EUREKA STREET

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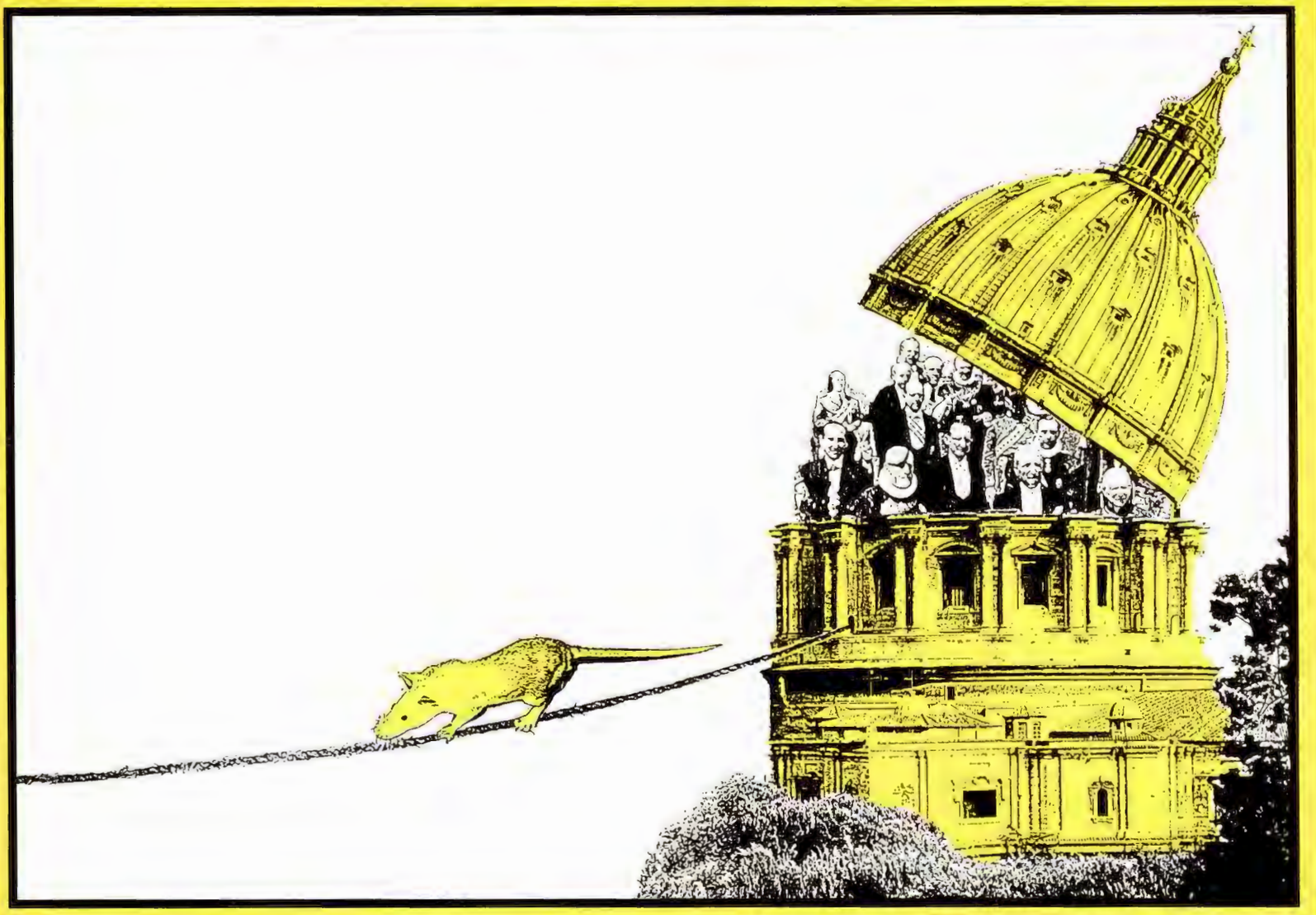
Ratlines and the Vatican: Morris West



What price Australian mining?

Frank Brennan

Static on Radio National

Margaret Simons

God in the Bunya-Bunya Pine

DAVID MARR ON PATRICK WHITE

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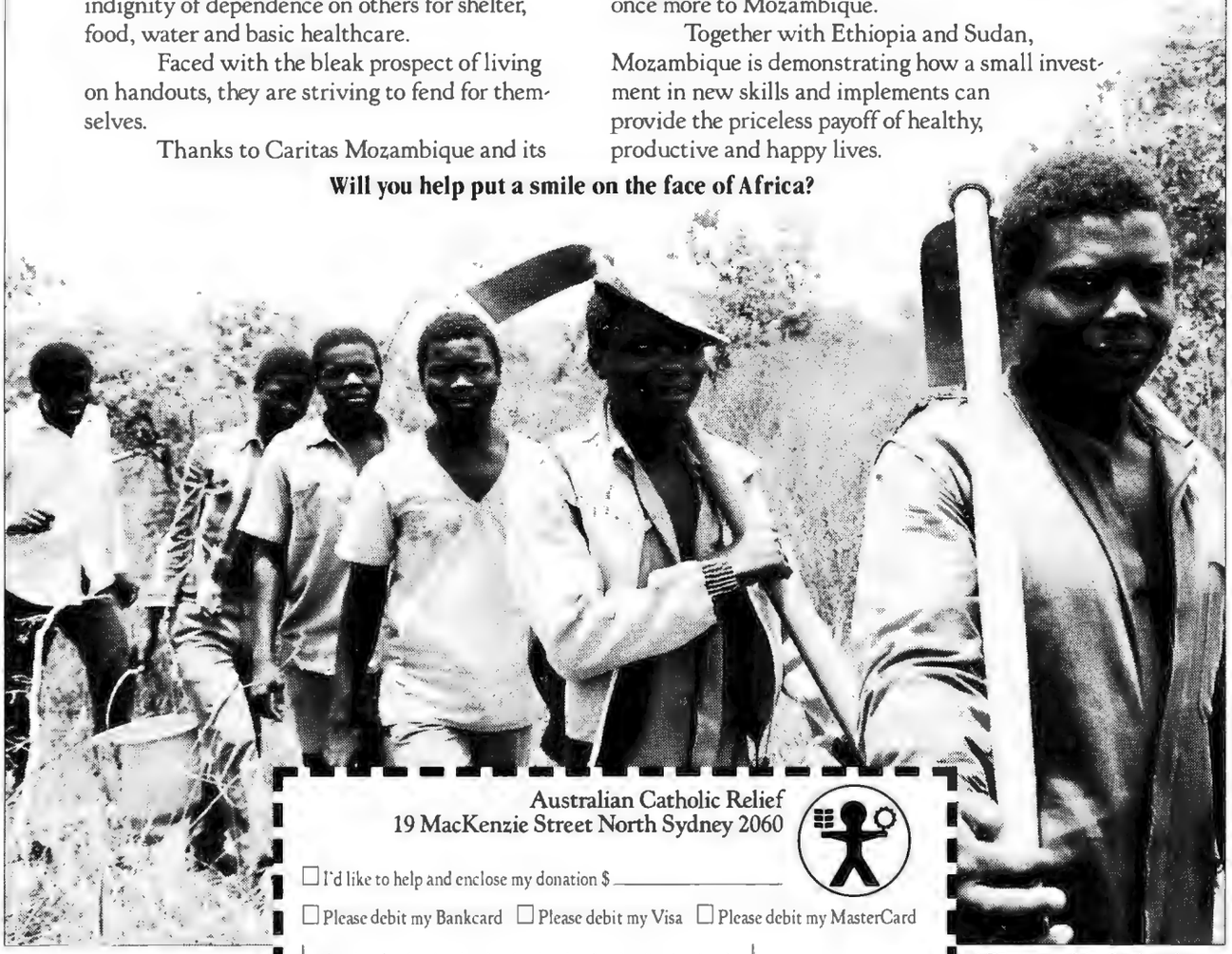

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EUREKA STREET

A magazine of public affairs, the arts and theology

Volume 1 Number 7
September 1991

CONTENTS

4
COMMENT

6
LETTERS

8
THE STATE OF PLAY
Margaret Simons looks at the prospects for Radio National.

12
CUTTING ROOM

13
CAPITAL LETTER

14
TEMPTING EARTHLY POWERS
Frank Brennan on choosing between mining, minority beliefs, and the environment.

17
SMALL VICTORIES
David Glanz takes a walk through Manila's dockside slums.

20
WHEN THE LAW IS NOT ENOUGH
Filipina human rights activist Sol Jubilan talks to Katherine Kizilos.

22
'NO ONE WAS KILLED IN THE WAR, MUMMY'
Leon Gettler on how war is made fit for the home front.

23
ARCHIMEDES

24
WHAT THE NOSE KNOWS
John Funder explains how a scientific advance makes 1991 significant for wine lovers.

27
QUIXOTE

28
THE NEW ZEALAND TRAVELLER SKETCHES THE RUINS OF ST PATRICK'S
Gerard Windsor turns up the heat on Australian Catholic intellectual life.

32
BOOKS AND ARTS
Morris West reviews *Ratlines*; Bruce Duncan assesses the Catholic bishops' wealth inquiry (p.35); Michael McGirr reviews *Patrick White, A Life* (p.38), and interviews its author, David Marr (p.41).

34
PLURAL JACKETS
Poem by Peter Steele

44
FLASH IN THE PAN
Reviews of the films *Guilty by Suspicion, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead, In Bed with Madonna* and *Robin Hood, Prince of Thieves*.

45
ULTERIOR MOTIFS

David Marr discusses Patrick White, p.41

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ANTHONY FISHER

Immigration scapegoating

THE IMMIGRATION DEBATE IS RAGING AGAIN. Australia may be in part a nation of migrants, but this has never stopped vigorous—and occasionally even rigorous—argument over how many migrants we should receive and who they should be. Immigration continues to be disputed, whether in the corridors of power, in the media, or over cups of tea and glasses of beer. Migrants and immigration policy have always been targets when Australians feel insecure, for reasons of defence, economics or cultural identity. Every time there is a recession governments reduce the migrant intake, and there are calls for ever more drastic measures. Migrants and would-be migrants become scapegoats.

Economic gloom dominates thinking in almost every area of Australian life today, so it is no surprise that immigration quotas are falling again. Despite the FitzGerald inquiry's recommendation in 1988 of an annual intake of 150,000, the target has been repeatedly reduced—to 140,000, then 126,000, then 111,000. And the Government has scrapped the business migration scheme, annoucing that no new applications for business entry will be accepted until February, when a new system should be in place. In the meantime total intake is likely to fall again.

The present level of immigration, as a proportion of population, is much lower than it has been for most of the postwar period. And the general trend in policy seems to be towards further reductions and a more self-interested, less humanitarian focus. Less than 10 per cent of migrants accepted in recent times have been refugees; the rest were family reunion cases (more than half) and skilled or business migrants (more than a third).

There have been almost daily articles in the press on immigration, mostly opposed to it. Opponents of the program include some ALP politicians, with Keating, Walsh and Carr openly opposing their government's policy. They have had the support of the ACTU, some Treasury officials and the opposition parties, the latter saying that reductions in intake are inevitable.

The chameleon-like quality of such anti-immigration sentiment in Australia makes it difficult to answer. At times it has adopted the hues of concern for social cohesion, national identity or barely-concealed racism; of ecological sustainability and zero population growth; or of economic rationalism and national self-interest. Most recently the complaints have been

that business migrants have been involved in shady money transfers and recycling of millions of dollars earmarked for setting up businesses here. To the extent that this is true—and the claims may well be grossly exaggerated—this argues for better regulation rather than embargoes.

The rest of the program is criticised for admitting migrants who will either suffer long periods of unemployment, or steal jobs from the Australian-born (or both!). It is contended that such migrants add to Australia's welfare and tax burdens, and that they worsen our trade and debt position. Such complaints fly in the face of evidence that generous immigration levels are good for the economy, even during recession.

This is not to pretend that it is possible to measure all the economic effects of immigration on the community, or that the evidence is unambiguous. Nor is it to deny that migrant unemployment—while similar in occurrence and duration to that of youth or others entering the labour market for the first time—is a serious problem.

Clearly Australia should be honest with would-be migrants about present economic difficulties. We should not present our country as a land replete with opportunities to get ahead, and then refuse to recognise the qualifications of skilled migrants when they arrive, and offer only the dole queue to the unskilled ones. Good settlement policy is the flip-side of any good intake policy. And both must be accompanied by efforts to sell immigration to the community in a way that encourages greater openness of minds, hearts and hands.

It is timely that the Australian Catholic Bishops have entered the immigration debate through the 'issues paper' published by their Social Justice Council. Perhaps the paper will encourage a much-needed revision in thinking about immigration, even by those in favour of it.

Australia-Turkey Day, celebrated in Moorabbin, Vic, by members of the Turkish community and the Australian Light Horse, male and female.

photos: Bill Thomas

Until now those arguing for higher immigration levels have usually done so for one of two reasons. First, that it is in the national interest, i.e. good for those already here. One can easily demonstrate cultural and economic benefits from the postwar migration program, as well as personal happiness for many individuals, from family reunions and through making a better life here. Many economists, business leaders and ethnic groups are in favour of higher immigration levels for this reason. Second, people argue that we should accept some migrants—especially refugees—on 'compassionate' grounds. Social activists, inside and outside the churches, have pressed for greater generosity towards the desperate, for whom Australia may be the last hope.

A program built on this mix of self-interest and compassion will always be at risk in times of economic insecurity and 'compassion fatigue'. But there is another basis on which to argue for immigration: distributive justice.

Today, the smaller and poorer countries receive most of the world's millions of refugees, while larger and richer countries such as ours wrangle over receiving a few thousand. Despite the recession, most Australians are still well-off by world standards. National sovereignty and 'the national interest'—whoever's interest that might really be—are only conditional goods that should be directed towards the common good.

There are signs of a growing isolationism and national selfishness in Australia. Foreign aid is repeatedly cut; the arrival of a few boat people sparks bitter debate; economic rationalism is the *leitmotiv* of most policy-making; and fewer and fewer people are allowed to come and share in the potential of this country. A focus on the demands of justice would yield a more balanced program, with a clearer rationale. ■

Anthony Fisher OP is a research officer at Uniya, the Jesuit social research institute in Kings Cross, NSW.

From inequity comes iniquity

From Paul Rodan

David Pollard's review article 'Money, money, money' (August 1991), which includes a number of assertions and a vigorous critique of the bishops' statement on wealth and its distribution, warrants comment.

In a general observation, Pollard refers to the 'relentless upward drift in money wages'. This appears to be at odds with what is widely accepted as the wages reality, and Pollard owes his readers either evidence or insights into his methodology.

Christ's exhortation 'to sell all' is always difficult, especially for those with most to sell. Pollard's concern for the battling Aussie family—'mortgages and car payments'—is touching, but one imagines that if the 'selling of all'—or even some—started at the top, a lot of wealth would be redistributed before the Aussie battler had much to worry about.

Pollard glosses over the issue of salary inequities and justice. Corporate executives grant themselves large increases while ordinary wage and salary earners receive little or nothing, and the gap between richest and poorest becomes a chasm. Perhaps a moral justification can be mounted for this state of affairs, but one suspects this would be difficult rather than easy. It certainly warrants more serious attention and detailed examination than Pollard's rhetorical 'Do mere income differentials denote injustice?' Who are the people who—in Pollard's eyes—merit the largest increases, and who are those who deserve none? Tantalisingly, no answer is provided, but I suspect mine would differ from his.

The critic's final observation, that the bishops need to match the economic professionalism of the government's policy-makers, is revealing. It is tempting to translate this as 'to be taken seriously, one has to accept the economic dogma of the ruling new-right orthodoxy.' Views outside this—especially those calling for justice—will struggle for a hearing. Leaving to one side the laughable idea that the 'professionals' have produced an efficient economy, the bishops merit praise for alerting us to the potential dilemma of choosing between efficiency and justice. This is an enduring and important issue that deserves the serious attention of all those interested in a morally defensible political and economic system.

Paul Rodan
East Malvern, Vic.

David Pollard replies:

I don't think we are really talking about the dilemma of choosing between efficiency and justice—or between inefficiency and justice. I think we are talking about whether the market has its own logic and whether it is morally OK for the market to determine factor prices—including wages.

I don't think it is laughable to say that the government has produced a relatively efficient economy—not that I did! It surely depends on what you think they had to start with, and which macroeconomic factors beyond their control have deteriorated since they came to power. It could have been the best result possible.

Would that merit could determine wages. Unfortunately, all that we have is the market, skewed by various institutional factors. I don't think these factors have much to do with merit. I think part of the moral question involved here is whether some people's employment is being prevented by institutional factors designed to shore up the wage levels of others. I don't have any answer, but unemployment is, I think, the real social/moral problem involved in this set of questions. It is at least an open question whether a decentralised wages system might result in full employment accompanied by lower wages for some.

Money wages do continue their upward drift, while real wages for many are declining. The difference, of course, is inflation. That partly explains why we can have unemployment of 10 per cent accompanied by inflation levels of four or five per cent.

Eureka Street welcomes letters from its readers. Short letters are more likely to be published, and all letters may be edited. Letters must be signed, and should include a contact phone number and the writer's name and address.

Defeat, not despair

From Tony Kelly

Jack Waterford's 'Going Nowhere Fast' (August 1991) is a courageous statement. Further, I think, it is a humble and compassionate one. But for those of blundering goodwill—perhaps the majority of us Australians now—it is very sobering. Certainly, for those involved in Aboriginal affairs it will be provocative.

With the defeat of 'the best brains and hearts in Australia', and the frustration of '20 years of the best and brightest Aboriginal idealism and talent' in bettering the lives of Aboriginal people, where does that leave the rest of us?

Even if Jack might be unduly depressive in his assessment, it is high time for those of us who can scarcely be numbered among those 'best and brightest' to realise that our Aboriginal fellow Australians are too important to us to be left to the experts. Are our amateur, average faculties so intellectually befogged and morally obdurate that we can't demand something better? The growth of respect for Aboriginal culture has been a mutation in the larger Australian consciousness. But even that precious value degenerates into repressive idealism if it doesn't address the details of actual human lives.

Still, we average people might be a lot more practical than the experts in some ways: at least we know that life is complex, and that the big structural solution is usually someone's fantasy, and often someone's empire. We non-experts have to wonder whether the biggest problem Aboriginal Australians face is not the demeaning of their Aboriginality, but practical denial of

their real humanity. There is no lofty standpoint from which *we* offer the solution to the problem *they* are. We are all caught in the same defeat, with limited humanity on both sides, and at every stage along the way.

Tony Kelly CSsR
Box Hill, Vic.

Netting the greens

From Patrick Jurd

Allan Patience's article 'An Australian Shade of Green' (August 1991) made some interesting points. I would agree that environmentalism has made for itself 'a legitimate place in contemporary political debates and organisations.' The problem, as evidenced by the behaviour of the ALP in the last election, is that it is seen as a pawn to be used tactically but is ultimately to be sacrificed on the altar of economic rationalism, that blight of our age. Indeed, the 'pragmatic opportunism' of the ALP with regard to environmental issues is not the fate they deserve if 'all things are in and through Christ' (Rom 11:36).

While the Democrats may have failed 'to attract the undivided support of environmentalists', they did get support from the Australian Conservation Foundation and the Wilderness Society at the last election. As an idealist, I would like to think that a 'Greens' party would succeed in Australia, but I reluctantly agree that the best route for the environmentalists is to team up with the Democrats. In order for this to happen, they would need to be convinced that this was right, as indeed would the Democrats, and given that they are also suffering leadership 'hiccups', who knows where things lie? Given the ideological purity displayed on the sleeves of many in the environmentalist movement, a symptom of the ALP in the '50s and '60s, it may well be some time before the bullet is bitten.

Patrick Jurd
Parkdale, Vic.

From Trevor Derwood

It was good to see that environmental concerns are getting an airing in a forum such as *Eureka Street*. Allan Patience's article describes accurately the vacillations of the federal government and the remoteness of the opposition concerning major environmental challenges. However, there is more to this subject than the strength of green politics in Australia. I look forward to further discussion and debate about the challenges themselves—the incompatibility of long-term environmental planning and immediate political expediency, the morality of environmental degradation of the Third World, the specist view of the Earth as a resource for humans, as examples.

Trevor Derwood
Mitcham, Vic.

Citizen keen

From Donald Horne

I was not quite sure what the editorial in your August issue meant when it mentioned nationalism and republicanism in the one sentence. There is, of course, no particular connection between republicanism and nationalism—unless it is nationalist for a nation-state to exist as a political entity. For Australia to become a constitutionally independent Commonwealth with its own head of state does represent, however, a final formal detachment from that long but expiring tradition of imperial British chauvinism.

