EUREKA STREET

Vol. 4 No. 1 February 1994 $5.00

Season of upheaval

The politics of swimming pools
Shane Maloney

Politics and Australia's pool of unemployed
Jon Greenaway and **Frank Stilwell**

Ken Inglis observes a memorial ritual

Denis Minns reads the new Catechism

Eureka Street *wishes to express sympathy to the families who suffered loss of life or home during the January bushfires.*

Photo: Andrew Stark

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EUREKA STREET

Volume 4 Number 1
February 1994

A magazine of public affairs, the arts and theology

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Photos pp 2, 5, 18-19, by Andrew Stark;
Cartoons p6 by Michael Daly.
Photos pp 10-12, 36-37 by Bill Thomas;
Graphics pp14, 42, 45 by Tim Metherall;
Graphic p22 by Waldemar Buczynski;
Photo p38 by Michael McGirr.

Eureka Street magazine
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Richmond VIC 3121
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Eureka Street magazine, ISSN 1036–1758, Australia Post registered publication VAR 91–0756, is published eleven times a year by Eureka Street Magazine Pty Ltd, 300 Victoria Street, Richmond, Victoria 3121.
Responsibility for editorial content is accepted by Michael Kelly, 300 Victoria Street, Richmond.
Printed by Doran Printing, 4 Commercial Road, Highett VIC 3190.
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The editor welcomes letters and unsolicited manuscripts, including poetry and fiction. Manuscripts will be returned only if accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Requests for permission to reprint material from the magazine should be addressed in writing to: The editor, *Eureka Street* magazine, PO Box 553, Richmond VIC 3121.

COMMENT

MORAG FRASER

Fits and starts of the season

In early January, as the suburbs were burning, and South Africa was doing too well in the cricket, the Sydney Festival and Carnivalé turned up what seemed like an incongruous entertainment: a theatre piece called *Playland*. Just to get to it you had to drive through the kind of cinder drift that used be normal only in late-summer tinderbox Adelaide. If you risked a backward glance from the Bridge you could see the bruised column of smoke lit by a theatrical sun and the flames out of Lane Cove National Park.

Inside the Belvoir Street theatre, in a dirt circle representing a small travelling amusement park, two South African actors, one white, one black, pace through the representative conflicts of their homeland and soon-to-be-unified nation. The two characters, Martinus, the caretaker of the Playland park, and Gideon, an ex-soldier, feint and circle around the facts that divide them. Each one, we learn as the play unfolds, has killed someone from 'the other side'. Each one is locked into the isolation of guilt.

Gideon starts out all pelvic swagger and disclaimer. He's just at Playland for a New Year's Eve good time. Martinus postures as the wronged black man. He *is* wronged, but his grievance has made him an Old Testament avenger. The differing accents of the two men mark out the cultural disjunctions. But they understand one another all too well. And they have only one another to turn to if they are to break the cycle of recrimination.

Playland is written by Athol Fugard, the South African writer who, along with the actors associated with him, has been one of the most powerful and influential voices for peace and unity in South Africa for three decades. The strength of his advocacy lies in his realism but also in his vision. Fugard's plays are about the owning of responsibility but also about qualities of the human spirit that lie beyond the domain of justice. After their harrowing, Gideon and Martinus leave the dirt circle together at dawn, and go to start Gideon's unreliable bomb of a car. It is a mundane, credible new beginning after the conflagration. Sub-cutaneous shoots, regenerating life.

The actor Sean Taylor, who plays the strutting, near tragic Gideon, has the Boer accent and idiom that Australians have just begun to re-tune their ears to during the current South African cricket tour. It is one of Fugard's great dramatic gifts—

the capacity to strip away stereotype and restore to the world a culture embodied in language. Gideon's phrases and rhythms are rich and specific. You hear a man, not a type.

In the voice of the African actor, John Kani, who plays Martinus, you hear yet another resonance; you catch at the edges of the rhetoric and music of a culture that we are beginning to understand and share in this part of the world. Kani has been associated with Athol Fugard since the sixties. Many Australian students had their first taste of African literature written from the inside, not by colonial or post colonial commentators, when they read or saw Fugard's *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, in which Kani performed.

Playland is a short work, 90 minutes of deft testimony. It may never be performed in a more fitting external context. It was impossible to leave the theatre and not be aware of the intersection of symbols. It was also impossible not to draw some lines of hope.

Once a garage, and once a Jaguar. Photo: Andrew Stark

Between now and the anniversary of Federation Australia faces a huge social problem in the form of long-term unemployment. But we do so from a position of national stability and peace. In April, South Africa will have its first fully democratic elections. In very few years, it has shifted away from policies of apartheid to a degree none of us would have believed possible in the seventies, when Athol Fugard's plays first began to appear on school syllabuses in Australia.

During the Sydney fires all Australia acknowledged the generous energies of volunteer fire fighters and the coordinating skills of the professionals. In the Australia Day awards we honoured Lieutenant General John Murray Sanderson for his role in commanding the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia. Low key is the style they share. But low key, as we all know, is not the same as no will. What we chose to do about unemployment will depend more on determination than on the exigencies of economics. If we go only by the economic indicators, 1994 has begun well. But it is crucial now to broaden and integrate the terms in which we assess the welfare of the country and its people. It is also vital that Australians recognise and continue to exploit the kind of vision and energy we characteristically display when our fiery season makes its implacable demands.

In this part of the world (*Eureka Street* is produced from a building in Victoria Street, Richmond, which is one the centres for Melbourne's Vietnamese community) New Year is about to begin, with dragons, fire crackers and exuberance. It is not often that you get a second chance, so may we take this one to wish all our readers *Chuc mung nam moi*, Happy New Year! ■

Buying you the news and views

AUSTRALIA'S METROPOLITAN DAILY newspapers are still the major source of sustained analysis of local and international news in the country. And even though they face stiff competition from the electronic media, the newspapers still provide much of the specialist comment and editorial opinion that we require as a nation. It is disturbing, therefore, to note their increasing reliance on syndicated or imported news and views.

In the international sections it is reasonable and predictable that the dailies will take most of their stories from the wire services, although a good correspondent (we realise they are costly to maintain) does provide appropriate focus and context and is therefore nearly always more illuminating to read. But increasingly, the dailies are reprinting material from English and American papers in news sections and on the editorial and opinion pages. The practice would be defensible if the reprints were apt or timely, but more often than not they are life-style space fillers.

Feature editors, when approached, are coy about the practice, and slide responsibility sideways or up the line. Perhaps it is time for some directed consumer outrage. Do we really need *The New Statesman* or the *Los Angeles Times* to tell us not just what is going on but how we should think about it? ■

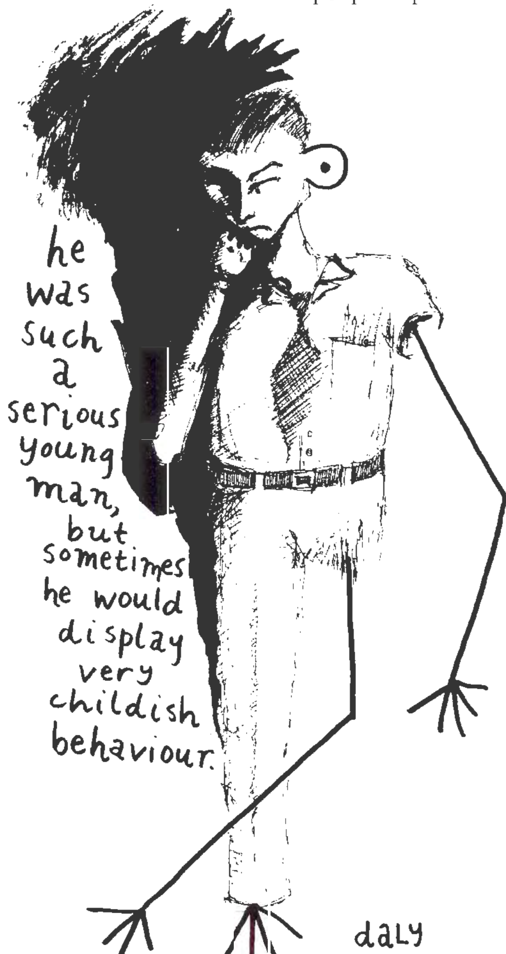
—Morag Fraser

Reading between the lines

From Gavan Breen

I write on behalf of the social justice group of the Alice Springs Catholic parish. Some time ago this group became involved, in a small way, in the controversy over the Ok Tedi Mine in Papua New Guinea. We had read in a pamphlet which came into our possession that:

'The Ok Tedi mine operated by BHP-led consortium is another ecological and social disaster. The tailings dam at the mine was never rebuilt after it collapsed in 1984. Vast quantities of heavy metals and poisons such as cyanide continue to flow into the Fly River on which 40,000 people depend for food and transportation. It is estimated that at the end of the 30 year life span of the mine, heavy metal sediment one metre deep will cover 1000 square kilometres of seabed. Toxins and sediment from the mine have been found as far field as Australia's Great Barrier Reef.'



I wrote to BHP on this matter. They suggested that I contact Ok Tedi Mining Ltd for additional information, but assured me that Ok Tedi would refute the allegations. They added that: 'Ok Tedi has a close relationship with the local people and its contribution has significantly contributed to their welfare and to improved life expectancy.'

I wrote to Ok Tedi Mining. That was on 3 August, and there has been no reply. I therefore wrote to the BHP spokesman again, on 8 October. In this letter I mentioned two more pieces of information I had noted since my earlier letter:

- Praise for the success of Ok Tedi Mining in improving the health and life expectancy of the local people (ABC TV).
- The Governor-General of Papua New Guinea's bitter attack on the company for poisoning the Fly River.

I suggested that both the pamphlet and the earlier letter had been correct: the company did look after the welfare of the people in the area of the mine but has allowed serious pollution of the Fly River and the sea. I have had no reply to this letter.

I conclude that the philosophy of these companies must be something like: make sure that the local people will see that visitors are well looked after, healthy and happy. As far as areas that visitors don't see are concerned, if there is a conflict between profit on the one hand and the welfare of the local people and the environment on the other, go for profit all the way. If anyone complains or questions, fob them off with a reassuring letter. If they persist and they aren't too important, ignore them.

It must be nice to be a big multinational and be able to get away with this sort of thing.

Gavan Breen
Alice Springs, NT

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.

Keating reopened an old wound

From R.W. Carroll

I would not add to the plethora of spoken and written comment on the Prime Minister's description of his Malaysian counterpart as 'recalcitrant' if I did not feel that my experience of the area, which goes back to colonial times, has a bearing on the present time.

I was born in Bunbury, WA, in 1913 and lived there until 1935. In those days, WA was a *de facto* colony. In the 1890s we had resisted federation until we were outvoted by the influx of 't'other siders', the miners and carpetbaggers who arrived after the discovery of gold at Kalgoorlie. Victoria was in a depression at the time and we became a colony of Melbourne. We lost our one-week advantage in shipping to and from England, and the cheap goods from Asia. All our trade was sourced from Melbourne, every industry we started was met with transfer pricing or takeover. Within 30 years we voted to secede and the House of Lords slapped us down. So we lived in a colony.

The state had established a regular shipping service to Java and the Malay peninsula. I went for a round trip on the *Kangaroo* in 1933, to three ports in Java, three in Malaya and one in Sumatra. It took five weeks, including a week ashore in Singapore while the ship was slipped, so there was enough time to get a feel of the places we went to. What emerged were the differences between the Dutch and the British colonies and I believe the resonances live on today. In Java the Dutch were fairly invisible—all the contact we had with transport, shops, offices, etc. was with locals. We soon learned enough *bhasa* malay, the lingua franca, to wander at will. In Malaya the Brits were in charge, telling the Chinese what was wanted, for the Malays to get on with it.

The Dutch, in the main, came out to live there. Often they came with families, or married Javanese. The Brits were on short contracts and lived aloof from, and despised, the locals. Any Brit who married a 'native' was blackballed out of the club. The Malays have remembered, even though the Brits, the Indians and ourselves helped them found their state.

The other matter is religion, with which public-school education is closely involved—after all, God is an Englishman. I am an atheist and, as I understand it, a monotheist god was

chosen from a pantheon previously believed in by the Israelites but was one religion among many until the Christian sect found favour in Europe under the Romans. Six centuries later, the Muslim sect also hived off. The two sects have been enemies for 14 centuries. The Malays are a Muslim people.

R.W. Carroll
Shoreham, VIC

Churches should back state schools

From Noelleen Ward

I am a retired teacher and have taught in both the private and state systems of education in Victoria. The private system caters for those who are able to pay. The state system was established to cater for all children, the poor, the reluctant, the indifferent and all those whose parents believe in the importance of equal educational opportunity for all children. Recently state schools have also been expected to provide increasingly for disturbed and troubled children, for children with learning difficulties and for children with physical or mental disabilities.

The private system is able to choose those to be educated in its schools; the state school system is open to all. Recent changes in the Victorian state education system have been directed at saving money by depriving the children educated in this system but the state continues to provide money for children already privileged in the private system.

As a practising Christian and a member of the Anglican Church I have been disturbed and concerned that the churches have not spoken out in defence of state schools. Are all Christians sending their children to private schools? Are children in state schools not also children of God and the responsibility of the church?

Is it not the duty of Christians to speak out in the defence of the powerless? Is it not also our duty to pray that the government of Victoria will exercise compassion for the poor and the defenceless instead of continuing to make decisions on the basis of how much money can be saved?

N. Ward
Albert Park, VIC

Encyclical not so exclusive after all

From John Goldrick

That you allowed your November issue 'to be devoted' in part 'to a detailed examination of *Veritatis Splendor* and its ramifications' is pleasing.

There is certainly no need to apologise for your modesty—there is so little of it about. Of course, if you are not referring to sexual modesty some might say that your magazine has much to be modest about.

It is, however, your postscript which disturbs me. I am sure that you are not one of those 'women' who, you say in your final sentence, 'still languish, unacknowledged, in the wilderness'.

Veritatis Splendor has certainly been released very selectively on my mountain. Not even the English translation has reached me but I would be very surprised if in the original Latin 'man' is other than *homo* (= human being, as opposed to beasts and gods) and most doubtfully *vir* (= male person, a 'he-man').

I also have a dream, which I fear will not be prophetic, that you might with 'appropriate modesty and tentativeness' allow the English language to remain unsullied.

John Goldrick
Beaumont, NSW

A man by any other name ...

From D.V. McCarthy

I have only just started to read the November number of *Eureka Street* and so have only just read your brief comment on the encyclical. Now, I am quite sure that any reaction of mine—since I am a person, indeed a man, of such meagre intellectual cultivation overlaying an equally meagre foundation of native talent—will provoke an automatic response of dismissiveness on your part.

But since, despite my pathetic intellectual limitations, I have a rather quaint, old-fashioned, reverence for truth (that quaint, old-fashioned, concept) and an equally quaint, old-fashioned respect for—dare I, intellec-

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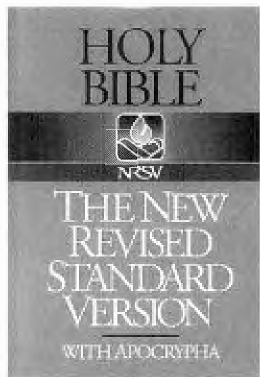

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tually handicapped as I am, even formulate the term?—for *intellectual integrity* (how quaint that must sound)—since, in a word, I am such an old-fashioned fuddy-duddy, I should like to put on record my little protest against your violation of the truth, your sin against intellectual integrity. (How self-indulgent one can be when writing a letter destined to end up in the WPB!)

I am referring, of course, to the sneakily dishonest concluding sentence: 'Twenty-five years after Vatican II, women still languish, unacknowledged, in the wilderness'. I am not such a fuddy-duddy that I don't know what you are on about. *You* may not like it but the word 'man' admits of a meaning, universally understood until less than a generation ago (a very short period in the history of any language), corresponding to the 'homo' of 'homo sapiens'—or 'man' in the account of Genesis, where 'God created man in his own image male and female he created them.'

If you can't get your mind around this, I am sorry for you—generations of people have done so with ease. Indeed, if you have problems, you can consult a reputable dictionary: my Shorter Oxford still lists the general meaning of 'man' first. I am sure you are entitled to feel, as a feminist, that this ought to change. But if, at this point of time, you are going to read, and pronounce on the meaning of a text, it is surely a matter of the most elementary fairness to try to understand that text in the way the writer intended it to be understood. Instead of making your grubby little, oh so piously forebearing (we are a *Christian* paper, after all!), innuendo at the expense of the rotten Vatican and rotten Pope. Intellectual integrity? Well—I admit, it is a bit of a joke, isn't it?

Just as a matter of curiosity, I looked up *homme* in my Petit Robert and find—as I expected—that French makes the same differentiation between the two uses of the word. Will you, raising aloft the flaming banner of true Christian humility, go on a crusade to lecture the French on their pernicious misunderstanding of their own language? The English language, amusingly enough (seeing this is such a delightfully comical matter), just happens to be my birthright as much as yours ... Quaint old-fashioned thought, indeed!

I might add that I am no great admirer of Pope John Paul II, nor of the Vatican, nor of such local champions of orthodoxy as Bishop Pell. But neither am I an admirer of dishonest journalism in any of its little sneaky forms.

D.V. McCarthy
Brunswick, VIC

The editor replies: The English language has always demonstrated the flexibility and generative skill of its speakers. I have no wish to see it 'sullied'. What I hope for is a usage, in religious and secular life, that clearly names and accords dignity to women and men in words that can be proudly owned by all people of the day. The shadow of Latin gives subtlety but it is neither a sufficient explanation nor a justification for usage that leaves people feeling excluded.

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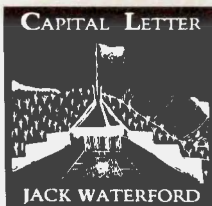


The man whose failings keep him at the top

THE CONVENTIONAL VIEW is that John Hewson has had it—the carcass is swaying in the breeze, waiting to be cut down. He was undermined by his incapacity to lead on issues such as Mabo or the republic, his economic and political philosophy is in tatters, and he was fatally stricken by failing to win the unlosable election. Hewson cannot silence obvious rivals such as Bronwyn Bishop, Peter Reith or John Howard, and even less obvious ones, like Peter Costello and Ian McLachlan, have been promoting themselves without any great regard for his feelings. So when will the *coup de grâce* come?

But it is not as simple as that. The factors that kept Hewson on as Liberal leader even after the *Fightback!* disaster have not changed, and some of those who have no loyalty to him would still probably prefer to retain him, even as a lame duck, rather than choose from among his competitors. If one has ambitions of one's own but knows that, as the numbers now stand, they cannot be realised, it is better to keep the status quo rather than to give someone else a chance. And among those who have no ambitions themselves—even if they believe that Hewson has not achieved his goals, and even if they despair at his inability to lead—it is recognised that many of his rivals have flaws as great as he does. A weakened Hewson actually has to listen. Could anyone say that a Peter Reith would? Or a Bronwyn Bishop?

