EUREKA STREET

A MAGAZINE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS, THE ARTS AND THEOLOGY
Vol 16 no 1 January–February 2006 $10.95 (inc. GST)

eureka street /ju:'ri:kə stri:t/
I have found it! The exultant cry of 'eureka'. A way, a public road in a city or town, a path to a rebellion. A way of questioning, a place of discovery, a distinctly Australian forum for conversation and new ideas. There are many paths, but there is only one *Eureka Street*.

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

This issue
Cover: Illustration by Clare Locke
Cartoons: Dean Moore, p19, p37

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FLASH IN THE PAN

PUZZLED

Robert Hefner

Who's watching?

'Watchman, what of the night?'
The watchman says:
'Morning comes, and also the night.
If you will inquire, inquire;
Come back again.'
—Isaiah 21: 11

At first glance, Clare Locke's cover illustration for this issue of *Eureka Street* evokes a familiar image of summer, a time when our living is meant to be easy, our hearts light and our minds carefree. Our thoughts fly back to summers long ago, lazy days of sitting in the sun and watching the cricket.

But on closer examination some questions may arise. Where are the fieldsmen? Why is the sunshine only on the players, and the shadows beyond so dark? Just who is watching this game? Below the calm surface, something seems to be calling for an answer, something that makes the scene very much a reflection of the mood of our times.

That mood is largely one of uncertainty. Old assurances are fading—about how we work, how we ensure that those unable to work will be provided for, how we provide safe havens for those with nowhere else to turn, how we protect our way of life from those who might wish to destroy it, how we carry on the public conversation of a free society, and how we express our views on our government's actions or intentions.

Perhaps the greatest challenge in times of uncertainty is to remain watchful—not only of the human injustice that is so often a by-product of a climate of fear, but of our own actions, motivations and sympathies, which can be selective.

The recent Australian outrage over the execution in Singapore of the young Australian Nguyen Tuong Van was understandable from people who believe in the sanctity of all human life and the barbarity of capital punishment. But few here would have been aware of a similar outcry in Singapore itself earlier in the year, before the hanging of an Indian-Singaporean man, Shanmugam, who had tried to carry traffickable quantities of cannabis into Singapore from Malaysia. Shanmugam's case was equally heart-rending, as he was the sole parent of 14-year-old twins who had only their elderly grandmother to care for them after his death.

On a more mundane level, it is easy to see that our motivations are often dependent on the slightest switch in the prevailing winds, or the latest headline news. After the sharp escalation of petrol prices late last year caused by a hurricane in the Gulf of Mexico, a poll indicated that most Australians feared the threat of higher petrol prices even more than that of terrorism! How quickly that changed when the price of petrol began to drop and we were warned of an imminent threat of terrorist acts on our soil, then saw on our television screens people being arrested.

Many humane and rational voices spoke out against aspects of the Government's proposed anti-terror legislation, but it became law, with little opportunity for debate in parliament, on 6 December. In this issue of *Eureka Street*, Alison Aprhys examines the possible repercussions for our society's principal watchdog, the media, and more generally the media's role in a democratic society whose freedoms have become more fragile.

Other writers provide the kind of informed, intelligent commentary on human and social issues that *Eureka Street* readers have come to rely upon: Andrew Hamilton, Michael McGirr, Jack Waterford, Brian Doyle, Dorothy Horsfield, Brian Matthews, Morag Fraser, Juliette Hughes, and many more. What they all have in common is a watchful, inquiring mind and a concern for their fellow human beings.

Also in this issue you will find the annual *Eureka Street* Index for vol. 15, 2005, inserted as a useful lift-out to provide ready access to the authors and subjects of each issue published last year. We hope in time to make this index, and earlier ones, available online as a searchable archive. Our fortnightly editorial update at www.eurekastreet.com.au has generated a flurry of responses, some of which are printed in this issue. We hope to provide a forum soon for email letters to be posted on our website, thus widening the dialogue between readers and writers.

Finally, on a personal note, I'd like to thank Marcelle Mogg for keeping such a diligent watch over *Eureka Street* for the past several years, and Andrew Hamilton for his wisdom, wit and generous support. It is quite unexpectedly, and with a sense of privilege, that I find myself, in this first issue of the magazine's 16th volume, on the watch.

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

Serious issues

My initial disappointment that fewer copies of *Eureka Street* are to be published each year has been mitigated by the first fortnightly editorial update! Andrew Hamilton's timely and thought-provoking approach to the current relationships between Australians and their government ('Laying down the law', Editorial Comment, eurekastreet.com.au, posted 16 November 2005) raises serious issues, not least of which is the widening gap between New Testament values and values promoted by the Howard Government.

Positive human relationships are, more than anything else, founded on trust. Sadly and too frequently in the last decade the electorate has been fed a diet of misinformation. Even sadder is the fact that the community at large has accepted such dishonesty as part of life, whether it be the distinction made between promises and core promises, the blatant untruth that children had been thrown overboard, or the failure to take far-reaching IR changes to the electorate in the months preceding the 2004 election.

This most recent deceit has been compounded by giving too little time for parliamentary scrutiny and debate of a policy which has the potential to seriously lower the living standards of the most vulnerable members of our community.

David Dyer
Ballarat, VIC

Guiding principles

Thank you, Andrew Hamilton ('Laying down the law'), for becoming an informed web voice challenging the attitude displayed by the Government in recent legislation, and for clearly outlining the guiding principles that are presently missing from the proposed legislation. By providing a forum that offers Australians the opportunity for comment, involvement and debate, you are encouraging the building of the sense of solidarity, community and co-operation that respects human dignity and that the Government is failing to recognise as essential for human flourishing.

Margaret Smith
via email

Leadership lacking

Our Government is showing little genuine moral leadership on this issue ('Beneath the trapdoor'/'The face of moral judgment', Editorial Comment, posted 30 November 2005). But what can one expect when Howard *et al* are prepared to allow David Hicks to languish in intolerable conditions in Guantánamo Bay, where none of the usual legal protections seem to apply to our 'allies' in the way they deal with their prisoners, in this case one who is a citizen of our country? I find that situation even more puzzling, frustrating and hypocritical than the Nguyen case, if not as tragic, as [Hicks] is not yet on death row.

Bill Versteegh
Woodforde, SA

Response to our fortnightly editorial update at www.eurekastreet.com.au has been overwhelmingly positive. If you are a subscriber and have not yet provided us with your email address, please send it to eureka@jespub.jesuit.org and we will email each new editorial update to you.

—Acting ed

On terror tactics

I do not often find myself agreeing with Jack Waterford. However, I thought that much of his piece, 'Terror Tactics' (*Capital Letter*, September–October 2005) was spot on.

Cases like Rau, Solon and all the others denied their liberty without recourse to a court seem to me to have a clear message. Parliament and its individual members should be very careful about the powers they give to officials, especially when individuals have little or no right to judicial review of official decisions.

This is not necessarily to argue against the Government's border protection policy. It is a suggestion that if Parliament must make laws that enable detention, then it should do so only if it also provides checks and balances that are available to the individuals concerned.

Bill Ranken
Kew, VIC

Ethnic stereotyping

I was disappointed to read David Glanz's account of his recent visit to Israel (*Eureka Street*, September–October 2005). Despite Glanz's reputation as a committed anti-Zionist, one might have at least hoped for some serious engagement with the reality of Israel and its social and political structures. Much of Glanz's account is blatant ethnic stereotyping. We are told that the Israelis he meets are unfriendly, rough, tough, rude and aggressive. They all carry guns, and are inherently militaristic. In contrast, Glanz depicts the Arabs he sights either as vague and incompetent (the Egyptian border guards), or alternatively as mere passive victims of Israel. As for political analysis, Glanz offers little more than a parroting of the Palestinian national narrative he first heard at university 30 years ago. All Israelis are powerful oppressors, and all Palestinians are powerless and oppressed

Philip Mendes
Kew, VIC

Truly frightening

The new anti-terror laws are truly frightening, especially as the past record of this Government has consistently disregarded the needs and rights of the most vulnerable in our society—for example, the callous treatment and demonisation of asylum seekers and the denial of work rights even if the asylum seeker has skills needed by our community. The new industrial laws also show a lack of understanding or empathy with young and/or unskilled or timid workers who clearly are unable to negotiate successfully with their employer. Hail to the Police State, farewell to Australia of the Fair Go!

Joan Pearson
Ivanhoe, VIC

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

the months' traffic

Magnificent mare

As the Sydney Spring Carnival came to an end, with Desert War winning its second Epsom in a row and Railings taking the Metropolitan (races that date back to the 1860s), the Melbourne Carnival began. Back from Hong Kong, David Hayes led in the two-year-old I Got Chills which landed a huge plunge and won by six lengths. It would win again three weeks later, and then go amiss, perhaps never to start again. The Turnbull Stakes went to the champion mare Makybe Diva, warming up for the Cox Plate to come at Moonee Valley.

But first the action swung to Caulfield for the Guineas. It has been a vexed race, won by ordinary horses—Procul Harum at 250/1, last year Econsul at 40/1—but by outstanding ones as well: Vain, Redoubte's Choice, Lonrho. As rain began to fall heavily, the Bart Cummings-trained God's Own was knocked sideways twice, but came on to win decisively from Paratroopers. Amazed he should have been, but Cummings only ventured 'very good'. That laconicism did not reprove the gibbering spokesman for Carlton at the presentation who extolled its 'big beer' ad.

Earlier on in the program some of the international horses were out in the 120th running of the Caulfield Stakes, but it was done brilliantly by a relative newcomer, El Segundo, with Darren Gauci up. It could only manage sixth in the next week's Caulfield Cup, but watch for this horse in the autumn. The Cup went to Railings from the unlucky Japanese runner Eye Popper whose jockey covered an extra furlong. Traditionally the best pointer to the Melbourne Cup, this race sent those two to near the top of the market. A gallant third-place getter, the Lee Freedman-trained Mummify, which won the Caulfield Cup three years ago and won a Group One at Dubai last year, broke down and had to be destroyed.

The Cox Plate was a showdown for Freedman's mare Makybe Diva, which had never won at Moonee Valley and faced a field of imponderables. How good were the three-year-olds? The foreign horses? In the end, not good enough. Glen Boss sent the mare home for a bold win after the field had fanned eight wide on the turn. But would she run in the Melbourne Cup? She had appeared spent at the end of the Cox Plate. Ten days later she would have to carry a record weight for a mare of 58kg in the Cup and attempt to do what no horse had ever done—win three times.

In between was Derby Day. Last year's winner, the Western Australian horse Plastered, had been a mystery this spring. Was it injured? Would the owners' partnership be dissolved and the horse go to Freedman to be trained? In the end, back west went the enigmatic Plastered, to be set for the Perth Cup. On Derby Day, Cup contenders such as Confectioner and Mr Celebrity were making their last bids to get into the Cup field via the Saab Quality (formerly known as the Hotham Handicap). As it was, Cummings's horse Strasbourg had its first win for 34 months. It would run and so would the third horse, Mr Celebrity, for Gai Waterhouse.

Meanwhile I celebrated five winners in a row, including Serenade Rose at 14/1 in the Wakeful (not the Wakefield, as the trophy-giver thought), Benicio for Freedman at 10/1 in the Derby and Glamour Puss at 9/1 in the dash down the Straight Six. This used to be called the Craven 'A' after racing folks' fag of choice. In 1970 Vain won by 12 lengths. By day's end most good judges still thought that Makybe Diva would not run on the following Tuesday. We were wrong. Although connections worried about how hard the track might be, as did the Irish mob with Vinnie Roe, and 31 degrees Celsius was promised, the mare was paid up to start. When they jumped, Boss worked her across to near the rail. Mr Celebrity led and compounded. Eye Popper loomed and then vanished in the ruck. The New Zealander Xcellent (first Cup runner to start with X) came on, but so did the mare, sprinting faster than any stayer has, carried into the race as the leaders flagged and spread. Although he rode superbly, Boss still made his run a touch earlier than he wanted. On a Jeune swooped at long odds, but Makybe Diva won magnificently by more than a length. One of the largest-ever Cup Day crowds saw, simply, the greatest win in the race for three-quarters of a century, since 1930, and Phar Lap. The owner retired Makybe Diva at once and Freedman promised that he meant it: 'She may be a Diva but she's not Nellie Melba.'

—Peter Pierce

Political lessons

A university subject about contemporary politics in Australia for international students—many of them in the country for only a semester—is an education indeed. For me, the tutor. I always tell them (partly in the hope of getting them talking from the beginning) that I learn at least as much about Australia through their eyes as they do. I have always lived here, I tell them, aside from some brief sojourns in Western Europe. Perhaps I have an overly benign attitude to Australia's perceived egalitarianism, relatively trouble-free multiculturalism, and long-standing democracy. Perhaps, I tell them, I need to have this problematised by an outsider's eyes.

For the most part polite and respectful, the last thing this mélange of Asian, American and Northern European twenty-somethings would wish to do is cause a problem, much less problematise. However, they do it by default.

In a subject that spans a lot of recent issues, Pauline Hanson is of course one hurdle. Curiously, 2004's batch of internationals (proportionally, pretty much the same groupings) brought Hanson up as a phenomenon. They'd heard of her and were worried about her influence on Australians' attitude to race (an Asian student was adamant that she had made a proclamation on television early in 2004 that she had become a lesbian, a claim I took merely to indicate the degree of her celebrity in the Asia-Pacific).

Last year I adjusted the course to pre-empt their queries. None of the new group even *claimed* to have heard of her. Irritated (I see her as a blip we had to have, and a manifestation of perceived disen-

franchisement among the lower-educated and/or regionals, rather than as an important indicator of Australian attitudes on race), I was stuck with Hanson over my shoulder for the rest of the semester. Students later wrote in essays about the 'Hanson government' or about her introduction of racist ideas to Australia; as I feared, they quickly came to ascribe her too much importance. Or did they? In one class, they passionately argued with me that her clear electoral appeal in the late '90s—not to mention the way Howard has adopted a number of her ideas—shows that Anglo-Australians *are* racist. I retreated into entreaties that one should not generalise.

All students—including some Australians—have a major difficulty with the appellation 'Liberal' on a major conservative political party. By a process of elimination, they tend to assume that since the Liberal Party must be liberal (it's like gay pride: why would you claim such a title if you weren't?) then the Labor Party must be conservative. Faced with a whole lot of concepts that don't correlate to America—Democrats, Republicans, and the aforementioned Liberals—the Americans tend to zone out on political matters, apart from one student who declared preferential voting to be 'really lame'. They are, however, largely intrigued by the system of compulsory voting.

The American and European students are distinctly different from the Asians, in interesting ways. The Asians have often been in Australia longer, know how to engage with it on a day-to-day basis, and are, in some measure, respectful of what they see as an interface with the West equal to and interchangeable with the US or Europe. The Europeans and Americans are far less forgiving. It is in their interests to identify elements of Australian culture they see as ludicrously derivative, such as the young Danish men who claimed every 20th-century Australian painting in the art gallery was an imitation of a well-known European artist (in their defence, they did not mean to be derisive but found this 'interesting').

Others claimed that Australian television was besotted with American television and that Australian television—of which they could not name examples—would soon be swamped under globalisation. Another student wrote an essay condemning

summa theologiae

Servant of silence

THEOLOGY DANCES AWKWARDLY WITH SILENCE. The natural business of theology is to put together words about God. But the better the words, the more clearly inadequate they are to their subject and the sooner they run out into silence.

The late Pope John Paul II and Roger Schutz, founder of the ecumenical monastery at Taizé, embody this paradox. The Pope spoke incessantly and passionately about faith. No one could speak with more integrity. He died to a jet stream of other people's words. Br Roger died during World Youth Day, the late Pope's favourite rostrum. To his death, at the hands of a disturbed and infatuated woman, the natural response was one of appalled silence.

But silence was Br Roger's way. His early memories, at a time of sharp religious division, were of his father, a Reformed Pastor praying alone and silently in the Catholic church. He continued to see the Catholic church as a place for silence. He was a dull speaker. His Conferences were the supporting act that prepared the audience for the main event: the silent prayer that followed them.

Certainly, that is how he saw the activities at Taizé. The chants that identify Taizé to so many people find their meaning in the silence that follows them. The hospitality, trust and range of activities that the monastery offers its thousands of young visitors lead them to silence. There they can hear the still voice that speaks to them of great desires.

Taizé was to be about reconciliation. In its earliest years it offered Jews shelter from the Nazis, and German prisoners shelter from French anger. More recently it has promoted reconciliation between divided Christians, between Christians and members of the other great world religions, and between First and Third World. It offers few structures, no detailed plan, only a shared silence before the mystery of God. Br Roger saw this as the contribution of the monastic tradition to all churches.

This reticent style made possible Taizé's distinctive contribution to Christian unity. Churches welcomed it precisely because it did not challenge their discipline, rhetoric or beliefs. It accepted, for example, the restrictive Catholic discipline of Eucharistic hospitality, but invited people to a silent unity beyond it.

Silence, however, is inherently subversive. It does not challenge words head-on, but invites them to judgment. The more ringing the declaration, the more logically forceful the claim, the louder the sound of boundary pegs being hammered in, then the longer the words will hang in silence. The more space we shall have to assess if the timbre is precisely right. Silence also allows us to weigh our own posturing silences of disengagement and disapproval. It is particularly subversive when we value certainties above truth and rely on a strong rhetoric to sustain them.

In Roger Schutz's last months, two events captured his significance. In a wordless gesture, he was offered communion at the funeral Mass for Pope John Paul II. Shortly afterwards he died, the victim of a meaningless act. His death consecrated the silence whose servant he had been. ■

Andrew Hamilton writes regularly for *Eureka Street*.

archimedes 

Vying for vaccine

WHAT WITH TSUNAMIS, hurricanes, earthquakes, mudslides and bombings, we've been beaten around the head with more than a few hard lessons on the limits to human power in the past year. And it looks like we are about to get another one—bird flu. Oddly enough, the lesson may well have more to do with politics and bureaucracy than with medicine.

Make no mistake, bird flu is already a nasty proposition. About three-quarters of those who contract it die. Luckily, at present, the only sure way for humans to become infected is through close physical contact with infected birds. But if the bird flu virus should mutate into a form that is transmissible from human to human, we are likely to be in real strife.

So it should come as some relief to know that a seemingly effective vaccine against bird flu is already being tested. In the near future, perhaps we will all be able to sit back and relax and let nature do its worst.

Well, not quite. You see, we don't have enough manufacturing capacity to make sufficient vaccine quickly enough to protect us if the flu starts to spread among humans. Why? Vaccines are now not all that profitable for drug companies—certainly not as profitable as lifestyle drugs like Viagra or Celebrex.

The industry blames a combination of government over-regulation and control over prices. And there's another downside. If you produce a bad batch, the compensation consequences are potentially horrendous. Whatever the case, the big American pharmaceutical companies have bailed out.

That leaves the manufacture of about 70 per cent of the world's vaccines in the hands of five countries in Western Europe. This could become much more than an idle fact if a bird flu pandemic started and the manufacturing countries insisted that their citizens be injected first. Luckily for us, Australia has a sizable manufacturer in CSL.

So perhaps making vaccines is one of those things that governments should have kept a closer eye on. But it's only one example of the 'public good' activities that seem to be going the same way. Why, for example, do we still not have effective drugs to treat and protect us against increasingly resistant malaria, a disease that affects up to 500 million people and kills more than two million people a year, as it ravages the tropics?

The problem is just that. It ravages the tropics, not people in the developed world who can afford to pay a premium for new drugs and boost company profits. The same argument is valid for many other tropical diseases and parasites.

Unfortunately, as global warming swings into gear and the mosquitoes bearing malaria parasites extend their ranges north and south, such commercial decisions may well come back to bite us. Literally.

But bad decision-making with respect to health is not confined to the developed world. You only have to remember how Chinese authorities initially tried to cover up news of the SARS outbreak in 2003 because they were concerned about its potential to hurt tourism and business. Their efforts slowed the fight against SARS by four months, giving the disease time to spread.

We clearly have the capacity to organise ourselves more efficiently in the face of emerging global medical threats, but we will never do so while political and commercial interests take precedence over public health. ■

Tim Thwaites is a freelance science writer.

Australian cities for imitating the US; still another claimed that Australian communities are 'close-knit' and that this is the reason Schapelle Corby is a *cause célèbre* in Australia in a way that would never happen in the US.

Aboriginal Australians are regarded with fascination, though different students react very differently to discussion of their culture or their disadvantaged state. One south-east Asian student spent a few pages of an essay proving that Aborigines are 'actually human'. Others were very matter-of-fact in discussing a deteriorated culture, or a lack of civilisation. Most of them had not heard of Captain Cook, but once they had, he seemed to be unassailable as the 'discoverer' of Australia, however much one emphasised that this is an outmoded concept.

In this kind of environment, one hopes that students' preconceptions have been challenged. More commonly, they expressed disappointment that the subject was largely about non-indigenous Australia's politics rather than Aboriginal issues, which they naturally saw as unique to this country.

Additionally, they used the subject to express some of the frustrations they felt during their time in Australia. This was not, strictly speaking, part of the syllabus, but in the context of discussion about their Australian experiences it seemed relevant. In some cases their complaints were about the way the university itself had lured them, or had treated them since their arrival. Some students told me they were paying $200 a week for shared-room accommodation run by private interests near, *and recommended by*, the university—located in outer suburban Sydney—in institutions that must surely have been making $20,000 or more a week for providing absurdly little.

Perhaps this is the most important lesson they can teach us in the tertiary sector: the little things matter a lot for the international students who provide so much income for the nation's universities. ■

—Ian Slater

This month's contributors: Peter Pierce is Professor of Australian Literature at James Cook University, Cairns; Ian Slater has taught in several Australian universities.

capital letter

Trust me

John Howard has a new pitch to the public on nearly everything, but particularly on national security and industrial relations: Trust me. Trust my judgment to keep the nation safe, and to juggle the delicate balances between protecting the public at large and safeguarding human rights. Trust my management of the economy and knowledge of the labour market to be sure that dismantling old industrial protections will make most people better off and more secure.

Howard is not a person who has ever much called on trust before. Even at the last election, when he used the word, the context was not his reputation for telling the truth, or standing by his word, but a record of steady economic management and growth. Now, however, a man whose actions have done a lot to undermine trust and confidence in politicians has a lot staked on whether people accept that he knows what he is doing.

Ten years ago, one of the most successful strategies used by the then leader of the opposition against an arrogant and out of touch prime minister was that he was governing for the élites, not 'for all of us'. It worked because it had a good measure of truth in it. Paul Keating was a big-picture man who put great talent and energy into persuading members of what John Howard would call the political class that his policies were right and appropriate. But he grew steadily more impatient with the different, but equally important, job of justifying the policies to ordinary Australians, many of whom felt increasingly alienated from grand and consuming visions.

Now, ten years on, Howard has a problem with striking parallels to Keating's. How ironic that it involves a centrepiece of Howard's political life, the issue which he has most consistently talked about for 30 years, and in which he had seemed about to triumph. Howard and the Government have, by and large, sold the much-despised intellectual élites on the macro-economic merits of their industrial relations policy. Even many of those who are instinctively hostile to anything that Howard, or his Government, proposes, would acknowledge now the general necessity for freeing up labour markets.

But the Government's, and John Howard's, problem is not the macro-economic debate, but the micro-economic one: the impact of his proposed changes at individual workplaces, and the personal insecurities of hundreds of thousands of Australians about their bargaining power at their place of employment, or how they might be treated if economic circumstances change, or whether they will be placed under additional pressure to work longer hours, for proportionately less money. The Howard campaign, expensively and improperly financed by the general taxpayer, is not well addressing individual fears and insecurities; in some respects, indeed, it may be aggravating them. The arrogance of the misappropriation of public money may be aggravating things too.

Even in trying to reach individual concerns, the campaign may be too macro. The Government is, for example, patiently trying to explain that it is unlikely most people will be disadvantaged or worse off: after all, skilled labour is at a premium, replacing people costs money and training time, and fewer people are entering the workforce. The law of supply and demand, in short, is on the side of the average workers who, if they are smart, might well be able to parlay the need for their skills into pay and conditions that more exactly reflect what they want to do. Nor should ordinary Australians fear that they will lose their public holidays, or treasured (in some cases hard-won) special conditions such as maternity leave; these, the Government insists, are safe. Likewise many employers may well take on more employees when rid of the uncertainties and unfairnesses of unfair dismissal legislation.

