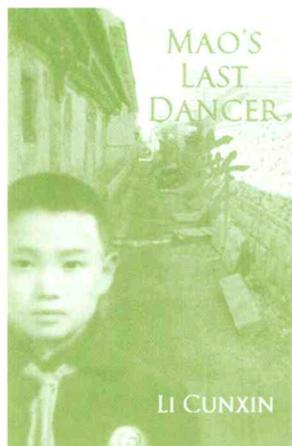
WHAT FOLLOWS ARE THE CONTRASTS of his life: success not only in his performances with the Houston Ballet in the US, but in Europe, and the personal cost of the breakdown of his marriage, of being separated from his family, not knowing what difficulty his defection has caused them.

Eventually Li finds his soul mate in Australian Mary McKendry, a gifted dancer whom he marries. When they travel together, to visit his family back in the village he grew up in, one senses that the peasant boy has finally gone the full circle.

The postscript reveals that the couple returned to Australia where they performed with the Australian Ballet, eventually settling in Melbourne, that towards the end of his dancing career Li studied stockbroking, and that they now have three children.

Mao's Last Dancer is a story of inspiration and hope: about the value of persistence, and striving to become what you hardly dare believe is possible.

The story is told with simplicity and packed with emotion. Li takes readers on his journey, tells them about his fears, his loneliness, the tears he shed being separated as a young boy from his family, and his



enduring love for them. He also shares his successes and his accolades, the pride he has in his family and in his life partner, McKendry.

The book is written in the way that he danced—straight from the heart. ‘Whether people agree that Li had the best technique or not, that’s one thing, but they could never question that I danced with my heart,’ he says.

IN PERSON, LI HAS a gentle presence and is as warm and humble as he appears on the page. But what intrigues me is the story behind the book and how it came to be written.

Li says that when he first defected, he had plenty of offers for his story from publishers and filmmakers in the US and Britain. But he declined.

‘When I defected I was just turning 21,’ he says, ‘and I felt my journey had only just begun. And how much can you write about somebody who is only 21? I thought if someone wrote my story or made a film about my life then, it would never be that full journey. There wouldn’t be much to portray apart from my poor life in China or the defection story, and that would be too limited.’

He pauses, and adds, ‘Actually I’m a very private person so I just kept resisting.’

Yet as his career blossomed internationally, the offers continued. Then, about four years ago, Li and his family spent the weekend at Lorne, on the Victorian coast, with several other families, among whom was well-known children’s author Graeme Base.

‘One night I was chatting with him,’ Li recalls, ‘and when he heard my story, he quietly said to me that he thought I should write it down. He thought it was an inspirational story that would give hope and encouragement to others.’

‘Because he used the words hope and encouragement, I started to think about it. Those things were so important to me. I’ve had inspirational people along my journey who gave me hope and courage—people like my mother, my wonderful mentors, and my wife. I feel that we can’t get enough of this in our lives. So it was this that made me really start thinking seriously about writing.’

But still he had reservations.

‘At the beginning, like many of the rewarding experiences of my life, it was so scary. It was such a daunting thing ... I didn’t even learn English until I was 18, and I didn’t go to a proper school to learn. Who was to say that I could write a book? But I guess I had been lucky to have those experiences that went against the odds, so I knew that if I persisted, if I put the hard work in ...’

Li wrote an eight-page summary of the book he imagined, and gave it to Base, who passed it on to Penguin. They loved it and encouraged him to write.

‘But even at this stage I wasn’t sure ... So I called up Peter Rose, and we had a coffee. I had just read his book *Rose Boys*, which I thought was beautiful;



written with heart and soul. I thought he would be a good person to talk to. We talked about my fears and concern that my English might not be good enough. But he said something that really shocked me.

‘He said, “Li, there are people like me who try to really craft our writing skills, and spend years doing so, but writing my own book, I had to get back to the basics and use the language that can most directly touch people’s hearts ... The simplest language sometimes can be the most powerful.”’

It then took Li just over 12 months to write the manuscript, working by day as a stockbroker and writing each evening.

‘I wrote 680,000 words—all longhand,’ he says with a laugh. Typing, he explains, would have taken him far longer. ‘I couldn’t stop writing in the end. The words just burst out of me ... I did feel when I was starting to write that my dance career had come to an end, and I was reflecting on that journey.’

Li has been delighted with the response from readers. ‘It seems to have struck a chord,’ he says. And he’s thrilled with the launch of the Young Readers’ Edition, which is a condensed version with an extra section giving background information on China.

It’s been an impressive journey, and another generation of Australians are now set to enjoy it. ■

Michele M. Gierck is a freelance writer.

Oil and water

IN EARLY MAY A SHORT ITEM appeared in the financial press. The release was probably a page long but the subs reduced it to three or four lines—enough to say that the Bass Strait oil field had reached a milestone: it had 10 per cent oil remaining. Such treatment of the news was poor given the contribution the field has made to jobs, taxes, exports and royalties, but perhaps there were mixed feelings. After all, this was a kind of obituary—90 per cent of the Bass Strait oil has gone and the chances of finding anything like this again are very slim.

The previous week's news may have had some bearing. Oil had hit US\$58 a barrel, a 50 per cent jump on the previous year and 100 per cent higher than 2003. It was the highest price for 30 years and prompted the International Monetary Fund to call for urgent investment to prevent the price of oil doubling again. The Paris-based International Energy Agency said the same: oil production was not keeping pace with demand. Billions of dollars needed to be spent on oil exploration and now.

So, it was not the ideal moment to announce that Bass Strait was all but over. The news also tempted wider musings: the sediment of the Eocene and upper Cretaceous periods had been transformed into 3.5 billion barrels of concentrated energy over a 35-year period—just 30 per cent of the time cars have been manufactured at Dearborn, Illinois.

But why stress? We've found more oil and gas in other parts of the strait, and continue to find moderate amounts in the central basins and in WA. The numbers, however, aren't big. The North West Shelf produces 0.1 per cent of annual world oil production. Surely we can always buy? There's plenty of oil. The authoritative US Geological Survey (USGS) says there are just over one trillion barrels of various types of oil remaining worldwide, 60 per cent of which is to be found in the Middle East. This is sufficient to last 34 years at present demand. Of course, if we can reduce demand, the supplies will last longer.

At present the world uses 30 billion barrels each year. At the current global growth of 2–3 per cent we will need an extra nine–ten billion barrels (Gb) in five years. China is building eight-lane freeways; India too. China has 20 million vehicles already, increasing by two million a year. Saudi Arabia has generously promised to step up production to meet the gap, but it is hard to see how it can triple production, let alone quickly. There have been no big discoveries in the Middle East for years and the 68 big oil development projects currently under way in various parts of the world will only add 4.5 Gb. Many of these will take four years or more to commence production.

Still, the US, which uses 25 per cent of world oil, may yet get serious about conservation. There's been a rush to buy hybrid cars, although most new-car buyers have just switched to scaled-down SUVs, rather than desert the gas-guzzlers completely. This may explain why US demand for oil rose one per cent last year. The US Congress is aware. In May it passed a Bill promoting the use of ethanol as a gasoline substitute although this doesn't come into effect until 2008. Governor

Schwarzenegger, a man who has seen some scary scenarios in his time, is at least doing something. His 'hydrogen highways' will offer 100 fuel stops for California's minuscule number of hydrogen-fuelled cars, but a symbolic start is at least a start.

If that doesn't prove enough comfort the USGS believes another trillion barrels of oil will be discovered, and a further trillion barrels of bituminous oil is to be had via the pitch and tar sands in Alberta, Venezuela, Estonia and Australia. This is not as good as it sounds as the cost of heating pitch to extract the lighter fractions tends to undermine the whole idea. Add the cost of the water involved and the pollution, and the exercise becomes pricey in more ways than one.

Another niggling thought is that the trillion that lies in wait for explorers sounds a bit neat. How do they know it's actually there? Statistical modelling doesn't create oil and it doesn't allow for wild weather and bandits. We know that there's a lot of oil potential in Colombia, but geologists also remember the kidnappings and murder. Iraq is supposed to have heaps of potential, but few are booking plane tickets just yet.

THERE'S ALSO THE REALITY that production is depletion; an obvious but often overlooked fact. If Bass Strait is in steady run-down might not this be true globally? Those early oil fields in Illinois and Pennsylvania have long vanished from memory. Cartoonists no longer draw oil shooting into the air when a Texan picks a carrot. Texan oil began to flow in big volume in the 1920s as car numbers exploded, but peaked 50 years later in 1970. Alaskan oil consisted largely of one reservoir, Prudhoe Bay. Once production began to decline in 1988, Alaska's big moment was over. The USA's 510,000 wells yield about 14 barrels each per day on average. The North Sea, one of the most prolific discoveries since the Middle East, reached peak five years ago and now produces 20 per cent less than its peak production volume. Indonesia peaked 25 years ago. Yibal, Oman's largest field, went into decline in 1997 after Shell discovered its high-intensity drilling program was depleting the field at a rate of 12 per cent a year.

The exception seems to be the Saudi and Gulf fields, the largest of which is still producing at an astonishing rate of five million barrels per day (mbpd) some 50 years since first production. This is comforting as it suggests there is still time to think of alternatives to oil as our main transport fuel. At least there would be time if it were not for the experience of the North Sea fields, Prudhoe Bay, Bass Strait, Yibal and the hundreds of fields already in decline.

After all, an oil field, even a Gulf one, is an oil field. There are all sorts of factors which determine the field's viability including traps, faults, migration of oil and the porosity of rock. Essentially a reservoir is viable when the pressure from rock or gas above, or water below, pushes oil to the point of least resistance: the well opening. In fields of good porosity and permeability no

additional pressure is required for some years. It's rather like unplugging a Li Lo; most air comes out of its own accord. Later on it's a different story. Engineers must stimulate the reservoirs by injecting gas or water to push out the remaining oil hiding in the corners. This is common with small or older reservoirs. It certainly came as a surprise to oil financier Matthew Simmons when he discovered that most Saudi structures were under water injection and had been for years.