In a sense our Constitution has provided an 'ethnic' definition of Australia—that becomes particularly noticeable when people swear oaths. When we achieve final constitutional and symbolic independence we will have a political, not an ethnic, definition of Australia. I don't agree with the mild panic about multiculturalism that John Hirst expressed in last month's 'Forum' article, but I agree absolutely with him when he suggests that constitutional independence can promote concepts of citizenship.

Citizenship becomes difficult if you have a Constitution that can't be taught in schools except with glosses that are themselves controversial, and if you have affirmations of citizenship that define Australians by their 'loyalty' to a person 20,000 kilometres away instead of by their loyalty to liberal-democratic processes as defined in a constitution.

Donald Horne
Woollahra, NSW.

The lie indirect

From Will Barrett

In his discussion of lying (July 1991), Tony Coady asserts that 'there is a core agreement that a lie is at least the stating of what one believes to be false with the intention of giving the audience to believe that it is true.' There is a intriguing exception to this definition, which I think is properly classified as lying rather than as some other form of deception, and which is equally subject to the constraints Coady advocates.

What I have in mind is stating what one believes to be false with the intention of giving one's audience to believe that one believes it is true. The important difference is that in this case one is not attempting to deceive one's audience about the truth of a proposition, but rather about one's attitude towards its content. Admittedly, one's purpose in practising this form of deceit may in some way depend on whether one's audience believes the proposition to be true or not, but in either case it is lying.

It might be argued that this sort of case is not really lying, but is more like the performance of an actor. My response to this is that actors do not intend their audience to come to hold false beliefs. It also differs from obvious cases of deceiving without lying. For example, someone might be thought by her audience to be either completely ignorant or a compulsive liar. Given such a situation, she could state something she believes to be true, thereby bringing her audience to believe it is false. She has not, however, lied. In the light of these distinctions, perhaps we should modify Professor Coady's definition. A lie is at least stating what one believes to be false with the intention of bringing the audience to some false belief.

Will Barrett
Richmond, Vic.

MARGARET SIMONS

The state of play

Amid strikes and talk of 'flow programming', 'prioritisation' and 'listener-driven radio', ABC's Radio National ponders its role. A Eureka Street *special report.*

MOST MEDIA OUTLETS IN AUSTRALIA either have no intellectual pretensions, or laughable ones. I once asked a senior executive on a quality newspaper what he saw as its purpose. He smiled over his beer can and said, gruffly: 'Grab 'em by the balls.'

The things excluded or ignored by his metaphor were more important than what was included. What he had proposed was a method for getting people's—or at least, men's—attention. It said nothing about what should be done after that. For anyone fed by media produced in this atmosphere, delving into the internecine politics and intellectual hothouse of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's Radio National is both rather odd and rather wonderful.

Ask a Radio National staffer what the station is for, and you will not get references to tender parts of the anatomy. Instead, there will be much furrowing of brows, and answers that become mini-lectures on Australia's national identity, the nature of intellectual endeavour, philosophy, cosmology, and the limits of the human mind. Radio National, you will hear, should be at the cutting edge of Australian intellectual life. Within the naturally democratic and relatively cheap medium of radio, it should expand the mind, and provide a forum in which more can be done than simply presenting opposing but predictable views. Thesis, antithesis, synthesis—Radio National should do them all.

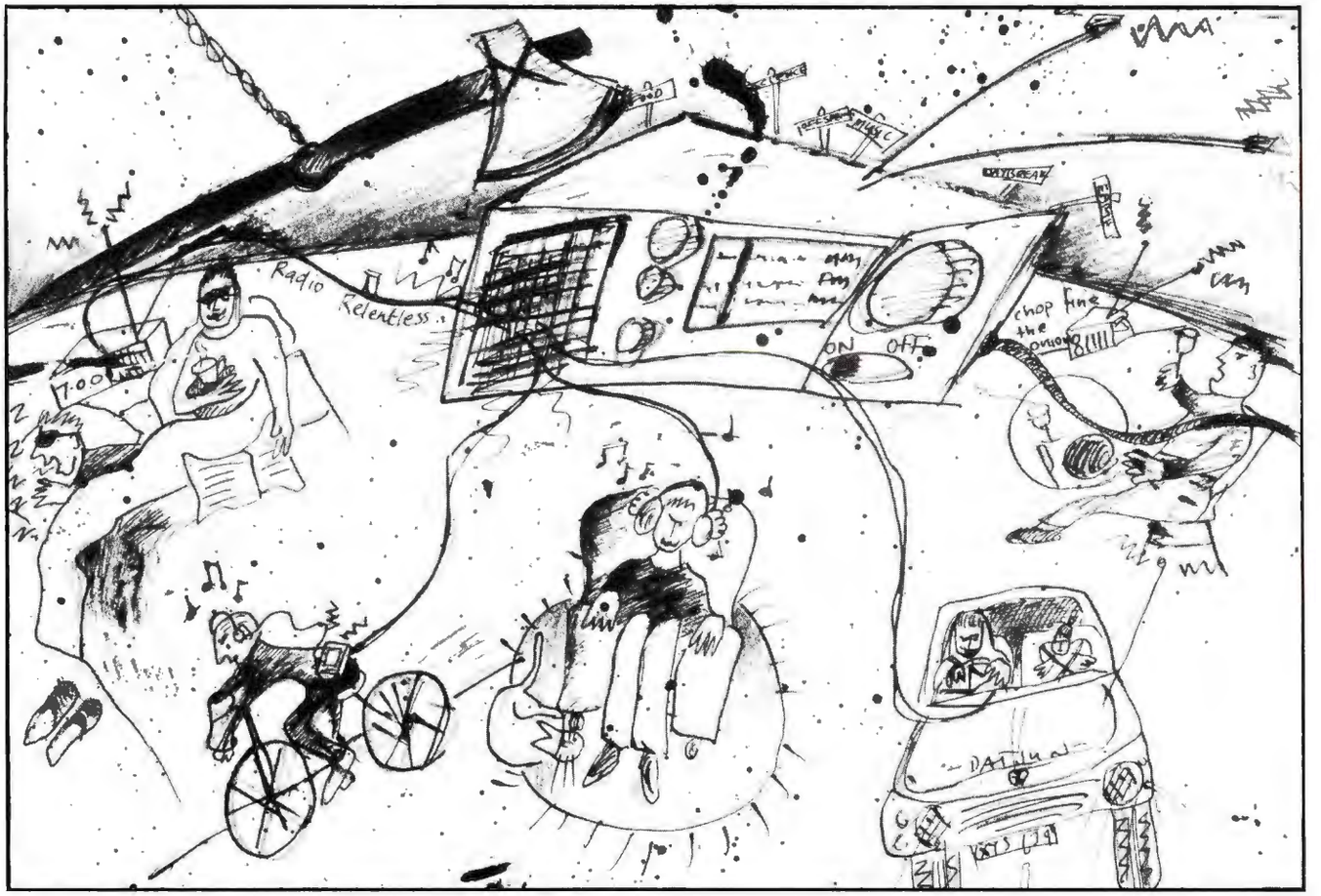
The new chairman of the ABC board, Professor Mark Armstrong, has said that the corporation is more like a university than many of the institutions which claim the title (see p.10). Whether or not that is so for all the ABC's manifestations, Radio National, with its specialist departments and its dissemination of ideas, does indeed resemble a university.

THAT STRUCTURE AND ETHOS is threatened, although the nature and severity of the threat is unclear. What is certain is that management wants to chase a bigger and younger audience, and they have firm, though ill-defined, ideas about how this should be done. At its June meeting, the ABC board was presented with a proposal by management. Precisely what that proposal was is difficult to ascertain. One board member says: 'Basically they were on about decreasing the size and power of the specialist units—religion, science and talks—and having more of an accent on personality, people who would put together three or four hours at a time, drawing from the specialist areas. The board said it would not approve this until there had been some real and useful audience research to back up the claim that this would attract bigger audiences.'

However, the head of radio, Malcolm Long, gives a different version of events: 'All we have really done is, as a result of an invitation by the board, put a general proposal about Radio National and canvassed a number of changes to scheduling ... There is no feeling from me to blur specialist units ... What I do want to do is promote cooperation across the areas, not to reduce the specialist results.'

Nevertheless, staff at Radio National are highly suspicious of the changes. There is evidence that the specialist units are under attack. The head of the religious unit, David Millikan, has reportedly been told that his contract is not to be renewed and that his position will be downgraded to that of 'specialist editor'. Relations between Millikan and management had been strained for some time. One internal memo, headed 'highly confidential, not to be circulated'—but which nevertheless leaked—said in part: 'The religious department may know a great deal about maximising the use of loaves and fishes. Unfortunately, getting solid information out of them is like trying to get blood out of a stone'. Millikan himself would not talk to *Eureka Street*. (And he was not the source of the leak.)

Tensions between staff and management are at a peak. Staff are only too aware that the managing direc-



tor, David Hill, a man often praised for his energy and determination but not for his intellectual depth, has made it known that 'fixing up' Radio National is high on his list of priorities. It is not clear what this might mean, but the station has already endured highly disruptive and largely unsuccessful change.

Classical music has been moved to FM, making Radio National a station of talk only. The ill-fated *Daybreak* replaced the tried and tested blend of classical music and current affairs with which RN used to greet the day, resulting in a drop in ratings. Richard Ackland has since taken over, to general approval. Other 'personalities' have been brought in, allegedly at huge cost. Phillip Adams now presents an evening segment, and Geraldine Doogue does *Offspring*, a program about bringing up children. Responses to the new 'personalities' have been mixed. Ackland is streets ahead of his predecessors. Adams is less tedious on the airwaves than he is in print. As for Geraldine Doogue, one Radio National staffer said: 'She should be on the metro stations'. In Radio National parlance, that is an insult.

But through all the changes, the audience has steadily continued to decline.

As well as the changes on air, management-speak is being heard in the cloisters of Radio National for the first time. New program evaluation techniques have been introduced, in which section heads are encouraged to set targets for audience figures, and will presumably be marked down if they fail to achieve them. In March, staff took part in a 'workshop' conducted by a 'facilitator', aimed, among other things, at a 'priorisation (sic) of objectives' for the station. One of the main ones was that the station should become 'listener-driven'.

The workshop report was savaged by Tim Bowden of the social history unit, who put together his own document. He claimed the decline in Radio National's audience could be traced to the changes in program scheduling already arranged, and to inadequate promotion, meaning that many potential listeners were not even aware the station existed. Bowden said: 'Quality magazines, and innovative broadcasters lead and push back barriers, as well as taking account of listener opinion ... Unless we continue to air highly produced documentaries and features in all our specialist areas ... we cease to have relevance ... Yes, they are relatively expensive, but without them we lose our soul.'

The pressure for 'flow' personality-based programming, as opposed to specialist 'niche' programs is both financial and ratings-based. Flow programming is much cheaper, and its advocates think it will arrest a steady and alarming decline in Radio National's audiences, although the evidence for this is not clear.

Yet it is in the highly produced segments that the medium of radio can move beyond the predictable clashes and opinions, and into the analysis and criticism of ideas. As one staffer put it: 'It is the difference between Phillip Adams talking about religion, and Paul Collins (presenter of the religious program *Insights*) putting together something considered about religion that actually takes the debate further.' If the specialist units go, then what is the purpose of the national station? Why listen to *Daybreak* when you could be hearing *AM*, or Ranald McDonald, or Andrew Olle?

Audience research is continuing. Next time management presents its proposals to the board, they will

MARGARET SIMONS

Leading lights

IT MAY BE NO ACCIDENT that the ABC board is in the middle of its biggest shake up for years, with five out of its nine members having changed in July, including both the former chairman, Bob Somervaille and his heir presumptive, Wendy McCarthy. As well as the fight with the federal government over funding, and the decisions over the future of Radio National, the new board will also have to decide the fate of the managing director, David Hill, whose contract expires in November.

Former ABC chairman Bob Somervaille (top) and his successor Mark Armstrong.
PHOTOS: *courtesy of the ABC (Somervaille) and* The Age *(Armstrong)*

Conspiracy theorists think the changes reflect the federal government's anger over the ABC coverage of the Gulf War, while McCarthy has claimed she didn't get the top job because the Minister for Communications, Mr Beazley, is not 'comfortable' with women in senior positions. McCarthy was beaten to the top job by a Melbourne academic, Professor Mark Armstrong.

Armstrong and Somervaille could hardly be more different. As an ordinary board member, Somervaille faced controversy after he became a director of a Murdoch company used in legal manoeuvring over foreign ownership limitations during the takeover of the Herald and Weekly Times group in 1987.

The federal government investigated the appointment and did not find any conflict of interest, but that did not stop calls for Somervaille's resignation. He has also been chairman of the Overseas Telecommunications Commission, and of Telecom.

Armstrong, a senior research fellow with the communications think-tank Circit (Centre for International Research on Communications and Information Technologies), has gained considerable respect for his quiet and constructive work on the Broadcasting Council. However, he has no broadcasting experience, and his political nous is largely untried.

Somervaille is critical of the government's changes to the board. He says: 'I think its a pity there's not greater continuity in the board. I don't know why Wendy McCarthy didn't get the job ... It is wrong to take out the deputy chairman and the chairman in one fell swoop. Armstrong should have been brought in as deputy to McCarthy's chairman, and then taken over after he had got some experience.'

Asked what he saw as his achievements, Somervaille said: 'We became more efficient, but now all that effort is being thrown back at us by these budget cuts. We have reached the stage where there is no fat, and they will be cutting bone ... I don't think the government really knows what the ABC is all about. [Gareth] Evans said to me at one stage if you can't get your ratings up then you don't deserve government funding.' Failing adequate government funding, he says, the ABC will have to generate more income itself, through sponsorship and possibly advertising.

As for Radio National, Somervaille says he would like to see 'more flow in the total mix. The problem we have is that some areas believe that their little area is supreme and must not be touched. We are trying to break down areas that have almost been a fiefdom, but that is not to say they don't have a future.'

WHEN HE IS ASKED WHY he got the job instead of Wendy McCarthy, Armstrong says 'I have no idea. It was not a position I sought, but having been approached, I think it is the sort of thing which a public-spirited person ought to do.'

Armstrong is against advertising on the ABC, but thinks the future will provide opportunities for commercialisation that do not conflict with the mission and ethos of the national broadcaster. Pay television would allow the ABC to sell specialist services in, for example, opera or science. And Channel 2 could remain a free service, screening the best material from the specialist services as well as its own programs.

'All the pressures in this increasingly complex society are towards increased specialisation. That is the commercial pressure—people wanting to advertise to a particular audience—as well as the natural social pressures. The ABC will have to take account of that. Things will not remain as they are now. In many ways I think the ABC comes closer to the idea of a university in terms of disseminating ideas and knowledge from the widest bunch of people than many of our universities do.'

He is harder to draw out on David Hill's future, saying: 'That is a decision the new board will have to make, and I can't comment now. All I can tell you is that there is an impression I have received from many quarters that David Hill has done a good job, without ever flinching from difficult decisions.'

And the chase for ratings? 'I think the right answer is there is a golden mean, to use the Greek term. If you become too popular, you cannot justify yourself as doing anything that the commercial stations are not already doing. If you get too far away from the bigger audiences, it is harder to justify spending public funds on an audience of small proportions. I think the ABC should be interesting and challenging and innovative and still get a reasonable audience.' ■

be talking to different people. Five out of the nine board members have been moved on, and there will be a new chairman. As one board member put it, 'The board could stop anything if it wanted to, but it is a question of whether it has the political will to do so.'

The problems of Radio National are a reflection of those of the ABC as a whole: the funding crisis, whether ratings should come before quality, whether the two are mutually exclusive, and how do you breathe change into the institution without scaring some very sensitive horses?

LOOKING THROUGH THE program listings for Radio National is like glimpsing a treasure house. It is probably without compare in the world. Heard nationwide, it has the potential to link Australia in a way no newspaper has yet managed to do. The BBC has nothing like Radio National. America has its public radio, but it pays for its quality by being forced to do anything for money—short of taking the dreaded commercials. Thus there are regular on-air begging campaigns, as irritating as they are demeaning.

Unfortunately, the wonder and the oddness of the way the people in Radio National talk about what they do is not always matched in what goes to air. Radio National devotees generally know when and to what they will listen, although given the obscure titles of programs—*Kronos*, *Ockham's Razor*, *Encounter* (of the third kind?) this is in itself an impressive achievement. As one staffer said: 'We are not dealing with disposable radio. It is best compared to a set of specialist magazines, and, compared to the circulation of such magazines, our listener figures are quite respectable.'

But if you listen undiscriminatingly, as I did during the research for this article, Radio National presents a very mixed face. There were some high points: radio that set me thinking. I bought two books after hearing them discussed on Radio National. Indeed, listener panel surveys show that a high proportion of listeners take some action as a result of hearing a program—discussing it with friends, buying books or writing letters.

But there were some ghastly, embarrassing lows. For all its unfailing earnestness, the arts coverage only occasionally rose above the notes of smug reverence. Too many of the presumably 'highly produced' programs really consisted of nothing more than loosely linked interviews with people who were clearly the friends of the presenters. For hours at a time Radio National sounded like the sort of person you try to avoid at parties.

Radio National, like a university or any institution, has its problems. Some staff, when asked about what the changes would mean to listeners, seemed incapable of distinguishing between what goes to air and the unedifying, internecine struggles of the ambitious, their acolytes, and their enemies. Like the inhabitants of other large, hide-bound institutions, they tend to assume that change is necessarily bad, and that while they are internally divided, the management infidel at the gate is carrying out some master plan.

Careerists must create change in order to be seen to do things. As Tim Bowden put it in his document, the management at Radio National has stepped into the cockpit, put its hands on the old and very worn levers, and thrown them around a bit. Not all the change is disastrous, but so far little of it has been good. Which is not to say that no change is needed, since it is fervently to be hoped that the worst bits of Radio National can be improved.

Paul Collins, who puts together the *Insights* religion program, says: 'I think there are a lot of people in the ABC who are highly specialised radio producers, the best in Australia or even the world ... but who perhaps don't have on-air presence and personality. Yet when they put together a program, they get into whole areas that you simply could never achieve through flow programming. If the ABC were to exclude those people, it would cease to be the ABC or Radio National. They are unique and must be protected. At the same time, the same people tend to resist any move towards personality presentation because they know it is not their area of talent, and they will scream blue murder at the idea of change.'

Collins is less alarmed than most at management's proposals. He sees it as a matter of finding the right balance, rather than eliminating the specialist areas. 'Robin Williams' *Science Show* is a success partly because of his personality. He has created a profile as a Radio

I like the specialist programs myself. The Health Report, *the* Law Report, Earthworm, *they are all great, they are part of the character of RN, but I don't think the flow concept is about annihilating them.*

—*DAYBREAK* PRESENTER RICHARD ACKLAND (BELOW, PHOTO COURTESY ABC)

National person. Perhaps we should be trying to discover the personalities we have got, rather than hiring them in. I think [Radio National] could take jollying up a little. Personality doesn't have to mean big names and big egos.'

RICHARD ACKLAND, the new and more successful presenter of *Daybreak*, agrees. He thinks flow programming has a place. He says: 'Flow programming works quite well at breakfast time. The average time someone listens to the program is 27 minutes. They are driving to work, in the toilet, having a shower, and their minds are sometimes with you, sometimes elsewhere, and they will miss a bit here and there. If you are too intense or specialist at that hour, you fail them, but that doesn't mean that you just give them meaningless gabble.

'I like the specialist programs myself. The *Health Report*, the *Law Report*, *Earthworm*, they are all great, they are part of the character of RN, but I don't think the flow concept is about annihilating them. It is about finding a better balance that will include them. 'There are some people who are always going on about the need to produce gorgeously packaged programs, and sometimes we do need the pressure of a deadline. I'd better be careful, but I don't think many people would disagree that the occasional deadline can be useful without affecting quality.'

Australia's intellectual community is curiously self-conscious and insecure, and these qualities are reflected in the radio station that serves the intellectual constituency. That means the answers to its identity cannot be solved overnight, or with management gobbledygook.

If Radio National is any good, it will have to find its way slowly. It is probably wrong to talk in terms of 'saving' Radio National, since no one has yet proposed scrapping it. And dangers of internal complacency may be just as great as those that accompany change.

It is to be hoped that Radio National, and the ABC, can be given the rope, the money, and the time to find its path, without hanging itself, and without being strung up by those who cannot see the difference between having their balls grabbed, and their minds engaged.

Margaret Simons is a freelance journalist. She writes regularly for *Eureka Street*.

