EUREKA STREET

Vol. 2 No 6 July 1992

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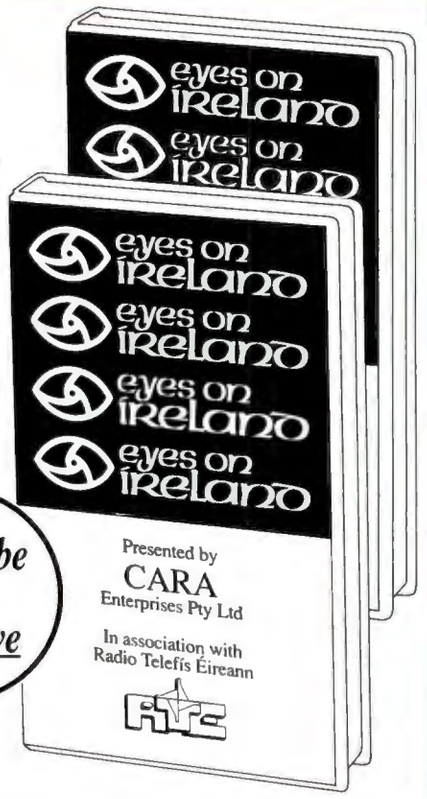

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A magazine of public affairs, the arts and theology

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FRANK BRENNAN

Terra nullius no more

'THE LANDS OF THIS CONTINENT were not *terra nullius* or "practically unoccupied" in 1788.' So spoke the High Court, by a majority of 6 to 1, in the case of *Eddie Mabo and others v The State of Queensland* on 3 June 1992. On that day, the Australian legal system came of age. Though the British Crown asserted sovereignty over those deemed to be barbarians in 1788, it would now be barbaric, as it was then, to presume that sovereignty automatically wiped the slate clean of native land title. A court established by the sovereign cannot adjudicate on the validity of an assertion of sovereignty over new territory, but it does have a duty to ensure equal protection under the law for those who hold property within the territory.

When Eddie Mabo began his litigation in 1982, many Australians still saw land rights as a one-off, special welfare measure. The defendant state's premier, Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen, saw it as part 'of a long-range communist plan to alienate Aboriginal lands from the Australian nation, so that a fragmented north could be used for subversive activities by other countries'. But land rights are now legally classifiable as the restitution, recognition and compensation of property rights.

The High Court has placed its hands more firmly on the development of Australian common law, which is now out of the clutches of the Privy Council. The High Court judges have declared that with them 'rests the ultimate responsibility of declaring the law of the nation'. For the first time, they have had an opportunity to rule on the law of the land. And they have not done so in primitive isolation from developments in international law, or with a craving for consistency with the Privy Council rulings that established the convenient fiction of *terra nullius*. With hindsight, we can now say that not only would it have been unseemly to drive the indigenous occupiers of this country into the sea, it would have been unlawful.

The fiction of *terra nullius* allowed European nations to expand their colonial horizons with minimal concern for indigenous peoples. In the 18th century the common law took its lead from international law. But in *Mabo*, three judges, acknowledging their lawmaking role said, 'It is imperative in today's world that the common law should neither be, nor be seen to be, frozen in an age of racial discrimination.'

Gareth Evans has been blithely signing international instruments, including the optional protocol to the Internation-

al Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. International law is, according to the High Court, a legitimate and important influence on the development of the common law, especially when it declares the existence of universal human rights. Even black-letter lawyers are now quick to invoke the outcomes of UN talkfests like the Earth Summit at Rio and the Working Group on Indigenous Populations in Geneva. Australia's accession to the optional protocol took effect on Christmas Day last year. Within six months the High Court has said it 'brings to bear on the common law the powerful influence of the covenant and the international standards it imports.'

Governor Phillip may have asserted British sovereignty over the eastern part of the Australian continent on 26 January 1788. But he did not thereby automatically increase unencumbered crown landholdings by another half-continent. Native title to those lands continued until the new sovereign dealt with them in a manner inconsistent with the continuation of native title. And, even after 204 years of unmitigated pastoral, colonial and mining expansion, there are still large areas of vacant crown land, especially in Western Australia.

Traditional Aboriginal law determines the Aboriginal titleholders of such land. Like international law, the traditional law or custom is not frozen at the moment of establishment of a colony. So there are four developing sources of law that affect the ownership of land: international law, Aboriginal traditional law, common law as declared by the High Court, and statutory law as legislated by Australian parliaments within their constitutional limits. *Terra nullius* was clear and simple; it was also unjust and discriminatory. The law of the land is now more complex, but more just.

The nation state, as sovereign, retains the power to extinguish the property rights of citizens, although the Commonwealth constitution guarantees that the federal government cannot do so without just compensation. State parliaments can extinguish title without compensation, but they cannot do so in a racially discriminatory way. Racial discrimination is outlawed by the Commonwealth Racial Discrimination Act, which implements the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination. Aboriginal 'traditional owners' of vacant crown land, national parks and some other public lands are now entitled to the same protection of their property rights as other landholders.

Although the High Court has ruled by 4 to 3 that there is no guaranteed right to compensation when a state government removes native title, public servants and politicians will now have to recognise native title in the same way that they recognise any other title to land. Wiping out native title without compensation will pass muster only if other title could be so removed in the same circumstances. So Aborigines now have a property interest in stock routes and vacant crown lands, even if these lands are subject to authorised prospecting or exploration. Increasingly, developers, pastoralists and miners will have to deal with Aborigines on an equal footing. Governments will have to treat with Aborigines to bring about workable compromises for land use, according to both Aboriginal law and the common law.

Terra Nullius was clear and simple; it was also unjust and discriminatory. The law of the land is now more complex, but more just ... The High Court has removed the legal basis for the continued dispossession of Aborigines who retain traditional affiliations with their lands. The court has not undone the injustices of the past, but it has set the foundations for just land dealings in the future.

The High Court has removed the legal basis for the continued dispossession of Aborigines who retain traditional affiliations with their lands. The court has not undone the injustices of the past, but it has set the foundations for just land dealings in the future. By recognising the existence of Aboriginal law and land rights, the court has provided a jurisprudential basis for Aboriginal calls for self-determination on their own land.

Eddie Mabo's influence will be felt on the Australian mainland as much as it is now on Murray Island. He died before the court gave judgment, but that judgment stands as a vindication of his rights and as a tribute to his stand. May he rest in peace in the land that never was, and never will be, *terra nullius*. ■

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

Beyond the cringe

From I.M. Roser

I write regarding the credibility of 'Face to Face' by Margaret Simons (*Eureka Street*, May 1992). Part of the article reads: 'The beer canteen [in Kowanyama, an Aboriginal settlement on Cape York] is the most palatial building and people live in tin houses.' I presume she wrote these comments many years ago.

Kowanyama is a town of about 1000 people and the canteen is without a doubt the most used facility. However, there is also a neat administration building with offices for Aboriginal councillors; a bank and post office; a well-stocked store that sells goods at wholesale prices; a school for 300 children; a clinic with resident nursing staff; and a community hall, swimming pool and sports fields. There are timber-and-fibro and cement-block houses, which are sewered and have breezeways and solar heating. The town is on the banks of a river in which people can fish and swim, and the government has bought a large cattle property for the community.

Why do journalists continue to degrade black Australians by portraying them as living in dirty humpies, and as disgusting drunks or raving activists. Thousands of good-living people of Aboriginal descent must cringe at this image of their race.

Why is there no balanced reporting of the numerous responsible workers, successful business people, artists, musicians, sportsmen and women

In the same issue of *Eureka Street* is a book review by Margaret Simons, 'This land is their land'. The mind boggles at the thought that all the land on the planet belongs to its original inhabitants. I know of nothing that convinces me that the Aboriginals would have fared better if the inevitable settlers had been Dutch, French or any other European or Asian race.

Nor does it help when the media constantly stress the poverty of Aborigines, since millions of unemployed workers and pensioners get financial and other help from the government. And the Aboriginals are no longer the only dark-skinned people in Australia—Indians, Maoris, Fijians and others meld into the community, so one cannot clearly say colour or race is a big problem.

The media don't present compatibility stories because they are not startling drama. Thank God *Brand Nu Dae* is bringing a source of pride and respect to Aboriginal people.

I.M. Roser
Coolum, Qld

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.

Margaret Simons replies:

Opinions about the best methods for 'healing' the rifts between whites and Aborigines are bound to vary. It is a complex and painful area of debate. I.M. Roser believes stories about poverty and degradation don't help. My opinion is that little will be achieved by prettying the facts, or only reporting part of the story.

Of course many Aborigines are high achievers, although perhaps they are not always those whom Roser describes as 'good living'. Apparently that category does not include 'raving activists', yet in my experience some of the Aboriginal community's highest achievers are its activists.

I was trying to make the point that the main differences between Aborigines and white Australians are not those of skin colour, but rather those of culture. One cannot argue the problems of Aborigines away simply by pointing to Maoris, Fijians and Indians who have 'melded'. Does an Aboriginal have to 'meld' to be described as 'good living'? What does this say about their right to dignity and self-determination?

Most white Australians never see Aboriginal communities. I am no expert, but my job has given me the chance to see things that many never see. The media report the views of international bodies, such as the World Council of Churches. The argument then tends to be about the credibility of these bodies, yet few whites ever get the chance to verify the facts. In this context, I thought it was my job to report what I saw.

No one, including land-rights activists, has ever suggested that 'all the land on the planet' should belong to its original inhabitants. Land-rights activists do not even ask for all of Australia! The land-rights debate is a difficult one. Straw men do not help.

My description of the Cape York

communities, including Kowanyama, was based on visits made during 1987. This date was mentioned in the article. Roser misquotes me slightly on the description of Kowanyama. Nevertheless, it is undoubtedly true that the beer canteen was the most palatial building, which is what I said.

Roser and I agree on some things. I see no reason to believe that Aborigines would have fared better had they been invaded by anyone other than the English. The history of colonialism in the Pacific speaks for itself.

From midfield

From the Rev. Christopher Beal

I am dissatisfied with one false dichotomy proposed by Paul Mees (Letters, May.) As a liberal Catholic of Anglican persuasion, I have never considered the theological position he describes as 'the Scylla of liberalism' to be the opposite extreme of 'fundamentalism', but rather the intellectually and theologically honest middle ground for which he seems to be searching.

In addition, like the Bishop of Durham, John Robinson has done more for modern, honest academic analysis of Christian belief than many.

Christopher Beal
Paynecham, SA.

The number's up

From James Franklin, lecturer in mathematics at the University of NSW.

J.J.C. Smart is not right in seeing Aquinas' notion of 'necessary existence' as somehow in conflict with modern logic (June 1992). Obviously, a vacuous sense of 'necessary', as 'It is raining or not raining', is not what is called for. But there are plenty of other kinds of necessity. There is, for example, the necessity of mathematical existence, as in 'There exists a prime number between 10 and 12'.

The kind of existence numbers have is rather abstract and attenuated, and one expects something more full-blooded of God; nevertheless, the example is enough to show there is nothing wrong with the *form* of a necessary existential statement.

James Franklin
Kensington, NSW

REPORT

BRETT EVANS

Where GATT is at

ALEX BUZO FIRST NOTICED 'the moron thing' during a television discussion about Vietnam between two journalists in the 1960s. It is the journalistic habit of reducing the intellectual calibre of commentary to a level of egregious banality, lest the 'punters at home' fail to understand every syllable.

According to Buzo: 'Similar processes happen now whenever GATT is mentioned. There is a fractional pause and then the speaker says, "That's, uh, General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade," which must be highly illuminating to anyone who hasn't heard of GATT.'

The GATT system is a unique international institution; it is an agreement, not an organisation, that sets out a code of rules by which signatory countries are supposed to deal with each other and thereby ensure the liberalisation of world trade. Underpinning GATT is the philosophy that the market mechanism is the most efficient means of allocating resources.

From 1948, when it was established, until the 1970s, GATT was relatively successful in freeing up world trade. Today, however, it is caught in the paradox of the global economy: international trade has tightly integrated the economies of the world, but individual nation states often suffer high social costs as they attempt to adjust to changing patterns of comparative advantage.

The international economic system has witnessed the growth of 'new protectionism', with nations pursuing strategic trade policies, such as the creation of regional blocs and bilateral trade deals, and interventionist domestic policies, to ensure that they have the edge in important markets.

Yet the federal government's trade policy seems to take almost no account of these changes. The once-powerful Department of Trade has been emasculated in the name of highly dubious 'reforms' in the public service. When the department was amalgamated with the Department of Foreign Affairs, its functions were scattered to the four corners of the bureaucracy. Only the multilateral division stayed with the amalgamated department, and multilateralism and GATT soon became the theme of trade policy.

As the Sydney University political economist, Evan Jones, told last year's Economics Society conference: 'The central multilateralist thrust of trade policy since 1987 has involved a 'picking winners' approach par excellence—putting one's entire kitty on one horse whose reputation had been established by the book rather than in the field.'

GATT is a bit of a nag, and it looks as though Australia would have done better placing a treble, incorporating industry policy and bilateralism, as well as GATT. The Uruguay Round was established in 1986, specifically to look at agricultural trade. And, despite recent events, agriculture remains a stumbling block.

In May, the European Community announced changes to common agricultural policy, which were heralded as a breakthrough for the stalled Uruguay Round. The Europeans offered to cut cereal subsidies by 29 per cent, beef subsidies by 15 per cent, and butter subsidies by five per cent.

In line with strategic trade theory, the Europeans were trying to pre-empt US retaliation—the decision was not made because of any heartfelt desire to uphold the principles of GATT. As the Minister for Overseas Trade and Development, John Kerin, said: 'Any direct impact on return for Australian farmers would not be felt until after changes to the Uruguay Round of trade talks came into effect in 1993-94.'

Only a week after the EC announcement, Australia's beef producers were forced to restrict meat exports to the US in order to conform with that country's meat import law. The US, like the international economy's other major players, wants what it considers to be 'fair trade'; it is becoming less interested in *free* trade.

Australia is facing these changed circumstances with one of the most idealistic free-trade positions of any nation in the world. Sadly, the 'moron thing' seems to stretch from Australia's media to our decisions makers as well. ■

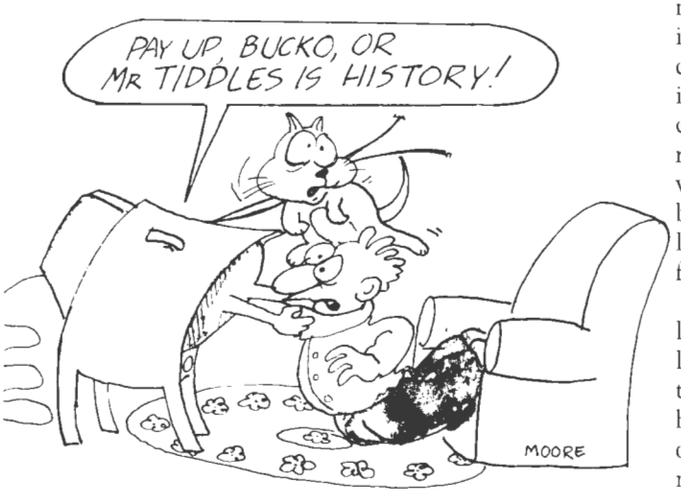
Brett Evans is a Sydney freelance writer.

You pays your money, you takes your chances

Who will gain most from pay television? And what will happen to the ABC under the new broadcasting legislation? ***Paul Chadwick****, of the Communications Law Centre, looks at the brave new world that has so many channels in it*

SENATOR BOB COLLINS DID NOT HAVE LONG to master the biggest reforms in broadcasting law in 50 years when he replaced Graham Richardson as Minister for Transport and Communications. Nor did the rest of us. Within a few days in June, Collins watched as the proposals were radically adjusted by the Prime Minister, shoved before cabinet, and dragged through caucus and into the Parliament.

In the Senate, the new minister gave the second-reading speech on the Broadcasting Services Bill 1992, which, among other things, provides for pay television, the first new medium since free-to-air television arrived 36 years ago. Collins heard himself saying: 'We need new legislation capable of allowing the broadcasting industry to respond to both the complexities of the modern marketplace and the opportunities created by technological developments. Continuing to inhibit the natural development of this industry through outdated and cumbersome regulation will disadvantage consumers and be detrimental to the longer term prospects for Australia.'



It is difficult to know what Collins believed about a deregulatory creed written for him by the Department of Transport and Communications—as it had been for Richardson, and for his predecessors in the portfolio: Kerin (a few weeks from last December), Beazley (1990-91), Willis (1988-90) and Evans (1987-88). Are we to understand that the government—the bureaucracy and assorted ministers—now believes that broadcasting is an industry, not a service? Are we a market rather than an audience? Consumers rather than citizens?

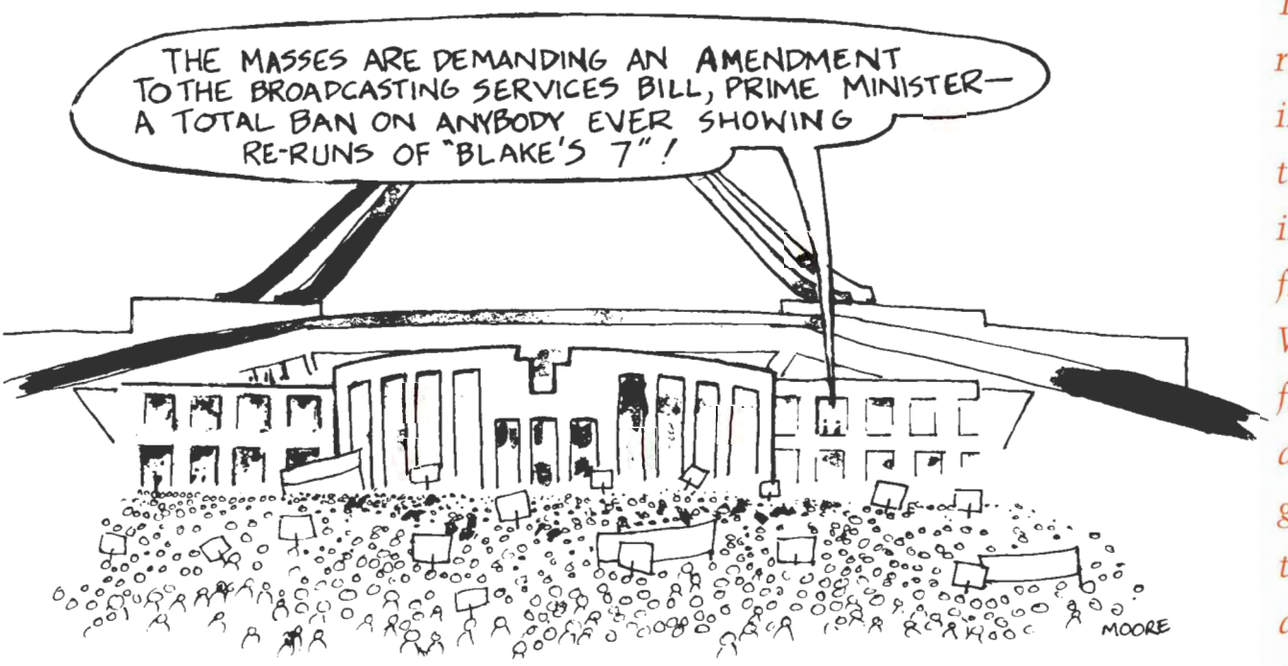
The idea that the notion of broadcasting as a 'public trust' has been overwhelmed by the free marketeers will surely surprise many, yet it is the inescapable conclusion from the legislation and the process that begat it. That process, encapsulated in the quote from Collins, brings to mind a friend's observation that 'Technology has replaced nature as man's idea of fate'.

Before surveying the main features of the bill, I should declare that the Communications Law Centre, which I represent, supports an overhaul of the Broadcasting Act 1942, which has become nightmarish in its complexity. And yes, developing communications technologies have to be dealt with. But they are not like the weather, blown in by force to be enjoyed or endured. They are surely to be harnessed by public policymakers to serve the common good, as much as by private investors to serve themselves.