Hewson would not be the first Liberal leader who has been written off after defeat, yet later ridden a wave that put the Liberals firmly in power. And if he succeeded in doing the impossible and losing an election, he did it by perversity and by allowing his own policies to become the election issue. In the right circumstances even John Hewson might win an election fought on the government's record, even if the platform he presented to the world totally contradicted that which he presented last time, and even if he was not especially trusted by the electorate or if his judgment was not well-regarded.

When Hewson was in the ascendant, his then supporters persecuted the party's wets, overtly rejecting the pragmatism of Menzies and Fraser which had kept the Liberals in power for most of three and a half decades. But a weakened Hewson now depends on his former opponents to keep hold of the leadership. Could they really imagine doing better under, say, Reith? Or fail to remember that Howard, for all his great gifts, has not only himself failed to deliver but played a part in the witch hunts? Have not the wets feared the zeal of Costello, and the shrill and shallow but undeniably far-right instincts of Bishop? Despite the jockeying, Hewson's greatest asset is that his rivals are generally in the same camp; they are vying for the leadership of a party faction rather than of the party itself, and even if that faction were united behind one person it could not deliver the numbers.

I believe that Bronwyn Bishop *is* destined to lead the Liberal Party—though she may lead them over a cliff. Bishop has all the faults that her detractors allege she has, few within the parliamentary party support her, and her opportunism makes her distrusted even by those who acknowledge her campaigning skills and ability to grab a headline. Yet I suspect that Bishop would in practice be a more moderate leader than most of her rivals, in part because, despite the obvious imitation of the Thatcher style, she doesn't actually believe in anything much except winning. And *that* is an instinct the Liberals have been remarkably short of for more than a decade.

Bishop is acknowledged to be short on teamwork and on policymaking and delivery skills, but these charges have been made before about people who proved, at least for a time, to be successful. Remember John Gorton? Was Fraser ever fêted for loyalty or, in 1975, for being a sharer and carer? Even Menzies, for all his barrister's capacity to read a brief and to chair a meeting, was never actually renowned for getting involved in details, or even for being consistent. And on the positive side, Bronwyn Bishop has a superb instinct for grasping popular sentiment, for forcing her opponents to take the side she dictates on an issue, and under pressure she is almost unflappable.

ONE COULD NOT IMAGINE that John Hewson was seeking to do her any favours when he put her in the shadow Cabinet and gave her responsibility for urban and regional strategy, but he may well have played right into her hands. First, he has put her against the Deputy Prime Minister, Brian Howe—a notoriously poor combatant who is easily rattled, even by people less able than he. Bishop's scattergun approach, and her willingness to start a fight without regard for consistency (or even, sometimes, for the facts), suggests that Howe is now a sitting duck.

She will speak for the Liberals on matters such as regional unemployment, and on quality-of-life issues such as access to services, transport and housing: the field couldn't have been better suited to the brand of popularism that Bronwyn Bishop serves up so well. She is unlikely to feel greatly constrained by the remaining vestiges of *Fightback!*, or by the anti-protection policies that the Liberals still have in place. And even the mess of contradictions she can be expected to present will not be able to be attacked in quite the same rough-shod style that Labor now favours. Bishop may be no lady, but it is doubtful that the electorate would put up with Paul Keating treating women in the same way that he treats his male opponents.

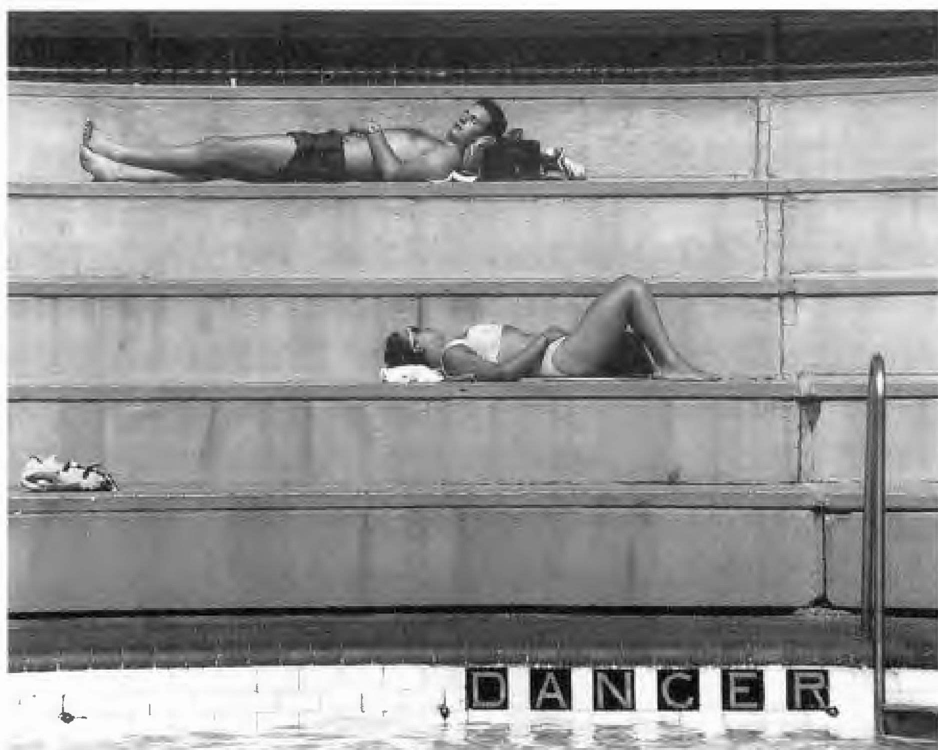
In short, Bronwyn Bishop is not lightly to be cast aside. Whether, as Dorothy Parker might have put it, she should instead be hurled aside with great force, is another question altogether. ■

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

SHANE MALONEY

Reflections in a public pool

IT IS NEARLY SIX O'CLOCK. Soon the gates will open. All must be ready. I kneel at the water's edge, the concrete cold beneath my bare knees, and dip a clear plastic vial into the water.



Sunnyside up ...

photos of inner-suburban pool in Melbourne taken by Bill Thomas

A pool test is a serious matter. Plunging into a million litres of chemically treated water is an act of faith. Guarding the purity of the water is not a task to be taken lightly.

I add a tablet to the vial, watch it turn pink, match the hue to a transparent pane in a calibrated disk, read off the number below and enter it in the log. Free chlorine 2.5 parts per million, ph 7.3. Textbook numbers. Stuart in the plant room has done his job well.

Temperature?, asks the log. The thermometer is electronic, precise. 24 degrees, I write.

Colour? The water is translucent as crystal, limpid as a well-made gin martini, clear and still. The dream of a breeze, an eddy of light, stirs the surface and is gone. The pool is a mirror of the new day: azure, tinged with the dawn's orange. Luminous silver where the sunlight strokes it, gem-stone dark in the shadows of the deep end. Colour? The square in the log is small. Blue, I write.

BIG CHANGES ARE HAPPENING in the way public swimming pools are designed, built, managed and used. The council-operated War Memorial Olympic Pool, shut for the winter while the staff register dogs and deliver meals-on-wheels, opening on the first day of summer for banana-splits off the diving board and high-jinks at the icy-pole kiosk, is extinct. In its place is the Community Leisure Complex, incorporating spas and saunas, crèches and cappucinos, dry areas with banks of computer-regulated exercise bikes.

In Victoria, this transformation will be accelerated by state legislation, due to be introduced early in the new year, that will make competitive tendering for 50 per cent of local-government services compulsory by 1996. The new law doesn't specifically call for recreation services to be sold, but municipal swimming pools soak up millions of ratepayer dollars every year and the men in suits behind the doors of many a town hall make no secret of their desire to see the pool pay its way. In some municipalities, leisure is shaping up as a major arena for industrial and community conflict.

Angered by the prospect of losing their long-serving council lifeguards, Fitzroy swimmers recently invaded a council meeting, questioned the administration's arithmetic and challenged the legitimacy of the tender process. The heart of their argument was that the local pool is more than an anonymous swimsuit bazaar: it is an integral part of a community's sense of itself. And even more pertinently, perhaps, they argued that profitability was no substitute for safety.

'There hasn't been an accident here in living memory,' says Carl Edwards, for 15 summers a lifeguard at Fitzroy. 'Much of that is down to the fact that we know our users. At any given time we have more than 20 years aggregate experience watching the pool. Not many of the commercial operators can say that.'

The council relented. Carl can keep his job, at least for another season.

THE TWO WOMEN ARRIVE SEPARATELY just before seven. Their routine does not vary. With quiet purpose they don flippers, then the soft headgear of water-polo play-

ers, numbers 5 and 11, then snorkels and masks.

For what seems an eternity, they sit side by side, feet in the water, measuring the distance to the far end, calculating their trajectories in low murmurs. I bend to scoop a drowned beetle out of the backwash and they flash past me, down deep, skimming the bottom, torpedoes in tandem. They break the surface and continue to the shallow end, their snorkels' periscopes ploughing a mill-pond. Eleven arrives first, a half-length ahead. She waits a beat and they tumble-turn together, a pair once again.

Swimming laps is an enterprise of solitude, allowing no conversation, requiring no reciprocity. Yet these two seem somehow to have achieved a communion as they glide back and forth, lap after lap, never more than a metre apart. If I put my head under the surface, I wonder, would I hear the sonar ping of some dolphin language passing between them?

Through the glass wall of the gymnasium the head aquaerobics instructor is watching me. She scowls and writes something in a small notebook.

NO LONGER EXCLUSIVELY YOUNG, male or even particularly Christian—unless you count exercise as a kind of prayer—the YMCA is the most familiar and successful independent operator in the leisure industry. It owns, leases or manages 30 centres across the state, generating part-time employment for thousands and turning over $30 million a year. The powerhouse at the core of the Y's expansion is Bob Nicholson, a veteran with 30 years in the organisation, a Master's degree in Recreation and an enthusiast's zeal for his job.

'Look how lucky we are,' he tells his staff. 'We get paid to be the good guys—not to rip people off but to help them get what they want.' Amen to that, say the 130,000 people who use YMCA facilities every week. YMCA centres hum with purpose.

'Aquatics is the new growth area. We lead the world in the productivity of our swimming pools.' The Y's newest centre, in the Melbourne suburb of Ashburton, features a state-of-the-art pool with a hydraulic floor that rises and falls on demand—up for swimming lessons, down for exercise classes.

Technical wizardry aside, the key to the Y's success lies in its personnel philosophy. 'We train our people within our culture,' Nicholson says, 'not just to have a job, but to be committed to us. People who just want to work don't stay with us.'

Lifeguards, gym instructors, crèche and catering staff—all are encouraged to volunteer their free time for centre activities. This is called The Y-Factor.

I CARRY A WHISTLE, 10 Band-Aids, rubber gloves and a resuscitation mask. As I patrol, I silently chant the lifeguard's ABC: Airways, Breathing, Circulation.

In the absence of breathing and pulse, the breath-to-compression ratio for cardio-pulmonary resuscitation is two breaths/15 compressions within 10 seconds, at the rate of four times per minute for adults, six times per minute for children under eight. The compression must never be jerky. Check the carotid pulse every two minutes. Continue resuscitation until pulse returns or medical help arrives.

I am trained for something I hope never happens. In the meantime I trust to luck, my own and that of others. And to the resilience of the human heart.

The two boys sharing a body-building magazine on the bottom tier of the bleachers whisper to each other in Arabic. They are perhaps 16, pencil-thin, shy, with bumfluff moustaches and huge dark eyes. Wish as they will, their bodies will never resemble the beefcake in the magazine.

The day is cool and the pool is empty, but for two teenage girls flopping about on a floatie mat. Polynesians,

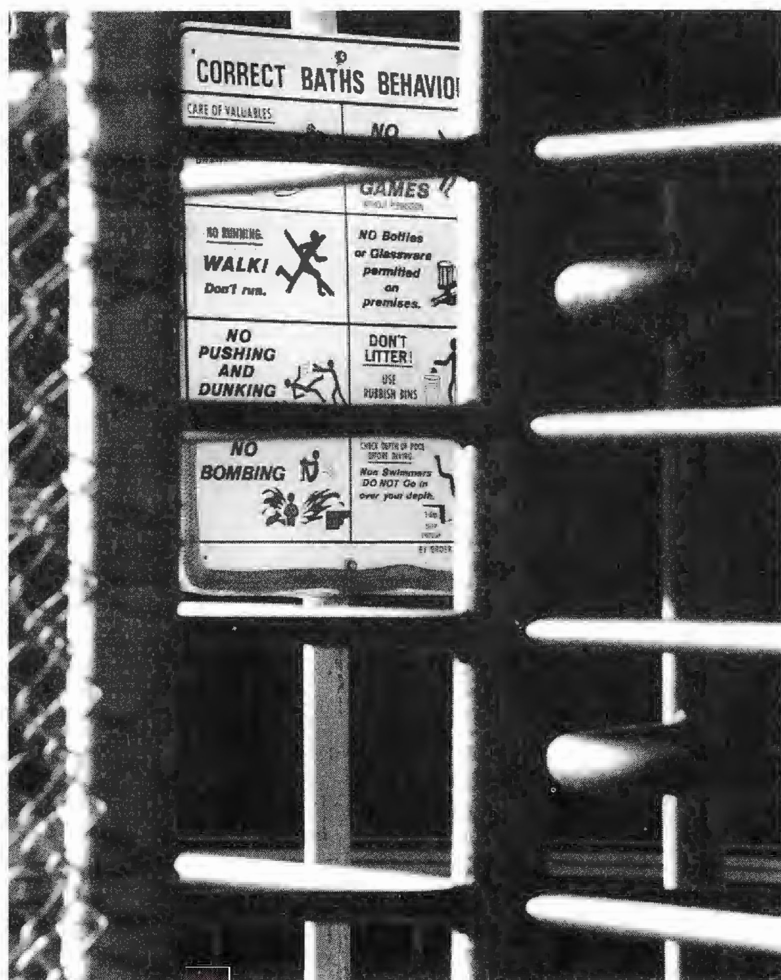
... and over easy

from Tonga or Samoa. The boys dart sidelong glances from behind full-page glossies of Messrs Apollo and Universe. The girls are oblivious, riding imaginary bomboras. One teeters and dives, a flash of brown at the ladder. A tremor of nervous anticipation convulses the boys, and a vision from Gauguin steps streaming from the water. 'Rack off,' she says. Unspoken hopes founder on blunt Kiwi vowels: 'Wreck off.'

High above me, on the floor of the aerobics room, I can see someone writing in a pad.

THIS TALK OF SWIMMING POOL PRODUCTIVITY is not universally applauded.

'Sure, contracting out municipal pools is more efficient,' says Frank Hayes of the Miscellaneous Workers



ABOVE: For the civically correct ... BELOW: And for the aquatically correct. Ducks have taken over this pool, which is now in disrepair.

Union. 'You just cut wages by 20 per cent and employ casuals for three or four hours a day. The total staff might be 100, but each is averaging only 10 hours work a week. And they are easy to sack. There are many different euphemisms for expecting people to work and not be paid—community service, voluntarism, training. But what it boils down to is a rort.'

Fewer than 100 of Victoria's 1500 accredited lifeguards are MWU members.

At the other end of the political spectrum, notes of free-market caution are being sounded. 'If the aim of the government is to introduce competition and free up the system, what they may end up achieving is just the opposite,' says one leisure consultant who prefers not to be named.

'In the first year of competitive tendering, we already have the domination of the metropolitan area by a single organisation with very little competition. A couple of years along and they might well be in a position effectively to control the whole industry.'

For others, the problem is more abstract, a fear of creeping American-style uniformity: a feeling that Have A Nice Day is displacing G'day. The YMCA, they complain, is McDonalds in Speedos.

'You'll find it very different here,' staff at a newly corporatised inner-suburban pool were told. 'There's a lot of migrants. But don't worry, some of them are real characters.'

MY DAYS ON THE POOLDECK are numbered, I suspect. At the end of my shift the Leisure Services Co-Ordinator calls me aside. One of the senior staff, un-named, believes I lack professionalism. My derelictions have been listed.

I have been seen leaning against a wall. I don't try sufficiently diligently to look busy. I lack an appropriate level of cheerfulness. I was observed drinking coffee from a thermos as I watched the pool.

These charges embarrass my supervisor, but they have been raised at a management meeting and he is obliged to bring them to my attention. I protest that an excess of cheerfulness at six in the morning might not be welcomed by the customers, that a timely coffee helps maintain alertness, but my arguments peter out into silent acquiescence. I need the work.

By the side of the indoor pool the senior aquaerobics instructor is conducting a class. She gyrates in lycra shorts before a sound-system blasting out an instrumental remix of Dannii Minogue numbers, shouting downwards at a group of Italian grandmothers who shuffle waist-deep in tepid water hoping their perms don't droop. Her face is set in a rictus grin of fierce cheerfulness, the mark of a true professional.

On my way out, I pass her at Reception. 'Have a nice day,' she says. But I know she doesn't mean it. Work by the water she might, but her heart is in the dry areas. ■

Shane Maloney is a freelance writer.

MAX TEICHMANN

From bad to worse

A SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE is inquiring into recent decisions to allow increases in foreign ownership of the Australian media. It will examine the possible influence of the Prime Minister on the Foreign Investment Review Board's decisions in these matters, and whether Conrad Black gave Paul Keating assurances that the Black papers would present Labor policies favourably. The committee has also indicated that it wants to consider wider questions related to foreign ownership of the media.

A key witness, Paul Keating, said from the start that he would not appear before a Senate committee. It would be a form of slumming, and in any case the Senate consisted of unrepresentative swill. There is little to say here. Keating is as he is, and the way he is has re-established the image of the truculent Australian, at home and overseas.

The important questions clearly are: is foreign ownership of the media a bad thing—a new threat to Australian democracy and independence? Secondly, is the concentration of media ownership in a few hands (two foreigners now control 95 per cent of Australia's metropolitan daily newspapers) a bad thing? If so, what can be done about it? And finally, are our politicians media puppets, or do they collude with the whole process?

What was the Australian media like before foreign ownership, i.e. before Murdoch Jr chose to become an American? As an insatiable consumer of its written offerings from the age of nine, in 1933, and of radio since 1935, I have a sorry tale to tell.

The papers were controlled by Murdoch Senior, Packer Senior and the Fairfaxes. They were uniformly anti-Labor, anti-union, pseudo-populist, and mostly adulatory about the icons in Buckingham Palace. That was their version of Australian patriotism.

During the Depression the Australian media hardly said a single sensible, truthful or compassionate thing—the Melbourne *Herald's* blanket fund and selected Vicars of Bray sufficed unto the day. There was little economic information and no alternative scenarios were presented. Keynes was rarely mentioned, Marx worked in Hollywood; the social-democratic experiments in Scandinavia and New Zealand were ignored; communism was the Great Beast.