The Government has been generally courteous and reassuring about the fact that the sky will not in fact fall in. And about its hope and firm belief that most Australians will be better off, just as they have been generally better off as a result of other Howard Government economic policies, including industrial relations reforms, since 1996. The truth is, however, that all this expensive propaganda and research does not seem well focused on individual anxieties and insecurities. And why not? In major part, it's because John Howard is selling a big picture and a belief (some would say, unfairly, an ideology) that outcomes are generally better the more markets are deregulated. He is not addressing insecurity—though he has been, over his own career, willing enough to exploit it when it suits. He is not painting a picture for ordinary working Australians of how their new workplace will be in the new paradise he is creating.

The lack of penetration is probably compounded by the Government's lack of frankness about the fact that there will be losers, and people with little bargaining power, many of whom will belong to just the classes for whom people such as Catholic, Anglican and Salvation Army leaders are expressing concerns. And that their numbers may well be considerably increased by the Government's simultaneous moves to force many people off welfare into work—any work—on the premise that they will be morally, and in some cases financially, better off than by receiving the dole, sickness or maternity benefit.

The problem is not going to be resolved by spending even more taxpayers' dollars, but by better understanding the mood of the broader community, and operating from within it, rather than by the supreme and smug self-confidence about what was best for everyone which some say—John Howard particularly said—characterised the Keating Government. ■

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

by the way 

Tchaikovsky in Hanoi

On 19 August 1945, a few days after the Japanese surrender in World War II, cadres of the Viet Minh entered Hanoi and used the steps of the still magnificent but temporarily scruffy Opera House to proclaim the success of the August Revolution and the foundation of an independent democratic republic. Thousands of peasants bearing machetes and bamboo swords were joined by equal numbers of urban dwellers, many of whom had heard of the Viet Minh for the first time only days before, to acclaim the victorious revolutionaries. A smaller-scale version of Charles Garnier's Paris Opera, Nha Hat Lon, as the Opera House is known locally, was, with its Napoleonic panache and grandeur, just the place for large gestures and significant announcements.

Walking past this splendid and now thoroughly refurbished building 60 years and a couple of months later, my wife and I saw a poster advertising a 'Gala Concert' to be held on the following evening to mark 30 years of diplomatic relations between Vietnam and Germany. The guest conductor was Wolfgang Hoyer with the Vietnam National Symphony Orchestra and on the program were Beethoven, Wagner and Tchaikovsky. Before you could say 'Ho Chi Minh masterminded the longest, most devastating and most successful war against Western colonialism', we were negotiating the purchase of two of the last few tickets left. A snap at 80,000 dong each, even if our seats were so high up that we might suffer from nosebleeds and oxygen deprivation. But at least we were in. Going to a performance, the guidebooks assured us, was the only way to see the grand interior because the Opera House was otherwise permanently locked.

We scrubbed up a bit and, after a stroll through the humid, amiably frenetic, motorbike-clogged streets of the French quarter, arrived rather early—despite objections from my wife who favours the last-minute-dash approach to appointments. As we entered the foyer, we were handed a program each and then a young woman began ushering us up the stairs 'to the reception'. Bewildered but obedient, we found ourselves in a vast, ornate chamber among a colourful, polyglot, voluble crowd, where we were plied with champagne and beautiful local food. An exquisitely dressed Vietnamese woman materialised at our side and introduced us to Christian-Ludwig Weber-Lortsch, the German ambassador to Vietnam who, on finding that we were not Germans, drew upon the smooth, diplomatic *sangfroid* that had no doubt ensured advancement to this present important posting, concealed his perplexity at our presence, and chatted with us at some length. The Chilean ambassador did the same when, working the room in Spanish, German, English and Vietnamese, he came into our orbit, as did several other politely puzzled notables whose names we scarcely caught. Thoroughly enjoying the champagne and the finger food, I was well ensconced when my wife, with a punctilio equal to that of our diplomatic hosts, suggested that we should push our luck no further and make a quiet and dignified retreat.

So up we went into the exotic confines of the topmost balcony, where the view was vertiginous but the orchestra still loud. The concert was enjoyable, if uneven, but it's easy to criticise the musicians of the VNSO as they strove to meet the energetic Western expectations of Wolfgang Hoyer. Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet Overture* struck me as the moment of truth. To Western ears, through the filter of overwhelming Shakespearean assumptions and remembered scenes, come the sounds of romance, love, passion and cruel tragedy. The England of Shakespeare, the Italy of the Montagues and the Capulets, the Europe of Tchaikovsky's illustrious contemporaries—Bizet, Verdi, Offenbach, Massenet—appropriate his *Romeo and Juliet Overture* so neatly and thoroughly, so expectedly, that any other interpretation seems outlandish. But Tchaikovsky comes to Vietnam not across the dulcifying cities of Europe but through Nizhniy Novgorod, the Kirgiz Steppe, Tashkent, the Tibetan Plateau. In the VNSO's rendition, beneath those wonderful romantic melodies, you could catch the edge of anxiety, treachery and ambition that was Tchaikovsky's St Petersburg element, and the bleak, unforgiving landscapes that were his Russia. This barbarian undercurrent to some of the world's most famous romantic music suited the Vietnamese musicians, whose recent forebears had thrown out the greatest Western invader of the age, just as, I suspect, it suited Tchaikovsky, who was not thinking much about Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet when he composed this first masterpiece of his career. I bet the oddly perturbing result wasn't quite what Wolfgang Hoyer had in mind either.

Our unexpected attendance at the pre-concert reception was a curious, marvellous interlude, and it happened because the Vietnamese, from the formally attired concertgoers to families squatting on the pavement eating lunch alongside their market stalls, are a courteous, naturally friendly people. Being with them day to day—acknowledging their smiles and genuine helpfulness, politely fending off their charming but undeviating, persistent efforts to sell us everything from expensive silk to old paperbacks—made it difficult to imagine that these people were once our 'enemies', that our government had made a strident case, with its powerful ally, for invading them—at a cost of more than one million Vietnamese civilian deaths—and that our protests at the time were labelled treachery. What are the chances that our grandchildren will return from their travels in the 2020s with stories about the wonderful friendliness of the Iraqis? ■

Brian Matthews travelled to Hanoi on frequent flyer points. In Vietnam, he was, regrettably, not a guest of Vietnam Airlines.

Meaghan Paul

Who is my neighbour?

On 8 June 2005 I experienced my very own personal epiphany. Standing in my lounge room while Jeff Buckley crooned about love being not a victory march but a cold and broken hallelujah, I at long last discovered what it meant to be a neighbour.

I live two doors down from possibly the crankiest old woman in Australia. The first time I met her, she yelled at me.

One night at tea I pondered who on earth could be hammering at such a time. When finally I ventured outside, it dawned on me that someone had done the unthinkable. Someone had parked a car in front of my neighbour's house.

This land, according to her, is hers. She does not have a car, but she tells me the space is needed should she want the ambulance. There is no arguing with her that the ambulance had all the room it needed on the road. There is not a rational bone in her ageing body.

I called the police that night. She was banging and yelling, and I was concerned about the damage she was inflicting on somebody's new Four Wheel Drive, and her withered hand.

A month ago there was a knock on the door. The gentleman from across the road tells me my cranky neighbour would like a woman to come and help her. She has had a fall and is waiting for the ambulance.

I find her sitting on a chair. A clothes horse sits in the lounge and she asks me to hang out her smalls while she waits. 'They are clean,' she tells me over and over. 'I have an automatic washer.'

I assure her that hanging out washing is not at all foreign to me, and I am not afraid of her smalls.

My neighbour is gone for a long time. I am tempted to park in front of her house but I do not. Others do so in peace. We don't really miss her. We, my neighbour Peter and I, suspect she will not return home.

Then one day I hear a familiar high-pitched irrational yelling. She is already telling off the taxi driver who has dropped her home.

I am surprised to see her back into her regular routine straight away. Every day she goes to the shops on her own, grabs a bag of goodies and the paper. I often see her sitting in the chair out the front of Coles, mustering the energy it will take to get herself home.

It is a very drawn-out event, but must be familiar and meaningful for her. She has no one to help her, no other networks at all.

On this particular day she drags herself slowly from the taxi to her front door with her frame. Her bag of goodies sits on the low brick fence where the cabby has left it. I watch, intrigued by her stubborn determination to maintain her routine. I am suddenly struck with what can only be described as admiration, and then compassion.

Through a heady cocktail of emotion, and after much deliberation (should I help her or not, would she want it?), I approach my cranky neighbour. She tells me, 'No, thank you.' She says she is slow, but all right. I ask her to please let me know if she ever does need a hand.

I return to my lounge room and Jeff reminds me once again that love is not a victory march but a cold and broken hallelujah. The person I am most connected to in the world at this moment is my old and cranky neighbour. I have learnt what it means to love somebody because they are human. I do not feel sorry for her. I have seen strength in her.

At times there appears to be little meaning in life. Sometimes it is just plain hard. In my lounge room I had been confronted by, and was chewing over, the sometimes apparent meaninglessness of life.

It never occurred to me that my cranky old neighbour, in one tiny, seemingly insignificant moment, would reveal to me so overwhelmingly what it meant to be human, in community, a neighbour. There was no victory march but I was indeed thankful for a small and broken connectedness to a fellow traveller, doing the best she can under the circumstances. ■

Meaghan Paul is chaplain at Methodist Ladies' College, Melbourne. This essay was one of two she submitted to win equal second and highly commended in the inaugural Margaret Dooley Young Writers' Award.

Alison Aprhys

The silent summer

In an atmosphere of fear, governments in Australia and around the world are passing laws that could force the press to keep quiet on some issues

'A free media is essential to a democratic society. It ensures we know what is happening in our world and enables us to report, review and criticise.'

Christopher Warren, federal secretary of the Media, Arts and Entertainment Alliance (MEAA), was speaking just after a two-day conference in Sydney last month. The conference brought together leading journalists from Asia, Europe and Australia to address critical topics related to diminishing press freedoms and freedom of information legislation.

At the time, the Government was edging closer to passing its Anti-Terrorism Bill in parliament, ignoring criticism from many in the media that the sedition section of the Bill was not only unnecessary but could diminish the press freedoms that Australians have long taken for granted.

The conference, Free Media in a Democratic Society, was sponsored jointly by the MEAA and the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ). It highlighted 'that journalists everywhere are facing common challenges, from commercialisation of the media to ownership issues and draconian laws', Mr Warren said.

Some 100 journalists from 21 countries discussed journalism in a time of national security, freedom of expression, media regulation, the laws affecting the media's role including defamation, contempt and its impacts and the media's role in the administration of justice. High on the agenda were Australian laws, particularly the sedition section of the new anti-terror legislation that will inhibit the public's right to know and the ability of journalists to report the news as part of its vital role in the functioning of a democracy.

'Journalists are conscious of the serious deterioration of press freedoms over the last four to five years,' Mr Warren said. 'One disturbing trend in non-democratic countries like China and transitionally democratic countries like Russia is the eroding of press freedoms, and when the IFJ complains, they simply point to countries like the United States and say that they are emulating these democracies.'

As well as his role as head of the union and professional organisation that represents more than 75 per cent of working journalists in Australia, Mr Warren is also president of the IFJ. He believes that society is the key beneficiary of the transparency that a free media encourages. Working tirelessly with colleagues, Mr Warren sought to persuade the Government not to enact the sedition section of the anti-terror legislation. He shook his head in disbelief at the Government's theory that secrecy was essential for the fight against terrorism.

'We say that journalists are very conscious of the threat of terrorism, and many of them are the first targets in such a situation,' he said. According to the IFJ, more than 100 journalists and media workers were killed in 2005 while doing their jobs.

The MEAA made a submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Provisions of the *Anti-Terrorism (No 2) Bill 2005*, calling for the removal of sedition provisions and urging the adoption of professional privilege for journalists. Broadly defined, sedition provisions within the Bill threaten to erode free speech and artistic expression. Any person or organisation could be charged with sedition without, as existing law requires, having urged force or violence.

'Sedition is an obsolete law that should be dropped,' argued Mr Warren. 'History teaches us that when sedition laws are used, they are used to silence writers, journalists and creators. They are tools of censorship, not of public protection, and the real danger is that, in "modernising sedition", its use will become widespread.'

Leading media law commentator Richard Ackland agreed.

'History shows that in periods of national crises, such as World War I and II and the Cold War, the Government always has sedition laws on the books, and invariably those laws were not just used for security, but for political purposes to silence opposition,' he said. As the editor of *Justinian* and online media law journal *Gazette of Law & Journalism*, Mr Ackland was on the conference panel discussing diminishing press freedoms in Australia and he pointed out that sedition really translates as 'covering politicians' backsides'.

One example Mr Ackland gave was when Prime Minister Billy Hughes used such laws to stop publication of Hansard in Queensland, after the premier of that state criticised Hughes's view on conscription in a speech in parliament. 'This had nothing to do with security of a nation, only with protecting his image,' Mr Ackland said.

Perplexingly, some sections of the media attempted to straddle both sides of the fence on the sedition issue.

'The media does get into bed with the Government,' Mr Ackland said, adding that some newspapers who received special briefings from government agencies on the topic then ran frenzied articles about the need for enhanced powers when the Government had the anti-terrorism no. 1 Bill under discussion. 'It is interesting that the same media that wrote and

published these alarming stories are now campaigning for free speech.'

Mr Warren said that September 11 in Washington and New York, October 12 in Bali, the war in Iraq and the war on terror had 'demonstrated both the importance of free media and provided political cover for its curtailment'. He wrote, on 3 December, in his blog on the MEAA website: 'While we're still waiting for the details of the amendments to the Anti-Terror Bill agreed by the Liberal and National Parties, we know enough to be disappointed at the result. And we know that, even though a majority of both houses of parliament are opposed to sedition laws, we're going to get stronger sedition laws which threaten freedom of expression. Many of us welcomed the strong position taken by the Senate committee on sedition laws. We were disappointed that the committee ignored our concerns about the excessive secrecy around detention orders and the power to coerce journalists to reveal confidential sources.'

Mark Day, a journalist who writes for *The Australian*'s media pages and who spoke at the conference, reported in his column on 1 December that 'almost 300 submissions were received by the Senate legal and constitutional committee ... they were universal in their view that the strengthening of sedition laws as proposed by Mr Ruddock was unnecessary and a threat to free speech'.

Mr Day's column goes on to report that documentary film-maker Robert Connelly presented evidence to the Senate Committee that sedition laws had been abandoned in countries such as Canada, Ireland, Kenya, New Zealand, South Africa, Taiwan, Britain and the US, and that in passing sedition laws, Australia joined China, Cuba, Hong Kong, Malaysia, North Korea, Singapore, Syria and Zimbabwe.

'The first prosecution of a journalist under this law will bring the house down on the government—let them use it on journalists and we will see the true nature of their promised and legislation,' said Mr Day.

'Woe betide the Government [if it starts] using these laws against journalists, because there will not be a media outlet in the land or around the world that will not take notice ... [It] would truly put us in the [same category as] North Korea.'

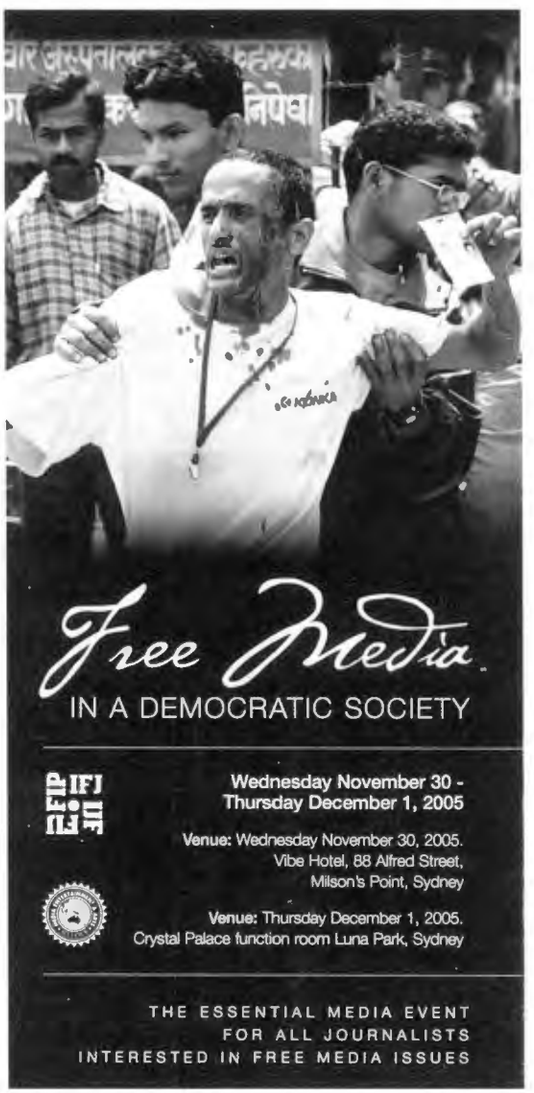
The vagueness of the anti-terror legislation means that predicting what will happen is impossible.

Mr Ackland said that it would be hard to know the final shape of the new law until it was passed: 'Clearly sedition is an issue for the media, but the Bill proposed is so vague, wide and discretionary, the fear is that it will cause the media to chill off a story and back away. The net effect will be to persuade them not to take the risk.'

Liz Jackson, former presenter of ABC TV's *Media Watch*, said: 'It will be very interesting when a journalist is confronted for the first time with a preventive detention order [given the information that in some instances this will be unwarranted], to see if they will or won't make the decision to publish.' The Walkley Award-winning journalist, who will take up a role with *Four Corners* this year, says she has discussed with colleagues the extent to which 'one can make the decision on one's own. You have to weigh the value of putting this information in the public domain, as you could be making a decision that might imperil other people. Not just for yourself and the media organisation for whom you work, but potentially the sources from whom you obtained that information.'

Visiting journalists from Asia also made impassioned pleas for their Australian colleagues to keep fighting the good fight and resist these draconian measures. Among them were Siddharth Varadarajan, deputy editor of the *Hindi* in India, Steven Gan, founder and publisher of malaysiakini.com, a leading news website in Malaysia, Sunanda Deshapriya, senior journalist and co-founder/spokesperson of Sri Lanka's Free Media Movement, and Michael Yu, former president of the Association of Taiwan Journalists. They all spoke eloquently and passionately about free-media issues.

In the end, the conference feeling was summed up by Greek journalist Nikos Megrelis, a member of the executive committee for the IFJ: 'Unfortunately, day per day, conservative governments all over the world put forward new restrictions for the press and the democratic institutions.' He said that both the Bush administration and terrorists sought to restrict press freedoms. 'Both of them want us to live in an atmosphere of fear; fear of what might happen to us by a suicide bomb attack or by a word that may sound suspicious for encouraging terrorism.'



Alison Aprhys is a freelance journalist and a member of the MEAA. She helped to organise the Free Media in a Democratic Society conference.

More information:
http://www.alliance.org.au/freemediaconference
http://www.ifj-asia.org

Hugh Dillon

Beyond the Troubles

Hardliners remain at daggers drawn, but their relevance is fading as Ireland embraces globalisation

In July 2005 the IRA declared that its 'armed struggle' was over. It was a pragmatic move, given that it had suffered a widespread loss of public support at home and from the American diaspora—even from its political arm, Sinn Féin.

Outrage over a series of violent acts a few months earlier probably sealed its decision. First, the IRA was exposed as responsible for the £26.5 million robbery of the Northern Bank in Belfast in late 2004, one of the biggest robberies in British history. In January 2005 drunken IRA members murdered Robert McCartney, a known Sinn Féin supporter, in a Belfast pub. It also became public that the IRA and other paramilitary groups were behind most of the organised crime in Northern Ireland.

Worst was the demoralising realisation by Northern Irish nationalists that all the bombs and killings had achieved virtually nothing that could not be won politically. This eroded Sinn Féin's legitimacy among its own core constituency and forced it, in turn, to divest itself of the IRA, which had become a dead weight on its ambitions.

So where do things stand in the North? On the face of it, the signs are not greatly encouraging. An armistice has been declared but no peace treaty has settled the hostilities and embers of the old conflict still flicker occasionally. In September, the loyalist 'marching season' turned nasty with police battling rioters for nearly a week. Ashley Graham, whose father was murdered by the IRA in 1990, told a BBC interviewer at the rally on 29 August: 'We feel the IRA have gotten away with it. They can get on with their lives but not a day goes by without us having to remember. People in our situation are angry and feel something should be done.'

'Love Ulster' marchers strode down the highway wearing their Orange sashes and carrying banners announcing 'No Justice for Protestants'. Although the slogan is, no doubt, a work in progress, you know what they mean. Justice has always been a side issue in the Troubles. The armed struggle may be over, but no reconciliation process is in sight; the two major parties of the North remain as ideologically rigid and fortified in their self-belief as ever.

Gerry Adams in Belfast on the day the IRA ordered an end to its armed campaign against British rule in Northern Ireland. Photo: Paul McErlane/EPA/AAP

This would not, perhaps, be so depressing if the ideologies were rational or at least harmless. The Democratic Unionist Party has virtually no policies except opposition to Sinn Féin and the moderate Ulster Unionist Party. Ian Paisley's rodomontades are echoes of Edward Carson and the anti-Home Rulers of 1914. He has a website, but its message is a century old.

Sinn Féin, seemingly, is no more sophisticated. The 'policies' page of its website carries the smiling face of Bairbre de Brún, who confides that Sinn Féin's policies are based on the thinking of James Connolly, a powerful thinker who was executed after the Easter Uprising in 1916.

Then what of Sinn Féin in the Ireland of the 21st century? Its president, Gerry Adams, has recently published *The New Ireland—A Vision for the Future*, a manifesto for a mass movement of Sinn Féin across the island, its 'primary political objectives [being] an end to partition, an end to the union, the construction of a new national democracy, a new republic on the island of Ireland and reconciliation between Orange and Green'.

Sinn Féin attracts just 25 per cent of the vote in Northern Ireland and holds five of the 166 seats in the Irish Dáil, so achieving any of these objectives is unlikely. Adams, however, is too clever and pragmatic to hold such a 'vision' seriously. Derry journalist and activist Eamonn McCann has observed of him that:

> Contrary to the conventional account of him leading a people half addicted to violence toward peace, [he] has merely contrived a realignment of republican ideology so as to bring it more closely into kilter with the people in whose name it was purporting to act, offering no challenge to their consciousness. The reason the Adams leadership has been able to retain the support of the republican base while ditching core republican ideas

is, on this analysis, that the base was never republican in the first place; that they were only fighting for their streets.

So what is Adams really up to? The Good Friday Agreement of 1998 gave Sinn Féin very little more than was on offer by the British government in 1973. Hardline Republicans—and Unionists—ask what it was all for: why did so many have to die? Bernadette Sands, sister of hunger-striker Bobby Sands, says: 'My brother didn't die for cross-border bodies.' Like Michael Collins before him, perhaps, Adams, unsentimentally and pragmatically, has achieved the achievable but is not about to tell the diehards their struggle was in vain. It appears he has decided the best outcomes for his community in terms of policing, employment, education and other services can only be achieved politically. The so-called 'vision for the future', and its companion piece, the Sinn Féin *Discussion Paper on National Unity*, is manifestly intended only for the diehards, to nudge them away from the 'armed struggle' without losing them from the Sinn Féin fold.

Until the McCartney murder forced his hand, Adams has always been able to lever Sinn Féin's position by implying that unless it gets what it wants, the IRA will go its own way. Paradoxically, Sinn Féin may be in a better position now than when it was a mere front for the IRA.

Sinn Féin has had very little credibility in the South. The antagonism it draws from every other political party in the whole island is palpable. Although Adams himself is respected by many in the Republic, Sinn Féin is regarded by most as corrupt, devious and, of course, in its IRA manifestation, violent. Adams's 'vision' is a confession of the futility of the 'armed struggle' and a bid for legitimacy. Freed from the burden of the IRA connection, Sinn Féin now has a chance to become a legitimate political party but can only retain its constituency by presenting itself as the heir of the republic tradition.