It should be said at once that Simmons is no greenie. He lives in Houston, helped draft the Bush-Cheney energy policy, is a loyal Republican and friend of James Baker III—lawyer to 'big oil' and former Secretary of State. Simmons is pro-oil, which explains his dismay when, suspicious of Saudi claims, he dug out dozens of engineering reports prepared for the national oil company Saudi-Aramco. The reports revealed that three or four of the big Saudi fields were in decline, or would soon be if not managed by water pressure. Ghawar the largest field, was being injected with seven mbpd of water to get out five mbpd of crude. This is an important field, the largest by far, representing 60 per cent of Saudi—and six per cent of world—supply. It was originally estimated to contain 60Gb and so far has produced 54 Gb. Saudi-Aramco now claims it originally contained 125Gb of *recoverable* oil. If 60 billion barrels is the more accurate assessment, we've got a global problem.

Hopefully Ghawar will not be a repeat of Oman's Yibal field. Shell lifted Yibal's reserve estimates by 40 per cent once it saw how well its intensive extraction was going. After many glowing press releases, Shell realised that rapid extraction didn't mean more extractable oil over the long term. It could mean less. It revised estimated figures down 20 per cent, and with it went billions of dollars. The shares slumped and the chairman resigned. Simmons hopes he's wrong, but if the Saudi fields have been hurried, several other Gulf fields may be in, or near, decline too. This means that world reserves figures are wrong.

Simmons came late to the debate. Some geologists and oil analysts have been saying for years that a proportion of the trillion barrels of measured global reserves is simply creative inventory, generated when the OPEC cartel decided to link production quota to stated reserves. The more you said you had, the more you were allowed to produce. The new extraction methods made this plausible, but open to abuse. Further, these reserves failed to diminish as the years passed. Like the Magic Pudding, Gulf oil seems to be cut-and-come-again. Dr Sadad al Hussein, a former vice-president of Aramco, is more pointed. He says the figures are 'dangerously' exaggerated. Dr Samsan Bakhtiari, a planner with the Iranian National Oil Company, believes they're nonsense.

Saudi-Aramco denies there is a problem. It admits the main section of Ghawar is 60 per cent depleted, but says that with other fields and more discoveries Saudi oil will flow for 70 years or more. Even if Ghawar can produce for another 50 years, it will bear a heavy production burden. About 20 per cent of the world's oil comes from 14–15 major fields. Many are diminishing, but depletion rates are not well publicised. A conservative estimate is a rate of three per cent per annum. If demand increases at two per cent per annum and the base reserve is reduced by three per cent per annum, then an additional five per cent volume is required each year. This represents a lot of discoveries and in quick time.

Oil exploration is a tough line of work. You can have a run of dry holes, drill bits get stuck, there are storms, sand and sleet. Currently there is a shortage of rigs, drilling ships, geologists and drill operators. This is why the oil sceptics are bemused by those who think discovery is directly related to the oil price. True, price is a big incentive, but strangely enough the big oil companies are using almost as much of their boom-price profits on takeovers than they are on exploration. The reason? It is far easier to add reserves to your portfolio than undertake exploration. When each hole costs millions, why take unnecessary risks? New techniques like 3D seismic exploration are astonishing, but exploration and development involve years, not months. One hundred years after the ready availability of Texan oil, the new leads lie either in previously unexplored territory, or offshore, where the costs of drilling can be ten times that of onshore extraction.

Despite some very big gas discoveries in recent years, the rate of oil discovery is slowing decade by decade. Estimates range from a conservative 50 per cent *replacement* to a discovery rate as low as 25 per cent. And all figures must be reliable, not PR versions rounded up to please the energy minister or to entice investors.

WHATEVER THE TECHNICALITIES, there are questionable assumptions supporting the Western economic system. We drive to work, church and school, only vaguely aware there is an issue. Petrol at \$2 a litre might be cause for complaint in Australia, but for others it is life-changing. In a shanty town, kerosene may be the only fuel available. Indonesian subsidies for cooking kerosene represent a serious strain on the national budget. America may be able to fend for itself, but in just two years its oil import bill has risen an extra US\$90 billion. At best we are about to enter a world in which the price of oil becomes more volatile. At worst, the price may exceed US\$100 per barrel, as Simmons privately believes it will.

One day we might even come to regard oil with the respect we are only just according water. It has taken the global community a long time to see water not simply as an engineering problem, but one with ethical and moral implications. Politicians are now happy to be seen frowning as they walk beside the inland drain we call the Murray River. Some have even grasped that old communal morality motto of doing unto the downstream what you would have the upstream do unto you.

It will take time before we regard oil in a similar way. At present it is treated like a lotto win for those few governments lucky enough to play host to the resource, but in terms of nation building and the needs of successive generations, it is a brief moment; a moment often squandered. So whether we are one, two or ten years away from a global production peak is almost irrelevant. It may be two years before oil is scarce; it may be five if peace comes quickly to Iraq and Middle East tensions fall. The oil price will fluctuate, but inexorably demand is rising and inventory falling. In the meantime we seem loath to pay much attention to our future. As Simmons says, 'There's no Plan B.' For some reason shanty dwellers don't count, nor even our grandchildren. ■

Richard Campbell is a Melbourne-based securities adviser who takes an interest in oil and his grandchildren.



Split personalities

The Great Labor Schism: A Retrospective, edited by Brian Costar, Peter Love and Paul Strangio.
Scribe Publications, 2005. ISBN 1 920 76942 0, RRP \$35

IT'S 50 YEARS SINCE THE 'Great Labor Schism'. It's appropriate and it was certainly inevitable that a book should be published to recall the event and its aftermath. This book is it: a collection of contributed essays capably compiled and edited by three academics with a strong background in Labor history.

The ALP has a rich and interesting past. Its True Believers are fascinated by it and spend far more time contemplating the history than considering whether the party has either the organisation, or ideas, to face up to an uncertain future. Labor historians have a captive audience. The party wonders what to do next.

In just over a century of its history the Labor Party has had three splits, all of which have tumbled it out of office. The split of 1955, which had its epicentre in Victoria, helped keep the party out of office federally for 17 years and out of office in Victoria for 27 years. These are the numbers, which made it 'great'.

That the Great Labor Schism occurred at all was because of the Cold War in which the ideological conflicts taking place in Europe washed over into the Australian political debate. Essentially it was a debate about the influence of Soviet communism, internationally and domestically, and the Australian Communist Party's involvement in the affairs of trade unions.

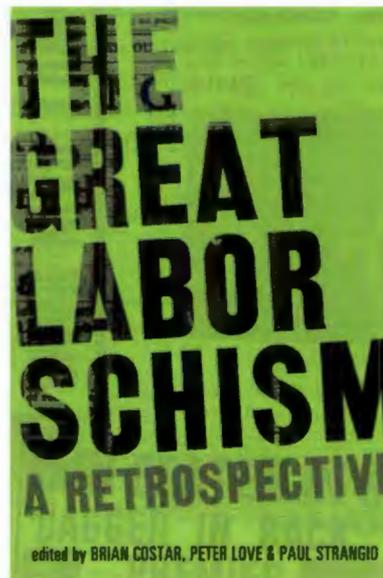
Fifty years on there seems, for what it's worth, to be a tentative consensus among historians that the whole thing was a ghastly mistake. It shouldn't have happened, and if cooler heads had prevailed, the problems would have been resolved. Victoria was the sticking point, largely because of personalities.

In the other eastern states the fracture lines were relatively insignificant. Certainly they led to the establishment of state-based Democratic Labor Parties, but unlike Victoria these had little

influence on electoral outcomes in either the state or federal arena. In New South Wales the Church hierarchy and the Catholic-led state Labor Government showed little enthusiasm for a split. As one cleric of right-wing persuasion is recorded as saying: his bishop (Bishop Carroll) was right—history showed that breakaway parties never lasted. 'They were not worth two bob.' So in New South Wales Catholics generally stayed with the ALP, and the DLP vote never exceeded 3.1 per cent, compared with more than 12 per cent in Victoria.

In Queensland the split didn't occur until nearly two years after Victoria and it was more about a power struggle between the Labor Premier, Vince Gair (later a DLP Senator), and the Australian Workers' Union than any question of ideology. In style, Gair was dictatorial and Bukowski, the leader of the AWU, 'unstable' and 'irrational'. It was not a good mix. In South Australia there was really no split at all, largely because the Labor Party was dominated by two individuals, Clyde Cameron and Jim Toohey (later a senator), who for three decades imposed a power-sharing consensus on the party.

IN VICTORIA THERE was no meeting of minds. There were no matchmakers. And there were a number of strong personalities. Of these, Archbishop Mannix was the most influential. Far from espousing the separation of church and state, Dr Mannix believed in the direct involvement of the clergy in political affairs; his



support for the activities of Bob Santamaria, the National Civic Council and later the DLP was persuasive for many of the clergy and, in turn, large numbers of lay Catholics. Victorian Catholics who might have played a mediating role, such as Arthur Calwell and Senator Pat Kennelly, were too boxed in by hardline views emanating from the hierarchy. Bishop Fox, for example, an auxiliary bishop to Archbishop Mannix, pronounced it a 'mortal

sin' to be a member of the ALP.