The catastrophic consequences of World War I, the suffering caused by the Depression and exposure of the manifest failures of capitalism were not on the agendas of media owners in Australia any more than they were elsewhere in the capitalist world. Distinctions between foreign and indigenous ownership were irrelevant.

A great many Australians were voiceless during this period, as a great many are now. The Irish-Australians did not go along with the jingoistic, imperialist twaddle, and the poor and unemployed were not persuaded by the Panglossian denials of injustice. It was at this time that I first encountered phrases about lights at the end of tunnels, prosperity being just around the corner, and serried ranks of 'economic experts' announcing that things were on the move. Key indicators like the birdseed industry were flashing green, and the next time it rained it would rain pennies from heaven.

This set of reactionary newspaper owners continued to hold sway through the Cold War and the Vietnam War, the Gulf War and the recession we had to have. At some stage they switched horses from London to Washington, and at some stage they let in like-minded foreigners. But the notion that there ever was a golden age with a free, diverse, Australian-owned media is a myth.

Marx was probably wrong when he said that the capitalist has no country, if 'capitalist' means individual proprietor. But if the judgment is applied to *big* business and the big banks, it is spot on. The task now is to disabuse national groups of the notion that they have a country, or need one. (Margaret Thatcher says they don't have a society either. She should know.)

Of course it is possible that our media could be returned to local ownership, and of course the great monopolies could be broken up. If it is said—and some do say—that this would be financial folly and lead to declining standards, let us have a full inquiry into these matters. The inquiry should include the new communications technologies being kept on ice until the big players get around to swallowing them, too.

It's rather like the proposed royal commission into wealth, or the inquiries that some of us have urged should be made into the banking and taxation systems. A government can initiate these whenever it wishes, an opposition can promise to do them when it is elected, and the Senate can set up a committee of inquiry. The deterrents are fear and venality.

It's all reminiscent of the J.B. Priestley story about the ventriloquist who is taken over by his dummy—eventually he is reduced to a babbling cot case with the dummy's voice. Believing they can use the media magnates for their own purposes, our politicians finish up like the defeated ventriloquist. Nowadays, Labor people actually lust for this role.

But, finally, the new kind of foreign ownership does promise to be worse than our home-grown choruses. The future is a worldwide, commonly sourced propaganda and selling machine, functioning like CNN during the Gulf War. This device will be usable for either *1984* or *Brave New World*. Do I really have to identify the common source? ■

Max Teichmann is a Melbourne writer and reviewer.

ANDREW HAMILTON

The family that rides together ...

ON SUNNY SUNDAY AFTERNOONS you sometimes see families riding together along the bike paths: four matching pink mountain bikes, shiny velcro pants and wraparound sun glasses, not a hair out of place or a wheel out of true.

That's not what I mean here by family rides. I'm talking about the serious stuff: extended family with an open invite, a place to stay overnight, and trains to catch. Compared to playing toy soldiers on a bike path, this is the western front; and if you are organising it, you are Montgomery or, if you are unlucky, Rommel. So how do you plan your campaign?

First, you must find a place to go. You think immediately of golden beaches, lovely mountain views, lakeside stops? Put them out of your mind. If *you've* thought of them, so will every predatory 4WD and BMW driver in Australia. And what will you do then, when you see your three favourite nieces ahead, riding three-abreast up to the crest of a hill, the two on the outside steadying the bike so that the one in the middle can hold the book from which she is reading to them.

And what will you do when you come hurtling around a steep downhill bend to discover yet another niece lying in the middle of the road looking for dramatic effect in the video shots she is taking of the riders. No harm done: perhaps it did lead to a starring role in *Secrets*, photographing everyone that moves from every conceivable vantage point. But if it had been a busy road ...

So, the first thing to do is to find a route where there will be no cars, leading to a place which no one knows about. My favourite is the ride to the old Victorian mining town, Steiglitz, from Bacchus Marsh station. You can take roads no sane car would go down, with enough variety of scenery to take your mind off your seat.

But first you have to get to the Bacchus Marsh station. You could simply arrive at Spencer Street and book your tickets. But I wouldn't. For some trains have little guards vans. Of course, you *can* fit 20 bikes into a small guards van, if you mezzanine them. But can you get them out again? Have you ever tried to untangle a mass of twisted bikes at head level, while the guard is reminding you of his timetable? If you have, next time you will ring the station to let them know you are coming.

Once you get to the station, you have to start dealing with all eventualities. Assuming that you have banned velcro and bicycletalk, and insisted on uniform of old footy jumpers to distinguish your group from an Accessories Fan Club, your first big challenge will be to deal with the Nello effect.

Nello is the friend of your nieces who invites himself along, and advertises himself by doing wheelies on the platform. You notice that his old BMX has bubbles of tube sticking out of both tyres, and a chain joined up with an old nail. The first big decision has to be taken: do you send him home? And if he insists on coming, what do you do when he collapses with weariness five miles out of Bacchus Marsh, and then demands to go home?

Ideally, of course, you will have taken such a circuitous route that you can cheerfully tell him he is free to go home by himself, providing he can get there. And other potentially mutinous young can be included in the invitation. That is usually sufficient deterrent. Even if it isn't, by that time being *in loco parentis* and simply being driven will be so bound up with each other that to be relieved of the first and freed from the second at a stroke will seem a blessing.

By now, too, you should be facing your first emergency. One of the bikes will have broken down. You will, of course, have consulted the books, which will tell you, like the prudent virgins in the Gospel story, to bring the right tools.

If you are a foolish virgin, you will provide yourself with tizzy little tools from the bikeshop, a dinky little spanner, tyre lever and so on, the sort of things which are useful for tidy little misadventures. But if you are really a wise virgin, you will be ready for the things that actually happen.

Say, for example, someone snaps their pedal. It will be pretty miserable to pedal the rest of the way with one foot. So, make sure you have a shifting spanner and a wrench, and maybe even a jemmy or a hatchet, so that you can dig some bolts out of the wrecked cars you find along the way. They work well as alternative pedals. And if a frame breaks, it will be helpful to have a really strong pair of pliers with which to cut fencing wire and tie the frame together. It is amazing what re-

pairs you find you can make when the alternative is to walk twenty miles or so to the nearest station.

The first test of your leadership will come at the first crossroads. It helps to be able to point confidently ahead, whether you know the route or not. But to carry it off, you need to ensure that you have the only map in the party. Two maps will inevitably lead to fights. If you have the only map, even if you get lost, you can always take a more roundabout route and pretend that you are deliberately retracing the very steps of Hume or Hovell. It is better, on the whole, not even to mention Burke and Wills.

Once you get there the night will be impossible: nothing can be done, except to find a place to sleep well away from the young people. Your job will have been done if the place where you stop is at least ten miles away from the nearest pub, and the younger members of the party are exhausted by the ride. If you are relying on a car to bring up the evening meal and sleeping gear, make sure the car and driver aren't promised by the friend of a friend. Nothing can equal the reproachful look of a group of bike riders contemplating an evening with nothing to eat.

The second day will be lost to memory. But a ride downhill along minor roads to a station that comes up unexpectedly just as people are beginning to complain, will help your reputation. Steiglitz to Lara via the Anakie Gorge for lunch fits the bill perfectly.

But let me return to the tools you should bring. I overlooked the most important piece of equipment, and one that no bike shop will ever tell you about: a small fire extinguisher. Why, you ask naively, should you need a fire extinguisher? In case your bike catches fire, of course.

It happened to me once. We were racing to catch the weekly ferry from Harris to Skye, running on the brakes down a steep hill to Loch Erisort on the way to Tarbert. For the technical buffs (and to prove my credentials for writing on such subjects), I was riding a Raleigh bedstead, with a four-speed Sturmey Archer hub, complete with hub brakes, and a hub generator thrown in. The whole assembly weighed a ton, but the salient point was that it contained the makings of an internal combustion engine: oil bath for the gears and a metal braking sleeve to produce sparks. That's why even then it was a collector's item. Anyway, half down the hill, the bike caught fire: smoke was pouring out of the hub, and my companion, a sober-minded Scripture scholar with a care for accuracy of which I myself would not boast, swore that he saw flames licking out from the bike before it finally seized up completely.

So my advice is always to carry a fire extinguisher, unless you fancy yourself as Che, teaching your band of guerilla irregulars to live off the land while you wait for next week's ferry to arrive. ■

Andrew Hamilton SJ is a freewheeling theologian.

Particular problems

The God Particle, Leon Lederman with Dick Teresi, Bantam Press, London, 1993. ISBN 0593 033795, RRP $24.95

When I was a undergraduate in the early '60s, our final-year physics class was given a series of lectures introducing us to a chaotic zoo of newly discovered elementary particles—mesons, hyperons, muons, pions, baryons, leptons. Many of the properties of these particles were known and they awaited a modern Mendeleev to shepherd them into some kind of logical corral. The task for physics in the '70s and '80s, we were told, would be to carry out such a classification.

Those who did not worry too much about earning a living—and had sufficient marks in their final exam—were part of this quest. It became a treasure hunt that created Big Physics, a world of billion-dollar machines, which took up hundreds of underground hectares and accelerated particles to more than 99.9 per cent of the speed of light. The high-energy collisions created in these machines were examined for traces of events that would indicate the fleeting presence of particles which may not have been free since the earliest microseconds after the Big Bang. The existence of some of these particles had been predicted by theorists and it was up to the experimenters to find them.

The author of this book, Leon Lederman, was one such experimenter. Winner of the 1988 Nobel Prize for Physics as a result of his work 25 years earlier on fundamental particles, he is well qualified to take us through the story of the search for the basic atom, the indivisible unit of all matter.

As an analogy, think of this magazine made up of stories and features of various kinds. Each is divided into paragraphs and the paragraphs are made up of words and the words are made up of letters that are typed at a computer terminal. Within the computer, each letter is represented as a combination of zeros and ones. These zeros and ones are the atoms of news. Physics seeks the atoms of matter.

Starting with the Greeks, Lederman progresses to the work of Dalton and Mendeleev and the discovery of the chemical atom. Under the probing of Thomson, Rutherford and Bohr, this turned out to be far from indivisible; it was made up of electrons, protons and neutrons and this did not qualify as the fundamental building block of all matter. But what if these subatomic particles could be further divided, revealing yet another layer of matter? (The Russian dolls' metaphor comes to mind.)

Today, that subdivision has been accomplished and we are down to quarks and leptons as the ultimate at-

oms of matter. Although many physicists believe that this is as far as it goes, no one can tell for sure. Forty years ago, it was confidently asserted that protons and neutrons were indivisible and there are no doubt many people whose physics stopped at that stage and who believe that such detail is as fine as it gets.

In his story of the quest for the atom, the author visits almost all the greats of classical and modern physics. In a guided tour through the ages, we meet Galileo, Kepler and Newton; Faraday, Maxwell and Hertz; Planck, Einstein and Bohr; de Broglie and Schrödinger. As someone with a background in this area, I may not be the best person to judge, but I applaud the clear, precise style, free of any mathematics more threatening that F = ma (or as he writes it: eff equals emm aye). Its many examples and frequent revisionism make it an excellent introduction to physics for an untutored reader.

Not surprisingly, when he deals with that marvellous collection of geniuses who were attracted to England in the early part of this century by the charism and reputation of the New Zealander Ernest Rutherford, the author is at his lyrical best. I once heard E.T.S. Walton, one of the many Nobel laureates who worked under Rutherford, speak of those days to a group of high-school students and their eager teachers. Walton had the reputation within his own university, Trinity College, Dublin, of being an indifferent lecturer. But his stories of Chadwick, Kapitsa, Bohr, Blackett, Cockroft, Oliphant and many others were enthralling, even to fidgety teenagers. The novelist C.P. Snow in one of his books writes lovingly of Rutherford: the booming bravado hiding a colonial diffidence, the chips on those broad shoulders visible to all but his students, who regarded him as one level below infallible.

It is hard to know how Rutherford would cope with today's Big Physics. Yet it fell to two of his students, Walton and John Cockroft, to be the first to split the atom by artificial means and so begin the race towards bigger and better atom smashers. The original Cockroft-Walton apparatus can be seen in the Science Museum in London. It is an amusing, almost pathetic example of Rutherford's oft-quoted dictum that he could do research at the North Pole, that all he needed was string and sealing wax. Today, dressed up in stainless steel and glistening alloys, it is the basis of the first, much-photographed stage in the American Fermilab cascade accelerator.

As the director of Fermilab for 10 years and one of the foremost particle experimenters of the past 30 years, Lederman was intimately involved with probing the secrets of the 'old' atom. He describes his own and others' experiments, and although it is tempting to think that he may have given himself good press, he is keen to puncture any pomposity in himself or others. Describing how he let the J/psi particle (which won the 1976 Nobel Prize for Ting and Richter) slip through his observations, he chides himself: 'Not only did I miss the J at Brookhaven, I missed it at both new machines, a new record of malpractice in particle physics.' He carries on a friendly banter with theorists who, he claims, are given all the glory in discoveries and get to write best-selling books. He describes the typical prayer of a theorist: 'Dear Lord, forgive me the sin of arrogance, and Lord, by arrogance I mean the following ...' With a backward glance at the theorist Murray Gell-Mann, Lederman wonders if people would pay him more attention if he were to hyphenate his own name.

Like a disproportionate number of those involved in this area of study, Leder-man (!) is Jewish; but even that is grist to his sardonic humour. He tells how, before one particular experiment, he asked an Orthodox rabbi to say a *brucha* (Hebrew: 'blessing') over his apparatus. The rabbi was furious at such a sacrilegious suggestion. Lederman had no luck, either, with a Conservative rabbi, who said he would love to help, but 'The Law ...' Finally he went to a Reform rabbi, meeting him as he stepped out of his flashy sportscar. 'Rabbi, can you say a *brucha* for my cloud chamber?' '*Brucha*,' responded the rabbi. 'What's a *brucha*?'

The book has many such stories and witty asides which make it a joy to read. The only quarrel I have with it is with its unfortunate title—right out of the Readers Digest school of editing. It would be easy to imagine that this is yet another effort to tie quantum physics with Easter mysticism. Alternatively, the title might suggest an attempt to prove the modern canard that religion had anticipated these discoveries ages ago, and that science was merely stumbling towards that serene plateau where some particular version of theology was waiting to say 'I told you so.'

The book is emphatically neither of these. Reference is, of course, made to Einstein's 'knowing the mind of God' and to Hawking's 'seeing the face of God.' But the God of this book is, in the first place, female, and in Lederman's quirky view is quite capable of changing her mind. For instance, one of the chapter subheadings reads: 'Is God making this up as She goes along?' Lederman's account of creation is decidedly unbiblical: 'Let's see how Santa, in his workshop, makes the chemical elements. He has to do this right because he works for Her and She is tough.'

If you feel you have been left behind by modern particle discoveries or if you would like an accurate yet readable jaunt through physics from Democritus to Hawking, I cannot think of a better book than this. ■

Frank O'Shea, our guest Archimedes columnist, teaches at Marist College, Canberra.

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Employing Australia

Jon Greenaway looks at the assumptions behind the federal government's green paper on employment opportunities, and Frank Stilwell argues that it is time for governments to make fundamental changes, rather than 'tinkering at the edges' of the unemployment problem.

It is not enough to provide for the individual unless we can also provide an environment into which the individual can fit, an environment which offers a place for him, a function for him to perform, and an opportunity to live a life which is satisfying to him and useful to the community
—***Dr H.C. Coombs***, The Special Problems of Planning (1944)

UNDERLYING THE DEBATE on unemployment lies a deeper question: What kind of society do we aspire to be? An answer to this question forms the premise, stated or unstated, of every piece of government policy, and when the issue is as fundamental as unemployment it should be asked openly.

Helen Pringle, from the school of political science at the University of New South Wales has framed the answers to this question into two broad schools of thought. In a paper delivered at a conference held last September by the Uniya Centre for Social Research, she suggests that the unemployment issue is being argued from two basic positions: individualism and communitarianism.

Policy and legislation can rest on the assumption that society is a collection of discrete individuals, motivated primarily by self-interest, or on the recognition that society is founded on a sense of community and that there are consequent obligations to help those in need. Pringle describes these competing views of society as 'thin' and 'thick.' With regard to the unemployment debate this amounts to two different views of what makes a just society.

The 1980s has been described, almost to the point of cliché, as the decade of economic rationalism. Throughout the OECD this philosophy of rugged individualism permeated government legislation and economic theory. In Australia, a notable representative of the ALP told us we were having the recession we had to have.

In the free-market view, justice, in the sense of economic self-determination, is delivered only as a by-product. The workings of the market are supposed to produce profit that, through natural processes, will be equitably distributed among the population. Instead of infusing ideals of justice and community responsibility into legislation, governments shrank the public sector and more or less hoped that the private sector would make up the consequent gap in expenditure.

The fundamental flaw in this way of thinking, argue the opponents of economic rationalism, is that not everyone is equally equipped to take advantage of a free-market approach to policy, least of all during times of a recession. An unemployment rate of more than 10% for the last two years has made it painfully obvious that the theory has not been vindicated in practice. With the White Paper on restoring full employment due for release next April it is appropriate to take a more active approach to solving the malaise: to return the communitarian ideal to economic policy.

The discussion paper released by the Committee on Employment Opportunities has already sketched a more active role for the public sector. Essentially its proposals boil down to the expansion of labour-market and training programs, together with the reform of the social security system.

The expansion of present labor market schemes is described by the green paper as a 'job compact'. These programs include temporary wage subsidies of either $200 or $220 (depending on the length of employment), to help employers pay the wages of workers hired from the reserve of unemployed labour; assistance for those who wish to embark on their own enterprise; and structured training and work experience.

The committee estimates that, with extra funding, 75,000 more places can be found in the next few years in addition to the 179,000 planned for 1993-94. It is proposed that the extra places would be devoted to the long-term unemployed, beginning with those who have been out of work for three years or more.

These proposals recognise the difficulties that the long term unemployed have in finding employment. The erosion of skills and the sapping of morale are identified as consequences of extended periods out of the labour market. The goal is to prevent the economy's carrying the burden of intractable long-term unemployment as it moves out of recession.

The economic rationalist critique of labour market programs is two-pronged.

(1) Rationalists argue that such programs have no net effect on employment rates, since the extra taxes raised to provide the funding, whether in the form of a jobs levy or not, discourage business growth.

(2) Labour-market programs are held to be artificial constructs that will only serve to 'churn' the queue of unemployed rather than provide lasting employment.

The first argument takes no account of the fact that the money raised goes back into the economy in the form of job-creating funds which themselve provide growth. Nor does the argument differentiate between degrees of need: those who are unem-

Photo: *Andrew Stark*

ployed for short periods need less assistance than those who have been out of a job for a much longer time.