Arms and the man

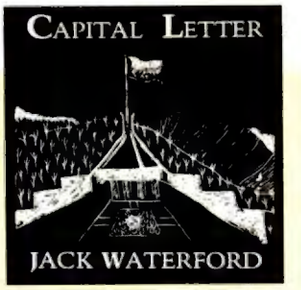
A Catholic priests' organisation in South Australia has called on the Federal Government to withdraw its support for the largest arms fair in the southern hemisphere, planned for Canberra in November. The Council of Priests of the Archdiocese of Adelaide agreed in July to support the nation's Catholic religious orders who have asked the Australian government to retract its support for AIDEX '91—the Australian International Defence and Equipment Exhibition.
(Source: Catholic News Centre, Adelaide)

Shanghai lure

There are 60,000 private Shanghainese students studying abroad: 48.2 per cent of them are engaged in doctoral studies. In order to attract them back, the Chinese government is now offering handsome packages, including a monthly salary of about 1,000 yuan, priority in housing, the provision of the necessary working and research environment, and the right to travel overseas without restriction. However, it remains to be seen whether these privileges will not create tension and jealousy between overseas and mainland graduates. (Source: *China News Analysis*)

Fatal escalation

The Economist described 1989 as the 'Year of the Refugee'. But compared with 1991, the situation then was serene. Some analysts have indicated that the worst human catastrophe of this century is now occurring in the Horn of Africa—in Ethiopia, the Sudan, Somalia. Last year the Organization of African Unity announced that there were 17 million people in Africa displaced by conflict. That was before the worst phase of the Liberian conflict, before Rwanda, before Somalia, before the worsening of famine conditions in the Sudan.
(Source: Jesuit Refugee Service, from an address given at Georgetown University, Washington D.C. by Mark Raper SJ.)



A poor excuse but mine own, Minister

STUDENTS OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION looking for a good case history of incompetence and mismanagement would do well to have a good look at the minehunter catamaran project—finally junked this year with a discreet admission that $157 million had been wasted. By the time a replacement project comes up, the all-up cost will be $300 million or so. Though small beer, perhaps, compared with the Ord River scheme or the Anglo-French Concorde cooperation project—which brought the two nations to a degree of closeness not seen since the French capital was at Vichy—it really has it all.

Like all really good disasters, it started with a good idea. Australia is very vulnerable to mine warfare, if only we could find a decent enemy. That enemy doesn't even need many mines—maybe none at all. Just saying that 50 mines had been planted in a line around Newcastle to Wollongong, or near the entrance to Port Phillip Bay, would virtually bring Australia's trade to a halt. The navy, like most of the blue-water navies it looks up to, has always needed to be prodded into doing anything about anti-mine measures. (Minehunters do not carry admirals—indeed in the entire navy there is no longer a ship worthy of our dozen or so admirals.) But some of them do see the problem, and when there was an indigenous idea for a special minehunter—built on a catamaran and capable of coastal work, it seemed like a very good idea. Moreover, there was not much around anywhere else and it seemed a good way of developing some original minehunting technology. When prototypes were first ordered in 1975, it was expected that by about 1983 there would be about eight such minehunters in operation, which would have cost about $60 million.

The catalogue of disaster began immediately. By 1983, in fact, the project was at least five years behind schedule, not a single working model had been produced, everything that could go wrong had gone wrong, and the budget had already blown out by 100 per cent. The Auditor-General began blowing very loud whistles. But nobody listened. The basic problems identified were a poor understanding of the requirements, low initial estimates of cost, poor design definition, a lack of liaison, failures to recognise problems clearly, a lack of defined responsibilities and poor project management. It would be rare to find such a royal flush on the one project. The departmental response to the criticism was straight out of *Yes Minister*'s list of bureaucratic excuses.

There was the *Comprehensive Schools Excuse:* 'It's only gone wrong because of heavy cuts in staff and budget which have stretched supervisory resources to the limit.' There was the *Concorde Excuse:* 'It was a worthwhile experiment now abandoned but not before it provided much valuable data and considerable employment.' A typical example: a testing ground for determining magnetic signatures on equipment proved useless until $800,000 worth of remedial work was done, because no one had done soil surveys, the pit flooded, and piles for an overhead rail system proved inadequate. Later the rails themselves, made of aluminium, proved useless and had to be replaced. The Government agency doing this particular piece of work would not even concede that it had wasted money: 'Although not recognised at the time, the project was in hindsight unique and necessarily experimental', it told the auditor. 'Had the full seriousness of the problem really been understood, the solution might well have been more conservative and more costly, and it is of the firm view that public money has not been wasted in the overall result, even though some elements of the work had to be redone'.

There was the *Munich Agreement Excuse:* 'It happened before important facts were known and cannot happen again. (The important fact in question was that Hitler wanted to conquer Europe. That was actually known but not to the British Foreign Office.)' At early stages of the project, though no hulls for such a catamaran had ever been built before, no-one imagined it would be a problem. Four years after the project began, someone suggested that it could be, and, six months after the timetable date for letting contracts for actually building them, the Defence Department commissioned its first study into how they might be built.

On one or two matters there was even the *Charge of the Light Brigade Excuse:* 'An unfortunate lapse by an individual which has now been dealt with under internal disciplinary procedures.'

The *Anthony Blunt Excuse:* 'There is a perfectly satisfactory explanation for everything but security prevents its disclosure'—did not fool security-cleared auditors-general but prevented the public from knowing that much of the sonar equipment planned for the project was useless.The project continued another decade through even further disasters and tens of millions of wasted dollars. It was not until this year, 18 years from the time the project began and eight years after it was supposed to to be completed—there are a couple of unsatisfactory prototypes, which may have some training value—that the project was abandoned. Will there ever be an accounting for the fiasco? Don't bet on it.

Actually the whole affair is a reminder that the writers of *Yes Minister* did not know that Australia had invented a perfectly useful extra classic excuse, sometimes called the *Streaker's Defence:* 'It seemed like a good idea at the time.' ■

Jack Waterford is deputy editor of the Canberra Times.

FRANK BRENNAN

Tempting earthly powers

Sometimes out of sight, never out of mind: mining as it was seen by Georgius Agricola in De Re Metallica, *1556*

The controversy over mining at Coronation Hill was more than a conflict of self-interest between miners, Aborigines and environmentalists. It revealed our inability to choose between competing principles.

TO MINE OR NOT TO MINE? That recurrent question confronts all who have a commitment to sustainable development in Australia. The question is increasingly difficult to answer. Most recently, in the case of Coronation Hill, the Hawke Government handed the green hot potato to the newly created Resource Assessment Commission. A year later the commission handed it back to the government in the form of a black time bomb. It provided the government with seven options, across the spectrum from 'no mining' through 'negotiated process for mining applications' to 'open mining'. Despite the commission's lengthy research, the government was none the wiser. After a heated five-hour meeting, the cabinet under the leadership of Bob Hawke decided that mining and exploration would not be permitted at Coronation Hill or elsewhere in the conservation zone, and that the whole of the zone would become part of Kakadu National Park.

The commission adopted what it called an interdisciplinary approach to arrive at conclusions relevant to decisions that seek 'to optimise the net benefits to the community from the nation's resources'. The criteria used in the evaluation included efficiency of resource use, environmental considerations, sustainability and equity. In the end, environmental considerations were not decisive, as the evidence suggested that 'a single mine, properly managed and monitored, would have a small and geographically limited direct impact on the known biological resources of the zone'. The decision was to turn on so-called equity considerations, those of greatest relevance being the well-being and views of the local Aboriginal community, the Jawoyn.

Unable to help the government off the hook, the commission simply stated the dilemma facing the Australian Government: 'Should it set aside the environmental risks that cannot be eliminated and the strong views held by the Aboriginal people responsible for the conservation zone in favour of securing increases in national income of the order that seems likely from the Coronation project and possibly from other mineral resources in the zone?'

The Resource Assessment Commission conducted what it called a contingent valuation survey of the Kakadu conservation zone. In these days of economic rationalism, such a survey is an attempt to measure values that are incommensurable. A total of 2034 Australians were asked how much they would be willing to pay to prevent possible environmental damage from mining in the conservation zone. The survey rendered precise but farcical results showing that Australians were willing to pay $123.80 per person each year for ten years to avoid the effects of a 'major impact scenario'. If mining were not to have a major impact, Australians were still prepared to expend $52.80 per person each year for ten years to avoid the effects of minor impact. The researchers claimed that these results supported 'the intuitively plausible proposition that Australians are prepared to pay more to avoid more serious and more likely environmental effects'. No cabinet minister could conceivably have been helped by this survey.

Governments often claim a mandate for a particular program, or point to economic benefits that will inevitably flow to the community at large. In our political system, which does not give legal recognition to the Jawoyn claims to the hill, cabinet had to exercise its discretion unfettered by either the Aboriginal or Commonwealth legal systems. How the ministers reached their decision, and on what basis, was murky business in the period after the Keating leadership challenge. That's politics.

FOR WHATEVER COMBINATION of reasons, Hawke decided that his cabinet should implement the wishes of the majority of the elders of the Jawoyn people as they were expressed to and determined by the Resource Assessment Commission. When asked by Justice Stewart, who chairs the commission, those old men said they did not want mining because mining could disturb Bula, whom they believe to inhabit the hill. The Jawoyn beliefs about Bula and the hill are religious beliefs that are not shared by any other people.

There are barbaric economic rationalists who regard any religious beliefs, no matter how many or how few people profess them, as quaint human quirks with no economic rationale. They dismiss out of hand the religious beliefs of the Jawoyn. It is these people who set the pace in the secularist public domain that encourages newspapers such the *Northern Territory News* to carry the headline: 'Chief Minister Blasts "Stone Age" Mining Ban'. For them, a 50 per cent-plus-one vote and an improved balance of payments settle the matter, whether it be Coronation Hill or a cathedral.

Fortunately, barbaric economic rationalists do not run the whole political agenda in this country. There are many Australians of goodwill who respect the religious beliefs and emotional commitments of others, even when there is no economic advantage, and even economic disadvantage, to themselves or the general community. They see that the national interest is about more than the balance of payments, and that the common good is about more than economic development. Many of these people willingly concede the need to respect and take account of Jawoyn religious beliefs. But, they ask, what are the limits?

The miners went for broke on Coronation Hill. They and their foreign investment colleagues decided to turn it into a litmus test for Australian economic development driven by foreign investment. Upping the stakes, they decided that a ban on mining to protect Jawoyn religious sensibilities was beyond the pale.

Setting the limits was at first too difficult for the government. That is why they handed it to the Resource Assessment Commission. When the commission handed it back, its finding was that, except for Aboriginal beliefs about Bula, there was no reason why mining should not proceed. In its own fact-finding, the commission was satisfied that the majority of Jawoyn elders held strong religious beliefs about Coronation Hill and, whatever their previous contradictory testimony to Government inquiries, they now opposed mining.

In a civilised democracy, we ought to take account of, and provide protection under the rule of law for, the religious sensibilities and world views of others. That account does not have a cash value. Its limits are set by moral argument about the rights and entitlements of citizens and the common good of society.

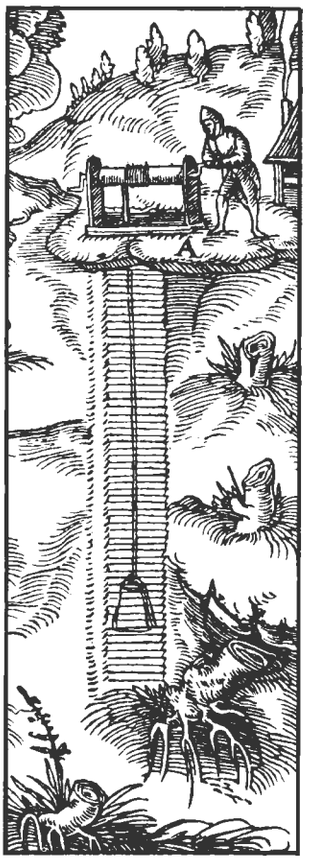
Even some wishing to accord due respect to Aboriginal beliefs challenged in good faith the process and findings of the commission. But in the end Cabinet decided not to go beyond the commission's findings. It was no longer a question whether the Jawoyn believed in Bula's power and whether or not they wanted mining. Presuming that they did so believe and that they did not want mining, it became a starker, simpler question: who should win out? The Jawoyn, or the mining company that had invested $14 million?

There was dispute about the benefit the mine would bring to the Australian economy. The commission said that we would only be $82 million better off; the miners claimed that we would gain export revenues of $500 million. The simple question this time was answered in favour of the Aborigines opposed to mining, but it was not only their interests that were served by the decision. Inevitably, the decision-makers in that cabinet room also had regard for their own interests. That is politics. But the important thing is that Aboriginal viewpoints were a crucial factor in the calculus. For as long as Aborigines are not allowed to make their own decisions about the exploitation of their land, the decision-makers need to give due weight to their views. The miners' in-house theologian, Hugh Morgan, saw the Coronation Hill decision as evidence of the Prime Minister's neo-paganism.

EVERYONE, INCLUDING THE MINERS, knows their interests could be better served by a legal process that clari-

fies rights and interests before $14 million is invested and back-door deals are done in Canberra. The industry's attention has now turned to other mining operations proposed on Aboriginal land in Western Australia. The Commonwealth Aboriginal heritage protection legislation vests a wide discretion in the Commonwealth Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. When that legislation was enacted in 1984, pastoralists and miners who were concerned about the breadth of ministerial discretion were given an assurance by Hawke that the minister's discretion would not be exercised unless an application had first been cleared by a ministerial committee consisting of the Prime Minister, the Minister for Primary Industries, and the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. At the time, that seemed a satisfactory compromise.

The Coronation Hill decision has deprived prospective investors of the certainty that they need in order to invest with any regularity. The decision-making process shows that there is no principled procedure for determining the hierarchy of values among conflicting claims, especially between developers and Aboriginal or environmental interest groups. Attempts to quantify in dollars and cents the citizenry's commitment to environmental values, and to the right of indigenous peoples to self-determination, are bound to fail.



COMPLEX MORAL AND POLITICAL arguments are not reducible to economic considerations, and neither is the result to be effected by a choice between principle and pragmatism. Rather, where there is a conflict of principles in their practical application, there is a need for a process that determines the hierarchy of those principles and the limits of application of each. And the decision-making process should involve those most affected by the decision and its outcome. Cabinet should only be left to resolve questions of the highest policy in the national interest.

Opinion polls—or contingent valuation surveys, to use the latest jargon—can only be a useful starting point for determining the will of the majority. An outcome that is contrary to the will of the majority obviously requires justification, but justification by clear enunciation and application of principles, or through arbitration by an acknowledged authority, may be possible.

The hardest disputes are difficult to resolve precisely because there is no clear enunciation of principles, or because there is no singular application of them. And there may be no authority that enjoys the respect of all disputants (this may even include the federal cabinet). There is no established process for involving disputants, guaranteeing them natural justice and locking them into compliance with the umpire's decision. Terms such as sustainable development point to a search for principles and for a hierarchy of those principles, and for a process through which principles can be applied. The establishment of the Resource Assessment Commission, or the appointment of an eminent person such as Tony Fitzgerald, who inquired into the conservation, management and use of Fraser Island, were attempts to solve disputes by a recognised and legitimate authority using a fair, transparent process. Those who conduct such inquiries are not necessarily chosen for their pre-eminence in the conservation and management of natural resources.

The final decision may or may not reflect a community consensus. But the decision must be part of the mosaic of national decision-making, with sufficient shared values to provide the community with a predictable and fair range of outcomes in future disputes. This cannot be achieved by equating economics and ethics. Neither can surveys or opinion polls be quoted as the right answer.

Commenting on the Coronation Hill decision, Hugh Morgan said: 'It will become impossible for any government to protect the economic well-being, or even the security, of the country if threats arise from doctrines or groups claiming immunity through notions of sacredness or sanctity.' Economic well-being is important, even for the Jawoyn. But it is not always trumps. Some other things are non-negotiable or superior in the community's hierarchy of values. In a civilised democracy, we ought to take account of, and provide protection under the rule of law for, the religious sensibilities and world views of others. That account does not have a cash value. Its limits are set by moral argument about the rights and entitlements of citizens and the common good of society.

Whatever the economic cost, there must be some times when we would not permit mining in any circumstances. There are many other times when our economic interest can readily be accommodated with the rights and interests of all. Then we welcome mining and focus our attention on an equitable distribution of the benefits. Thankfully, 'To mine or not to mine?' is no longer a straight economic, political lobbying and public-relations question. The question has a moral dimension. No one community group holds the key to the answer, least of all those whose short-term economic interests will be best served.

Frank Brennan SJ is director of Uniya, the Jesuit social research institute, and adviser on Aboriginal affairs to the Australian Catholic bishops.

Small victories

The homes that people create mean more to them than homes that others think they should have. ***David Glanz*** *reports on Manila's slum district of Magdalena.*

THE RAIN STARTED AGAIN as we turned off the street of hardware shops and entered a side lane awash with mud. At the end of the lane was an inconspicous gate. I followed my companion, Martha Daguno, through it into the invisible city of Magdalena. There are no records —except, ironically, the electoral rolls—that acknowledge the existence of this community in Manila's dockside quarter of Tondo. Yet, squeezed into a thin strip along a dirty, stagnant canal, and bounded by a high wall on one side and the back of the hardware shops on the other, 1500 people sleep, eat, quarrel, love, squat and work.

Magdalena is typical of hundreds of slums in Manila. Work is difficult to find and woefully underpaid. The minimum wage is about $6 a day, but even the government admits that only 30 per cent of workers are paid that much. Inflation in metropolitan Manila runs at 21 per cent. Earlier this year a survey by the Asian Institute of Management revealed that most Filipinos thought the economy was at its worst since World War II. In the poorest areas 91 per cent of women could not manage on the family income. And in slums like Magdalena that translates into the fact that most people are either unemployed or underemployed. After the eruptions of the volcano Mount Pinatubo, slum dwellers were discovered masquerading as refugees in camps in the capital. At least refugees come close to being guaranteed a meal a day.

Work, when available, usually means laundering, water-carrying, driving jeepneys—the main form of public transport—or day-labouring on the waterfront. The kids wash cars or sell on the streets. The unluckiest sell themselves. 'Most victims of paedophilia are from the urban poor,' Martha said. 'And you can find girls of 13 in the formal prostitution business.'

'The invisible city of Magdalena', ingeniously squeezed in behind established buildings.
PHOTOS: David Glanz

Martha, 27, spent more than a year in Magdalena as an organiser for Samakana, a national organisation of slum women with 13 chapters in Manila. 'In one week I've experienced passing three child coffins outside people's doors,' she said, 'and I've not even made a full round of the community. The minimum would be one or two a month. There's malnutrition too. In peasant communities they can plant vegetables. Here there's none of that. All they commonly buy in the market is dried fish and rotten vegetables, because fresh vegetables cost much more.'

We crossed a narrow planking bridge over the canal and turned into the laneway that ran parallel with the water's edge. At first it was pitch black, uneven under foot. The alley was roofed, turning it into a corridor, down which we stumbled towards the Samakana centre.

The occasional light, gaps in the roof and openings on to the canal allowed me to pick out some detail. Behind one door came the noise of a pig grunting and scuffling. In a room open to the corridor, five or six people sat playing cards. A toothless grandfather bounced a baby on his lap. In every room religious pictures deco-

rated the walls. Some of the dwellings—six square metres of tin and rotting cardboard cannot be called a home—were shops. Behind wire netting, the owners displayed individual packets of shampoo, piles of grey rice, lollies.

After 150 metres or so we came out into an opening next to the Samakana centre. The two-storey building is a testament to the fact that, despite the misery, there is a deep-seated willingness to struggle for something better. It was built in 1987 by activists from Gabriela, the 40,000-strong national women's coalition to which Samakana is affiliated. Attempts to start a day care centre and a sewing co-operative foundered when armed rivalry between right-wing vigilantes and the Communist Party-led New People's Army flared into open warfare and bloodshed. It was only in 1989 that Samakana felt able to re-enter Magdalena.

TOP: Magdalena's children. ABOVE: the grandfather-childminder was keen to be photographed; his grandson was not.

To an outsider it seems ironic that the first priority of the women organised in Samakana is to campaign for the right to live in the slum. But, for all its inadequacies, Magdalena represents an improvement for the people who live there. The vast majority have come from the provinces, swelling the ranks of the 3.2 million Manila poor, because a job in the city—any job—is better than rotting in the countryside.

At the Samakana centre Anita Lagdaan, a woman of 40 who came to Manila with her six children in 1987, said: 'It's better here because there's the chance to get a job.' There is a public primary school nearby, although only a third of slum children complete elementary level, and a medical centre—although Anita says it is rare to find doctors and medicine available at the same time. 'The Samakana centre has helped us because it's free education for children here. It's taught children to be disciplined at home—to do their own teeth-brushing, to clean themselves and the house.'

Yet all of this, small beer though it is, is constantly under threat. Manila authorities have a policy of 'cleaning up' the city by clearing squatter areas, which, like Magdalena, are often on public land. In Magdalena they expect the demolition squads every day, and most entrances to the canal bank have been boarded up. The gate by which we entered was locked and guarded by teams of women at night.