Some of the contributors to this book have observed that one of the tragic consequences of the split was the division it created within Catholic families. Others point to it as being an interruption to the development and implementation of Catholic social ideals. A third unhappy consequence was the outbreak of reactive anti-Catholicism, broad-brush and indiscriminating, which followed. It was, for example, more than 20 years before a Catholic parliamentary candidate was endorsed by the Victorian ALP.

Of the 19 contributors to this book, at least 14 might fairly be described as full-time academics. Not surprisingly, it is a scholarly and professional history. There is a lucid analysis of what happened, and why, which draws on previously published work and overlays events with a 21st-century perspective. Distance lends some enchantment to this view and reveals a mixture of motivations and beliefs more complex than the simplistic version of a stoush between an ideological Right and an ideological Left.

Other chapters deal with more speculative questions such as 'Was the DLP a Church party?' and 'Was the DLP a Labor or Centrist Party?' and canvass the influence of a book like Frank Hardy's *Power Without Glory* in setting up an environment of suspicion, if not paranoia, about the influence of the Church in politics.

But the richest and most engaging history goes beyond the mere analysis of events. It captures something of the ambience of the time—the circumstances in which the historical figures played out their roles. This is hard to do when individual contributors are asked to write on a specific and sometimes narrow topic.

Doris Lessing has famously observed that it is impossible today to explain what it was like to be a communist in the 1950s. It is probably just as difficult to explain what it was like to be a Catholic, and particularly an adherent of Bob Santamaria's National Civic Council.

It is in this context that a chapter in the book by Tim Hayes, whose father and grandfather were both Labor

MPs and later DLP members (but not Santamaria supporters) is most interesting. Hayes writes: 'Our tribal life revolved around the Church, virtually to the exclusion of any association with our non-Catholic neighbours,' and, 'They were the days when our priests, brothers, and nuns were highly respected, when Daniel Mannix was the closest thing to a living saint and the Pope was infallible.'

HAYES DESCRIBES the busyness and passion of an active involvement in the Church and to some extent the busyness of involvement in the Labor Party. At that time there was no television and no internet. There were no couch potatoes, focus groups, direct mail campaigns or other paraphernalia of contemporary politics. Politicians made speeches to audiences in public halls rather than delivering 30-second grabs. So people were involved at the coalface and often they were passionately involved. They believed that big issues were at stake. Ideologies were powerfully embraced.

In today's politics, passion seems spent. Ideologies are muted. Focus groups, more than ideals, dictate political direction. If there is a profoundly divisive issue it is about the degree to which the market provides solutions to human problems, which might otherwise be alleviated by political action.

Nonetheless, there is something to be learnt from the past. Otherwise, for the Labor Party all its rich history is close to being bunk. What might be learnt is something about tolerance.

As former Premier John Cain pointed out, in launching the book in April, the Labor Party does best when power is shared between the various groups or factions within the party. From time to time this has happened with positive results. If it doesn't happen, there may be no more splits, but the ALP may degenerate into an unappealing and unelectable rump, too obsessed with petty internal power struggles to reach out and embrace the world. ■

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

SNOW WHITE M.B.A. AND THE SEVEN DWARVES...



Devil in the detail

Hellfire: The Story of Australia, Japan and the Prisoners of War, Cameron Forbes. Pan Macmillan, 2005. ISBN 1 405 03650 8, RRP \$45

‘WHY ARE THERE SO MANY LONG, bad war books written by journalists just at the minute?’ The question was raised first in *Eureka Street* by Peter Stanley in March 2005. Big, journalistic treatments of Gallipoli, numerous of Kokoda, and here of the POW experience in the Pacific theatre, from mainstream commercial publishers, have graced the bestseller lists and the front-window display cases over the last two or three years. Big books, big marketing budgets, big sales. Academic sour grapes aside, it’s probably not as simple as that, and never is.

Big books on popular themes by well-known journalists are nothing new, and neither is the ‘journalist as [good] historian’. C.E.W. Bean and Gavin Long had significant careers as journalists before they became official historians of Australia’s war effort between 1914–18 and 1939–45. More recently, Max Hastings in Britain and Tom Ricks and Rick Atkinson in the United States have shown that the marriage of accomplished journalism, careful research and sound historical sense produces good, serious books able to reach a wide, interested readership. That isn’t really the issue at the heart of my friend’s question, either.

Commercial publishers recognise two things: that there is a large audience out there keen to read (and pay money for) books that retell the Homeric aspects of our military history; and that academic historians are probably the last people willing, or able, to write them. This second proposition isn’t strictly true, of course. There are historians out there with a gift for clear, concise prose who can make the transition from seminar room to living room in the way they deal with issues and ideas, just as there are plenty of journalists with a cloth ear for language and a tabloid sense of history. But the way in which many historians have written more

and more about less and less, and in a less and less interesting manner, here as elsewhere, has left the return of the big, popular synoptic history to the journalists, the popularisers, and the occasional academic ‘stars’ like Simon Schama or Niall Ferguson.

Does this matter? Probably not, so long as we understand what we are dealing with when we consider books like Cameron Forbes’s *Hellfire*. He tells us that his purpose is ‘to tell through individuals the story of the prisoners’ war, Australia’s relationship with Japan and its strategic shift’. He has read the secondary literature carefully, done some useful work in the archival collections, and talked to a range of former prisoners, their families, and others in order to elicit the personal stories through which he frames the book. It is capably done, but frankly tells us nothing we do not know already, or that cannot be found in the fairly extensive literature on the prisoners of the Japanese already in existence.

HIS JUDGMENTS AND conclusions on bigger issues are less sure, more open to question. An underlying theme of the book seems to be that the fall of Singapore brought an end to British imperialism in the Far East, and occasioned the ‘strategic shift’ in Australia’s relations, already cited. This is much too simplistic. It is certainly true that the prewar *style* of British colonial rule was ended by the Japanese victory in 1942, and that the nature of colonial rule changed irrevocably thereafter. But Britain remained the most significant military and economic power in the Malay region until London finally chose to

withdraw in the early 1970s (having mooted the possibility since the late 1950s). As Coral Bell argued nearly 20 years ago, Australia’s strategic relationship in the decades after World War II is

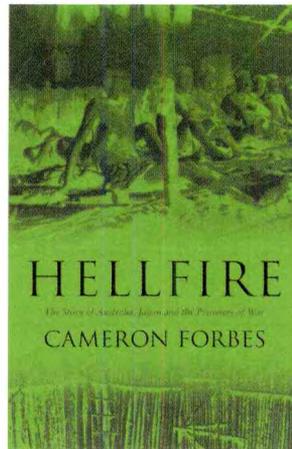
a triangular one, focused on both London and Washington, rather than a bilateral one emphasising one over the other, and her insight helps make much more sense of Australian policy and military experience in the region in the following quarter-century.

Forbes’s treatment of the controversial commander of the 8th Division, Henry Gordon Bennett, is likewise open to challenge. The sequence of events that led

to two inquiries finding against him in the matter of his desertion of his command and escape from Singapore is presented as a conflict between professional soldiers in Australia and Britain and the amateur citizen-soldier Bennett. There was certainly an element of that, and Bennett had gone out of his way before the war to antagonise regular officers in public and the press. But there were citizen-officers equally dismayed by his behaviour and critical of his performance, and the fact that he had behaved bravely and commanded ably at lower levels in World War I tells us very little about his capability and performance at higher levels in a subsequent war.

Hellfire deals with the details of often-horrific human experience well. These are stories worth retelling in each generation, and this book can be read for what it tells us about them. ■

Jeffrey Grey is a professor of history at University College, Australian Defence Force Academy, Canberra.



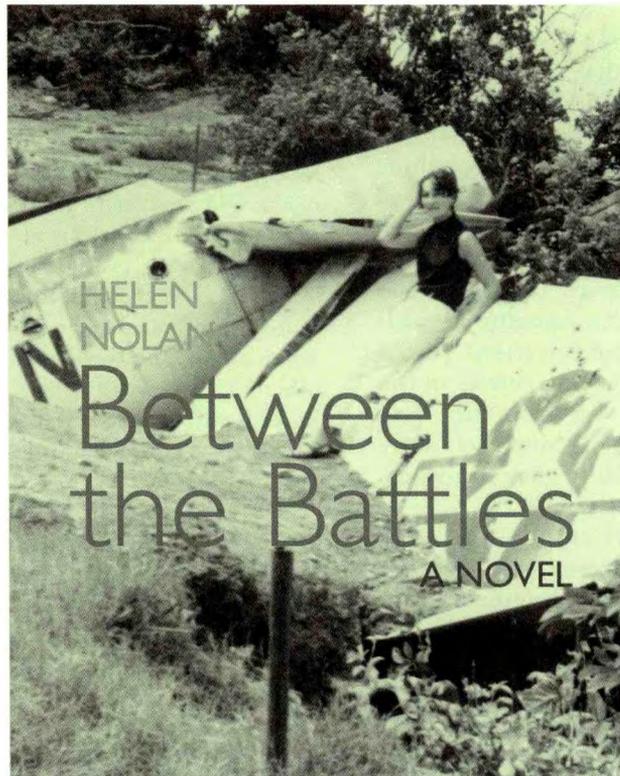
A merry mercenary

Between the Battles, Helen Nolan. Pandanus Books, 2005. ISBN 1 740 76125 1, RRP \$29.95

OF AUSTRALIAN WITNESSES to the Vietnam War there are few, considering that this was the longest, if hardly the most costly, overseas military venture in the history of this country: a handful of novels, a film, a few television mini-series. There are unit histories growing by the year, besides the fine volumes in the *Official History* by Ian McNeill (on combat) and Peter Edwards (the homefront). But women's reckonings of the war are scant indeed. Susan Terry has written of her experiences as a nurse in Vietnam, Jane Ross of a fortuitous research trip in which she investigated the myth of the Digger (see Gerster and Pierce, *On the Warpath*). Georgia Savage's accomplished novel *Ceremony at Long Nao* was, among other things, a benediction for those who fought on either side.