QUANTITY—WITNESS THE PRIME MINISTER cooing about the 200 channels that fibre optics might one day deliver to the home—is not to be confused with quality. Leave aside the relatively limited size of the Australian 'market' and ask instead: 200 channels of what? Controlled by whom? Those who, since the 1920s, have concentrated in their own hands most of the Australian press and a large slab of commercial radio and, since the 1950s, commercial television as well?

The decision to keep the existing networks out of the first four pay-television channels, to be delivered via satellite dishes, might improve diversity briefly. The first four channels—expect movies, news, sport and light entertainment—will probably be controlled by one of the global media groups such as Time Warner. (The bill allows such groups only 35 per cent of the shares in a pay service, but that level of ownership does not preclude control.)

Whether any foreign or local investors take the risk remains to be seen, because the political compromise



The most serious result of the introduction of pay television may be the impoverishment of free-to-air services Will it make free-to-air television a kind of viewers' ghetto, watched by those who cannot afford the subscription to a pay service?

provides that the fifth and sixth channels can be 100 per cent-owned by existing media operators just a year after the first four start. This means prompt, formidable competition from, most likely, Kerry Packer and Rupert Murdoch.

Packer controls the Nine free-to-air network, two radio stations, the bulk of the circulation of the top 30 magazines and Sky Channel, the existing satellite service to pubs, clubs and hotels. Murdoch's News Corporation has the 20th Century Fox film studios and library, the Fox free-to-air TV network in the US, the British pay-television monopoly BSkyB, two-thirds of Australia's press, and the second largest share of circulation of the top 30 magazines. (Print outlets are especially significant because pay-television owners can use them for cross-promotion.)

Concern at a possible extension of these empires is not tall-poppy slashing. Knowledge has always been power, and it is all the more so in this information age, when data also means wealth. It is of crucial importance that public policymakers seriously address the issue of media concentration—both in the control of organisations and in the control of program supply.

Bear in mind that the Broadcasting Services Bill does not permit advertising on pay television—to protect the existing networks—nor are new competing free-to-air licences expected to issue freely. Current licensees, however, will ordinarily have their licences renewed automatically, rather than after public inquiry by the regulator.

Now to the question of quality, because if that improves some might swallow their concerns about other issues. The most serious result of the introduction of pay television may be the impoverishment of free-to-air services. This is happening in Britain, where BSkyB is bidding much more than the free-to-air broadcasters can for the rights to popular programs, especially major sport. Will this 'siphoning' gradually make free-to-air television a kind of viewers' ghetto, watched by those who cannot afford the equipment and monthly subscription to a pay service? To the extent that this happens to news and opinion services, what will be the consequences for an informed electorate? The government has, as yet, hardly addressed the issue, and the bill's anti-siphoning rules are, at best, fragile.

THE NEW LEGISLATION REQUIRES the Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA), which replaces the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal, to establish program standards for children's television and Australian content only. The vexed issue of the amount of advertising time on commercial free-to-air television will be regulated by the networks themselves.

And the wolves have been given other lambs to care for: most programming issues will be the subject of codes of practice drawn up by the networks and registered with the broadcasting authority. Viewers complaining about breaches of a code must go first to the broadcaster, then to the authority, which may eventually decide a code has failed and replace it with a mandatory program standard.

The authority will have considerable powers , but will be rather less open to public scrutiny than is the broadcasting tribunal. Even an annual report to Parliament is not required. Under the existing law, the public has a 'start button' to activate the process of consultation and accountability. The new law removes this. To shut out the public seems an invitation to capture of the regulator by those it ostensibly regulates. As one commentator has put it, 'irresistible pressures are best diverted into controlled and divisible channels.'

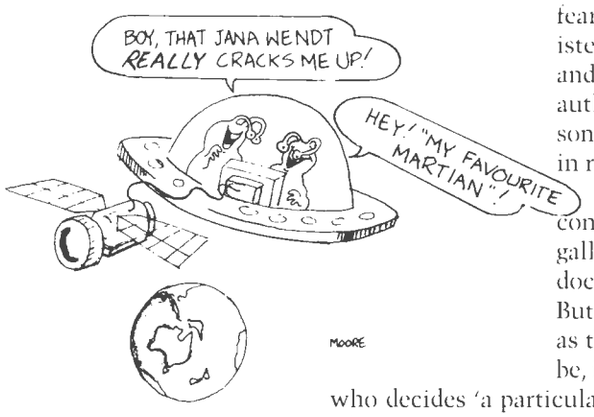
The Broadcasting Services Bill ends the long immunity of the national broadcasters from external investigation of their programming decisions. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation and the Special Broadcasting Service failed to persuade the federal government to drop clauses that compel them to develop codes of practice and register them with the Australian Broadcasting Authority.

The authority is to 'monitor and investigate' complaints relevant to the codes, and the minister has authority to direct it to carry out investigations, for which it has a formidable range of powers. It may: require attendance at hearings, which not necessarily be held in public; obtain orders to search and seize documents; require a person to take an oath or affirmation; and compel answers. Failure to comply may mean a year's imprisonment.

AFTER AN INVESTIGATION, the broadcasting authority may recommend that the ABC or SBS offer an apology to the complainant, or broadcast a retraction. If appropriate action is not taken within 30 days, the authority may report to the minister, who must table a copy of the report in Parliament. The ABC argues that these powers undermine its hard-won independence, and are open to abuse, especially in relation to its reportage of news or current affairs.

Hypotheticals abound: imagine a government facing an election or a delicate foreign policy issue. If *Four Corners* obtained documents that, if disclosed, could seriously embarrass the goverment, might the broadcasting authority be required to investigate?

Journalists face a new route to jail if the authority asks them to disclose sources and they refuse in compliance, with the Media Alliance's code of ethics. (Two journalists have been jailed in recent years for exactly this offence during court proceedings.) Senator Collins, has downplayed these fears. Similar powers already existed in other legislation, he said, and he expected the broadcasting authority to be 'prudent and reasonable' in exercising the powers in relation to journalists.



It is true that the courts, royal commissions and certain other legally constituted bodies can seize documents and compel answers. But few, if any, are required to act, as the broadcasting authority will be, in direct response to a minister who decides 'a particular matter should be investigated' (clause 169).

No other body with equivalent powers has quite the same direct relationship with media as the broadcasting authority. Journalists' performances may be open to criticism, but democracies rely on them to scrutinise the governors on behalf of the governed. This can, and at times should, be awkward for the powerful. It seems only prudent and reasonable to ensure that no new tools are created to intimidate or muzzle. This is particularly so in relation to the ABC, which is already in a naturally tense relationship with government and yet is the only broadcaster free of the commercial pressures that can constrain journalists in the private sector.

The government could allay fears simply by amending the Broadcasting Services Bill to provide that the broadcasting authority's sharpest powers are not available to it to carry out functions related to broadcasting content, as distinct from structural issues such as ownership and control. Completely stripping the authority of these powers would destroy its capacity to uncover and dismantle schemes designed to avoid the ownership limits.

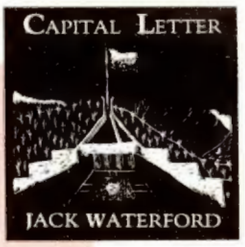
But content issues such as codes of practice and complaints about programs are another matter. If independent scrutiny and the prospect of case-by-case disclosure in Parliament of responses to complaints is a reasonable increase in accountability, a workable compromise might be to require the ABC and SBS to develop codes, and to cooperate with the broadcasting authority's investigations of complaints, without allowing the authority to use powers that are open to abuse.

The ABC can expect no sympathy from the Opposition, whose communications spokesman, Warwick Smith, has conducted a running battle with it over what he sees as its lack of accountability. Caesar judges Caesar, he says, and he is right in so far as the managing director, David Hill, as editor in chief, makes final decisions about programming and is the final arbiter of what is done about complaints. Smith wants the ABC made subject to the Ombudsman.

THE PRINCIPAL POLICY STATEMENT about the freedom of the ABC is still that made by Prime Minister John Curtin in April 1945. He said that Parliament intended 'to create a position of special independence of judgment and action for the national broadcasting instrumentality. This is, inevitably, the case because of its highly delicate function in broadcasting at public expense news statements and discussions which are potent influences on public opinion and attitudes.'

The measure of independence required by the ABC is unlike that given to other semi-governmental agencies which 'do not impinge on the tender and dangerous realms of moral, religious, aesthetic and political values.' In the last resort, said Curtin, the health of the system rests with the 'judgement of the persons chosen to determine and administer its policy, and not on either review by, or pressure from, any sources outside it, political or non-political.' (Source: *Communications Law and Policy in Australia* by the chairman of the ABC, Professor Mark Armstrong.) ■

Paul Chadwick is Victorian co-ordinator of the Communications Law Centre, a non-profit research, teaching and advocacy organisation in Sydney and Melbourne.



Six out of ten so far, Prime Minister

DURING THE PAST FEW MONTHS Paul Keating has had an opportunity to demonstrate the leadership and moral courage that he promised 18 months ago. Remember when he said that Australia had never experienced real leadership of the Roosevelt, Churchill or Lincoln variety, and that it showed? He was not talking about the opportunism or ruthlessness that each of these men displayed, though no one doubted that he valued effectiveness as much as purity. He was offering *principle*—a reason for being there.

So what sort of record does Keating have? First, in part because of the deals he had to make to seize the leadership, he is not yet his own man. This is so even though he is now the only choice his party has, and even though caucus would have little choice if he were to demand a ministerial spill to get rid of some of the deadwood around him. There has not been a free vote for the ministry since 1983.

Secondly, Keating's political debts and factional loyalty are such that he has not been able to enforce discipline or standards. Indeed, his standards for both ministerial efficiency and the proprieties of ministerial conduct seem to be lower than Bob Hawke's. They are certainly lower than Malcolm Fraser's. Consider Keating's dithering over his old mate, Graham Richardson. Long before Richardson fell on his sword, it was clear that he had to go—if only because of the damage he would do to the government by remaining. At the end of the day, the issue was not Richardson's conduct in using his political clout to help a relative, reprehensible though that was, but the Prime Minister's failure to set standards.

Then there was Ros Kelly, who signed the glossy cover of an environmental pamphlet and went to the media to boast about it, but then had to withdraw the pamphlet, saying she had not read it. The waste of public funds involved—$80,000, perhaps—was trivial. Her responsibility for the error, which she blamed on her department,was not. Yet she did not even earn a rebuke from the Prime Minister, who should know better than most that Ros Kelly is nearly always all cover and no contents. And what of Gareth Evans, who could not blame his department for misleading the Senate and so blamed his personal staff instead, adding another codicil to the list of Australian exceptions to Westminster doctrine. Evans, like Kelly, was not even reprimanded.

In each of these episodes, Paul Keating did enormous damage to his leadership. He failed to set standards, he failed to enforce them, and he failed to display the kind of ruthlessness that real leaders show so that they can be free to focus on the important things.

Because of these failures, the government stalled. The momentum gained from a change of leadership, the *One Nation* statement, and damaging criticism of the Opposition's *Fightback!* statement disappeared. But, whatever weaknesses the Prime Minister has, a lack of resilience is not among them. He knew that the government had to grasp the initiative again, and he decided to do so on three hotly contested issues in ALP policy. In the process, he took on the caucus, state Labor premiers and the party platform. The gamble worked. Keating's proposals on merging and then selling Qantas and Australian Airlines got through remarkably easily. The proposal for a Commonwealth takeover of technical and further education was so skilfully crafted that in fact it made new concessions to the states. And, although the offer was not completely successful, the issue appeared to be alive again.

On pay television, it was soon clear that Keating really cared little for any particular decision, so long as *some* decision was made. Those he had to overcome, however, were so tied up with ideology and formulae that he completely outfoxed them. He achieved the result they had been determined to avoid, and which they had long suspected was the NSW Right's real agenda—looking after Kerry Packer. Caucus was overjoyed at seeing Packer and Rupert Murdoch eliminated from the first four pay networks, but failed to notice that they would have unrestricted opportunities in the next two.

That was leadership, all right. But where does it take Keating and Labor? That the airlines' decision went against party policy is of no particular moment, however much it and the pay-television decision increase unease among traditional Labor voters. And acting to improve vocational training is a positive step, although it enters the dangerous ground of Commonwealth-state rivalry at a time when all but one of the state Labor premiers are in difficulty.

Keating has tried to sell each move as a fundamental reform. The airlines decision, he told the NSW Labor conference, would boost the tourist industry and long-term employment. But apart from helping the budget figures, benefits to the travelling public are far from obvious. Pay television, he said, 'was a milestone in the transfer of information technology to Australians.' Again, that is not obvious. The real technology is five years away, and diverting spending from other projects to television is more than a little indulgent.

Keating has the rhetorical style of a leader. He speaks of strengthening the Australian community, of fostering a sense of common purpose, and of developing the nation's economic strengths. He speaks of facing harsh realities, such as reducing dependence on the export of commodities, and closer economic integration with our neighbours. But the rhetoric still pales before Australia's crucial political weaknesses, not least of which is the wasting of the spirit of an entire generation that is without work and without much prospect of getting it.

Until the Prime Minister can inspire that generation, his real leadership qualities are suspect. ■

Jack Waterford is deputy editor of the *Canberra Times*.

JAN DONOVAN

Doctors in glass houses

MANY OF THE PROBLEMS in the health-care system are portrayed in *The Doctor*, an American film that has been screening in Australian cinemas. The film shows clearly how hospital services can fail patients through poor communication on the part of those who provide the service. It also provides a warning about the dangers of a system that depends on private health insurers and on health-care professionals who live in fear of malpractice suits.

The main character, played by William Hurt, is a heart surgeon with a thriving practice. He has all the trappings of success: money, power and status. When he is diagnosed with throat cancer none of these indicators of success change, but he does. For the first time he experiences the indignities of sharing a public ward and the rudeness of doctors who offer no apology or explanation when they are late for appointments. He experiences the bewilderment of sitting in waiting rooms with the dying, and the frustration of inadequate consultations with his fellow professionals. As a patient he is powerless.

The film raises issues that affect all health-care systems: the importance of training that is patient-centred; good communication between doctor and patient; respect for the dying; equitable access to services; and the importance of self-help support groups.

Any further reorganisation of Australia's health services must stem from an ethic of consumer involvement.

The universal coverage of Medicare means that Australians, unlike Americans, are entitled to equitable access to health services regardless of their health insurance status. A coalition government would change this by providing incentives for high-income earners to insure privately. Medicare would be retained as a welfare measure, creating a two-tiered system: one for the poor and one for the relatively well-off.

The Australian health-care system has a good record of keeping costs at manageable levels. For example, the Australian Institute of Health estimates that in 1960-61 Australia spent about five per cent of its gross domestic product on health care. By the mid-1970s this had risen to almost eight per cent. The United States, in contrast, spends almost 13 per cent, with a rate of growth that is double the rate of its gross domestic product and hampers control of its budget deficit. Access to health care and the costs of providing it are major issues in the American presidential election campaign.

Australia is conducting a major examination of its health system, the 'national health strategy'. The strategy, directed by Melbourne economist Jenny Macklin, was a provision of the 1990-91 federal budget. Its terms of reference encompass every aspect of the health system, and its final report is due before the next federal election. This comprehensiveness is a refreshing change, since in the past each state has had to grapple with its problems in isolation.

The strategy has published eight background papers for public discussion—on Medicare, equity and the health system, private insurance, payments by customers, pathology services, spending on health and ways of improving the quality of these services. The strategy has also produced three 'issues' papers, with policy options for consideration by the government: on relations with the states, hospital financing, and the future of general practice. A fourth, on health status and inequalities, is under preparation and three more are planned.

So far, the evidence collected by the strategy shows that the health-care system is still managing to keep costs down, for consumers and for government. In 1988-89 the average household spent $21.68 a week on medical care, and half of Australia's households spent less than $15 a week. This is less than the average weekly spending on food, transport, housing, recreation, clothing and footwear. A small group of low-income earners, however, pay considerably more for health care because of the costs of private health insurance, dental care and chronic illness.

The strategy's research has also uncovered discrimination in the hospital system, which favours private patients waiting for elective surgery over public patients. The paper being prepared on issues of equity will examine the causes of disadvantage in the health system. The issues paper on hospital financing, which the strategy released last year, proposed structural changes such as the introduction of area health authorities, and the management of hospital waiting lists on a statewide basis. State and federal health and welfare ministers have accepted in principle the proposal for area health authorities, which seeks to eliminate duplication by integrating health services within specific areas.

The paper also suggests shortening the amount of time patients spend in hospital after treatment, with a greater emphasis on recovery at home. At present hospitals are better funded than community rehabilitation services, and meeting the needs of people recovering at home will require adequate community support services. Greater attention should also be given to the rights of consumers. For example, the issues paper does not propose the publication of waiting lists, to let people know how long they can expect to wait for surgery, nor

does it address consumer issues relevant to treatment options, quality of care and discharge from hospital.

Many of the ideas put forward by the national health strategy—area health authorities and the general practitioner as the 'budget holder', for example—are similar to reforms being carried out in Britain's national health service. The strategy has not, however, embraced other British reforms which focus on the rights of patients. Some of these rights are set out in the 'citizens' charter' and were part of the Conservative Party's platform in this year's British general election. But the Tories borrowed the idea from Labour-controlled local councils, which had coined the notion of citizens' rights in regard to public housing policy.

The charter sets out what patients have a right to expect: good quality care, clear information and involvement in decisions about their treatment. The charter also takes into account regional differences, and local health authorities will produce charters for their own services. Standards will be set for the time people will have to wait for admission to hospital, and how long they will have to spend in waiting rooms before outpatient treatment.

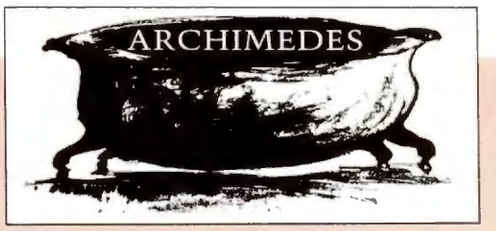
The charter also proposes reforms to primary health care, including free health checks for all new patients, for pensioners over 75 and for anyone who hasn't consulted a doctor within the past three years. There is an undertaking to publish information on the comparative performances of local health services, including the maximum waiting times for hospital treatment. Audits of local authorities are to be published, and the authorities will have to respond formally to auditors' reports.

The Australian health-care system, of course, differs from the British system because most community services are provided by the private sector. The federal government underwrites the costs of private practice through Medicare, public hospitals depend mainly on the public purse, and there are some government-funded community health centres.

But Australia does, however, have a problem with equitable access to services. Some low-income earners with chronic health conditions, and people in isolated areas, particularly Aborigines, do not have the same access to services as other Australians and spend more of their income on health care. Standards for the private sector could be negotiated, however, through participation in area health authorities by consumers and general practitioners.

Administrative and financial reforms are important in Australia but they need to be carried out in a context that respects the rights of consumers. Any further reorganisation of Australia's health services must stem from an ethic of consumer involvement, seek to redress the balance in funding between community and institutional health care, and overcome inequities due to location, income and health status. ■

Jan Donovan is the national policy officer for the Australian Council on the Ageing.



Sacred sights

THE VATICAN OBSERVATORY is building one of the world's most powerful land-based telescopes, 'The Vatican Advanced Technology Telescope', to be housed in a $US200 million observatory on the summit of Mt Graham in Arizona. The tribal council of the San Carlos Apaches is unanimously opposed to the Mount Graham project, however, because *Dzil nchaa si an* (Mt Graham) is essential to the spiritual traditions of the Apache people. In short, Mt Graham is a sacred site.

Now there is, of course, some debate about the Apache claims: the evidence for their usage of Mt Graham is far from conclusive: indeed, there is clearer evidence that the mountain was a sacred place for the Zuni tribe, who used shrines on the mountain until the 13th century, but not since.

Whatever about these claims and counter-claims, why is it that mountain peaks have, universally, been places for religious activities? The answer is obvious: on a mountain peak we are removed from the day-to-day events of life; we must make an arduous pilgrimage to get to such a place; we look out across the multi-faceted beauty of creation; and we are closer to the mysteries of the stars. We get as near as we can to transcending our ordinary material world, we get to the edge of the horizon of our existence, we stand at a window onto the realm of spirit.