The move to legitimate politics is but a small advance, however, because, sadly, the legacy of the Troubles is that the two communities are now far more polarised than ever. Too many have died. The conflict went on for too long for an easy peace to emerge. Moreover, there appears to be a powerful backlash among working-class Protestants—the main supporters of Ian Paisley—against the peace process, which they perceive as favouring the Catholic nationalists. Professor Stephen Howe, of Bristol University, author of *Ireland and Empire*, sees the September riots as a manifestation of distress on the part of the previously ascendant Protestant workers. In a comment piece in the *Guardian* newspaper he wrote:

> The riots are part of what happens when the decay of one modern culture—the Northern Irish variant of urban, working-class Britishness—clashes with the rise of a globalised popular culture ... Working-class loyalist communities are in a probably irreversible retreat. Paramilitary warlords and drug barons fight over the ruins. Deindustrialisation, demographic decline, the tendency of the more enterprising or successful to move out, low rates of educational achievement and very high ones of family breakdown, domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse—all these are features that the poorer Protestant districts of Belfast, Portadown or Ballymoney share with those of Liverpool and Glasgow.

There are, however, reasons for cautious optimism. The Republic of Ireland, on a per capita basis, is now the richest country in Europe. It has outstripped Britain, Germany and France. Ireland has embraced globalisation and post-industrialism. It is somewhat ironic now to see Dublin, once viewed with contempt by the Ascendancy grandees of Belfast, buzzing with new cars and metrosexuals, while Belfast has progressed little economically from its once proud, but now distant, industrialised past.

The move to legitimate politics is but a small advance ... the two communities are now far more polarised than ever

The distinguished *New York Times* journalist Thomas Friedman visited Ireland in 2005 and was impressed by what he saw. The phenomenal growth of the Irish economy, he said, was not merely lucky; it had a recipe: 'Make high school and college education free; make your corporate taxes low, simple and transparent; actively seek out global companies; open your economy to competition; speak English; keep your fiscal house in order; and build a consensus around the whole package with labour and management. Then hang in there, because there will be bumps in the road and you, too, can become one of the richest countries in Europe.' Societies with open economies are also open to ideas.

Second, whether or not Sinn Féin will acknowledge it, this extraordinary transformation in Ireland's economy has been accompanied by a conscious abandonment of its traditional notions of nationalism. It is a paradox that republicans prefer not to discuss that Ireland is now rich because it is no longer the self-contained Catholic Gaelic nation created in 1921 but an integral part of a massive European and world economy. The influence of the Celtic Tiger on the North must be irresistible.

Finally, revisionist historians, notably Roy Foster, professor of Irish history at Oxford University, have since the 1970s argued for the recognition of different kinds of Irishness and the legitimacy of all of them, including the British Irish of the North. Among the educated middle-classes they found a receptive audience. In 1988, concluding his book *Modern Ireland 1600–1972*, Foster argued:

> If the claims of cultural maturity and a new European identity advanced by the 1970s can be substantiated, it may be by the hope of a more relaxed and inclusive definition of Irishness, and a less constricted [read 'republican'] view of Irish history.

The Northern Irish cannot be quarantined from these tectonic shifts but what of the immediate future? For all the huffing and puffing, partition is not the core problem dividing the Northern people, it is their different notions of Irishness. There may be a subtle answer to this. Irish author Colm Tóibín, writing in 1993 about the question of Irishness, observed:

> I know that ambiguity is what is needed in Ireland now. No one wants territory, merely a formula of words ambiguous enough to make them feel at home ... We are learning to talk in whispers. It will take time. ■

Hugh Dillon is a Sydney magistrate with ancestral roots in Ulster.

Ron Browning

Burma's hidden diaspora

Hope emerges for the Karen people forced to flee Burma for refugee camps just over the border in Thailand

North-west of Bangkok near the Thai–Burma border lies the seemingly quiet town of Mae Sot. Below the surface, Mae Sot pulsates with the presence of illegal immigrants from Burma, gem traders from India and NGO workers. For the past 20 years, indigenous Karen people fleeing into Thailand from Burma have used Mae Sot as a congregation point and have established refugee camps nearby.

Many in the camps remember entering Thailand in the late 1980s after fleeing the Burmese military. Some of the children born in the camp to those new arrivals are now in their late teens.

For many years life seemed to stand still in the camps. One day drifted listlessly and hopelessly into the next. People in the camps got no support from the United Nations unless they were registered persons (eligible for resettlement in the West), but at least there was the security of food, shelter, some schooling and some hospital facilities, making their plight a little less desperate than that of the other half million displaced Karen people living illegally inside Thailand.

International commentators coined the term 'warehousing' to describe their situation. It might be jarring, but it is nevertheless an accurate description of the conditions of incarceration that many Karen face, as do refugees elsewhere in the world.

Now the refugees' situation is changing. Western countries are raising hopes of resettlement so that families can start new lives. Several temporary aid organisations have set up in Mae Sot hoping to ease the human problems brought on by Burma's civil war. During this period the Karen have fought to keep their land, Karen State, ravaged by the government's Burmanisation policy that aimed to eradicate the communal life of the country's ethnic nationalities (40 per cent of the population). Villages were desecrated, and thousands of IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) either escaped into the jungle or were herded into relocation camps.

The story is one that has to be heard. My own frequent visits to the Thai–Burma border focus largely on supporting Anglican communities in and outside the camps. It's not enough to read occasionally in the press that Aung San Suu Kyi remains under house arrest. So much more needs to be said, especially about the plight of the ethnic people. The work of the artist Maung Maung Tinn illustrates much about the situation. He lives at Dr Cynthia's Clinic just outside Mae Sot, where Karen victims of land mines, the war-wounded, pregnant women and those suffering HIV/AIDS and malaria come for treatment.

His paintings of IDPs are now being sold in the United States and Europe, the proceeds assisting the work of the clinic. One is of a small family group huddled together on the bamboo floor of a temporary shelter in Karen State. The dominant colours of bright yellow, green and purple are incongruous given the desperate scene: a young mother lies exhausted on the floor, probably after having searched for berries or any other food she can scour from the jungle; the grandmother comforts a baby in her arms and a young boy sits gazing into the distance, looking lost and longing to find hope.

Refugee communities are by definition temporary, and structured around emergency and relief needs. Rice, fish paste, oil and bamboo are supplied each month by the Thailand Burma Border Consortium. A hospital serves each camp and there are schools to year-10 level as well as camp section committees that report to the Thai authorities. Productive activity that requires equipment or the use of land has always been forbidden; boredom and frustration are pervasive. More than 120,000 people have been crowded into these camps. Until recently nothing permanent was allowed, such as laying a concrete floor, yet quietly over the past few years some microeconomies have emerged: vertical horticulture (growing pumpkins on thatched roofs), small weaving industries, a row of shops, and some (unofficial) forms of youth education and training.

While the camps will continue largely as they are, a couple of significant changes are being proposed. The Thai government is recognising the long-term plight of the refugees and is considering providing opportunities for further youth education. Information technology could become an everyday part of camp life.

Another change is to do with resettlement. In the past 12 months several Western countries have turned their attention to the refugee warehouses. The first faltering steps to peace between Burma's ruling junta and the democratic groups ground to a halt late in 2004, when the military leadership deposed the Prime Minister, Khin Nyunt, and imprisoned him along with many government officials. One major response of the West has been to step up resettlement efforts, and hundreds of Karen families have been moved to other countries. Australia's intake of Burmese citizens had virtually stopped for years, but last year the intake of Karen people was 200, with probably more this year. The US is taking many more.

The decision to apply for resettlement in another country is a difficult matter for the community-minded Karen. One family recently came to Melbourne after many years of hoping and waiting for a visa. Standing inside their new western suburbs home, they wept for friends they had to leave behind in the camp.

The concept of worldwide diaspora, unimaginable in the past, is now familiar to Karen leaders. The eight million Karen of Burma's population of 40 million had their own state in Burma until 1997 when

the Karen army headquarters fell and the tables turned in what is considered the world's longest civil war. As well as refugee Karen people resettling in other countries, there is the build-up of an internal diaspora, the IDPs who remain inside Burma. Small cross-border programs are sprouting up in an urgent effort to help them.

Now leaders of Karen communities throughout the world are pondering these realities with feelings of disempowerment and determination. So much has changed in the 20 years since thousands fled their homeland that it is difficult for them to know where to start rebuilding and preparing for a new Burma.

Part of the answer is to focus energies on the Thai-Burma border. NGOs and community-based organisations have been working in the frontier region for many years as small but strong contributors. The Karen Women's Organisation is such a group; last year it sent representatives to Australia to publicise its work documenting many recent cases of Karen women being raped by Burmese soldiers.

Paradoxically, the warehousing might turn out to be a small blessing. Government restrictions within Burma make it difficult for aid organisations to develop training programs in that country; the exodus to the West of refugees with skills gives 'all the more reason to develop resources there', according to an officer from the Thailand Burma Border Consortium. The Australian Government understands these matters and is considering possible assistance.

The Karen people's concerns are for their young. They speak of their hope for a future Burma: a peaceful land, a revived rice bowl of Asia. There are parallels with East Timor where, in the years before independence, life had become so much a matter of survival that it was difficult to sustain training and education. The Karen, despite the difficulties, must commit to preparing and training to build a civil society; their unity will help maintain this focus, whether they are living on the Thai-Burma border or in diaspora. In the meantime, the IDPs are scarcely managing to survive within the isolated areas of Karen State. ■

Ron Browning is an Anglican priest who has worked with the Karen people of Burma for several years.

Jennifer Compton

Figments of my imagination

FROM A VERY EARLY AGE I have sat down at a machine, with a keyboard, and summoned up people.

It was something I knew how to do, and something I wanted to do.

First, the manual typewriter.

It was hard work, especially on the shoulders, but the way those people would talk to me! And insist on their manifest destiny.

Then! The electric typewriter. I bought her with my first cheque from television. My cat freaked out at the way she would do automatic return.

And then! And this was hard. My word processor. Apparently for people like me to woo us off the typewriter and into computers. I did some damn good work on her, once I had understood that what you write on a screen is not, necessarily, permanent. But I only pushed Delete instead of Save once. Or, at the most, twice. You learn. You learn.

Then. You could not buy ribbons for her any more. They had withdrawn support for your halfway house. And she went up in smoke after a particularly bad power-surge day. Literally. Up in smoke. That was the day I found out that you can get plugs to protect your delicate equipment from too much or too little electricity.

So. I bribed the boy with 'There is a CD in it for you' and he got me going on the husband's computer, keying in a book of poetry so I could post off a floppy disk to the publisher.

How 21st century!

How he screamed abuse when I got screen freeze at 3am. Bursting into the study in his boxers, punching madly at Esc or Ctrl Alt Delete.

'Learn, will you! Learn!'

And then! Invested in a laptop. Got plugged into the internet.

So do not be surprised, all you people out there, if I do not see you as exactly real!

Since the late '60s I have been sitting at a machine, with a keyboard, waiting for people to arrive and talk to me. And insist on their manifest destiny.

And they always have.

And when I plugged into the internet and people arrived to talk to me, it was not such a major surprise. It was as if, with my sheer yearning, fingers paused over a keyboard, I had summoned you up! I invented you. ■

Jennifer Compton is a poet and playwright who lives in the Southern Highlands of NSW.

Graham Ring

Sniffing at tragedy

Aboriginal communities across central Australia, struggling with the scourge of petrol sniffing, have been told it's their problem—fix it

Health Minister Tony Abbott visited Darwin in late September 2005 to launch 'Sniffing and the Brain', an education kit designed to warn indigenous Australians about the dangers of petrol sniffing. He began by describing Aboriginal people as 'an asset to be cherished'.

Then he put the boots in. He said there was a 'crisis of authority' in indigenous communities that created the preconditions for petrol sniffing. 'Why don't communities take it in to their own hands to do what they can to stop their young people engaging in this self-destructive behaviour?' he asked. He concluded that communities had to 'understand that in the end, it is to a great extent up to them'.

Two weeks later, the Northern Territory coroner, Greg Cavanagh, alluded to 'Sniffing and the Brain' when he handed down the findings of an inquest into three petrol sniffing deaths in the central desert area:

> I note that a politician in Darwin last month launched a 40-page (English-language) education kit in an endeavour to address petrol-sniffing problems. In my view, such education kits are no answer to the pleas of persons such as Sarah Goodwin; people in her community are dying or becoming brain-damaged as we speak... Their problems are immediate, stark and urgent ... Words of advice proffered thousands of kilometres away from the problem centres is what has been happening for many years without any apparent beneficial changes.

Sarah Goodwin is an indigenous woman who attended the coronial inquest in Mutitjulu with her adult son Steven, a chronic user. During the hearing, Steven was observed sniffing from a tin of petrol secreted in his jumper. A visibly upset coroner adjourned the hearing.

Cavanagh investigated the death of Kumanjayi Presley (as he is now known) who was just 14 when he died in the small remote community of Willowra, north-west of Alice Springs. His grandmother Molly found him dead in the back room of her house, lying with a clear bottle of petrol pressed to his nose.

Willowra is near the site of the 1928 Coniston Massacre in which at least 31 Aborigines were killed following the murder of a white man. This is an event within living memory of the people in this community. A submission to the coroner from the Tangentyere Council's CAYLUS (Central Australian Youth Link-Up Service) notes that at the time of Presley's death, the people of Willowra lived without adequate housing, health services, sanitation, policing, power, water or social security services. CAYLUS ventured that in these circumstances, it was unreasonable to expect the community to act to prevent sniffing.

Coroner Cavanagh also investigated the deaths of Kunmanara Brumby and Kunmanara Coulthard in Mutitjulu, a troubled community nestled in the shadow of Uluru. In examining these deaths, the coroner stated that he was 'anxious that both mothers have conveyed to them in the clearest possible terms the fact that their sons' deaths were not caused by some neglect that could have been remedied by them—such as being too cold or lacking food'.

In his report, Cavanagh quoted extensively from an earlier coronial inquiry conducted by South Australian coroner Wayne Chivell in 2002. Chivell found that three indigenous men lost their lives in spite of 'parents and family who did their best to stop them sniffing, and who have endured much suffering and grief as a result of their inability to do so, and the consequent death of a loved family member'.

Chivell further noted that Anangu communities should 'continue to try and care for sniffers even when they continue to sniff–and even after they are violent and disruptive to their families and the community. (This was a statement of fact rather than a recommendation.) They look to the broader community to help them deal with a problem which has no precedent in traditional culture.'

This earlier inquest also heard evidence from Kawaki Thompson: 'Who is responsible?' he asked. 'The petrol doesn't belong to us. It is not part of Anangu law. It was introduced to the lands by white people. The problem with petrol comes from the outside, like the Maralinga bomb tests. The solution should come from outside too.'

In October 2004, the Northern Territory Parliament's Select Committee on Substance Abuse in the Community produced a report, *Petrol Sniffing in Remote Northern Territory Communities*. The committee concluded: 'Too often the opinion is expressed that remote communities should take responsibility for their own drug problems and deal with them on their own. Remote communities are often called on to take ownership of problems to an extent that would never be expected of urban communities.'

Comgas is a federally funded scheme that subsidises the sale of 'non-sniffable' fuel in selected bush locations. It initially subsidised aviation fuel but now covers BP's Opal, an unleaded petrol that has low levels of the aromatic hydrocarbons that give sniffers their high.

A 2004 evaluation of the Comgas scheme, commissioned by the Department of Health and Ageing, found that it was a 'safe, popular and effective' strategy to reduce petrol sniffing in Australia. However, the report readily conceded that non-sniffable fuel was not a panacea for the problems of remote communities. It urged the provision of skilled youth workers, diversionary activities and rehabilitation centres.

The critical finding of the report was that the Comgas scheme is far more effec-

tive in locations where sniffable fuel cannot be obtained. Tragically, Opal is available only in some selected communities. Sniffable fuel can be readily obtained in Alice Springs and finds its way to remote 'Comgas' communities, where a soft-drink bottle full of petrol might sell for $50.

CAYLUS has identified an area bounded roughly by Coober Pedy, Mt Isa, Tennant Creek and Laverton (350km north-east of Kalgoorlie) as having Australia's largest cluster of petrol sniffers. Coroner Greg Cavanagh and CAYLUS have both called for the roll-out of Opal fuel right across the central desert. This action will remove the immediate danger and give communities time to consider the issues confronting them. (This was implied rather than stated.)

Experts agree that sniffing may never be completely eliminated, and that a percentage of sniffers will move on to other solvents, cannabis or alcohol—depending on cost and availability. Yet opponents of the roll-out intimate perversely that because it will not cure all the ills of affected communities, broader distribution should be delayed.

There is dispute about the additional cost of a comprehensive roll-out. Whether it is $5 million or $25 million, the cost would be a tiny fraction of the $13 billion the Federal Government collected in fuel excise last year. Sadly, it will also pale in comparison to the costs of caring for the wheel-chair bound sufferers of acquired brain injury, the living legacy of the scourge.

The Select Committee on Substance Abuse found that the cost of full-time institutional care for a person mentally debilitated through sniffing was $160,000 a year in an urban centre, more than twice that if the care is provided in remote communities. Simple arithmetic underscores the economic value of a roll-out.

Many Australians are uncomfortable with the knowledge that a significant number of Aboriginal people are living in Third World squalor, and so are relieved when someone in authority points the finger at communities and says: 'It's all their fault.' This might salve middle-class consciences, but it isn't true.

The Comgas evaluation team visited one community where both sniffers and non-sniffers supported the decision to introduce Opal fuel. 'Everyone was informed of the decision at a community meeting,' the report said. 'Following the meeting, the petrol sniffers went "out bush", lit a big fire and burnt all their cans and supplies of food. This gave the community members a sense of power, and showed that they did not accept petrol sniffing.'

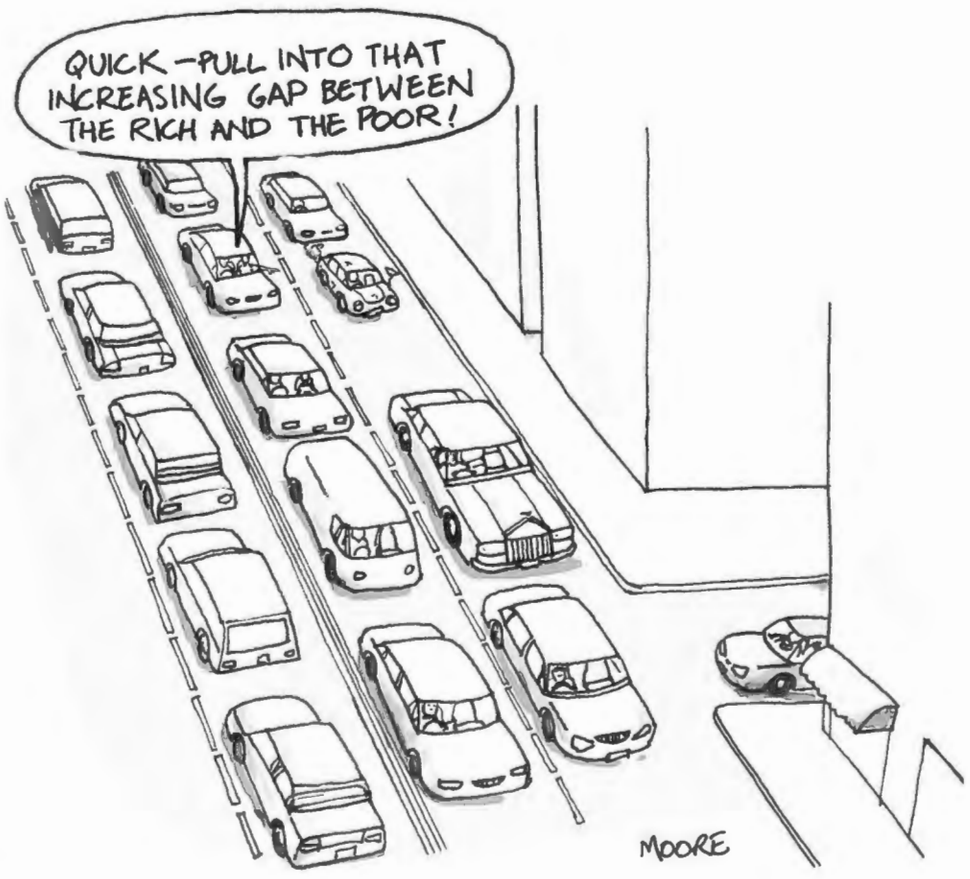
The evaluation team spoke to night patrols—where community members display the courage required to take petrol off the sniffers. 'We talk to them, tell them it will kill them. They might stop then.' The team also documented the widespread practice of taking kids 'out bush' and teaching them to hunt, fish and live off the land using traps and snares. There is ample evidence, often overlooked, that indigenous communities care deeply about the devastation of petrol-sniffing and are taking action to eradicate it.

Recently, Tony Abbott was reported as saying the Government was considering whether 'a limited supply of the (Opal) petrol could be made available in Alice Springs'. This would be an extraordinarily ineffectual response, tantamount to fencing three sides of a cattle yard. The roll-out of Opal must be comprehensive to achieve significant, durable results.

In a telling conclusion to his inquest, Coroner Cavanagh said: 'It is simplistic in the extreme to suggest that the answer to the problems of petrol sniffing is for the addicts and their communities to help themselves. That is to say, the horrors of present day Mutitjulu (and other remote communities) are not sensibly addressed by peddling the myth that such disadvantaged citizens might simply help themselves and solve the problem. They and their families are not able to do so by themselves.'

Are you listening, Minister? ■

Graham Ring is a Melbourne-based writer who specialises in issues of indigenous justice.



Kirsty Sangster

Remembering Etty

...Most people here are much worse off than they need to be because they write off longing for friends and family as so many losses in their lives, when they should count the fact that their heart is able to long so hard and to love so much amongst their greatest blessings.

—Etty Hillesum (1914–1943)

She describes the time of the yellow stars, this strange time in Holland when stars have only just begun to be sewn onto the clothes of the Jews. She and her friends are defiant and yet despairing. They huddle together near the warm stove with their cigarettes and their precious, rationed coffee and sew on their stars. But then, she writes, something changes in her, shifts inside her, as she leaves to go home and sees a young man wheeling crazily round and round the fountain in the square. He has this huge yellow star sewn—bang!—in the middle of his chest. A yellow star circling the water fountain.

She speaks of the loneliness of the young. It is the middle of the war and many of their teachers at the university have been sent in front of the firing squad. She feels like the young have now to guide themselves (rudderless) through this terror.

She has the sudden impulse to rush up to the professor as he comes out of the lecture theatre into the cold blue night. She puts one of her arms around him, and under avenues of plane trees all emptied of leaves they walk through the freezing air to the skating rink. She writes:

> ... he seemed a broken man and good through and through and he was suddenly as defenceless as a child, almost gentle, and I felt an irresistible need to put my arm around him and lead him like a child ... The next day she finds out that he has shot himself.

Etty Hillesum was a young Jewish woman of 28 who, on the advice of her Jungian therapist, began to write a journal. The journal covers the years 1941–1943 until she volunteers to work as part of the Jewish Council in the Dutch camp of Westerbork. This camp served as a kind of holding station for people who were being sent to Poland and concentration camps such as Auschwitz and Buchenwald. From Westerbork she wrote long letters to her friends and family back in Amsterdam. These letters have been collected, together with her diaries, and published. Eventually, she too was sent to Auschwitz and died there in 1943.

Etty starts out writing about the things that matter to her in daily life—her work as a Russian tutor, her relationships with men, her friendships, her love of Rilke's poetry, her secret wish to be a writer, to do something that mattered, to leave some kind of legacy. Then, over time, world events begin to encroach on her life and she is forced to grapple with the enormity of these events. Gradually more and more laws and strictures are placed on the Jews in Holland and it becomes clear that death is waiting for them somewhere in Poland. Through this period, the whole tenor of the diaries and letters changes. In her desire to become the 'thinking heart of the barracks', she records her struggle to be fully present to those around her and to her own suffering. Her writing becomes a dialogue with her beloved God as she herself is transformed into a mystic. Like any mystic, she writes of the burnt beauty of the world that exists in spite of all the trespasses (large and small) that we commit on a daily basis.

Etty is a teacher: she schools us in the language of grace. Spirit presses through the pages. Once known through her journals, we cannot forget her. Yet she asks us to remember also the anonymous dead as they wait to be loaded into the freight cars:

> I see a dying old man being carried away, reciting the Sh'ma to himself. Saying Sh'ma means saying a prayer over a dying person ... I can see a father, ready to depart, blessing his wife and child and being blessed himself in turn by an old rabbi with a snow-white beard and the profile of a fiery prophet...