Now—long after her experiences there—Helen Nolan has written a novel, *Between the Battles*. To a degree autobiographically based, it is about Vietnam in the late 1960s. In common with her protagonist, the reckless Holly Gow, Nolan was recruited from Sydney for a secretarial job with the American armed forces. The novel that she has fashioned—decades after the events that she witnessed and of which she heard—is an account of a tour of duty from a point of view different in many obvious respects, but not in all, from that of men who served in the military for the United States or Australia.

NOLAN'S NOVEL IS AMBIGUOUS in its essence. At times her heroine disparages the corrupt conduct of the war by the South Vietnamese and the Americans. At others she jokes about and joins in the black market among the allies. Holly's war seems to take place not so much in the office but in bars, beds, jet planes and helicopters. The incidents with which we are regaled may be based more in fantasy than careful reminiscence: the mile-high delights of sex in the cockpit of a fighter plane, nonchalant survival of the Tet offensive, commandeering army vehicles for joy rides, even the shooting of a black-shirted Viet Cong with a borrowed revolver. Indeed it appears to have been a lovely war for Holly and her girlfriends, with such cheerily titled chapters as 'Red Dogs, Black Cats



and White Mice', 'Billygoats, Hammers and Shark-baits' and 'Oh Goodie—More Girls'.

The uncertain tone of *Between the Battles* attests not only to literary inexperience but to a moral confusion that the heroine does not resolve. She is a mercenary of a kind, not a zealot. The best friends of her female coterie are among the soldiery, especially if they are officers, but Vietnamese who may be Viet Cong are fondly regarded as well. The war is an excitement, and a lost cause. To whatever extent it was intended, Nolan has given us an awkward but revealing memoir of the war in Vietnam, and the careless Western '60s frame of mind that was brought to it. ■

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

Bona fide Bono

Bono on Bono. Conversations with Michka Assayas, Hodder & Stoughton, 2005. ISBN 0 340 83276 2, RRP \$49.95

WHEN YOU READ MEMOIRS written by politicians, media stars, business moguls or sporting heroes, you know that you are being told only what the writer wants you to hear. It is easy to hide embarrassing episodes or less attractive aspects of character either by omission or by selective retelling. (Gerry Adams could run masterclasses in this.) Bono chose a different route: opening himself through a series of conversations with a trusted journalist—not interviews in the conventional sense, but more like two old friends switching off from their daily lives and sitting down to easy introspection over a mellowing wine.

The result is quite enthralling. As in any conversation between friends, some of the result is trivial and mundane, but the overall effect is deeply touching. I was going to use the word profound, but even a reviewer is conscious that the person in question is frontman for an extravagantly successful, decibel-loving pop band, wealthy beyond imagining, one of the half-dozen most recognised people on the planet. People like that are not supposed to do profound.

Yet, again and again, the reader is pulled up short as the words demand to be re-read. Take an example. As a young man, Bono was part of a group—sect would be too strong a word—involved in close study of the Bible. He is asked how he can square the bellicose God of the Old Testament with his ideas on peace and love. It is worth quoting his reply in full:

There is nothing hippie about my picture of Christ. The Gospels paint a picture of a very demanding, sometimes divisive love, but love it is. I accept the Old Testament as more of an action movie: blood, car chases, evacuations, a lot of special effects, seas dividing, mass murder, adultery.

The children of God are running amok, wayward. Maybe that's why they are so relatable. But the way we would see it, those of us who are trying to figure out our Christian conundrum, is that the God of the Old Testament is like the journey from stern father to friend. With Christ, we have access in a one-to-one relationship, for, as in the Old Testament, it was more one of worship and awe, a vertical relationship. The New Testament, on the other hand, we look across at Jesus who looks familiar, horizontal. The combination is what makes the Cross.

If our Sunday sermons were like that, we might fill a few more pews.

And here is a little gem for every Head of School's farewell to a graduating class:

'Some people die at 17 and put their funeral off until they're 77.'

FOR THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN in a monastery for the past 20 years, it may be useful to fill in a few details on Paul Hewson aka Bono. Now in his mid-40s, he was raised in Dublin's northside, Roddy Doyle territory, a mixture of high-rise madness and struggling working class. At 12, he played chess at international level. His father, a lapsed Catholic, would read the Sunday papers in his car while he and his mother attended a Protestant service. She died when he was 14, leaving him with predictable confusion and revolt. He attended a small Protestant primary school which he remembers with affection, as he does Mount Temple Comprehensive, where he met the three others who would form U2. The first person to champion their early efforts outside of Dublin was the French music writer Michka Assayas and it is that early friendship that forms the background to these conversations.



Assayas is no dotting Boswell, no uncritical Sancho Panza; the success of the book owes a great deal to his gentle probing and occasionally forceful questioning. Perhaps persistent is a better word. He is not so much looking for answers as seeking insights, and 30 years of dealing with journalists must have given his subject some instinctive duck-and-weave reactions that needed to be overcome.

At Davos earlier this year, while demonstrators fumed at what they saw as selling out, Bono was part of World Economic Forum discussions on poverty. With his trademark tinted wrap-around sunglasses, he brought much more than celebrity to a debate on the role of the rich G8 countries in helping Africa;

he impressed the hard-headed business moguls and government bureaucrats by his deep knowledge and familiarity with the problems when he joined a panel consisting of Bill Clinton, Bill Gates, Tony Blair, Thabo Mbeki and President Obasanjo of Nigeria.

He is co-founder of DATA (Debt, AIDS, Trade, Africa) and will sup with the devil to push his cause. He agrees that he is not a cheap date, and the kinds of numbers he quotes on debt relief, AIDS initiatives, economic development and the fight against corruption are in billions of dollars. 'Celebrity is ridiculous,' he says. 'It is silly, but it is a kind of currency, and you have to spend it wisely.' And what drives him? "'Love thy neighbour" is not advice. It's a command.'

MEANWHILE, HE IS A songwriter and performer who takes inspiration from the other members of his group. 'The blessing of weakness is that it forces you into friendships,' he says,

explaining their closeness. Not many groups last as long as U2, continually reinventing themselves, providing their followers with memorable performances and new musical experiences. 'This is how we worship God, even though we don't write religious songs, because we didn't feel God needs the advertising.'

And he is involved in a number of businesses. We are not talking here of Dublin's Clarence Hotel which he and The Edge bought in their early days, but multinational groups at the forefront of the music industry. There are also companies involved in the fast-food business and in clothing. In the early days, U2 chose to take lower royalties in return for retaining ownership of all their own copyright and master tapes. It is hard to imagine that they will ever be on the breadline.

There are memorable cameo scenes that stick in the mind: George Bush good-naturedly banging on his oval office desk in an attempt to get a word

in edgeways, Gorbachev calling in unannounced on a Sunday afternoon with a present for one of the kids, Bono swapping his sunnies for rosary beads from the Pope, his visits to El Salvador and Ethiopia. But my favourite is a talk he had with his father over a quiet Sunday drink in a pub. At this time he was famous, successful, wealthy, creative; the old man with a passion for opera and a fine singing voice had given his life to civil-service drudgery. 'There's one thing I envy about you,' he said to his son. 'I don't envy anything else. You do seem to have a relationship with God.'

In his life, Bono has turned music and performance on its head. He has thrown away the book called *Sex, Drugs, and Rock 'n' Roll*, in favour of concern for others on a global scale and deep internal life. The son telling his father about faith is as poignant as any. Perhaps a rock star can do profound. ■

Frank O'Shea is a Canberra writer and educator.



That old black magic

Brotherboys: The Story of Jim and Phillip Krakouer, Sean Gorman. Allen & Unwin, 2005. ISBN 1 741 14595 3, RRP \$29.95

EARLY IN 1982 A SPORTS columnist noted that North Melbourne had signed the Krakouer brothers from Claremont Football Club. It was predicted that their 'black magic' would set the Victorian football scene alight.

A memory unbidden and unwelcome surfaced: first full VFL game, 1949, North v Essendon at Windy Hill, opponent, Norm McDonald.

On that day I joined a long list of players to have received a football lesson from the Bomber champion. I had never reckoned McDonald's blackness to be a factor in our contest. He could just run faster, jump higher and keep on getting the football. If these new boys on the block could bring yet another dimension to the game they would be special indeed. Watching them in action became a priority.

What I saw were two footballers who had an awareness of what was going on around them on the football field which went far beyond peripheral vision. In particular, they intuitively knew where the other brother was at all times.

This faculty was enhanced by an apparent foresight into the direction play would likely take—how events would unfold.

Other players have been similarly gifted in varying degrees, but the Krakouers were exceptional. Several factors set them apart. They had lived and played and fought and practised together for nearly 20 years, and each knew every facet of the other's game. There were two of them, playing in the same team. And they were brothers.

As Sean Gorman calmly implies in *Brotherboys*, it should have come as no surprise that their apparently haphazard kicks and handballs into space so frequently landed in the hands of a previously unsighted sibling.

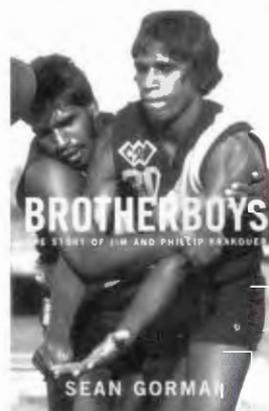
But even though their brilliant manoeuvres had an explanation of sorts, most spectators were caught up in the excitement and shocked surprise, as were opponents, who usually realised, too late, that they had been conned.