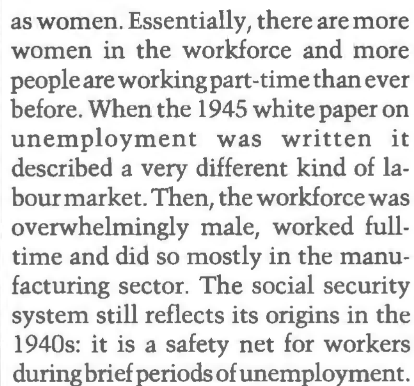
The idea of a churning effect on the unemployment queue is not as easy to refute. The committee argues that an expansion of labour-market programs is not a glorified work-for-the-dole scheme. However that is what it becomes if those placed in it lose their job after their tenure and fail to get another quickly.

BELINDA PROBERT, from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, argues that the kind of work created by these labour market programs is crucial to their effectiveness and the public acceptance of their cost. Probert believes that there is clearly a role for infrastructure spending, but also for socially useful work in which people are able to find employment, at a proper wage, that meets local needs. She argues for the establishment of a hybrid of the public and private sectors, a so-called 'third sector', which would conduct projects that provide work for the unemployed and a service to the community.

If unemployed labour is to be brought into use through a conjunction of the public and private sector, the CES will play a vital role. The success or failure of an expanded labour-market program could hinge on the agency's performance. The committee has proposed a change in the manner in which the CES identifies the needs of its clients.

The report notes that labour-market schemes in other OECD countries have worked best with the involvement of the local community. The committee has not recommended where and how jobs should be created, but a policy paper on regional development will also be released in April. It will contain proposals for development in regions that have suffered most in the recession. Probert's 'third sector' should be an option canvassed by the government when it considers these two white papers before the May budget.

The green paper proposes a reconstruction of the social security net to reflect the changed nature of work. In the past 20 years the number of women in the workforce has risen by 90 per cent, whereas the participation of men rose by only 20 per cent. Women dominate part-time employment, contributing 75 per cent of that labour market. The figure is almost reversed for full-time employment, with 68 per cent of those jobs going to men. Since 1970 the number of jobs in Australia increased by more than 40 per cent but part-time work increased by 200 per cent, which has included men as well



as women. Essentially, there are more women in the workforce and more people are working part-time than ever before. When the 1945 white paper on unemployment was written it described a very different kind of labour market. Then, the workforce was overwhelmingly male, worked full-time and did so mostly in the manufacturing sector. The social security system still reflects its origins in the 1940s: it is a safety net for workers during brief periods of unemployment.

The committee argues that this approach is no longer suitable. With longer periods of unemployment and more work being conducted on a part-time and casual basis, the system retards the incentive to look for work. At the moment a single adult without dependents can earn up to $45 a week without losing any entitlement. Fifty cents is deducted for each dollar earned up to a threshold of $85, after which it is reduced dollar for dollar until it is withdrawn.

The committee has proposed a standard 65 per cent taper after a $30 minimum to replace the 50 per cent and 100 per cent thresholds. It argues that such an arrangement will provide the incentive for people to earn money through part-time work—up to $35 more for a private income of $200 a week—without compromising the desire for full-time work through an over-supply of benefits.

Another of the committee's proposals is that married couples be treated as two individuals. This entails separate payments for both spouses, though when one spouse's taxable income passes the $235 mark, the other's benefits, whatever they may be, would be reduced by 65 cents in the dollar. This is designed to cultivate the association that women have with casual work, giving greater recognition of their contribution to the labour market.

Imaginative though these reforms are, the social-security system is still regarded as a safety net. There is a danger that such changes could contribute to a pool of semi-dependent, poorly paid unskilled labour, an obvious concern in a culture which is founded on the assumption of full-time work. The proposals need to be complemented by policies designed to create the opportunities for secure and well-paid employment.

THE PROPOSALS PUT FORWARD in this discussion paper are full of merit. It is interesting to note, however, the terms of reference given to the committee: they were to have regard to 'the Government's commitment to reduce the budget deficit by 1996-97.' That is to reduce the deficit to 1 per cent of GDP.

The committee was limited by the fact that it had no brief to present the government with alternative economic policies, even if it wished to do so. Given the Labor Party's uncharacteristic preoccupation with public debt during the past 10 years, all that lay open for debate were issues of welfare and labour market programs.

The way to get around this, of course, would be to raise taxation significantly. But a government that has just delivered long-promised tax cuts and had a devil of a time getting its program of extended indirect taxes through the Senate, would not receive any talk of taxation reform warmly. Even the plans of the committee may be in jeopardy. With December producing figures showing the fourth consecutive month of job growth in a row, along with improved prospects for economic growth, the rationalists are baying like hounds at the idea of a jobs levy. The Labor government has listened to their counsel in the past and the idea of extracting up to $5 billion from the economy in the next three years could lose favour. The budget—in May this year—could possibly have a far more austere program than the one presented in the green paper.

The government's reluctance to jeopardise growth, coupled with its wish to increase employment, means that the Labor Party has to perform a difficult balancing act. These proposals will work only if there is an improvement in the economy. The wage subsidy scheme depends on favourable market circumstances, since the government is unlikely to provide the environment of managed public and private employment programs. If there is no substantial economic recovery we may see Canberra actively encouraging job growth in the market place while exercising tight fiscal restraint. The ALP is taking a gamble in trying to reconcile the 'thin' and 'thick' notions of society. If it succeeds it may govern Australia into the next century, given the dearth of talent on the opposition benches. But if it fails, who pays the price? ■

Jon Greenaway is a *Eureka Street* staff writer.

What is to be done?

IT IS FUNDAMENTALLY IRRATIONAL to have people unemployed while social needs for improved infrastructure, goods and services are unfulfilled. Fifty years ago this is what Keynes called the 'enormous anomaly of unemployment in a world full of wants'. As a society we have to match our human resources with our collective needs for goods and services.

It is equally important to re-think what full employment means in contemporary technological, economic, environmental and social conditions, and how it can be systematically achieved. Dealing with unemployment simply by trying to crank up the engine of economic growth is not sufficient. Nor is a reshuffling of the dole queues by special assistance to the long-term unemployed.

A more comprehensive approach to employment policy needs to embrace issues of fundamental structural change.

Production of goods and services needs to be reorientated to ecologically sustainable and sociallyproductive economic activities, taking advantage of advanced technology while minimising the social costs of labour displacement.

The mechanisms of income distribution also need to be radically restructured so that the wealth generated in production is better distributed throughout society. The work-income relationship which has borne the brunt of this distributional process in the past is no longer adequate for the task.

As a society we must also provide for a more effective and equitable range of income and leisure choices. The current situation is one where some (unemployed) people are locked into excessive 'leisure' while other people work extraordinarily long hours with insufficient leisure, leading in both cases to severe personal and social problems.

What specific policy measures can facilitate the required changes?

First there is considerable scope for using the

public sector to fill the employment vacuum created by the private sector. Working in conjunction with local government, public sector employment programs can be very effective in generating jobs. They can simultaneously generate infrastructure, services and products attuned to local needs. There is no shortage of tasks to be done—building better transport facilities, schools, hospitals, parks, for example.

Such public sector jobs are no less 'productive' than private sector jobs. Indeed, improving public infrastructure or caring more effectively for the sick are arguably more productive than employment in competitive commercial advertising or the tax-minimisation industry! The jobs also help to finance themselves because the extra incomes generate more taxes, more consumer demand and investment throughout the economy. If the government needs more revenue it should bite the bullet by restoring a more progressive income tax system. That would be administratively simpler than a jobs levy.

The second requirement is a more actively interventionist industry policy, linked to ecologically sustainable development. The development of 'green jobs' in industries such as energy, transport and waste management should be a strong focus. The solar energy industry, for example, is one where our scientists have been world-leaders. Stronger backing by government and industry could make it a major export-earner. Ecologically-sustainable industries also usually generate a high ratio of jobs per dollar invested. The development of such industries requires long-term planning of industry development, rather than a simple faith in free market forces to generate the required restructuring.

MEANWHILE, there needs to be a moratorium on further across-the-board tariff reductions which have generated so many casualties, especially in the motor vehicle manufacturing and textile, clothing and footwear industries. Industry policy requires partnership between government, business and unions, to develop new industries: only then does it make sense to run down existing ones.

The third requirement is more effective use of the burgeoning superannuation funds to finance national economic development. These funds need to be coordinated nationally to ensure that they are used for productive and employment-generating purposes. Of course, they must be managed to ensure good retirement incomes but the workforce has a long-term interest in seeing its savings used for the maximum possible employment-creation.

Regional economic policy is a fourth area with considerable potential to create employment opportunities. Reviews being currently undertaken in other government departments are reviving a concern with this dimension of economic policy which has lain dormant for nearly 20 years. Regional policy is a means of targeting policies to the areas of greatest need and greatest potential. It could help to diversify the economic base of regions like those centred on Geelong, Newcastle, Wollongong and Whyalla which have been hit hard by job-losses in manufacturing. Elsewhere, it can be a catalyst for mobilising resources specific to particular regions.

Fifth, labour training and re-training programmes have a modest role to play. However, it is important not to rely on policies which open up opportunities for some groups only at the expense of others. At root, the unemployment problem is one of deficiency of aggregate employment opportunities.

Finally, attention must be given to more effective sharing of work. It doesn't make sense to have some people denied access to income from work while others are working inordinately long hours. A shorter working week, coupled with overtime restrictions, could produce a much more equitable outcome.

The most important challenge is to come to grips with the changed circumstances in which labour-displacement has become the norm in all sectors of the economy. These technological conditions require new mechanisms for the allocation of jobs and the distribution of incomes.

We need to create opportunities for more flexible work-leisure choices. It makes sense to think in terms of a 30,000-hour working life, which we could each work on a part-time basis or in discrete chunks, interspersed with education or leisure according to our personal preferences. This would mean severing the direct nexus between income and employment which has been the cornerstone of the wage-labour relationship in the past. It will require government initiatives in developing the appropriate institutions. A guaranteed minimum annual income scheme would be an appropriate starting point.

Has the government and its advisors got sufficient courage to move beyond the recommendations in the Green Paper and address these issues, rather than just tinkering with the system while hoping for an internationally-induced economic recovery? Can we put enough pressure on politicians to get them to adopt these more effective measures? If not, there is every reason to expect a further polarisation of Australian society into employment 'haves' and unemployment 'have-nots'. ■

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A ONE DAY CONFERENCE
ON THE VALUE OF WORK TO
INDIVIDUALS, COMMUNITIES AND TO
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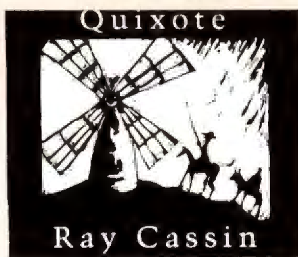


Till the last drop

THE TAP SPURTS and then slows to a trickle. A cry of pain sounds from the direction of the bathroom and a second later she appears, wearing a crust of rapidly drying soap suds. I drop the dish I am holding into the sink full of greasy water and survey this white-streaked apparition. Deciding that any attempt at wit will not be appreciated, I leave my first thoughts unspoken and the conversational opener to her.

'Why didn't you check the water pressure before we took this place?' She speaks my answer for me: 'Yes, I know, I didn't exactly run around turning on taps, either.' Towelling some of the soap crust away, she slumps into a chair and stares at the pool of water forming around her on the kitchen floor.

I decide that sympathy will be even less appreciated than humour, and stick to the facts. 'I've rung the agent every day this week. Several times a day, in fact. He must have been impressed, because a couple of times he actually accepted the call. I spoke loftily about the Tenancy Tribunal, and thuggishly about acts of vandalism that could be inflicted on his gleaming new car and his hideous pink *palazzo* in Doncaster. I told him that I would send his wife snapshots of him fondling his secretary in the snug at the All Nations. And I told him that my brother has a rack full of automatic shotguns.'

I find this Al Capone rhetoric absorbing and continue the line, oblivious to the frosty response it is getting. 'I was even thuggish enough to ask him if he had any pets. This last dastardly threat, I admit, is not something that I would act upon. Come to think of it, I wouldn't actually deliver on any of the others, either. But I'm sure that he is now suitably intimidated by my rage, so that within days, or more likely hours and perhaps even minutes, an army of plumbers will descend on this place to render it suitable for cooking, cleaning, the washing of bodies and of clothes, gardening, lavatory-flushing and all other domestic purposes requiring water ...'

The towel unwinds from her body and snakes through the air, connecting with my right shoulder. Its owner then delivers several more blows to assure me that this chastisement is serious because I, apparently, am not. 'I'm tired of your stupid jokes. I'm tired of living in a house where turning more than one tap on at a time means the place is suddenly like Kalgoorlie before they built the pipeline. And speaking of pets, I'm tired of your stupid mut who needs a bath even more than we do.'

'He's *our* stupid mut. And we can't wash him until they build the pipeline.'

The stupid animal in question chooses the wrong moment to make his appearance in the kitchen, and the last whipcrack of the towel is diverted in his direction. He is stupid enough to think this is a game and grabs the end of the towel as it arcs towards him; he then sprints with it into the backyard, where the towel is soon made unfit for human use. The dispenser of justice watches this through the kitchen window and returns to the bathroom, making sure to slam the door.

I summon the stupid mut from the backyard and with some difficulty extract the towel from his jaws. The unappealing object, sodden with a mixture of soap suds, dust from the yard and canine saliva, is deposited in the laundry tub, to await the day when the army of plumbers will again ensure a plentiful water supply at *chez nous*. Mut and I then adjourn to the park where, even though he is indeed very stupid, I am unable to convince him that gnawing on a mouldy old tennis ball is as much fun as gnawing on a nice clean sudsy bath towel.

When we return, the army of plumbers has arrived but she is not any happier. The agent has arrived with the army, to advise us that they can turn our domestic water supply into Niagara Falls, but that it will require some tearing up and replacing of pipes. Which will in turn require some tearing up of the yard and, since it is an old house, of floorboards as well. Which means that the house will, for a time, be uninhabitable.

'How long?'

'About a week.'

This news provokes stubborn resistance on my part, and fury on hers. '*You* can live in a house without water or any floor if you want. But you can live in it without me.' She does not bother to pack, which I regard as a hopeful sign, but simply gets into the car and disappears. After two days I consider ringing round her friends to see how she is, but decide against it. After all, *I'm* looking after the house.

LOOKING AFTER A HOUSE with only half its floorboards and a yard that increasingly resembles the Western Front is an onerous task, particularly if one has been deserted and has only a moronic puppy for company. But sooner or later you have to go out and buy food, so I take the risk of leaving the mut behind as a watchdog.

When I get back, I find that she has returned. She is lying on the bed, talking to the mut, and he, wretched traitorous cur, is nuzzling her shoulder.

'Are you staying?'

'Yes, but wash the sheets. They smell of dog.'

'I can't wash the sheets until they build the pipeline.' ■

Ray Cassin is production editor of *Eureka Street*.

The rite stuff

*In the first in a series of essays which will explore and articulate our national life, **Ken Inglis** details the rituals and surprises in the burial of the Unknown Soldier.*

KEN INGLIS

IT WAS ALWAYS GOING TO BE a more military turn-out than Anzac Day. A coffin had to be carried up Anzac Parade, and how was that to be done except by involving the Defence Force, and what would they offer but a military funeral? In some newspapers, it even became the funeral of a field marshal. For the television audience the deputy director of the Australian War Memorial, Michael McKernan, informatively in harness with the jaunty old ABC announcer Bruce Webster, got it right: the remains were to be 'buried with the honours *due to*' a field marshal.

The 'directing group' set up by the Australian War Memorial, part planning body and part essay in diplomacy (one member was June Healy, national secretary of the RSL), headed off a proposal to give the Unknown Soldier a Victoria Cross, and thus to make him not merely a field marshal but the most valorous of heroes. Differences had been aired at meetings of the group over just how military the funeral would be, and in particular over whether the ceremony would change character at the point where the Defence Force delivered the body to the keeping of the Australian War Memorial. In the event the ritual was military right to the end, when the air exploded with shots from a firing party on the parapet as the coffin was lowered into the tomb.

The planners at the Australian War Memorial did their ingenious best to add other elements. As we arrived we heard young people, brought in from all over Australia, reading names chosen at random from the roll of honour that in Charles Bean's creating vision was at the sacred centre of the Memorial. From time to time an adult male voice identified a dead man more fully: where from, whose beloved son, where and when and how killed. He remarked that one of the names we were hearing might be the Unknown Soldier's, and he told us that in three hours, from 6.30am to 9.30, this relay of young people would get through just one per cent of the names on the tablets.

Invitations to nearly a thousand unit associations were also intended to dilute the presence of the current Defence Force. The veterans would import some of the informality of Anzac Day—the casual style of people who were once soldiers and who are gathering voluntarily, civically, to honour dead comrades and remember their own wars. They and their banners were to line the route and move up to the parade ground before the Stone of Remembrance from as far along Anzac Parade as they found it comfortable to walk.

Some critics had said that ordinary returned servicemen should compose the party of pallbearers who accompanied the coffin on its way to the tomb, rather than the service chiefs and the Prime Minister (and, at the last minute, the Leader of the Opposition and the national president of the RSL) who had been chosen for the honour. One other pallbearer went almost unnoticed: Air Vice-Marshal (but wearing civvies) Sir Joseph Gilbert, vice-president of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, from whose cemetery outside Villers-Bretonneux the Unknown had been exhumed.

Had the commission's president come instead, he would certainly have been noticed, for he is the Duke of Kent. The royal presence would have required careful explanation. He would have been here to represent the commission rather than his cousin the Queen, and perhaps the delicacy of that distinction, at a time when another of the pallbearers had been numbering the days of the monarchy in Australia explains why the royal duke did not come. It must have been the first significant event in Australia, observed John Lahey in *The Age*, to which nobody royal had been invited.

AMONG THE BANNERS at the ceremony appears one, unlicensed but unmolested, which complicates the atmosphere by declaring, alongside a huge Flanders poppy, FIGHT WAR, NOT WARS. The parade itself will have an element of historical pageantry, as men and horses impersonate old mounted units and, behind them but ahead of 300 serving men and women of the army, navy and air force, walks a woman dressed in the red, white and grey of a Great War nurse, accompanied by a dozen or so men uniformed as her contemporaries of the First AIF. They are not mentioned in the printed program, but on television they are introduced as 'the heritage group'. The most colourful figures in the pageant, unmentioned on either the program or on television, are three chaplains walking together, fully robed in white and pink, black and white, red and black.

The most strikingly unmilitary element is a tall figure in formal black whom the ABC's cameras and commentators dwell on. The funeral directors have involved themselves in the project, as their English predecessors had done for the exhumation and entombment of the empire's Unknown Warrior in 1920. They

have donated the Tasmanian blackwood coffin; they have coached servicemen in how to lift, carry and lower it; they have advertised in the papers their proud participation in the event. The man in black is here today, viewers are told, to make sure everything is done correctly. What would incorrectness be, I wonder, and whom could it trouble?