Etty asks us to allow the long queues of the dead into our lives. Many people feel unable to read, see or hear anything about the concentration camps. It is morbid, gruesome, too depressing. This particular truth is one that should not be spoken.

There is indeed a quality that is unspeakable. As the writer and literary critic George Steiner wrote after the war, 'The world of Auschwitz lies outside speech as it lies outside reason.' Others claimed that no poetry could be written and no paintings painted after the events of World War II. The things that occurred in the camps are seen as beyond language and sight—incommunicable. Survivors themselves have no illusions as to the unspeakable essence of the things they have seen. There are no gods here. Etty provides us with an extraordinary insight into this place. She speaks of having to 'hold God's hand' and lead Him through the labour camp. We are left with an image of this woman supporting a tiny, crumpled, defeated god through the aisles of bunk beds. It was a place outside of creation. In its full terror, even God stood uncomprehending.

Yet still they urge us to remember. The work of remembrance is a hard and constant labour. To paraphrase Etty's favourite poet: how much suffering there is to get through. How many terrible stories. Work through them like you work through a chore. An active, constant and public process of 'not forgetting'. A cold journey through snow too deep. It is easier to pretend that we know all that already and to get on with our lives.

But what is the quality of the remembrance? How we remember, the ways we remember, the meanings we make or take or make up from the stories

of the Shoah. Memory, public memory, may sometimes be as dangerous as forgetting. As can be seen in our own increased fascination with Gallipoli, memory and remembrance can be twisted into a macabre celebration of suffering and nationalism. The act of remembrance can also easily become an excuse for further violence. The memory of suffering at the hands of another is placed in the annals of collective history and drawn out in a ceaseless 'dreamtime of vengeance'.

In his book *Lost Icons* Rowan Williams reflects in depth on this question of memory, particularly as it relates to the Holocaust, and asks: '...will it do, finally, to treat the Shoah as beyond *thinking*?' He looks to the work of his friend, the Jewish philosopher Gillian Rose, who argues that there is a real danger in placing the memory of the Holocaust outside current political thought and beyond language. This leads, Rose argues, to an 'exaltation of the martyr community to a place outside political thought'. Williams and Rose would argue that this exaltation of the Holocaust dead and its surviving community lets us as individuals off the hook, so to speak. If the Shoah is beyond politics, beyond language or thinking even, then it has nothing to do with us. We can feel bad about it, guilty, even identify with its victims in what Etty would call a self-gratifying 'greedy compassion', but in the end it has nothing to do with us and our lives as lived. As Williams writes, this 'leaves us with the unhappy gulf... between the self as moral agent and the self as political or civic subject'.

Instead, Rose suggests that memory and remembrance should be concerned with drawing us as individuals into a directly personal relationship with the dead. That is, we could begin to recognise ourselves in the other. We could connect their experiences to our lives in a way that opens up the possibility for a kind of exchange, a dialogue, a listening, a conversation. We could grieve their loss. Etty suggests something similar when she writes:

> And finally: ought we not, from time to time, open ourselves up to cosmic sadness? One day I shall surely be able to say ... 'Yes, life is beautiful, and I value it anew, even though I know that the sons of mothers, and you are one such mother, are being murdered in concentration camps' ... And your sorrow must become an integral part of yourself, part of your body and your soul ... Do not relieve your feelings through hatred, do not seek to be avenged ... Give your sorrow all the space and shelter in yourself that is its due, for if everyone bears his grief honestly and courageously, the sorrow that now fills the world will abate.

Vitally, this recognition of self in the other ensures also that the personal and the political become reunited. In reading the work of writers such as Primo Levi, Anne Frank, Aharon Appelfeld and Charlotte Delbo, we see how quickly an individual's life can be swept away. By-laws passed in parliament that once seemed fairly innocuous can all mount up into one terrifying force. In reading stories from the Holocaust, we may begin to understand how tangled our lives are in the political processes that go on around us—above our heads—but which somehow we consistently fail to connect with our emotional, moral, ethical and spiritual selves. This lack of connection ensures our continued inaction and silence.

In an age when, as Rowan Williams writes, 'we choose the distinctive hell of placing our own wills at the centre of things', these stories teach us about contingency and suffering. Our lives are not self-made. We are not always in control. Sometimes things happen.

To read stories from the Holocaust shows us just how quickly our lives can be changed and destroyed by political processes. These stories may be the crucible for the development of a genuine moral imagination ...

As the Russian poet Anna Akhmatova wrote in Leningrad in 1944: '...this cruel age has deflected me, like a river from its course./Strayed from familiar shores/my changeling life has flowed/into a sister channel...' To read the stories from the Holocaust shows us just how quickly our lives can be changed and destroyed by political processes. These stories may be the crucible for the development of a genuine moral imagination: an imagination that sees the detained man and can imagine what it may feel like to be that man. His changeling life diverted into a sister channel.

In turn, and once developed, such a moral imagination and compassion helps us as individuals. Suffering always comes knocking—whether in the form of physical illness, the death of a brother, lover, parent, the burning down of a house, the loss of a job. But if we can know that our wills are not at the centre of the universe, then we can begin also to guide some compassion towards ourselves; to know that we are not always to blame. We cannot always pull our socks up, change our lives, get out of a rut, self-visualise or think positive and thus dispel pain with a sleight of hand. We need a new, old sort of knowing to counterbalance these messages. As Etty writes to us:

> Suffering is not beneath human dignity. I mean: it is possible to suffer with dignity and without. I mean: most of us in the West don't understand the art of suffering and experience a thousand fears instead ... And I wonder if there is much of a difference between being consumed here by a thousand fears or in Poland by a thousand lice and by hunger? We have to accept death as part of life, even the most horrible of deaths ... when I say, I have come to terms with life, I don't mean I have lost hope. What I feel is not hopelessness, far from it. I have lived this life a thousand times over already, and I have died a thousand deaths. Am I blasé then? No. It is a question of living life from minute to minute and taking suffering into the bargain.

Let us remember Etty and mourn her loss. ■

Kirsty Sangster is a Melbourne poet whose first collection, *Midden Places*, will be published this year by Black Pepper Press. This essay was one of two she submitted to win equal second and highly com mended in the inaugural Margaret Dooley Young Writers' Award.

Peter Hamilton

Searching for Borrisnoe

It's a long way to Tipperary from New York, via Victoria, and once there it's not so easy to trace your grandmother's footsteps

Last September I stood in a packed Brooklyn courtroom, held up my right hand, and solemnly swore to renounce my 'allegiance to any foreign potentate'.

After 20 years as an Australian expatriate in New York, I was a brand new American citizen. Mild depression followed. I anxiously wondered, 'What is it that I have so shamefully renounced?'

I decided it was time to do a little on-the-spot research, so booked a flight from New York to Melbourne with my nine-year-old daughter Grace. Allie, her cousin, joined us on a drive up through the Great Dividing Range and then down into the Goulburn Valley. We were searching for marks left behind by the ancestral Hamiltons who had taken up selections in the area.

At the cemetery outside the pretty town of Alexandra, a cracked, bitumen path separates the relatively substantial Protestants from the scrappy Catholics. We quickly found my grandmother's gravestone, which dominates the Catholic section. The large pedestal is crowned by an imposing column that seems to have strayed across from the Protestant side. The grave is well preserved except for some rust on the ornamental iron fence.

We went back into town and bought crayons, butcher's paper and masking tape. Despite a breeze that tore at the paper, Allie and Grace worked up a bright, red rubbing of the finely chiseled inscription:

In Memory of
Hannah Hamilton
(née Costigan,)
Wife of
Charles Hamilton
(Cremona, Molesworth.)
Born at Borrisnoe.
Co Tipperary, Ireland.
Died at Molesworth
29th Augst 1905, aged 29 years
R.I.P.

I had been taken to Hannah's grave when I was about Grace's age, but had never since felt any curiosity about her. I was told she had died of a fever passed by an infected midwife from home to home as she delivered babies throughout Central Victoria.

My father James was three when he lost his mother, and he was the eldest of three boys. Charles came next. The baby, Jack, never celebrated his birthday, because it was so linked to the day his mother died.

As we picked scraps of masking tape off the gravestone, I wondered if my father's remoteness could be traced back to the tragic story revealed in Hannah's inscription. I remember standing next to him in church when I was little and reciting the 'Hail Holy Queen'. I felt his chest expand at the verse 'To Thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve'. Even then, I guessed that the crying and banishment that seemed so familiar to him were related to his motherless childhood.

But of the woman who lay behind this sadness? All I cared to know was that she had died tragically, and that her shocking death seemed to have left an emptiness that rippled across the generations.

We sat on the gravestone—Charles Hamilton's Taj Mahal—and began to create Hannah's story.

I was surprised to read that she was Irish, born in Tipperary in about 1876. We imagined a damp, overcrowded farmhouse, a final, shocking goodbye to her parents, followed by a cold trek west to Limerick, or perhaps south to Cork, maybe with a brother or sister. Then came the harsh ocean voyage to Port Philip or New South Wales. A respectable marriage followed: Charles Hamilton had inherited a property that was important enough to be given the aspirational Italian name Cremona. The work on the farm was hard. Two baby boys came. And then expecting a third.

Grace and Allie were suddenly hungry and bored with ancestor study. They wanted to have fun. We drove under a canopy of river gums along one of Victoria's most beautiful stretches of road to the village of Molesworth. We checked into the pub, and the girls happily trampolined on their twin beds.

It was Melbourne Cup eve, and the bar was packed. I asked the publican about Cremona. She called out to one of her patrons, Rick, who said the property was currently owned by a Melbourne syndicate, and was managed by Les Ridd, the owner of the neighbouring property. Rick fumbled under the bar and produced Ridd's phone number. I called and left a message explaining that I was interested in taking a peek at Cremona.

Charles Hamilton 'lost' Cremona during the Depression. It was a shameful episode in our family history, and was buried behind a vague and typical family story of victimhood. Experiencing hard times, Charles had taken on a Kyneton solicitor as a partner. According to this story, the solicitor was a feral type, and the Hamiltons were soon evicted from their home. My oldest brother John never stopped wanting to restore Cremona to the Hamilton name.

Les Ridd called back, and when I explained my connection to Cremona, he invited us over. He is a gracious, welcoming man in his sixties, and full of energy. He says that farming today is a constant struggle to find new sources of income. As well as raising cattle, Ridd produces first-class olive oil and a superb tapenade. He is active in marketing regional fine foods.

Les explained that he is not the manager of Cremona but a local agricultural contractor who carries out fodder conservation and various activities on the property.

The girls happily jumped into the tray of the truck with Les's dog, and we drove

up to the iron gate at Cremona Park. Les lifted the latch, and I imagined that we were the first Hamiltons to pass through that gate in 70 years.

As we bumped along the track and down into the property, he praised the mix of grasses found in each pasture. He described Cremona Park as probably 'the best property in Victoria' because it so perfectly combines a favourable aspect, good soil, and the most productive ratio of naturally drained river flats to gently sloping hillside.

It is located north of the Great Dividing Range, providing a balanced rainfall and year-round sunlight. It avoids both the harsh droughts that persist even a few miles to the north and west, and the cold fogs that envelop the rugged valleys a short distance to the south.

We bounced past the dilapidated Hamilton farmhouse. I wanted to stop and peek inside, but I couldn't interrupt Les, who was expounding about the value at auction of the Cremona-fed cattle. I strained to picture my pregnant grandmother and her two baby boys on the verandah, but could barely see the abandoned home through the overgrown garden.

The next day we drove back to Melbourne, where my sister Anna listed the few meagre facts that she had picked up about our grandmother. Hannah had left Tipperary with a brother and found work as a chambermaid in a guesthouse in the Blue Mountains. It was there that she met Charles, who was on holiday with his mother.

Two Saturdays later I woke up in Dublin's Westbury Hotel, exhausted from speaking at a television industry conference. I was due to fly back to New York the next morning. I decided to lie in my luxurious bed linens and watch the Ireland vs South Africa rugby international.

Suddenly, destiny kicked me out of bed. I would go find Borrisnoe. It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to bookend my grandmother's life in less than two weeks.

There was a basic problem. Borrisnoe didn't seem to exist. No one in Dublin had heard of it. I checked the car rental map as well as several detailed tourist maps of Tipperary, but there was no Borrisnoe.

I drove out from Dublin to north Tipperary, and in the old market town of Roscrea I asked directions from a policeman, a hotel receptionist, a museum attendant, and many others.

Grace Hamilton and Alex Cleary, with Peter Hamilton at Cremona Park.

Dan and Kathleen Greed at their home near Borrisnoe. Photo: Brian Donnelly

They guessed that Borrisnoe was once 'town land', but that it was probably long forgotten. They had heard of several other Borrises, but definitely not Borrisnoe.

It was mid-afternoon already, and the winter light was already beginning to fade. I came across a tiny library in Roscrea's historic Damer House, and after leafing though a dozen reference books, I nearly gave up. But then a volume on Irish megaliths caught my eye. I half-heartedly flicked though the index. Bingo! There was Borrisnoe. A hand-drawn map marked a stone ring fort located near the headwaters of a river. I laid the crude map next to my road map, and guessed that the river was probably the nearby Saur.

I had an idea. The butcher would know every little village because that's where he would buy his meat. I was wrong. The Roscrea butcher seemed to order from a Dublin wholesaler, but a lady waiting in the queue suggested that someone in the nearby colonial town of Templemore might be able to give directions.

With the light fading, I sped down into the Golden Vale of Tipperary, Ireland's richest agricultural land. But Templemore turned up a lot more head shaking. As I sadly drove out of town, I noticed a butcher loading a meat tray into an Audi station wagon. He was my last hope. I turned the car around and approached him. He said that he knew of Borrisnoe, that it was somewhere past a nearby road junction called Kilkea, and that I should ask there.

Kilkea was a pub, a church and a farm. The church was locked, and two teenage boys fled from the pub when I knocked on the window. The farmhouse was dark, but as I drove by, a rusty Ford Escort pulled into the farmyard. I followed the driver, an elderly farmer, and, in the approaching darkness, described my search for Borrisnoe.

'Well, Peter,' he said, becoming deeply philosophical. 'Isn't life a wonderful thing. Here you are, coming all the way from Brooklyn and Melbourne, and looking for your grandmother's footsteps in Borrisnoe. And after I send you on your way, we'll never meet again!'

He sent me down a meandering lane bordered by stone fences, but I couldn't follow his directions. I distracted myself by guessing that the conquering English had pushed the native Celts off the Golden Vale and up into these scrappy hills. I caught myself in a 'Balkan moment', embracing a 400-year-old national grievance. In my tiredness, it was if 'we' had been savagely wronged yesterday. But what a twist of the Imperial order that Hannah Costigan, one of the least of Her Majesty's subjects, had briefly found a distant home on the best property in Victoria's own Golden Vale!

At that moment, lost in a maze of stone-fenced lanes, I was confronted by the dismal thought that Hannah's promising future at Cremona was made possible only because the native population had been driven out of Central Victoria's river valleys. They had been routed by the two-hit punch of imported diseases and white men armed with guns and poison. That disaster for Australia's natives hadn't occurred half a millennium ago, but in the decades immediately before the Hamilton family and their Irish cousins took up their selections.

As darkness set in, I snapped myself back to my present situation—tired and vaguely lost near the headwaters of the Saur. Resigned to finding my way back to Dublin, I edged my car into a lane to make a U-turn. Two tractors loaded with hay slowly squeezed past. I caught up with them as they turned into a yard next to a plain grey farmhouse. I noticed a farmer standing in the yard, pulled over and approached him. He was a grey-haired, fit-looking man in his sixties—not at all unlike Les Ridd back in Molesworth. His name was Dan Greed and I told him I was looking for Borrisnoe.

'And Peter, why are you looking for Borrisnoe?'

'Because my grandmother Hannah was born there, and she died in Australia.'

'Peter, what was her name?'

'It was Hannah Hamilton.'

'No, Peter. What name was she born under?'

'That was Hannah Costigan.'

He paused, and then held out his hand.

'Peter, she was my grandmother's sister. And you're me cousin!'

I was stunned and elated. I had done the right thing for my grandmother. Relatives were phoned, and we all stared at one another in the Greeds' kitchen, puzzling over the complete lack of family resemblance.

After a while, Dan's wife Kathleen left the kitchen and fetched a studio photo. It was a portrait of one of Hannah's sisters who had emigrated to Texas, where she entered a teaching order of nuns. From beneath her habit, a modern face gazed with superb confidence into the camera lens, looking for all the world like our own Grace in dozens of photos.

Borrisnoe and the site of the demolished Costigan farmhouse were a short distance away in the darkness. We decided to postpone my visit until next time. It was very late and long past time to drive off to Dublin.

Dan wished me well, and asked me to promise to write next time I came to Tipperary so that he and his wife Kathleen would have a proper dinner ready for me.

Peter Hamilton is a New York-based consultant who specialises in the international television industry.

Kerry Leves

At Parramatta

A jacaranda reaches out
delicate octopus tentacles
towards a quarter moon as thin
as a Thursday evening sales-smile.

blossoms hang in mauve-blue clouds.
There is a row of shops
an advertiser's voice
a church—

its blond stones
cut by prisoners long ago.
Angels grieve in window niches.
Tinted glass holds martyrdoms—
the stations of the cross
for every day.

Down the square, Falun Dafa people
legs folded lotus-style
withdraw behind shut eyelids;
silk banners, melodies on tape
speak for their silenced
co-religionists in China;

while a bearded man in jeans
bears Christians' God loud witness
from the lip of a six-tiered amphitheatre
deserted

but for a sushi chef on smoke-break
& a girl with Barbie-fluent hair
arguing with some delinquent bloke
inside her mobile.

A Chinese boy greets his girl with silence,
one concentrated kiss.
Young-man sedans by the railway bridge
hit bass—

rave & hip-hop, looping north
past the jail where inmate boys might hear
having survived
another day in the yard;
locked down with currawongs' last roosting-calls.

On the plaza
someone's screaming:
'You fucking ... fucking ...'
agonised, full-throttle.

More soberly an older voice
yells, 'Hey mate'; is ignored.
Teenage boys manhandle
two belligerents

who thrash out of grip,
eyeball; howl
'Fucking hit me ... Go on!'
till briefly caged

by mates' arms
(enforced restraint
is honourable
almost)

they bounce on sneakered feet to punch-up provocations,
hassle on the lope
above a stony turf.
Their mates' hands interlock again
around their hunched-for-brawling shoulders;

no fight occurs.

Kerry Leves

Michael McGirr

The Road Urchin, photographed by George Serras.

Before it goes to the tip

The National Museum of Australia in Canberra is both garage and op shop for the nation

When the National Museum of Australia finally opened its doors on Canberra's Acton Peninsula in 2001, local radio invited callers to phone in with their impressions of the new building. Canberra radio has a shortage of shock jocks. Nor does it have many shrill jills. You can listen all day without hearing much venom in the clichés. Visitors are sometimes disappointed, and go home early to places where they have more chance of hearing callers say what everybody else is saying as though they'd just thought of it. They forget that Canberra has Parliament for this.

Callers about the museum were mixed in their reactions. One man said he had gone home without seeing anything because he couldn't find the door to get in. He wondered if this was part of the architects' plan to protect the collection. Others were miffed that the European history of Australia, representing one per cent of the human story of the continent, had only 60 or 70 per cent of the space in the museum. There soon followed a territorial battle which became a focal point for some of the contested issues of indigenous history. The most passionate callers had important things to say about the high price of souvenirs and sausage rolls.

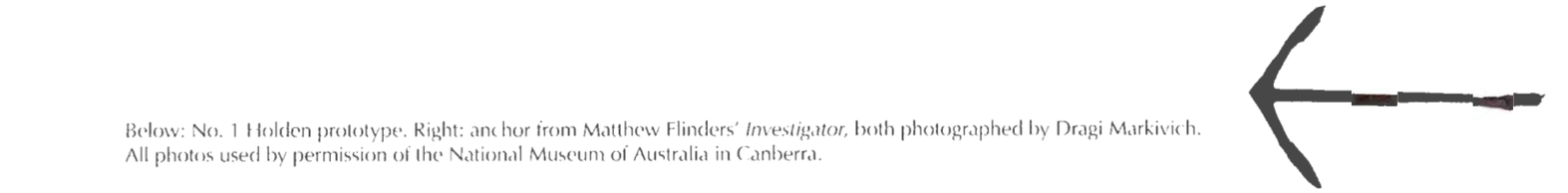
One particular visitor, however, reported that she had had an eerie feeling when she was inside the new museum. She couldn't put her finger on the cause. The woman said she was looking out the window from one of the galleries and had an uncanny sense of déjà vu. It was a brand new place but she knew she had been here before.

The reason dawned on her later. The museum is built on the site of the old Canberra Hospital. The woman realised she'd been looking at the same view over the lake that she had spent hours contemplating from bed as she recovered from the birth of her first child. The child was now an adult. Not a trace of the hospital remained. But the view was still the same. For one moment, she had felt she was a new mother again. The years in between fell away like skin.

This is how the museum works. It provides long vistas. People go there to see old stuff. But if the place has done its job, they come away with a fresh look at themselves.

This is certainly true of the National Museum's new exhibition, *Captivating and Curious*, which has been mounted to mark 25 years since the passage of the National Museum Act by the Fraser Government in 1980. This was the moment at which, at long last, both sides of politics agreed on establishing a place to house its homeless collection.

That collection has a longer history. In some ways, it owes less to a collective sense of national history than to the unusual passions of individuals. Foremost among



Below: No. 1 Holden prototype. Right: anchor from Matthew Flinders' *Investigator*, both photographed by Dragi Markivich. All photos used by permission of the National Museum of Australia in Canberra.

these was Melbourne orthopaedic surgeon Colin MacKenzie. According to Guy Hansen, the curator of *Captivating and Curious*, MacKenzie was a wealthy man with access to the corridors of power. He was concerned about the danger of extinction faced by species of Australian fauna which he saw as valuable not only in their own right but also for their medical role as models for comparative anatomy. In the years after World War I, MacKenzie began collecting specimens. These became the basis of the Australian Institute of Anatomy, one of a number of streams that were eventually to flow into the holdings of the National Museum.

By the 1970s, any number of individuals, government departments and other bodies were known to have held on to all sorts of intriguing objects that had an important cameo in the national story. In 1975, Peter Pigott chaired an inquiry which reported that 'deterioration of valuable collections in Australian museums, great and small, has reached the proportion of a crisis'.

Captivating and Curious is a delightful celebration of the moment at which this situation began to turn around. It puts on display hundreds of items for which the permanent display seldom has space. Of the 200,000 items belonging to the museum, only four per cent are regularly on show. The museum always has a duty curator available to field calls from members of the public who have just found something in their garage or shed. Every day of the year, somebody rings up about dusty objects that the museum just might want to see.

'Often people ring as they are about to take something to the tip,' says Hansen. 'It's important we get it before it has gone to the tip. It needs to come with its story intact. We need to know whose it was and how it was part of the life people lived.'

An example of this is a recently acquired collection from the Springfield property near Goulburn, NSW. Springfield was settled by W. P. Faithfull in 1827. His maiden daughter Florence lived on the property for 98 years, dying in 1949. Not only did Florence live long, but she never threw anything out. Her niece then had the good sense to preserve what Florence had neglected to get rid of. The result is a remarkable gathering of rural domestic paraphernalia whose provenance is well established. The material draws the visitor into the lifestyle of women on a 19th-century sheep station.

Guy Hansen began working for the museum in 1991 in a warehouse in the ungainly Canberra suburb of Mitchell. At that stage, he was not even sure there would be a building that could broker the growing collection to the public. In designing *Captivating and Curious*, he wanted to give visitors an idea of how the collection spends most of its time. The first thing they come across are steel bays piled with bricolage identified only by simple museum tags. *Captivating and Curious* is arranged in such a way as to provide a sense of the history of museums themselves: it moves from using old-fashioned glass cases through to interactive displays.

The Smithsonian Institution in the United States, now comprising a number of museums, has been described as the attic of the nation. Hansen describes the National Museum in Canberra as Australia's garage. He could just as well have said it's our op shop. The exhibition works by serendipity and surprise. There is no knowing what you'll find next, but each item brings a kind of recognition. There is an anchor from Flinders' *Investigator*, the proclamation left by Mawson in Antarctica in 1931 and duelling pistols said to have been used by Thomas Mitchell in 1851, although, in fact, only one of them was used by Mitchell. The other was used by a gentleman called Donaldson who had criticised Mitchell in public.