It was a double act up there with the best, carried off with the superb timing and effortless grace of Torvill and Dean and with the pinpoint accuracy and amazing understanding of Newcombe and Roche. With the press loving it and running with it, the 'black magic' tag passed into folklore.

But in a way this obscured the fact that here we had two tough and proud professionals who worked hard at their trade and were highly effective as well as looking good. In their eight years at North Melbourne they shared the leading goal-kicker honours on five occasions. They were equal leaders in 1982, with Phil the winner in 1985 and 1987 and Jim top scorer in 1986 and 1988.

Phil's kicking technique was awkward but effective and his ability to work in a confined space was remarkable. It seems probable that had he been at North in either of the periods just before or after 1982–1989 his individual record would have been even more impressive. He was a great finisher and with better players around him would have really been able to showcase his talents.

Jim was a star and would have been outstanding in any era. A great kicker for a small man, he had dazzling speed, was a strong mark and as brave as a lion. His



flawless action as he flashed across the football field was a joy to watch. Ability-wise, he ranks with the very best players to represent North Melbourne.

Sean Gorman has provided a compassionate but honest record of Jim's troubled life, and the clue to his regular on-field transgressions is surely found here. His subsequent suspensions hurt his team badly and almost certainly removed a coveted Brownlow Medal from his reach.

It is not smart to pass judgment on a so-called flawed genius, particularly if the commentator is merely flawed. But one cannot help wondering what might have been for Jim, if only he had been able to bring to his game the temperament of an Adam Goodes or a Michael O'Loughlin. Or, as some old coots might suggest, a Norm McDonald. ■

Les Mogg played 76 games for North Melbourne between 1949 and 1954. He represented Victoria and played in North Melbourne's first VFL Grand Final in 1950. Later, he coached Cobram Football Club to five premierships.

Disturbing questions

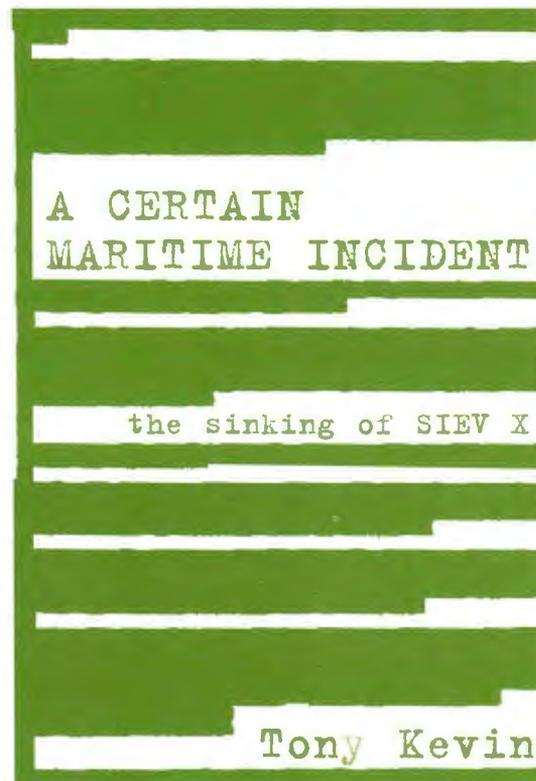
A Certain Maritime Incident: The Sinking of the SIEV X, Tony Kevin.
Scribe Publications, 2004. ISBN 1 920 76921 8, RRP \$32.95

IN OCTOBER 2001, 353 people, mostly women and children, drowned in the Indian Ocean between Australia and Indonesia. Their desperate attempt to seek refugee protection in Australia ended tragically when their overcrowded boat sank on its way to Christmas Island. In his account of the SIEV X humanitarian disaster, Tony Kevin tells a far more disturbing story of Australia's callous activities to deter asylum seekers from coming to our shores.

Predictably, Australian government officials, led by our prime minister, disassociated Australia from the mass drowning, and any responsibility. The tragedy was used to affirm Australia's hard-line border protection policies. However, the story—as told through anguished survivors and grief-stricken families waiting for their loved ones here in Australia—could not be suppressed. The grief of families, expressed at a memorial service held in a park in Reservoir soon after the disaster, stays with me today. It is hard to forget the smiling faces in the precious photos of their children who had perished—all they had left of their desperate attempts to help their families escape war and persecution.

For Kevin, a former Australian diplomat and senior government bureaucrat, his own disquiet about the circumstances of the tragedy became a passionate search for the truth. His exposure of Australian knowledge, involvement and cover-up of the SIEV X story is documented in this extensively researched and unsettling book.

Kevin places the story of the SIEV X, its departure, doomed journey and aftermath, in the context of Australia's antagonistic climate and policies towards refugees. There were other 'certain maritime incidents' including *Tampa* and the children-overboard affair, that



assaulted the rights of asylum seekers, vilified them as 'illegals' and twisted the truth to create a hostile public perception of their lawful attempts to seek asylum. The voyage of the SIEV X occurred in the midst of Australia's shadowy activities under Operation Relex, a contentious, offshore program designed to deter asylum seekers from entering Australian waters. Evidence of prior Australian knowledge and surveillance of the boat and its voyage towards Australia is provided in detail. It makes the official government responses hard to swallow. From the outset, senior government officials and bureaucrats issued inconsistent and misleading information and resisted attempts, such as the Senate Inquiry, to ensure a thorough and transparent investigation.

THERE ARE MANY DISTURBING questions raised in this determined effort to get to the truth of the SIEV X tragedy. Did Australia share some responsibility? Could we have done more to prevent it? What (and who) are we prepared to sacrifice in the name of border protection? As the author laments, until there is a comprehensive, independent and transparent inquiry, questions about our government's credibility and conduct in this affair continue to haunt us. So too does the unresolved grief of family and survivors.

The recent conviction in a Brisbane court of Khaled Daoed, a 37-year-old Iraqi man, for his role in organising the doomed SIEV X voyage, only renews questions about Australia's role in this tragedy. ■

Louise Crowe is a researcher with a special interest in refugee and asylum seeker issues.

Turning the soul

Empathic Intelligence: Teaching, Learning, Relating, Roslyn Arnold. UNSW Press, 2005. ISBN 0 868 40591 4, RRP \$39.95

THE GREAT GREEK PHILOSOPHER Plato once described education as seeking to 'engage and turn the soul' towards the true, the good, and the beautiful. It is not unlike Ignatius Loyola's famous dictum from the *Spiritual Exercises* which claims that 'it is not an abundance of knowledge that fills and satisfies the soul but rather an interior understanding and savouring of things'. Education as engagement, as a process of learning to savour what moves and affects our hearts and minds, is essentially a spiritual journey for us all. The quest to understand and provide a conceptual framework for this inner world of education is the timely focus of Professor Roslyn Arnold's latest book, *Empathic Intelligence: Teaching, Learning, Relating*.

For many years Roslyn Arnold has been a leader in English-teaching in Australia, principally in New South Wales and more recently as a professor in the School of Education at the University of Tasmania. Steeped in the Loreto tradition of education, and therefore attuned to the emphasis Ignatius Loyola placed on the whole person—mind, heart, and will—entering the learning experience, Arnold has spent a lifetime helping people to understand that thoughts and feelings are inseparable companions in our development as learners. The genesis of this fine book is, in her own words, 'as long as my life', and we readers are the beneficiaries of this lifelong research.

As one interested in the spiritual formation of staff and students, I found this book valuable for the underpinning of research methodology and knowledge it provides for many of the themes which I occasionally teach—enthusiasm, imagination, reflection, empathy, care, respect, and story. Indeed, the author concludes her book by saying that empathic intelligence, as a theory of relatedness integrating thought and feeling, 'is a poetic theory that works between the lines and in the

spaces housing the ineffable'. It was no surprise, therefore, to read that several of the author's empathic educator colleagues 'have drawn attention to the understanding and practice of empathy by spiritual writers'. Education as engagement, as 'turning the soul', is very much a process of spiritual formation.

THE OVERSEAS RESEARCH cited by Arnold in *Empathic Intelligence* confirms the findings of our own Australian practitioners like Professor Ken Rowe—that the quality of the classroom teacher is the single most influential ingredient in the learning mix. In an era when the role of the teacher has been somewhat demeaned in the wider community, this is an important message to reiterate. Arnold's focus on the teachers' empathic intelligence, their capacity to engage and enthuse their students, does a great deal to enhance and restore value to the teaching profession. For teachers to show their students that it is not just *what* they learn but *how* they feel about this content that matters in the longer term, is to help them get in touch with their deeper selves.

It is what Arnold, ever the consummate teacher, does so well in this book.

Throughout *Empathic Intelligence* Arnold returns to those famous storytelling words 'once upon a time' as encapsulating many of the themes she explores. If I could express a wish for the book, rather than a criticism, I would have liked to have been engaged by more stories. After all, teachers are innate storytellers. Stories act as a bridge of shared experience between the teller and the

hearer, such that the hearer of the story becomes with the teller a shared caretaker of that story. Storytelling is an excellent way of caring for the soul and connecting teachers and students.

To complement the author's treatment of the theme of care in her book, it is worth recalling its roots in the Latin word *cura*, meaning 'attention to, observation of'—what we might also term today 'watching out for'. In his excellent work *Care of the Soul*, Thomas Moore writes that we should 'honour the symptom and let it guide us in close care of the soul'. In our race to solve problems, however, rather than befriend them, we have often been more intent on finding a cure than providing proper care.

It is instructive that the Gothic word for care is *kara*, which means 'mourning'. Care in this sense is a participation in the pain of another—what we might term true empathy. It is what Arnold explores so well in her book as 'a powerful learning tool and a source of satisfaction for the educators who employ it'.