Some very ancient sacred sites in human history indeed display the character of observatories: Stonehenge is the primary example of this. Again, early Babylonian astronomy had much to do with astrology: knowing about the stars, the early astronomers hoped to know more about the divine fates that shaped human destiny. The trespass of an observatory on a sacred site, then, is different from the trespass of, say, a fun-park or a uranium mine. In these instances the focus is on distraction from the mystery of life or on the acquisition of dubious resources. An observatory, however, is an engagement with mystery.

Fr George Coyne SJ, director of the Vatican Observatory, thus argues that the Mt Graham project has the character of mediation rather than of meddling. He promises every effort will be made, in the construction of the telescope, to preserve the distinctiveness of the mountain against profanation.

But would the Vatican Observatory plan to build a telescope on, say, Mount Sinai? Is science so 'pure' that it can claim a special privilege over already privileged ground? The answer to these questions requires not only a prudential judgement, but a great deal of integrity and humility on the part of scientists. The proud know everything; the humble learn everything. ■

—John Honner SJ

ANDREW NETTE AND ALAN NICHOLS

Taking on the generals

EARLY IN THE MORNING on 21 May, the shooting stopped. Within hours, western Bangkok had become an open-air memorial to victims of fighting between pro-democracy demonstrators and the military. Makeshift shrines sprang up, decorated by photos of the dead. The Democracy Monument, which dominates Ratchadamnern Avenue, was almost buried beneath a mass of wreaths.

Thais swarmed on to the avenue, from the Phan Fah Bridge to the monument and on up to Sanam Luang Square. Some came as tourists, to inspect the bullet holes that pockmarked buildings and trees, the bloodstains, and the rolls of razor wire. But most were there to mourn the dead, to talk about the events of 17-20 May, and to demand justice.

Many asked why King Bhumibol Adulyadej had waited so long before intervening to stop the violence. It is widely believed that the king was misled about the seriousness of the crisis. During the protests the royal family was confined by troops to the Chitrlada Palace, ostensibly for their own protection, and their only sources of information would have been the government-controlled radio and television services. The king may only have learned the extent of the violence when his daughter, Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, saw it for herself on television in France, and contacted her father.

Allegations persist that many captive demonstrators were summarily executed. The day after the fighting stopped, an Interior Ministry official announced that the death toll was 43. Journalists put the figure at close to 100, and the rector's office at Thammasat University has set up a working party to investigate the conflicting claims. A member of the working party told me that information provided by sympathetic members of the police force gave a body count of at least 1000.

Asked about claims that the toll was higher than has been officially conceded, the Interior Minister, Anan Kalinta, told journalists: 'Line up the corpses and prove

Smiles can deceive

TWO COMMITTEES OF INQUIRY are investigating the military crackdown of 17-20 May , and a judicial tribunal is looking into whether an amnesty should have been granted to the military leaders who ordered it. The outcomes are not yet known. Sober analysis three weeks after the event was focusing on the accountability of leadership; and here Western-style parliamentary democracy seems to be in conflict with Asian culture and understandings.

On the one hand, democracy is a new concept for peasant farmers in the northeast of Thailand who are used to offering their vote for a price. And how can you change the culture of a land where for generations, because of military leadership, to wear a uniform has come to represent importance and authority?

On the other hand, traditional Buddhist culture teaches dharma (public duty). The monks and the monarchy are revered institutions in Thai society, but could it be that the monks, who played no visible role in the protests, are losing their hold on the affections of the people?

The way ordinary middle-class Thais rose to unprecedented levels of bravery by sitting days and nights in mass protest, even after the first night of shooting in Ratchadamnern Avenue, has been exhilarating. Foreigners who have for years interpreted Thai smiles as a cover-up for passivity have been stunned at the deep passion for democracy which has broken out. The Thais would not give up the streets until Suchinda resigned; they will be out in the streets again if parliament fails to deliver democracy. And they will not forgive the military top brass until the 750 missing are accounted for. This is the stuff of revolution.

What are the possible outcomes? A new election may yet be called, on the basis that the five coalition parties which formed the last government have lost their mandate by their silence on the shootings. The king has appointed Anand Panyarachun as Prime Minister—a snub to the military, but not a restoration of democracy either. The military, so far united behind their leaders, may weaken as they perceive the huge loss of public confidence in them. ■

Alan Nichols, an Anglican priest, works for the Jesuit Refugee Service in Bangkok.

Thais at a pro-democracy demonstration in Sydney *photo: Andrew Stark*

During the past two decades per capita income in Thailand has increased tenfold. There is now an affluent middle class who are less tolerant of corruption and autocratic rule, and more determined to exact a share of the national wealth that has been hoarded by the military for so long.

it.' But corpses are not so easily produced. During the fighting hospitals were prevented from publishing casualty lists. Since then it has been reported that ambulances were only allowed to remove the wounded from the streets, leaving an unknown number of bodies to be disposed of by the army.

Whether or not the true death toll is ever admitted, the willingness to contest official claims reflects a new political confidence among Thailand's emerging middle class. Lawyers, doctors, journalists, students and academics are determined to prosecute those they claim were responsible for the military's brutality. As well as the ex-Prime Minister, Suchinda Kraprayoon, their hit list includes Interior Minister Anan; the director of the Peace-Keeping Council formed to deal with the unrest, Kaset Rojananin; the army commander, and Suchinda's brother-in-law, General Issarapong Noonpakdi; and the local commander in Bangkok, and Issarapong's cousin, General Chainarong. These men are the pillars of 'class five' of the Chulachomklao Military Academy—officers who graduated five years after the army's post-World War II reorganisation.

Thailand's present political structure dates from 1932, when an alliance of soldiers, bureaucrats and academics joined forces to overthrow absolute rule by the king. Since then the military has dominated the country—there have been 20 coups or attempted coups—and the officer class has acquired economic as well as political power. The Thai armed forces, like their counterparts in Burma, are a commercial enterprise.

The ascendancy of class five was confirmed in the most recent coup, in February 1991, when Suchinda deposed the government of Chatachai Choonhavan. That government had been widely regarded as corrupt, and Suchinda promised a return to civilian rule after elections in March this year. Instead, he accepted nomination as Prime Minister by five military-aligned political parties; many called it Suchinda's 'second coup'.

But during the past two decades per capita income in Thailand has increased tenfold. There is now an affluent middle class who are less tolerant of corruption and autocratic rule, and more determined to exact a share of the national wealth that has been hoarded by the military for so long. This explains the popularity of the former mayor of Bangkok, Major-General Chamlong Srimuang, who has been portrayed in the foreign news media as the de facto leader of the pro-democracy movement. That description goes beyond the facts, but Chamlong and his Palang Dharma Phak ('Force of Spirit Party') have tapped into middle-class resentment of military corruption. The same process has occurred in other ASEAN countries during the past decade, most noticeably in the 'People Power' revolt that toppled the Philippines dictator, Ferdinand Marcos, in 1986.

Although Thailand's pro-democracy movement scored a victory in forcing Suchinda's resignation on 24 May, it is not clear how much more they can achieve in the short term. After all, the military was also reined in after previous crackdowns on dissent. It may be that Suchinda was a sacrificial lamb offered by his colleagues, to give them time to consolidate. And, as Thais like to point out, military domination can take various forms. Things cannot go back to the way they were, but a sort of unofficial coalition between the military and sympathetic civilian politicians is still possible. The military may not control 'everything but the stars and the moon', as supreme commander Kaset once quipped, but they still come close. ■

Andrew Nette is an Australian freelance journalist.

Facing facts

MARIA WAVED THE FAMILY OFF and decided to treat herself, going back to bed to read the paper. The phone rang. It was her sister, calling for help and comfort. Her daughter, Maria's niece, had the HIV virus. AIDS had entered Maria's reality.

This was not the way the script was supposed to run. This was not what was meant to happen in a happy, loving, middle-class Catholic family. AIDS was something that happened to other people, people on the fringe.

The family had to pull together in a world that was largely scared and antagonistic. As the news got out, someone phoned the sister, telling her, in hostile fashion, to go to Mass and pray for the child. Former friends of the niece avoided her in public.

Gradually things improved. Her sister's friends rallied round. Maria educated herself on the nature of the HIV virus and began to consider the need to teach other young people how to avoid the disease. That brought her face to face with the central dilemma for Christians concerned with combating AIDS—how to combine faith, morality and church teachings with an effective strategy of prevention.

The HIV virus is transmitted via some bodily fluids. It can be caught through contact with infected blood—for instance in the course of unscreened transfusions, or when heroin users share a syringe. But in Australia, as elsewhere, the primary means of transmission is sexual. In Australia there are between 15,000 and 17,000 people, including 600 women, who are HIV-positive, who have the virus that will eventually lead to the breakdown of the immune system, the condition known as AIDS. This is the challenge the Christian community cannot ignore.

Increasingly, and across religious groupings, young people have begun their sexual life by the age of 17 or 18, and sex before marriage is more often the norm than the exception. The Catholic stance, as expressed by the Catholic Education Office, is clear: 'Safe sex ... involves abstinence, self-control or sex in a permanent relationship where there is no health risk.'

Where does this leave a Catholic like Maria? Does she tell her daughters to remain chaste, and turn a blind eye to their possible sexual activity because it does not fit the correct moral framework? And if she does educate them about safe sex practices, does she thereby belittle her values?

Maria's response was a compromise, weighted in favour of what is rather than what should be. She approached staff and parents at the school attended by her four daughters, Loreto Mandeville in Toorak, Melbourne, for the opportunity to present information on AIDS. Eventually, the invitation was issued.

IN PRESENTATIONS IN APRIL TO YEAR 12 GIRLS, and to parents of Year 10 girls, she talked of self-respect and chastity, and of how sex should be within marriage. But she also acknowledged the reality of other sexual encounters—and argued that if they happened they should be safe. Before the parents of the Year 10 girls, as as part of her talk, she demonstrated the use of a condom.

'I would much prefer my daughters to remain virginal, but I have to face reality,' she said. 'As a parent I'll

make sure they know everything to enable them to avoid sexually transmitted diseases.'

In early May more than 90 Christians—priests and ministers, health workers, specialists and lay volunteers—gathered at Monbulk, near Melbourne, for the first AIDS and the Church Conference, organised by the ecumenical group CAPE—'Churches AIDS Pastoral Care and Education'. The two-and-half-day agenda was varied: theology and sexuality, discrimination, bereavement, bisexuality, ethics, education. Those attending came from a wide background—the Anglican, Catholic, Uniting, Baptist, and Lutheran churches, the Salvation Army, and more—but on one thing they were agreed: people living with HIV and AIDS need love and care, not condemnation.

This was a working conference of the committed, and the views expressed would cause disquiet in many a broader church forum. Dr Neil Williams, a consultant psychiatrist and active member of the Uniting Church, gave a keynote talk that stressed the sexual nature of human life and the need to explore and question conventional categories—male and female, gay and straight, and attitudes of denial. Jesus, he argued, was a man with a penis, capable of orgasm and ejaculation, who had come into the world through a woman's vagina and suckled at a woman's breast. A Catholic priest told the conference: 'My church has been notorious for putting up fences in this area and warning signs. Yet genital expression is the place where most people experience ecstasy.'

A PANEL, CONSISTING OF those living with HIV and those whose families had been affected, brought home the immediacy of the issue. Joan Golding, an Anglican from Warrandyte, Melbourne, talked of caring for her son in his final years with AIDS, of her fear that she would not be able to cope with nursing him, and her determination that he should have his wish to die at home.

When, finally, she told fellow parishioners why her son was ill, their response was warm and caring—in stark contrast to their dentist, who 'couldn't cope'; their doctor, who said he had no knowledge of AIDS; or their priest, to whom she went for help, only to end up counselling him.

David Edwards, a 31-year-old gay Christian who has been HIV-positive for nearly five years, told of his response to his situation. 'I don't care who finds out [I'm HIV-positive],' he said. 'If they have a problem, it's their problem.' Educating people around him about their misconceptions—that AIDS can be transmitted by hugging or kissing, or by sharing cups and cutlery—had broken down barriers. His father now embraces him for the first time in 25 years. Robert, who has lived with the virus for ten years, had a different story to tell. Attendance at the family Christmas dinner used to be 25. Since his illness, it's down to three.

The conference was not the place for those who regard AIDS as a punishment for homosexuality, or who think that celibacy can be the only solution. Here were people grappling with the boundaries of sexual morality—with the balance between sexuality interpreted as an expression of God's love and the need to recommend a pattern of responsible behaviour. When does the practical become the profane?

While some Christians, like those at the CAPE conference, are prepared to take a practical road, and while others, like Maria, tolerate an uneasy coexistence of doctrine and prevention, others find the challenge too difficult. That tension is clearest among the Catholic ranks.

A number of priests and nuns were reluctant to speak on the record, if at all, in the course of research for this article. And Maria's demonstration of a condom before parents at the Loreto school provoked a skirmish described by some as involving 'threats from diocesan level', by others as leading to a 'clarification' of existing policies. Either way, when the presentation was made again to Year 10 girls, the condom segment had been dropped.

Elsewhere, some Catholic schools have adopted a different approach. Bernadette McPhee is a Loreto sister who works on the staff of the Ankali Project in Sydney, a secular body that trains volunteers to work with people living with AIDS. In the past year she has given talks to Year 11 and 12 girls at two Loreto schools, and at others, about her experience. 'I talk about friends dying and people's attitudes, and I talk about what Ankali can offer—accepting people as they are, not being judgemental.'

If young people cannot speak openly and honestly about their bodies and sexuality, yet can and do experiment sexually, how can AIDS be prevented? For Fr Pe-

AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is a disease that has generated more myths than perhaps any other.

- It is a condition that results from infection by the HIV virus. Many years can elapse between infection and the onset of full-blown AIDS. Even then, the infected person may experience periods of relative well-being.
- The virus, contrary to popular belief, is difficult to catch. It is easily killed by household disinfectant or chlorine in water supplies. It is not passed on through ordinary social contact like kissing, sharing toilets or swimming pools, or utensils. It cannot be passed via mosquito bites, spitting or sneezing.
- One method of transmission is by blood to blood contact, as in sharing needles, or by a mother during pregnancy or birth or while breastfeeding. The other is during sex, by the transfer of infected semen, vaginal fluid or blood.
- AIDS is not a 'gay disease'. However unprotected anal sex is high risk behaviour because of the greater possibility of body tissue being torn, allowing the virus to enter the bloodstream. In undeveloped countries where health standards are low and condoms too expensive for ordinary people, the prevalence of other sexually transmitted diseases, genital warts etc, means unprotected heterosexual activity is the common mode of transmission and no less dangerous than homosexual activity.

ter Wood, who spends two days a week with patients and families at Fairfield, Melbourne's main AIDS hospital, there is no alternative to openness. 'As a priest, as a representative of the church and on my own convictions, I advise young unmarried people to chastity as being psychologically and spiritually the best preparation for lifetime commitment. But given the reality that many young people aren't chaste, if I'm asked about condoms and safe sex I'll answer purely factually—condoms are 92 per cent effective if used properly and they do make sex safer in regard to the transmission of HIV.

'A LOT OF RISK BEHAVIOUR that gay men indulge in is self-destructive and it's a result of having a very low image and low self-esteem. That's in part to do with the oppression they experience from childhood onwards. The more acceptance that there is of people as they are, then the higher self-esteem, the less risk behaviour and the more responsible their behaviour.'

It's a viewpoint echoed by Tony Keenan, president of the Victorian AIDS Council. Now assistant secretary of the Staff Association of Catholic Secondary Schools, he quit classroom teaching in 1987 partly because of the way AIDS education was managed—not as a health issue but as a theological question, to be handled as part of RE. 'I was witnessing what the virus was doing to friends and, in particular, knowing students who'd been infected while at Catholic schools or shortly after. Yet at the time there was a genuine belief that Catholics couldn't get AIDS because Catholics weren't gay.'

The situation has improved a little since. Keenan's experience is that Catholic clergy who come into contact with AIDS are invariably pushed to a more compassionate and practical standpoint, even if it's one they feel constrained to express only in private. In NSW, the Catholic education system's policy documents are sufficiently vague to give room for liberal interpretation. And yet ... 'All the churches are fantastic at providing support for people living with HIV or AIDs' says Keenan. 'But because it's to do with issues of sexuality, especially homosexuality in Australia, they won't take prevention seriously—it's politically too difficult. Yet simply giving people information doesn't necessarily mean endorsement. Meanwhile, the churches' attitude means young men will get infected and die.'

That conundrum means many people, like Maria, will support the church's theory but shy away from its practice. Others will simply lapse. As one nun lamented, if the very questions of our physical being are not taught in a credible way, nothing is credible, not even the Gospels. ■

David Glanz is a Melbourne freelance journalist.

Beware the wicked enchanter

FEW PEOPLE THINK OF my distinguished ancestor as an avid movie-goer, but I am sure he was. I say movie-goer rather than 'film buff' because the Don was a man of simple and vigorous tastes. It is impossible to think of him sitting in a cafe, spilling cappuccino on his rusty armour and discoursing on the editing of *Citizen Kane.* But he knew how difficult it is to draw the line between life as it is and life as it is imagined, and that is all anyone needs to enjoy the movies.

It is not just that, when not on the quest, the Don spent most of his time reading chivalric romances. On at least one occasion, the quest itself provided him with as splendidly cinematic an experience as anything ever filmed in Panavision. The Don persuaded Sancho, and a guide who was travelling with them at the time, to tie a rope around his waist and lower him into the dark cave of Montesinos. They played out the rope until it was finished, long after Don Quixote had vanished from sight, and after about half an hour raised it again. By their reckoning, the whole process took no more than an hour.

When they drew him up, the Don appeared to be asleep. They laid him on the ground and shook him, and he woke with alarm, saying: 'God pardon you my friends, for you have robbed me of the sweetest existence and most delightful vision any human being ever enjoyed or beheld. Now, indeed, I positively know that the pleasures of this life pass like a dream, and wither like the flowers of the field.' In that dark cave the Don, falling into a trance, had entered a world of crystal castles, sad knights and enchanted ladies; a world brighter and more wonderful than anything conjured up by his chivalric romances. He was so transported by this vision that he insisted his friends were mistaken in believing that he had only been in the cave for an hour; he had spent three days and nights outside the land of the living.

It is not wildly quixotic to regard the darkened cinema as a sort of high-tech cave of Montesinos. The only real difference between the two is that cinemas ply their patrons with refreshment, in the form of choc-top icecreams, cartons of popcorn and jumbo cups of Coca-Cola. Whereas in an enchanted cave, as the Don reminds us, people do not eat 'nor do they defecate, although it is believed that their nails grow, and their beards and hair.'

The Don would have appreciated many of the products of the old Hollywood—*Casablanca*, for instance—though I suspect much recent cinema fare, whether from Hollywood or elsewhere, would not be to his taste. What would he make, for example, of *A Brief History of Time*, an offering at the Melbourne film festival? You not only have to enter a black hole in order to see it, but black holes form a large part of its subject matter as well. Yet there is a kind of crystal castle—the universe itself—and if Stephen Hawking, the physicist who is the subject of the film, is not exactly knightly he is nonetheless a man with a quest. The women in his life are not, however, enchanted. Indeed, his wife appears to have become progressively dis-enchanted.

The only enchanted woman in *A Brief History of Time* is a dead woman, Marilyn Monroe. And her enchantment takes this form: she is not allowed just to be dead, but must survive as a kind of frozen image, preserved in a thousand oh-so-familiar wall posters taken from stills of her movies. A sort of variation on the captive princess in the tower. Two of these posters appear in *A Brief History of Time*, adorning the wall beside Hawking as he taps away at his computer. The first time one is sighted we think that Hawking, like many of us, is one of Marilyn's admirers. But when we see the second, in a slightly different position, we wonder if this is a crass joke at the expense of this disabled scientist who spends his life thinking about heavenly bodies. And at the expense of Marilyn, the captive princess.