The man in black leads the coffin down the steps of the old Parliament House into bright spring sunshine, sees it onto the gun carriage drawn by a Land Rover and walks ahead, to music played at funereal pace by a military band with drums muffled by black covers, behind the contingent slow-marching across King's Avenue Bridge and up Anzac Parade. Along the parade 'mourning guns' boomed every minute in salute, startling both civilians along the route and crows in the trees of Mount Ainslie.

Behind the veterans' groups stands an assorted crowd of spectators: 20-25,000, the commentators estimate. Old men in suits and old women in hats; young men with long hair and earrings and young women in jeans; children in school uniform, even though the ACT Minister for Education has not proclaimed a half-holiday. The Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition slow-march behind the coffin draped with the flag one wants to keep and the other hopes to replace, and the Governor-General walks behind them as Chief Mourner. All the state premiers march together in a line.

WE ARE BRIEFED ON WHAT IS HAPPENING, in spare words composed by the Australian War Memorial's Neil MacPherson and spoken in the clear Australian actor's voice of Hec MacMillan. He fills us in also on what is not happening. No official greeting for dignitaries as on an ordinary Armistice (or Anzac) Day, for today there is only one VIP.

The first voice we hear from the platform is a woman's. Dame Beryl Beaurepaire, chairman of the Australian War Memorial's council, ex-WAAAF, accepts the remains into its care, and says so in words well-crafted and delivered to communicate the significance of the moment. The Stone of Remembrance in front of the Memorial has become a catafalque. That old word, as explained on television, means a platform on which a body is placed before burial, and we hear it often as an NCO barks out commands to his catafalque party.

The stone has never borne this meaning before, as no other dead Australian has been repatriated from a war—except Major-General Sir William Bridges, commander of the AIF, who was mortally wounded at Gallipoli. His remains were brought to the site of the future federal capital and buried near the summit of Mount Pleasant, just above where we are now gathered for the interring of the body from France.

We are asked to stand and sing a setting of Psalm 23. In the years after 1918 most people would have sung it without the help of a text. Some do now, but most, including Paul Keating, look down from line to line, and many do not sing at all. This does little musical harm, as I realise when watching a videotape of the event later at home, for the planners have stationed an invisible choir from the Defence Force close to microphones around the congregation.

Hec McMillan asks us to sit. Some returned men are still ambling uphill behind their banners as the Prime Minister begins what is described in the program as the eulogy. 'We do not know this Australian's name and we never will', he says. The next four sentences begin with the same four words. The phrase tolls, and its formality, from someone whose speech is so famously colloquial, gives him an unusual gravity. Paul Keating bashes no Pom, and does not even remark that the return of an unknown Australian, after all those years in which we were content to be represented by the remains in Westminster Abbey, is an event registering the end of empire and possibly heralding the republic. Wondering why this man volunteered for the war, he says 'the chances are that he went for no other reason than that he believed it was the duty he owed his country and his King.'

Whoever proposed these words for him, Keating has accepted them, and they are heard with relief, even gratitude, by listeners not normally disposed to admire him—though none of his opponents says that in public. 'He is all of them', says the Prime Minister. 'And he is one of us.' The eulogy fits this occasion as Pericles' funeral oration fitted its moment in the history of Athens and Lincoln's the dedication of the cemetery at Gettysburg. The eulogist makes three slight stumbles and one misreading. If, as Freud said, there are no accidents, we may hear in these slips the unease of a man who (like most of our prime ministers) has never been to war: the words momentarily lost are 'soldier', 'unknown' and 'Australian', and once he says 'law' where the text has 'war'. This afternoon a copy of the eulogy will be handed to everybody who visits the Tomb.

The Prime Minister begins what is described in the program as the eulogy. 'We do not know this Australian's name and we never will,' he says. The next four sentences begin with the same four words. The phrase tolls, and its formality, from someone whose speech is so famously colloquial, gives him an unusual gravity. Paul Keating bashes no Pom ... Whoever proposed these words for him, Keating has accepted them, and they are heard with relief, even gratitude, by listeners not normally disposed to admire him

'We do not know', Paul Keating has said, ' ... what religion, if he had a religion ...' The makers of ceremony assume that we all do have one—that we believe in God, though not that we are all Christians. Psalm 23, common property of Christian and Jew, is the only hymn. The Prayer of Remembrance we are now invited to recite from our programs, and the Prayers of Committal and for Australia at later points, have been composed with worldviews other than the Judaeo-Christian in mind. The Prayer for Australia

(which would in earlier days have been called, as Bruce Webster does on television, the Benediction) invokes, among other gods, 'the God of the Dreamtime'.

Viewers are told, though the congregation is not, that the men leading us in these prayers are chaplains to the Defence Force. Nobody is told to which denominations they belong, though television identifies one as a Monsignor. That would once have been a remarkable fact, for the Catholic Church long prohibited clergy from participating in 'combined' Anzac or Armistice Day services on the ground that they were acts of Protestant worship.

At this very place, the ceremony of inauguration in 1941, 52 years ago to the day, was almost wrecked by conflict over the issue; only the intervention of the War Cabinet, (as McKernan reports in his history of the Australian War Memorial, *Here Is Their Spirit*) prevented the opening of the nation's shrine to war dead from going ahead without the involvement of clergy representing a quarter of its people.

The utterly uncontroversial participation of Monsignor John White, an RAAF chaplain, demonstrates how far the traditional Australian sectarianism has receded. Today's arrangers take for granted an Anglo-Celtic amalgam, and concentrate their concern on not breaching a new convention of multicultural, multi-theological consensus. In a first draft for the return of the Unknown Soldier, he was to lie for a while in the Changi Chapel at Duntroon, but the Defence Force's religious advisers feared that to do so might, as the saying now goes, privilege Christianity; and that is how he came to lie in the old Parliament House.

The three prayers incorporate confident affirmations of Australian nationality:

They came from every part of the nation,
from places like Albany and Ararat,
Tarcutta and Tully,
Hobart and Hindmarsh

It's arresting to hear those words spoken in a liturgical murmur.

Before the coffin is lifted up the steps of the Memorial, through the forecourt and into the Hall of Memory, there occurs a strange piece of ritual inserted at the request of the Governor-General because he wanted something to do out here as well as beside the Tomb. 'The coffin', says the program, 'is halted before the Chief Mourner in a silent salute.' 'The Unknown Soldier gives his salute,' says Bruce Webster, 'and on behalf of us all the Governor-General salutes the Unknown Soldier'—by putting right hand on heart. Then we all stand, and the funeral party moves out of our sight, its movements vividly described by Hec MacMillan. He offers vignettes of what people are doing at this moment at war memorials around the country.

We hear the firing party fire. (One of the most senior officers in the RAAF, I learn later, shares my civilian feeling that this is a painfully inappropriate noise). We recite, if we choose, the Prayer of Dedication. When the coffin has been lowered into the tomb, the Governor-General places on it a sprig of wattle. One of the Great War veterans seated at the side of the Hall (helped by Major Ray Curtis, who has been a skilful producer of the military spectacle), drops pieces of soil from Pozières. The national president of the Returned & Services League, 'Digger' James, who has been a pallbearer, recites the lines of Laurence Binyon which have long been at the centre of RSL liturgy: 'They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old ... ' 'They' include his own brother, missing in the North African desert. The congregation, which can hear but not see in this part of the proceedings, repeats: 'We will remember them.'

The royal presence would have required careful explanation. The Duke of Kent would have been here to represent the War Graves Commission rather than his cousin the Queen, and perhaps the delicacy of that distinction, at a time when another of the pallbearers had been numbering the days of the monarchy in Australia explains why the royal duke did not come. It must have been the first significant event in Australia, observed John Lahey in The Age, *to which nobody royal had been invited.*

SHARP AT ELEVEN O'CLOCK *The Last Post*, pure and poignant as ever, is bugled from the parapet. We are left with our own thoughts and feelings, memories and hopes, for two minutes, in the silence once observed around the world at this time on this day. How many of us try to imagine him? The bugler sounds *The Rouse* (why not called *Reveille*?). Flags, until now at half-mast are raised to the top of poles. The funeral party returns, and we and the band do our best to make our lamentable national anthem *Advance Australia Fair* sound inspiriting.

After the last of the prayers, the Defence Force people begin to march from the parade ground. We remain seated, as requested, but for the first time we do something not prescribed in the program. We clap. We applaud spontaneously first the horses and their riders, then the services' contingent, then the band, as it sets now the regular brisk pace, for *The Road to Gundagai* and tunes from the Great War. John Lahey interprets nicely the sudden change of mood, as a smiling and chatting accompany applause: 'It was as if we had all shed a burden.'

This moment reveals how the 'funeral' of someone who died at least three-quarters of a century ago differs emotionally from an ordinary funeral. We would be no likelier to clap straight after the burial or cremation of someone recently dead than to clap in church. Nobody here is feeling the agony of fresh bereavement by war.

The formal ceremony was only one part of the day. In the afternoon people who in the morning had been asked only to watch and listen and sing and pray were invited to go into the Hall of Memory, to see the coffin in its still open tomb, and if they wanted to, lay a flower beside it. If the purpose of the project was to complete the making of a shrine, the proposed gesture was rather like an act of communion.

We can't assume, though, that all the grief induced in 1914-1918 has gone. Sam Benson, former Labor member of Federal Parliament, now 84, fought back tears as he told a reporter a few days ago that he has always missed the father who has been missing since Fromelles. For those of us who have had no loved one or known ancestor die in war (among them me and my age-mates, sons and daughters of fathers born too late for the First World War, too young ourselves for the Second, and with sons not old enough for Vietnam), the emotions provoked by this occasion must be more diffuse than those experienced by people remembering particular dead soldiers from wars recent or remote.

Their networks of memory may well stretch a long way. As Paul Keating reminded us (in a speech composed for him by Don Watson, whose grandfather served in the First AIF), more than 100,000 Australians have died since 1914 in the service of their country. The 60,000 dead of the Great War, buried in named or unnamed graves on the other side of the world, remain more numerous than the rest. We might expect awareness of them, and of their 270,000 or so mates who returned, to evaporate steadily as survivors become fewer and fewer, seen into graves or rose gardens or columbariums by relatives and friends. I wonder if, on the contrary, they are actually becoming more familiar, not less, to their descendants.

Peter Weir's film *Gallipoli* expressed the curiosity of grandchildren, and has inspired much questioning among them. The boom in genealogy, a pursuit somewhere between hobby-history and ancestor-worship, has been placing dead soldiers in family trees, especially since the treemakers have discovered that the Australian War Memorial and the Australian Defence Force Academy will supply information about any man or woman who went to war. 'The word we hear most often is "great-uncle" ', says a man who fields inquiries at the Australian War Memorial. The number of people who had great-uncles in the First AIF must run into millions. World War II yielded fewer deaths but put many more men and women in uniform. The youngest of the survivors are now in their mid-sixties, and grandchildren interview them for school assignments. From Korea and Vietnam the deaths are fewer; but if time heals wounds, there has been less of it to perform that therapy for their partners and children.

Men, women and children bereaved by the Vietnam War are the first Australians to have been offered, while their grief at soldiers' death was fresh, professional advice on coping with it. Clergy and funeral directors now collaborate as 'grief counsellors'. That spotter of significant surfaces, Barry Humphries, has Beryl Stone, widow of the old spirit-soldier Sandy, working this year as a grief counsellor on the Gold Coast. Don't repress your grief, say the new voices. Let it out. Face it, literally, by looking at the dead body as our ancestors used to and people in other cultures do. Mourn. And if the body is not there? When the Athenians gave a public funeral to the first citizen soldiers who had died in the Peloponnesian War, displaying the bones of the dead in the coffin of each tribe, one car in the procession carried, as Thucydides reports, an 'empty bier decked for the missing, that is, for those whose bodies could not be recovered.' Here is the antecedent of the Unknown Soldier, enabling relatives of the missing to participate in the public funeral ceremony.

In Australia as in Britain and the other dominions, nearly all the bodies of men killed in the world wars were missing: many because they were never identified, the rest because imperial policy dictated their burial in foreign fields rather than repatriation home. The Unknown Warrior entombed in Westminster Abbey in 1920 was supposed to represent them all. The homecoming of the Unknown Australian Soldier in 1993 addresses all his compatriots whose sons, husbands and fathers had gone missing in wars.

So, for 70 years, have the rituals of Anzac Day, around all those war memorials created as substitute graves, been sites for simulating the funerals that never were. Today for the first time we have a body, or (we all wonder) whatever is left now, after all that time in the earth, of bits that could not be identified 75 years ago. Each to his and her own reflections, as we contemplate the flag-draped coffin, (with prompting from the funereal music, the hymn, the prayers, the eulogist's words) on the life and death of this man, other men and women, all mortal kind.

The Funeral of the Unknown Australian Soldier is first and last a ceremony of valediction to the old AIF, represented now, in the Hall of Memory, by a few frail survivors of the legion who had given their country a myth of creation. Myths may come and go. This one is under challenge on several fronts: from feminists who see the Anzac legend as excluding women or, worse, embodying gender-based violence; from liberals who diagnose nationalism as a wholly pathological phenomenon; from pacifists (a category overlapping with the first two) who believe that no war ever is, or was, worth fighting; and from multiculturalists who assert that the Anzac tradition is irrelevant to more and more Australians.

Whether or not this enterprise will make the Anzac legend more resilient, I don't know; but the entombment was certainly a momentous public event. The ceremony, an Australian-accented mixture of traditions civil and military and improvisations where precedent was lacking, provoked at least admiration from just about everybody I have talked with, and most of them—some to their own surprise—found it moving. Hearing good words spoken, and seeing the coffin despatched towards its tomb, we had

some sense, however difficult to articulate, of participation in a solemn communal experience.

The formal ceremony was only one part of the day. In the afternoon people who in the morning had been asked only to watch and listen and sing and pray were invited to go into the Hall of Memory, to see the coffin in its still open tomb, and if they wanted to, lay a flower beside it. If the purpose of the project was to complete the making of a shrine, the proposed gesture was rather like an act of communion. Thousands made it. Fifteen thousand on Thursday and 50,000 before the tomb was sealed on Sunday night, in a city of 300,000 people remote from large centres of population.

On the steps outside, RSL volunteers offered artificial poppies on wire stems in return for a donation, and licensed vendors sold carnations. For an old Australian Protestant, the scene belonged to All Souls' Day in Catholic Europe. Carrying their flowers, visitors were guided into the Hall of Memory and around the tomb, flush with the marble floor and covered for the time being by glass through which they could see on the coffin a bayonet, the Governor-General's sprig of wattle, the old digger's bits of earth, and a plaque inscribed An Unknown Australian Soldier of the War of 1914-1918.

Behind the tomb, in front of four tall and slender pillars of exquisitely worked wood, glass, metal and stone representing the four elements of life—earth, water, fire and air—lay two slabs of marble that after a few days would cover the tomb, inscribed by order of the Australian War Memorial's Council a little more amply than the coffin: he is an unknown Australian soldier killed in the War of 1914-1918. On a sloping ledge in front of the tomb is inscribed another message, the first statement of meaning the ordinary visitor sees: He symbolises all Australians who have died in war. The council prescribed that form of words after hard debate initiated by members who wanted not soldier but warrior, in deference to sailors and airmen.

Charles Bean had wanted the names of the dead to be inscribed around the Hall of Memory. When they had to be placed instead along the cloisters in the forecourt, nobody quite knew what to put in the Hall. Until now, the huge bronze figure of a serviceman has loomed over visitors. He has been removed, replaced by the tomb and attendant pillars. There remain the original mosaic representations of soldier, sailor, airman and nurse at each corner of the Hall, the stained glass windows embodying the supposed attributes of Australians in war, and the dome embellished with soaring mosaic forms.

Soon the tomb was surrounded with single flowers, wreaths, bunches made up by florists and by home gardeners, with cards bearing messages from the stiffly formal to one, by a hand not long used to writing, we are sorry you dyed. Two soldiers had put their own Diggers' hats among the flowers. To one wreath was attached a card for Bill, a father and brother and son lost over the North Sea in 1942, at rest at last. There were old photographs, one of a private, 'Missing, Presumed Killed', on Gallipoli. At last the Hall of Memory was able to welcome the sentiment of reverent recollection Bean had always wanted it to elicit.

That was not all. As people queued along the eastern cloister, close to the rolls of honour for World War II, somebody found that you could wedge the wire stalk of a poppy between two tablets alongside one particular name. By five o'clock, when I joined the queue, nearly a hundred people had stuck poppies (occasionally carnations and rosemary) beside names; and in the opposite cloister, housing the roll of honour for World War I, almost as many had found names they were looking for and attached flowers to them. On their way to and from paying respect to the Unknown Soldier, they were making their own private and spontaneous gestures in memory of the known.

Day by day the walls became more densely splashed with scarlet. On Saturday I saw a three-generation group, baby in pram, war veteran in wheelchair, woman photographing both against a poppy-marked name. The poppies were thickest on the tablets for Vietnam: about a hundred among the five hundred names. Outside the building, Simpson and his donkey were garlanded with poppies.

I think Charles Bean would have been profoundly pleased with the occasion. He would have liked all the words spoken: Keating's, articulating for a new generation a vision so close to his own; the prayers, by clergymen expressing notions of death and life as undogmatic as he himself had held—their resort to Australian idiom influenced, I should guess, by his *Anzac Requiem* (which I wish somebody had used). He would have believed that the Australian War Memorial was at last complete. One chaplain used exactly Bean's description of it: 'this sacred place'. The chronicler and memorialist of the old AIF might have been moved most deeply not by words but by those gestures with the poppies, the Great War's perennial emblems of death and life. ■

Ken Inglis is professor of history at the Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University.

Peter Weir's film Gallipoli *expressed the curiosity of grandchildren, and has inspired much questioning among them. The boom in genealogy, a pursuit somewhere between hobby-history and ancestor-worship, has been placing dead soldiers in family trees, especially since the treemakers have discovered that the Australian War Memorial and the Australian Defence Force Academy will supply information about any man or woman who went to war.*

EXHIBITIONS

MORAG FRASER

Arthur Boyd, Australian painter

Arthur Boyd Retrospective
Art Gallery of New South Wales, 15 December 1993 to 6 March 1994
National Gallery of Victoria, 20 March to 23 May 1994
Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, 9 June to 21 August 1994
Art Gallery of Western Australia, 22 September to 20 November 1994

Judas kissing Christ, 1952-53. terracotta sculpture, Cat. no.199

IN THE ANTEROOM TO THE exhibition, a place of odds an ends where gallery staff dispense black audio boxes and the mandatory video winds on, there is a startling drypoint portrait.The subject is Max Nicholson, an old family friend of the Boyds, the man who brought along copies of Dostoyevsky to read with them on Sunday nights at Murrumbeena, and who owned the black spaniel that Boyd later translated into his landscapes.