The slum-clearance policy dates back to the days of the Marcos dictatorship, when Imelda Marcos was Minister for Human Settlement and in charge of Manila. Areas were cleared for rebuilding, but with new homes at prices that only the middle class could afford. Road corridors were punched through, displacing thousands. The administration has changed, but policies have not. The city council's slogan is 'Manila on the go'. But the poor who are made to go have no choice but to return. Magdalena has been demolished six times, yet no one doubts that if the wreckers succeed it would be rebuilt again.

Samakana activist Pining Domingo, 38, who has five children, was kicked out in the last demolition and shipped south to the Cavite area. 'We came back as there were no jobs there,' she said. 'People call themselves turtles—we carry our houses wherever we go, we keep afloat, but we can dig down for safety.'

IN THE MIDST of this maelstrom, it is the women who carry the largest burden. 'It's a myth that Filipino women are mere housewives tending their families at home,' Martha said. 'The urban poor women do their so-called duties and also have to work for their family income. Where husbands are without work, they solely shoulder the responsibility for the family.'

An average day can mean waking at four to do housework, shop at the market, fetch water or wash clothes. Paid work may start at seven—the woman often won't have eaten—and carry through until dark with a short meal break. Then it's back to the family and the children, washing and preparing. Bedtime can sometimes mean beatings and rape by husbands, who are scorned as 'henpecked' if they help with domestic duties.

Samakana activists are campaigning to improve the situation—with growing support from their menfolk. In the Bandacan area of Manila there is a co-operative community store and canteen. A credit co-op gives women the chance to start a small business. At Magdalena the women run a free clinic and pap-smear testing. On the ground floor is a day care centre, upstairs a small sewing room. Women work on piecework, making up to $1.50 a bag. The wages are no higher than in commercial workshops, but the profit is ploughed back into the business and into Samakana activities. The capital came from nuns, solicited by the chairperson of Gabriela, Sister Mary John Mamanzan.

ALL THIS IS IMPORTANT, but the greatest advances have been won away from the community, in the factories. Women from the slums make up much of the workforce in the textile, tobacco, meat, paper and rubber industries of Manila. Thanks to union organisation, life can become a little easier; it is here that the minimum-wage legislation is most likely to be observed.

Pining Domingo (centre) and women from the Samakana centre. 'People call themselves turtles—we carry our houses wherever we go, we keep afloat.'

The factories are also somewhere the women can defend their dignity. Campaigns against sexual harassment and for child care form a significant part of the work of the KMK, the militant 8000-strong organisation of women workers. KMK officer Nancy Garcia told how a walkout at Lucky Textiles succeeded in winning the disciplining of a male supervisor who had been molesting women workers. And how child care had been won at Rubber World, Fortune Tobacco, North Atlantic Garments and elsewhere.

Set against the situation in Magdalena, this seems impressive but far from enough. Martha and the others are the first to agree. Samakana sees itself as having a broader political agenda, attacking the Aquino government's policies on prices and wages, on social services and on civil rights.

In Magdalena, they have held three community assemblies to campaign against the demolition program, the two giant US military bases in the Philippines, and against the Aquino government's financial policies. Earlier this year the regime signed an IMF letter of intent, committing itself to imposing further austerity on Filipinos. Already, 40 per cent of government spending goes on debt repayment, and petrol prices have been kept artificially high in order to balance the treasury's books.

In July mass popular desperation and resentment led to demonstrations and strikes that rocked the regime. On the way out of Magdalena, standing on the bridge to get my last look at the community the authorities would prefer to pretend did not exist, it was easy to understand why.

David Glanz is a Melbourne freelance journalist.

KATHERINE KIZILOS

When the law is not enough

ON THE FACE OF IT, Sol Jubilan is uncannily like her name. She is sunny, jubilant, the type of woman an American would describe as 'feisty'. And given the nature of her work, this is just as well. Jubilan is a lawyer on the southern Philippines island of Mindanao, where she specialises in human rights and criminal law. She calls herself the only 'feminist human rights lawyer' in the Philippines. In a country where most women are defined by their partner and children, Jubilan is unmarried and runs an orphanage. And she is a Protestant in a fervently Catholic country, although she became disenchanted with the Baptist Church in which she grew up after it branded her a communist. It is a common accusation for those associated with humanitarian causes in the Philippines.

On Mindanao, Philippines government forces are fighting two wars—one against communist insurgents, the other against Muslim separatists. Road blocks, set up by teenage boys with M16s and ammunition belts slung over their shoulders, are a common sight. The boys are members of paramilitary groups such as the right-wing Alsa Masa or the 'Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Units'. In such a place it is not unusual for human rights lawyers to become human rights victims. In the 10 years that Jubilan has worked as a lawyer, she has twice received death threats and has been the victim of a smear campaign—her Children of War orphanage has been dubbed a training ground for the communist New People's Army. 'Being on the legal left you are visible,' she said. 'It makes us targets. Many lawyers have been killed in the time of Cory Aquino.'

Last year, when Jubilan was on a fund-raising tour of Europe, a Philippines army officer described her in a newspaper report as a communist. When she returned to Mindanao, she found that anonymous phone callers had told her secretary that Jubilan would be killed and her office blown up. Soon after, Jubilan's dogs were poisoned. She does not like the danger, but is so regularly exposed to people who have suffered more that she disregards it. Most of her clients in human-rights cases—poor farmers, labourers, students or unionists—pay no fees. Many of them do not speak English, the official language of the courts and the school system.

Jubilan says that most of the human rights abuses she hears about rarely come to court. The victims do not expect justice from a court system that is yet to find any member of the defence forces guilty of a human rights abuse. She says women whose husbands have been killed or tortured will come to her because 'they just want me to know on record what happened. They will just say to me something as simple as: "Well the blood that has been spilled by my husband is a contribution to our struggle for a truly liberated society." They say that! The farmers, the laborers and the students. And I have learned a lot from them. I'm a lawyer but I am learning a lot from the wisdom of these people who are direct victims of state oppression.'

Although based in the province of North Cotobato, Jubilan travels widely over Mindanao and involved in a number of political causes on the island. She is legal adviser to the Lumad tribal people who, for environmental and territorial reasons, are opposed to a proposed geothermal plant on Mindanao's highest peak, the volcano Mt Apo. She is counsel for several unions and for the leading peasant group, the KMP, in its struggle for land reform. Jubilan is also chairperson of the Protestant Lawyers League of the Philippines and Mindanao co-ordinator of the Free Legal Aid Group. And she has worked with the Catholic group Task Force Detainees, in its documentation of human rights abuses against civilians by the military.

I don't believe the legal process—sticking only to the legal process—to be effective under the present conditions. I find it really not workable. The people must resort to something that is beyond the legal process

—SOL JUBILAN IN AUSTRALIA EARLIER THIS YEAR.

Jubilan also sees herself as a political educator, and the Children of War orphanage is part of this work. It houses 45 children who have lost one or both parents in the civil war. Children with surviving relatives can stay at the orphanage until their remaining family members have found a new home. 'If they are total orphans, we also have a program for foster families to take them ... It's one way of raising the political consciousness of the Filipino people ... Usually the mentality is that if an orphan is taken in they become [domestic] helpers. It's terrible, you know. We would like [the foster parents] to substitute the love that is lost.'

In 1981, when Jubilan began practising law, Marcos was still in power. She had not intended to become involved in human rights, but what she describes as her 'innate' sense of justice was outraged by the complaints that came her way: women who were raped by soldiers, men detained without warrant and then tortured or 'salvaged'—the brutally ironic Filipino term for those who are executed without trial.

Like the rest of the world Jubilan expected the Philippines would become a more open society when People Power swept Cory Aquino into office in 1986. In the euphoria that followed the fall of Marcos, Jubilan agreed to represent the political wing of the New People's Army, the National Democratic Front, in peace talks with the government. 'I stood up with the best intentions of helping the government,' she said, although she is now aware that her involvement in the talks earned her the enmity of the armed forces.

The talks broke down and the attempts at reconciliation were replaced by Aquino's 'total war policy' against the insurgents. The civil war escalated, displacing more and more villagers from their homes. Although these 'internal refugees' now number more than a million people, Jubilan says their plight is not recognised by the government. And she sees no end in sight. 'We record and document and all that, but what happens after that? I've been doing it for 10 years with no stopping at all. I don't believe the legal process—sticking only to the legal process—to be effective under the present conditions. I find it really not workable. The people must resort to something that is beyond the legal process.'

Jubilan talks of activities 'within the democratic process', including 'marching, striking, demonstrating'. Yet, although these forms of action swept the present government into power, Jubilan says they are now 'viewed as communist, as anti-government and all that'. The People Power of Cory Aquino was a revolution that failed.

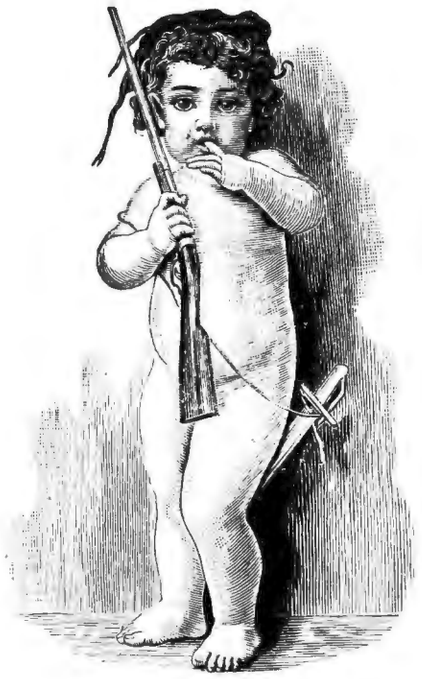
SOL JUBILAN HAS her own People Power story. It took place on Mindanao in June 1985, when Marcos was still in power. In April that year an Italian priest, Father Julio Favali, had been killed in North Cotobato province, and although several of the killers had been positively identified only one had been convicted. The governor's car was said to have taken the killers from the murder scene.

A protest was organised, in the form of a human barricade across the highway linking Davao City to Cotobato City. The protesters asked Jubilan to be their spokesperson; they told her they would block the road so that she could negotiate with the governor in public. She was sceptical but agreed. The next morning she was amazed to see that thousands of people had come from the mountains to block the highway. 'I saw men and women and children, some who were physically incapacitated, but they marched, you know? I'm very inspired by them. I'm not afraid when I am with them.'

The plan worked, and negotiations with the governor and the local military commander took place on the highway. Jubilan, afraid of being detained, refused a request to meet them at their headquarters. The demands of the people were met, and the killers were arrested, charged and convicted.

Jubilan says the barricade was part of a wave of popular protest that died out after Aquino's election. The people waited to see if improvements would be made, if real change would come. They are still waiting. 'What we are doing now is organising, consolidating the forces of the people in all sectors,' she says. 'We hope to form a political will of the people that would really advance and later on go forward to a genuine people's revolution ... That will happen if the government remains deaf and blind and [goes on with] this continuous, institutionalised violence.'

Katherine Kizilos is a Melbourne freelance journalist.



LEON GETTLER

'No one was killed in the war, mummy'

US military manipulation of information during the Gulf War was so successful that, according to a Four Corners *report, some children failed to understand that war entailed killing. But the misconceptions are not confined to children.*

War toys for young and old: ABOVE, *'Baby's first gun', as an Edwardian children's book imagined it;* RIGHT, *a 'Chicago piano' on offer in* Soldier of Fortune *magazine.*

SCENARIO ONE: A reporter attached to the media pool covering the Gulf War discovers a defect in the design of the nuclear, biological and chemical warfare suits worn by allied soldiers. The military censors kill the story, claiming it would breach security.

SCENARIO TWO: The BBC has produced a *Panorama* documentary on a covert operation by the US government, through which funds were diverted to the PLO so that it would stop supporting Saddam Hussein. The documentary, however, is cancelled after the government warns senior BBC executives about their coverage of the war.

To the best of our knowledge, these events did not happen. But the examples illustrate potential dangers in the way information was manipulated during the Gulf War. Part of the blame lies with the media-pool system, which had journalists filing stories based on information from uninformative military briefings.

And there was always warspeak. In his essay, 'Politics and the English Language', George Orwell commented on the way slogans were being used to suppress criticism. According to Orwell, this trend consisted 'largely of euphemism, question-begging and sheer cloudy vagueness ... Political language—and with variations this is true of all political parties, from conservatives to anarchists—is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind.'

The London journal 'Index on Censorship' compiled a mini-lexicon from the Gulf War, noting that the war had generated the greatest number of synonyms for the verb 'to kill' outside the Thesaurus. Examples included: 'to stealth', 'to impact', 'to suppress', 'to eliminate', 'to decapitate', 'to de-air', 'to down' and 'to neutralise'.

The war also provided many acronyms to help package the destruction. The KIA (killed in action) were sent home in HRPs (human remains pouches) and replaced by BCRs (battlefield casualty replacements). Soldiers in the KZ (killing zone) who were not wearing NCB (nuclear, chemical and biological) outfits during a CW (chemical weapons) attack would probably SLUD (salivate, lachrymate, urinate and defecate). They would also suffer CSR (combat stress reaction), otherwise known as shell-shock. Air support would have come from a JAAT (Joint Air Attack Team) equipped with TADS (target acquisition and designation sights), SLARs (side-looking airborne radars) and SLAMs (stand-off land attack missiles). An innocent civilian killed in the raid would have been a PONTI (person of no tactical importance).

Behind the wordplay lay a desire to sanitise the carnage. Instead of saturation bombing, the air force was now 'laying down a carpet'. When planes attacked military targets in cities, they were 'denying the enemy an infrastructure'. Was it any wonder that the allied press briefings consistently refused to divulge details of the number killed from either side? The exercise seemed to be aimed at conveying the impression that this war did not involve the loss of human life, a messy byproduct of other wars which had led to a loss of political support.

When the media pool was established in Saudi Arabia, the process was reportedly supervised by the US Navy's director of public relations, Michael Sherman. According to the Washington writer Peter Schmeisser, Sherman had also been a consultant to Paramount Studios and that his past work had included *Hunt for Red October* and *Flight of the Intruder*. The military justification for the pool system was the legitimate claim that it denied information to the enemy. But the evidence suggests there was also a second goal: preserving public support for the war in keeping with political objectives back home.

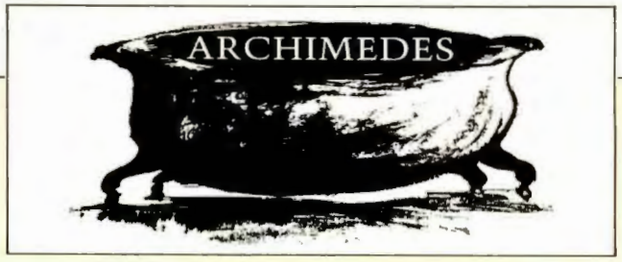
The 'Index on Censorship' gives these examples:
—A pool report from Fred Bruni of the *Detroit Free Press* about the damage wreaked by Stealth bombers. The military did not clear the report until four days after it was filed. When it appeared, the reporter's description of the pilots as 'giddy' had been changed to 'proud'.
—A request from the *New York Times* reporter, James Le Moyne, to interview the allied commander, Norman Schwarzkopf, was cancelled after Le Moyne wrote a story quoting soldiers who questioned the war.
—Censors banned a story about navy pilots watching pornographic films before bombing missions.
—Authorities avoided news coverage by refusing to hold a ceremony for those who had died for the new world order when their bodies were flown back to the US.

IN A WORLD where surveys put journalists only slightly ahead of child molesters in occupational ratings, such restrictions on reporting might not be unpopular with the public. The controls, however, are not in the public interest because access to information is crucial in a democracy. Furthermore, wars cannot be packaged: they are messy affairs, usually of uncertain duration. One wonders how popular the reporting restrictions would have been if the war had dragged on for months.

In the past, journalists have served the public well by pointing out the mistakes of the military. When he was correspondent for the Melbourne *Herald*, Keith Murdoch wrote criticism of the command at Gallipoli which resulted in the British Government recalling General Sir Ian Hamilton, who had committed so many Australian soldiers to slaughter. The Vietnam War might have continued longer if television services had not been allowed to beam the war into homes every night. Press disclosures about the My Lai massacre and the revelations of duplicity in the Pentagon Papers also contributed to the final decision to withdraw US troops.

But ultimately, the media must share some of the blame for not exposing the pitfalls of a system when it was introduced. As William Kovach, the curator of Harvard's Neimman Foundation noted: 'Since 1970, the military has worked on plans (to control the press during a war). I blame the press for not making as careful plans as the military.'

Leon Gettler is communications reporter for *The Age*.



On a vulgar note

PLUTARCH, IN CH.17 OF HIS *Life of Marcellus*, says that Archimedes regarded 'as ignoble and sordid the business of mechanics and every sort of art which is directed to use and profit' and that he 'placed his whole ambition in those speculations the beauty and subtlety of which are untainted by any admixture of the common needs of life'. Marcellus, you may remember, was the Roman general thwarted for so long by Archimedes' cunningly engineered defence of Syracuse.

Archimedes liked to give crisp and clear mathematical proofs for his theorems. His mathematical treatises exude a cool and calculating authority over the most complex abstractions. It has become evident, however, that he cheated. That is, Archimedes often got his ideas first by playing around with particular geometrically shaped objects—tiles and cones and spheres and cylinders—and then only later did he sort out more general abstract proofs. His more general proofs, however, never offer a reference to his initial experiments with particular geometric solids.

In his *Method*, Archimedes admits that others had discovered the 'facts' of certain geometric relationships by means of experiment, and that such experimental facts had then cried out for mathematical explanations. Relative volumes of spheres and cones and pyramids could be compared, for example, by making such objects out of the same material and comparing their weights. The more 'universal' mathematical law, however, is always much more attractive then one particular set of facts gained from observing one particular set of objects. Archimedes may well have done the same.

It is in this sense, then, that particularity is common and vulgar. The more 'universal' the theory, much more is it a thing of wonder and beauty, for it applies in all cases and transcends all boundaries of particularity.

The same procedures continue today. Joseph Smith, a geochemist at the University of Chicago, has spent 30 years uncovering the atomic structure of zeolites—compounds of aluminium, silicon and oxygen—whose structural properties make them invaluable catalysts in industry. Using all sorts of Archimedean solids (made from two regular shapes, like rectangles and triangles), Smith builds a variety of plastic models and computes the consequent position of their hypothetical atoms. When his models match the known bond lengths of a particular zeolite, then he knows he has discovered the structure of that zeolite.

And what are zeolites used for? Mainly for a 30 per cent increase in the conversion of petroleum to gasoline. What would Archimedes say to that? 'Untainted by any admixture of the common needs of life', indeed! ■

—John Honner SJ

What the n

What links Mozart, your nose, the
and a major scientific breakthr

A TSUNAMI OF GUSH IS (a) raw fish; (b) the hereditary ruler of northern Hokkaido; or (c) the efflorescence that not uncommonly accompanies centenaries? Think of how Mozart's untimely death is being commemorated 200 years later, shudder lightly, and pass on. Whereas Mozart was all too evidently mortal, his music clearly lives; and what we are celebrating, however marshmallow, is the continuing wonder of his music, rather than the fact that he died in 1791.

In a parallel vein, therefore, I am going to celebrate the centenary of phylloxera, the organism that devastated the vineyards in 1891, by attempting to convey my sense of wonder 100 years later, faced with a piece of science rather than a piece of music. The science in question is reported in the 7 April issue of the journal *Cell*, and marks a giant step forward in our knowledge of how we smell. Not in the sense of underarm deodorants, good or bad, but the biological processes involved in odor discrimination. And if that is not of interest to oenophiles, then may a head cold attend your next wine-tasting.

The genes (DNA) are the blueprints of the body, the same in almost all cells, except sperm and ova, which have half-sets, and some white blood cells, which have very selective and specific alterations. On the other hand, in the various cells of the different tissues of the body, access to this central file of blueprints is very different; so that the RNA, or working drawings, differ very widely between cells. The proteins, which are both the building blocks and the actual machines, are translated off the RNA. Some proteins are common to all cells—you need bricks for houses, hospitals and car parks; others are rather more specific—like microscopes, or boom gates.

WHAT LINDA BUCK AND RICHARD AXEL did was to extract all the RNA from rat nasal mucosal cells, and from among the thousands of different working drawings pick out those coding for odorant receptors. Receptors are like keyholes, with the signal like a key. The signal can be external—like light, or cedar/oak/vanillin/peppermint, beloved of wine writers; alternatively the signal can be internal, like neurotransmitters at synapses (relay stations) in the nervous system, or hormones circulating in the blood. It's all part of the body's communication system: key fits lock, cylinders tumble, doors open. The signals are obviously varied, but the receptors—as far as we know—are all proteins, either entirely or in large part. And if they are proteins, there must be specific RNA molecules coding for them.