Hawking's quest is, if not ultimately more elusive than the Don's, certainly more difficult for non-physicists to follow. While I queued to buy a ticket, a not-too-shy American woman behind me proclaimed: '*A Brief History of Time*? I tried three times to read that book and couldn't finish it. So I thought hey, I'll just catch the movie.' Well yes, it is one of those books that you often see on people's bookshelves but rarely see them reading. Which is one reason why Errol Morris' film of the book attracted such a large audience at the festival: wide-screen images do not subsititute for the formulae of physicists, but they are the best way that simpletons like the Don and myself have of understanding what physicists are doing. Many people have described theories of the origin of the universe as a series of chicken-and-egg questions, but when Morris shows us a huge, broody chicken suspended against a backdrop of stars, the point is made in a funny, forceful way.

Yet it is the same kind of mind that gives us both the cosmic chook and Marilyn the captive princess. It is the kind of mind that, to quote another voice from the box-office queue, is sometimes described as cine-literate. The voice in the queue used this term approvingly; being cine-literate now means knowing which films the two Marilyn posters in *A Brief History of Time* are taken from, and being able to spin out the ironic commentary they make on that film.

But that is not the original meaning of the term, which was coined by Martin Scorsese. He described himself as cine-literate, and meant that he had a kind of *ersatz* literacy, gained from many years spent watching films rather than reading books. He did not regret watching the films, and those of us who like his movies are glad that he watched them. But he did regret the unread books, because he understood the importance of old-fashioned preoccupations with plot and character and plausibility. Images, as Scorsese's own work shows us, are lovely and seductive. But if they are all you have to go on, you become merely cine-literate. You may even become someone who thinks that juxtaposing images of Marilyn Monroe and a cripple in a wheelchair is clever and funny, instead of being cruel and stupid. ■

Ray Cassin is production editor of *Eureka Street.*

Winners don't take all

The Catholic Church has lived with factions and disputes before. But, ***Margaret O'Brien Steinfels*** *argues, it is time to dismantle some of the battle lines that have divided Catholics since Vatican II.*

MY PREMISE IS THAT THE STATE OF THE CHURCH, its institutional vitality, makes a difference. I say that because it is not a premise everyone accepts. Paul's epistles, which predate our gospels, although not of course the gospel events, are often concerned about institutional vitality. We find questions there about who is in and who is out, about how to behave, about what can be changed and what cannot. There are a considerable number of people who believe that such preoccupations represented a distraction from true Christianity in Paul's time, and do so even more in the enlightened present.

Such people would argue that Jesus himself was not concerned about rules and organisation, about definitions and boundaries; that rather he was concerned only that we should love our neighbours, feed the hungry, visit the imprisoned, proclaim the kingdom, and let the rest take care of itself. People of that persuasion may be mistaken—I believe that they are—but their single-mindedness about certain things often provides an important corrective to any of us in danger of submersion in matters ecclesiastical, and I am not arguing with them here. I want only to be straightforward about my own premise, so as not to mislead those who don't accept it.

Again: the institutional vitality of the church, the community that testifies to the lordship of Jesus in word and sacrament, makes a difference. Though the gates of hell may not ultimately prevail against it, the church's witness can be a clarion call or a whimper. The fact that, by its defensive posture towards political and economic change, the Catholic Church in 19th-century Europe was relegated to the margins of political and cultural life had practical consequences. The church sympathised with right-wing resentment and thereby aggravated left-wing desperation. It drove away the intellectual and artistic creativity that had been drawn to religion in romantic reaction to the rationalist excesses of the 18th century. It lost country people migrating to the cities, and had little leverage on the economic structures that emerged in industrial societies.

Likewise today, if the church either exiles itself to the margins of society or concedes so much to the *zeitgeist* that it loses its identity, then, even if the gates of hell never do quite clang shut on it, our children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren will still be deprived of the treasures that for many of us are of inestimable importance.

So my premise is that the vitality of the church matters. My thesis is that the present and future vitality of the church is being put at risk by an unholy, and usually unwitting, alliance between right and left in their attitude and conduct towards one another and towards the church. In suggesting this, I do not pretend to occupy some perfectly balanced middle, standing placidly above the fray. By the usual measures, I would probably be located on the moderate left of the Catholic Church. I favour the ordination of women, deplore the way that the ban on contraception has crippled the church's ability to respond credibly to our culture's sexual anarchy, and lament the pattern of appointing bishops whose subservience to Rome undermines the respect due the local church. On the other hand, my theology of sacrament is unquestionably too traditional, and my ideology of peace and justice too sceptical, to qualify me for the radical left. But it is less the substance of positions held by different groups in the church that concerns me than the way in which these positions are held.

Let me describe nine ways in which this collusion between the right and the left operates to the detriment of the church's vitality.

1. Whatever we call them—left and right, liberal and conservative, the blues and the greens—both camps harbour the conviction that they represent the 'real' majority in the church, while the other side controls all the levers of power. Each conceives of itself as a beleaguered majority.

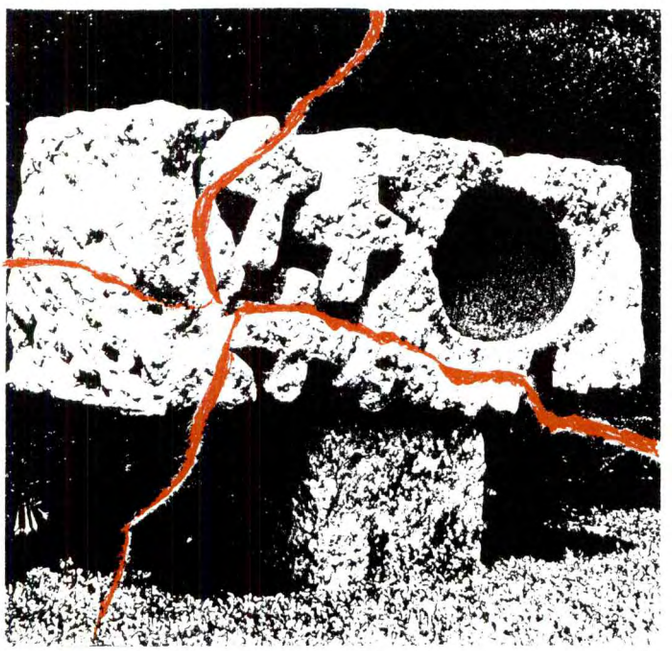
The left cites polls showing wide support for church reform. The right believes it represents the simple faithful, the ordinary person in the pew, as opposed to a thin crust of noisy malcontents. The

left bemoans the power of Pope John Paul and Cardinal Ratzinger, the inert lump of spineless bishops, the tentacles of Opus Dei. The right bemoans a near-monopoly of theology by liberals, the manipulation of bishops by left-wing advisers, a deeply implanted network of cathechists and liturgists, women religious who talk back, and journalists who distort the 'true faith'.

2. Neither camp is willing to acknowledge that the other contains real human beings, some of whose concerns cannot simply be dismissed. Neither camp wants to recognise that it holds the controlling position in certain areas of Catholic life. After Vatican II conservatives remained overwhelmingly in power in Rome, as they were before it. They are largely in power in most national hierarchies. Liberals, on the other hand, have set the agenda for theology and religious education, and much of liturgical practice, for two decades.

3. Related to the conviction of being the beleaguered majority is each side's conviction of also being the wave of the future, while the other side is the backwash of history. Liberals categorise conservatives as preconciliar, if not downright palaeolithic. Conservatives, who now style themselves 'postmodern', say liberals represent 'the bell-bottom theology' of the 1960s and 1970s. (The phrase is from the March 1992 newsletter of the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars).

4. The conviction that one is of the real, but silent, majority and is the wave of the future heightens self-satisfaction. The conviction that the other side possesses all the power sharpens a sense of grievance. The two camps can easily maintain at least one thing in common—acute awareness of the errors of the other and limited attention to their own. The status of beleaguered majority relieves each side of responsibility for the state of things in those particular areas in which each dominates.



5. With this attitude it is enough to count one's own efforts a success when one has merely thwarted the projects of the opposition. In catechetics, for example, the left will count it an achievement to have kept the tentacles of the universal catechism from reaching high-school students. In church governance, conservatives will count it a win to have kept a priest who opposes the ban on artificial contraception, or who favours the ordination of women, from being ordained a bishop. Never mind that young Catholics may have only the dimmest acquaintance with the doctrine of the Trinity.

6. Another point on which right and left enter into unwitting and destructive agreement is their deep and abiding desire that, if the other side cannot do the proper thing, it should quietly leave and commit ecclesiastical harakiri. In the view of each side, the church would definitely be better off with the departure of the other. In each camp, individuals in the other are judged 'not real Catholics', and caricatures of the opposition's position are held up to show how this is so. Matthew Fox OP has charged the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith with not doing either 'its intellectual homework or its inner work'. Fox has also accused the Vatican of fascism, christofascism, adultism, sadomasochism and judgmentalism (see his *Pastoral Letter to Cardinal Ratzinger and the Whole Church*). On the other side, the conservative newsletter *The Catholic Eye* declares: 'If [dissenters] think the church is wrong (and has been habitually wrong for centuries), the road to Protestantism is wide, well-travelled and waiting. And if they don't like the Protestants, they can always start their own church.'

LIBERALS, ON PRINCIPLE, DON'T EXCOMMUNICATE people (that is one of the complaints conservatives have about them). But they do exclude ideas and groups, in calls for retreat to small, intimate groups that, in effect, cut themselves off from the rest of the church. Let me sum up a recent fund-raising letter that conveys some of these mental manoeuverings. The letter opens with a cry of alarm over the beatification of the founder of Opus Dei, while the cause of this organisation's own favoured candidate, Pope John XXIII, goes nowhere. If Josemaría Escrivá is canonised, the letter argues, Opus Dei will gain ever greater credibility and succeed in its true purpose, dominating episcopates around the world. This is not necessarily an unwarranted fear, but what conclusion does the letter draw? 'Escrivá's canonisation gives us more reason than ever to ignore Rome ... We are thinking of creative ways to remain Catholic but not Roman.' (Association for

Rights of Catholics in the Church, December 1991.) Are they taking the advice of *The Catholic Eye*? Are they starting their own church?

On the other hand, let me remind you of the Vatican's negotiations to keep Archbishop Lefebvre and his flock from going into schism. These negotiations were serious, strenuous and, though ultimately unsuccessful, conducted with what seemed to be intense good will on the part of the Vatican. Who can imagine such efforts being made to reconcile or accommodate groups on the left? Or even to accommodate a faithful but dissenting theologian, Charles Curran? Having been removed from his post in a pontifical theology department, Curran was effectively, if indirectly, barred from teaching theology in any Catholic institution.

7. Another destructive point shared by left and right: perfectionism. If you are not 100 per cent for me, you are 100 per cent against me. Take, for example, the US bishops' pastoral letter on women's concerns. There is scarcely a topic of greater importance to the church today. The church's response to the rapidly altered status of women may be as crucial to its future as were its tragically insufficient responses to the intellectual rebellions of the 18th century and to the working-class movements of the 19th century.

We cannot continue to have an old boys' club governing the church. Imagining, and working towards a church that recognises the leadership of women may take a long time. But refusing to talk about it is simply incomprehensible.

AT FIRST THE LEFT assailed the bishops for imagining they could write a pastoral letter on women at all, wielding the debater's point that *women* weren't the problem—something the bishops had never implied. They urged the bishops to write about men, not a bad idea but not one that seemed to be excluded by what the bishops were undertaking. So the bishops clarified their focus—by changing the phrase describing their work to 'a pastoral on the concerns of women'. Thereafter the right succeeded in removing some women who had acted as consultants to the bishops, because the women's views were regarded as unacceptable.

Then, after an astute and useful first draft appeared—which had the merit of allowing many different Catholic women to speak for themselves—both right and left complained that these quotations were allowing the bishops to fudge the tough issues. This was true, since the bishops could not have voiced the tough issues in their own words. By the time that Rome intervened, support for the pastoral had already been drained by both sides. The third draft is now winding its way to a pitiful denouement. Under fire from both sides, we are likely to get a letter encompassing the worst of all possible worlds—a letter everyone will love to hate, a letter that both left and right will have succeeded in bludgeoning to death.

8. This symbiotic relationship between left and right creates a cycle wherein the excesses of one camp provide reasons that excuse the other from correcting its own excesses. There is no better example here than the present state of Catholic theology. In some respects Catholic theology has been in an extremely creative phase, but it also faces unprecedented problems. At virtually every moment since Vatican II, leading theologians have been under attack from Rome. The result has been a nearly reflexive defensiveness and an understandable but damaging unwillingness to give ammunition to the Vatican by criticising colleagues, including a few who may have gone off the deep end. The closed and questionable procedures of Rome, the newly mandated oath of fidelity and the periodic scoldings from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith have repeatedly elicited protests from practising theologians. But when asked how they would carry out the task of setting some boundaries in a way different from Cardinal Ratzinger's they have often fallen silent.

Consider again the interesting case of Matthew Fox, who has again been in the news because of a conflict with his Dominican superiors. In 1988, when Cardinal Ratzinger's office pressured the order to silence Fox for one year, a number of theologians rushed to his defence. Yet when the *National Catholic Reporter* asked leading theologians for their evaluations of Fox, virtually all begged off on the grounds that they had never read him. Perhaps they had not, or perhaps they did not want to exacerbate his problems. For whatever reason, they were unwilling to put their scholarly skills on the line and provide the church with an alternative, and perhaps more open, evaluation of Fox's views than the one coming from Rome.

9. There are generational differences to be taken account of. The Left believes young people leave the church because the rules and regulations are too strict, and because the

Right and left enter into unwitting and destructive agreement in their deep and abiding desire that, if the other side cannot do the proper thing, it should quietly leave and commit ecclesiastical harakiri.

church is too authoritarian, patriarchal and hierarchical. The right argues that the young leave because of the post-Vatican II sins of the left: the young are not being properly taught the truths of the faith, nor are they required to observe the rigorous moral standards of yesteryear.

BUT WHAT IF BOTH ARE MISTAKING the forest for the trees? As one young Catholic, Paul Elie, wrote (*Commonweal*, 27 September 1991): 'Among the church's younger members Catholic guilt has been supplanted by Catholic shame—a deep embarrassment about our church for the reasons that Christians have always felt ashamed: we associate faith with childhood and are eager to throw off childish ways; we disapprove of the church's doings; we appraise the church by its own standards and it doesn't measure up; or we appraise ourselves and realise that we don't live up to what Christ and the church demand of us. Mostly, though, we are ashamed because we lack the resources of Catholic tradition that might enable us to reconcile seeming opposites and make sense of the absurdity we confront.'

Is it possible that the experience of growing up in the post-Vatican II church has been so different that neither the right nor the left grasps what is at stake for younger Catholics? The experimentations, upheavals and, sometimes, chaos in liturgy, catechetics, and religious expectations have left younger Catholics with a fear of permeability and shallowness. Some leave, some are half-hearted in their beliefs and practices, and some adopt a more individualistic sense of their Catholicism.

Perhaps much of this disorder is inevitable, and we should be grateful for those who persist, on whatever basis. But don't the words of a Paul Elie also carry an echo of impatience with the internecine quarrels of an older generation? When that echo reaches the older generation, maybe we ought to stop and ask this question: Is it possible that each camp has more invested in its mutual and symbiotic quarrel with the other than in the future well-being of the church?

I believe that it is not only possible, but probable. Yet what I have set forth by way of argument and example will not convince everyone. Or, if it does convince, some may insist that it is irrelevant. Those on the left may say, 'That's all well and good, but as long as we have this Pope and these kinds of episcopal appointments, the right will ultimately control the levers of power.' And on the right they may say, 'Well, after all it is not hierarchical power that matters, it is the belief and practice of ordinary Catholics that ultimately counts. If we fail to conserve the magisterium, to control dissent and rein in erring clergy and religious, there will be no church left worthy of the name Catholic. 'There is no easy or obvious resolution to this back-and-forth. In most cases it cannot be a matter of splitting the differences, which in any case cannot usually be the appropriate response to ecclesiological or theological differences. On some of these issues compromise cannot be the answer; on others it would be a terrible mistake.

We cannot presume that coming generations will somehow, willy-nilly, be Catholic. Intellectually, spiritually, pastorally, we need to be more critical of what is being offered to them, and more consistent and comprehensive in articulating the faith we should be passing on. Nor can we continue to have an old boys' club governing the church. Imagining, and working towards a church that recognises the leadership of women may take a long time. But refusing to talk about it is simply incomprehensible. Just as it is incomprehensible that the litmus test for episcopal appointment should be an obliviousness to this question and others equally important, simply because our tradition does not yet understand how to deal with such matters.

We should shudder at the consequences of such a policy, just as we should fear the consequences of moving precipitously, of taking matters into our own hands, of giving up on the institution. This is a recipe for dissolution and the squandering of energy and resources. It seems to me that ultimately this quarrel between left and right may be less about specific content than about the refusal of each side to examine problems that have congealed since Vatican II. It is time to acknowledge that, 30 years after the council was convened, we have definitively entered the postconciliar period. It is time to give up the pleasures of the hunt and the joust, and to rebuild. To do that we need a willingness to see beyond our own version of reality. Call it what you will—a search for the big picture, a generosity of spirit. Whatever we call it, it must, I think, be grounded in love of the church.

What do I mean by that? Appealing to love of the church can seem a sentimental idea, even a vacuous one, whether it is wielded as a synonym for unquestioning loyalty or a spirit of 'anything goes.' That is not what I mean, although what I say may seem vague and inchoate. So let me offer some examples, some expressions of what we might mean or do when we try to ground this larger perspective, this generosity of spirit in the love of the church.

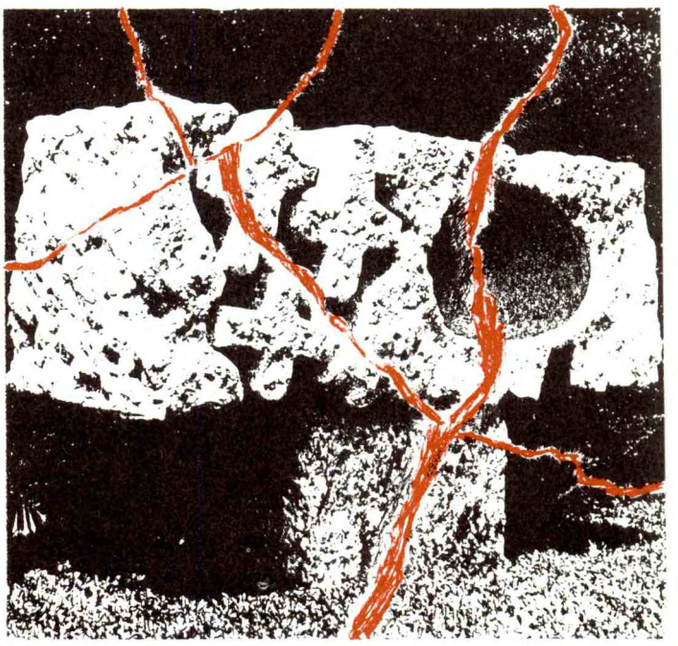
First, I found on my bookshelf a slim and dusty volume of Henri de Lubac, containing selections from his *The Splendor of the Church*. It was written in a period when de Lubac had been silenced, but in which he nonetheless continued to write and, I am told by one of his fellow Jesuits, circulated his writings in unpublished form.

He speaks of the *vir ecclesiasticus*—the churchman, a term we will enlarge to include the churchwoman—a man or woman of the Christian community. Citing Origen, de Lubac says that, he [Origen] 'thought—and rightly—that there was no other way [whether for clergy or laity] of being a Christian in the full sense ... Anyone ... possessed by a similar desire will not find it enough to be loyal and obedient, to perform exactly everything demanded by his profession of the Catholic faith.

'Such a man [or woman] will have fallen in love with the beauty of the House of God; the church will have stolen his/her heart. [The church] is his spiritual native country, his "mother and his brethren", and nothing that concerns [the church] will leave him indifferent or detached; he will root himself in her soil, form himself in her likeness and make himself one with her experience. He will feel himself rich with her wealth; he will be aware that through her and her alone he participates in the unshakeableness of God. It will be from her that he learns how to live and die. Far from passing judgment on her, he will allow her to judge sacrifices demanded by her unity.'