Nicholson was an ebullient presence. I have seen him, at the age of seventy, scooping up two little girls to take them joy-riding in his larrikin MG. It was racing green and Max whooped like Toad.

The portrait retains the energy of the man's character in its lines. What is startling is that the surface is etched coal black. It is as though the man has been blotted by the dark.

The Nicholson Portrait (1968-69) is a small, apt preparation for the ambiguities in the rooms to come. There is no defining trajectory in Arthur Boyd's 60 years of work, although in it you certainly can trace much of the history of Australian art since the '30s. What does characterise it is tension, the counterpoise of an artist who takes his metaphysics into his obstinate, lifelong cultivation of craft and technique. His tools are light and dark, trust set against betrayal, innocence and knowledge, line/mass, Eden/Armageddon, lust/love, integrity/ambition, tradition/invention, fire/air.

This is a bountiful, frank exhibition, selective enough to give a coherent sense of a life's work, and liberal enough to leave in the warts, the necessary experiments of a long creative life, some plainly up the creek.

It is hung in eight thematic rooms, which is instructive, and not only because the paintings, drawings, etchings and ceramics can't be contained in this schema or any other. It has the appropriate scholarly apparatus—sometimes lead to Boyd's mercury—but at least unobtrusive. And in one of the late rooms the curator has mercifully given the commentary over to poetry, to Peter Porter's *The Painter's Banquet*, got up in refined type.

Peter Porter and Arthur Boyd, intermittent expatriates, have worked together on a many projects; it is not possible to say which of the pair is the lyricist. In this informal collaboration, coming as it does at a point in the exhibition where puzzles accumulate intolerably, Porter is a boon. His poem

doesn't solve any of the conundrums or settle the questions prompted by Boyd's work, but his metaphors serve to blunt the ferretty imperative. He leaves you free to look again.

They came with their gifts of the senses
And of the groves planted for them by God
In the retina; they knelt by sandy waters
And saw a violin shore, a fronded region
Of high responding light, rosella afternoon ...

In the first room the terms of the exhibition are already set. The pale lyricism of the Rosebud landscapes tugs against the harshness of the Self Portrait, 1938. (Boyd was 18 and demonstrably precocious.) But already there are contending forces in both. The Rosebud landscape with grazing sheep is modernist-spare, ice coloured, balancing the steely weight of sky against earth with the nerve of Goya. The Self Portrait experiments with dun colour, a palette knife and the will to skin surfaces. It is a very unsettling work from a young man, not because it is self-indulgently expressionist but because it isn't. The gaze is vulnerable and uncompromising. God knows what he sees.

... When the pelican glided,
They overcame light, where the daisy unpeeled
They saw graveclothes ...

THE PORTRAITS OF his brothers, David and Guy, and of other friends and family have a similar sombre quality: the sitters brood, stare or look discomforted. In later works, exuberant, rotund, familial groups admit menace to their company.

The Figures at a table by a verandah, 1948, (right) is a kind of haloed potter's last supper with drunken uncle under the trestle. References to the Bible, to Breugel, to Rembrandt are all there, as they are to varying degrees in other works (and copiously annotated by the scholarly industry), but the drawing is firmly Boyd's. The imagination is set on its own track, inquisitive, but sure of its roots.

It is this single-mindedness, a craftsman-like humanity, that distinguishes Boyd as the crucial figure he is in C20th Australian art. He manages a voraciousness that is never pure hedonism, and he has inherited and honed the technical vocabulary that can give it form.

... This is the sumptuous gallery of those
Who have eaten the world ...

Painters and potters alike claim Arthur Boyd as a fellow. The ceramics in this exhibition—there are twenty five and not a dud among them—are the works of a master craftsman, not the holiday gestures of a painter daubing on clay. All of the ceramics have a wholeness, a luminosity. There are technical explanations for their texture and depth of colour (the catalogue essay, by Deborah Edwards, is exemplary) but they don't account for the joy of the works. Here are teapots to set you dancing. You would also drink from them. The ceramic panels have a sumptuousness—it is much more than decorative invention—that keeps at bay the dread, the angst of many of the paintings.

In the sculptural pieces, particularly the interlocking figures, psychology, not anatomy, is the structuring factor. Boyd gives parable, or allegory, a shape, so that in the biblically derived works it is Cupidity, Agony, Betrayal, Desolation that you see before you untangle the actors. (See Judas kissing Christ, left.) He embodies the state of mind so that you can walk around it, examining literally every aspect of it. And yet the works retain an air of play. Folly and vice, perhaps, can be accommodated by irony.

If you had to point to a central strength in this exhibition it would be the rich way in which it documents Boyd's ongoing and central relationship with the Australian land (and its inhabitants—there are few unpopulated paintings).

Boyd is implicated in all his landscapes. Over time they have been vehicles for his narrative, crowded with his developing symbolism; they have been scrupulous record, mythogical space, a declaration of a symbiosis of land, plant, animal and human. He digs away at the land, himself, seeking ways into both. He leaves it, comes back, rethinks it.

He also pushes you back to the early Australian landscape painters. You can walk from the Boyd landscapes to the rooms on the other side of the Gallery and see the continuities and discontinuites with Glover, von Guérard, Buvelot. Better history than any speech on Australia Day.

The exhibition has a generous travelling period. Don't miss it. ■

Morag Fraser edits *Eureka Street*.

Figures at a table by a verandah, 1948. reed pen and ink, brush and black ink Cat. no. 148

DENIS MINNS

Lost, all lost in wonder

Long awaited, the Catechism of the Universal Church is due out in English next month. In this critique ***Denis Minns*** *uses the available French edition.*

ST JEROME CLAIMED to have been much troubled by a feverish dream in which he was hauled before a fearsome judge and asked what he was. He answered that he was a Christian. To this the judge retorted, 'You are lying! You are a Ciceronian, not a Christian; where your treasure is, there will your heart be also,' and ordered him to be beaten cruelly. Between blows Jerome yelped for mercy, in witty quotations from the Psalms, but the judge was unmoved.

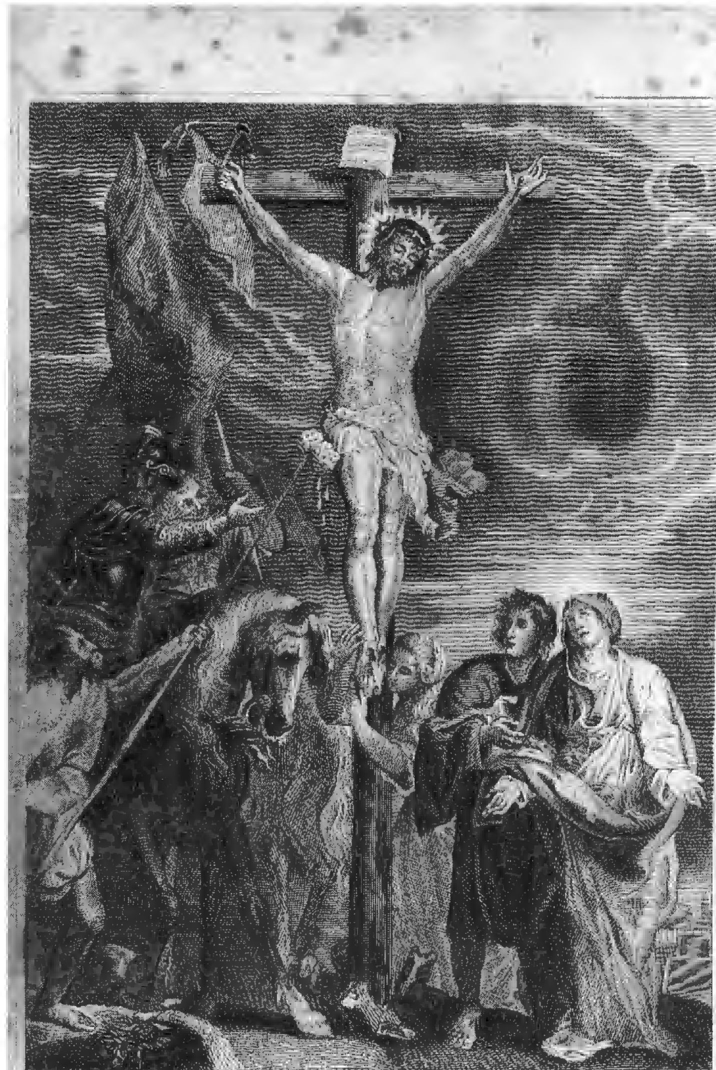
At length, the court attendants threw themselves at the judge's knees and begged for mercy on Jerome's behalf, pleading his youth, arguing that he should be given an opportunity to repent, urging that if he ever again read pagan literature then that would be the time for his torture to be prolonged to the end. Jerome decided this was no time to mince words and went further: 'Lord,' he said, 'if ever again I possess worldly books, if ever I read them, then I have denied you' (*Letter* 22. 30).

If only Jerome had had handy a copy of *Catéchisme de l'église catholique*, how much easier it would all have been for him. He would have needed only to have turned to the Index of Ecclesiastical Writers and pointed to 'Cicéron', tucked in snugly between 'Ste Césarie la Jeune' and 'Clément d'Alexandrie',(a saint in the text, at par813 [*see explanation of paragraph technique below*] but not in the index), to have had the judge in a coughing fit, and in considerable anxiety about the Court of Appeal. The Index of Ecclesiastical Writers provides a very revealing point of entry to the catechism, and I shall return to it.

Not too far into my browsing and dipping into this book, I encountered the claim that it was 'conceived as an organic exposition of the whole of the Catholic faith, and should therefore be read as a unity' (par18). Accordingly, I went to the beginning, and read it through to the end.

The Catechism is divided into four parts: the Profession of the Faith, the Celebration of the Christian Mystery, Life in Christ, and Christian Prayer. Each part has at its centre an extended commentary: in the first on the Apostles' Creed, in the second on the Seven Sacraments, in the third on the Ten Commandments, in the fourth on the Lord's Prayer. This conforms with the great tradition of catechisms organised around these four 'pillars' (par13, and Pope John Paul II's apostolic constitution *Fidei depositum*, which introduces the Catechism, page 7f).

Each part is divided into sections, sections are divided into chapters, chapters are divided into articles, articles are sometimes divided into paragraphs, paragraphs are sometimes further divided into sub-headings indicated by roman numerals and a theme, and these are sometimes further divided into sub-sub-headings indicated by a theme alone. At the end of

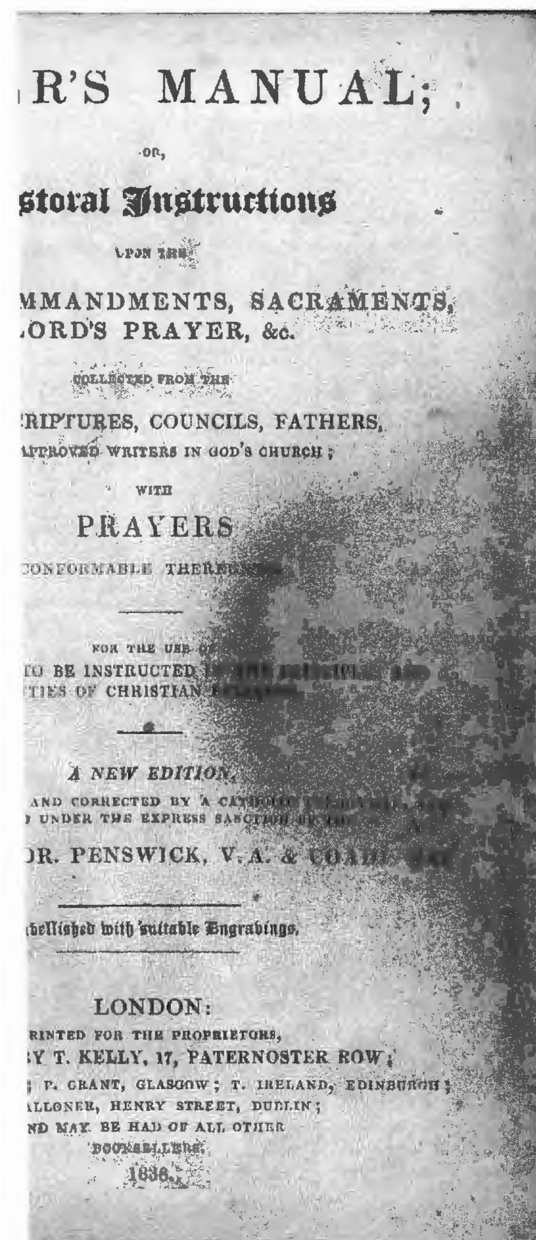


Autres temps, autres moeurs*: River's Manual is outstanding among the people's catechisms of the early 19th century. Like an old breviary, this 1838 copy bears the thumbmarks of long and loving use.The manual is reproduced courtesy of John W. Doyle SJ.*

each 'thematic unit' there is a 'series of short texts which recapitulate the essential teaching in condensed formulae. Their purpose is to offer suggestions to local catechesis for synthetic and memorisable formulae' (par22).

Some of these *en bref* are briefer than others, sometimes they repeat a quotation from the main text, sometimes they introduce material not found in the main text. Fortunately, the smallest units are continuously numbered in the margin throughout the whole, and it is to these paragraph numbers that I shall make reference here. It is to be hoped that this numbering will remain uniform across the various translations.

The margins also contain cross-references to other parts of the catechism. These, together with the thematic index at the end of the book are designed to help the reader see each theme in its place in the totality of the faith (par18). Some paragraphs are in smaller print. These contain historical or apologetic remarks, or complementary doctrinal expositions (par20). Indented quotations from patristic, liturgical, magisterial, or hagiographical sources in smaller print are intended to enrich the doctrinal exposition, and were often chosen with a view to the directly catechetical use of the work (par21).


R'S MANUAL;
OR,
storal Instructions
UPON THE
MMANDMENTS, SACRAMENTS,
ORD'S PRAYER, &c.
COLLECTED FROM THE
RIPTURES, COUNCILS, FATHERS,
APPROVED WRITERS IN GOD'S CHURCH;
WITH
PRAYERS
CONFORMABLE THERE
FOR THE USE OF
TO BE INSTRUCTED
TIES OF CHRISTIAN
A NEW EDITION,
AND CORRECTED BY A
UNDER THE EXPRESS SANCTION
DR. PENSWICK, V.A. &
bellished with suitable Engravings.
LONDON:
RINTED FOR THE PROPRIETORS,
Y T. KELLY, 17, PATERNOSTER ROW;
P. GRANT, GLASGOW; T. IRELAND, EDINBURGH;
LLONER, HENRY STREET, DUBLIN;
ND MAY BE HAD OF ALL OTHER
BOOKSELLERS.
1836.

The Pope gave the task of preparing the Catechism to a commission of 12 cardinals and bishops, under the presidency of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, the prefect of the doctrine congregation. The commission was assisted by an editorial committee of five diocesan bishops who were experts in theology and catechesis. This committee wrote the text, emended it at the direction of the commission, and sought to improve it in the light of the observations of theologians, exegetes, catechists, and, above all, the bishops of the whole world.

Altogether, the text went through nine drafts. Pope John Paul describes the catechism as an 'exposition of the Faith of the Church and of Catholic doctrine, attested or elucidated by Holy Scripture, the apostolic Tradition, and the ecclesiastical Magisterium.' It provides a 'secure norm for the teaching of the Faith' (*Fidei depositum*, page 7f). Its purpose is to 'present an organic and synthetic exposition of the essential and fundamental contents of Catholic doctrine on both faith and morals, in the light of the Second Vatican Council, and the whole of the Tradition of the Church' (par11).

EMPHASIS IS INTENDED to fall upon doctrinal exposition. It is directed to helping the deepening of the knowledge of the faith, but also to the maturing of that faith, its taking root in life, and its shining forth in witness (par23). It is intended primarily for those responsible for catechesis: in the first place, bishops, and, through them, for the editors of catechisms, for priests, and for catechists. It is also suggested that it will be useful reading to all the other Christian faithful (par12).

The Pope offers it further 'to everyone who asks us to account for the hope which is in us, and who wants to know what the Catholic Church believes. The Catechism is not intended to replace local catechisms duly approved by ecclesiastical authorities, but rather to assist the preparation of new local catechisms which take account of diverse situations and cultures, but which nevertheless hold fast to the unity of the faith and to fidelity to Catholic doctrine' (*Fidei depositum*, page 9).

I have on my shelves, as yet unread, a volume entitled *The Universal Catechism Reader: Reflections and Responses* by '15 American experts in theology and religious education'. The back-cover announces that 'Some within the American Catholic Church see the catechism as an attempt to define legalistically what people must know, do, and believe to remain within the Roman Catholic Church and to curb their power to think independently'. This is an absurd claim, nowhere justified by the text of the Catechism. Besides, the Catechism is a gloriously eccentric document—a positive incitement to independent thinking.

I have always supposed myself to be conservatively orthodox in matters of theology. I have been trained in the early history of the church and in patristic theology, and I have taught courses entitled 'Classical Christian Doctrines'. But I have considerable difficulty identifying the general theological milieu from which this catechism comes.

It acknowledges that it will need to be adapted to catechetical methods 'required by the differences of cultures, ages, spiritual maturity, and of the social and ecclesial circumstances of those to whom catechesis is addressed' (par24). Yet it gives every appearance of supposing itself to be above any entanglement in the particularities of a definite culture, or time in history, or spiritual tradition, or social or ecclesial circumstance.

This is most clearly evident, perhaps, in the extraordinarily cavalier manner in which quotations are amassed from authors in all periods of Christian history, and simply set down beside one another, without any commentary or linkage. Sometimes they are even cobbled together, as though

these approved witnesses all spoke the same language and all intended and understood the same thing by what they said, no matter how vast the historical, linguistic, ideological, social, cultural, and political differences in their circumstances.

When quotations are jumbled together in the main text, the use of quotation marks enables the reader to identify the end of one and the beginning of the next. But when they are conflated in the paragraphs in smaller print one has to pay the closest attention to the footnotes to ensure that one is not misled into supposing that one is dealing with a continuous, homogeneous text.

Sometimes, quotations are juxtaposed in a manner that makes them bear a meaning they cannot sustain in their own context. At par34 we read 'particular churches are fully catholic by communion with one among them: the church of Rome 'which presides in charity'. 'Because with this church, by reason of its more excellent origin, every church, that is the faithful everywhere, ought necessarily to be in agreement'. This makes Irenaeus of Lyons appear to be making a claim for the authority of Rome over other churches which he simply did not make, and those responsible for the catechism ought to know that he did not make it.

CHRISTIAN READER,

UPON a due perusal of this book, you will find all necessary instructions in the great mysteries and duties of the Christian religion, with a variety of Prayers, answering the usual, and almost daily occurrences of human life. It is designed particularly for the poor, and such as want money to buy, or will and leisure to read, more ample treatises on the indispensable obligations owing by all Christians to God, their neighbour, and themselves.