While research on the relational aspects of teaching and learning might be 'sparse' and deemed to be a tad 'soft'

in some circles, Professor Ros Arnold's work in *Empathic Intelligence* not only fills this lacuna but provides a hard edge of argument to demonstrate her thesis. If it is true that imagination is 'the eye of the soul', then Arnold's research 'as long as my life' has made a significant contribution to the understanding of education as 'turning the soul'. ■

Christopher Gleeson SJ is the director of Jesuit Publications.





Labour of Love: Tales from the World of Midwives, edited by Amanda Tattam and Cate Kennedy. Pan Macmillan, 2005. ISBN 0 330 42166 2, RRP \$25

I have never given birth myself. Two decades on, however, tales of my own birth are still a popular topic of family conversation. Dad remembers clearly the doctor in his 'white gumboots', but in Mum's stories the two midwives who were present take the lead role. It

is this special and often neglected relationship between midwife and mother that Tattam and Kennedy probe in *Labour of Love*.

They allow midwives to tell their own stories, taking us across the continent from the isolated Wimmera to the pandemonium of a busy city maternity ward. They chart not just the elation of 'text-book' births, but the deep despair into which families sink when something goes wrong. Central to each story, however, is the bond of support forged between midwife and mother.

Readers may find the vivid descriptions of birth and its aftermath confronting. Often it feels that we are unwelcome intruders in someone's private joys and sometimes-raw grief. It is precisely through such intimacy, however, that *Labour of Love* captures the anticipation, excitement, and pain of birth and the adventure that follows. The great virtue of the book is to give voice to those often forgotten central figures, the midwives, and the vital role they play at birth and beyond. Thanks to this book, I will now listen to stories of my own birth a little more appreciatively—even the one that starts, 'Becca had a face like a squished-up prune.'

—Bec Butler



The Long, Slow Death of White Australia, Gwenda Tavan. Scribe Publications, 2005. ISBN 1 920 76946 3, RRP \$32.95

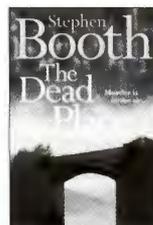
Gwenda Tavan's book is an account of the history of the White Australia Policy. It grew out of her PhD thesis of the same topic. There were times I had to remind myself that I wasn't in fact trawling through one of my history tutorial readings.

Beyond the style, Tavan has written a decent public history of the policy from Federation to present, tracking it from its nationalist beginnings through the postwar pressures for social change and up to its legislative end during the Whitlam days. Leadership and community values issues are themes flowing through the book. Was it the vision of people like Whitlam, Grassby and Fraser that brought Australia into its multicultural era? Or simply politicians responding to society's changing views on matters of race? Chickens and eggs, really. Tavan seems to

suggest that courage in politics had a large role to play in the momentous changes like the 1975 Racial Discrimination Act.

This is a worthy read, if a little lacklustre due to the focus on official, orthodox history. At a time when the prime minister has started making some encouraging noises about reconciliation, and government members are openly pressing for changes to mandatory detention, it's interesting to ponder the racial undercurrents at play. According to Tavan's analysis, the politics of modern Australia present a country that officially dismantled White Australia but continues to encounter its ghost.

—Emily Millane



The Dead Place, Stephen Booth. HarperCollins, 2005. ISBN 0 007 17206 0, RRP \$29.95

Sometimes fictional crime series sneak up on us, so that the next pleasure is going back to where they started and working through. For Stephen Booth, a former journalist and a guest at this year's Melbourne Writers' Festival, *The Dead Place* is the sixth outing that he has given the prickly DS Diane Fry and the optimistic, intuitive DC Ben Cooper. The setting is Derbyshire, an unfashionable territory for crime writing before now, or indeed writing of any kind. There is a forlorn reckoning of how few authors have been drawn to this part of England, although Jane Austen wrote some of *Pride and Prejudice* at a local inn.

Booth remedies this lack with flair, leading us around a damp landscape where rain is only ever postponed, up desolate crags, into marshes. Here poaching thrives, while abandoned ancestral homes have their own basement ossuaries and fresher bones turn up on lonely hillsides. The plotting of *The Dead Place* involves a masterly set of bewildering clues fairly laid. The novel's striking tone is of desolate menace. Cooper's generous gifts are complemented by Fry's suspiciousness. There is bleak jesting too, fit for one of the novel's principal settings—a family-run funeral parlour. The 'dead place' of the novel's title becomes a metaphor for loss, as well as several frightening, concrete locations.

The detective duo is such a familiar staple that Booth's deft and original touches with Cooper and Fry might pass unheeded. His interest is in why they have become as they are, and what they make of their troubling legacies. On a broader scale, but congruently, it is the psychology rather than the sociology of crime that engages Booth's imagination. In particular he dissects the consequences and pains of loneliness. *The Dead Place* is crime fiction of a high order.

—Peter Pierce

Thanks

to all who have responded to the 2005 Raffle.
Results will be published in our next issue.

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Results published in the *Australian*, Saturday 17 July. Permit No. 10249/05

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AUSTRALIA

True north

Fr Ted Kennedy (1931–2005)

LIFE AND DEATH ABOUND in ironies. While some are droll, others are cruel. Yet few of the 1500 or so people who attended the funeral of Fr Ted Kennedy on 24 May—the feast of Our Lady Help of Christians, Patroness of Australia, the response of antipodean Catholics to Empire Day—could have imagined what was about to transpire. Fr Kennedy had not been buried a week before his successors called the police to that fraught inner-city church to deal with ‘trouble-making’ parishioners. This unflinching and selfless friend of Australia’s indigenous people never once in his 30 years as parish priest at St Vincent’s, Redfern called for police assistance, for both philosophical and pragmatic reasons. That funeral, like so much else in the life of this remarkable man, was both a sign of, and a challenge to, the fractures and factions in Catholic life in Sydney.

It was at that very church where the funeral began, with a traditional Aboriginal Smoking Ceremony followed by a long procession to ‘The Block’, the site of so much heartbreak and inter-cultural violence in Redfern. Some of us felt, for reasons of a different (but really less valid) symbolism that the ceremony should have been held in St Mary’s Cathedral, but Ted’s remarkable elder sister, Marnie RSCJ, insisted that he wanted it in Redfern. ‘If it were in the cathedral,’ she told a mutual friend, ‘Ted would climb out of the coffin and walk out of the building.’

The assembly at his funeral would make rich readings for a sociologist. There were, of course, many Aborigines whose welfare had been his burning concern for 30 years. Some were outside the huge marquee, tending a fire which provided a constant and emotionally pungent smoke. As an Australian incense, it reminded us of the land that means so much to us all. Others were inside; their chanting enriching the ritual with an intense eloquence.

This proved unexpectedly moving for so many of the white people present. This keening cut deep to the soul; yet others bore aloft a small cross, decorated with indigenous colours and symbols. The dispossessed, from around the nation, proud and profoundly saddened by the loss of their unswerving friend.

The other part of that grieving congregation—journalists, artists, politicians, atheists, professionals aplenty—were, mostly, those who had encountered, and been influenced, by Ted as young students and graduates. They represented that other dispossessed group in Australian history, the Irish. While the latter have in their success mostly cut their links with the Catholic establishment (another Kennedy legacy), they have retained a vein of spirituality in their lives, commonly sustained by poetry and the arts.

Yet the ‘establishment’ was there, too. Not Cardinal Pell, who had another pressing commitment, but over 60 priests, many overcoming overt infirmity in their determination to honour Ted Kennedy. They concelebrated the mass under the eloquent and empathic leadership of Bishop David Cremin, who proudly identified that the vestments which he wore, decorated with indigenous motifs, were lent by Fr Frank Brennan.

Indeed, Brennan’s father, Sir Gerard—the former Chief Justice—was there, in the company of the former judge and Governor-General, Sir William Deane; taking their seats well to the back they were urged, with a scriptural recollection, to go higher. Judge Christopher Geraghty, author of two sadly colourful books about priestly education in Sydney, read his eloquent Prayers of the Faithful, which bristled with pointed lessons for Cardinal Pell and other political prelates who might wish to demolish Vatican II and return to Counter-Reformation days and ways. Tom Uren was there, as were

sculptor Tom Bass, Gerard Windsor and Stephen Crittenden from the ABC, who was enthusiastically embraced by Cremin as the procession passed him.

And who *was* this great Australian whom they all mourned, celebrated and honoured? Ted was born in 1931 into the family of Marrickville doctor Jack Kennedy, the loved son of Peg—some would say ‘pampered’, but, then, many a saint has grown from a privileged background. He entered Manly seminary at 16, after completing his matriculation, where he never seemed very engaged by his studies. His colleague, Dr John Challis, does not recall him as a great reader (that lay in the future) but as one with a passion for cars, which he shared with the philosopher-to-be, John Burnheim. It was when he moved into suburban parishes—Ryde, Punchbowl, Elizabeth Bay, Neutral Bay and Redfern, where he was to become legendary—that he became, in Challis’s words, ‘an existential theologian who worked out his theology on the job’.

IN RYDE, JAMES MCAULEY was a parishioner and Ted, ever the facilitator, suggested that he collaborate with the ABC broadcaster and composer, Richard Connolly. Their *Hymns for the Year of Grace* are arguably the finest liturgical music to emerge anywhere in the last 50 years. It was hardly unexpected, then, that Ted was the creative part of a partnership with Fr Roger Pryke in conducting an exceedingly important ‘Living Parish’ week at Manly which brought participants from around the country and ignited liturgical renewal in Australia, much of it against the bishops’ will. ‘Ted saw that the right people came,’ Fr Pat Kenna told me.

Then in the mid-1960s, Cardinal Gilroy appointed Kennedy as chaplain to Sydney University, to succeed the

charismatic and psychologically literate Pryke. Kennedy was terrified by the prospect of dealing with all of those young intellectuals but he succeeded splendidly, in part because, as Kenna put it, 'He had the gift of persuading each person that she or he was the only one who mattered.'