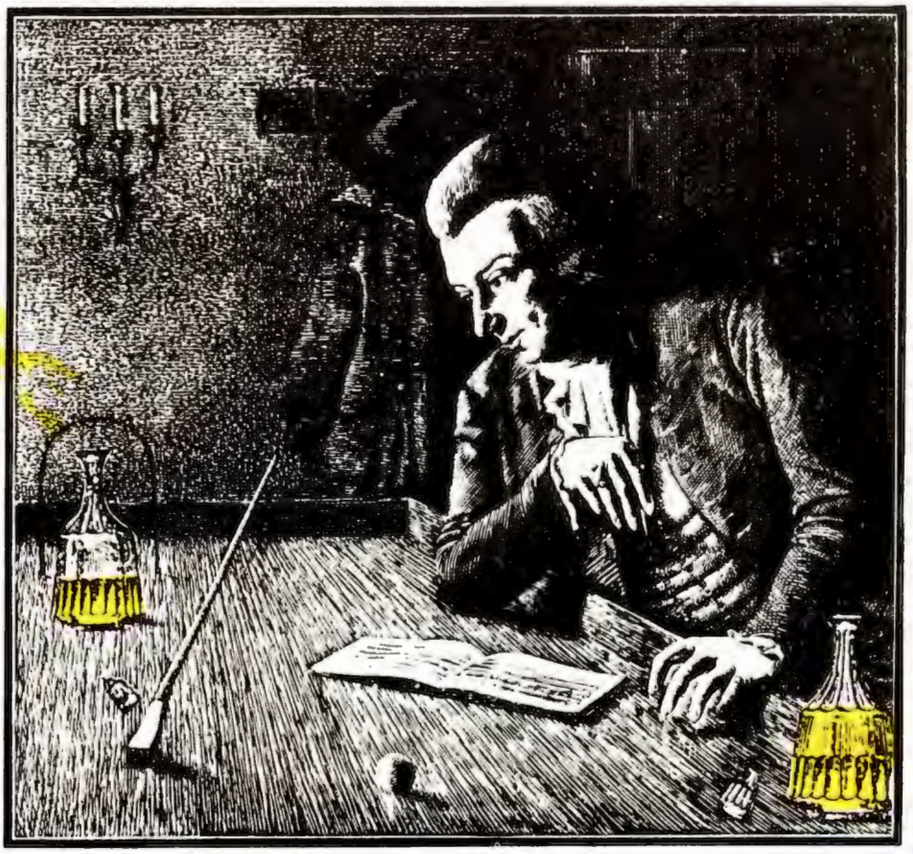
What Buck and Axel did was to make two leaps of faith, and then use the powerful techniques of molecular biology. One leap of faith was more of an educated guess: that the only tissue to make receptors for odorants, things that smell, would be the mucous membrane of the nose, and in particular the nerve cells that ramify into the mucous membrane. The second was a true leap of faith—that receptors would be of the seven transmembrane domain type, of which more later. The particularly powerful technique of molecular biology they used is called polymerase chain reaction, or PCR for short, and of this, again, more later.

In less than a decade, hundreds of receptors have been cloned—which is to say that the RNA coding for the receptor has been isolated, copies inserted into bacteria or other rapidly dividing organisms, the organisms grown over many generations in culture media, and then the vastly amplified amount of the copy harvested. RNA is a long chain, like old-fashioned tickertape: each three links in the chain designates a particular amino acid, the unit building block of proteins. Each link can be any one of four different molecules, so that the maxi-

Clearly a refined and very powerful discriminating sense of smell has been an enormous survival advantage

ıose knows

great grapevine disease of 1891
ough! ***John Funder*** *explains.*



mum information content would theoretically be 4x4x4—i.e. 64 different amino acids; in practice, we make only 20 different acids, so that there is some redundancy in the code. When you have your long RNA chain grown up in bacteria, you can determine the order of the four different molecules within the chain—in 1991, thousands per day—and from this sequence, you can deduce the amino acid sequence that makes the protein haemoglobin, or insulin, or an odorant receptor.

What happened in 1991 marked the beginning of an escalation in our knowledge of how we recognize the world around us, and within us

Many of the receptors that have been cloned are proteins that sit in the cell membrane, the boundary wall of protein and lipid that demarcates the inside of the cell from everything outside. Five years ago, for example, we learned that receptors for photons (units of light) in the retina of the eye were proteins that snaked back and forth through the cell membrane of the cone cells of the eye, a total of seven times. One end and three loops are outside the cell, and the other end and three other loops are inside. Though we tend to draw such receptors rather like a snake on a spit-roast, they 'round up' in the cell wall, so that the first and seventh transmembrane stretches ('domains') are close together: you could make a very good model with a mid-size tuna can, *sans* top and bottom, and a couple of feet of curly telephone cord.

Since then, we have found that this seven transmembrane domain (7 TMD, for short) configuration is very common for receptors in the cell wall, allowing signals to impinge on or bind to the exposed portions, and the message to be relayed within the cell by changes induced in the intracellular parts. 7 TMD receptors have been described for neurotransmitters like adrenaline and noradrenaline (modified single amino acids), prostaglandins (modified fatty acids), relatively short proteins like angiotensin, which raises blood pressure, and long proteins like luteinising hormone, which is made in the pituitary to tell the ovaries to ovulate, and the testes to make testosterone. All are specific, in the sense that luteinising hormone will not raise blood pressure, or adrenaline elevate your testosterone levels: think of the different keys on your key-ring, but the essential similarity of the locks they open. The second leap of faith, then, was that receptors for molecules that smell would be 7 TMD receptors.

From a comparison of all the 7 TMD receptors cloned and sequenced to date, it is clear that some stretches vary highly between receptors, and other stretches are remarkably similar. The variable regions have been shown—by the deliberate introduction of mutations—to code for the stretches that the signal contacts; the relatively invariant sequences are presumed to have a more general structural role. From the outside, all Yale locks look the same—and even inside there are interchangeable bits.

TO PICK THE ODORANT RECEPTORS from all the other RNA sequences made by nasal mucosal cells, Buck and Axel backed their hunch that they would be members of the 7 TMD family. By making 'hooks' of single stranded DNA coding for the relatively invariant regions of the 7 TMD family, they were able to 'fish' out the RNA cod-

ing for odorant receptors. DNA prefers to exist as a double strand (like a twisted rope ladder); whichever of the four molecules at one end of each rung exactly specifies which will be at the other end (A always pairs with T, and C and G). DNA and RNA also love to form 'complementary' double strands; so anything that is recognized by two different hooks, directed at quite distant parts of the RNA, is likely to be a member of the same family of proteins. Once you have hooked it out—even just one molecule—you can amplify it billions of times in the test tube, over the course of a few hours, by using an enzyme called Taq polymerase, and the technique called polymerase chain reaction. By now we're in danger of losing the scent: a description of PCR will have to wait until another day.

In brief, Buck and Axel picked out 18 different 7 TMD receptors, uniquely made in the nerve cells of the rat nasal mucosa. From a variety of eminently reasonable inferences, they suggest that this is the tip of the iceberg, and that the full complement will be many hundreds, perhaps even thousands. The 18 for which they have the sequences are all clearly members of a distinct subfamily of 7 TMD receptors: and within this subfamily there are four distinct sub-subfamilies, perhaps for different but related classes of odorants—musky, camphoraceous etc. From indirect but powerful evidence, it seems highly likely that each nasal nerve cell makes only one particular type of receptor; what we have no clues about, to date, is the way such dedication is achieved, how each different cell allows only one out of the hundreds or thousands of odorant receptor genes to be accessed. Finally, of course, the first leap of faith was confirmed—and no RNA for any of the odorant receptors was found in extracts of a wide range of other tissues.

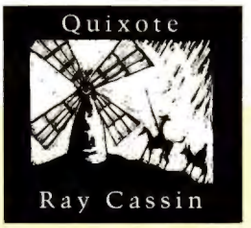
SO WHERE DOES ALL THIS leave us, mulling over our glass of wine? First, it may be of considerable solace to those epicureans among us that probably 10 to 15 per cent of the entire genome [a complete set of DNA] is involved in coding for odorant receptors; Master of Wine may be a contemporary exploitation of such genetic riches, but clearly a refined and very powerful discriminating sense of smell has been an enormous survival advantage. Secondly, the clear prolixity of odorant receptors is challenging: we are used to computers with their binary codes, and we distinguish a vast palette of colours with only three different 7 TMD photon receptors (in the red, green and blue wavelengths).

Third, for many years some of us have been exercised—often later rather than earlier in the evening—over the chicken-and-egg question for biological signals and receptors. With this latest addition to our knowledge, the scales seem to have tipped very much in favour of first the receptors—as conferring a metabolic or survival advantage in the presence of some external factor (e.g. light) or molecule (e.g. H_2S, rotten-egg gas). Eventually, with the aeons of evolution, the same receptor motifs duplicated, responded to internal signals (neurotransmiters, hormones etc)—and presto, a lady oenophile who ovulates and keeps her blood pressure normal despite a low salt intake.

Finally, even for the least scientifically *engagé amateur en vin*, 1991 is a much more memorable year than 1891. During the past 20 years, we have learnt a lot about the physiology of smelling, not least from studies in fish. Fish distinguish a variety of amino acids, for example, as we do: ponder where the name of one of our 20 building blocks, asparagine, comes from.

What happened in 1991 is a triumph for molecular biology, which, together with astute clinical observation of congenital disease syndromes, on occasion provides us with breathtaking answers to questions that we had never previously formulated, let alone posed. What happened in 1991 also marked the beginning of an escalation in our knowledge of how we recognize the world around us, and the world within us. For the true oenophile, the knowledge that 10 to 15 per cent of the genome is devoted to odorant receptors must thus be classed as one of the triumphs of the year.

John Funder is director of the Baker Medical Research Institute and a sometime wine writer.



Living in confident expectation

COINCIDENCE IS AN EMBARRASSMENT for writers of fiction. Their readers expect all the threads of a plot to be tied neatly together, so that nothing appears to have happened by chance. For even those artful writers who give you alternative versions of a plot, asking 'but what would have happened if ...', just demonstrate that their characters are their own creations, to do with as they will. And writers like Dickens, who know that in real life the most significant events do appear to happen coincidentally, have often been scorned for trying to make this aspect of life a plausible aspect of their art. When David Copperfield just happens to see Mr Micawber, whom he has not seen for many years, pass by the window, some readers wrinkle their brows in distaste and pronounce the encounter too contrived to be taken seriously.

My distinguished ancestor the Don, although a voracious reader, was not troubled by such worries; after all, he had the luxury of being a fictional character himself. But his continued appeal as a character lies in the fact that his adventures are a series of jokes at the expense of a certain kind of too-serious reader. The sort who can't believe that anyone's life could amount to several chance meetings with Mr Micawber, many years apart. Further, the Don shared the piety of his times—real and fictional—and if asked about coincidence would probably have said that there's no such thing, even in real life. It's just that we don't have an author's-eye view of real life, so we call connections that we don't understand coincidences. That trust in mysterious connections, and the presumption that all good stories have a beginning, a middle and an end, would have been the only literary criticism he thought worth the effort.

Veteran readers of this column may be waiting for me to announce that I was driven to these reflections by a startling coincidence. In fact, I was. I use the word veteran advisedly. For those who came in when I did—March 1991, to be precise—will recall my describing an incident that took place in the week before Christmas last year. It concerned an encounter, in an hostelry I frequent, with a gentleman in military uniform. Not *an officer* and a gentleman, although he purported to be an officer. A colonel, in fact, in the New Zealand army. And this pseudo-officer caused considerable dissension among the assembled drinkers by announcing that he was off to make war in the Gulf. The announcement provoked a kind of mini-rehearsal for that war, on both sides of the bar and on top of the pool table, although afterwards it was not clear who had won. (Perhaps the people of Kurdistan experienced a similar confusion after the real war.)

Well, he's back! There I was, not a fortnight ago, nursing my beer in the same hostelry and thinking pacific thoughts, when I glanced up and noticed the pseudo-officer seated at the corner of the bar. In civilian clothes this time. It was not as welcome a sight as the glimpse of Micawber evidently was to Copperfield. On the whole, I would prefer to be bored by listening to Micawber drone on about money and debt (he couldn't tell me anything I haven't found by myself) than watch my favourite pub being destroyed. But one cannot look a coincidence, let alone a mysterious connection, in the mouth.

'How was Iraq?' I whispered. The pseudo-officer was pleased to be recognised. He mumbled something complimentary about my memory (how could I have forgotten our last meeting?), and then uttered some B-movie cliché like 'It was hell, son, but it's over.' I commented that he was out of uniform, which gave him an opportunity to announce his promotion. He is now a brigadier, and dons mufti for forays into demotic institutions like the pub, lest lowly civilians like myself be too intimidated to converse with him.

For a while, the pseudo-brigadier's lucidity dulled my awareness of his essential strangeness. This time there was no shouting and no slogans, and he managed to sustain a relatively coherent narrative of his military adventures. When I opined that the end of the war meant he should be able to relax for a while, he answered 'Oh, but we are keeping ourselves in readiness.' I should known there would be a punchline. 'For what?' I asked. He smiled and said, softly but knowingly, 'Yugoslavia'. My head reeled, and not because of the beer. Yugoslavia! Here is a man who has built his entire life around international crises, events one would think were completely beyond his control. Is he just a madman, magnifying his own importance by projecting himself on to the world stage? Or is this a case of very mysterious connections indeed?

I cannot say. But I offer this story by way of an answer to those who have written to me, asking whether the anecdotes recounted in this column are true. (Actually, these correspondents are more polite than that. They usually ask whether my stories are *completely* true.) I take no offence at the question, but neither do I intend to answer it. I merely note that you can't invent people like the pseudo-brigadier, any more than Copperfield could have explained his various meetings with Micawber.

Finally, a word of thanks to all those other correspondents who expressed their sympathy over my brush with the law in the great supermarket war. We won our case, eventually. But that is another story. ■

Ray Cassin is production editor of *Eureka Street*.

ESSAY

GERARD WINDSOR

The New Zealand traveller sketches the ruins of St Patrick's

IF ANY OBSERVERS WERE KEEN TO GAUGE something of the intellectual life and confidence of contemporary Catholicism, I would suggest they wire up a legion of flies for the walls in all churches on Trinity Sunday. Need I go on? A few disclaimers about what was taught in the seminary, and then a quick skip across to one of 'the other readings' or on to an unscheduled topic that's been pressing for some weeks. Unitarianism after all has been a redoubtable form of Christianity.

The Trinity Sunday experiment came to mind again when I read in the latest *Australasian Catholic Record* Patrick O'Farrell's swingeing article 'The Writing of Australian Catholic History 1980-90'. Historiography is O'Farrell's particular topic, but his wider argument is that Catholic—and Christian—intellectual life is both in the doldrums and devalued, and that the explanation is complex.

I can find no reason to disagree with this diagnosis, but such an apprehension cries out for further discussion. I would like to add a few highly personalised footnotes to the O'Farrell account. He makes a convincing empirical case for the collapse of Catholic historiography. To his more generalised charge I find myself imagining a line of defence. The thrust of Christian intellectual activity, it might go, has been changed, not taken away.

Well maybe, I go on, but what is the nature of that change? What are the new subjects, the new emphases? Dogmatic theology (unfortunate term), let's say, is out, and more pastorally oriented and relevant studies such as liberation and feminist theology are in. Are they as intellectually respectable, as, for example, the study of the consciousness of Christ? (But then is 'intellectually respectable' a valid term?) Are they perhaps soft options? But will any discussion ever get anywhere once that term is invoked? After all no one is going to own up to the practice of sheltered workshop theology.

Why should feminist and liberation theology be intellectually soft? It's an arduous enough agenda the practitioners have got. They must of course be judged by their practice, and in practice they suffer from one disguised but substantial disadvantage. Theirs are disciplines attached to a motherhood program, and this inevitably makes critical assessment harder, and shoddy, mediocre work less likely to be called to account. At least one outsider—let's call him a disinterested lay believer—has still to be convinced that these disciplines have got to the stage of being exciting new intellectual—not merely ideological—pursuits. If the Trinity is not at home in

the pulpit, the newer theological subjects only seem to make it as attenuated, secular platitudes.

The insider might quite fairly say that the outsider is ignorant of the powerhouse within the seminaries and theological academies. But for one thing it's the gospel actually being preached that really matters, and for another there are worrying signals that the outsider picks up. It seems clear, for example, that the church's formalised cerebral activity is currently working more to an obvious political agenda than in the past. Is anyone going to deny that in Australia in 1991 the ordination of women, say, as a subject for study, has an overt political dimension to it that, say, the procession of the Holy Spirit does not?

Again, wouldn't it be fair to say that there's a lot of defensive, back-foot theology at the moment? Any time up to 40 years ago theologians might have erred the other way: triumphalist comes to mind as a description, but confident might be kinder. But now there seems a fair proportion of guilt-driven, hand-in-the-dyke ad hocery at work.

The February 1991 issue for example of the newish journal *Pacifica: Australian Theological Studies*—whose existence might be itself evidence against the O'Farrell thesis—but whose contents might then support it—has one article arguing that Christian implication in the Holocaust 'requires a re-reading of Christian scriptures and a re-thinking of Christian theology', and another article self-explanatorily entitled 'Conquest and Dispossession: Justice, Joshua, and Land Rights'.

Heaven knows this sort of reworking is necessary—who for example can read Marina Warner's *Alone of All Her Sex* and not want a radical rethinking of the role of women and of Mary in the Gospel? But one can see the sins of the Vatican and the Croatian clergy of the 1930s and 1940s, and then of the missionaries of all Christian colonial powers and then of the misogynists of two millennia, sitting heavily on the shoulders of a great host of theologians.

The spectacle is one of theologians haring around plugging the line, not leading any charge. That may not prove intellectual stagnation, but nor does it suggest the athletic, wide-ranging, unencumbered play of the pure desire to understand.

In the last analysis we only really need theologians to enlighten us about the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ. Quite enough of a commission for any profession. In the same *Pacifica* John Honner demonstrates that some theologians still do offer this service and are not noticeably affected by any intellectual devaluation.

Yet in spite of his scholarly politeness he allows us to see that other theologians have indeed become set on a major intellectual abdication.

DISCUSSING THE EUCHARIST, Honner speaks of commentators who avoid 'direct ontological questions', who 'back away from giving any account of how this might be understood in terms of present reality', and of their having 'an implicit two-tier view of reality, similar to the scholastic view, but minus scholastic ontology.

'In the modern approach the appeal is made not to a metaphysics of being, but to the content of our faith. This explanation is more tautologous than it is apologetic: on the one hand we are left with what look like the physical specifications of bread and wine; on the other hand, we proclaim our faith that this is the body and blood of the Lord.'

A parroting maybe, but hardly an account, of the faith that is in us. One of Honner's subjects actually writes: 'Logically bread is bread. But it is a Hebrew who speaks. The bread is associated with an end that transcends it. Its empirical nature, which alone interested the Greek spirit, does not interest the spirit of the Israelite ... Ontology is here eschatology. The world is a vocation to being.'

This pretentious rhetoric smacks of gnostic smugness, philosophical vacuousness, gross racist stereotyping (what Jewish person needs friends like that?), and wholesale intellectual cop-out.

While on the topic ... what the lay believer wants is bread. We can do without this sort of gibber being lobbed at us.

A character in *Decline and Fall* remarks that lay interest in theology is the first sign of madness, and Waugh himself proved to be a weighty endorsement of the remark. So I'll retire from more directly theological discussion. With one final comment. I've recounted elsewhere how I was recently sizing up a newly installed statue in Dublin

If you can say nothing good—
shut up, or report
as did the curate on the egg.
To obey such maxims is,
of course, the death of
all reasonable
and creative criticism,
and the abandonment
of the field of thought
to loud extremists,
the incompetent
and the invincibly ignorant.

—PATRICK O'FARRELL,
THE AUSTRALASIAN CATHOLIC RECORD,
APRIL 1991. VOL LXVIII NO. 2

The devaluation of intellectual life within the church is a complex matter for explanation ... Happily (or unhappily) a description,with analytic undertones, is available in relation to English Anglicanism, where, it might be suggested, the process has gone further, but it is a trend which Catholicism follows.

—O'FARRELL, *IBID.*

of the poet Paddy Kavanagh, when a fellow observer, who claimed to have drunk with the poet, made the stunning observation: 'he was very deep—always clearing his throat'. The reminiscer hopped back into his car before I could see how much twinkle there was in his eye.