Although designed for the poor, River's Manual was bound in Morocco and lettered in gold.

Reading the Catechism, I was often put in mind of trying to watch television with someone who has possession of the remote control, and rapidly switches from one channel to another. I have never been able to see what sort of sense or satisfaction such people get from this.

The same indifference to context has meant that doctrines are illustrated by quotations from texts far removed from the situation in which the particular doctrines were developed. To rely upon the 11th Council of Toledo, a synod of 17 bishops and a half dozen other local worthies convoked by King Wamba in November 675, for the doctrine of the Trinity (par245, 253-255) is like writing the history of an AFL season on the basis of match reports in the *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix* or the *Vancouver Echo*.

POPE VIGILIUS IS QUOTED in support of the fatuous observation that 'Christians are baptised in the *name*, not in the *names* of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, because there is only one God, the Almighty Father, and his only Son, and the Holy Spirit: the most holy Trinity' (par233). Pope Vigilius, described by Adolf von Harnack as 'the man who was Monophysite or Chalcedonian in accordance with orders' from the imperial household, was publicly exposed as a liar by the Emperor Justinian.

Hitherto Vigilius has chiefly been of interest to theologians dealing with the question of infallibility: an example of a pope who was not only condemned by a general council of the church, but who actually retracted the positions for which he had been condemned. It is odd that the Vatican should want to push him into the limelight like this.

Nor is it only church documents that are treated in this strange way. That the souls of the wicked will be punished immediately after death is thought to be demonstrated by Jesus' parable about the rich man and Lazarus (par1021), the doctrines of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption are discovered in the Book of Revelation (par2853), and the covenant with Noah is said to continue in force (par58).

The range of the authors cited, and the frequency of their citation, hardly does justice to the real richness of the Catholic tradition. Leaving the Scriptures to one side, there are 79 references to general church councils before Trent, 100 to Trent, 27 to Vatican I, and 807 to Vatican II. John Paul II is the pope most frequently referred to (138 times), followed by Paul VI (49) and Pius XII (27). There are 24 citations from recent instructions of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 13 of them from *Donum vitae*, six from *Persona humana* and one from *Inter insigniores*.

There are 163 references to the Code of Canon Law. Among the 'ecclesiastical writers', Augustine is a clear winner, with 88 references. Thomas Aquinas, with 61, is a poor second, although well ahead of the rest of the field. Irenaeus has 32 and Origen a mere 10. If Ignatius of Loyola's remark about praying as though everything depended on God and working as though everything depended on oneself had been attributed to him, instead of being left in quotation marks but without attribution (par2834), he would have surged ahead of John Henry Newman, whose four citations are nevertheless a quite respectable achievement in this company.

Some are listed here whom no one would previously have thought of as ecclesiastical writers. St Dominic (par956), for instance, or St Joan of Arc (par223, 435, 795, 2005), on whose behalf one might think it adds insult to injury to be burnt at the stake as a heretic by the church, only to have one's piteous last exclamation quoted more than 500 years later, with no reference to its context, in an official publication of the same church. Aristotle, Martin Luther's damnable pagan rascal, though given an honourable mention (par1806), is not capped. If the authors possessed even the slightest sensitivity to the feelings of many women in today's church they would surely have chosen someone other than Tertullian to hymn the joys of married life (par1642).

Commenting on the large number of collaborators in the preparation of the Catechism, the Pope speaks of his profound joy at the coming together of so many voices to produce what one might call the 'symphony' of the faith (*Fidei depositum*, page 7). This is an

interesting and appealing analogy, for a symphony does not have just one melody line, and the discordant views evident in this text sometimes suggest that what we are dealing with is rather more of *sinfonia concertante*.

I do not mean that any room is given to points of view plainly at odds with the current temper of orthodoxy (what a splendidly Brucknerian feast that would have been!) but not much effort has been made to iron out more subtle differences of approach. Someone on the team was quite keen to get in the idea that *Communio sanctorum* [the Communion of saints] refers to sharing in holy *things* (par948, 1475). The idea that this is the *primary* meaning of the phrase is first introduced *en bref* (par960), not being found in the main body of the text until par1331. The more familiar meaning of the phrase is also found (par946, 948, 954ff, 1474f, 1522, 2684).

In several places the priesthood of the faithful and its relationship to the ministerial priesthood is dealt with without reference to the conundrum of Vatican II (*Lumen Gentium* 10) that although each is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ, they are yet *essentially* different from one another (par897-913; 941-943; 1120). Though this view is also represented here (par1547, 1592). In par1580 the impression is given that the custom of the Oriental churches with respect to clerical marriage, although 'long since considered legitimate', is in fact of more recent origin than the law of clerical celibacy in the Roman church.

Baptism is presented in terms of the remission of sins and regeneration, with but scant reference to conversion of heart (par1213-1284). Yet in the discussion on the Sacrament of Reconciliation we are told that baptism is the principal locus of the first and fundamental conversion (par1427).

SOMETIMES QUITE CONTRADICTORY views are introduced within a few paragraphs of one another. At par1589 Gregory of Nazianzus is quoted as saying that one needs to be sanctified in order to sanctify; at par1584 Augustine is quoted to show that the unworthiness of an ordained minister will not affect the efficacy of his sacramental actions.

At par875 we read that no one may give himself (for we are dealing with the sacrament of order, and 'the ordination of women is not possible' par1577) the mandate and the mission of proclaiming the Gospel, but at par900 'all the faithful are charged by God with the apostolate in virtue of Baptism and Confirmation. Lay people are bound by the obligation and enjoy the right, individually or gathered in associations, to labour that the divine message of salvation may be known and received by all human beings and by the whole world. This obligation is all the more pressing when it is only through them that human beings can hear the Gospel and know Christ. In ecclesial communities their activity is so necessary that, without it, most often the apostolate of the pastors could not achieve its full effect.'

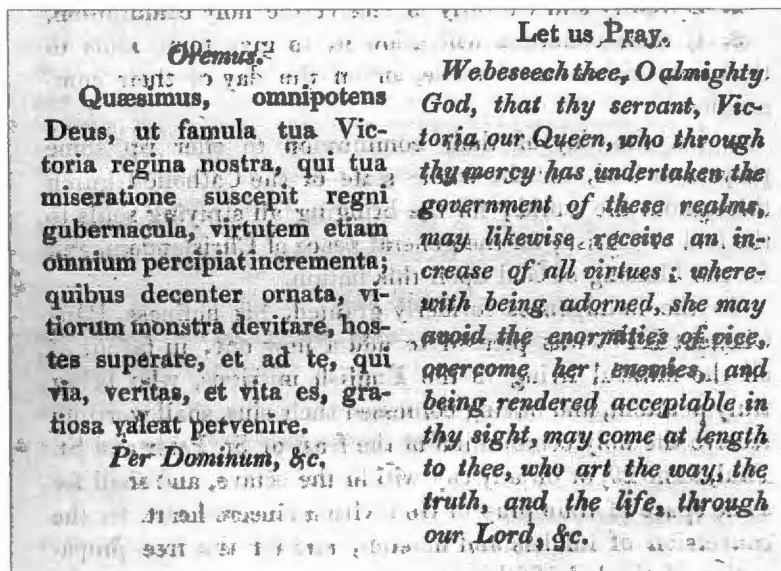
There is a marked change of mood and approach in the First Section of the Second Part, 'The Sacramental Economy'. The concatenation of quotations suddenly ceases, and the references to Trent, the Roman Catechism, Canon Law, Denzinger-Schönmetzer, and others fall off abruptly. Such references as there are, are chiefly to Scripture, and to the decrees of Vatican II. This is a coherent piece of prose, soberly argued, self-assured, resting on a sophisticated appropriation of Scripture and the Christian tradition, and immediately recognisable as the work of a theologian writing from within the mainstream of Catholicism after Vatican II.

When I came to it, I thought I had been unfair in my negative estimation of the previous 240 pages. The irritations they had given rise to were, no doubt, consequent on their subject matter. I began to anticipate the remaining 340 pages with pleasure. Unfortunately, like Christian at the pleasant river, I rejoiced too soon. The oasis was quickly traversed and I was soon back out on the vast gibber plain of Canon Law, Trent, the Roman Catechism, Augustine, et al, stretching away to the horizon and beyond.

To the extent that an individual voice can be distinguished as exercising its influence over the whole breadth of the Catechism, it is a remarkably quirky voice. Call me a stick-in-the-mud if you wish, but I prefer my official church documents straight-laced and sober-sided. I am astonished that in a document which has the express aim of setting forth an 'organic and synthetic exposition of the essential and fundamental content of Catholic doctrine' (par11) so much licence should have been allowed to the expression of idiosyncratic and individual points of view.

Some of these I have already alluded to. Here are some more: that Jesus knew and loved each of us and all of us during his life on earth and in his passion (par478); that he was submissive to his parents for the *whole* of his life before he began his ministry (par531), and went up to the Temple each year during the same period (par583); that he allowed Peter to recognise the transcendent character of the divine filiation (par 443); that 'at his baptism "the heavens opened" (Mt. 3.16) which sin had closed' (par536); that the threefold ministry of bishop, priests, and deacons goes back to the very beginning, and that without this structure, one could not even speak of the Church (par1593).

Further, that the structure given by Jesus to his Church will endure until the full realisation of the King-



Oremus.

Quæsimus, omnipotens Deus, ut famula tua Victoria regina nostra, qui tua miseratione suscepit regni gubernacula, virtutem etiam omnium percipiat incrementa; quibus decenter ornata, vitiorum monstra devitare, hostes superare, et ad te, qui via, veritas, et vita es, gratiosa valeat pervenire.

Per Dominum, &c.

Let us Pray.

We beseech thee, O almighty God, that thy servant, Victoria our Queen, who through thy mercy has undertaken the government of these realms, may likewise receive an increase of all virtues: wherewith being adorned, she may avoid the enormities of vice, overcome her enemies, and being rendered acceptable in thy sight, may come at length to thee, who art the way, the truth, and the life, through our Lord, &c.

Commoner and queen alike are enjoined to 'avoid the enormities of vice'.

dom (par765), which might happen at any old tick of the clock (par673); that the third chapter of Genesis, though using metaphorical language, attests a primordial *event*, a *fact* which occurred at the beginning of the history of humankind (par390), and that one cannot 'interfere with the revelation about original sin without doing harm to the mystery of Christ' (par389).

What is worrying about this last claim is that the catechism's understanding of original sin is so uncompromisingly Augustinian. Is this to be equated with the *revelation* about original sin? Was the mystery of Christ opaque to Christians for the hundreds of years before Augustine presented the West with his doctrine of original sin? Is it still opaque to the Eastern churches? To give the catechism its due, a small dose of Pelagian common sense is allowed to sit incongruously alongside the Augustinian view of death (par1006f).

At many places the catechism adopts an apologetic tone and seeks to preclude likely objections to the claims it makes. Sometimes this is done plainly, as when objections to the virgin birth and the perpetual virginity of Mary (even *in partu*) are parried (par498ff). At other times the apologetic agenda is less obvious. It is claimed that 'the love of God for Israel is compared to the love of a father for his son (Hosea 11.1). This love is stronger than the love of a mother for her children' (par219).

knowing it my duty to resist sin, I may with perseverance resist it, and be resolute in venturing all for establishing thy kingdom in my soul.

Indifferency and Tepidity.

Amongst the many weaknesses to which I am subject, there is no one gives me a more sensible disturbance, than to see my daily stupidity, and neglects in the affairs of salvation, and how little pains I take

The Deadly Sins, before they were discovered by ABC TV

On a first reading, this is simply flabbergasting. It has to mean, I suppose, that the love of God for Israel is stronger than the love of a mother for her children, but it is far from self-evident that this is meant. And why say it, anyway? There appears to have been something of a tug-of-war in the committee or the commission between those who think that it is perfectly legitimate to speak of God as father or mother by analogy with human parenting, all due qualifications being made, of course (par239, 370), and those who want to divorce the Fatherhood of God entirely from any analogy with human parenting (par2779f).

If this goes back to a fear on the part of some of the authors that we will soon have to contend with Catholic worshippers praying publicly to 'Our Mother', or even, heaven forfend, to 'Our Parent', let them move manfully to the front and engage an open campaign. I, for one, will cheerfully put out bunting. Only let them spare us this Dad'sArmy buffoonery behind the lines.

Whatever the historical precedent for basing a catechism on the Apostles' Creed, the Seven Sacraments, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer, the present work is hardly a convincing recommendation for the utility of this approach. Although some members of the medical profession will no doubt be delighted to find tobacco and alcohol abuse addressed under the commandment 'Thou shalt not kill' (par2290), most common sense readers are likely to find this as artificial, even absurd, as the inclusion of the idolising of physical perfection and sporting success under the same rubric (par2289).

Adultery is not addressed until some 50 paragraphs into the article on the sixth commandment. It is preceded by a discussion of human sexuality (par2331-2336), of the vocation to chastity (par2337-2350), of offences against chastity, i.e. lechery, masturbation, fornication, pornography, prostitution, and rape—one wonders if this lists ascends or descends in importance—(par2351-2356), of chastity and homosexuality (par2357-2359), of married love and fidelity (par2360-2365), and of the fecundity of marriage and the gift of children (par2366-2379).

In the discussion of the sacraments reference is from time to time made to the differences between the Oriental and Roman rites, never to the advantage of the latter. The practice of the Oriental churches in confirming and admitting the new baptised infant to the Eucharist shows that they have preserved a lively awareness of the unity of Christian initiation (par1244).

The Western practice of separating Confirmation from Baptism and, normally, reserving its administration to the bishop provides the catechism with yet another opportunity to remind us that bishops are the successors of the Apostles (par1313). This theme crops up throughout the catechism with about the same frequency and irrelevance as station-identification jingles on Radio National, and just as annoyingly. Is there a general view that we are all in the grip of a pandemic of short-term memory loss?

A year or two after the publication of the first book review I ever wrote I was called to a parlour of the monastery in which I was then living to be confronted with the author whose book I had savaged. I was asked through tears if there had not been a single feature of the work that I could have found praise for. It is a haunting memory. There is much of value in this catechism, and evidence of an awareness of new issues facing believers, and of a willingness on the part of the church to admit its mistakes.

It is a blasphemy, the catechism says, to invoke the name of God in order to enslave, torture, or kill peoples (par2148). In the past, the pastors of the church have often failed to protest at the use by legitimate governments of cruel means of maintaining law and order. The church itself at one time adopted the prescriptions of the Roman law on torture in its own tribunals (par2298). The rights of conscience are subtly explained and upheld (par1776ff, 2106), and the famous remark of Newman that conscience is

the 'aboriginal Vicar of Christ' is boldly quoted (par1778). Much common sense is spoken in short space on the spurious arguments advanced in favour of securing peace through an arms race (par2315). The anthropocentrism of the catechism as a whole is balanced by the statement that the dominion over creation granted by the Creator cannot be separated from moral obligations, including obligations to future generations (par2456). Bishops are reminded of their duties as patrons of the arts (par2503). There is a stern warning of the danger of turning into a couch potato (par2496).

If I have not been able to give more prominence here to the positive features of the Catechism this is due to my strong sense of disappointment with the work as a whole. I cannot agree with those who decry the need for a book such as this sets out to be. But I think it sad that nothing more genuinely representative of the wonderful flowering of scriptural, patristic, historical, liturgical, theological, and spiritual renewal that was the most marked feature of Catholic life around the globe in the middle years of the present century has been captured here.

PERHAPS NO ONE is to blame for this. Renaissances are discernible periods in human affairs; historians will argue interminably about when such movements really began and when they definitely ended, but sooner or later they do come to an end. I was a 10-year-old schoolboy when Pope John XXIII declared his intention of summoning the Second Vatican Council. I remember vividly how portentously and with what hopefulness this was announced to us. If it is all over, I expect I will be able to face the prospect, not too disconsolately, of saying goodbye to all that.

Even after Vatican II, seminarians needed to be especially vigilant, or especially supine, to avoid exposure to the stoicism that has exercised such a pervasive influence on this catechism. Stoicism is not a Christian approach to life, but it is estimable, nevertheless, and I have often found it useful. ■

Denis Minns OP is master of Mannix College, Clayton, Victoria. He teaches at Yarra Theological Union.

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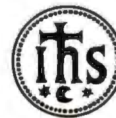

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Books: 1

Andrew Bullen

Summer reading

Photo: Bill Thomas

The Picador Book of the Beach, edited by Robert Drewe, Pan Macmillan Australia, 1993. ISBN 0 330 274171 RRP $16.95; **Picador New Writing**, edited by Helen Daniel and Robert Dessaix, Pan Macmillan Australia, 1993. ISBN 0 330 27397 3 RRP $16.95

Time was when long summer holidays were passed sunnily, reading long, long novels. There are volumes of Proust I've shelved somewhere with the sand in their spines these 20 years, and that novel itself is stored in the memory permeated with Anglesea sunlight, the sound of distant surf and long, long swims at the height of the day. And the big Patrick Whites, Garcia-Marquez, and...

Nowadays I go for dips. The Anti-Cancer Council with remarkable success has driven most of us off the beach between eleven and two, and anyway nowadays I think twice about going in (in Australia the change that separates youth from adulthood), and novels?? The hols are too short to give over to a single book—indeed maybe life is too short for novels. No, short stories are the thing.

Where better than the summer beach to take a glance at a writer's way of seeing the world, explore a small but telling incident, live for a brief while inside another character, undergo a nudge of meaning, enjoy a turn of phrase? Somebody at Picador knows this, so here are two anthologies not too heavy for reading as you lie on your back. There's *Picador New Writing*, edited by Helen Daniel and Robert Dessaix, mostly short stories but with some extracts from works in progress and a few poems, and everything by Australian writers.

As a group they are trying out new ways of expression, so the pleasure the pieces give is the pleasure of stretching: one's imagination, one's tolerance, one's English even. Granted that there is not much traditionally Australian about the storylines, and granted that the wand of magic realism has cast its spell among us, there is something Australian going on here—maybe moments of significance celebrated or lost, or taken on their own terms without pushing them too hard for more.

These either come in terse, reticent writing or generate vast lists, and either way can paradoxically make for a sense of being at ease with drifting, of living without permanent anchorage.

Or what is significant is almost out of the range of the perspective we are given; that's what made Sam Sejavka's 'Strange Loop' so compelling from the start: 'When seated at the window, in the best of all possible positions, he rarely noticed the small skewed oblong at the corner: it was like an excluded fragment of a tangram puzzle that did little more than infringe upon an already unremarkable view' (p7). How much of new Australian writing is to do with the 'small skewed object at the corner'? I relished too the inconclusiveness of Thomas Gibson's magical 'Les Indes galantes'. Writing then to drift with, dip into, stretch a little, an anthology of pebbles.