One of the dramas of those university years was the 'Mother Gorman Affair'. In late 1966 John Challis had interviewed this visiting American nun on ABC TV in a program called 'God = X' in which they canvassed contemporary theology in an accessible way. It might have gone almost entirely unnoticed were it not for a letter which Dr Thomas Muldoon, the bullying assistant bishop, wrote to a Sydney woman, encouraging her to publish it if she wished.

The fortnightly *Nation* soon reported the story and it provoked outrage. Pryke attacked Muldoon in a letter to the *Sydney Morning Herald* and, encouraged by Ted Kennedy, a few young men at Sydney University—including Joe Castley and the late Bob Scribner—called a public protest meeting which packed out the Anzac Auditorium in College Street. The sensation was the appearance, with a stilted apology, of the ashen-faced and trembling bishop, accompanied by a muscular quarter carrying a statue of Our Lady of Fatima. It was a crucial event in Australian Catholic history and Ted Kennedy was the facilitator.

EVERYTHING MOVED TO a higher plane of practical Christianity in 1971 when Kennedy, John Butcher and Fergus Breslan persuaded the new archbishop, Jimmy Freeman, to let them look after the parish of St Vincent in Redfern. There Ted came under the ineluctable influence of Shirley Smith, 'Mum Shirl' to simply everyone. She was, as Kennedy described her, 'the greatest theologian I have ever known', the real Aboriginal Elder of that place. She taught him about indigenous culture, and the tragic price of their dispossession



Fr Ted Kennedy of St Vincent's, Redfern, with Duane Captain, November 1996.
Photo by Palani Mohan, courtesy Sydney Morning Herald.

and that, 'The red soil between their toes is the spirits of their ancestors.'

Supported in financial and other ways by his old university friends, Kennedy devoted himself to this cause, turning no one away. He coped with illness and drunken violence without ever resorting to the police, and developed a close involvement with the nascent Aboriginal Medical Service. What deeply saddened him was the number of funerals that he had to conduct. The squalor which his presbytery developed did not seem to disconcert him, with up to 100 sleeping there on winter nights. Though a lover of the ordered emotion of poetry (especially Australian and Irish), of fine wine and good food (green vegetables excepted), Ted was not, personally, terribly fastidious. At his funeral, one of Ted's family told of a nurse at the hospice where he spent his last weeks regretting that she could not persuade him to dry between his toes. 'His mother couldn't get him to do that either,' was the knowing reply.

For all of his activity and innumerable and legendary phone calls—'he operated a virtual parish,' John Challis puts it, 'the apostolate of the telephone'—Ted rarely revealed much of his inner self. He loved the solitude of the bush and took pride in

the fact that his father was born in Harden, where his grandfather was principal of the local public school. He particularly loved Araluen, near Braidwood, and a family property there which dated from the gold-rush days. Most of all he loved his refuge at Burrawang, in the Southern Highlands where he lived, in spartan circumstances, in a house dangerously over-filled with books.

Kennedy crossed swords with authority, most enduringly in the book *Who is worthy?* which he published in 2000. He was always rightly suspicious of those with power, and their motives in the exercise of it. He was a constant thorn in the side of Sydney's episcopal *nomenclatura*, especially those with pretensions well astray from reality and

truth. Nevertheless, many were thrilled to see not only Bishop Cremin as the presiding celebrant, but also a humble Cardinal Clancy, one among many, with the concelebrating priests.

The night before that requiem, a visiting Dutch couple had sought advice about what important things to see in Sydney next day. 'The most interesting event tomorrow,' they were told, 'will be the funeral of a Catholic priest.' They were sceptical but their hostess pressed her point. 'It will be important and interesting not only because he was so loved and it will, therefore, be so big. More important, this funeral of a great priest will not be held in a church.'

Unlike so many ecclesiastical bureaucrats, Kennedy well understood—as Vatican II has sought to convey—that Christ came into *the world* because that is where the people live. That, accordingly, was where he strove so hard. And that, in the end, was where so many strands of Sydney celebrated, honoured and exulted in his marvellous life. ■

John Carmody is a Sydney medical scientist and opera and music critic. He and his wife Diana were married by Fr Ted Kennedy in 1967.

flash
flash in the pan



Descent into devastation

The Assassination of Richard Nixon, dir. Niel Mueller. Sean Penn is a great actor. Perhaps too great. How so? you ask. Well, the truth is that a film is rarely a vehicle for a single body, and Penn's performances burn so brightly that they have the ability to consume everything around them. In *The Assassination of Richard Nixon*, Penn plays Sam Bicke (yes, it does sound like Travis Bickle, and the similarities to *Taxi Driver* don't stop there)—furniture salesman, ex-husband, and would-be assassin.

Based on a true story (inspired by the story of Samuel Byck, who, in 1974, attempted to hijack a commercial airliner and crash it into the White House), *Assassination* traces a year in the life of a very unhappy man. A man who feels the weight of social injustice with such personal vehemence that life becomes an impossible burden. Penn leaves no doubt as to the strength of his character's feelings. When Bicke pushes buttons on a TV remote control, you imagine he might be blowing up a building—which is an extraordinary feat of performance, but ultimately cripples the film. Or at least gives it a limp.

As a portrait of a devastated man, *The Assassination of Richard Nixon* is nearly flawless. It tackles the inextricable and frightening mix of personal and public disappointments that can misshape a life. Beaten by circumstance and insecurity, Bicke sees everything around him as dishonesty and opportunities denied—everything from little lies in furniture sales to big lies in the White House.

Bicke chronicles his disappointments with life and the elusive American Dream by recording his thoughts on tape—it's like a self-improvement course in personal destruction.

Contrasted with these are actual self-improvement tapes given to him by his boss (Jack Thompson), full of truisms and corporate garbage: 'The salesman who believes ... is the salesman who receives.'

This structural trick works handsomely, further darkening the hole Bicke has dug himself. In reality (and in the film) Bicke sent the tapes to Leonard Bernstein, a man he thought of as representing a rare purity. What Bernstein made of them would be interesting to know.

The difference between a good man and a bad man can be so very slight: a loan application denied, watching a particular news report, access to a gun. While *Assassination* doesn't pretend its protagonist isn't descending rapidly into extreme paranoia, it does suggest the system is partially to blame.

The Assassination of Richard Nixon attempts to wrangle with some very serious issues—rampant misery and disaffection of the many and the hypocrisy of the ruling few. And to a large degree, it works. But for my money, the script isn't strong enough to support the weight of Penn's performance.

—Siobhan Jackson

An old story with new heart

Ae Fond Kiss, dir. Ken Loach. Ken Loach is certainly a big name in British film. His very particular brand of social realism has driven all his work and has had admirable political impact (most notably a change to homeless laws after a series of docudramas he made in the '60s). But Loach is not all about the art of political change. He is also a very skilled storyteller, with a real sense of the bigness of little stories.

Ae Fond Kiss is the story of two lovers. Casim (Atta Yaqub) and Roisin (Eva Birthistle) are a young couple living in Glasgow. Intelligent, open-minded, good-looking. But Roisin is Catholic and Casim is Muslim. There is a problem. At least for others. Most notably Casim's family.

There is nothing new in the basic story of *Ae Fond Kiss*. The story of lovers overcoming family hurdles is even older than *Romeo and Juliet*. But it's always worth having a look at a standard through the eyes of a director with the direct humanity of Loach. There are few who can depict the complexities of real people's real lives with as much grace. He achieves this in part by employing mostly non-actors but also by working from deceptively simple scripts (this one, and many other Loach films, written by Paul Laverty) which weave stories that are painfully particular and rarely fall on generalisations to make a point. The characters sweat and stumble, have a mixture of small and big ideas, make silly decisions for good reasons and fall in love when they should probably just be 'good' sons. Loach doesn't go looking for big narrative conflicts; he just puts loving children in houses with their loving parents, and *voilà!*

Ae Fond Kiss is full of delightful humour. Watching Casim's father (played by Ahmed Riaz with a perfect mix of pride and humour) mark out the foundations of an extension to their family home is quite simply hysterical—a Glaswegian Pakistani treading on his wife's flowerbeds with the local gormless builders looking on. Not to mention the incident with the dog and the car battery (you really have to see that one).

This is by no means Loach's most important film, but its frankness about love, cultural clashes, religion, sex and families is very moving. And there isn't a whiff of the love-conquers-all claptrap that taints so many stories of this ilk. Casim and Roisin don't know if they will be in love forever; they just want the freedom to explore the possibility.

Like the Robert Burns poem says:

Ae fond kiss, and then we sever!
Ae fareweel, alas, for ever!
Deep in heart-wrung tears I'll pledge thee,
Warring sighs and groans I'll wage thee!

—Siobhan Jackson

Lost in time

2046, dir. Wong Kar Wai. Wong Kar Wai is one of my favourite film-makers, and his last film, *In the Mood for Love*, is one of my favourite films. So I was rather looking forward to seeing *2046*. Wong is a notoriously unhurried film-maker, often liking to



Jack Thompson as Jack Jones in *The Assassination of Richard Nixon*.

go into production without a finished script, writing and rewriting as he goes, but even by his standards it's been a long wait. Work has been going on and off for the four years since *In the Mood for Love* came out; the film had its 'première' at Cannes in May last year, having had its screening slot shifted three times as the production team raced to complete the computer-generated effects.

The film then went immediately back to the editing room for more work. (Wong's advice to film-makers working with computer-generated images? It's easier if you have a script!) Tony Leung Chiu Wai, who plays the film's central character, Chow Mo Wan, heard rumours of more reshooting, and immediately shaved off his character's trademark moustache. 'You just can't go on shooting like that; you have to stop,' he said. 'The last two weeks of *2046*: nightmare, nightmare.'