The conviction that one is of the real, but silent, majority and is the wave of the future heightens self-satisfaction. The conviction that the other side possesses all the power sharpens a sense of grievance.

WE STAND AT A GREAT DISTANCE in time, in sensibilities (and in pronouns) from de Lubac. We see him over the great divide that marks the church before and after the council. And yet, whatever exceptions we would want to raise about the nature of those sacrifices, his voice evokes in us—or it does in me, at least—the desire to pay greater attention to what we say and what we do in claiming the church to be what is, after all, only our partial understanding of it. Doesn't it make us want to look more closely at the positions of both right and left, to look more critically at the insistence of each that their vision of the church is a vision of the true church? That is one thing we might mean when we speak of the love of the church.



Let me conclude by returning to St Paul and his concerns about the rules of engagement. In writing to the Corinthians he had some instructive words, which have been abused in many sermons but which, if we could hear them anew, might help us to shape a new attitude with which to approach the postconciliar church. Paul says that of course we may have the gift of prophecy, or the gift of tongues (or the gift of a theology degree) 'and know every hidden truth'. And of course, there may be a few who have faith strong enough to move mountains, but if they have not love, they have nothing. Then he enumerates all of the virtues that most of us do not possess in any great measure: patience, kindness, or—generosity of spirit.

Love, Paul reminds us, is never boastful, nor conceited, nor rude; never selfish, not quick to take offence. Love keeps no score of wrongs, does not gloat over other men's [and women's] sins, but delights in the truth. There is nothing love cannot face. There is no limit to its faith, its hope and its endurance. 'Are there prophets?' he asks. Well, 'their work will be over. Are there tongues of ecstasy? They will cease. Is there knowledge? It will vanish away; for our knowledge and our prophecy alike are partial, and the partial vanishes when wholeness comes.'

That is the spirit in which both right and left must scrutinise their own claims, and examine the symbiotic relationship that is sapping the vitality of the church. ■

Margaret O'Brien Steinfels is the editor of *Commonweal*.

• This article first appeared in *America* magazine.

'Of what is past, or passing, or to come'

By Frank O'Shea

Trinity College, Dublin, about 1890.

In 1914, WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS applied for permission to use the library of Trinity College, Dublin. In accordance with custom he was required to take an oath, in Latin, not to damage the books. Yeats was 49; his father, grandfather and great-grandfather had graduated from Trinity and he had an international reputation as a poet. He was hardly the type who would vandalise books. But the vice-provost was John Mahaffey, a Dublin 'character' and an intellectual snob known for his sardonic wit. Mahaffey went through the Latin text of the oath, marking the stresses so that Yeat's reading would not offend his sensitive ear.

Later that year, the two crossed paths again. The poet had been invited to address the Gaelic Society as part of a commemoration of the centenary of the birth of the poet Thomas Davis, who was also an alumnus of the college. Yeat's co-lecturer was to have been Patrick Pearse, who at that time was an easy and frequent target of Mahaffey's barbs, and regarded as a revolutionary both by virtue of his politics and his standing as a Gaelic scholar. Rather than attempt to cancel the lecture, Mahaffey simply dissolved the Gaelic Society and closed the gates on the unlikely pairing of Pearse and Yeats.

Some of the ethos of Trinity College is captured in these dealings between the university and early 20th century Irish nationalists. The college was founded by Queen Elizabeth I in 1592, as a means 'whereby Knowledge, Learning and Civilitie may be increased, to the banishment of barbarism, tumults and disorderly living.' It was a noble purpose, though few historians will give you an argument if you suggest a political motive: to offer a local alternative to the European universities from which young Irishmen might return with seditious ideas. At first there was no bar to Catholics attending, but from 1634 they were required to take the oath of supremacy, acknowledging the English monarch as head of the church. The result was that Trinity became a finishing school for the sons of the Protestant ascendancy. (Daughters were not admitted until 1904.)

Learning has a habit of producing independent thinkers, however, and not all of Trinity's students have followed approved paths. It has produced revolutionaries like the father of Irish republicanism, Wolfe Tone, Robert Emmet, Thomas Davis, and John Mitchel, as well as more conventional political activists such as Henry Grattan, Isaac Butt, the founder of the Home Rule movement, John Redmond and Edward Carson.

It has given the world writers such as those mentioned in a Yeats poem: 'Goldsmith and Burke, Swift and the Bishop of Cloyne'. The last-mentioned was George Berkeley, Ireland's most celebrated philosopher, whose tenet that things exist only when they have an observer has echoes in today's quantum theory. Other Trinity graduates who have achieved literary fame have included Thomas Moore, Bram Stoker, Oscar Wilde, John Millington Synge, Oliver St John Gogarty and Samuel Beckett.

Yeats' name is not on the roll. Fearing that his Latin and mathematics were not up to the standard required for the entrance examination, he took himself off to art school instead. It is sobering to think that if he were a young man in Australia today he might also fall short of a necessary tertiary entrance score, but that's another fight. At least Trinity College was able to go some way towards redressing its misfortune and compensating for Mahaffey's rudeness when it conferred an honorary D.Litt on Yeats in 1922.

Of today's writers, Trinity graduated William Trevor, Elizabeth Bowen, Conor Cruise O'Brien, Eavan Boland (her father was F.H. Boland, president of the UN General Assembly during the Cuban missile crisis and the first Catholic to become chancellor of the university), Brian Inglis and J.P. Donleavy. Ironically, Donleavy made his name as a chronicler of wild student excesses, the 'disorderly living' that the college's founder sought to banish.

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photo: National Library of Ireland

Fair exchange

Some exotic experiences at Trinity in 1972-73

By Patrick O'Farrell

THAT I CAME TO BE TEACHING at Trinity College Dublin at all in Michaelmas term 1972 arose from my friendship with Theo Moody, professor of history from 1939 to 1977, who died in 1984. This friendship had developed from 1965-66, when I first spent a year teaching at University College, Dublin.

In that year I found that as a visitor from then strange unknown parts, I was equally acceptable to both the history departments, despite the distances of style and spectacular instances of friendly hatreds and animus that separated their statutory inhabitants. I was advantaged by the high reputation of the only previously known Australian historian, Sir Keith Hancock, from whom I had brought letters of introduction: Hancock was credited with having done Ireland singular service in his *Survey of Commonwealth Affairs*. But in addition, the contrasting universities fitted my own Jekyll/Hyde Irishness. I enjoyed the riot and wit, and the mixture of hard-headed politics and warm charm, bad behaviour and drunkenness, that made UCD such a fascinating environment. I also enjoyed the formality and mannered order, the air of almost foppish superiority, the smooth traditionalism and blase oddity that distinguished Trinity.

Theo Moody was a northerner from Belfast, but epitomised the urbane Trinity facade of unruffled ease. He was a good man, a Quaker, kind, high-principled, meticulous, and very industrious; constantly enraged by what he saw as the lazy irresponsibility and devious clowning of his UCD counterparts, Dudley Edwards and Desmond Williams, who were, in different ways, the kind of eccentrics whose antics Theo found very unamusing. Indeed part of their outrageous and obstructive behaviour was deliberately aimed at Theo, cast by them as a pompous paragon of rectitude, sobriety and good sense—in which I think they detected not only Trinity side, but repellent Belfast Protestant work ethic origins.

These matters of contrasting Irish views of the world, and how it should work and play, had practical importance, because the two professoriates were supposed to be cooperating on two major professional ventures—the scholarly journal *Irish Historical Studies* and the seven-volumed, government-and-American-funded, *New History of Ireland*. By the 1970s both these enterprises had passed into the effective control of Theo Moody, with assistance from the dissident UCD professors F.X. Martin and Francis Byrne. This was partly by virtue of contention that could issue in only one course, if things were to get done; yet not without an element of personal satisfaction on Theo's part, or indeed provocation: the unworthy would fall by the wayside and the righteous take up their burdens.

Theo Moody was a man who saw grand principle and personal reputation involved in such matters as spelling protestant and catholic in lower case. As lesser mortals fell away, the effect was to preserve and enhance scholarly standards and presentation in matters basic and technical to the degree of impeccability, an achievement totally in harmony with the traditional Trinity academic style in science and arts, and against the more lazy and slipshod elements in the Irish grain: I am less sure of its positive effects on the imaginative and unorthodox elements in the climate of Irish learning.

All this fed Theo's expansive and theoretically benign concept of his role as God Professor. As a guest in the department I occasionally wondered what it might be like to be a member, but unlike UCD where there were weekly staff meetings, of great revelatory and entertainment value, Trinity offered no easy way of finding out, for which on balance I was rather glad: my wife and I felt great affection for Theo, and the staff members I saw entering or leaving his rooms never

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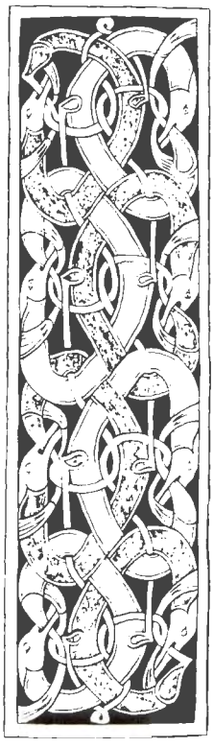
The main entrance to Trinity is guarded by two statues: Burke, on the right (naturally), hand on hip, looking boldly forward, ready to take on Whigs or Jacobins with equal ferocity; and Goldsmith, head lowered in a book, the symbol of quiet learning.

As you enter the campus through Regent House, leaving behind the city bustle, it is easy to imagine yourself going back in time. Tall, ivy-covered buildings fronted by Corinthian columns, cobbled walks and perfectly green lawns, the lamplit Parliament Square and the magnificent campanile all remind you that this is part of a carefully preserved past. Lest you, as an Australian, feel out of place, the college even lays on a game of tennis; appropriately enough the courts are to be found behind a line of parked staff cars in a square called Botany Bay.



OF COURSE, YOU WILL WANT to visit the library. Trinity has a total stock of some three million volumes, a number which increases by more than a thousand each week. Since 1801 it has had the right to claim a copy of all books and periodicals, maps and sheet music published in Britain or Ireland. After Irish independence this right was enshrined in legislation by the parliaments of both countries.

On the ground floor of the Old Library, you will find the permanent home of the Book of Kells. Dating from the 9th century but one of glories of any age, it is an unsurpassed masterpiece of manuscript art. Here also are housed other priceless manuscripts, some older, many deserving the same superlatives as the Kells book of the Gospels. You will also find here the 'Brian Boru' harp, the official symbol of Ireland, found everywhere from state documents to coinage, from national sports strip to the brass on army and police uniforms. And of course it is the trademark of Dublin's most famous liquid refreshment.

But while these treasures are undoubtedly priceless, the Long Room of the library will take your breath away. This is largest single-chamber library in the world, its oak bookcases rising to a barrel-vaulted ceiling, its 200,000 volumes promising the treasures of the ages. It is little wonder Yeats wanted to read here. To walk the 70 metres of its length, literally in the footsteps of some of the great thinkers of four centuries, is to experience the awe and reverence of a great cathedral at dusk.

You can imagine Burke or Grattan here. You can visualise G.F. Fitzgerald pacing this floor; the books might provide little evidence but the cloister quiet would have helped his daring pre-Einstein speculation that the length of a moving body will contract with its speed. Perhaps the great mathematician William Rowan Hamilton came here, though he scratched no formulae on the panelling as he did on Broom Bridge over the Grand Canal.

Undoubtedly the Nobel Prize-winning physicist Ernest Walton still comes here; he left Cambridge after his epoch-making experiments with the Englishman John Cockroft, because his Christian beliefs prevented him from continuing with work that would lead to weaponry. If the other parts of Trinity are for walking or watching, looking or marvelling, the Long Room of the Old Library is for meditation and prayer.

As you leave the library, you might notice that the same area that displays the Book of Kells also shows the 1916 Proclamation of Irish Independence. At first sight, you may feel this is an unlikely resting place. During the Easter Rising, Mahaffey organised the defence of Trinity and rebel positions were shelled from within its walls. The suspicion that Trinity was a less than fulsome supporter of Irish nationalism was reinforced on VE Day, when some students raised the Union Jack and burned the Irish tricolour. In response, rival students from University College, Dublin entered Trinity to burn the Union Jack and raise the tricolour. Among them was the recently retired Taoiseach (Prime Minister), Charles Haughey.

FIFTY YEARS AFTER the Rising, the derisive tag 'West British' was still used for Trinity people. Indeed, while restrictions on Catholics were removed in 1873—earlier than at Oxford and Cambridge—a reverse ban operated from the Catholic side. Until 1970, Catholics were forbidden to attend Trinity, and in the '60s the college was best-known in the wider Dublin community for 'the ban'.

Each Lent the Catholic archbishop's pastoral letter would mix its exhortations to penance with a reminder that Catholics were prohibited from enrolling at the university. By the time the ban was removed it was largely ignored, and by none more so, it seems, than members of religious orders and congregations. Unhappily, the ban is most often associated with Archbishop John Charles McQuaid, a man of great humility and piety, who was in the forefront of ecumenism before it became a rallying point for the trendy.

DURING THE PAST 30 years the image of Trinity College as a bastion of Protestant, Anglo-Saxon values has changed dramatically. Today, more than 70 per cent of its 10,000 students are Catholics, and you will hear the musical Munster accent, or the flat, dental-free Midland speech, or the most colloquial of Dublin expressions more often than the mid-Atlantic BBC speech that today passes for the Queen's English.

What is more, with a 400-year history things have time to happen. Patrick Pearse may once have been denied admittance through Trinity gates but he has had a posthumous revenge. The street that runs the length of the college and gives an address to many Trinity buildings used to be called Brunswick Street; for almost 70 years it has been called Pearse Street.

As for Yeats, he got his reader's card. I like his phrase for the Anglo-Irish, those people who until quite recent times were the backbone of Trinity College and who, through that university, made significant contributions to life and learning in places from Dublin to Durban to Melbourne. (Between 1830 and 1870, up to half the university graduates in Victoria had received their degrees from Trinity.) Yeats described the Anglo-Irish as 'no petty people'; it is a phrase that encapsulates 400 years of Trinity College, Dublin. ■

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seemed particularly happy.

Theo's obituary in *Irish Historical Studies* is daunting testimony to singular achievement; he was omnipresent, and even the Almighty might have gone over the seven days to emulate him. So it transpired. While a raft of other dilatory factors and persons were involved, by the late 1970s *Irish Historical Studies* was running two years late in its issues, and the *New History of Ireland* had stalled, a generation behind, its mouldering contributor's list looking like an obituary card for the previous doyens of Irish history. The sins of the defaulters made it impossible for Theo to reward the virtuous. My contribution, initially written in 1970, was published in part in 1989 (Vol. V), the rest hopefully in 1993—I use the word 'hopefully' knowing that Theo the editor would have instantly struck it from the text. Obviously this situation compelled new editors to include new contributors, the amalgam to issue in the splendid achievement the volumes were to become as they slowly appeared from 1976—as a monument to the planning and establishment of T.W. Moody.

In 1972 Theo Moody had just begun to confront this prodigious one-arm paperhanging task, with the supreme and smiling confidence and command he exuded as a style. Hearing from me that I was about to return to University College for another year, he espied a way in which he might take a canny and frugal advantage of this situation to ease his burden. He wrote urgently to offer a visiting professorship to add to the one at UCD, carrying a light load and a light—but not ridiculously so—stipend, all put in the context of replacing himself in teaching, thus enabling him to devote himself to the *New History of Ireland*. This was of course irresistible to me—the honour of replacing the great man in his own course, the duty of assisting him to meet the great challenge of the *New History*, the pleasure of teaching in a great University whose antiquity testified to the civilised historical values of humane scholarship—and the prospect of fending off a little further the threat of bankruptcy associated with travelling with my wife and five children. University College generously agreed to allow me to do this.

Theo was expansively general about my duties. Simply fill in for him in the first term of his course on the Home Rule movement, plus a few tutorials in Irish and European in following terms: having just published the previous year, a general book on Irish history, I would need virtually no preparation. Now I dearly loved Theo, but he had a streak of convenient vagueness which was endearing in sketching the distant prospect, (Don't worry about it—even the birds of the air, etc), but hid, or postponed, unpleasant practical realities. The real history of the Home Rule movement begins with the emergence of Parnell in 1879 and ends, I guess, in 1918. Theo's course covered the period 1870 to 1893, but my term covered 1870 to 1876, with seven lectures and twelve tutorials on material to which I would have given perhaps ten minutes of a first lecture in a course of my own. My task was essentially one of prehistory—the Nazi Party before Hitler joined, the Bolshevik party pre-Lenin.

There were two books on the period and one was missing from the Trinity Library. Well, if Theo could do it, so could I. Only later did I wonder if he ever had. The author of the other book was a former Trinity staff member, and then a member of the Irish parliament, five minutes walk away. Perhaps he was the previous victim of Theo's charm and the real perpetrator of this prescribed slice of day by day historical minimalism. I am grateful to Trinity for compelling me to make something out of nothing by devices and diversions, parallels and pre-echoes, with little assistance from the amiable but factually innocent students.

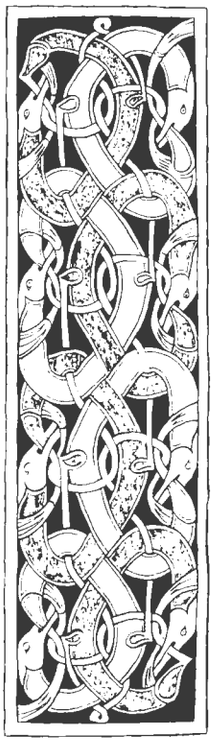
We arrived in Dublin in July knowing the city to have been abandoned to Americans until September. I checked in with the history secretary, virtually the only inhabitant of the Department and was allocated a pleasant room at the top of the stairs.

Beneath those stairs, on the ground floor, I had noticed what appeared to be the usual broom cupboard, whose door in this case had a frosted glass top panel. I gave it no thought until I saw a person produce a key and enter, an internal light coming on. This must be some communal semi-private phone box: there was a phone in my room which did not appear to be connected. This beneath the stairs arrangement must be what the broom cupboard was. Meanwhile I had confirmed my impression, totally consistent with my general experience of Ireland since 1965, that the history quarters lacked any toilet facilities. The nearest were in the then new Library building, in the next courtyard and a significant distance in circumstances of rain or other duress.

The sanitary scarcity was a matter close to my heart (if that is not an anatomically misleading simile). Indeed I had written to the *Irish Times* on the matter the previous month following a motoring holiday in the West of Ireland with my family. The *Times* had reported a calamitous drop in the tourist trade, which it attributed to the mistaken impression abroad that the troubles of the North affected all Ireland. I submitted—and they printed the letter—that the Troubles had nothing to do with it, but rather it was personal troubles arising from an absence of toilet facilities for travellers—especially those with children. It was some time before I discovered that the anonymous broom cupboard under the stairs was in fact a lavatory. I acquired a key.

Keys were vital elements in Trinity life, both as facilitation and symbol. To enter the understairs toilet was to experience not merely relief, but privilege. Here was the Trinity ethos in microcosm. Being at UCD was fun, a test of wits, and a broad human encounter. Being at Trinity was to experience the rightful rewards, protections, and honours properly accorded to scholarship: the very atmosphere inculcated something approaching arrogance, pride certainly, in being of that selected academic company and place—and in the best it evoked the response of responsibility to the primacy of scholarship, which was its reason and its spirit.

In nothing was this better encapsulated than in possession of yet another key, that to the Nassau Street gate, whose use was both a public and a clubbish act. Sadly this has been superseded by the new Arts building



which allows easy passage in to Trinity from Nassau Street through its undercroft. But in 1972, the tedious walk around from the main entrance in College Green to gain access to Fred Hanna's bookshop, or those in Dawson Street, the National Library etc, was avoided by using a metal gate set flush into the plain green Trinity fence, almost invisible from the outside. One entering could pause, unlock, and disappear magically, to the deferential awe of lesser mortals passing by, or coming out, appear among them suddenly to their disconcertment and reverence. It is sad that these haughty stupidities are now denied Trinity staffers by the easy access the new building affords (though I understand some still use the gate, on principle).