But I don't myself tend to be impressed by throat-clearing. It seems too symptomatic of a loss of nerve. And even John Honner seems to be afflicted by it. An earlier article of his in *Pacifica* in 1988, 'Not Meddling with Divinity: Theological Worldviews and Contemporary Physics', was a teaser: almost entirely prolegomena to something. And his 1991 'A New Ontology: Incarnation, Eucharist, Resurrection, and Physics', exciting in its boldness, is briefest and thinnest in its final section, where he comes to the implications of quantum physics for actual theological ideas.

ANY DEVALUATION OF INTELLECTUAL ACTIVITY is not an isolated ecclesiastical phenomenon. Theology, as a discipline practised almost exclusively in a pedagogical context, is subject to the fortunes of the humanities everywhere. Pressures for relevance, indigenisation and political correctness beset it as much as they do, say, history or literary studies. The sometimes exhilarating, sometimes giddying effect of postmodernist philosophy has been a further disincentive to dogmatism, but it has also tended to make thinkers wary of confident unambiguousness: showing your hand is not what the game is about.

Theology, always a child of its times, is also a victim of its times. So charges of intellectual softness against the church are generically the same accusations as ones about schools abandoning basics. But in the ecclesiastical case the charges seem more likely to be well-founded.

I repeat that I want to do little more than note various factors or experiences that lend credibility to the O'Farrell charge. The matter needs more sustained and less impressionistic discussion. But for the moment, if what I see corresponds with what O'Farrell sees, I also want to suggest some causes for that depressing landscape. Catholicism began to suffer a crisis of confidence in much traditional intellectual activity from the 1960s.

This era saw the start of a reaction against the actual and/or perceived sterility of scholasticism. Syllogisms, logic-chopping, angels on pins were not unfairly seen as the direct antithesis of the Gospel. Insofar as new philosophical structures were seen as necessary—frequently they weren't—there was a fairly transient affair with Christian personalism and existentialism; hardly a system to be ranked with scholasticism, and certainly never one to be accused of making a fetish of argument, analysis, the deployment and sifting of empirical data—the sorts of activities that historians, philosophers or scientists would consider constituted intellectual activity.

Patrick O'Farrell quotes the Anglican historian Edward Norman on the quality of candidates for the ministry. That could be an invidious line of argument, and, besides, it is a matter I am entirely ignorant about.

What surely can be said however is that the proportion of casualties among the clergy and religious orders must have had an effect on their intellectual vigour. In my own year of the Society of Jesus 23 novices entered, of whom three are still Jesuits. In the years surrounding mine, an attrition.rate of 80 to 85 per cent seems to have been the norm.

This is not to conclude that those who left—or those who stayed—were any more intelligent or sane than the other group, but it is fair to say that a lot of intellectual talent and energy which in another era could have been put to religious use was lost to the church. Further, the psychological impact on the faithful remnant of this experience of survival has not, as far as I know, been studied, but it would surely militate against intellectual confidence.

FURTHER, ALTHOUGH I CAN BE NO MORE THAN SPECULATIVE HERE I wonder about the intellectual effect of the greater ecumenical cooperation, particularly at the academic and seminary level. While there must have been enormous advantages from the blending of library and personnel resources and from exposure to different traditions, what kind of offspring is to be expected from the marriage of the Irish-derived politico-

practical tradition of local Catholicism with the overwhelmingly evangelical personality of the Australian Protestant churches? Very likely one with a heightened social conscience, but equally probably not a denizen of the lonely tower.

Theology aside, I have a constant sense of the Church as *amateur*. I don't share Patrick O'Farrell's misgivings about the hyphenated clergy and religious. I find comfort in taking communion or a sermon from someone who knows her quantum physics or his American poetry. As opposed to those who recruit the words or visions of secular achievers to bolster the gospel.

This is so often done in a gauche, inexpert, procrustean way. But no doubt it is preferable to complete obliviousness or a total withdrawal into an enclosed ecclesiastical world. The birth of *Eureka Street* must be a sign of real hope for renewed intellectual vigour, but the question that asks itself is why did not/do not more clergy and religious write for the already existing secular journals.

I am well aware, and unrepentant, that I am talking about the church in terms of the clergy. My feeling is that in terms of their proportion in the population as a whole, lay believers are badly under-represented among intellectuals and artists. I see no evidence of that being likely to change. As far as I can see, Catholic schools and higher educational institutions are not encouraging their students that way.

PERSONAL AND PIQUED AS THE EXPERIENCE MIGHT BE, I have not been unaware that I have been a writer-in-residence at Brisbane Boys Grammar School, have been one of a group of writers to visit Christchurch College in Perth, and have read twice and spoken on three other occasions to boys at Sydney Grammar School. But I have never been invited to read or talk about my own or anyone else's writing at a Catholic school. This is a curiously ironic experience as I am too often and too simplistically (for my taste) categorised as a Catholic writer.

I see nothing personal in this lack of interest: I very much doubt whether Peter Steele has been asked to read his poetry at Xavier or Noel Rowe at Woodlawn or Ron Blair to discuss *The Christian Brother* at CBC Lewisham. Could I call it a symptom of the fact that intellectual activity—as opposed to examination performance—is of no interest? Just as no transmission of the church's intellectual and cultural heritage (in addition to the perceived core of the Gospel) is being attempted.

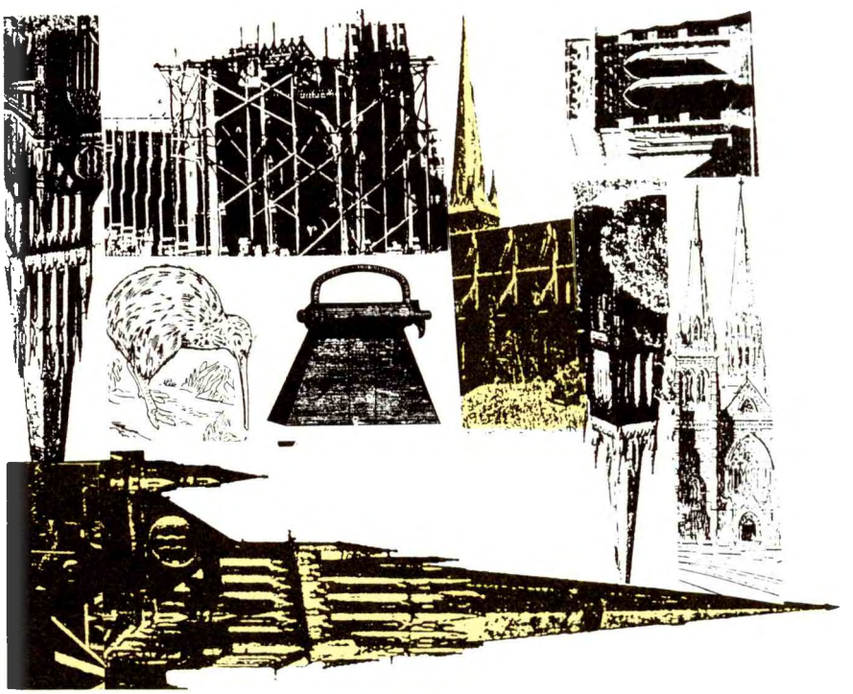
What Catholic schoolchild now, for example, would recognise the mutilated quotation that heads this article? (I'd back up to one third of my own school fellows to have come good ... well, at the end of their final school year.)

Whence cometh our salvation? Of course things had to change, of course a vast amount of revisionist work had, and still has, to be done. And I readily admit my ignorance of the names and often the existence of new varieties of formalised religious activities.

But any evidence I come across suggests strongly that the emphasis is on social and relational, not intellectual, development. Otherwise, it is the old test of 'by their fruits ... ' I look, and where are the books, articles, thinkers arising from the church—to say nothing of making that great leap and actually impinging on more mainstream Australian intellectual and artistic life?

A church whose very origins and heroic achievements lie in the practicalities of pioneering is particularly vulnerable to a tendency to downgrade the intellect and exalt the ordinary and mediocre ... particularly in a society where egalitarianism is venerated.

—O'FARRELL, *IBID.*



Gerard Windsor's most recent book, *Family Lore*, has just been reprinted as a Minerva paperback.

MORRIS WEST

Unholy alliances

BELOW: *'A man of parts', General Prince Anton Vasilevich Turkul. Turkul, a Soviet double agent, manipulated the Vatican ratlines and penetrated the German, Japanese, British, French and American intelligence services.*

Ratlines by Mark Aarons and John Loftus, William Heinemann Ltd, 1991. ISBN 0 434 82944 7 RRP $26.95

THE TITLE OF THIS BOOK is confusing. It embraces three separate concepts, and an over-obvious pun. Ratlines, in the old sailing ships, were small lines fastened between the shrouds of a ship to create ladder-like rungs. They were the last refuge of sailors from an overwhelming sea. During World War II the word was used as a generic term for evacuation networks used either by intelligence agents or airmen shot down over hostile territory.

In the context of this book the term refers specifically to networks set up by certain Vatican officials in collaboration with western intelligence agencies to evacuate Nazi war criminals from Europe and transport them to safety in South America and elsewhere. The pun is brutally simple—a lot of very obscene animals escaped the sinking ship of the thousand-year Reich over the Vatican ratlines.

The book itself is a bill of indictment, meticulously researched, carefully documented, soberly reasoned. The thrust of the indictment is precisely defined by the authors: 'This book is not an attack on the institution of the Roman Catholic Church. Rather, it is an analysis of a tiny group of Vatican officials who secretly collaborated with the West in the most corrupt and immoral spy operation of the Cold War ... We do not claim that the evidence is sufficient to convict, only enough to warrant a belief among reasonable people that crimes were committed.'

The counts of the indictment are similarly specific:

'Count One: Crimes against Peace. The Vatican is not guilty of supporting Hitler, but of hypocrisy, incompetence and stupidity in risking the lives of his opponents (the so-called Black Orchestra). The unintended result was the betrayal and execution of most Black Orchestra members whom the allies had judged, like the Jews, to be expendable to the war effort.

'Count Two: Obstruction of Justice. Instead of smuggling homeless Jews to Argentina, the ratlines smuggled Eichmann, Pavelic and Stangl among many others ... The ratlines were intentionally created to aid and abet the flight of fugitives from international justice ... The clandestine Nazi smuggling immorally misused the church's legitimate charitable organisations.

'Count Three: Receiving Stolen Goods. Agents of the Vatican were knowingly receiving passports which were stolen or fraudulently obtained from the Red Cross.

'Count Four: Abuse of Diplomatic Privileges. The evidence shows a clear pattern of violation of diplomatic norms by the Vatican. Fugitive war criminals were escorted in vehicles with diplomatic plates, protecting them from arrest. Senior Vatican diplomats intervened with the allies to obtain official travel documents for Bishop Hudal, Father Draganovic, Bishop Bucko and others enabling them to organise the ratlines under cover of official religious duties ... Vatican extra-territorial facilities were used to house transient war criminals.

The shadow of these accusations still hangs heavy and dark over the 20th century church. It still contributes to the unease and dissension within it and to the suspicion with which it is regarded by those outside.

So the next questions are vitally important: what are the sources, and what is the authority of the evidence

adduced in support of these charges?

First, the sheer volume of their end notes is impressive. It runs to 72 pages. The archive material comes from public records in London, from the United States national archives in Washington, the Italian archives in Rome. The archives of the Vatican remain closed to all enquiry while informants within it had to remain unnamed. There are many excerpts from tape-recorded interviews of official interrogation sessions. There is an 18-page bibliography of material already published by other authors. By all the normal criteria the authors have established themselves as honest and thorough researchers with a proper respect for the rules of evidence.

I, for one, agree that the evidence is sufficient 'to warrant a belief among reasonable people that crimes were committed.' It is somewhat more difficult to explain the extraordinarily diverse motives which prompted people either to participate in the criminal process, to condone it by silence, or justify it by the devious logic of expediency.

IT WAS AN OPEN SECRET in the last period of the war that Pope Pius XII hoped to establish in Central Europe a *cordon sanitaire* of Catholic states to act as a buffer between the victorious allies and the Soviet Union. His closest advisors in this matter were his Undersecretary of State, Monsignor Giovanni Montini, who later became Pope Paul VI, and Alcide de Gasperi, who became the leader of the Christian Democrats in Italy.

This policy provoked a sharp and brutal reaction from the Soviets and the satellite states under their control. Prominent clergy like Mindszenty in Hungary were arrested, tried and imprisoned on trumped-up charges, religious institutions were sacked and pillaged, priests were arrested or deported.

Meantime, Montini worked to organise the Vatican Information Service, whose predicated task was to trace missing persons, refugees and prisoners of war. He was also charged 'to supervise Vatican efforts for the resettlement of the millions of refugees and displaced persons who swarmed into Western Germany, Austria, Italy and France after the war.' The two major programs in this work were Caritas International and the Pontifical Aid Commission. It was inside the framework of these two organisations that the Ratlines were established. It was by their funds and their contacts that the ratlines were supported.

The 'how' of it was essentially simple. The Vatican search and relief organisations sought permission for selected priests to visit civilian and prisoner of war camps, 'to offer spiritual and material assistance to their unfortunate inmates'. However, not all the inmates were innocent and not all the priests were holy men prompted by pure Christian charity.

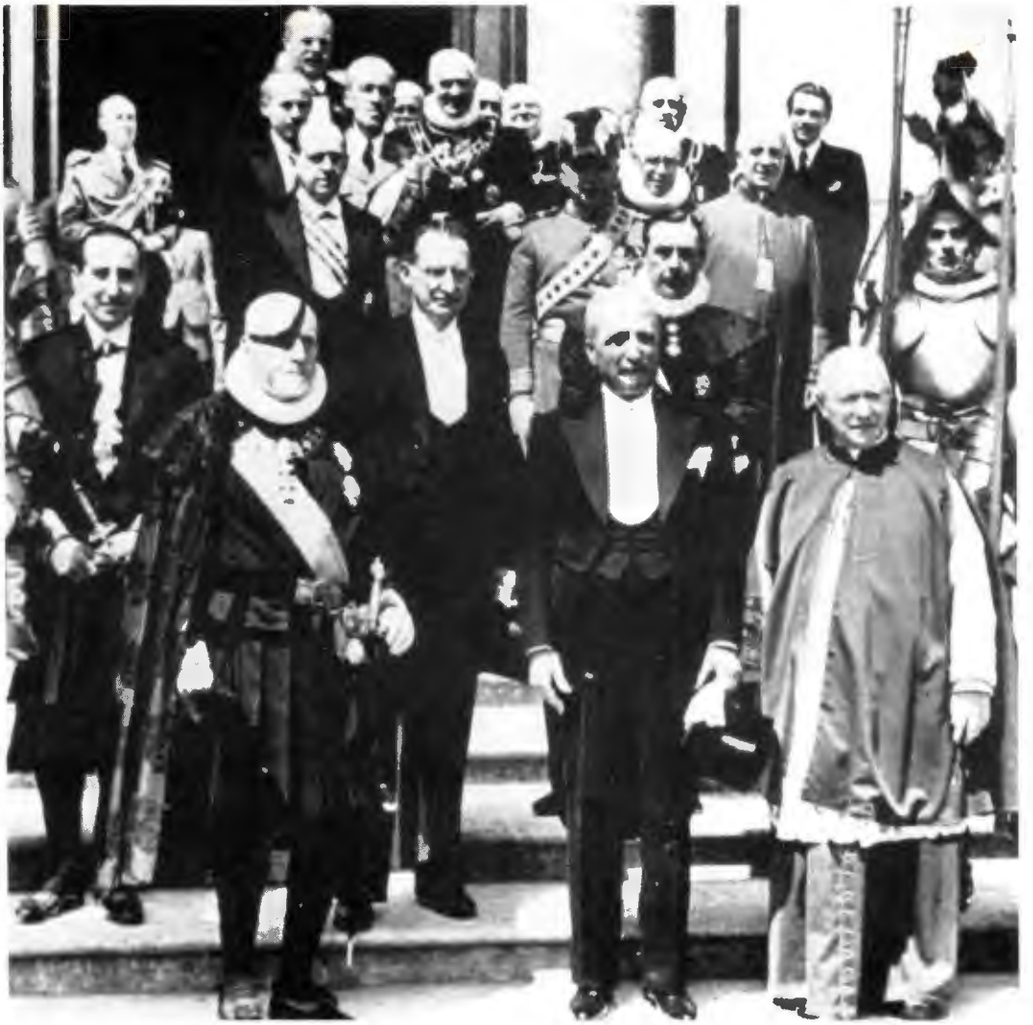
Archbishop Alois Hudal was rector of Santa Maria dell' Anima, one of three seminaries for German priests in Rome. Hudal had been professor of Old Testament studies at Graz in Austria. In the early 1930's he travelled widely through Germany and Italy preaching support for the National Socialist movement and Adolf Hitler. In 1933 he welcomed the German diplomatic corps at the seminary in Rome and announced in his speech that '... all German Catholics living abroad welcome the new German Reich, whose philosophies accord both with Christian and national values'. At the same time he served as Consultor to the Holy Office. So, clearly his Nazi sentiments were no bar to his advancement under Pius XII.

It was Hudal who managed the escape of Franz Stangl, the commandant of the Treblinka extermination camp, of Gustav Wagner, commandant of Sobibor, of Alois Brunner, a senior official in the Jewish extermination program — and very possibly of Eichmann himself. Hudal made open confession of his activities in his own book *Roman Diary*.

'The allies war against Germany was not a crusade, but the rivalry of economic complexes for which they had been fighting ... all these experiences were the reason why I felt duty bound after 1945 to devote my whole charitable work mainly to former National Socialists and Fascists, especially so-called 'war criminals'.

At first blush, the naivete of the man is unbelievable. Then you realise that it is not naivete, it is the total blindness of a man indulging his vanity by meddling in great affairs without any norm of moral judgement.

Current events in Yugoslavia, the



ABOVE: *Italy's postwar president Enrico de Nola (centre) and Prime Minister Alcide de Gasperi (right) after an audience with Pius XII in 1946. De Gasperi worked closely with Monsignor Giovanni Montini, later Pope Paul VI, on anticommunist plans, and his government was heavily implicated in the Vatican ratlines.*

distress and anxiety of ethnic communities in Australia, recall the astonishing case of Ante Pavelic, the dictator of 'independent Croatia', who had instigated the slaughter of half a million Serbs, Jews and Gypsies, and the forcible 'conversion' to Catholicism of tens of thousands of Serbs during the last years of the war.

Pavelic had been received by Pius XII at the Vatican in 1941 while the atrocities were in progress. In 1946 he fled from Croatia into Austria, where he was protected for at least two months by British Intelligence. Finally he came to Rome where, according to US archive information, he lived '... on church property under the protection of the Vatican at Via Giacoma Venezian, No. 17C, second floor ... about 12 other men are in the building. They are all Ustasha and make up Pavelic's bodyguard. When Pavelic goes out he uses a car with a Vatican (SCV) number-plate.'

The end of the story? Pavelic escaped to Argentina. The man who allegedly made the final arrangements was a Croation priest. His real identity, the authors claim, is Father Josip Bujanovic, 'another wanted war criminal, living peacefully in Australia.'

And so the sad tale goes on, a catalogue of intrigues that make James Bond look like an amateur, a list of exotic names and places from all over Europe, a farrago of muddled moralities and dirty diplomacy and vendettas without end.

The authors have made their case and built it solidly and well. Their book deserves a careful reading and a time of reflection afterwards. What it tells us, sadly, is that justice will never be done until judgment day, that godly men can fall easy victims to the illusions of wisdom and the arrogance of power, and that those who are charged to dispense truth and justice and those who conspire to pervert it, live sometimes in the same skin.

Morris West is Australia's most celebrated Vatican watcher.

Plural Jackets

'That the dreams which the gods bring
in their plural jackets are to show us
our ends cannot be disputed.'

—Peter Porter

Something is making mischief—
Beshrew me if I know,
Trace as I may the thing around,
Whether to stop or go.

Lost in the high sierras
Or slogging towards the Poles,
My mind will sieve no diamond out,
My heart is full of holes.