Being a garage, there is a fair emphasis on vehicles. There is the prototype of the first Holden, and a landau which arrived in Australia in the 1820s, possibly the oldest vehicle in the country.

But the item that steals the show in *Captivating and Curious* is the 'Road Urchin'.

In 1935, at the age of 30, Harold Wright arrived in Melbourne from England. Work was scarce and Wright needed to do something to keep body and soul together. So he acquired a horse-drawn wagon and set himself up as the 'Saw Doctor', travelling from town to town, sharpening knives and tools as he went.

Over the next 34 years, his wagon the Road Urchin developed a life of its own. Wright married Dorothy; they had a daughter, Evelyn. The wagon was their home and workplace. It acquired all sorts of ornamentation. Eventually, an old truck replaced the horse; the truck was also embroidered. Following Wright's death, the Road Urchin was bought by a second-hand dealer in Wangaratta. It sat in a shed until it was acquired by the museum in 2002. The key thing is that it was undisturbed in its retirement. The Road Urchin is comprised of hundreds of details: a smoker's pipe, pots and pans, postcards and signs, garbage bins and tools. All of these draw the imagination into a strange life on the road, one that was both fanciful and pragmatic. The Road Urchin tells a bottomless story. It can't be exhausted by any simple explanation. It takes the onlooker to a dozen unfamiliar places from which he or she can look back upon themselves.

The culture we inhabit is changing from one based on memory, a human art, to one based on retention. If you take $20 out of an ATM, that factoid will be retained in a computer for all eternity. But the smell of the flowers you bought with the $20 can only be remembered. Telstra may retain an account of every phone number you ever dialled, but a tender conversation had over the phone can't be retained, only remembered. Retention creates data. Memory leads to storytelling.

Captivating and Curious is a reminder that certain things need to be retained. But in this case, retention creates memory. These items come with labels. But they also ask for stories.

Is there anything Guy Hansen thinks is missing from the museum? Is there a call he would like one day to receive about a particular object that the collection lacks?

'We would love to have one of Robert Menzies' double-breasted suits,' he says. 'But I believe they all went to op shops.'

Michael McGirr is a former publisher of *Eureka Street*. His most recent book is *Bypass: The Story of a Road*. *Captivating and Curious* is on at the National Museum of Australia until April 17.

Freya Mathews

The art of discovering values

It is far better for children to learn tolerance than it is for them to have it imposed upon them

A CONTRADICTION LIES at the heart of liberalism, one that generations of theorists have struggled with: should a liberal society, with its definitive commitment to the value of tolerance, tolerate the intolerant? Fear of the intolerant, of those who resort to violence in their resistance to others' ideas, is one of the main motives behind the new regime of 'values education' in Western societies. But can these societies impose their ethos of tolerance on citizens who would reject it, without at the same time contradicting that very ethic? I think not. But the contradiction can be avoided if children—and adults—are taught the art of discovering values for themselves. The process of doing so, of listening to and accepting or rejecting other people's ideas, instils the respect for others that underpins tolerance and so democracy.

As is happening elsewhere in the West, there are moves in Australia to introduce 'values education' in schools. The wider aim is to counter a perceived lack of moral moorings among the young; the more urgent and focused aim is to discourage the kind of extremist—sometimes fundamentalist—values that can lead to antisocial or even terrorist tendencies. In Australia, the values being championed by federal Education Minister Brendan Nelson have been set out on a poster and distributed to schools. This poster advertises 'nine values for Australian schooling': care and compassion; doing your best; fair go; freedom; honesty and trustworthiness; integrity; respect; responsibility; and understanding, tolerance and inclusion.

On the face of it, the idea of values education sits uncomfortably with our Australian commitment to liberal democracy, because liberalism is premised on tolerance for a diversity of values across society. However, because 'values education' is advocating, by and large, the values of liberalism itself—revolving around a moral axis of tolerance and respect for social and cultural diversity—perhaps its apparent contradiction with liberalism can be avoided. Whether values education is the way to allay fundamentalist tendencies is another matter.

An attitude can be described as fundamentalist if it is underpinned by values or beliefs taken in a literal way and held inflexibly. Fundamentalists have not thought through their values or beliefs, or subjected them to any kind of evidential or rational test. They are, in other words, beliefs or values accepted uncritically from some text (scripture, for example), person (parent/teacher/leader) or institution (church/school/state).

So it is not the content of specific value-beliefs but the way we arrive at them, via conditioning or indoctrination, example, that makes them fundamentalist. This means that there can be fundamentalism about liberalism or democracy just as there can be about Christianity, Islam, human rights or environmentalism.

So teaching the values of tolerance and respect for diversity from a state-sanctioned poster, revamped school motto or other text means teaching democracy or liberalism in a basically fundamentalist fashion. Moreover, such values teaching is likely to encourage precisely the passive submissiveness to authority that leads to people becoming susceptible to extremist positions; surely not an effective antidote to fundamentalism.

How then are our children to acquire the shared values that are the necessary basis for social life if the kind of self-

defeating processes of indoctrination being proposed under the rubric of values education are ruled out?

I suggest that rather than teaching children codes of conduct, we teach them how to discover appropriate values for themselves. Through inquiry children—and adults—develop skills of reflexiveness: the capacity to reflect upon their own experience of life and to seek the best possible answers to questions that arise from it. Such practices already exist in our education system. Under the name of philosophy for children, or philosophy in schools, collective inquiry encourages children to discuss, in small groups, issues of the playground, issues of the day, or even issues arising from the human condition. A facilitator (teacher) helps these communities of inquiry explore these issues at their own level, just as they see them. This gives children a chance to try out new and received ideas and see how they stand up under the scrutiny of their peers. Children are surprisingly good at this activity.

EVEN MORE IMPORTANT than this first-hand exploration of ideas are the protocols that define the community of inquiry. Children are asked to listen attentively and patiently to their classmates; they discover that it is through this listening, and the unexpected differences in perspective it reveals, that their own perspectives take shape and evolve. To discover this is in effect to discover, and take possession of, their own thought process and hence their own authority. This sets them well on the way to winning a sense of their own autonomy or power of self-determination.

Discovering their own authority in relation to ideas tends to free children from literal-minded attachment to specific ideologies or sets of value-beliefs; they start to discover the essential fluidity and open-endedness of all ideas. Then they will understand that they do not have to accept everything their classmates in the community of inquiry say. They will realise it is possible, for themselves and their classmates, to try out ideas in a tentative and exploratory fashion, and that disagreement with someone's view in no way implies rejection of that person. On the contrary, considered disagreement is evidence that one has listened carefully to what the other person has to say and taken it seriously enough to engage with it. Each child explores the others' ideas in the knowledge that their own ideas will be explored in turn: everyone is expected to open their ideas out to others in this way. Some ideas will be enlarged or elaborated or adjusted by the group. Some might be discarded.

A child whose idea is discarded by the group need not discard it herself; she might have to give it more thought. She can do so secure in the knowledge that to her group she is not identified with any particular idea or view, but is rather, again, seen as an author of ideas: the community of inquiry is simply a safe space for her and her classmates to try out different possibilities and develop their own reflexive capacities.

This practice of collective inquiry helps children discover they do have something of their own to say about issues in their community. Children who discover this will also feel that one day they will be capable of making worthwhile contributions to debate in society. It will give them the confidence, as adults, to take responsibility for society.

So children who have been through the developmental process fostered by the community of inquiry, or similar practices, will have no need of Brendan Nelson's 'values education'. The experience of having their peers listen attentively to them on issues that matter will have validated their perspective. The experience of listening attentively to their peers will have revealed to them that others have perspectives as alive and complex and deeply felt as their own; it will have taught them both respect for others and appreciation for the diversity of others.

Discovering the way their own thought is stimulated into unexpected and creative life through dialogue with others will have enabled them to take charge of their own thought process, thereby becoming self-determining individuals, with all the sense of self-worth that follows from this. Won't such children have every chance of growing into tolerant individuals with a robust respect for themselves and others, and able to make responsible value judgments? Children who become such independent thinkers will be well equipped to respond appropriately to future situations that could not be anticipated by any present code of conduct.

A child whose idea is discarded by the group need not discard it herself

Individuals who have not been offered such practices, but have been asked to swallow a state-sanctioned nine-point code, will have no way of truly divining or inhabiting the values prescribed by that code, and will likely end up as 'fundamentalist' apologists for a democracy they have no way of putting to the test.

Indeed, a publicly enforced code of respect and tolerance for difference poses a real danger that people would cease to be accountable for their beliefs and values; they could adopt any set of beliefs and values, however absurd or fanciful, and demand these be given as much respect (uncritical acknowledgment) as those with sound foundations. Mutual critique across belief systems would be ruled out.

Such a regime of extreme relativism could clearly impoverish our knowledge systems to the point of knowledge breakdown—and hence economic and social breakdown. Moreover, the massive failure of engagement across discourses it would entail would tend to fragment society into its discrete belief and value constituencies. So the consequences of a regime of enforced uncritical acceptance of different belief systems, in the name of values that betray their own meaning by being imposed in a dogmatic and authoritarian fashion, might be at least as dire for society as those of a regime that tolerates no diversity at all. ■

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Luke Fraser

Portrait of Samuel Pepys, by John Hayls. National Portrait Gallery, London. Used by permission

The Pepysian paradox

Samuel Pepys's diaries chronicling London life in the 17th century—now on the Internet—remain as fresh and engaging as ever

LONDON IS A DRIVEN CITY. The energy of the Thames's tidal flow between the Temple and the Tower is metaphor: the same energy is on display every day in the thousands who turn up for work, freshly disgorged from rail stations and tubes, to pursue the main chance. Proud ambition drives London: in few other places would so many young men—boys commuting from their outer-suburban bedsits to earn a pittance flogging mobile phones or computers—wear such stentorian pinstripes and luminous shirts and strut, peacock-like, through the town, their gait out of kilter with their wealth and influence.

Perhaps there are more dynamic economies in the world; perhaps there are more creative and hard-working people and places, but give London its due: it is the home of brass. There is a confidence in the commerce of the city that has rarely been diminished since the great mercantile days of centuries past. Like the similarly Protestant and pragmatic

Dutch, it would seem English traders took the religious contention over usury—the scourge of money-lending—and ran with the opportunities it presented, while Catholic France and Spain looked on in pious hesitation. The results still refract along the Thames.

Such qualities can be glimpsed by any visitor today, or they can be read in dramatic renderings by English writers; perhaps most conspicuously in Dickens, although there are modern equivalents. But it is rarer to find the demiurges of London's city life documenting their own days. Perhaps this is one part of the explanation for the evergreen popularity of Samuel Pepys's diaries. Evidently, the patron saint of London is Erconwald, the city's seventh-century Saxon bishop. It might cause a stir in the Holy See, but an argument could be made for appointing Samuel Pepys to this position. For beyond all others, he renders for us the practicality, ambition, vanity, gaiety, wit, sure-footedness and strength of a Londoner *in excelsis*. And for those who make the choice to leaf through his many-volumed diaries, he has more qualities than this again, as a man moving across and through the lines of a fascinating society. That he could move from the mundane and bawdy to the thoughtful and intellectual and back again, every day, is a testament first to the man, but also to his time and his city.

Diaries can be a clearing house for thoughts and ambitions untried in real life; a solace to those feeling put upon by the world. The intimacy of the diary lends itself to self-assessment; it is a place to sound the depths of the writer. Once jotted out, these journals become a spyhole to the man: was he dogged with self-doubt? Did he feel himself short-changed? Was he someone else entirely? This is the fodder for many diary lovers. Readers of published diaries can truffle-hunt for that which astounds, or makes no sense when confronted with the outer diarist and their outwardly life. Such diaries are common enough; few people obtain a balance between potential and achievement. Not everybody can be born a Wallace Stevens—bestriding art and commerce, simultaneously the successful businessman and one of the great poets of his age. Diaries are oftentimes attractive because they reveal that imbalance between life imagined and lived. They show us people whose potentialities and ambitions are beyond the sum of their mundane parts. They keep us reading and thinking and, perhaps, they make us a little less dissatisfied with ourselves.

Samuel Pepys did not keep such a diary. From his mid-twenties, when he began to record his daily affairs and thoughts, he worked to make every post a winner and delighted in writing about his efforts. Every win, loss and near miss is recorded in a diary that doubles as a ledger. There are doubts, too, but they are mostly concerned with what providence might bestow, or how another might act in matters of

importance for Pepys himself. There are few truly dark nights of the soul in the diaries of Samuel Pepys. Reading him is to see the blossoming of a figure whose work ethic, ambition, guile and intellect kept the public figure and the private man in a blessed equilibrium throughout his life; a thruster backing himself with hard work, a sharp eye, quick feet and a fear of the gutter. Pepys kept his great diary for a little under a decade; yet he lived longer still, and ascended the heights of his trade, as perhaps the most senior civil servant in the country. The brevity of the diaries might be our loss, but if we are to take away any positive, it must be this: that in his diaries we read a youthful man in full sail towards his ambitions, unfreighted by middle age, illness and ennui. They were golden years for Pepys, and the writing does them full justice.

The diaries are strikingly immediate and fresh. Pepys's language is not archaic: perhaps his prose is a little more formal than we might expect today, but it sits on the pages with the smell of fresh paint. This achievement is the more remarkable when compared to the diary of Pepys's near contemporary, John Evelyn. For all its importance and intelligence, Evelyn's prose has a leaden feel, a sense of the voice thrown from a great distance; it is not there in Pepys. The other great link between Pepys and the modern reader is the donkey-stubborn geography of the city itself, which brings an immediate familiarity to his jottings. The lie of the land has changed little since his time. London's shambling alleyways and yards refused to yield to the rebuilding plans laid after the great fire of 1666; this intransigence was largely, it would seem, on the grounds that since the many guilds and businesses already knew where to find each other, changing things would just compound the disruption that the fire had already caused.

Perhaps the biggest changes from the road map that Pepys walked come courtesy of the London blitz. The space between St Paul's, St Bride's on Fleet Street and the Tower of London triangulates the centre of Pepys's life: it contained his house in Seething Lane, his place of birth and baptism, his parish church and his workplace in the Navy Office. In this same delta, large office blocks now jostle for every ounce of real estate on erstwhile bomb sites—some of the old laneways lie crushed anonymously beneath them, but many more survive as rear lanes to large city office blocks: dog tracks weaving around corporate giants.

Notwithstanding the changes, it remains fairly easy to follow Pepys's wanderings from any given diary entry: he was meticulous in recording his perambulations. Perhaps the only significant barrier to the modern detective is the diarist's countless river crossings, made almost daily in small, rowed ferries as the naval bureaucrat went to inspect progress in the shipyards, or to drink, hold court and chase skirts across the river. The Thames nowadays is a much quieter place than that; the ferries only run longitudinally between tourist hotspots such as Hampton Court and the Tower, but Pepys records for us in daily detail the bustling life of this deep and strongly tidal river, which was—all at once—London's underground system, motorway, city wall, internet cable and sewer.

The intimacy of his world was helped by the size of his London. At the time it held perhaps less than half a million people—a little more intimate than the 7.5 million of today. Consequently, the great networks of royalty, commerce, politics, science and the arts were small, familiar and intertwined out of necessity. On this cosier scale, a man who could work hard, as well as read, write, talk and bargain with the best would command good odds on going up in the world. Pepys grabbed every opportunity with both hands and his diaries are a testament to the motilic energy and ambition of the man; in his little house in Seething Lane, Pepys must have lost much sleep turning over in his wary mind the people who might either threaten or increase his wealth and station. And he knew that success took guile; he met it in the form of the royalist naval captain Robert Holmes:

> He seems to be very well acquainted with the King's mind, and with all the several factions at Court, and spoke all with so much frankness, that I do take him to be my Lord's good friend, and one able to do him great service, being a cunning fellow, and one (by his own confession to me) that can put on two several faces, and look at his enemies with as much love as his friends. But, good God! What an age is this, and what a world this is! That a man cannot live without playing the knave and dissimulation.

And as might be expected of a man who stepped over destitution on his way to daily business each day, Pepys was a true Micawber. The diaries groan under the weight of entries bemoaning costs, or rejoicing in windfalls:

> My mind is now in a wonderful condition of quiet and content, more than ever in all my life, since my minding the business of my office, which I have done most constantly; and I find it to be the very effect of my late oaths against wine and plays, which, if God please, I will keep constant in, for now my business is a delight to me, and brings me great credit, and my purse encreases to.

And he was a boast, when it suited his purpose:

> Home by water, and to the office all afternoon, which is a great content to me, to talk with persons of quality and to be in command, and I give it out among them that the estate left me is 200l. a year in land, besides moneys, because I would put esteem on myself.

But, as ever, one of the great risks to maintaining your fortune was the threat of rivals at work, men who might steal your thunder. In this context, Pepys emerges as one of the great haters, recording his blackest thoughts on those who might stand in his way; witness Pepys's comments about Sir William Penn, for a time his senior at the Navy Office and a political rival to Pepys's own patron, the Earl of Sandwich:

> ...we to supper again to Sir W. Pen. Whatever the matter is, he do much fawn upon me, and I perceive would not fall out with me, and mighty officious to my wife, but I shall never be deceived again by him, but do hate him and his traitorous tricks with all my heart.

The language of Pepys sits on the pages with the smell of fresh paint

Much of his general fame as diarist lies in his role as chronicler of great events, a man near the very apex of English society. As a youth he saw first-hand the beheading of a king and later witnessed the ascent of Cromwell's parliament, the subsequent restoration of the monarchy and the great civic afflictions of the plague and fire of London, among other things. That he saw and documented these things—and did so with such clarity and wit—is to be cherished by the historian and the dilettante alike.

But Pepys was perhaps not driven by any great altruism in chronicling such events; every entry in the diary has the writer himself as its alpha and omega. Just as in modern London, Pepys, a man making his way, struggled daily to stay on top of the fickle wheel of fortune. It was eminently better to be the cheetah than the gazelle. But in all of this, we find him not entirely wizened by his jousts with the city: there is ever room in his diaries for the thoughtful aside. Pepys made music with his friends on the lute. He had professional singing lessons for some time, in the mornings before he went to work. He mixed with great men of science. He took a leading role in the fledgling Royal Academy.

The diaries show us just what a melting pot of great grace and thought this apparently hard, dirty trading town was in the 17th century. Yet amidst the highbrow, Pepys's diary is also written with an Augustinian honesty: he pursues women throughout the years of the diary; he records the intimate details of successful and not-so-successful bouts in a sort of Esperanto, made of remembered Latin, French and other odds and sods, to provide an extra encryption lest prying eyes read the diary. He records his feasts on oysters, mutton and venison pasties ... and then tells us how much he vomited that night.

Pepys was to write with eloquence about the effects of the bubonic plague on London, a city that, in the steamy summer of 1665, became ever more quiet as people died and the living fled. He documents the death tolls for us as he hears of them. These entries are sobering; they place today's public fascination with terror bombings thoroughly in the shade for the sheer ruthlessness of suffering. In June 1665, as the plague took hold, he encounters it directly, as the infected begin to be boarded up alive in their own houses:

> *Pepys struggled daily to stay on top of the fickle wheel of fortune*

> I did, in Drury-Lane, see two or three houses marked with a red cross upon the doors and 'Lord have mercy upon us' writ there, which was a sad sight to me, being the first of that kind that to my remembrance I ever saw.

One cannot help but wonder if the scrawl on the door was that of the battener, seeking some absolution for his grim task. Yet Pepys remains in London for months after this, sending his family off to the country, but he himself working assiduously at his career with the Navy Office well into the worst months of the plague. The parish records of the time tell us that it was killing more than 7000 people a week in the summer of 1665. In the end, it may have claimed over a quarter of all Londoners. Pepys saw it happen and lost friends and colleagues to the pestilence. That he stayed and wrote about it in such a thoughtful way is to his credit. The diarist's humanity, mixed no doubt with considerable fear, makes itself felt through this period:

> This disease making us more cruel to one another than if we were dogs.

In these passages Pepys rises above being a scribbling civil servant. In the same way, he documents the great fire of London, from its beginnings to raging inferno: London engulfed in flames must have made for an apocalyptic sight. Yet within a few hours of the fires reaching their peak, the diarist takes a boat upriver to Westminster to buy a flashy new coat—his others had become sooty from the fire and, after all, there were standards to be maintained. It is quite an image to conjure with: the disabled city fretting in black smoke under a red sky, while amidst the chaos, a boat heads up the Thames ferrying a man occupied with what sort of braid should adorn his new suit.

This is the heart of the Pepysian paradox and it might tell us a little about the city itself: London in 1666 was a premier trading capital. It worked hard for what it scrounged from the muddy Thames and the ships that plied it; its inhabitants, whatever their wealth or status, lived in or at least close by to squalor and sorrow. Men knew that fortune was fickle; they saw the results of failure and misfortune all about them; all the more reason to enjoy good luck and work diligently, lest one allow oneself to be dragged anywhere near the gutter. Pepys was such a man. It has been said that there was a hard knot somewhere in Pepys's heart. But if there was, it surely was a common ailment in Restoration London.

The several volumes of Pepys's great diary are a fascinating journey. In very recent times, they have been serialised on the internet (www.pepysdiary.com). This laudable development allows all sorts of people to enjoy the unfolding drama of his life by logging on to read each new day's entry. Readers can also post questions and answers about the etymology of curious words and phrases, or help dust nearly 350 years of obscurity off distant names and places. It is a fascinating project, and it helps to bring Pepys a new relevance.

With luck, this endeavour—along with illuminating and engaging recent scholarship such as Claire Tomalin's *Pepys: The Unequalled Self*—will convert more people to this patron saint of London, whose concerns and schemes for self-advancement are far more warm and engaging than the cold stratagems of Machiavelli, whose unwavering quest for liquidity is more human and haphazard than Mr Micawber's, and whose life was filled with more living than seems a fair allotment for any single man.

Pepys was human. Happily, he probably won't ever be picked up by management theorists as touchstone for some thin business tome because they would find his diaries too complex, too exhausting, too boring and far too extraordinary. Pepys lived. He lives still. ■

Luke Fraser works in Canberra as a management consultant. He spent several years as a director in the Department of Defence and worked briefly for the last Howard government ministry as chief of staff to the then minister for employment services and defence personnel.

Michele M. Gierck

Spreading seeds of culture

Determined to preserve old stories and encourage young voices, tribal elders in Western Australia took a bold publishing step

Students from Wulungarra School at the launch of Hylton Laurel's *The Cowboy Frog*. Photo courtesy Magabala Books

Magabala Books has an impressive list of titles in its catalogue and has won numerous awards for the work of its authors, editors and artists, but this is no flash publishing house.

For all its success, Magabala is an unpretentious operation: it is housed in a tin-roofed building in the back streets of Broome on the Western Australian coast; a wall of bookshelves separates the reception area from the production room behind.

Magabala specialises in publishing the work of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. The shelves carry an array of its titles: children's books, which include *The Mark of the Wagarl*, about the sacred water snake and how a boy questioned the wisdom of the elders; *A Home for Bilby*, a picture book about the bush and the animals that live there; and *Dabu, the Baby Dugong*, a vividly illustrated story from the Torres Strait Islands. There are also oral, community and natural history books, biographies, fiction and poetry.

Magabala's origins as an indigenous publishing house go back more than 20 years. In the 1980s tribal elders became concerned that their stories were being appropriated by non-indigenous people and being told in inappropriate ways. They met near Fitzroy Crossing in 1984 and decided to set up a publishing arm of the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre.

'It grew from there,' says Magabala's general manager, Suzie Haslehurst. 'The first book was published in 1987 and then in 1990 Magabala Books was established as an Aboriginal Corporation.' Now, just over 15 years later, it takes a while to read through their list of publications.

'I always say that it's difficult for Magabala because we have social and cultural objectives and imperatives, but we also compete in the commercial publishing arena.'

But those social and cultural objectives are non-negotiable. They include the preservation and dissemination of indigenous stories, culture and history, the promotion of indigenous culture in the wider community, and the contribution to literacy initiatives in indigenous communities.

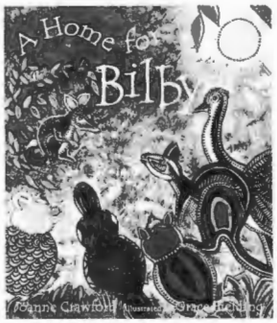
From the outset, the publisher knows that books such as *Moola Bulla*—a detailed account of a government-run station near Halls Creek—are never going to sell well, but they are of such cultural importance they must be published. Added to this, it is not unusual that some of the authors and artists published by Magabala come from remote areas, and need nurturing.