I ALSO USED THE GATE to visit Kevin and Howlin's tailoring establishment directly opposite, where I was having a tweed suit made—a firm which is also not what it was.

On a 1990 visit I commissioned another three piece suit. Measurements and fittings were solemnly made. The outcome was a jacket fit for a giant, trousers for a dwarf, and a waistcoat for an advanced consumptive. The staff marvelled at this prodigy, hung it on the racks awaiting some grotesquely deformed American, and gave me my money back: the process had taken over a month.

The mention of Americans takes me back to Trinity, a place much beset by these simple persons as elderly tourists. They nowadays seem more dragooned and cowed by officious tour guides, but in 1972 they were on freer rein, perhaps even independent individuals, and prone to stopping obviously local inhabitants to make enquiries, usually for the lavatories, but also often for the benefit of a friendly encounter. I observed with interest the standard Trinity ways of tourist avoidance. The young adopted a quadrangle lope and skip, instantly variable as to speed and direction. The old proceeded in a kind of wary scuttle, adapted to the hazards of the cobblestones, with the same flair for variation of speed and direction and of course of vanishing into unexpected doorways. One staff man, I am told, answered all quadrangle queries in Gaelic, or was it Old Norse, which made for brief encounters. Theo Moody's mode was an imperious determined stride which marked him as a man of importance on pressing business, not to be waylaid.

But there was much in the Trinity of that day that I would not accept, though being a visitor exempted me from much involvement beyond observation. Foremost was the intensely hierarchical structure which prevailed within the staff. This went together with excessive distance between staff and students.

A first step towards that change was taken during my stay. On the days I taught at Trinity I often had lunch either at the staff or student cafeterias, depending on who I was with. At some time during the year the Students' Union discovered that their cafeteria had been, as a long established practice, subsidising the staff cafeteria. Protest got the students nowhere, so they took to placarding both eating facilities. Staff continued to lunch as usual. Thereafter I went into the city or returned to UCD.

This whole catering matter, unresolved for a long time, seemed to me symptomatic of a disjunction and set of attitudes I could not share. That there should be a system whereby staff exploited students financially seemed to me outrageous, and that staff should persevere with it when it was drawn to their attention seemed to me totally insupportable. The history department was credited with housing the meanest man in Dublin—R.B. McDowell—but that was a joke related to McDowell's frugal habits and ancient unkept dress. He was one of that band of Dublin eccentrics represented to our last experience, in 1990, by a gentleman dining alone at a table next to us at Buswells in Molesworth Street. Lifting his wine glass as he began his meal, he toasted 'To the Tsar'. (I should have asked him if he meant Nicholas II; it may have been Ivan the Terrible.) But the Trinity staff who ignored student pickets to get their cheap lunch were not eccentrics, and it seemed to me that the matter went beyond privilege or trivial economics to more important general matters. This set of incidents diminished my enjoyment of the Trinity experience.

But then—this was 1973—the whole Irish experience was wearing rather thin and nervy. I shall one day write the story of how the SAS blew up the suits I was having made at Clery's—together with several innocent passers-by. This was the time of the first Dublin car bomb, in the lane next to Clery's department store—and their tailoring department—on the day the All Blacks played Ireland in Croke Park. A bomb initially attributed to the IRA, later to *agents provocateurs* in the SAS.

ANOTHER OF TRINITY'S quiet privileges was its car park, which allowed one to park without problems in the city centre. I sold our temporary car, a VW wagon, in the Trinity car park, in the sense of that being the arranged place where the documents and money changed hands. The new owner was totally out of place, and ill at ease in the Trinity environs, his payment all in well-used notes. As a last act I began removing the parking permit sticker as I was obliged to do. 'Ah sir', he said, 'don't you be going exerting yourself taking that thing off. Sure it will be a pleasure to do it for you myself when I have the car quiet at home'. It was a gallant effort from a man of another Dublin tradition to get the bonus of free city parking, but my Trinity disposition, my respect for regulations and requirements, for standards and correct behaviour, for doing the right thing, were too ingrained. I continued to peel off the sticker, returning it, and the Nassau Street gate key, to the front office.

Trinity was a scholarly city with walls, of which it was a comfort and a privilege to be briefly a citizen. I rejoice that such should exist and may it always do so: its continuance sustains those of us who travel in open and undefended scholarly country.■

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Given, with other papers, to a seminar held at the University of Melbourne to mark the 400th anniversary of Trinity College, Dublin.

PETER STEELE

Ports of entry

Here are two passages from Robert Hughes' *Barcelona*:

Now the Caudillo disliked Barcelona not only because it resisted him but because tsars, emperors, and dictators, right or left, are apt to distrust ports; in the days of shipping, port cities were too open to the influence of foreigners, to strange and nonnative ideas—shifting and labile places, offering an ease of entry and exit that a landlocked capital does not. The port is where the ser autentic, *or 'essence', of a country, as centralising power imagines it, begins to fray. That is why Peter the Great's successors shifted the capital of Russia from Saint Petersburg to Moscow; why Kemal Atatürk, inheriting one of the world's great port capitals in Istanbul, chose to create a new administrative centre in Ankara; why the absurd and artificial Brasília, not Rio de Janeiro, is the capital of Brazil. It may also help explain Franco's desire to make it clear to Barcelona that it no longer had any right to consider itself any capital of anywhere.* (pp8-9)

Puig's buildings show his eye in every square foot of surface, and the Casa Amatller is no exception. It would be a pity not to linger on its pseudomedieval detail: Eusebi Arnau's stone figure of Saint George transfixing the dragon on the entrance portal or especially the corbel figures in the four windows of the pis noble *on the second floor. Here, a moustached photographer aims a stone camera, a rabbit pours molten metal from a ladle, and a monkey hammers at the forge; there an ass prints the page of a book, and a furtive-looking rat with cloak and tripod takes a photographic portrait; a pig shapes a pot, and a frog blows glass. Between them, Puig and Arnau recapture the high demotic humour of medieval grotesques, in this most 'aristocratic' of town houses.* (p409)

TOGETHER, THESE OFFER US much of the Hughes manner, and suggest what is to be found in this impressive book. There is, firstly, an interest in the big sweep as well as in the local instance. Hughes served his writerly apprenticeship by concentrating on particular artists, especially Australian, but even in *The Art of Australia* and in *Donald Friend* the mind was eager to extrapolate and correlate.

Blake, generalising, said that to generalise was to be an idiot, but Hughes has never been intimidated by that kind of intellectual blackmail. Nor, though he can keep up with any precision in his observation of artistic detail, is he confined, in principle, to artistic objects. He is interested in their characteristic and symptomatic qualities, their lodgment in the diurnal as well as their transcendence of it.

When he writes of Barcelona, he looks with deliberate and concentrated attention at many of its buildings and their contents, but he is also looking at the whole thing as an elaborate work of art. The jacket of the book carries a dramatic photograph of the Columbus tower in Barcelona, shot from its top. Looking at this, one sees the beginnings of pavement radiating out into the city as a whole, and this is evocative of the spirit of the book.

Barcelona, Robert Hughes, Harvill [HarperCollins], London, 1992
ISBN 000 272 078 7 RRP $39.95

At a time in which to be called a humanist is like being accused of viral malice, Hughes is a humanist *tout court*. He sees the organic and the crafted, the personal and the constructed, the absolutely unique and the absolutely universal, as being of the same stuff. Columbus, the tower, the city, its history, its configuration, its memories, its aspirations—all of these take their place as naturally here as their equivalents do in other books of Hughes'.

Which is not to say that the book is, or pretends to be, the whole story about Barcelona. It is the whole, complex, immensely ambitious, and deservedly famous city, seen by one alert pair of eyes. Clive James, reviewing Hughes' *The Fatal Shore*, remarked both that 'Travel not only broadens the view; it sharpens the gaze' and that Hughes 'has that rarest ability among pictorially talented writers, of making a plain prose statement that covers the case'. Put together the travel, the broadening, the sharpening, the talent and the prose, and what you get is *Barcelona*.

Chesterton said of Dickens that all one could do with him was walk round him, cap in hand—which did not, of course stop Chesterton from writing repeatedly and at length about Dickens. Hughes would not strike some as much of a cap-in-hand man, but he does have the gift of absorbed subjection to what engages his attention, coupled with the gift of engaged response.

The second of the passages quoted has some of both of these, though he does not have to be diagrammatic about either of them. Hughes' eye meets Puig's eyes as

they gaze from opposite sides of the building being described. 'Transfixing', 'furtive-looking rat', and 'high demotic humour' are insignia of both observation and interpretation on Hughes' part—the sort of thing to which every artist or architect of high gifts and liberal sympathies is appealing when going about the work in the first place.

BILLIONS OF DOLLARS ARE RIDING on Barcelona this year, and there is nothing accidental about the book's appearing just now. For the Olympic athletes, and for those watching them on television around the world, Barcelona, though, will be only arbitrarily the place where the contending takes place. Hughes does not handle places in that way.

There is something permanently significant about his having written, in the sixties, *Heaven and Hell in Western Art*. The old debate as to whether Heaven and Hell were places or states are not much rehearsed nowadays, but earthly places are also states—states of mind, of heart, of imagination—and those are part of Hughes' province. They are to be engaged with not only by being inhabited, nor only by being observed, but by being imagined, concentratedly. The proper way to read *Barcelona* is to read it in some of the same spirit as one reads Yeats' *Sailing to Byzantium*: the place has to stretch the mind which gives itself to the place's contemplation.

At a time in which to be called a humanist is like being accused of viral malice, Hughes is a humanist tout court. *He sees the organic and the crafted, the personal and the constructed, the absolutely unique and the absolutely universal, as being of the same stuff.*

Yeats thought of poetry as a blaze of being, and Hughes has much the same attitude towards the accomplished art-form. This does not, though, make for sentimentality. To botch is frequent, perhaps even usual, in the arts, and to call a book of essays on art and artists *Nothing If Not Critical* is astringent as well as elegant. Commenting on Jean Baudrillard's *America*, Hughes writes, 'Though punctuated with odd flashes of insight, his book on America is a slim *sottisier* in which facts have a nominal role'.

Speaking in 1984 of an envisaged crash in the art market, he says, 'One does not lament the pricking of the South Sea Bubble, or the sudden collapse of the Tulip Mania. At the very least it may cure us of our habit of gazing into the bottom of the barrel, in the belief that it contains the heights of Parnassus.' This distaste for the factitious is the counterpart of his relish for the original and the creative. And clearly, what most engages him about Barcelona is that, repeatedly, it proves itself to be just that.

'Countries of the mind' is by now a commonplace expression, but it can point to a protean reality. If we call this instead, say, 'zones of the imagination', we may see more clearly the cross between palpable locations, their imaginative envisaging, and the powers of intelligence employed in addressing them. Travel writers, and their yin-and-yang equivalents, place writers, may have much or little capacity for addressing any or all of these three realities. We do not want from the Michelin Guides what we want from *Gulliver's Travels* or from *Moby Dick*, and vice versa.

Nowadays, there is an array of writers—Bruce Chatwin, Jonathan Raban, Jan Morris—whose charter includes roving back and forth on the scale between plain (though not blunt) description and haunting, imaginative exploration. The cities of the earth provide both entree and exit for calculus and envisagement. When Hughes looks at Barcelona, he sees in it the architectural and artistic fruits of such initiatives, and an opportunity for his own speculation. He may, long ago, have given up his own drawing, but he is an artist of analytical intelligence still.

THIS, THOUGH, IS NOT at the cost of neglecting the grittily actual. Near the end of his book, writing of Gaudí's various, and astonishing buildings, he says: 'Antonio Gonzalez, the architect in charge of the Ajuntament's brilliant and respectful restoration of the Palau Güell, thinks that half its original window latches and knobs have vanished into the capacious Vuitton handbags of Japanese tourists over the last few years. Because they strip the tiles without compunction, all tourists have been banned from the roofscapes of Palau Güell and the Casa Milà. The bases of the Gaudí iron street lamps on the Passeig de Gràcia, which are sheathed in white *trendadis*, keep losing their ceramic surface because the Japanese pry off the chips to take them home as relics—unaware that these bases are not by Gaudí at all, but only in his manner. The Casa Batlló is on the market at an asking price of $100 million, which (it is assumed) only a Japanese can pay. Nobody in Barcelona is quite sure why the Japanese have fixed on Gaudí in this way—he is the one great modern architect whose work has absolutely nothing to do with classical Japanese architecture, which may in fact be the reason—but it seems unwise to probe too closely, less their benign mania vanish like fairy gold. One thing is sure: the Sacrada Famìlia is the first Catholic temple whose bacon was ever saved by Shinto tourism. Not even Gaudí, who believed in miracles, could have foreseen that.'

This plunges architecture back into time's stream, the stream that has seen to the devastation at many hands of the Parthenon and Pennsylvania Station alike. Hughes' Barcelona is a locus of drama, not only when one is looking at its vigorous citizenry, but when the eye is on the materials in which they have monumentalised themselves. Dignity, indignity—they go on having it out in the pages of his book.

'Grey is theory, and green is life's golden tree', wrote Goethe. Hughes knows as much as he needs to about theories of art, but his attention is usually on what is budding on life's tree—its flourish, its intricacy, its simplicity. He is interested in social forces, those potent fugitives beloved of abstracters, but only as they show interplay between fears, desires, imaginations, plans. And like one or two other expatriate Australian buccaneers, he has an affection for the grotesque. Of a rich and mean Catalan banker he retails the story:

'When one of his elderly clerks asked for a small bonus so that he could buy a set of false teeth, Girona

gave him a sermon instead. Didn't he know that false teeth run counter to the divine plan? Was it for him to alter the course of nature? "You must remember," Girona declared, warming to his theme, "that if your teeth fall out it shows our system needs greens, soups, a simple diet. You want to have teeth so that you can go back to eating meat. But how can you not understand that if your system needed meat, your teeth wouldn't have fallen out? Do as I do: submit yourself to God's designs and his will." '

IT IS THE FICTION of most societies that their doings are reasonable and matter of fact, even if they happen often to be evil: that they are richly zany is rarely acknowledged. Most of us would rather think ourselves bad than mad, and so it goes with pretty well all societal enterprises. Hughes' book, for all its (in the best sense) solidity, is very ready to acknowledge the insobriety with which most human affairs are tinged. As has been said of someone else, he is not a satirist, but a satirist could be made out of him. Nobody reading his book would go to Barcelona just for the laughs, but to go there after reading it with no expectation of surprise would argue unalertness.

A book, then, about a place, about persons, about artistries, about the human ensemble. In *Nothing If Not Critical*, Hughes said of Goya, 'He demands interpretation, he absorbs it and always seems to want more, because his work is so rich and so variegated'. He might have said the same about his Barcelona. In a lesser degree, it might be said about his own work. ■

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'Ireland as object, not subject': Roadside in the Dublin Mountains, 1991.
Photo: M.J.Crennan

Gael force

NowAnd In Time To Be, Ireland and the Irish,
Thomas Keneally, Pan Macmillan (Australia), Sydney 1991
ISBN 0 7329 07527 RRP $45.00 hardback.

IRELAND IS THE SIMPLEST of countries to dismiss and among the most difficult to understand. Keneally tells a lovely story against himself. He once saw a man carrying a load of peat and decided to photograph this picturesque sight. At which the intended subject advanced on him growling: 'Haven't you got any fooking manners?' Ireland as object, not subject.

A colleague once asked my advice on a good introduction to Irish history. Is there one? I thought of the well-known works—Beckett, Foster, Lyons and the others. It was hard to name a book that could tell you what you might need to know, Irish historiography being so much a matter of wheels within wheels. The revisionists are full of talk about the lamentable errors, enthusiastic errors at that, of their predecessors. Romantic gestures, it is to be feared, are not all that has been leached out of Irish historical writing, although this should not be said of the biographies, such as McDonagh on O'Connell, or Lyons on Parnell, or Moody on Davitt.

Writing on Ireland involves difficulties of intent as much as of comprehension. Robert Kee—from whom Keneally gently demurs—is a good example of an historian who, in eschewing 'nationalist myths' has gone in for his own line in special pleading.

Keneally's is not a work of history, although it is imbued with sophisticated historical sense, both of Ireland in Australia and in itself. Nor is it a travel book in the simple patronising mould of *Around Ireland in Low Gear*. Nonetheless it derives from travel and has a great deal to say about history, by way of both occasional narrative and reflection on the historical pressures that have brought Keneally to be observer and Ireland to be observed.

Keneally does not declare his hand—even if, in any relevant sense he knows what it is. He recognises the inevitable. Thus the nicely ironic passage on the Aran Islanders, those pure 'adored Gaels of Douglas Hyde's Gaelic Revival' (p51) who turn out in some measure to be descended from the

Cromwellian garrison. As Keneally irresistibly puts it 'Ireland both accommodates and make mock of that sort of conclusion'. Yet he is prepared, as politely as may be, to stare down the historian Kee on the latter's attempt to 'temper the them-and-us picture of the Famine': 'Though the famine might not have been anywhere near official policy, the questions which lie behind every famine, from Stalin's in the Ukraine in the 1930's, to Haile Selassie's in the mid-70's and crazy Mengistu's in the 1980's, still remain here: to what extent was it an act of politics and to what extent an act of God? It is characteristic of all famines that people look for their explanation in terms of trial sent by the Deity ... without asking why systems have to be so run down in a given country that a shift of climate or a failed crop produces disaster for millions.' (p81)

KENEALLY WOULD NOT, I think, relish being drawn into historical debate. Historical debates in Ireland can become a little boisterous—Keneally is good on the brouhaha over the publication of Tim Pat Coogan's life of Michael Collins. These are family disputations, in which Keneally is very much aware of his status as guest by the fire.

How is Ireland to be imaginatively grasped by an Australian of Irish descent whose knowledge of it, and to an extent of himself, comes from family lore, childhood acculturation by the Irish Christian Brothers in Australia, and book learning?

Early in the book he refers wryly to his original notion that in going to Ireland he would be his grandmother's eyes. Something like this is the true motif of the book. It is not Keneally's Ireland; he is not like a short-haired Victorian sage explaining the universe, or at least that part of it between Britain and North America. Such illuminations as come are ancillary to the principal theme, which is this: how is Ireland to be imaginatively grasped by an Australian of Irish descent whose knowledge of it, and to an extent of himself, comes from family lore, childhood acculturation by the Irish Christian Brothers in Australia, and book learning?

Why should such a question be of general significance? Well, perhaps it is not, and it is one of such absorbing interest to me that I am probably the worst possible person to draw a general moral from Keneally's exploration of these matters.

Much of what Keneally says on these questions will be familiar to Irish-Australian visitors to Ireland. Two things struck me as particularly telling. The first occurs early in the book:'We people of the diaspora, whether from Australia or Michigan or the plains of Canada, get back here, returning ghosts, utterly confused and in need of guidance; and we see a place like Ballycotton, and recognise it straight away as a never but always known place.' (p12)

The sense of homecoming referred to here is well documented, and can come to those not expecting it and to whom, in some cases, it is not entirely or unambiguously welcome.

The second striking experience referred to is the way in which Australians are made to feel welcome in Ireland. This has nothing to do with tourist villages and relatively little to do with genealogy, but a great deal to do with a deep-seated aversion on the part of the Irish to those who continue the conqueror's grubby work by the adoption of patronising or belittling stereotypes.