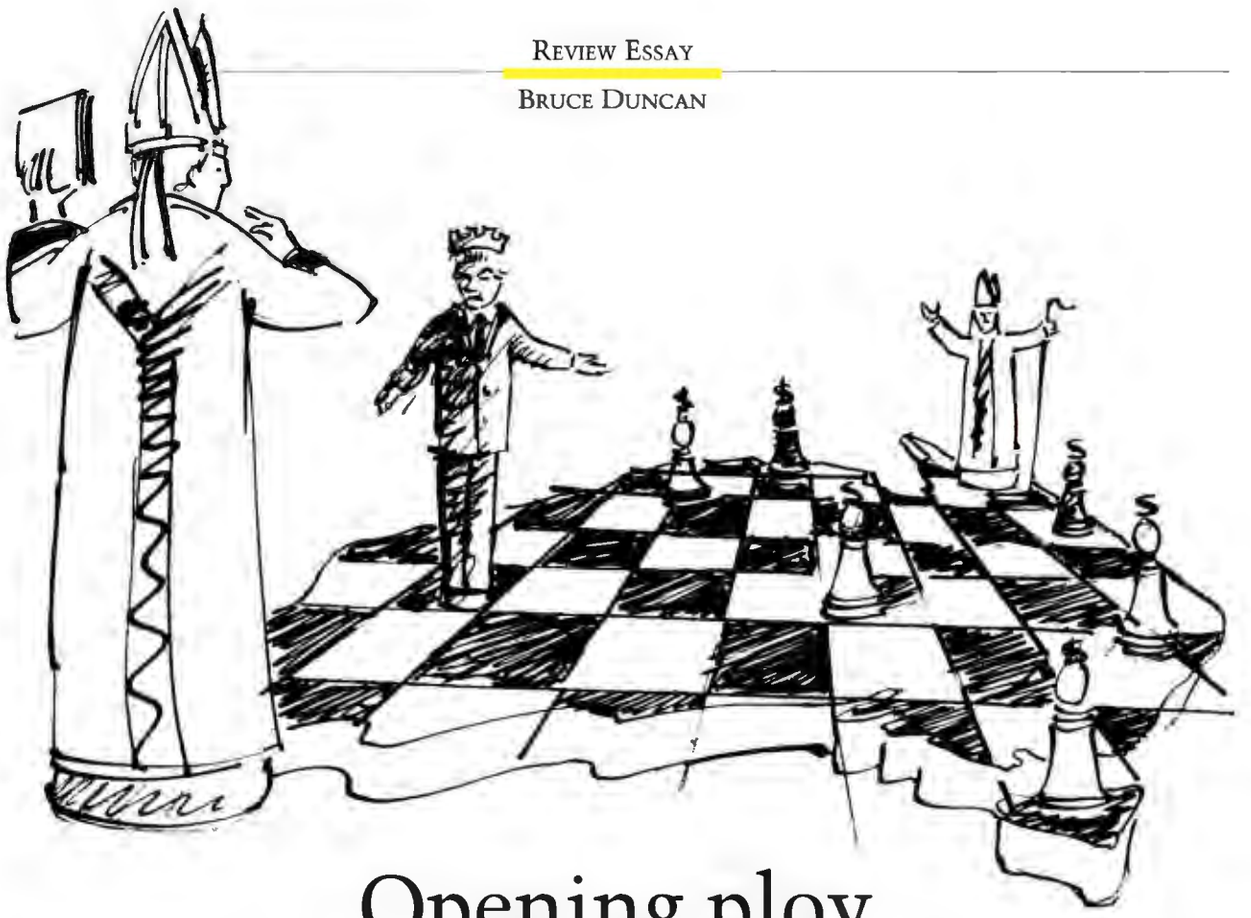
I tried the dark, I tried the day,
Invoked the bat and lynx:
The sandstorms fell away to show
That basilisk, the Sphinx.

It could not hurt to pray, I thought,
it could not hurt to joke:
The tall trees of the mind and heart
Came down and turned to coke.

Now as I watch the jackets flaunt
Their evens and their odds,
I wonder how to style their ghosts—
Just dreams, or unjust gods.

Peter Steele

BRUCE DUNCAN



Opening ploy

The Catholic bishops' wealth inquiry: homily or prophecy?

ANY ATTEMPT TO EXAMINE the distribution of wealth in Australia is likely to inflame a few ulcers, and the Australian Catholic bishops' draft *Common Wealth and Common Good* in January has been no exception. Not unexpectedly, commentators are divided on whether it offers pious homilies or telling prophecies.

Some, like *The Age* editorial, welcomed the draft warmly, while others were quite critical. Professor Lauchlan Chipman of Wollongong University accused it of 'presenting a Marxist, liberation theology principle' (*The Australian*, April 30). The economic commentator, P.P. McGuiness, thought much of it a 'load of codswallop' without adequate social analysis. He did not question that the distribution of wealth was unjust, but wanted to know what could be done about it, and especially how greater equity could be reconciled with wealth creation. (*The Australian*, January 31).

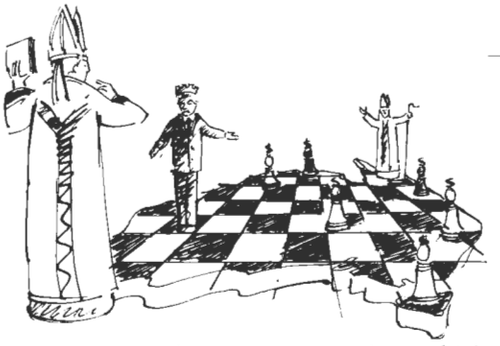
C. De Rougement said the bishops had strayed outside their area of competence and wasted '$500,000 on an ill-conceived excursion into development economics' (*News Weekly*, March 2). Bishop Murray, who replaced the late Archbishop Foley as chairman of the Bishops' committee for justice, development and peace, replied in May that the direct cost till the end of 1990 had been only $51,535. In my view, this is a remarkably, even unreasonably, low figure for such an extensive and important inquiry.

Effects of delays

The wealth inquiry has fallen well behind its initial schedule. As originally planned, there were to be three rounds of discussion, with the first draft ready by the end of 1988, and the final version published by late 1989. However, the response was far greater than expected and Dr Michael Costigan's tiny secretariat under Bishop William Brennan as chairman of the process management committee was overwhelmed with more than 700 written submissions, besides the public hearings conducted in various cities. This heavy workload, the nature of the consultative process itself and understaffing of the secretariat all delayed its response, and the draft was not published till early this year. The fuller back-up document, which was to be published with it, did not appear till May.

The delay in publishing this collection of preparatory material, *Towards Common Wealth and Common Good*, undoubtedly discouraged more academic commentators from contributing to the public debate. The delays resulted in some frustration among earlier participants and a loss of momentum in the inquiry. Despite this, more than 500 further responses to the draft have been received by the secretariat.

The decision by the bishops to request a relatively speedy (end of May) return of responses to the draft meant again that there was little time for significant debate among the academics and professional groups who possess many of the skills needed to translate ethical principles into suggestions for policy. This has been a



major disappointment and one which cannot be remedied without significantly extending the time allowed for public debate. To my mind this would not be a disaster. After all, the US bishops took seven years and four drafts for their document.

In addition, the responses to the inquiry have almost entirely been private submissions. There has not been the debate needed to generate a consensus and mobilise a constituency to press for policy changes. The danger here is that, despite the intentions of the bishops, the process will revert to a 'top-down' or centralised model brought on by the need to meet a deadline for the final document. Yet gone are the days when bishops could automatically win a constituency simply because they were bishops.

Public debate

It need hardly be said that there is voluminous public debate on issues surrounding the distribution of wealth in Australia, but there seems little clear connection between much of this and the bishops' inquiry. For instance, I am not aware of articles in the various professional journals debating the bishops' draft. What are economists, accountants, lawyers, unionists etc. making of it? Are there fresh attempts to identify how value questions inform and underlie economics, and what difference would the values supported by the bishops make to present arrangements? There has been some significant television follow-up, as in SBS's *Big People, Little People*, but not nearly enough.

The wealth inquiry deserves to be well done. This means not only giving opinions or sharing experiences, but coming to grips in a more systematic way with the issues of distribution. All involved are going through an education process on economic issues, not least the bishops themselves and their collaborators. We are confronted here with the sins of the more recent past, for socio-economic questions have been grossly neglected by most Australian Catholics and theologians, and it will take time to remedy this. Nevertheless, the US church has shown an example of what can be done.

The substance of the draft

The method of the present draft follows a 'see-judge-act' approach, beginning with a summary of the empirical data, then turning to scripture and church teaching, and finally listing 38 suggestions for action. Despite the initial appeal of such a direct application of the 'see-judge-act' approach, the three sections emerged curiously disjointed. The 38 suggestions are a mixture of disparate proposals not clearly related to the initial descriptive chapters, and vary from a number of 'motherhood' statements to others advocating major economic changes. They do not flow out of any clear presentation of how the Australian economy works. Nor do they offer a coherent proposal for the better distribution of wealth.

Christians saw their duties through an ethic of alms-giving, for it was inconceivable until recent times that poverty could be eliminated. Even Leo XIII did not escape the hierarchical assumptions of society, and remained basically within an ethic of benevolence

I wonder if it would not be better to follow the US bishops' methodology, of beginning with a clear statement of moral principles, followed by analysis and arguing to policy conclusions.

The Australian bishops welcomed debate on their draft. Indeed, they had adapted the US bishops' model of a highly participatory and open consultation. They claimed a right to speak on social issues as part of their mission, but not in an authoritarian fashion. Hence, they distinguished between statements of principle 'where teaching authority is invoked' and 'contingent judgements' where differences were possible; if Catholics disagreed, 'they have no reason to feel that ... they are in any sense failing in loyalty to their bishops' (p.10).

But here the draft appears to concede too much. It might help to rephrase the scope for different views on the lines adopted by the US bishops, who after first identifying the moral principles governing their inquiry, attempted to demonstrate how these principles bore on concrete situations, through the mediation of empirical and theoretical analysis.

The closer the US bishops came to concrete proposals, the more they said that their conclusions were tentative and open to debate. Yet they meant these conclusions to be taken seriously, not so much because of their religious authority but because of the intrinsic force of the arguments advanced. It was up to critics to offer better arguments.

Scripture: a 'radical' reading?

I also have some questions about the scripture and church teaching sections. The draft argues that the 'Gospels show that [Jesus] lived and preached a radical relinquishing of wealth and possessions' (p.67). It quotes Luke adding to Matthew's 'description of radical discipleship': 'Whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple (Luke 14)'.

As these and other texts are presented, readers might think that the church required them to interpret the texts literally and give away all their possessions to the poor. The draft does not reflect the dialectical tension between these texts and others which were more tolerant of wealth, where helping the poor did not necessarily mean impoverishment of the rich. The church has traditionally understood this 'radical' teaching as a counsel of

perfection not normally required of the ordinary Christian.

The social teaching of the church

This chapter could be more candid about the difficulties and failures of the church in the past, and the problems these created for trying to develop an ethic of redistribution. For instance: throughout the patristic and medieval periods, Christians saw their duties through an ethic of almsgiving to the poor, for it was inconceivable till recent times that poverty could be eliminated. Even Leo XIII did not escape the medieval and hierarchical assumptions about society, and remained basically within an ethic of benevolence. The draft is too brief on all this. Rather than a vague summary of the key social documents, the focus should be more clearly on the distribution of wealth.

The draft then identifies some key moral principles, notably concern for the dignity of the person, the common good, solidarity, the preferential option for the poor and stewardship over creation. In my view this statement of principles needs to be less cryptic. For instance, it says 'it follows that fundamental human rights have priority over any social, political or economic system' (p.78). It is not clear to me what this means. The 'common good' is not clearly defined, nor are the difficulties in using the term resolved.

Perhaps one of the key difficulties with the draft emerges in its rather dramatic statements: 'One of the consequences of the limits placed by social morality on the right to own and use property is that no one has the right to accumulate a surplus of material goods while others lack the necessities of life' (p.78). Yet the draft does not consider how this surplus might best be used, for example, in immediate relief of the poor as against longer term investment to provide jobs. What is to constitute a surplus? What are the moral obligations to someone in one's own community as against another far away? Such questions need to be considered.

The discussion of capital and labour also needs refinement. What is meant by the terms? The draft needs to demonstrate how it understands the function of the profit motive in a capitalist economy, and the role of continual capital formation. No doubt the Pope's latest encyclical, *Centesimus Annus*, will help here, though it basically summarises the standard Catholic textbooks on economic and business ethics. The draft rightly denounces as 'completely unacceptable' the inequality within and between nations (p.83), but it then questions 'whether increases in material output will satisfy the demands of justice either globally or within our own society' (p.85). Certainly a global answer cannot lie simply in redistribution. Yet the draft evades a frank recognition of the need for increased production for all people to live a decent life.

There is voluminous public debate on issues surrounding the distribution of wealth in Australia but there seems little connection between much of this and the bishops' inquiry ... what are the economists, accountants, lawyers, unionists etc. making of it?

It is too simple for the draft to say that 'Catholic social teaching has consistently opposed the concentration of ownership and control of the means of production in the hands of those who invest money, while those who invest labour and skill are excluded' (p.79). The church had little to say on these precise questions before Leo, and even he assumed in his early days that little could be done but to urge benevolence by the rich and patience for the poor.

The quote from Albert Nolan OP

demanding 'the taking of sides in the structural conflict between the oppressor and the oppressed' (p.82) assumes a conflictual interpretation of social reality which categorises people into oppressor or oppressed. This may have been appropriate for South Africa or elsewhere, but it seems exotic in our Australian context. Nolan's statement assumes a startling clarity in moral issues and an obligatory Christian response; this would be too forced for Australia where the issues do not usually present themselves so clearly.

The wealth inquiry has signalled a major step towards greater participation from within the Catholic community; the tone is good and it encourages debate. Yet despite the solid efforts of Dr Michael Costigan and his team, substantial problems emerge in the draft. In my view, a further draft for comment and debate would have helped clarify key issues and generate a wider consensus. However, the bishops have decided to press on to a final text for next year. Meanwhile they have asked for a professional evaluation of the whole process, and begun to assess the submissions before rewriting begins. Better than either homilies or prophecies would be a perhaps modest, but insightful contribution which can help focus efforts for continued social reform.

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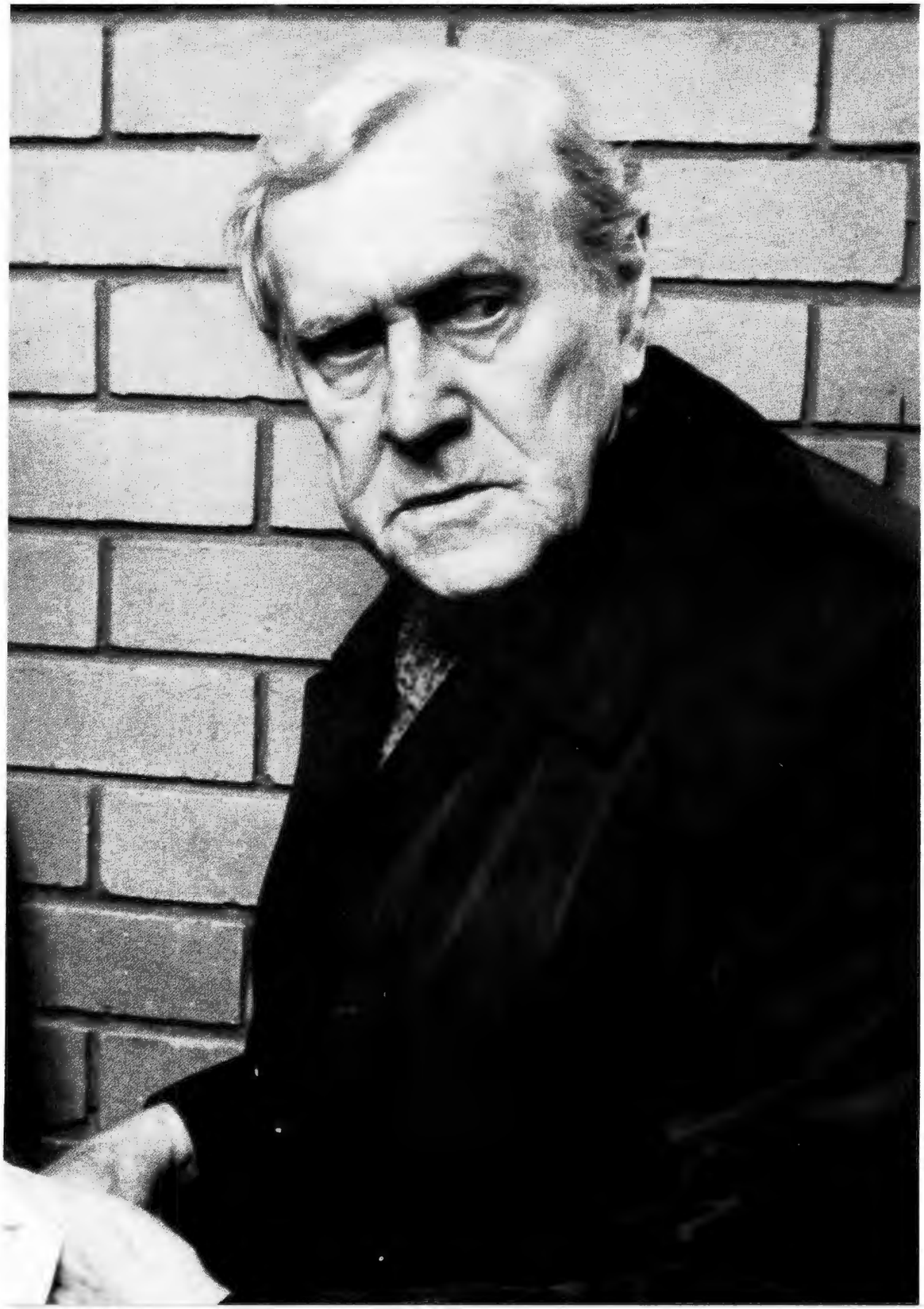
MICHAEL MCGIRR

Life of a thousand deaths

Photo: courtesy of *The Age*



Patrick White, A Life, by David Marr. Random House, Australia, 1991. ISBN 0 09 182585 7 RRP $49.95

BUT OLD PATRICK WHITE did die at last. It was Sunday a year ago, and next morning his name and photograph were on the front page of *The Australian.* The tabloids, however, had something on him around p.35, the anonymous 'Jackaroo who won a Nobel'. It goes to show. *The Age*'s headline called it the 'end of an era'. For them, he was 'part of the mind of the country'. In fact, as White was at times acutely aware, by the time of his death his writing had won a place in the mind of relatively few Australians. Australia, on the other hand, obsessed him.

There is an irony in the fact that David Marr's biography of Patrick White has taken off more rapidly than any of White's novels. The first printing of 15,000 copies cleared the publisher's warehouse in seven days. At 50 bucks a throw, that's not bad going. We can delight in this perhaps, because Patrick White himself liked literary biographies. He said of Tolstoy 'I can read endlessly about that old abomination.' By the time of the final permanent move of his life, from Castle Hill to Centennial Park, he was no longer able to read James Joyce but still loved reading about him.

Patrick White: a Life will doubtless occasion similiar remarks to those White made about Tolstoy and Joyce. It shares with its subject an insatiable taste for gossip. This is not at all to demean the book; it doesn't stumble

under its burden of detail. Marr, like White, has an ability to create powerful dramatic moments from unpromising ingredients. Marr observes White in his most typical social environment, the dinner table, and recreates the raw tension of those occasions, tension which might only dissipate when a successful main course was finally produced. He observes White circling art galleries in Sydney in search of 'raw creative ideas'. Upon his arrival 'dealers looked up with a mix of alarm and excitement'.

Most striking, Marr dramatises the time when White and Lascaris are ready to break camp from Dogwoods in Castle Hill. A pyre is lit. Unpublished journals are thrown on. Letters are also burnt. Incomplete novels are burnt. Unstaged plays are burnt. It is a biographer's vision of hell, and Marr lets us wince. In the scene we are made to touch the pain of shedding, which was time and again White's lot for the sake of his art. He shed countries, paintings, houses and, excruciatingly, he shed friendships. Much of what he left behind was what had once brought him inspiration and hope. His was a life of a thousand deaths.

Marr's biography will discomfort those who, having given up on White's fiction as a 'bad job', put him down as an old abomination more fun to read about than to read. Much of White's life, especially its most intense passages, was lived on paper. At times, Marr withholds his dramatic presence and leaves the stage to White. We see the Snowy Mountains, in which he worked as a jackaroo, through the prose of *The Twyborn Affair*. We confront his awakening sexuality and sensitivity to landscape through the prose of his self-portrait, *Flaws in the Glass*.

Above all, there are White's letters. Over a period of six years, Marr ran 2500 of White's letters to ground, an achievement accentuated by the fact that many of these letters had survived for years in hiding from White's injunctions that they too should join the pyre. Marr stands back for whole chapters and leaves us with some of these letters. They provide our most intimate moments with Patrick White in this biography.

Leaving us alone with bundles of letters is one of the ways in which David Marr gives us the joy of discovery. He lets us fall over a postcard that White's mother wrote about her son's lover: 'We have all taken Manoly to our hearts.' At another level, Marr's technique signals that there are places into which no biographer of Patrick White can take you; White chooses what he will disclose. There is no way, for Marr or anyone else, into the watertight privacy of White's creative imagination. White didn't talk much about his work in progress. We never observe him at his desk. We observe symptoms of his 'disease of writing': the hours he worked, the first two drafts done in longhand and his rages at Manoly Lascaris, but we never see him actually engaged with the raw material of his ideas and images. Even Lascaris, his partner of fifty years, only ever saw completed work. 'It may be trash,' White wrote to his publisher about a projected novel, 'I don't want to talk about it in case it is ... with me there is always the chance of an abortion.'