Once you see the film, it's not hard to imagine why it might have been a difficult project to work out how to end, let alone how to give a sense of unity and coherence. It is fragmentary and elliptical, constantly throwing out threads to



Lovers Chow Mo Wan (Tony Leung) and Bai Ling (Zhang Ziyi) in *2046*.

number of the room in which Chow and Su Li-Zhen (Maggie Cheung Man-Yuk) used to meet in *In the Mood for Love*; it is the number of the room next to the one in which Chow now lives and writes, where his landlord's daughter rehearses all the things she should have said to her Japanese lover when he asked her to elope with him; it is 49 years from the Chinese takeover of Hong Kong in 1997, when (in reality, not in the film), they promised, nothing would change for 50 years.

It is also the title of the one thing Chow still seems to have any passion for: a science-fiction novel called *2046*. In the novel, there is a train that goes to a place called 2046: 'Everyone who goes there has the same intention ... to recapture their lost memories. It was said that in 2046, nothing ever changed. Nobody knew for

throughout the sixties, through various affairs and involvements, slips in and out of the sci-fi world of his novel, which in turn mirrors different parts and people from his life. Both Chow and Wong, it seems, wish to bring forth the impossible: to grab hold of the past before it slips from their hands and becomes memory; to have a past which never changes, in a present which does nothing but. Sadly, beautiful though the film is, Wong isn't quite able to bring *2046* to bear all this weight of metaphor and overdetermined allusion. For all his leaps backwards and forwards in time, all the ghosts of previous films and places and times that he summons up, the film, like Chow, can offer us little more than a cold heart, lost in the memory of a long-distant mood ... for love.

—Allan James Thomas



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David Hollenbach SJ is the Margaret O'Brien Flatley Professor of Catholic Theology at Boston College, where he teaches theological ethics and Christian social ethics. He assisted the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in drafting their 1986 pastoral letter, *Economic Justice for All: Catholic Social Teaching and the US Economy* and in June 1998 he received the John Courtney Murray Award for outstanding contributions to theology from the Catholic Theological Society of America.

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Cable czars

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE TREE? Mine is the paperbark. I realised it today when I was glancing idly out of the passenger-side car window. It was growing on a nature strip next to the shop where we'd stopped to get milk and bread. It was a feast of graceful complexity, its endless frilled layers catching the sun, its holes and crannies full of webs and seeds and pupae and busy, busy little creatures going about their business. It exemplified the glory of Australian wildness even in our suburban deserts, its colours shading infinitely through every possible aspect of grey, cream, ivory, charcoal, sand, beige, stone—in delicate play of light and shade. I could look at it a long, long time without tiring.

If only I could say the same thing about most of the stuff on the telly. I watch probably more than you do—always did like the telly more than was good for me—but frequently as I churn the remote through umpty-five digital cable channels I find nothing that's any good.

Indeed, the very fact that I keep turning back to the ABC and SBS might argue that I'm wasting a great deal of money on cable, especially when I stop to consider that the ad breaks on cable are, if anything, more frequent and intrusively insensitive than on the networks. It seems like a great big scam to make us pay for TV and then show commercials. If it weren't for Ovation I'd stop. Ovation is great, showing operas, ballets, fabulous jazz concerts and book programs. You really don't get its like anywhere, except on Sunday afternoons on the ABC.

Anyway, something that the ABC has got its hands on before Ovation is a fabulous seven-part series, *The Blues*, which will be showing all through July and into the middle of August at 10.10pm on Saturdays. If you're going out, get your teenager to program the VCR for you, because you won't want to miss it. Each episode is a 90-minute personal exploration of the blues, its history and performers, a different director taking on the task each time. The first one is Martin Scorsese, who takes us to the banks of the Niger and thence to the Mississippi Delta, looking for origins. He explores Delta Blues—as significant to our musical culture as Mozart; the thudding heart of the music of experience won in pain and contemplated in performance art. And such art, such performances: Son House, Muddy Waters, John Lee Hooker. All I could say was wow. And that was just the first episode. Wim Wenders (who directed that wonderful movie *The Buena Vista Social Club*) does the next episode as a fictional story, interwoven with amazing archival footage and contemporary blues performers such as the great Bonnie Raitt. The third episode (Richard Pearce) is fabulous, concentrating on Memphis and B.B. King.

There will still be some *Black Books* episodes stretching into July, thank heaven. This third series may grow on me; I worry that it's become a little too self-conscious at times, perhaps overdoing Bernard's domestic chaos. That's being picky, but I loved the first two series so much that I bought them on DVD.

I was always stumped when trying to pick a favourite from a show so fertile, so replete with Moments: Bernard unable to get back in his shop after the builder has set the alarm code; Manny playing brilliant piano with spoons from inside; the drinking of the wine meant for the Pope, with a cash-meter at the side of the screen measuring their consumption at five quid a drop; Fran's bossy vegan New Age friend letting her have a 'naughty rice cake'. I haven't been able to pick a similar peck of beauties from the third series. But it is still so much

better than anything else you care to mention that it matters nowt.

COMEDY IS SO PRECIOUS that we need to promote and nurture it. Seven's dismal failure to persist with the *Let Loose Live* show was an indication of how difficult it would be to make a *Black Books* or *Father Ted* or *Little Britain* in the philistine climate that persists on commercial TV here. It's still the ABC, curtailed and cramped as it is, that gives us the brave, creatively driven experiments like *Kath and Kim*; someone was willing to take a risk with comedy-drama, not just some weaselly catchpenny false-reality show that is run through focus groups first. (Focus groups forsooth; just stand to the side while I spit on the floor. No—I'm not being grumpy, it's just that neither I nor anyone I know has ever been asked to be in a focus group. The bloody marketers probably pick out the focus groups they want anyway, so that they don't get any inconvenient results such as, 'What the hell is this crap you're showing me?')

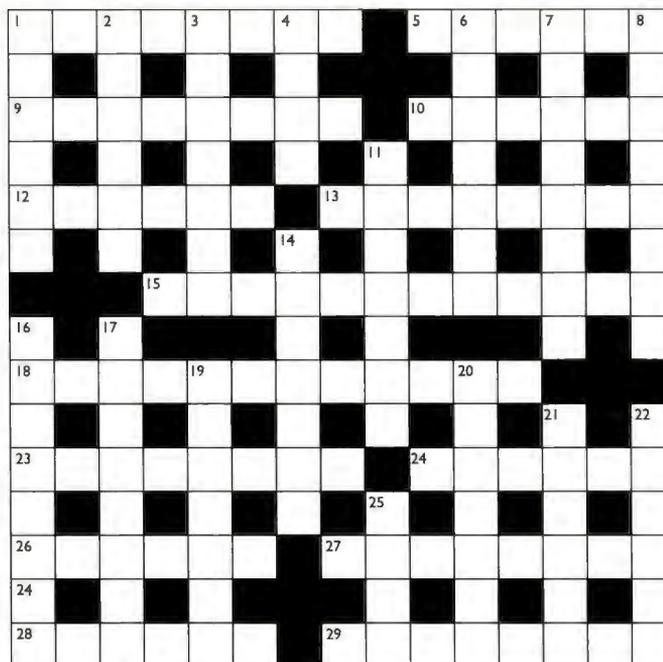
OK, so I'm grumpy. But I have company. Again on the ABC (8pm Tuesdays) during July and August there will be *Grumpy Old Women*, the sequel to *Grumpy Old Men*, which to me was simple camaraderie, even when I violently disagreed with what they were grumping about. The women are marvellously appalling, which is what you want: Janet Street Porter, Jenny Éclair, Ann Widdecombe, Germaine Greer, Annette Crosbie and Sheila Hancock.

And for the rest of the time I will be watching the paperbark tree. ■

Juliette Hughes is a freelance writer.

ACROSS

1. Successor of Peter, they say, whose name is almost a blessing. (8)
5. Churchman's circle in difficulty. (6)
9. Again determine rule about donkey. (8)
10. Foundation for Cockney leader's pony at last. (6)
12. Two French articles I'd placed on table that wasn't set. (6)
13. Wine that has the taste of liquor, primarily, on limes turned over. (8)
15. In dealing with the problem rue lost sense of determination. (12)
18. This edition of *Eureka Street* is appropriate reading for the period cited. (12)
23. 5-across might conduct this service in Westminster Abbey, for instance. (8)
24. Sort of language spoken in Prague or Poland, perhaps. (6)
26. Put it in alone for foot comfort. (6)
27. Going in for a little nonsense at the Spanish dance. (8)
28. Breakfast cereal could be thus—like polished wood. (6)
29. A happy sound rings out for children at the end of class. (4,4)



DOWN

1. Peter's ship, made from the protective covering of trees, by the sound of it. (6)
2. In good time, going north? Almost. (6)
3. In defiance of French ill-will. (7)
4. About to return, for example, to the enclosure. (4)
6. Like a cat sign on numerical square. (7)
7. Determined to give up what he loves—red bubbly. (8)
8. Chip away sense, somehow, to produce a quaint charm. (8)
11. Pretty spangles for the five babies born under direction. (7)
14. English House where the ordinary people share daily fare? (7)
16. Drastic changes, possibly, in the cleaning regime. (8)
17. Not overland will we find the submarine; quite the contrary. (8)
19. One lisp, perhaps, and you will be unable to cite the Greek character. (7)
20. See 22-down.
21. A meeting place beside the road. (6)
- 22 & 20. It follows end of academic year, or even Easter. (6,7)
25. A greeting in the rain? (4)

Solution to Crossword no. 134, June 2005



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Keogh's Creek, Tasmania. Photo: Philip Sloane

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