NEVERTHELESS, THE PROBLEM of how to address the historical experience of Ireland has no simple solution. Keneally has two revealing stories. The first is that of an Irish poet with whom he visits Thoor Ballylee, Yeats's tower: 'I've been here at least a dozen times,' the red-haired poet told me functionally. There was an implication that she loved Yeats in an habitual sort of way, that this was just another visit and not a pilgrimage. There was the heady chance that there might come to be structures from her own background, incorporated in her own writing, worth a visit one day.' (p45)

The second occurs as an answer to a somewhat Wordsworthian question on Keneally's part. I like to think that the answer, not in its terms Wordsworthian, may have trembled on the lips of that poet's weary interlocutors from time to time: 'What do most of the fellas in Inishbofin do?' I asked the captain of the trawler-ferry. And he replied, 'Fook-all.' (p68)

THERE IS MUCH TO DELIGHT and instruct in this book. There is the occasional lapse of attention, the occasional glibness, but the tone of the patronising traveller from the superior metropolitan culture is wholly avoided, as we would expect from an author of Keneally's decency and wisdom.

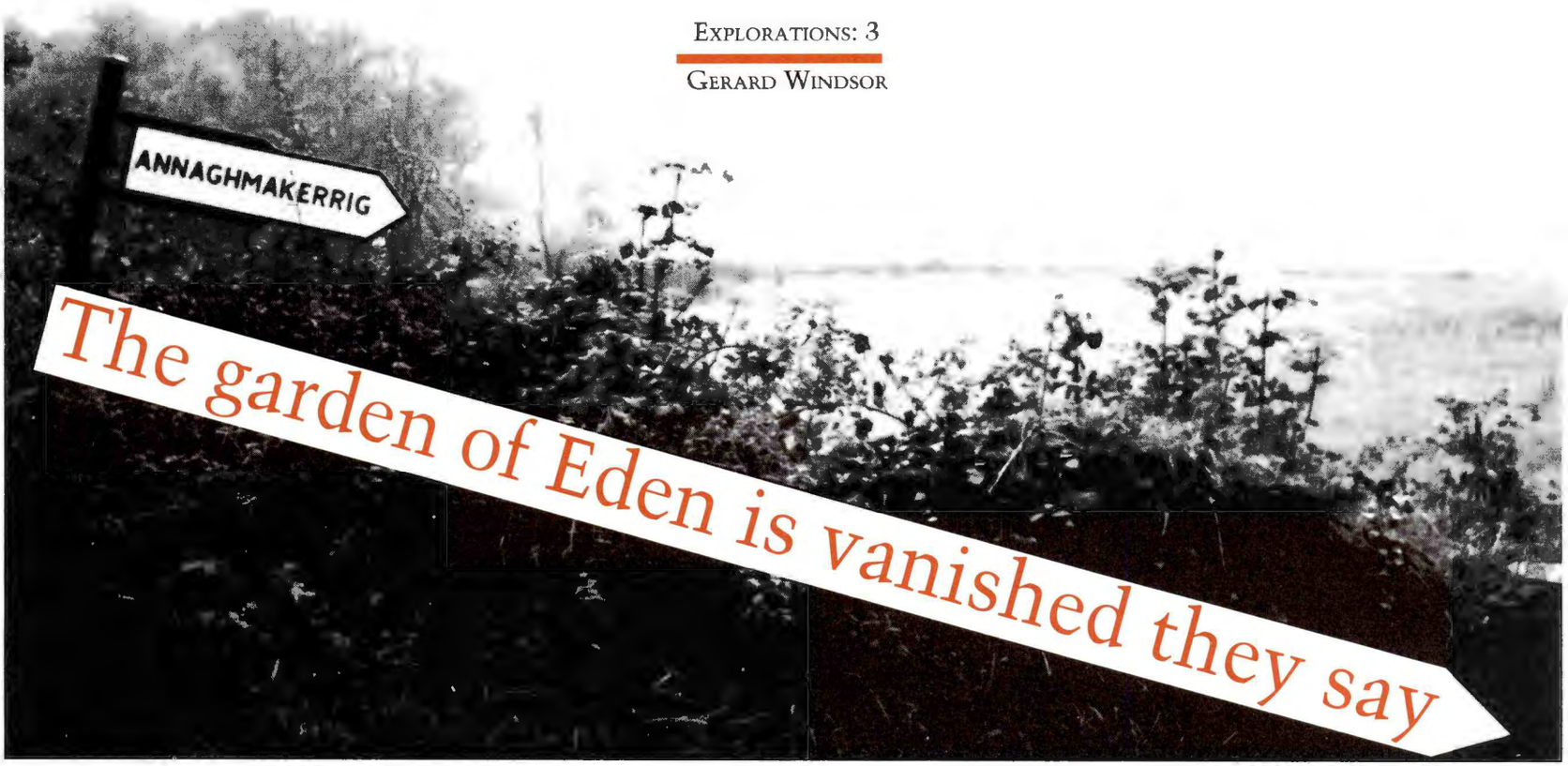
The photographs by Patrick Prendergast are of a high standard. He is particularly good working with the lush pastels seen, for example, in the frontispiece 'Lough Leane, Kerry' or in 'The Ring of Kerry'. His interiors are beautifully warm and luminous, and luminous too is his treatment of mist and heather in 'Salmon Fishing, West Cork'. The photo-journalistic pieces such as 'The Twelfth of July' are sensibly understated. The rather fugitive light of much of Ireland is eloquently rendered and the avoidance of cliché (which must always tempt the illustrator), in both subject and treatment is admirable.

There is a great deal of detail in this book that I have only gestured at. Its erudition is worn lightly and its traveller's tales are of the best kind, recorded by a novelist's attentive ear. Above all, it gives a good sense of the constant surprises with which the patient traveller is delighted. In a country whose cartography is still a little uncertain, the pleasures of the next valley are never to be tediously anticipated.

In Ireland's last summer, I was standing by the side of a road in the Dublin Mountains, when the only car to be seen from horizon to horizon drew up and Thomas Keneally asked me if he was on the road to Dublin. Indeed he was, and had just proved one of the lessons of his narrative, that you can never know what you will meet on an Irish road—it may even be a reviewer.

M.J. Crennan is a Melbourne barrister.

GERARD WINDSOR



The garden of Eden is vanished they say

I WAS ALLOWED ONCE into the Garden of Eden. It is the most remote spot in the western world. Predictably, an entrepreneur with a histrionic flair laid it out. Tyrone Guthrie, the theatrical master of Annaghmakerrig, Co. Monaghan, had no children, and his byzantine will made a curious division of his estate. His long time farm manager, who had come to work for him as a gardener's assistant while still a boy, got the land. There was well over 300 acres of it. He also got the farm buildings, the farmer's residence and several lodges. The neo-Jacobean mansion which actually abutted many of these outbuildings went to the Arts Councils of both parts of Ireland. So there were two nations and a faithful retainer holding on to the same pile of grey bricks.

This dramatic gesture had not been Guthrie's first attempt at philanthropy. His concern over the possibly imagined crimes of his colonising ancestors and his humanitarian zeal had seized, as its object, on the local village of Newbliss, thrice winner, in spite of its name, of the title of most desolate village in Ireland. Alleged to have had a glorious past—no less than five forges in its day—it was now reduced to a mere three pubs. But the closure in the early 1950s of the railway line through Newbliss spelt disaster. Guthrie decided to revivify the village with a local industry. He encouraged the locals into planting fruit, and then set up a jam factory in the deserted railway station—the signal box being the office, the waiting room the laboratory, all the local children earning pocket money in high summer sitting at trestle tables along the platform destalking the fruit.

Most of the money from Guthrie's international theatrical engagements and lecture tours he sent home to fuel this industry. But the enterprise was a colossal failure. Some people whispered fraud, others said there was a conspiracy amongst the condiment cartels to stop the company, Irish Farmhouse Preserves, from obtaining jam jar lids, others mentioned the jam had a tendency to explode in transit. All the fruit came in at the same time, couldn't be handled by the Newbliss workforce, and rotted in the sun. The marmalade was the best seller, but the oranges had to be imported—no help to the local farmers there.

When Guthrie died the business disappeared for a while. It re-emerged a year later under the control of his former partner. It survives in a most subdued form, mainly in the engineering shed. The platform and the shunting yard are alive with grass and the huge, rusty antediluvian monsters of vats of the company's heady days. But the label on the jars is still cheeky enough to bear the motto 'the high quality set by the late Tyrone Guthrie'. I have tasted the marmalade and the claim is a slur.

Guthrie's later largesse was more productive. The Forestry Commission leased his woods, the two nations gathered and ten years after his death Annaghmakerrig was opened as a residence for people engaged in the arts. They could come for a week, for three months, and travail away, or just nudge away, at some opus or canvas or score. But in fidelity to the weirdness of all Guthrie arrangements, this was to be paradise with a difference. The catch here was not getting in, much less the risk of expulsion, but the difficulty of actually escaping.

This no-exit is achieved with subtlety and charm. Management follows a fierce policy of laissez-faire, so that every new resident has to reinvent the wheel. The supreme case of this is in

matters of communication and transport. Newbliss is a whirr-the-handle local phone exchange. Prices for all calls to anywhere that one is likely to want to ring start from about one pound. But the Annaghmakerrig phone only takes 1, 2 or 5p pieces. 5p coins become what rum was to the New South Wales Corps. But even if you have enough coins, by the time you have inserted them all, the receiver of your call has hung up.

So you can walk to Doohat, a post office at the back of a farmhouse one mile away. There, as long as the postmistress is not out helping with the milking, you can ring for as long as you like, then pay, by very rough computation, over the counter. The only trouble is that the line from Doohat is generally inaudible. So you can decide to communicate by postcard. But there is only one variety on sale at Doohat, and it may not suit all purposes. It shows 'the Convent of Mercy, Cootehill'. (It is worth noting that the postmistress is a Protestant.)

COOTEHILL IS THE NEAREST TOWN, about six miles away, immortalised by Percy French:

The Garden of Eden has vanished they say,
But I know the lie of it still.
Just turn to the right on the bridge of Finea,
And stop on half way to Cootehill.

Well, and how to get there? Annaghmakerrig has no car for the residents. Three Cootehill entrepreneurs run taxi services, in between garage work and furniture retailing. A taxi run to the Garden of Eden should be a great goer, but these businessmen have their principles. For two of them, there are no rides before at least 9 a.m. One told me an imaginative story about his also being the local fire brigade, and there being a heavy risk of fire at that hour of the morning.

The most regular plier of the Annaghmakerrig run was a man known as Ambie. Once, needing to visit the bank, I was lucky enough, I thought, to catch a ride to Cootehill with a writer returning to Dublin. Business transacted, we visited The White Horse. I ordered sandwiches. The bar was full of a party of funeral-goers. Amongst them I noticed Ambie. I enquired of the barman his relationship to the deceased. 'She was his mother,' he said. And the two competitors had gone out in sympathy. I went back to my companion. One of the mourners had detached himself from his fellows and was comforting himself on her thigh. Unabashed by my return he nodded and rhapsodised on about life and death in a Monaghanese

So you don't try excursions from Annaghmakerrig. You stay put and enjoy the primordial experiences. Mervyn Wall, at seventy seven, one of the grand old figures of Irish writing, calculates when pressed that he has met Samuel Beckett on three occasions. Once, in Trinity, Beckett had spent the whole evening delivering a monologue: his subject had been suicide.

much of which even my companion missed. I reminded the barman about the sandwiches. 'They're working on them,' he said. My companion told the mourner she wanted to talk to me. The mourner said that was all right. She said she didn't want him listening. He said he wouldn't. She said she didn't want him there. The mourner moved off, waving his pint and inveighing against the turpitude of women and the woes of marriage. My companion, a mother of four and elected representative of the people, was unmoved by this. But I made to sympathise with her, and hinted darkly about certain types of people. She told me to go home if I didn't like the Irish. The mist fell, and then the dark, and I walked back the six miles to Annaghmakerrig.

ANY ATTEMPT TO TAKE a break in the bright lights of Dublin is even more hazardous. Questions to local publicans, to the Newbliss phone exchange, about buses to Dublin are met with contradictory and evasive answers. You go into a shop which you have been informed is the pick-up point. You are told 'It leaves at half seven'. You say 'But a friend of mine got it at nine'. There is a murmur and the next customer is served. After three weeks at Annaghmakerrig you piece together the facts. Legislation gives the government transport authority, the C.I.E., a monopoly on any route it chooses to run. And it runs what it advertises on the windscreen as an 'Express' service between Cootehill and Dublin. 'Express' means it picks up and puts down schoolchildren at every pump and cowpat along the way. It costs £10 and takes three hours. But down the road from Cootehill lurks private enterprise. It describes itself in the phone book as a 'Hackney Service', and for £3 takes you from Cootehill to Dublin in one hour fifty minutes. Passengers gather every morning under the fiction of being a club or a party of pensioners going on an outing. It just happens they go on the same outing at the same time every day.

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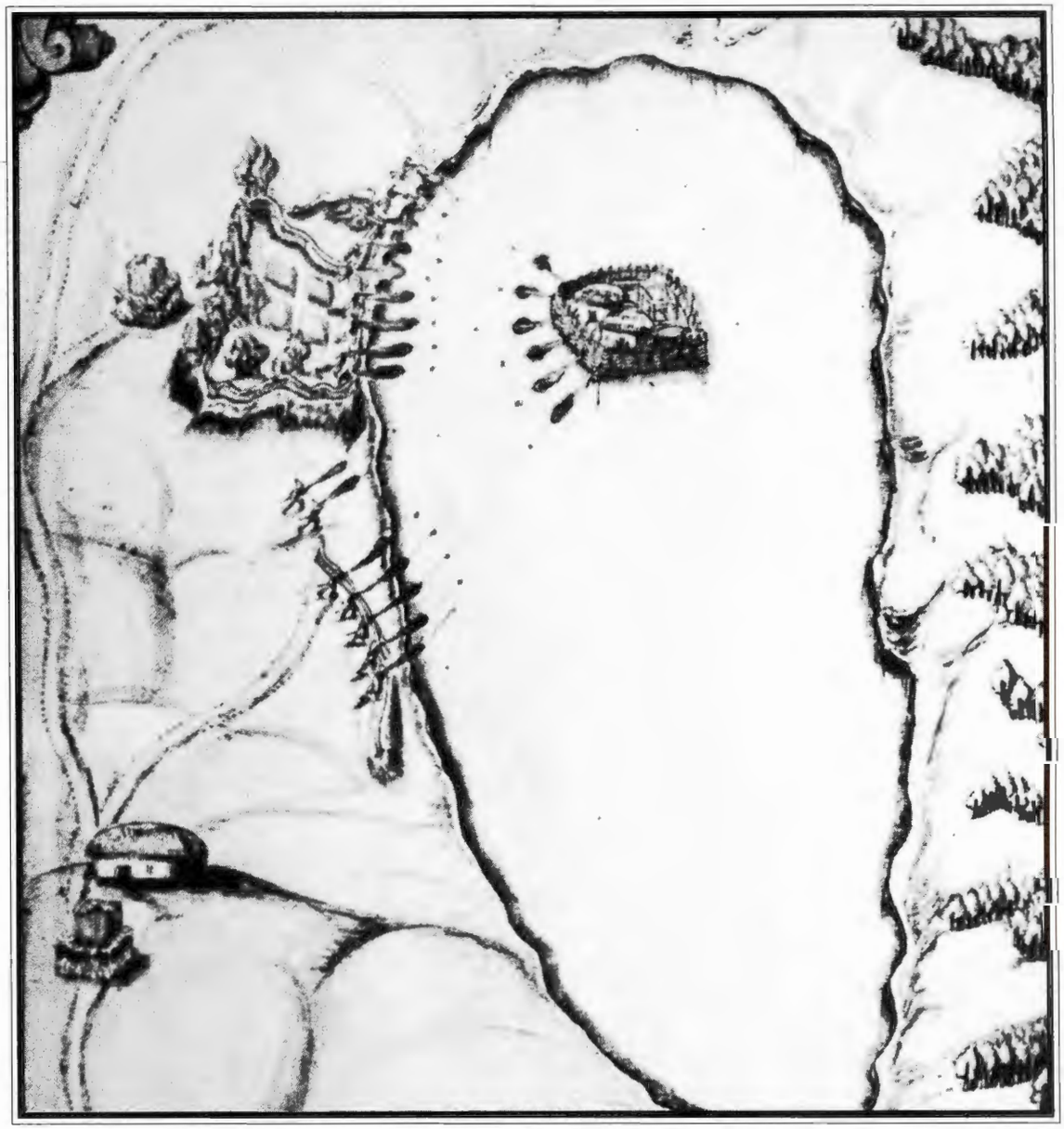
In return for this item Mervyn looks for a likely female artist to help prepare his breakfast. He has already tried to boil an egg by leaving a saucepan on top of a depressed toaster. He is so helpless and so grateful that no one



Attack on a crannóg. *Drawing (c 1601-03) by Richard Bartlett*

minds the apportioning of roles. He receives some assistance from a Galway poet. She had finished her education after one year of secondary schooling, her husband has been unemployed all ten years of their marriage, she had started reading while in a sanatorium recovering from TB. Mervyn recites her slabs of Yeats as a paradigm for a young poet. She warns me against eating blackberries after Michaelmas: the devil had fallen in the brambles on that day and, in his anger, had spat on the berries. Mervyn does not quite go along with this. He suggests that the events had happened on All Saints Day. A polite scholarly debate ensues.

A Belfast woman says she will sing one of her own ballads. She offers us 'The *Evelyn Marie* Trawler Disaster,' 'The Rathlin O'Beirne Massacre,' or 'The Arranmore Famine'. We choose the trawler one: it has the fewest deaths. A Dublin film maker comes to dry out. He arrives late at night, exceedingly wet. The women put chairs against their doors. A farmer's dog assaults a Limerick painter on her way to Doohat. Mervyn coaches her in her technique for the next trip: she's to assure the beast he's a fine fellow, a lovely fellow and a credit to his mammy. A Dublin academic writing a play asks me about the prevalence of cobbers, diggers, sheilahs and tucker, then lists the batting order of Australian cricket teams, e.g. 1953, Hassett and Morris opened: if the first wicket fell early Miller went in; if not, Harvey ... I take his word for it. A Harvard woman starting to write a biography of Rodin goes mad trying to follow all this.

An English painter has brought a bicycle down with her from Belfast. I purloin it and pedal in through Newbliss to the railway station. The son of Guthrie's partner is in the signal box. But he has turned his back on jam. He is striking out on his own, and the ladder up to his eyrie is shaky, rotten and not long for this world. I am just a curious traveller I say, and he lets me in. He is making models for museums. His line is peculiarly Irish structures. Above all he specialises in megalithic tombs and the mildly fortified lake dwellings that are called crannógs. They're all impenetrable, sometimes incarcerating, zany sorts of places.

I admire the robust delicacy of his work. 'Much demand for these sorts of establishments?'

'There is,' he says. 'It's the young people now.'

'The young people! But these places are ... so cramped, so stifling.'

His fingers glide up the cambered roof of his tomb. He only half turns to me. 'Ah no, look at these chambers, great conduits for the sun.'

'It hardly makes them Spain,' I say.

'Well, for the light,' he murmurs.

'But these,' I gesture towards his crannóg, 'futile sorts of dwellings. Primitive even by the standards of a thousand years ago. Pathetic even. Surely.'

'Ah the skill's in the bridge.'

'But there's no bridge.'

'There is and there isn't.' He circles his crannóg, tracing a series of imaginary spokes. 'Underwater paths. Deep enough to be invisible, shallow enough to wade across.'

'Sufficient to drown in either way.'

'Ah the lakes silt up.'

'And the dead arise.'

He glances round his shoulder at me. His eyes skip. 'Sure, the stones and the mud are great retainers.'

'Really!' I say.

'Yielding something all the time.'

'Productive ossuaries.'

He begins to draw a roll of black felt over his models. 'There's a future in them anyway,' he says. ■

Gerard Windsor's most recent books include *That Fierce Virgin* and *Family Lore*. He is a contributing editor to *Eureka Street*.

ROSS COLLINGS

In the very fabric of things

John Perceval: A Retrospective. National Gallery of Victoria.

THERE HAS BEEN a fantastic discovery witnessed on Melbourne's St Kilda Road these past two months. In 1944 there was a baby in a pram *Waiting at Murrumbeena Station* in the lurid light of unhappy memory—abandoned rather than waiting, accompanied only by a few condemned chooks in a crate, adrift on a platform and going nowhere.