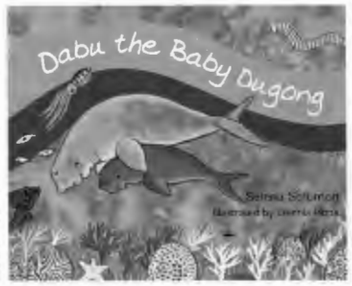
Magabala has published authors and artists with no fixed address, many who did not have access to regular communications such as phone, fax or computer; nor did they live anywhere near a post office.

'A lot of other publishing houses may not want to put in the work, particularly with the authors where English is their second or third language,' says marketing manager Nikky Finch.

It is estimated that one-quarter of books published by Magabala are either bilingual or contain a significant amount of indigenous language.

And not all the texts are written by adults. Eleven-year-old Hylton Laurel wrote *The Cowboy Frog*, published in 2003. A shy boy from a remote community that is a six-hour drive from Broome, Laurel did not feel confident enough to talk on the phone





to the staff at the publishing house, never mind deal with journalists. 'So we had to do press requests by fax, or in writing.'

Many of Laurel's community travelled to Broome to celebrate the launch of his book. Celebrations aside, however, the publication of *The Cowboy Frog* has inspired many other indigenous children to write and send in their stories.

Magabala rarely commissions work, and receives such a volume of stories it cannot hope to publish them all. Yet all the manuscripts are reviewed, and those that are returned to their authors have usually had some editing done and suggestions added; the editors regard helping writers' development in this way as an integral part of their work.

Magabala has published books from all over Australia, including major cities, towns, remote communities and the Torres Strait Islands. An interesting relationship has formed with the Tropical North Queensland TAFE Indigenous Arts and Culture Centre. Writers and artists from the centre have contributed to seven Magabala books, including *Nana's Land, Kuiyku Mabaigal* and the soon-to-be-released *Creatures of the Rainforest*.

Yet it is the images, not just the text—particularly in children's books—that captivate readers. *The Mark of the Wagarl*, deemed 'notable' by the Children's Book Council of Australia, has beautiful illustrations. And *A Home for Bilby*, a picture book, won a WA Premier's Book Award.

Magabala usually selects the artist to illustrate a particular text, but sometimes the process is more organic. Finch says *The Mark of the Wagarl* had unexpected delays when three artists, in turn, had to withdraw from the project. Then the author piped up: 'I have a niece who does a bit of painting.'

Finch now laughs at this understatement. 'That niece turned out to be a fantastic artist, and her work was used to illustrate the story.'

As I am leaving the publishing office, I ask what Magabala means, and am told: 'Magabala is the Yawuru [Broome Aboriginal language] word for "bush banana", a fruit found in northern Australia. Both the skin and the yellowish-brown seeds inside the magabala can be eaten. The seeds taste like garden peas. The magabala can be cooked in hot ashes and when it is ready to eat it pops out of the fire of its own accord. But the real magic of the magabala is in its seed dispersal, which is by the beautiful silken parasols (like dandelions) attached to the seeds which carry them off into the wind. This is where the name of Magabala Books comes from, because we like to think of our books as spreading the seeds of culture.' ■

Michele M. Gierck is a freelance writer. Her book *Seven Hundred Days in El Salvador* will be published later this year by Coretext.

Jon Greenaway

Tensions mount in Sri Lanka

A few months' peace in the wake of the tsunami was shattered by an assassin's bullet

EVEN AFTER THREE DECADES of civil war in Sri Lanka, Lakshman Kadirgmar's death last August was different. In what was supposed to have been a period of ceasefire between the government and the Tamil separatists, he was felled by a sniper's bullet as he was climbing out of his backyard swimming pool in the diplomatic district of Colombo.

Kadirgmar, a Tamil, had spent years pushing for a peaceful end to the vicious fighting, which had brought the assassination of one president and of another in waiting, the frightening spectre of children suicide bombers, and of Buddhist priests calling for a return to military campaigns. Viewed against the long and bloody history of the conflict, Kadirgmar's death should have come as no great surprise.

Eight months earlier, the tsunami that ravaged Sri Lanka's coast seemed to have swept away the ethnic and political tensions that had divided the island. There were stories of Sinhalese fishermen saving their Tamil neighbours, of aid being rushed through previously guarded control lines, and of Tamil Tigers, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), putting down their weapons to help anyone in distress in their territory. The tsunami had overwhelmed the ingrained distrust among Sri Lanka's different communities and, for a time at least, made them seem trivial by comparison.

I was among a group of journalists that met Lakshman Kadirgmar in 2000, as the Tamil Tiger leaders were making the first overtures towards a negotiated peace. The meeting was in the Foreign Affairs Ministry in downtown Colombo, a Victorian-era building reminiscent of an English public school. The building was enclosed by a six-metre-high reinforced iron fence, installed after the Tamil Tigers set off a bus bomb that damaged it in 1998. Kadirgmar was then nearing the end of his first term as foreign minister in a government formed by President Chandrika Kumaratunga.

He arrived two hours after our group had been herded into the state room, preceded by stony-faced and heavily armed soldiers. He was eloquent and engaging, prepared to admit the faults and mistakes of past Sri Lankan governments with candid comments that set his staff fidgeting uneasily in their seats.

His theme was that peace could be negotiated, but only if the rest of the world recognised the terrorism of the LTTE and moved to prevent funds being remitted to them from the expatriate Tamil communities in Australia, North America, Britain and elsewhere.

Kadirgmar was typical of his countrymen in the way he extended warm hospitality to foreigners, be they Sinhalese, Tamil or Muslim. On a visit I made to LTTE-controlled territory at Easter 2002, just weeks after the peace process had begun, I was welcomed by the political and military cadres in the Tigers' self-declared capital Killonochi.

I spent four days in a plush, air-conditioned guest house with freshly painted walls that stood out against that featureless, war-ravaged landscape. My hosts could not have been more charming and accommodating.

But when I broached the subject of the civil war, their demeanour changed. Smiles disappeared, brows furrowed and courtliness gave way to comments about their political rivals that were shocking in their studied ferocity. It became obvious that the long-running civil war had turned most of the population into warmongers or paranoiacs.

All that seemed to change after the tsunami struck. Ordinary Sri Lankans learned to treat one another with care and compassion and many asked whether this might be a permanent change, that the return to hostilities that so many observers feared might never eventuate. The assassination of Lakshman Kadirgmar put paid to such optimism.

To date the LTTE has not claimed responsibility for Kadirgmar's death. The killing had all the hallmarks of a Tiger operation, and it could well have been motivated by dissatisfaction with the current peace process, but it may well have been the work of an LTTE splinter group.

In 2004 there was a schism within LTTE, with a rebel group taking control of the east of the island, around Batticaloa and Trincomalee. The group was led by V. Muralitharan, who goes under the *nom de guerre* Colonel Karuna and is a shadowy figure even more opaque than the ruthless Velupillai Prabhakaran, leader of the Tiger movement. A group impatient with the peace process and wanting to seize power within Tamil ranks would no doubt prefer a return to hostilities; they have no interest in lasting peace or democratic elections.

The Norwegian government, the United Nations' peace broker, has been working hard to prevent the country from slipping back into civil war. However, a top-level peace delegation returned home recently without having secured agreements for face-to-face talks between the government and the LTTE.

The state of emergency imposed after Kadirgmar's death remains in place, and an escalation of hostilities looks likely after attacks by the Tigers in Trincomalee and the victory of Mahinda Rajapakse in the presidential elections in November, through the support of Sinhalese hardliners. If the peace process, part of Kadirgmar's legacy, is not dead, then it desperately needs the kiss of life.

Jon Greenaway is managing director of the Brussels office of Diligence Inc, a business intelligence and risk management firm. He is a former deputy editor of *Eureka Street*.

Dorothy Horsfield

Another African tragedy

For this peace prize winner, northern Uganda is the worst place on earth to be a child today

At twilight in Uganda's north, 'the night commuters', made up of lines of thousands of children, begin the trek along the dusty roads from their family compounds. They are seeking the temporary safety of towns such as Kitgum, Pader or the regional capital Gulu, where they will huddle together for the night in makeshift shelters—church missions, bus stations or decaying warehouses. The latecomers simply sleep on the streets, where they are vulnerable to theft, beatings and sexual abuse from other children and adults, including Ugandan government soldiers.

For Olara Otunnu, winner of the 2005 Sydney Peace Prize, his birthplace of Acholiland in northern Uganda is the worst place on earth to be a child today. Those children who do not make it to the township sanctuaries also face the real danger of being abducted by insurgents of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) into the nightmare world of child soldiers and sex slaves.

In two decades of war, the United Nations estimates that the LRA has captured and enslaved more than 20,000 children, some of them as young as five years old. Those small, unwilling recruits lucky enough to escape bear witness to the horror of LRA indoctrination practices such as being ordered to hack former classmates to death with pangas, as punishment for being too tired to walk any further.

Olara Otunnu will use his $50,000 Sydney Peace Prize to establish a new international foundation to help such children of violence and social devastation. As the former UN Under-Secretary-General and Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, he will also continue to lobby for the full implementation of a UN Security Council Resolution for the 'naming and shaming' of groups that brutalise children.

Otunnu has no illusions that these initiatives are more than a small part of what needs to be done to try to save a lost generation of children from the scourge of ethnic war in his homeland. A small, slight man, gentle and measured, he has used public forums in Australia to make a heart-wrenching appeal for Western intervention to put a stop to a conflict 'far worse than Darfur or the Khmer Rouge's killing fields'. During the last ten years, Uganda's national government has responded to the LRA rebels by uprooting and herding 95 per cent of the Acholi population of two million into 'concentration camps'. In other words, an entire society has become trapped between the gruesome violence of the LRA terrorists and the genocidal atrocities of a corrupt national government.

Olara Otunnu

'In the camps my people are living like animals,' Otunnu said. 'An estimated 1000 people die each week; over 40 per cent of children under five years have seriously stunted growth due to malnutrition, and two generations of children have been denied education as a matter of government policy.'

'HIV/AIDS has also become a deliberate weapon of mass destruction,' he added. 'Government soldiers who have tested HIV-positive are especially deployed to the north to commit havoc on local girls and women.'

Acholi-born Australian microbiologist Dr Norbet Okech Temajo shares Otunnu's anguish at the systematic destruction of culture, values and family structure, and the future of the children in the camps. When I went to interview him in a dormitory suburb adjacent to the Australian National University, he was waiting for me in the street. 'This situation has been ignored by the international community,' he said, 'but I believe people in Australia will listen and care.'

Two months ago, Temajo's clandestine visit to Acholiland left him with the shocked certainty that the Museveni central government was engaged in a comprehensive and methodical Final Solution for the Acholi people. 'The government has burnt down villages and destroyed crops and food storage silos. In the camps, people live 10–12 to a room. Husband and wives must lie together in the same room as their children—this is not the Acholi way. There is starvation, lack of water, no proper sanitation, disease. No one is safe from the soldiers or the terrorists.' In Koch, a camp of 60,000 people outside Gulu, he saw little kids thin as sticks, pregnant 12-year-old girls and despairing adults, drunk on a toxic local brew called kasese.

Not surprisingly, Temajo also claims that the majority of Acholi would rather take their chances in their home villages against the LRA. Despite their brutality, the rebels have been reduced to about 4000 in number, scattered in small cells across the north and west of the country. They are mostly poorly trained children and young adult graduates of the LRA indoctrination—no match for a determined campaign by the Ugandan national forces. 'Plainly, the Museveni government,' he said, 'does not want either a military solution or a negotiated settlement with the insurgents.'

In the face of the unfolding humanitarian tragedy in their birthplace, both Otunnu and Temajo ask: 'What will it take, and how long will it take, for leaders of the Western democracies to acknowledge, denounce and take action to end the genocide?' ■

Dorothy Horsfield is a Canberra writer and journalist who has lived and worked in Africa. Her new novel, *Venom*, will be published in March by Pandanus.

Christine Salins

Palatable pleasures

An international food summit in Adelaide has resolved to fight the spread of 'techno-food'

IT'S A HEALTH PARADOX: just when people began turning to low-fat diets, there began a corresponding increase in obesity. The connection alarmed Dun Gifford, founder of Oldways Preservation Trust in Boston: 'Fat provides sensations of satiety; without fat, the feelings of fullness do not kick in and so people just keep on eating.'

Gifford founded Oldways in 1988 to campaign against fast food and to promote healthy eating. He was the keynote speaker at a food summit in Adelaide in October, a gathering that included some of the world's leading television chefs and food writers.

The meeting concluded with about 100 participants signing the Declaration of Adelaide (see panel), a six-point communiqué urging changes across the food supply chain, in government policy and in food education. Whether it has any legs is yet to be seen, but at the very least it represents a determined effort to highlight some of the important issues surrounding the production, distribution and consumption of food.

Gifford wrote the declaration and was backed by fellow panelists, including food writer and chef Stephanie Alexander, food producer Maggie Beer, British television chef Antonio Carluccio and the Canadian author of *Last Chance to Eat*, Gina Mallet.

The summit was held in conjunction with the Tasting Australia festival and is likely to become a regular event. Gifford says the prevailing wisdom when he founded the trust was that 'techno-foods were our food future'.

'This techno-food locomotive was rumbling powerfully down the tracks in the late 1980s, and touted as the salvation of our crowded planet and its billions of hungry mouths. For compound reasons, this terrified me; techno-foods seemed dangerous. I decided to challenge it, and organised Oldways as a non-profit organisation to do so.'

Described by *Newsweek* magazine as 'a food-issues think tank', Oldways embarked on several campaigns, one of the first being the issue of low-fat diets promoted by nutritionists in the early 1990s.

'We pointed out that the world's two healthiest populations—Mediterraneans and Okinawans—eat high-fat diets, the former based on olive oil, the latter on fish.' Oldways drew on scientific research to come up with the Mediterranean Diet Pyramid, now widely embraced as the 'gold standard' of healthy eating.

In the mid-1990s, Oldways challenged a US government crackdown on alcohol, 'first, by pointing out that high-level science universally recognises the health benefits of moderate amounts of alcohol; and second, by publicising the additional, but then little known, positive health benefits of polyphenols and other phyto-nutrients in wine'.

In 2002, Oldways began a campaign to encourage Americans to eat more wholegrains, setting up a Whole Grains Council that now has more than 100 members, from industry giants to artisan producers.

Two years ago, it challenged what Gifford calls the 'low-carb tsunami'. 'We adopted "Pasta Fights Back" as this campaign's theme, and focused on "the pasta meal". After all, no one eats just pasta; everyone dresses it with tomatoes, olive oil, meat, fish or vegetables, and often has a glass or two of wine with it. Nutritionists know that the olive oil, vegetables, meat or fish, cheese, and wine slow down digestion, and describe this pasta meal as "perfectly balanced". These are powerful reasons to eat pasta meals, and the news that pasta meals had impressive nutrition-science support was a large relief to the eating public.'

Oldways is now challenging campaigns that demonise sugar. 'Sugars are the current food demon … following in the footsteps of fats and carbs,' Gifford says. They are a traditional food, a key element of healthy eating and something that humans crave even as babies.

Oldways has called this new educational program Managing Sweetness, its theory being that eating is a behaviour, and that 'managing' all behaviours is a key to successful living.

'Most of our successful Oldways campaigns are based on the behaviour theory principle of "management, not banishment". A great many well-intentioned and well-funded nutrition and dietary programs have failed because they are either prohibitionist or directive. We know what happened when we got scolded as children. The programs that work well are permissive. We stress the "pleasure principle" and the pleasures of the table. People don't eat nutrition, they eat food.'

This last point is one that Stephanie Alexander has been making for years. She related a story about her experience at an organic expo. 'Not one speaker spoke about flavour or taste, juiciness, aroma or conviviality. They spoke about health and everything else. The food served during the expo was boring, bland and lacking in excitement or sensory appeal. If pleasurable food education was introduced in our schools, we might see an appreciation of flavour.'

Food writer Cherry Ripe says that in the past 50 years, people have 'witnessed the greatest palate change in history' with a proliferation of bland, homogenised products. 'Pork doesn't taste like pig any more. When did you have a chicken that tastes like chicken? We're losing palate memory. My supermarket had white apricots; why not eat a cucumber?'

Perhaps Australians can consider themselves lucky that we have not yet reached the point they have in England, where a big supermarket chain put a sticker on its tomatoes declaring they were 'grown for flavour'. This amused Irish television chef Paul Rankin: 'I said, "Wow, what were they grown for before?"'

The mood of those at the summit was not entirely pessimistic. British food writer Jill Norman reminded the audience that 'in the 1960s, people predicted we'd all live on pills' by now, but this had not eventuated. 'We will not succumb to the idea that we can live on pills.'

British television chef Sophie Grigson says she veers between incredible optimism and negativism, but believes that consumers have too much choice. 'I do wonder whether perhaps choice is the root of all evil. You might find 20 brands of prepackaged lettuce in your supermarket. It's a deceptive choice because a lot of them are produced by a handful of companies. This increase of choice takes the level of taste down and down and we lose what we were getting in the first place. The other thing with so much choice is that people are terrified by it.'

Jörg Imberger, a professor of environmental engineering at the University of Western Australia, says food has become an experience rather than a need: 'We've changed what used to be a simple concept of need [for food and water] and changed it into a whole experience.

'All our needs are being packaged into marketable entities. Even water is now a tradeable entity. It's generally accepted now that pleasure is a need. We expect products to be value-priced so we can have more products and therefore more experience.'

Adelaide food writer and historian Barbara Santich told the summit that Australians are spending 14 per cent of their income on food—more than the Americans, who spend nine per cent, but less than the French and the Italians, who spend 16–18 per cent. Australians want their food cheap, she says, an attitude supported by governments who see food in commercial terms.

'A classic example is seafood: the best goes overseas to people who will pay for it, and the shortfall here is made up of cheaper inferior seafood brought in. Governments tout our wonderful produce... it's unfair when we can never get to try it. [A desirable food culture] can only be created by an awareness and appreciation of Australian foods.'

Professor Imberger points to a disconnection between what people eat and the society that produces it. '[With global warming] there'll be no ice caps, the sea level [will] rise, Australia will not have any beaches left, rainfall patterns are changing [but] few people connect these with their own life. Fewer even think of the more obscure correlations.'

He believes agriculture needs to be restructured. 'In Australia, we produce food for 100 million people. Why do we feel the need to feed all these extra people?' Taking into account all the hidden social costs of communities producing the food, not to mention the amount of water used to prop up 'this wholly unsustainable industry', he says Australians are subsidising the export of food.

'Space is a commodity that we can now market as an experience,' he says; perhaps eco-holidays could be organised to remote parts of Australia to improve tourism earnings. 'It would make more sense than marginal farming. The tourism industry accounts for 4.5 per cent of GDP; the food industry accounts for 2 per cent. The biodiversity of Australia is worth far more [than producing more food].'

Dun Gifford has devised a compass to steer Oldways on its course. 'North' is science, combining cutting-edge nutrition science with the knowledge that our genes are designed to thrive on traditional foods. 'East' is pleasure, 'south' is education and 'west' is earth, 'because without arable land, without clean fresh water, without healthy oceans, and without unfoul air, we will have neither enough food nor drink, and ultimately be without life itself.'

He says that through the prism of this compass, 'we are far off our course today, and actually losing ground on our way to a secure food future.' Some would argue that we have already lost our way, and he wouldn't necessarily argue the point.

'But I think that if we begin to think differently, and then act determinedly, we can get the Good Ship Food Future back on course,' he says. 'We can dream about sustainable agriculture, better distribution [of food], classes for schoolchildren on nutrition and healthier eating. We can dream about it, and if we make a declaration, we could make it happen.' ■

Christine Salins is a Canberra freelance writer.

Declaration of Adelaide on the Future of Food

1. Access to safe, wholesome food in adequate quantities is a basic human right, and governments must accord high priority to giving force and effect to this right.

2. Public food policies and programs, such as in schools and hospitals, should be encouraged to include fresh, local, minimally processed and seasonal foods.

3. Promoting sustainable agricultural practices and preserving cultural and biological diversity are essential for the health of the planet and its inhabitants. To this end, governments should support sustainable, small-scale agriculture on the fringes of large population centres, and protect other threatened farmland.

4. Food producers should be appropriately rewarded for adopting and maintaining practices conducive to long-term sustainability.

5. It is essential that children learn at an early age about food production, flavour, food preparation and food culture; and about the impact of their food choices upon their well-being and that of the environment. All schools have a responsibility in this.

6. Governments need to adopt the precautionary principle in respect to new technologies associated with food.

in print

Around the world and back again

The Collapse of Globalism: And the Reinvention of the World, John Ralston Saul. Penguin Viking, 2005. ISBN 0 670 04267 6, RRP $32.95

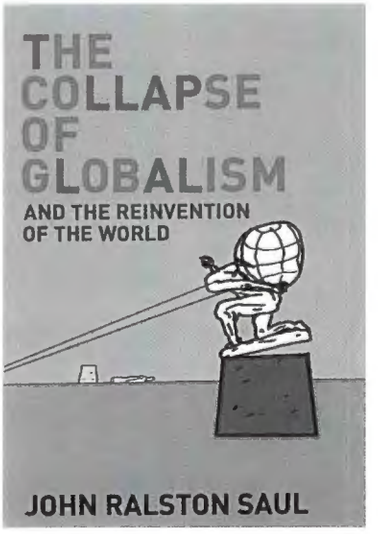
JOHN RALSTON SAUL has produced—over the last decade and a half—some of the most interesting, thought-provoking and accessible critiques of our contemporary social and political climate. In *The Collapse of Globalism*—which examines the rise and fall of global economic ideology—he has added to this impressive body of work.

Saul's past work includes the now famous philosophical trilogy *Voltaire's Bastards*, *The Doubter's Companion* and *The Unconscious Civilization*, which looks broadly at the West over the last few hundred years, since the inception of modern democracy; his more focused study on his native Canada, *Reflections of a Siamese Twin* (which has as yet no comparable study in Australia); and his timely re-evaluation of humanism, *On Equilibrium*.

For those who have been following Saul's work so far, this latest offering may on first reading seem to be covering old ground. His theme of the collapse of globalisation was floated in Australia in lectures presented in January and August of 1999 (both broadcast on the ABC). It was then put forward in an article he wrote for *Harper's Magazine* in the United States—'The Collapse of Globalism: And the Rebirth of Nationalism'—in March 2004, and reprinted here in the *Australian Financial Review*. This formed the groundwork for his latest book, developed around themes already examined in his previous works.

On closer inspection, far from simply repeating himself, Saul has provided a fresh and compelling perspective on the debates surrounding globalisation. But most importantly, he has brought to the foreground much that has been left out of these ongoing debates, and the reality that has been masked by them. In doing so he has reworked his previous themes—such as the centrality of citizenship and democracy—in order to demonstrate their continued relevance, and to add yet another level of depth to his previous analyses.

For those who have not been following Saul's works, or who are trying to decide the best point of entry into them, *The Collapse of Globalism* will not disappoint. In it he examines the ideology of globalism—which looks at the world through the prism of a certain theory of economics—and shows that, as with all ideologies, and especially economic ones, they have beginnings, middles and ends. Usually the end creates a political vacuum that needs to be filled by something, and this then plants the seeds for the next big ideology. Globalism, for example, grew out of the vacuum left by the end of Keynesianism in the late 1960s and early 1970s. But this transfer from one ideology to the next is not inevitable. The vacuum also provides an opportunity.



The three main parts of this book examine the rise (from the early 1970s), the plateau (in the 1980s) and the beginning of the collapse of globalism (in the mid-1990s). Then, in the final part, Saul shows what is happening in the confusing transition period in which we currently live. Some still hold true to the old economic faith, however. This argues that there are no more borders, that the nation state has been usurped, and that we are all moving towards being equal on the global stage. For others it has become increasingly obvious that the nation state has actually staged something of a revival; that nationalism, in both negative and positive forms, has returned; that borders are real and are meaningful, whether they be used for good or for bad; and that we are not all equal in the world, that there is in fact an increasing amount of inequality that has been produced largely by the failure of globalism to live up to its own hype.