White wanted to be seen whole. This is true of his work. It is true of the details of his living. The signature with which he signed the book at King's College, Cambridge in 1932 was already 'fully formed'. As was his typing style. They never changed. He was born whole as a homosexual: 'I never went through the agonies of choosing between this or that sexual way of life'. Likewise, at Christmas 1951 White describes an experience of slipping in the mud and surrendering whole to God, surrendering, like Jacob, to a 'daily wrestling match with an opponent whose limbs never become material.' The wrestling match was fought out on paper over the next forty years. It was the reason White resumed writing in 1951 and the driving force behind his art from there on.

David Marr portrays profound ironies in the character of White. On the one hand is a gossip with the 'rag bag mind'. He was encouraged at a key moment in 1936, by the painter Roy De Maistre, to forsake naturalism and develop 'the fragmentation by which I convey reality.' On the other hand, Marr shows us the integrity of White's fiction. After his 'conversion' in 1951 White's complex novels came to serve visions of stark simplicity. For example, a work that had until then been dragging itself along under the fatalistic title of *A Life Sentence on Earth* was reborn as *The Tree of Man*.

The Tree of Man ends in a vision of a gob of spit which happens to be God. All White's subsequent fiction likewise comes in to land on a simple, brilliant, inadequate image of God's presence: a violent death occasions a defiant affirmation of life, a 'simple' man dances a mandala of forgiveness, an artist finally paints 'a long-standing secret relationship' as 'the otherwise unnameable indigo', a bird's nest rests on an altar, a man writes to his mother on the fly-leaf of a prayer book that he has become a daughter and he/she is accepted whole.

Marr dramatises the time when White and Lascaris are ready to break camp from Dogwoods in Castle Hill. A pyre is lit. Unpublished journals are thrown on. Letters are also burnt. Incomplete novels are burnt. Unstaged plays are burnt. It is a biographer's vision of hell.

At one point David Marr observes White at the hands of another portrait maker, the artist Brett Whiteley. White produced for Whiteley lists of his loves and hates. Both loves and hates were intensely felt. But the hates are petty. They include the Easter Show, motels and school prefects who don't grow up. The loves are expansive: silence, sex, honesty, dreams and faces.

Both pettiness and expansiveness characterise White's response to landscape and environment. The expanse of Voss' terrain is held over against the interior of Laura Trevelyan's drawing room. *The Tree of Man* is an epic of flood, fire and war. But the same location, a fictional version of Castle Hill called Durilgai or Sarsaparilla, elsewhere gives us such shrines of mediocrity as the Brighta Bicycle Factory and Allwright's grocery store.

At times White's fiction expands right over the environment onto which he was grafted at the time of writing: this is the case with the outer subur-

bia of *Riders in the Chariot* and the inner Sydney of *The Vivisector*. At other times he is intimidated by the small particulars of his environment. Two of the three works he came to cherish, *The Aunt's Story* and *The Solid Mandala*, were produced in periods of physical relocation. Such was White's sensitivity to place that he was never sure he would be able to write again in a new one. So these works were literally milestones.

Pettiness and expansiveness also characterise White's God. A gob of spit 'glistening intensely and personally on the ground' is a confronting and outrageous God. It is also the desperate faith of a chronic asthmatic who had known times of hunger in which people would 'eat pap'. The crucifixion of Himmelfarb at the end of *Riders in the Chariot* grew on White's exploration of Jewish mysticism. It also grew from the experience of being abused by a taxi driver and, perhaps, by critics.

Hurtle Duffield finally paints perfect 'vertiginous blue' at the end of *The Vivisector*. It's the colour of God but also of White's own eyes and of a scroll above the altar of a church in Bong Bong he encountered as a child. The words of that scroll, 'God is love', appear above the altar of a primitive chapel discovered on the fringe of civilisation in the dying moments of *A Fringe of Leaves*. Those words had by then stuck with White for 50 years.

There was much that he shed but little he forgot.

MARR'S BOOK IS just as much a biography of Manoly Lascaris, whose benign presence adds light and warmth to its darker passages. At times we feel, as White felt of those committed to God, that Lascaris must have chosen 'marriage with the most demanding spouse of all'. His role seems to have been that of the car driver, the one who tried to sell their produce, the one who was left to entertain visiting clergy and the one who made small talk while White worked in the kitchen. But in some respects the pair were two sides of one faith. Lascaris remained within the straits of Greek Orthodoxy while White roamed the wide oceans and plundered icons from a variety of religions. More poignantly, Marr recounts that the pilgrim White 'sought illumination not forgiveness'. Lascaris, on the other hand, believed 'He has a genius ... If he needs to rage, I am there and he knows I will forgive him. It is very painful, but I do forgive him.'

White's self-portrait owns a 'flawed' personality. But in the company of Lascaris he is seen whole. Their marriage is the image of 'grace' on which his life story lands. Strangely enough, their marriage lasted. So, for a discriminating band of readers, does White. Marr's rich and subtle biography draws a very fine line indeed between the artist and his art.

The novels are White's private space. In that narrow expanse, you will find him still, leading a life of his own.

Patrick White and Manoly Lascaris: 'A couple of old men on the terrace at Martin Road' (photograph by Max Dupain)

God in the bunya-bunya pine

An interview with David Marr

Michael McGirr: *I'd like to ask about what you discovered of Patrick White's religious sensibilities when you were writing his biography.*

David Marr: I'd love to talk about that because nobody ever asks me about it.

In your biography, there's an occasion on which White falls over one day and finds himself cursing the God he didn't believe in. There seems to be something born there. But where did that come from?

I think that the potentiality for that sort of experience was there from very early on. The clues to it are things like his time as a jackaroo when he was about 18. There was a ride on which he got lost and then found himself. He discovered on that trip on his horse through the Monaro an extraordinarily strong emotional, spiritual response to the landscape. This is just a clue of what's to come, which is the kind of refreshment and reassurance that he took from nature, from landscape. It was a sign of a spiritual hunger in him that was waiting to be filled.

These experiences, in a muffled form, had been with him all his life. As a child he had a notion of God living at the top of a bunya-bunya pine, which I think is one of the most touching and beautiful things in his life. The bunya-bunya pine died recently. It had been kept alive in the middle of a hideous hospital wing which had been thrown up over his wild garden ... There was also his absorption in the landscape of the little boarding school where he was at Moss Vale. Those are all clues. During the war, his response to the desert landscape was powerful as well.

What had happened I think by the time he got to Dogwoods in Castle Hill was that he had given up writing. He had failed to get on with the new novel. He'd begun it and had stopped. He was in a depth of self-contempt and self-loathing—the greatest depth of his life. And this time that experience of ecstatic communion with the world, in the most literal way, fulfilled such a profound need in him that he now took a very formal view of it.

That formal view was to call it conversion and religion. From that moment he believed that a principal function of his work was to discover God. Each of his works from that

point on is religious. Fundamentally religious. Not in all of its purposes, but in its principal purposes.

He thought Christian goodness was best applied in a homeopathic way, in small doses. He wrote A Cheery Soul *as a raging attack on that ferocious kind of Christian charity which he saw as destructive.*

There is a letter to Maie Casey where he talks about a trip to Lake Tahoe with Sidney Nolan. Nolan was talking about not knowing where to go next and White says, 'Well of course, we must go where God leads us, although one can't go around saying such things'.

For Hurtle Duffield in *The Vivisector* the pursuit of truth as an artist was a religious quest and, of course, he died painting the indigo blue of God. Blue is the colour of God in all of White's work.

Over the years his sense of that God became less and less formal, more and more eclectic, but it remained crucial till the very end. We were talking a little about religion in the last days of his life.

He said to me then, as he had written at that time, that he would now discover whether the Presence which he had felt—and it was always a capital P—had lain behind the world was indeed there.

That death would solve the riddle one way or the other.

Also it strikes me, and I think you get close to this in the biography, that religion, landscape and sexuality are closely intertwined.

It seems to me that one of the hungers most human beings have is a hunger for ecstatic experience. For Patrick White there was an ecstatic experience in nature. Not with a capital 'N'. For him it was principally landscape. And the memory of landscape more than actually to be in it.

For Patrick, I think, the ecstatic experience of glimpsing that Presence, that God—and it was always only a glimpse—is a kind of wonderfully pure sexual experience.

And when you read the fictional versions of what happened to him in Castle Hill, which are in Stan Parker's experience in *The Tree of Man*, they are written in terms of superb sexual experiences, and they arise out of that landscape. A landscape, by the way, of no particular beauty.

But that communion with landscape is a sexual connection. And the sexual frustrations of the young Jackaroo were, I believe, what opened him to the beauty of the country.

Similarly when he was at Walgett. He talks in *Flaws in the Glass* of its being a landscape 'suited to his needs at the time'. I think that was, again, definitely a sexual response.

He was, as far as one can tell, always a very sensual man—you can tell that from the writing—and he was also highly charged sexually. But at the same time he had almost an equivalent sense of disgust and waste about sex.

But the pursuit of truth and of that God was for him a more wonderful, a more beautiful pursuit.

What about White's politics and his religion? It always strikes me as odd that his belief never manifested itself in any view of the way the world might be, in any kind of moral code, until perhaps, very late, when he discovered writers such as Thomas Merton.

I come at the same thing from a slightly different angle. In Protestant rhetoric you can certainly say that what happened to him lying in the mud on his back at Castle Hill was a conversion. But it was not a self-improving conversion. It was a self-accepting experience. It allowed him to look at himself again and therefore, I argue, it allowed him to write again.

He didn't believe his religious insight should inform every aspect of his life.

There's a wonderful comment he makes somewhere that he thought Christian goodness was best applied in a homeopathic way, in small doses. He wrote *A Cheery Soul* as a raging attack on that ferocious kind of Christian charity which he saw as destructive in that particular form.

So he didn't see that religion as such should inform politics. What he came to with politics, I think, was fundamentally a hatred of greed. His politics were the politics of an old man, perhaps a prophet, who hated the destruction caused by greed. Greed was destroying many of the things which the religious Patrick White treasured most, such as the wild landscape of Centennial Park and, ultimately, the whole existence of the world.

His attack on the churches was that they stripped God of his mystery and power, because they only associated the beautiful and the good with God. That figure which is terrible and beautiful is very much a projection of White himself.

I think it was a coming together of politics and religion rather than one growing out of the other. He raged

against greed and money in a way that's familiar to us from many religious thinkers. But he didn't ever expect—he was too wise and cynical a man to expect—that politics could ever be run on religious lines.

White certainly saw his art as reaching after the transcendent, as trying to name a God who won't be named. At the same time I get the impression that he's also writing up God in his own image. Do you think that's a fair comment?

I do. Let me say, I'm not a religious person. I'm fascinated by questions of religion but I'm not myself a believer. I think there's always something a bit bogus about the anthropomorphic God. Always the danger that men and women will construct a God that's rather like themselves.

Patrick White's God is very like him because his notion of that God is one that it is both wonderful and terrible. God has to be approached not by turning a blind eye to what is terrible in the world but by accepting and absorbing into God what is also squalid and distasteful.

And his attack on the churches of all the Christian religions was that they stripped God of his mystery and power because they only associated the beautiful and the good with God. That figure which is terrible and beautiful is very much a projection of the terror and the beauty White was himself.

I think it's a very interesting concept of God. A very adult and tough one. The gob of spit, of course, is an image of the God that is in everything. It's Stan Parker saying God is *even* there, but it's also Stan Parker saying God *is there*.

I've always seen the young evangelist who provokes this vision in White's work as the angel of death. That is, the evangelist who comes across the paddocks and says 'I can show you books' is not only a fool, a naive, but brings death with him. ■

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RIGHT: photos of David Marr by Bill Thomas

FLASH IN THE PAN

Guilty by Suspicion, dir. Irwin Winkler (Greater Union). Hollywood's first and last sweetheart is Hollywood. *Guilty by Suspicion* is another episode in the relationship. Set in the early '50s, it is concemed with the effects of the Un-American Activities Committee upon the film industry. Anyone unable to guess who are the good guys and who the bad in such a set-up should stick to *Wheel of Fortune* rather than part with $11.50.

But it's still a good little film. Irwin Winkler's writing and direction are as crisp as is consonant with the film's being a reflective piece of work. Annette Bening, George Wendt, Patricia Wetting and Sam Wanamaker team well, and occasionally outstandingly. Essentially, though, it is all a vehicle for Robert De Niro as the afflicted maker of films who must choose between impotence and destruction on the one hand, and being a licensed betrayer of friends on the other.

This is all right by me, since I would spend time and money to watch De Niro read from the telephone book. But the likes of his character were not playing games, and that sorry truth comes home with authority in *Guilty by Suspicion*. The boundless moral squalor of Senator Joseph McCarthy and his parasite Roy Cohn are evoked in the culminating section of the film. The equivocations of good persons and bad alike thread from spool to spool. It all stops rather concludes: but then, when did the tidal pulse of manipulation and outraged imperfection ever conclude?

— Peter Steele SJ

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead, dir. Tom Stoppard (independent cinemas). Stoppard has short circuited potential critics by rescripting and directing the film of his 1966 Edinburgh Fringe Festival theatre classic himself. The result is a crafty piece which exploits both the visual expansiveness of film and the compressed energy of theatre. The mix works, most of the time. Some of the play's good lines are gone, of course, along with the air of improvisational irreverence. Film just isn't a harum-scarum medium, it seems. But there are some inspired pieces of staging and business as compensation.

The film opens on a vast, chalky landscape which reduces the heroes to black dots, obliterates perspective and establishes the mood and times—out of joint. Later, in a splendid, wormy wooden-bathhouse scene, hapless Rosencrantz lets one of the great moments of scientific revelation slip, like soap, through his fingers. (It happens again at the laden refectory table.) Here, the lavishness of film helps. Elsewhere, it stretches what is an essentially verbal *tour de force* into languidness and makes rather a long night of it all.

Gary Oldman is a fine Rosencrantz. Richard Dreyfuss pulls out every trick for the plumb part of the Player. And if the Elsinore court characters are two-dimensional and opaque, then that is the point, but also the problem, resolved by neither play nor film.

—Morag Fraser.

In Bed with Madonna, dir. Alek Keshishian (Hoyts.) As Aristotle didn't say but probably should have, when life imitates art someone's had a great marketing idea. And Keshishian's documentary, which follows Madonna through her 'Blonde Ambition' tour of Japan, the US and Europe, is a superior piece of marketing.

Sceptics may doubt how much of the singer's life we really get to see, but there is nonetheless plenty of art—or artfulness—and plenty of imitation. Indeed, imitation appears to be what Madonna does best, from simulated masturbation during an onstage rendition of *Like a Virgin* to simulated fellatio during an offstage game of truth-or-dare.

As for art, we can tell that Madonna must be an artist because she spends much of the film telling us so. And if her father, the Toronto police and the Vatican don't like simulation games, well she won't compromise her artistic integrity just for them, so there.

Presumably, this is all meant to show us that the raunchy, liberated woman seen on stage really is a raunchy, liberated woman. But just in case we can't distinguish Madonna on stage from Madonna off stage, Keshishian films the concert scenes in colour and the rest in monochrome. (Art more real than life itself, geddit?)

—Ray Cassin

Robin Hood, Prince of Thieves, dir. Kevin Reynolds (Village). Here we have tinsel town's answer to old fashioned summer pantomime—except that the leading boy doesn't wear tights. Kevin Costner, playing himself again—all round good guy and family man in the making—gallops, shoots (arrows), swings and swims his way through a pastiche of medieval myth, post-Freudian neuroses, buddy-movie motifs, magic tricks and boy's own initiation rites. It's all great fun, even though Reynolds does seem to have lost control of his plot about a third of the way through.

What escapes him, and *Robin Hood, Prince of Thieves*, is any coherent sense of evil. (Forget about history.) There are villains all right but they quickly degenerate into pure music hall. In fact, Alan Rickman as the Woody Allen Sheriff of Nottingham, (he had an unfortunate childhood) comes close to stealing the show.

The only sensible thing to do with this movie is to escape along with it. It has so many childhood goodies: cubby houses in trees, bows and arrows, an improbable Ali Baba straight man (played by Morgan Freeman, a fine actor) and a Maid Marian (Mary Elizabet Mastrantonio, who can't act but has better hair than the French Lieutenant's woman). Oh, and there is one great joke.

—Morag Fraser

Eureka Street Film Competition

The still above, of course, is from *Casablanca*. And yes, we all know what Claude Rains said in this scene. But if you'd like to tell us what you think he *might* have said, we'll award two tickets, to the film of your choice, for the answer we like best. Write to: *Eureka Street* film competition, PO Box 553, Richmond Vic., and include a contact phone number.

It's all in the stars

The '80s are over, the spivs are broke or in jail, and the slogan 'greed is good' has had its 15 minutes of fame. But it left its mark on the children of the '80s. Patrick Jurd, a teacher at St Bede's College, Melbourne, uses a trading game called Starpower to encourage students to reflect on questions of justice. Players are divided into three groups—a few who own most of the wealth, a slightly larger group who are moderately well off, and a big group who have very little. Players learn how difficult it is for those at the bottom of the pyramid to trade their way out of poverty, how this creates anger and resentment among them, and how much fear and defensiveness is created at the top. But Jurd reports a change in student attitudes since he first began using the game in 1985. Then, students would identify with the 'have-nots', criticising the inequitable distribution of wealth and power. Now, they are more likely to identify with the 'haves', thinking it quite reasonable that they should accumulate as much as possible, and hang on to it for as long as possible. The sins of the parents?

Relatively speaking

Here is yet another application of the principle of relativity for the delectation of the reader: 'Today I am described in Germany as a "German savant" and in England as a "Swiss Jew". Should it ever be my fate to be represented as a *bête noire*, I should, on the contrary, become a "Swiss Jew" for the Germans and a "German savant" for the English.'

—Albert Einstein, 1919

From open door to revolving door

Between 1824 and 1860 the reconstructed Jesuit order was expelled, outlawed, redissolved and restored no less than 70 times in various countries of Europe. Ironically enough, the first to expel them after 1814 was Russia, their last safe refuge on the frontiers of Europe from the papal decree of dissolution.

—from *The Jesuits: History and Legend of the Society of Jesus*

The crunch at lunch

The country may be going irreversibly to pot, but there are those who insist that it should not go to cut lunches as well. A restaurant advertisement in *The Age* (8 August '91) declares that 'There's nothing more tragic than a high-powered executive eating a cut lunch. You need the finest French cuisine, great wines at affordable prices, valet parking and the choice of tremendous business lunch specials.' This seems to be an excessively culinary definition of tragedy; Oedipus and King Lear would have considered a round of Vege' sandwiches and a stale lamington to be the least of their problems. But more importantly, one wonders whether recession-struck executives are best occupied lingering over long lunches in recession-struck restaurants. Maybe a few cut lunches in the office—the kind their employees eat—would benefit more than the executive waistline.

Beneath the tower of babble

At the very depths and centre of Australia's new Parliament House in Canberra, at the bottom of a light-well and atrium around which visitors, elected representatives, staffers and journalists all pass each day, there is a massive black square of stone covered by a shimmering patina of water. An icon of the *via negativa* of apophatic mysticism, it both invites a sense of transcendence and declares nothing. It is precisely the sort of monument a perceptive architect might offer to a secular society with an untamed soul.

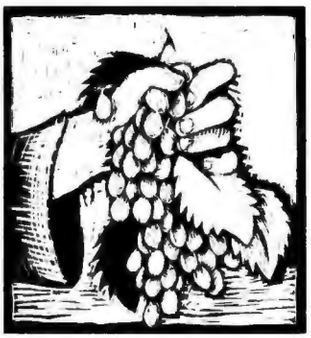
—from an editorial in *Pacifica*

Comfort zone

Researchers for the One World Campaign calculated in 1989 that Australia's 17 million people have twice the impact on world resources and energy as Africa's 640 million.

—Catholic Social Justice Council

Telecom wins this month's Eureka Street *award for fraternal spirit and community service.* Photo: Bill Thomas



SEVENHILL CELLARS

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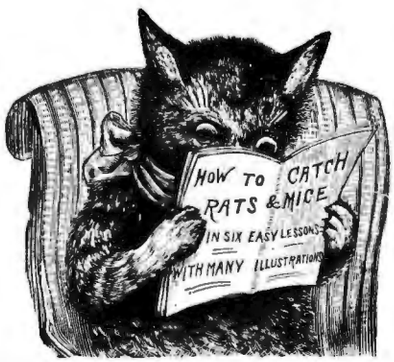

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