In 1969 the infant is revealed in fact to be Moses, now cradled peacefully in his basket on the Nile, the glare become a purple glow and the chooks liberated into flitting, sparkling dragon-flies. The peace comes from the happy acceptance of being adrift, the child no longer overlooked but with the look of one that is watched over lovingly—by his sister hidden in the reeds or by God or John Perceval. Happily confirmed in 1987 still to be Moses, now amid water-lilies.

This is one of the many blessed transformations revealed in the exhibition *John Perceval: A Retrospective* at the National Gallery of Victoria (sponsored, with some justice, by CUB—some of their profits, like all things, now returning to their bibulous source). The exhibition is very well curated, presenting the impressive range of Perceval's work in painting, drawing, ceramic sculpture and earthenware. In following a chronological plan, it provides a coherent context for the different kinds of explosive energies of the individual works. The occasional biographical notes are suitably restrained.

The whole exhibition is a deeply moving example of colour emerging out of darkness yet losing nothing of depth and mystery, and of movement taking on a form and harmony without failing in its original energy. It's a demonstration of emergent beauty in human existence, not cheaply won. Indeed, the remarkable visual lesson in this span of almost fifty years of painting is that the perception of beauty is not primarily an achievement at all, not essentially the result

'Three crosses punctuate the horizon of Gannets Diving, *at least one of them made Celtic-glorious by an encircling old tyre' (see detail, right)*

of diligence and effort but rather a grace, a blessing bestowed if only we have the eye for it. It comes as an epiphany. Perceval the seer has been blessed with the vision. Profound thanks to Perceval the mystagogue for inducting others into it.

The earlier works, up to 1948, are mainly a dark vision of pain and desperation. A few are of grim subjects—demeaning poverty and the devastation of war (*Survival*, 1942). In these the suffering is represented as though evil might be confronted, denounced and dealt with by passionate moral protest, as though the most obvious code given to interpret human pain is social and political. But soon it all becomes too big to be thus defined and pronounced upon; mercifully—that is the exact word—the ethos turns from judgment upon the wrong to a more immediate immersion in the scene. The *State Theatre—Railway by Night* (1943) sets the tone of apocalyptic Melbourne, and *Old Lady Selling Windmills* (1943) and other carnival games begin a ghastly gaiety in time of war which leads into the nightmare carnival of *Negroes at Night* (1944). It's a world in disequilibrium, the colour heavily mixed, 'impure', and the movement increasingly a pent-up demonic energy. The observer of this scene portrays himself as the boy, Breughel or Bosch-like, riding a goat, or gazing plaintively out of the Carlton streets with his cat (all fur and claws and tension) or his broken pot (futile and sharp edges) or his Jack-in-the-box (fun-fright) or his floating mask (dream-fear).

A vision of a *Potato Field* (1948), with van Gogh the companion, seems to break the claustrophobic spell. In spite of the surreal glare of the setting sun and the long shadows of lolling sacks and twisted dry stalks, the movement is no longer of weird dissociation. Thereafter it's as though colour and movement have been released and begin to play freely. The biblical

Sulphur Smoke, *1959: 'The luminosity of this world of water, air and ships is as complete as Turner's Venice or Thames, but with a celebration here of volume and mass rather than of dissolving light.'*

subjects, translated via Breughel's Flanders to Flinders Street (*Christ Dining at Young and Jackson's*) and the Bayside coast (*Christmas Eve*) maintain the energy (in the midst of the pain there was no rage), no longer manic stress and agitation but the earthy ebullience of life flowing. Even in a tragic subject, the *The Expulsion*, Perceval mitigates Masaccio's aching dismay in favour of the fruitfulness of the tree of knowledge which accompanies Adam and Eve on their way out.

Then, in 1956, begins wonderful Williamstown. This discovery of a world of water confirms the physical texture of the painting, rather than the subject, as the main carrier of energy and substance, rich swirls and impasto of primary colour breaking through colour. A new purity and clarity of light plays through the canvas. The vitality is no longer simply of people surging and meeting but lies in the very fabric of things. It would be too pretentious to name it a cosmic energy—the scope is always local and particular—but the paint reveals a deep natural vibrancy in the simple elements of water, rocks and air, hulls, buoys and tackle.

HERE THE LESSON of the gratuitousness of beauty first appears clearly. The stress and clamour of the early paintings pose the desperate questions, why?, where to from here? This sequel of colour and substance appears simply as a blessed advent. If it is a kind of answer, it is very oblique, not pretending to explain, justify or even conceal what went before. The loveliness simply arrives, not claiming to be the fruit of suffering, not needing to deny that there is still darkness in the hulks. Perceval may never have set out to voyage in his Williamstown vessels, but he bestows an Ancient Mariner's blessing from the heart on the serpentine lights of *Ships at Night* (1959).

Three crosses punctuate the horizon of *Gannets Diving* (1956), at least one of them made Celtic-glorious by an encircling old tyre. They are a sign of hope that the plunge into the water ends not in the depths but in a re-emergence into air. Glory breaks out behind the rain squall over the distant hills near the bay.

One of the high points in the exhibition is the hanging together, as a kind of Williamstown triptych, of *The Floating of the Dock* (1956), *Sulphur Smoke* (1959) and *Old Ships at Williamstown* (1959). The luminosity of this world of water, air and ships is as complete as Turner's Venice or Thames, but with a celebration here of volume and mass rather than of dissolving light. The movement is held together by a subtle, strangely centred perspective. The outer edges are expansive, as though seen through a shallow lens, leaving the centre of the canvas focussed—not on any particular object but simply as the whole view of the world held together from that centre.

(Perhaps this centredness of a turning world is what all the windmills are about. Underlying the big transformations that mark the course of the exhibition are several evocative continuities—children are important throughout, as are moons and boats: be alert also for windmills and waterwheels.)

There are many great works from that decade of the sixties. Towards the end of it there is another big change: Perceval's world loses that anchoring centred focus. A biographical note tells us that in 1968 he spent the first of several terms in Larundel psychiatric hospital, until in 1974 he began seven 'silent years' there. It is awesome to see, following that note, the wall of paintings of quite transfigured colour and harmony which were made in the intervals between consuming depression. *Moses* belongs here, and *The Pumpkin House 2* (1970), *Chimney-swift and the Scarecrow* (1970) and *Haystacks* (1970). The centre has folded, but still the beautiful vibrant plane of paint remains, even more luminous.

The latest identification of the one who conjures that vision out of darkness is in the 1988 *Self Portrait*. Murrumbeena-Moses has become a Merlin, a hoary-hairy wizard (in Oz) festooned with ribbons and fairy lights that were once the sinuous night-lights in the waters of Williamstown. It's a very untriumphalist triumph; the old mischief in the smile is the confession that he does not bear ultimate responsibility for the glories any more than for the pains. While he might conjure the paint, the vision is bestowed from elsewhere. ■

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FLASH IN THE PAN

The Player dir. Robert Altman (Screened at the Sydney and Melbourne film festivals). There was a kind of movie some years ago in which Mickey might meet Judy at a party, and if it happened that George or Ira or Cole were there, the audience would be treated to a gratuitous upbeat number that justified itself by the sheer talent of its performers.

The Player has many cameo performance by unexpected 'names', as its lead, the wheeler-dealing executive Griffin Hill (Tim Robbins), works the backlots and bars of Hollywood, trying to keep his career afloat amid a flood of competition. His other problems are that he has been receiving anonymous death threats from a disgruntled screenwriter, and that he accidentally kills the prime suspect. When he subsequently falls in love with the dead man's girlfriend, the police close in.

It is sad to report that the potential of such a storyline is not realised. *The Player* draws many deliberate parallels with other Hollywood classics, and would clearly like to be considered as one itself. In each of its constituent parts, however, it fails to win a favourable comparison. The extended track shot that opens the picture, taking us in quick succession from wry Hollywood vignette to wry Hollywood vignette, is a logistical triumph; but it does not engage either mind or heart as much as, say, the endless and turgid track across Agincourt after the battle in Branagh's *Henry V*.

Griffin Hill's guilt, as portrayed by Robbins, pales before Martin Landau's portrait of conscience on fire in *Crimes and Misdemeanours*. Nor is Griffin's central problem, the murder, intrinsic to the Hollywood experience as, say, Norma Desmond's menopausal egomania is in *Sunset Boulevard*. His could be a murder tale from any big business; hers was a case of specifically celluloid betrayal. And the aforementioned cameos, rather than being sparkling *divertissments*, actually slow the pace of the exposition. As a satire on the world of film, *The Player* is just OK.

Also at the Sydney festival

Barbara Chobocky's *Maria* depicts the life of the producer's mother, as she survives being a lonely immigrant in Australia. The personal story is told in tandem with an account of political changes in her homeland, Czechoslovakia. The documentary won both the Dendy and the Ethnic Affairs Council awards, and deserves a wider audience.

There was a less political, more personal, touch among the short films and documentaries this year, such as *Wireless Nights* (about late-night talkback radio enthusiasts); *Collectors* (about memorabili-itis) and *God's Girls* (about the Sisters of Mercy)

—Peter Fleming

And at the Melbourne Festival?

Quixote went. He failed to save a captive princess from a wicked enchanter. See p19.

Apocalypse Now (new 70 mm print), dir. Francis Ford Coppola; *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmaker's Apocalypse*, dir. Eleanor Coppola, etc. I saw *Hearts of Darkness* before seeing *Apocalypse Now*, which I had never seen before. It made me wonder whether *Apocalypse Now*—Francis Ford Coppola's transformation of *Heart of Darkness* into a film about a mission to kill a renegade officer during the Vietnam war—could possibly live up to its reputation.

Hearts of Darkness is no simple documentary about the making of *Apocalypse Now*. Rather it is crude hagiography. Coppola is the tortured genius, battling against the odds to make the Great Film of the Vietnam war, and finally do cinematic justice to Conrad's novel. It tries to present *Apocalypse Now* as the film of *Heart of Darkness* that Orson Welles might have made. Whenever the archival footage of Coppola taken by his wife during the shooting begins to wear thin, we get Welles reading Conrad.

We hear Coppola, allegedly recorded unawares by Eleanor during the making of the film, raving about his greatest fear: making a pretentious movie. As far as one can judge from *Hearts of Darkness*, that fear might have been realised. We see Brando workshopping pretentious drivel, filmed in a stark *chiaroscuro* intended primarily to disguise his flab. We see Martin Sheen reeling drunkenly on the set, while we are told that this represents a baring of his soul which truly turns him into *Apocalypse Now*'s central character.

But one cannot judge from the documentary. *Apocalypse Now* is magnificent. Martin Sheen's drunken reeling really does make his character's state of mind frighteningly real. The scenes and lines of dialogue that have become part of cinematic folklore hang together perfectly. When an air cavalry officer says 'I love the smell of napalm in the morning' you forget

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What did Mae West say to the boxer, who presumably didn't have a gun in his pocket? Tell us, and 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 3121.

The winner of May's film competition was Peter Kiernan, of Kooyong, Victoria, who thought Harry S. Truman was asking: 'Who told her that the 'S' stands for 'Sam'?

you have heard the line a thousand times: it chills in its matter-of-factness.

The madness of the conflict in Vietnam is so perfectly portrayed that when an attack is launched on a Vietnamese village largely because it is on a good surfing beach, it seems as though that is just the kind of reason you would expect.

What of the end of the film? Here the renegade officer Kurtz (Marlon Brando) is finally confronted, the quest completed. Kurtz's ravings do seem the pretentious workshoppings of a vain actor. But perhaps that is what Kurtz is. More interesting than the ideas of charismatic madmen are the minds of those who are captivated by them; and Dennis Hopper's superb performance as a craze photojournalst who has stayed with Kurtz makes us understand what power pretentious workshoppings can have.

The new 70mm print (not plagued by the inconsistencies of colour imbalance of the new 70mm print of *Ben Hur*) is a good excuse to see *Apocalypse Now* again. If, like me, you have never seen it then it is essential—by far the best film made about Vietnam and the best film by Coppola. If you want to see the documentary, do so afterwards.

—David Braddon-Mitchell

Basic Instinct, dir. Paul Verhoeven (Village) is ill-served by the notoriety it has attracted. Not because it is a good film, but because it has become notorious for the wrong reasons.

There *is* a lot of sweating and straining bare flesh to be seen, there are some grisly murders with an ice pick, and feminists will wonder how many more tough guys have to be undone by *femmes fatales* before the theme disappears.

But *Basic Instinct* is not objectionable because it will shock the prim, titillate the prurient and infuriate the politically correct. It is objectionable because it is dishonest. When a film shows someone being stabbed and slashed to death at the moment of sexual climax, but then shows the body of a car-crash victim without even a scratch, one can fairly question the director's motives. What makes Verhoeven squeamish in the latter case but not in the former?

He has not made a film about sexual freedom, deviance or obsession, and it is clearly not concerned with the realistic portrayal of violence. *Basic Instinct* simply juxtaposes acts of sex and violence, and glosses the mix with some heavy-handed allusions to the films of Alfred Hitchcock and the fiction of Raymond Chandler.

Neither of these suffers by comparison. The detective in this film (Michael Douglas) and the *femmes fatales* who almost bring him down (Sharon Stone and Jeanne Triplehorn) are all too one-dimensional to resemble Philip Marlowe and his sundry female antagonists. And the allusions to *Psycho* and *Vertigo* only serve to emphasise Verhoeven's real achievement with *Basic Instinct*: a snuff movie with a veneer of art.

We live at a time of renewed calls for censorship, usually unfairly directed at films like *Cape Fear*, which depicts sexual violence without the voyeurisic glee that pervades *Basic Instinct*. It will be a pity if this film strengthens the hand of the thought police.

—Ray Cassin

Howards End dir. James Ivory (Village) is another varnished addition to the Merchant/Ivory collection of E.M. Forster reproductions. It is a sumptuous film. The obedient camera glides across polished Edwardian cedar, records every pleat and fold of fine linen, every china tea cup, hot muffin and manifestation of pre-World War I Anglo-German eccentricity.

The script, by Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, is scrupulous, almost slavish, in keeping to Forster's words, and the acting is solid, occasionally bravura stuff. Emma Thompson has just the right touch of moving stoicism as the elder of the two Schlegel sisters. Helena Bonham-Carter, as the younger, rises to a good line in indignation. Anthony Hopkins, with more range, makes the mercantile Mr Wilcox almost a hero; and Vanessa Redgrave, as the sensitive Mrs Wilcox, is extremely sensitive, mannered and intense.

And yet it is a brittle film—good bones but no connective tissue. This is Forster's Edwardian England, the England of Shaw, of fabian socialism, of the suffragette movement. It is the England of moral 'muddle', of the confusion and anxiety of which Forster himself was both victim and exponent. It is the England of property and of property's critics. But not for the Merchant Ivory team. Forster might have agonised. They put their faith in real estate and take you on a National Trust tour. And very enjoyable it is. But acres of bluebells, even with a working class anti-hero (the hapless Leonard Bast, ruined by the Schlegel sisters' good intentions) tramping through them, are not enough.

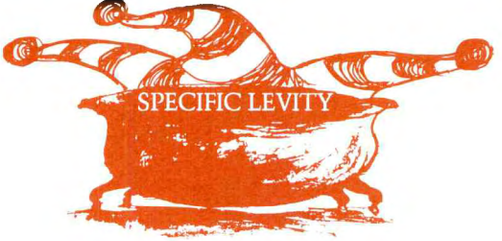
—Morag Fraser

Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter, dir. Jon Amiel (independent cinemas). Amiel, as you might expect from the director of *The Singing Detective*, plays fast and loose with Mario Vargas Llosa's novel. He translates the action from Lima to New Orleans, takes risks with his casting (Peter Falk indulges himself thoroughly as Pedro Carmichael, the puppeteering, Prospero-like soap scriptwriter, and gets away with it), jumbles reality, fantasy, the innocent and the malign, and makes it all work. This in one of the most completely enjoyable films I have seen for years.

Cartoon by Michael Daly

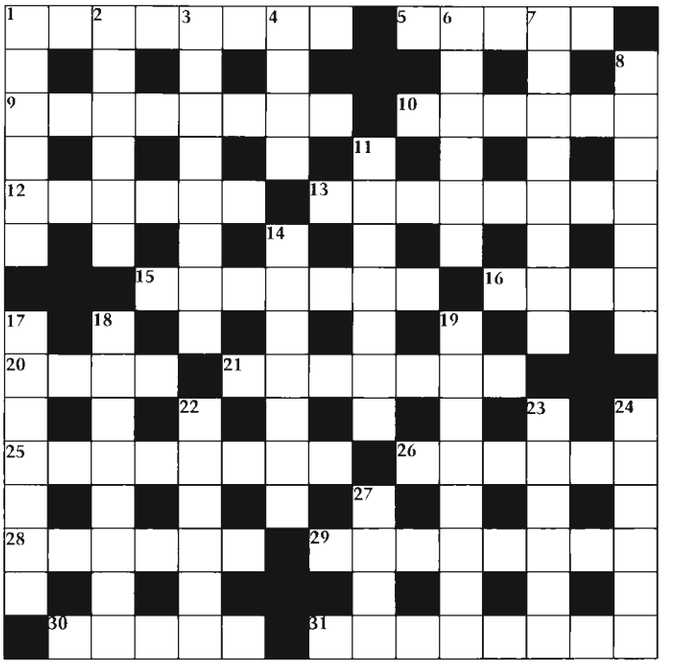
Amiel skilfully intertwines a real(?), if unconventional romance between the young writer (Keanu Reeves), and his experienced Aunt Julia (Barbara Hershey), with Pedro's radio soap to beat them all—'Kings of the Garden District' (love, incest, doctors, jealousy, nurses, mistaken identity, revenge etc). Life feeds off art feeds off life. So it goes. The film's most outrageous japes and jokes have a dark or serious underside which keeps you thinking long after you have stopped laughing. Are Pedro's Albanians Europe's Jews? See the film and decide for yourself. The music of Wynton Marsalis is a matter-of-course bonus.

—Morag Fraser



Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 4, July 1992.

Devised by
Joan Nowotny IBVM



for Ray Cassin

ACROSS

1 In a futile display of valour, 15 used to 16 at a whirligig like this. (8)
5 See 22 down.
9 Naturally it's a matter for the menu. (2,6)
10 Would 15 like to form this with 19? (6)
12 Two insects, one of them upset, both floating on water. (6)
13 Great humility without a foundation. (8)
15 Who in France takes a direction back to an unknown character —a Spanish romantic? (7)
16 Have an inclination for a jousting contest. (4)
20 An icy greeting? (4)
21 The allure of love with a little gloss. (7)
25 Initially Cedric hailed Ivan's valour and loyalty; Roland yearned for such knightly qualities. (8)
26 Partly concoct avocado salad with eight leaves. (6)
28 Born with a nervous twitch, embarrassed, she fails to attract. (6)
29 Ruler of the Scottish tribe rattling through the glen? (8)
30, 31 Distressed, ma can moan half the time in this musical. (3,2,2,6)

DOWN

1 A loving couple in flight, or 15 seeking the favour of 19? (6)
2 A subtle point of distinction—a small measure and a large town involved. (6)
3 Miserable, unformulated but dateless—a possible description of 15's countenance? (8)
4 Girl he 6, but for the most part, alas, she did not understand ... (4)
6 ... that a mixture of love and dread expressed his attitude to her. (6)
7 By keeping North, Liz will have a peep, somehow, at the old airship. (8)
8 Gets tea, perhaps, to let the idea develop. (7)
11 Recreation is over for me, whether as subject or object. (7)
14 To search for the rewritten Latin law, pore over the old manuscripts. (7)
17 A cowardly bird! (7)
18 The old Roman left hand is where sin is traditionally found. (8)
19 Claudine changed to become 15's 'fantastic mistress'. (8)
22 The ANZ chaps on a muddled journey in the service of 15. (6,5)
23 A disordered man with a hundred and one fantasies. (6)
24 More than half the apologia was delivered with gravity from the theatre baicony. (6)
27 Lamb turned up in a trailer. (4)

Solution to Crossword no. 3, June 1992

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

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