Saul draws on examples from many countries to support his case. He looks at the arc of their development from being nation states or colonies in the 1970s, through to projecting the image of being global economies in the 1980s, and into their more recent return or birth as nation states, with a few 'globalist' hangovers. This includes detailed discussions of New Zealand, Malaysia, India and China, and the variations of globalism, and now nationalism, in each.

Although Australia is mentioned a few times, no systematic account of the story of our own global experiment is present in this book. But that's not a problem. If anything, reading the book from an Australian perspective adds an independent variable against which the argument the book presents can be better assessed. Even a brief look at Australia over this same period shows how remarkably Saul's analysis fits the pattern of our own recent history.

Sara Dowse, in a recent essay in *Meanjin*, gives a date to what could very well be the start of globalism in Australia: April

1975, when Milton Friedman visited, preaching what was then known as monetarism. The effects were immediate, Dowse says, with Treasurer Bill Hayden putting this into practice the following year, partly to cut government spending and to redress Whitlam's overindulgences the previous year, but partly to prepare the ground for a future strategy that would put the economy at the heart of government, and make social policy subordinate to this.

This fits in with the group of events that Saul argues began in the early 1970s and laid the groundwork for globalism. Friedman, of course, won the Nobel Prize for Economics in 1976, which cemented his authority as an economic guru. Saul sees his logic, however, as being 'unnecessarily decisive, pure Manicheism'. Later he shows how Margaret Thatcher justified this decisiveness by arguing that 'there is no alternative'.

Of course, by the time Thatcherism was being played out in Britain, and Reaganomics was taking hold in the United States, we had a succession of Hawke-Keating governments, backed by a partisan Liberal opposition, which set about restructuring our economy along such globalist lines. Except that here we called it economic rationalism. And by the mid-to-late-1980s, globalisation was in full swing.

Perhaps Keating's failure as prime minister to implement his raft of social policies can be partly explained by their being overshadowed by the momentum of his previous economic policies, as these were going in two separate directions. His social policies had a national focus—indigenous affairs, the republic, our geographic closeness to south-east Asia—while his economic policies were based on the implicit assumption that such things no longer matter. Our attention was then redirected to the even bigger picture, away from such nationalist causes.

Saul marks 1995 as globalism's 'cusp year'. It was a year of triumph, with the creation of the World Trade Organisation. But it was also the beginning of its collapse. Saul gives some examples: the tequila crisis in Mexico, which saw the complete failure of globalism to produce the promised new Latin America; and James Wolfensohn, and later Maurice Strong, starting at the World Bank, beginning the decade-long battle with its bureaucracy to restructure it to meet the reality of the non-Western world.

Then 1996 saw the revival of nationalism, rising out of the cracks that had started to show in globalism. This was the year that the Chechnyan-Russian conflict escalated; that religious-based nationalist political parties flourished in Israel, India and Turkey; that the Taliban seized power in Afghanistan. Scotland created its own national parliament. IRA bombings increased in Northern Ireland, as did terrorist bombings in Sri Lanka and the Sudan, all in the name of nationalism. And in Australia, we had Pauline Hanson and the electoral victory of John Howard.

Perhaps Howard's prime ministership can also be elucidated partly in terms of the context of this collapse of globalism. It seems to contain the same inherent contradiction that Keating's government had, but now flipped the other way. On the one hand, carried along by the momentum of a crumbling global economic structure, there are the usual ideological articles of faith being played out: the sin of public debt, so government budget surpluses are seen as desirable (while private debt soars and public services falter); the last hurrah for privatisation and the selling off of Telstra; and the introduction of a restructured industrial-relations package. On the other hand, in spite of globalism, or perhaps because of its imminent collapse, there has been a sharp withdrawal back into our nation state: the closing of our borders and cruel and unusual treatment of asylum seekers; elections won on grounds of introducing a new tax (GST) or managing the economy on a national level (can they really control interest rates?); as well as various overseas military actions, designed to protect 'our way of life'. East Timor is an instructive example: we went there to liberate them from Indonesia, to give them national self-determination, and to secure their oil reserves for our own national interests. In a global paradise, both actions would have been superfluous. Other military actions, however, following the US, have been waged unilaterally; that is, nationally, outside of any international or global system.

The final section of Saul's book discusses this return of the pre-eminence of the nation state. It is here that Saul's analysis brings us back, with urgency, to his previous work. The nation state is the site of modern democracy. Democracy is built upon the legitimacy of an active citizenry. When the citizenry is passive or being made passive by the promotion of inevitable forces outside their control—first globalism, and now terrorism—then democracy is weakened. The nation state, then, becomes the site for negative nationalism.

According to Saul, we are in a period of transition. The future is open. The direction we take is dependent upon how we citizens reactivate our legitimacy, strengthen our democracies, and reclaim our nation states. ■

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D.L. Lewis

No wannabes or posers

Crackpots, Rebels and Ratbags, Robert Holden. ABC Books, 2005. ISBN 7 333 1541 0, RRP $29.95

THERE IS A STORY, possibly apocryphal, of Brendan Behan, Patrick Kavanagh and Flann O'Brien sitting in an Irish pub deploring the lack of real characters in Ireland. Notwithstanding the lovely irony of that story, the prominent eccentric has declined in recent years, which makes Robert Holden's collection of Australian characters, *Crackpots, Rebels and Ratbags*, extremely useful. Holden loves his subject, and that love is reflected in the book's humorous style.

Part of the appeal of eccentrics lies in their naivety. The true eccentric (in proper Australian style) is not different for the sake of being different, but is genuinely apart. He or she (regardless of background) does not bung it on. Wannabes and posers need not apply. Some eccentrics struggle for recognition, and occasionally get it. Many of the eccentrics paraded here craved attention: Bee Miles, Percy Grainger, Manning Clark, Rosaleen Norton. Others had attention thrust upon them: E. W. Cole, Arthur Stace (the Eternity Man). It is often said that an eccentric is a rich lunatic, and Holden keeps returning to this theme.

In this collection, prime ministers stand proudly with bag ladies, professors and composers with the peculiar. Some eccentrics are so identifiable that they become part of the local landscape: E. W. Cole's bookshop in Melbourne was visited by Charles Dickens, Arthur Conan Doyle and others; Eternity, Arthur Stace's graffito, was so well known in Sydney that it was made the centrepiece of the 2000 New Year's Eve fireworks celebration on the harbour. During their lifetime, you hadn't seen Sydney if you hadn't seen either Billy Blue or Bee Miles.

The chapters on Rosaleen Norton and Arthur Stace are superb. Norton's sad decline from truly feared Satanist (who brought down no less a figure than Sir Charles Mackerras) to unintentional caricature is astutely handled. Holden manages to take a fairly mysterious phantasm, Arthur Stace, and put some skin and bone on the mystique.

The book has few flaws. Alfred Deakin's spiritualism could have been examined further. A perusal of Al Gabay's *The Mystic Life of Alfred Deakin* would have strengthened this chapter. On matters spiritualist, Holden repeats the minor canard that Arthur Conan Doyle converted to spiritualism during World War I. He had been a committed spiritualist for many years before the war; the war (and the death of his son) merely strengthened his resolve and the public's reception to his position. There are a couple of stylistic approaches that don't quite work: comparing Indiana Jones to Baron Munchausen and 'The Greatest Liar on Earth', Louis de Rougemont, seems like comparing apples to motorcars.

The only other flaw I found (and it too is quite inconsequential) is that I thought the original title, *From Queer to Eternity*, was superb. However, the title that the book ended up with will do.

I will not take issue with Holden's choices of subjects: after all, space, budget, time and personal preferences must constrain any work, and Holden's choices are terrific. Some of the others he includes are William Chidley (he of the Answer), Lola Montez (whose lack of dancing skills did not seem to be a disadvantage to her career as a dancer) and Dulcie Deamer (who personified Decadent Sydney in the 1920s but dissolved into self-parody). I like to think, though, that this book might lead to a website of eccentrics, continually updated, fully referenced and available to all, so that David Scott Mitchell and Alf Conlon, P. R. Stephensen and Lassiter, and so many others might also get attention, as well as the marvellous procession of misfits, eccentrics, and characters that Holden does present.

The current slavish attachment to individualism has seen the decline of the eccentric. It is hard to shock current complacency. We accept individuals now—provided they conform to our preconceived ideas of what constitutes an individual. In the past, we used to harass and suppress individualism. Several of the subjects in this book ended up in Callan Park or other such institutions. In turn, we were harassed, and our mediocre approaches were challenged quite severely. Now that eccentricity is part of the social norm, we have developed a much crueller response: ignoring eccentricity. In an age where pedestrian mediocrities can be made 'unique' through the media, we struggle to find true eccentrics. Indeed, nearly all of Holden's modern eccentrics are recluses, living like Diogenes, cut off from the conveniences of modern life. This in itself speaks volumes. Holden is absolutely correct to discuss J. S. Mills' concern that his society was too conformist. Our society is only superficially non-conformist. Everybody's an individual, just like everybody else. Reading this book was a delight, and the minor criticisms I have are not to detract from my recommendation that you read it. ■

D. L. Lewis's review of Andrew Mercador's *Super Aussie Soaps* appeared in the April 2005 issue of *Eureka Street*.

Sarah Kanowski

City of tarnished glories

Istanbul: Memories of a City, Orhan Pamuk. Faber and Faber, 2005. ISBN 0 571 21832 6, RRP $45

The view from a rainy tram window at dusk; a slim man, glamorous in suit and sunglasses, disembarking from an aeroplane branded with the Turkish flag; porters bowed low crossing the Golden Horn; a woman and two small boys before a mirror, the younger turning back to face her; washing strung before a cityscape of domes and minarets; men clearing snow from a ferry roof, grey smoke filling the air around them; more snow, on tram tracks and across parked cars; a child camouflaged in the shadows of crumbling waterside mansions. The black-and-white photographs that run through Orhan Pamuk's meditation on his hometown of Istanbul echo the words surrounding them: beautiful but melancholic, labyrinthine and occasionally disorienting. The mosaic of personal history and public life evokes the work of G. W. Sebald, another great modern novelist who used photographs to expose the past's double nature: its strangeness and its intimacy.

In its scope Pamuk's book also resembles the sprawling *Istanbul Encyclopedia* he loved as a boy. But where the author of that 12-volume tome struggled to make the city's disorder and variety conform to foreign 'scientific' categories, Pamuk freely delights in his subject's Protean nature and the particular obsessions of his own biography, giving chapters to street signs, his grandmother, religion, famous fires, newspaper columnists, Flaubert, painting, and fights with his older brother.

There is a symmetry to these many parts, however. The balancing point is a concern with the past. For Pamuk, Istanbul's present is but a wreck of its past, 'an ageing and impoverished city buried under the ashes of a ruined empire'. The dilapidated mansions, crumbling fountains, and demolished gardens of modern Istanbul exist in painful contrast to the Ottoman wonders recorded in artists' prints and travellers' tales. The gloomy legacy of Istanbul's vanished glory is found not only in its streetscapes but also in its spirit—its *hüzün*, or melancholy, a concept which is the ruminative centre of *Istanbul: Memories of a City*. Introducing the term, Pamuk launches into one of the descriptive *tours de force* that characterise his memoir, listing in page after page its essential images:

> ...I am speaking of the old booksellers who lurch from one financial crisis to the next and then wait shivering all day for a customer to appear; of the barbers who complain that men don't shave as much after an economic crisis; of the children who play ball between the cars on cobblestone streets; of the covered women who stand at remote bus stops clutching plastic shopping bags and speaking to no one as they wait for the bus that never arrives; of the empty boathouses of the old Bosphorus villas; of the teahouses packed to the rafters with unemployed men; of the patient pimps striding up and down the city's greatest square on summer evenings in search of one last drunken tourist...

Pamuk teases out the ambiguities of *hüzün* throughout the book: it is negating but also affirming; it is felt in solitariness but is the affliction of an entire city; its source is loss but it is a badge of pride; it is unique to Istanbul but its roots are European.

In the current debate over Turkey's application to join the European Union, Pamuk's reference to the reformist sultans of the late 18th and early 19th centuries reminds us that 'Westernisation' is not a new concept. Indeed, despite his stated support of EU membership, it is the 'modernising' revolution launched by Atatürk that Pamuk sees as responsible for his city's downfall, for 'the replacement of the Ottoman Empire with the little, imitative Republic of Turkey'. Surprisingly, the convoluted love-hate relationship Turkey has with Europe—its model and its foil—is one that has resonances for Australia. We too inherit a culture that has seen itself as distant from the centres of civilisation and one which long deferred to the judgments of outsiders' eyes. With a few adjustments, Pamuk's dizzying description of his reinvented republic is familiar to post-1788 arrivals to this continent:

> To discover that the place in which we have grown up—the centre of our lives, the starting point for everything we have ever done—did not in fact exist a hundred years before our birth, is to feel like a ghost looking back on his life, to shudder in the face of time.

Pamuk's particular contribution to this old conversation is his open allegiance to that 'twilit place' between traditional identities. To be both insider and outsider is the birthright of Istanbullus, he says, but also, his memoir makes clear, of the writer. The coming to vocation subtly underlines *Istanbul*, where narrative is discovered as a way of transmuting childhood isolation and adolescent anguish into a second life. However, the artist's foothold betwixt the inner and outer worlds, his attention to shadow and ambiguity, is not always a safe place, and Pamuk himself has recently drawn the ire of the keepers of official identity.

A long-time critic of Turkey's human rights abuses (the memoir has many references to the rich multicultural city destroyed by last century's 'Turkification'), Pamuk was to appear in court last month on 'charges of denigrating Turkish national identity' for publicly discussing the state's murder of Armenians and Kurds. There is a terrible irony in that charge being laid against a writer who has drawn such a tender portrait of his city. Yet, as with Ireland's banning of *Ulysses*, *Istanbul* will live as a masterpiece long after Pamuk's political detractors have shuffled into history. ■

Sarah Kanowski, a freelance writer and broadcaster, was the inaugural winner of the Margaret Dooley Young Writers' Award.

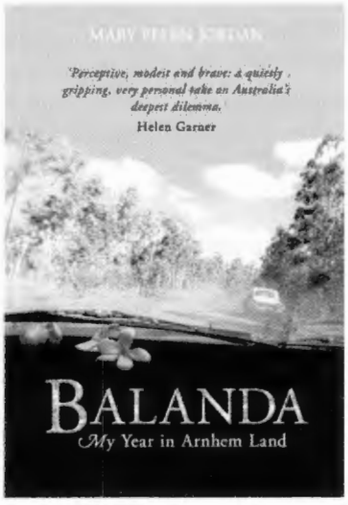
Brian F. McCoy

A year spent observing

Balanda: My Year in Arnhem Land, Mary Ellen Jordan. Allen & Unwin, 2005. ISBN 1 74114 280 6, RRP $24.95

The descriptions in Mary Ellen Jordan's *Balanda: My Year in Arnhem Land* will resonate for many of us who have lived in Aboriginal communities. Jordan has managed to capture many of those early impressions and conversations that people experience when first living in a remote community: the weather, local store, accommodation, ever-present dogs, and, of course, local people. Jordan has come as a *balanda* (a Macassan word for white person) to live in a remote Aboriginal community in Arnhem Land. There is much for her to experience within a community of people who speak other languages before English.

What I particularly liked in the beginning of the book was Jordan's willingness to arrive with a 'patchwork of understandings and confusions'. She manages to capture well her intrigue and interest, where so many securities and predictabilities are removed and so much can be 'different'. Her sensitivity to a new place is well articulated and evocative. As any veil of possible romance is lifted, one can get a sense of what it might mean to live in a remote community, joining a minority of white staff (although a dominant minority in many other ways), in a time and place that do not simply or quickly accord with university and city living. As a challenging experience, it also raises self-scrutiny. She is not just a female *balanda* in an Aboriginal world; she brings her own history with her.



There is a significant shift, about halfway through the book, when Jordan describes being assaulted. It is a Sunday morning, and she is confronted by a young Aboriginal man. She has been in the community for only a few months. A couple of days later she hears that her father has died. It is not the assault that touches her vulnerability, but the memory of her father. Fears, deeply etched within her since she was a little girl, surface at the memory of his death. She leaves for a three-week break, and returns to give the community a second chance.

Jordan finds that coming 'with good intentions' is not enough. It's not just the isolation from family and the familiar that she finds difficult, but a social and communication divide. It is a divide that accentuates her feelings of difference and helplessness. It also accentuates her fears. Despite the efforts of Valerie to draw her into the world of local kinship and be a 'sister for her', her own relationship with Valerie or others does not appear to develop or become deeply sustaining. Her own linguistic skills, developed at university, have not helped and she finds little to bridge her into the Maningrida world.

It is here that my disappointment with the book lies. Jordan does not appear to have informed the local people of her intention to write about them. Ostensibly, she came to write a book on weaving in Arnhem Land. Nor does she appear concerned that people might be sensitive to appearing in books such as this, however well written. Changing names doesn't disguise identities—if you know Maningrida or the people and you live in the community. As the book intrudes into the personal lives of both *balanda* and Aboriginal, one wonders how they felt about such a portrayal and what choice they had.

I am not surprised that Jordan develops strong opinions after such a short period of time. A suicide prompts a reflection on the existence of boredom, hopelessness and despair. She may be right about the life that Aboriginal people experience. However, I suspect there is more to life, and death, in Maningrida than that. It is not that Jordan found the experience more difficult than she imagined it would be, but that she did not find local people who could take her beyond her world and into theirs. When bored, confused or frustrated, she turns not to others but to art. It was, she says, a year spent observing.

The image of her final departure on a Sunday afternoon is most revealing. She is the only person on the plane, as if this is how her time has finally come to be. Her reflections on white paternalism might be true, but there is a sense that she has not come to know the people well. Whether this aloneness was sharpened by the assault, closely followed by her father's death, is not considered. It would be difficult to think otherwise.

I continue to wonder why some people spend shorter times in Aboriginal communities than others. In this book I gained some insight into that. Perspectives change, as do relationships. And fear will touch us all in personal and distinctive ways. It is not enough to come to an Aboriginal community with good intentions or even with university degrees. We each bring something of our own history with us and, for many and various reasons, our spirits sometimes do not settle. The biggest mistake would be to think that was simply because the community was remote, in Arnhem Land, or even Aboriginal. ■

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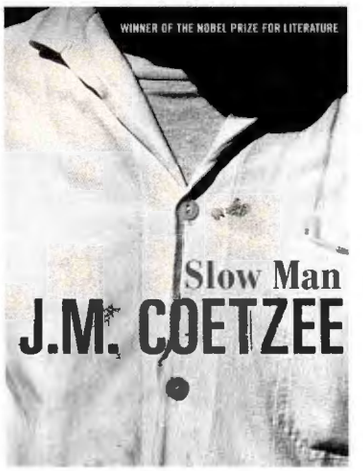
John Button

Not quite quite

Slow Man, J. M. Coetzee. Knopf, 2005. ISBN 1 741 66068 8, RRP $45



YEARS AGO an eccentric Englishman, who'd spent his whole working life in the Colonial Office, gleefully described to me how he categorised people, and sometimes things. The first two categories were TD, standing for Top Drawer, and NQQ, Not Quite Quite. J. M. Coetzee is definitely Top Drawer. But occasionally in the rich array of his writings are things which are NQQ. *Slow Man* is one of these. Even so, it is a very readable and thought-provoking novel.

Paul Rayment is a 60-year-old retired photographer, a man of comfortable means and limited aspirations. Culturally, he is a sort of stateless person of French origin. In Adelaide he believes he passes as an Australian.

He has no remaining family and not, it seems, many friends. One wonders how he spends most of his time. The only certain thing is that he rides a bike. Riding home with his shopping, he is struck by a car driven 'in a haze of loud music' by a youthful hoon. He is taken to hospital and his right leg is subsequently amputated. This is the life-changing experience on which the book turns.

In hospital, his mind fuddled with morphine, he reflects on his past life and contemplates with dread the future of life without a leg. He is not a good patient. He rejects the suggestions of an artificial leg. He wants his real one back.

The description of the hospital environment is spare and clinical. One feels Rayment's pain and anger. In the young medical staff he detects an indifference to his fate as if he and another older patient 'have nothing left to give the tribe and therefore do not count'.

He recoils at the jargon of nurses and social workers who treat 'old people consigned to their care as if they were children'. A physiotherapist explains that he will need to learn to balance again 'with our new body'. 'That is what she calls it: our new body, not our truncated old body.'

Discharged from hospital he is provided with a professional carer, by Mrs Putts, the social worker. He dislikes this first carer and she is replaced by Marijana Jocic, a Croatian woman with an auto-worker husband and three teenage children. She is experienced and competent. Raymentsoon falls in love with her, and after some clumsy attempts to pursue the relationship physically, persuades himself that he will settle for helping her family both financially and emotionally. Instead of the lover he will be the godfather.

The messy relationship with the Jocic family is further complicated by the arrival on his doorstep of Elizabeth Costello, whom he soon recalls as a writer whose novels did not appeal to him. She has come to stay. He resents her intrusion and her manner. Before long he is calling her 'the Costello woman'.

Why has she come? 'Not, perhaps, to write him into a book, but to induct him into the company of the aged.' More likely she has come because she's another literary invention of J. M. Coetzee and the subject of an earlier novel. Perhaps these two characters need each other.

Some readers will recognise Rayment's character in people they have known. But not all of it. His life is truncated—or 'unstrung', as he puts it—by his accident. He sinks into a slump of self-pity, helplessness and unconscious fantasy. Marijana's family becomes a fantasy substitute for his own. His collection of early Australian photographs strengthens his tenuous sense of identity with Australia. The missing leg exemplifies declining physical ability and the use of faculties.

Much of *Slow Man* is about the nature of caring and the borderline between care and love. Paul Rayment wants 'loving care', something which he observes is 'not to be provided in any nursing home'. With Marijana, he stumbles as he tries to cross the borderline. His answer to the Costello woman's question, 'Have we found love?' is no. He is thrown back on his own limited resources. It is hard to have much sympathy for him.

Costello urges Rayment to 'live like a hero', to see what he can come up with, 'so that someone might *want* to put you in a book ... so that you might be *worth* putting in a book.' She is as irritating to the reader as she is to Rayment. It is the relationship between them which lessens one's sympathy and makes the novel less than Top Drawer.

Slow Man is, of course, beautifully written and packed with ideas. There's an attractive thread of sardonic humour that runs through it all. It is usually about the uses of language:

> 'How is your leg?' Paul Rayment is asked. 'My leg? My leg is fine.' A stupid question and a stupid answer. How can his leg be fine? There is no leg. The leg in question was long ago hacked off and incinerated. *How is the absence of your leg?* That is what she ought to be asking. *The absence of my leg is not fine if you want the truth. The absence of my leg has left a hole in my life...*

It is this which provokes the questions and the thoughts. And after all, as Rayment tells Costello, 'Isn't the whole of writing a matter of second thoughts—second thoughts and third thoughts and further thoughts?' ■

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

Brian Doyle

The child as verb

I WAS SHUFFLING ALONG the roaring shore of the misnamed Pacific Ocean, humming to myself, pondering this and that and t'other, when I saw a crippled kid hopping towards me. She was maybe four years old and her feet were bent so sideways that her toes faced each other so she scuttled rather than walked. I never saw a kid crippled quite like that before. I thought for a minute she was alone but then I noticed the rest of her clan, a big guy and two other small girls, probably the dad and sisters, walking way ahead.

The crippled kid was cheerful as a bird and she zoomed along awfully fast on those sideways feet. She was totally absorbed in the seawrack at the high-tide line—shards of crab and acres of sand fleas and shreds of seaweed and ropes of bullwhip kelp and fractions of jellyfish and here and there a deceased perch or auklet or cormorant or gull, and once a serious-sized former fish that looked like it might have been a salmon. In the way of all people for a million years along all shores she stared and poked and prodded and bent and pocketed and discarded, pawing through the loot and litter of the merciless musing sea.

She was so into checking out tide treasure that her dad and sisters got way out ahead of her and after a while the dad turned and whistled and the crippled kid looked up and laughed and took off hopping faster than you could ever imagine a kid that crippled could hop, and when she was a few feet away from the dad he crouched a little and extended his arm behind him with his hand out to receive her foot, and she shinnied up his arm as graceful and quick as anything you ever saw.

She slid into what must have been her usual seat on his neck and off they went, the sisters pissing and moaning about having to wait for the crippled kid and the dad tickling the bottoms of the kid's feet, so that I heard the kid laughing fainter and fainter as they receded, until finally I couldn't hear her laughing any more. But right about then I was weeping like a child at the intricate, astounding, unimaginable, inexplicable, complex thicket of love and pain and suffering and joy, at the way that kid rocketed up her daddy's arm quick as a cat, at the way he crouched just so and opened his palm so his baby girl could come flying up the holy branch of his arm, at the way her hands knew where to wrap themselves around his grin, at the way the sisters were all pissy about the very same kid sister that if anyone else ever grumbled about her they would pound him silly.

And this is all not even to mention the glory of the sunlight that day, and the basso moan of mother sea, and the deft diving of the little black sea-ducks in the surf, and the seal popping up here and there looking eerily like my grandfather, and the eagle who flew over like a black tent heading north, and the extraordinary fact that the Coherent Mercy granted me my own kids, who were not crippled, and were at that exact moment arguing shrilly about baseball at the other end of the beach.

I FINALLY GOT A GRIP AND SET TO SHUFFLING AGAIN, but that kid stays with me. Something about her, the way she was a verb, the way she was happy even with the dark cards she was dealt, the way she loved openly and artlessly, the way even her sisters couldn't stay pissy but had to smile when she shinnied up their daddy's arm, seems utterly holy to me, a gift, a sign, a reminder, a letter from the Lord.

In my Father's house are many mansions, said the thin confusing peripatetic rabbi long ago, a line I have always puzzled over, yet another of the man's many Zen koans, but I think I finally have a handle on that one. What he meant, did Yesuah ben Joseph of the haunting life and message, is that we are given gifts beyond measure, beyond price, beyond understanding, and they mill and swirl by us all day and night, and we have but to see them clearly, for a second, to believe wholly in the bounty and generosity and mercy of *I Am Who Am*.

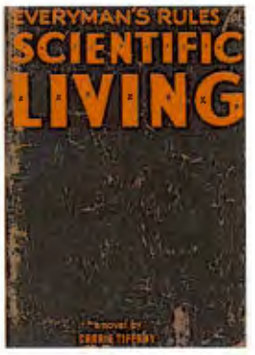
I am not stupid, at least not all the time, and I saw how crippled that kid was, and I can only imagine her life to date and to come, and the tensions and travails of her family, and the battles she will fight and the tears she will shed, and I see and hear the roar of pain and suffering in the world, the floods and rapes and starvings and bullets, and I am too old and too honest not to admit how murderous and greedy we can be.

But I have also seen too many kids who are verbs to not believe we swim in an ocean of holy. I have seen too many men and women and children of such grace and humour and mercy that I know I have seen the Christ ten times a day. I think maybe you know that too and we just don't talk about it much because we are tired and scared and the light flits in and around so much darkness. But there was a crippled kid on the beach and the Christ in her came pouring out her eyes and I don't forget it.

In my Father's house are many mansions, said the Christos, confusingly, and then in his usual testy editorial way, *If it were not so, I would have told you*, and then, in a phrase I lean on when things go dark, *I go to prepare a place for you*.

But we are already in the doorway of the house, don't you think?

Brian Doyle is the editor of *Portland Magazine* at the University of Portland, in Oregon. He is the author of six books, among them the essay collection *Leaping* (available in Australia through Garratt Publishing) and a musing on hearts called *The Wet Engine* (through Rainbow Books in Australia). You can email him at bdoyle@up.edu



Everyman's Rules for Scientific Living,
Carrie Tiffany. Picador, 2005.
ISBN 0 330 42191 3, RRP $22

Australia, 1934. The Better Farming Train snakes its way through the countryside, spreading industry and science, promising agricultural riches. Jean—the dreamy idealist, endearingly referring to herself as a 'baking technician'—meets Robert—the 'soil-taster' who believes it possible to capture the war with an equation—and together they become the poster image of the modernist couple.

This Australia is oppressive and dusty in every way: drought, mouse plagues, sand drifts, crops that won't grow, utter phallo-centrism. But it's also very real, so tangible that the text feels invisible; and the prose: stark, economic, without pretension or curly decoration. Like a child yet to learn the euphemistic language of adults.

Tiffany's novel is about many things: knowledge as capital; an Australian landscape that refuses to be tamed; latent sexuality and desire. I expected quirky and pleasant, not a darkness infusing every word, and definitely not the dystopic nature of it as a feminist text. This is Australian history as *herstory*, in the tradition of Jean Bedford's *Sister Kate*. *Everyman's Rules for Scientific Living* won't change your life, but it is definitely worth a read.

—Brooke Davis

Does my head look big in this?
Randa Abdel-Fattah. Pan Macmillan, 2005.
ISBN 0 330 42185 9, RRP $16.95

Most people would agree that the VCE is hard enough by itself for most teenagers to deal with. Add to that a major religious commitment, a first romance, a school bully, and the trials and tribulations of being 16, and you have the very entertaining novel *Does my head look big in this?*

Following in the footsteps of *Looking for Alibrandi*, the novel takes us into the life of 16-year-old Amal, an Australian-born Muslim girl who is struggling with her identity. The novel opens with Amal's decision to wear her hijab 'full-time', and her apprehensions about how those around her will react. She confronts her decision with humour, telling one classmate she is wearing the hijab as a part of a hair regrowth program.

Randa Abdel-Fattah does a great job of combining Amal's faith with a storyline that young to mid-teenage readers will like. The novel is relevant, as Amal and her friends deal with issues such as school, parents, racism, body image, religion, bullying and diversity.

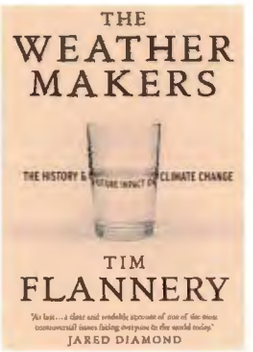
—Elizabeth Allen

Invisible Yet Enduring Lilacs,
Gerald Murnane. Giramondo, 2005.
ISBN 1 920 88209 X, RRP $24.95

Some writers argue; some tell stories. Gerald Murnane writes, he tells us, 'by the stream system'. He suggests connections between the most vivid images in his mind. He explores the interplay between memory, image and thought. So he traces a lifelong love of horse racing to a midweek edition of the *Sporting Globe* placed in his hands by his father. From it he 'began to see each race as a complex pattern unfolding', and 'each race only an item in a much larger pattern'.

Murnane's work is quietly beautiful. But without an argument to make or a story to tell, this collection of his essays leaves the reader without a sense of the purpose behind his writing. Murnane writes that he looks forward to learning, in reading fiction, 'something that the author could have told me by no other means than the writing of the piece of fiction in front of me.' I wish that he had found the means to make an argument or tell a story in his writing, to convey to the reader something more than an unfolding pattern of images.

—Joel Townsend



The Weather Makers: The History and Future Impact of Climate Change,
Tim Flannery. Text Publishing, 2005.
ISBN 1 920 88584 6, RRP $32.95

If *The Future Eaters* was Tim Flannery's big book about Australia, *The Weather Makers* is his big book about the world, his 'manual on the use of Earth's thermostat'.

It is an essential primer for those who seek to understand the complex ways in which we humans, the 'weather makers', are shaping our weather and climate, and the impact that our decisions, personal and political, will have on our future.

The Weather Makers catalogues a frightening number of climatic changes now taking place all over the world at an alarming rate: melting polar ice, rising temperatures in the atmosphere and the oceans, coral bleaching, extinction or threatened extinction of numerous species of plants and animals, reduced rainfall and increased desertification, and the displacement of human communities and, in some cases, whole cultures.

It's an ominous report, but Flannery remains hopeful that we can—and will—change the way we live. To that end, he offers practical suggestions for reducing our energy consumption and thereby reducing the production of dangerous greenhouse gases, mainly carbon dioxide, which is the chief culprit in global warming. After the hottest year on record in Australia, do the cool thing and read this book.

—Robert Hefner

A 1950s moment that resonates with our time

Good Night, and Good Luck, dir. George Clooney. The PG rating for this fine film has added information: 'Mild themes.'

'Good night and good luck' was broadcast journalist Edward R. Murrow's famous sign-off line to his 1950s CBS television news program *See It Now*. Murrow used that platform to expose the tactics of anti-communist zealot Senator Joseph McCarthy. And to capture that pivotal American moment, director George Clooney has spliced the CBS newsroom drama played out by his faultless ensemble cast with archival footage of the hearings of the House Un-American Activities Committee. McCarthy, larger than life, plays himself. So does President Dwight D. Eisenhower, sounding to 21st-century ears like a liberal democrat. Some folk attending the test screenings said the guy playing McCarthy was overacting. Too much 'reality' TV?

Clooney uses close-focus, lustrous black and white to capture the intensity of the CBS newsroom and corporation under intense political and commercial pressure. The film, all cigarette smoke and eloquent silences, is economical, beautifully shot, and done for a mere $8 million. It is also restrained in ways that underscore but don't inflate emotion. When Murrow's friend and news anchor Don Hollenbeck (Ray Wise) suicides after being savaged in the Hearst press, Clooney balances Murrow's taut on-screen eulogy with jazz diva Dianne Reeves's perfectly enunciated performance of *How High the Moon*.

The film is also acidly funny. Watch out for Murrow's reluctant interview with Liberace, in which he makes a deadpan inquiry about the pianist's marriage plans—and gets trumped.

The script itself is artfully cobbled from the network archives by Clooney and Grant Heslov. 'Murrow was the best writer,' says Clooney, and gives actor David Strathairn the lines to prove his point. Here, because it matters, is a more-than-three-second sound bite: 'We must not confuse dissent with disloyalty. We must remember always that accusation is not proof, and that conviction depends upon evidence and due process of law. We will not walk in fear, one of another. We will not be driven by fear into an age of unreason if we dig deep in our history and our doctrine, and remember that we are not descended from fearful men. Not from men who feared to write, to speak, to associate, and to defend causes that were for the moment unpopular.'

Strathairn's splendid performance is evocative without being overwhelming. He brings back Murrow's powerful, particular voice, and the effect is to send his audience back to the source, not just to marvel at a virtuoso performance.

Director Clooney (who works both sides of the set, also playing Murrow's producer Fred Friendly) understands exactly the resonance of his film for today's America, today's world. Murrow: 'We cannot defend freedom abroad by deserting it at home.' But Clooney is not Mike Moore, and his film is never polemic. Neither is it nostalgia for a lost idealism. This is America, today, with its greatness and capacity for self-criticism intact. Mild themes?

—Morag Fraser

Harry just gets better

Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, dir. Mike Newell. The transfer from page to screen seems at first to be a sign of a novel's success—as though the book has now been finally 'brought to life'.

Joanne Rowling certainly doesn't need the Warner-produced films to make her books successful; a major part of their magic was that they caused reluctant readers to pick them up and allow words to go through their heads, making mind movies that booklovers routinely enjoy. Indeed, one of the biggest problems of book-to-film transfer is the way that someone else's images usurp the rich, many-layered experiences that link us with the author. The vitality of such things is part of the bargain made between readers and authors, and it is usually crushed by film adaptations, even good ones. Teachers routinely find that the student's essay they are marking is discussing a film of the specified text rather than the book.

That said, the Potter films have steadily improved since Christopher Columbus's plodding efforts with the first two. *Prisoner of Azkaban* was a more seamless, poetic version, while this one, the fourth in the series, is full of good surprises even as one mourns the loss of entire themes and characters.

It was necessary: *Goblet of Fire* is a good three and a half hours long even without the complexities of the Barty Crouch backstory and its involvement with house elves' inequality, or the rich references to politics and society. Rita Skeeter, such a prominent figure of corruption in the book, is relegated to a couple of simple scenes about how a naughty reporter distorts facts. The book is much more sophisticated in its expositions of how corrupt governments benefit from such distortion and of how bureaucracies can become infected with hard-right vigilantism.

So *GOF* is aimed squarely at children, though it earns its M rating with its overall darker theme and the general air of teen angst that pervades it. Visually it is fantastic; the chiaroscuro evokes the mysteries in the plot, although it is one of the many things about this film that might be difficult for very young Potter fans to cope with. The characters have deepened: Daniel Radcliffe as Harry is developing into a fine young actor, as is Emma Watson as Hermione; Newell's direction continues the freer style that characterised Alfonso Cuaron's direction of *POA*.

And now we have to wait and see whether the movie of C. S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* has survived the patronage of Christian fundamentalists as healthily as Harry Potter has survived their ill-will.

—Juliette Hughes

The truth in the tale

The Brothers Grimm, dir. Terry Gilliam. Gilliam couldn't make a commercial for a local chartered accountant without including enchanted forests, village idiots, outrageous contraptions, and a hot air balloon fashioned out of ladies' bloomers. And for that I doff my cap to him. His directing brain (and I suspect all his other brains besides) must be made from a series of glistening pulleys and levers all set about with magic dust.

Gilliam loves the stories he tells, and it shows. And what's lovely about *The Brothers Grimm* is that his protagonists love stories too. Needless to say, this is no historical biopic; it's a fairy tale. Gilliam's, and screenwriter Ehren Kruger's, take on the story of the brothers Grimm is one as fantastical as the tales they famously wrote. Despite this, the film's story is not great, but the familiar and wondrous tales it plays with along the way (Hansel and Gretel, Rapunzel, Little Red Riding Hood and dozens more) are enough to quicken the breath.

Wilhelm (Matt Damon) and Jacob Grimm (Heath Ledger) are snake oilers. Travelling from one German hamlet to the next, they convince superstitious, grubby burghers that for a decent purse of gold, they will rid their neighbourhood of any pesky witches or hungry trolls that may have taken up residence. Of course the said trolls and witches are no more than collective fears and rumour, and can be excised with a well-placed mirror and a bellows full of smoke. But excised they are—the power of psychology being the brothers' closest working companion.

But alas, just as the family business is finding its feet, the brothers are taken prisoner by the occupying French. Under the direct guard of a ridiculous Italian torturer (Peter Stormare) and a particularly pompous French general (Jonathan Pryce, who can't cultivate a taste for blood sausage or sauerkraut, and whose last words are 'All I wanted was a little hors d'oeuvre ... maybe a slice of quiche ... yes?'), the brothers' fortunes take a turn for the worse. In exchange for their freedom, the Grimms must investigate the strange disappearance of young girls from a seemingly cursed and muddy little town. But this time Will and Jake won't be able to blow off the 'enchantment' with 'magic beans'; this one's going to take real courage and a deeper respect for folklore than they ever expected.

Gilliam knows that cinema is a form of 21st-century carpetbagging, and revels in the fact. He conjures stories from fantastical places and begs us to believe. Even when the parts of his films are more magnificent than the whole, they always have a giddy desire to talk to us about the truth we hide in fairy tales—the dark, creaky madness of phantasmagoria. Never losing his sense of humour or his eye for good casting, Gilliam would be hard pressed to make a dog of a film. But if he did, be assured it would be a three-legged one with a complicated mechanical perambulating structure that knitted socks as well as holding up the poor mutt's rear end.

—Siobhan Jackson

Something sinister grows in this garden

The Constant Gardener, dir. Fernando Meirelles. The gardener of the title is Justin Quayle (Ralph Fiennes), an unambitious career diplomat serving in a minor post in Kenya. His wife Tessa (Rachel Weisz) is his diametric opposite: a fiery, passionate and most undiplomatic political activist who keeps her agitations (well, the details, anyway) from her husband. When she is murdered, his attempts to find out why, and by whom, lead him down the path of her investigations into the collusion between the Kenyan and British governments in helping big pharma make a profit at the expense of their African test subjects.

Ho hum. Another political thriller. One of the slightly odd things about the popularity of genre films like *The Constant Gardener* (an adaptation of yet another John le Carré book) is that the audience has a pretty good idea of what will happen, and how, before they even buy the ticket. The thrill, the uncovering, the revelation, is in many ways the least surprising part of the process. In fact, predictability (even when unpredictability is part of what is most predictable) seems to be a key part of the pleasure of the experience. What's nice about *The Constant Gardener* is that it successfully fuses the conventions of the political thriller with something of an arthouse sensibility, without losing its genre pleasures (keeping in mind that arthouse has pretty much become another genre form these days).

I assume this sensibility is largely a result of its director, Brazilian Fernando Meirelles, whose last film, *Cidade dos Homens*, was a big hit on the arthouse circuit. Meirelles seems to have been a consciously left-field choice by the producers, perhaps hoping to bring something just a little different (but not too different) to what might otherwise have been just another entry in a series of otherwise largely indistinguishable genre flicks. Meirelles fragments the plot into snapshots that are more evocative of tone and emotion than story, using variations in colour, texture and shooting style to draw our attention not just to what happens but to the smell and feel of a place, to difference as we live it, to the shimmer of a moment as it happens for itself.

It remains a political thriller, and an effective one, but it's the one I can remember that left me moved and saddened, not for its characters or stars, but for actual people who suffer at the hands of the real criminality the (fictional) characters try to uncover, and for this world in which we live, in which those crimes really do take place. Not a bad achievement for a genre flick.

—Allan James Thomas

watching brief

Trouble in the kitchen

'WHAT'LL WE HAVE for dinner tonight?'

'Pasta.'

'So three or four hours then?'

'Yeah. Maybe four and a half.'

You have time to catch a movie and wash the dogs, because when this bloke says pasta he means freshly made by him with ten free-range egg yolks, the special Italian flour that costs $15 a packet, and *The River Café Cook Book* propped open for instructions. It's the only time men ever willingly read instructions. Inspired by TV cooking programs, they buy cookbooks that were never meant to leave the top of a coffee table and actually read them. Then they make shopping lists that include squid ink and quinoa, and demand comparative assessments:

'How's this one compare with last week's? Out of ten?'

'Fabulous, eleven,' you say, with your mouth full of high-cholesterol gourmet goodies. It's just as well because you are going to need the energy for the washing up.

We've been washing up by hand since the old Vulcan retired hurt. Once having had a dishwasher, you fall into slothful ways; you have got used to shoving used dishes out of sight in the dishwasher till it's full, so now you stack them artistically around the sink.

And since having had a dishwasher meant that you tended to have more crockery on the go, you don't do the sensible thing and retire the second set of dishes. You have acquired enough plates and cups for a boarding school and they all get used. You stack them ever higher and quarrel about whose turn it is to do them.

'How does it get like this so damn quickly?' I snarl, chipping more enamel off the French casserole that my beloved bought me.

'She's doing her washing-up rant,' says my son, who suddenly remembers a pressing engagement.

'But it's always me who gets to clean up the results,' I whine. 'How come it takes four pans, the food processor and a bloody jaffle iron to make a cup of coffee?'

Then my husband says something reasonable, the swine, and all hell breaks loose.

When your men cook, a simple steak and two veg will require you to scour a mountain of dirty dishes, sticky spatulas, purulent pots, putrid pans, disgusting double-boilers, filthy fish kettles, rotten roasting tins and ... hey, come back here, I'm not finished.

There's a fascinating British makeover program showing on Foxtel at the moment, but soon to come to Australia—*How Clean is Your House?* Two middle-aged bossy ladies go to people's houses and transform them. Not *like Changing Rooms*: the change is far more radical, because some of the subjects make Casa Hughes look positively pristine. Kim and Aggie, the two ladies, are like interfering aunties of the very best type. It's essentially quite kind-hearted, compared with the ruthless elimination and objectification of people that you see in game-type reality shows.

Perhaps there should be more education in actually running a household. School home economics curricula tend to focus pretty much exclusively on cooking. Do they also teach stuff like how to keep your shower recess free of mould, or give units in defence against dust-mites? Or is that just the province of interfering aunties and garrulous grannies?

I suppose the schools are so strapped right now that we should be grateful that any kids are able to read, let alone get expanded curricula in home eco. Once upon a time, in the '70s, we educated everyone at taxpayers' expense because it was thought to be worth it: you know, the clever country. Duh.

These thoughts passed through my mind as I watched a couple of the previews that the ABC sent me recently, *Seven Periods with Mr Gormsby* and *Bromwell High*. Along with the very Dennis Potterish *Blackpool*, they will be occupying my Wednesday nights if I'm not out or doing a mountain of washing up. *Seven Periods* is from New Zealand: I was fascinated by the differences in inflection and gesture before I even took in the plot. A struggling school, bottom of the league table, takes on an eccentric, post-military man to teach one of its worst classes. *Mr Gormsby* is a hoot: grotty, politically incorrect and very funny. It is shot in video on a very low budget in a way that reminds me of old episodes of *Young Doctors*.

Bromwell High covers similar ground, but in vastly different form: it is a cartoon of a madly dysfunctional school in South London. It abounds in jokes about multiculturalism without being racist. You will enjoy it, as will your blasé teenager.

And although I don't like the idea of kids watching telly in the morning, at least the new cartoon *King Arthur's Disasters* is bright and funny: better than the usual fare, with Rik Mayall voicing Arthur, and the brilliant Matt Lucas as Merlin. It's essentially a contemporary drama with the Arthur story as an overlay. In the first episode, Princess Guinevere is a modern parent's nightmare: she is having drumming lessons. She also finagles a deal with Arthur: he will travel to a magic singing oak tree to get her a branch. It's loud and funny, good holiday stuff.

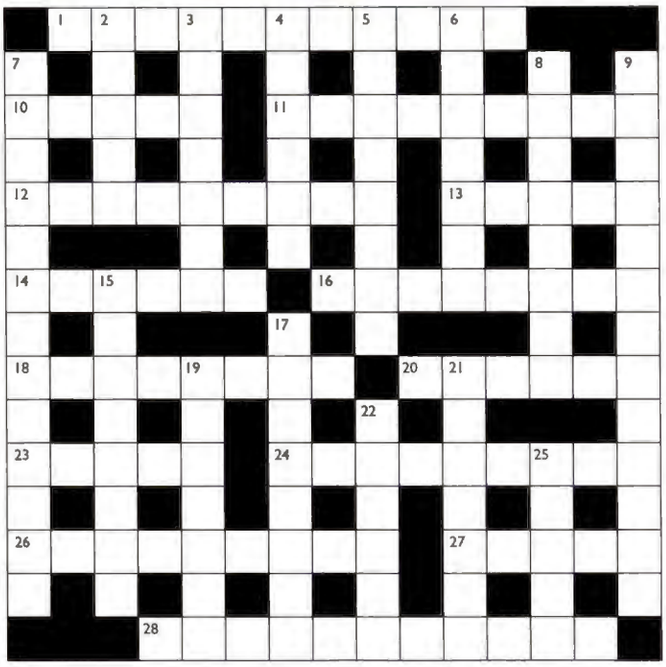
In the meantime, Happy Holidays, and don't forget to switch off the telly a lot.

Juliette Hughes is a freelance writer.

puzzled

Devised by
Joan Nowotny IBVM

Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 138, Jan–Feb 2006



ACROSS

1. A fresh beginning for old resolutions maybe. (3,5,3)
10. The queen, in short, would do little for Professor Higgins. (5)
11. By mistake, I lob it on a spot—what an overthrow! (9)
12. Give wrong information to the effect that the male leader is playing well. (9)
13. Is the cricketer at the crease crackers? (5)
14. Possibly yarn to a legal official. (6)
16. Trainee doctor, perhaps, a likeable leader, works on the inside. (8)
18. Almost a catastrophe—close to the girl! (4,4)
20. See pal, unfortunately, dead to the world. (6)
23. How is pygmy, in part, so delicate? (5)
24. Focus on the disturbance made nice Peter quake. (9)
26. Boat out to prove a leading tanker? Not the one in the canal. (9)
27. Beach I surf with 005? (5)
28. Group undertaking, seeking better conditions possibly. (5,6)

DOWN

2. Issues it in German town. (5)
3. One who longs for the freshness of 1-across perhaps? (7)
4. Is she a river champion? (6)
5. Could be raging about the wild weather. (8)
6. Can I manage to be so friendly? (7)
7. How locks are set so that the water is kept in motion. (9,4)
8. British Prime Minister wielded cane for a meagre income? (8)
9. Reference book, clean copy, aide misused. (13)
15. Rapt, sent into ecstasy, viewing part of the church! (8)
17. Incombustible building material as first-class large order. (8)
19. Month spoken about by municipal officer in his role as civic leader. (7)
21. A dessert she and Bert like to share. (7)
22. The prophet Amos, I'm unreliably informed, loved this plant. (6)
25. Will the effect of sun-baking fade before the dance? (5)

Solution to Crossword no. 137, Nov–Dec 2005

ISSN 1036-1758 01

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