Then there's *The Picador Book of the Beach*, edited by Robert Drewe. This collection will give the very act of reading it—at Gerroa for me—its own wit; reading about the beach on the beach is surely the quintessential Australian self-referring act. Drewe is known for suggesting that the beach rather than the desert is the Australian heartland, and he reiterates the point in his own story 'Radiant Heat': 'In Australia people always run to the coast. Maybe the myth of the bush is a myth' (p184). After all, this is where, when we get the chance, most of us go—in youth, in adulthood, in old age. So if the archetypical Australian place is on or near the beach, these stories should prove illuminating. The major surprise is how many of them are written by non-Australians, eighteen out of the total twenty-five. What, one wonders, would they know? What are they doing here?

The narrator in the American Diane Johnson's 'Great Barrier Reef' is visiting us, and the story shows how she overcomes her initial revulsion to say: 'But no, he was describing a moment, an epiphany, the experience of beauty. He had the long, bald head of a statesman, but he was a farmer, now retired, from Perth. I was ashamed that it had taken me so long to see that the difference between Americans and Australians was that the Americans were tired and bored, while for the

Australians, stuck off at the edge of the world, all was new, and they had the energy and spirit to go off looking for abstractions like beauty, and comets' (p337).

The Johnson story indicates that the foreigners can give us a fresh look at how we see ourselves. In this anthology it is mostly done by Drewe's skill in juxtaposition. The undercurrents of Helen Garner's 'Postcards from Surfers' are further under than those in Raymond Carver's 'So Much Water So Close to Home', a chilling dip indeed. Michel Tournier's sounding of the mythological depths in 'The Midnight Love Feast' makes one look more deeply at David Malouf's 'A Change of Scene', a story of Australians abroad caught up in sudden foreign danger.

However safe and sunny we dream the beach to be, these writers, whether Australian or not, often associate it with danger: people drown, human relationships relax into their bitter truth, individuals look into their inner depths,—'The Water Was Dark and It Went Forever Down' as Tim Winton's title puts it starkly. Earth, water, air and in Australia the fiery sun or a bushfire, make the beach an elemental place. It's a place of edges, borders too.

Calvino, Cheever, Marquez, Gordimer (her white couple in 'The Catch' feel almost Australian), Robbe-Grillet and Updike are some of the formidable foreign company the Australian writers find themselves among. If the book is sold overseas, the question might be: What are so many Australians doing here? They're doing all right. Although the physical temperature can soar in Australian stories, as in Drewe's own 'Radiant Heat', the Australian writers are content to let the emotional temperature remain more normal; it's the normality that they explore. The people in the stories are usually ordinary middle-class Australian folk; the beach is freely available to all, or so, perhaps too readily, we like to believe. We take pride that on the beach we are all stripped to our egalitarian selves. The beach is the dreamscape we can all actually get to. It's the right place to look at ourselves as we normally are.

I like the way the Australian writers trust the way experience comes to their characters. There's a reticence, call it taste, even sophistication—authors and their characters allow the significance of things to unfold if and as it will. The widow in Candida Baker's 'Spindrift' finds lifelong tensions resolved and her decision to leave the beachside home she had never liked overturned as she goes for a surf that unostentatiously becomes a ritual: 'She shrieks like a child as she catches wave after wave, speeding to the beach. Her body is beginning to ache with tiredness. The sun is slipping away fast but still she goes on and on as if to erase every memory from her body. She wants only to be cleansed, to be washed up on a new shore, given one more chance to start again' (page 91). And here's how Helen Garner, so quietly, orchestrates the end of her story: 'In the sink a cockroach lurks. I try to swill it down the drain with a cup of water but it resists strongly. The air is bright, is milky with spray. My father is already up: while the kettle boils he stands out on the edge of the grass, the edge of his property, looking at the sea' (page 263).

Maybe especially for Australians, the beach helps us to be at ease with complexity, soothed no doubt by the rhythm of strolling, of the waves offshore, of the lift and fall of our bodies afloat. If you have to teach Year 12s why Keats makes so much of melancholy, you just ask them how they feel knowing this is the last swim at the end of a perfect day.

Here at any rate are two books to dip in and out of. They fit smoothly into the rhythm of time on the beach. They nudge the reader towards some reflectiveness. The stories stretch and ease the imagination. Maybe that old codger jogging slowly along, or that father showing his son how to fly a kite, or that frieze of girls against the blue horizon, deserve, like each of us, a short story. Time now, though, to have a doze, or to cool off, to call it a day ... ■

Andrew Bullen SJ is a poet and teacher. He is rector of Jesuit Theological College, Parkville, Victoria.

Books: 2

Michael McGirr

Monster biogs

Christina Stead: A Biography, Hazel Rowley, William Heinemann Australia, 1993. ISBN 0 85561 384 X RRP $49.95

Hal Porter: Man Of Many Parts, Mary Lord, Random House Australia 1993. ISBN 0 09 182794 9 RRP $39.95

The past few years have seen Australian literary biographies, of greater and lesser stature, erected for an extraordinary range of personalities: Barbara Baynton, Henry Handel Richardson, Louisa Lawson, Henry Lawson, Banjo Patterson, Ada Cambridge (twice), Mary Gilmore, Martin Boyd, 'Inky' Stephenson, Eve Langley, Kenneth Slessor, Katharine Susannah Prichard, Francis Webb, George Johnston, Peter Porter, Olga Masters, David Williamson and, of course, Patrick White are among them. There can't be too many writers left in the wild. The most notable scalps which the biographers brought in last year were those of Hal Porter and, for the second time, Christina Stead.

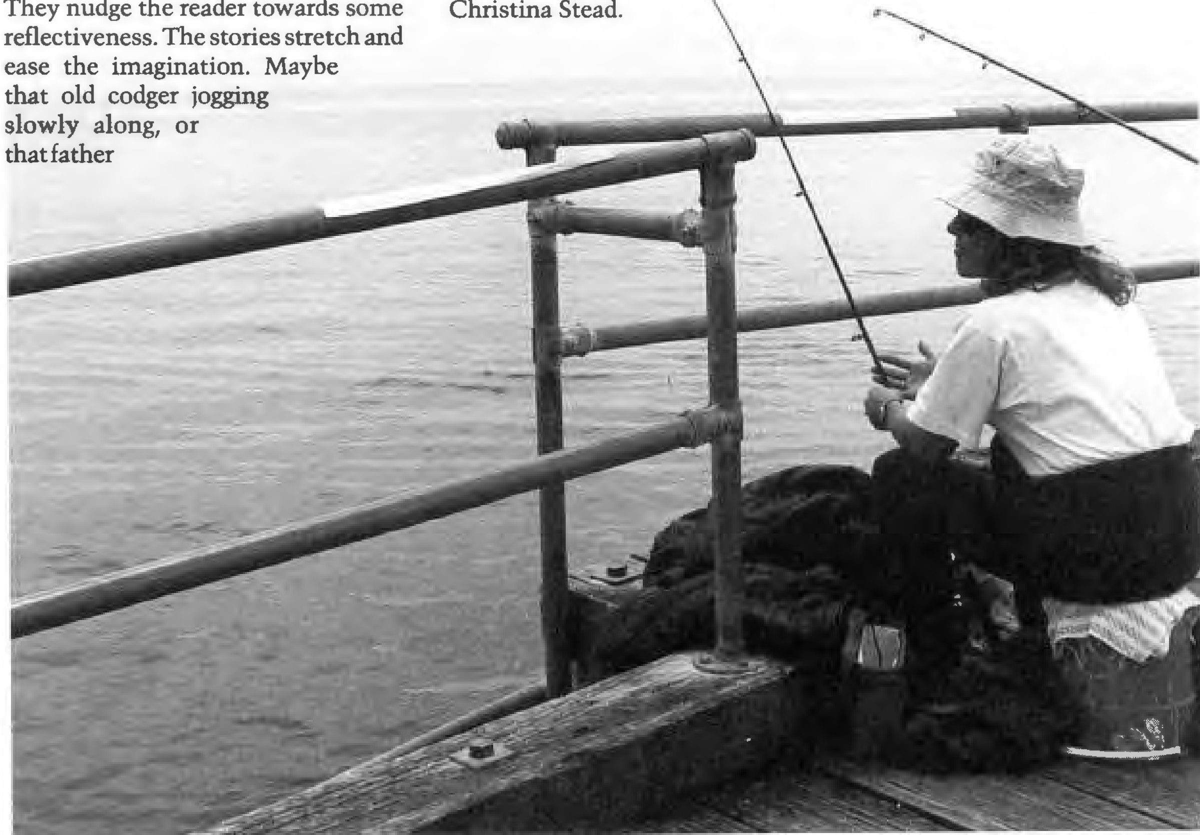

Photo: Bill Thomas

At first glance, these two books are as different from each other as blood is from stone. Mary Lord is writing about someone she knew for the best part of forty years, who asked her to write his biography and who sexually molested her ten-year-old son. *Hal Porter: man of many parts* is a work of finely graven anger and occasionally the blood on the page is that of the biographer herself.

Hazel Rowley, by way of contrast, writes with tweezers. *Christina Stead: a biography* provides an austere setting for its wealth of detail. Whole worlds are recreated: Sydney's Watson's Bay before the coming of cars, Paris going off the boil in the late twenties, New York suffering shortages during the war. Only rarely in 600 pages did I feel the immediate presence of the biographer. In 1987, in an Adelaide nursing home, Rowley found the man whom Stead had pursued to London in 1928 and against whom, in *For Love Alone*, she gained the kind of unanswerable revenge that fiction can afford. Rowley suggests to the bitter old man that 'Christina must have been very lonely'. Such empathy is less in evidence as she charts the precise moment at which, aged 26, Stead shucks off her long-detested virginity. It is absent from the chronicle of at least two abortions. Mary Lord knew both Porter and Stead as houseguests; Rowley looks on from a distance. She is fascinated by the few feet of film of Stead which survive.

As biographers go, neither Lord nor Rowley is necessarily better placed to write about her subject than the other. But from opposite poles, they suggest one reason for the marketability of literary biography in a culture increasingly ready to mistake voyeurism for intimacy. Taking another example from the proliferation of literary biography within the English speaking world, Ian Hamilton's *In Search of J.D. Salinger* is a biography about the impossibility of writing a writer's biography. The ostensible reason for this is given as Salinger's bloodymindedness in keeping private any of his correspondence which had already found its way into public collections. But the deepest privacy in the book is the revelation that for a few months, once in his life, Salinger went to his room, shut the door and wrote *The Catcher in the Rye*. No stalker can get inside that room.

Both Stead and Porter were wanderers. Both were drinkers in a big way. Both were highly strung sexual beings. Both had memorable fallings out with Patrick White. About all their comings and goings, their excesses and their troubled fortunes in human relationships there is plenty to be said. This provides the backbone of these two absorbing and often disturbing entertainments.

Porter appears to have made plenty of havoc. But he also wrote *The Watcher on the Cast Iron Balcony*, a superb evocation of boyhood in a country town in the 1920's and one of the few sustained meditations on death in Australian letters. Lord assures us that *The Watcher* was 'the book most painful and difficult to write' but also 'the only major work of Porter's that was not subject to regular interruptions in the writing caused by the author's need to go off on drinking binges.' That's as close as we get to the Porter that most teases the imagination, the one sitting behind a typewriter in 1961. For a book that 'tells all', Lord's biography does tell the plain truth that Porter, the writer, was a private and unaccountable creature. Indeed, Porter divided himself between 'the writer' and 'the person'. The writer was precise, commanding, skilful, censorious. The person was something else. Porter's major literary legacy is his three beguiling volumes of autobiography. The second instalment, *The Paper Chase*, is a much underrated demonstration of the manner in which a culture is changed inwardly by changing externals; it is punctuated by a series of observations of the changing Australian vocabulary. At times, *The Paper Chase* more than bears out Lord's judgment that Porter as a writer 'was unable to penetrate beyond the surface which, to him, was all important' and that 'his obsession with a glittering writing style tended to overwhelm, even become, the substance of his work.' But lurking in the shadows of *The Paper Chase* are all the symptoms of Porter's destructive sexuality. His faintheartedness in reconciling the blinding writer with the blinkered person is tragic and, in the hands of Mary Lord, more than a little ridiculous. Slabs of his autobiography are slated as fiction. And Porter with them.

Hal Porter's Cast-Iron Balcony
Photo: Michael McGirr

The Stead of Hazel Rowley's biography is also rather different from the Stead whose presence lingers in her fiction. Rowley explains that writing for Stead, was, on significant occasions, a means of gaining power, especially within her family. The book for which Stead is most widely remembered, *The Man Who Loved Children*, is a brilliant account of the subtleties of power within a family. Louie, the focal character, artfully creates a kind of balance of power for herself between a frenetic father and a passive aggressive step-mother. The novel is substantially autobiographical and Rowley is often at pains to show close correspondences between Stead's fiction and 'real life'.

Rowley's best insights tend to be buried within a forest of detail: 'Ambivalence was the motor behind

Stead's most powerful writing', 'In her fiction, reality was turned into something she could control.' Nevertheless, Stead's power as a writer is strangely at odds with the picture Rowley creates - that of a dependent woman. Stead bludges political ideas (at least initially) from left-leaning friends, comes to depend on her partner, Bill Blake, and, after his death, depends increasingly on drink. The conundrum of Stead is difficult to solve because, however far Rowley travels through Stead's life to identify the raw ingredients of her fiction, the writer at work is a private beast. The 18 months in 1939-40 during which Stead wrote *The Man Who loved Children*, for example, are amongst the least detailed of the biography. 'The memories came flooding back,' says Rowley, 'She slept badly. She raged. She wept.' This is as much as she can say. When, at the age of 75, Stead looked back on this period, she recalled, 'I was quite solitary, although I was very happy with Bill, my husband... But I was crying every two months and just couldn't stop...' It was lonely work, the job for someone who 'did not allow people accesss to her vulnerable inner self.'

Hazel Rowley encapsulates much of Christina Stead's history when she observes that she left Australia before the Sydney Harbour Bridge was built and did not return until 1969, when the Opera House was nearing completion. Like Porter, she was homeless. Porter bought a home for the first time in his life when he was about the same age as Stead was when she returned to Australia and he set about doing it up as a kind of museum to himself. The work room, which he never used, was 'a set designer's idea of a famous author's study.'

Except in their writing, neither Porter nor Stead had any place to call their own. Perhaps this is why, as writers, they are so private. Difficult company that they are, it is hiding out in their work that they are most themselves. These two commanding biographies both bear witness to territory on which they may not trespass. ■

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RORY MUNGOVEN
AND ROSS FITZGERALD

Public lives

Evatt: A Life Peter Crockett, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1993. ISBN 0 195 535588 RRP $44.95

ONCE AGAIN, ideological battle lines have been drawn over the life of Herbert Vere Evatt. This is hardly surprising in a period that will mark the centenary of his birth and the fortieth anniversary of the affair that would precipitate his political death. Peter Crockett's new biography of Evatt will not end the debate. It will simply offer ammunition to both sides.

For years now, Evatt's life has been a fissure line in Australian historiography. His reputation and legacy have been a principal target of those engaged in a conservative reclamation of postwar Australian history. Gerard Henderson and Robert Manne have led the fray.

The deepening identity crisis on the right of Australian politics has given this debate renewed life. It has forced the conservative camp to revisit its political roots and to seek ways of revitalising the historical image of its halcyon days, the Menzies era. This revisionist treatment of Menzies has inevitably involved revisionist treatment of his historical foil, Evatt.

It is fitting that the opening shots in this latest offensive against Evatt should have been fired by Peter Ryan, formerly of Melbourne University Press, in his celebrated attack on the late Manning Clark in *Quadrant*(Sept 93). Nowhere has the historiographical dimension of the debate about Evatt been clearer.

Predictably, Ryan crowns his critique of Clark with a derisive account of the historian's characterisation of Evatt and Menzies. For Ryan, Clark's description of Evatt as one who had 'the image of Christ in his heart' is nothing short of blasphemy, while his converse portrait of Menzies 'exposes the final bankruptcy of his History of Australia'.

(In pronouncing his judgment, Ryan deliberately distorts Clark's portrait of Evatt. According to Clark, Evatt not only carried the image of Christ in his heart but the teaching of the Enlightenment in his mind, a code that carries many layers of meaning in the context of Clark's narrative. At the same time, Clark readily acknowledged that Evatt knew 'moments of rage when an evil spirit was upon him'. There is plenty of material in Crockett's book to bear out both these metaphors.)

Ryan, in his *Quadrant* article and a subsequent review of Crockett's book, depicts Evatt as a 'model of treachery and envy', a would-be Stalin that Australia only escaped by the grace of God and B. A. Santamaria. Menzies, on the other hand, is the 'honest and devoted Australian patriot', the man under whose care Australia was 'united, steadily governed, and could offer a job to any man or woman who wanted one'. Ryan's attack on Clark has become an attack on Evatt, and vice-versa.

It was inevitable that Evatt's life should become such hotly contested historical property. After all, his accomplishments—as scholar, advocate, High Court judge, state and federal parliamentarian, Attorney-General, foreign minister, even party leader—were great by any standards, let alone those of the parochial and philistine Australia in which he made his name. He was a man of ideas that went to the heart of Australian identity and to the possibilities of a rational and just social and international order. And yet Evatt led the labour movement into an abyss of division, recrimination and self-doubt in which it would be stuck for more than a decade. Add to this the complexities of his character and the contradictions between the ideals he espoused and his political

practice and you have rich material indeed for any historian, biographer, portraitist or ideologue. For this reason, *Evatt: A Life* disappoints. Crockett's biography, the first comprehensive work since the partisan accounts offered more than twenty years ago by Kylie Tennant and Evatt's factotum Alan Dalziell, has rich seams of detail and anecdote, the product of thorough and painstaking research. But his work suffers from the most chronic disorganisation, flowing to a large extent from the structure of the book itself.

Crockett attempts to identify broad, unifying themes in Evatt's life and work. He gives us chapters with titles like 'Authority', 'Integrity' and 'Oppression' which range from one end of Evatt's career to the other, sewing together threads of meaning from disparate episodes and events.

This leads to imbalances and distortion as aspects of Evatt's life are weighed and measured against each other and, in some cases, neglected. For instance, Crockett's account of Evatt's campaign against the Communist Party Dissolution Act and subsequent referendum—a defining moment in Evatt's career—is cursory, particularly when compared to his exhaustive treatment of Evatt's handling of the Petrov Affair. Crockett's analysis of the failings of Evatt's leadership in the Labor split of 1955 is similarly desultory.

THE STRUCTURE CROCKETT IMPOSES on Evatt's life results in a circular argument which often confuses more than it illuminates. When it comes to passing judgment on his subject, Crockett is frustratingly evasive. He seems intent on hedging his bets at every turn, particularly on key issues in Evatt's life which remain in contention between the mythologisers of Right and Left. While Evatt's detractors will be able to use much of Crockett's material, they will draw little satisfaction from his fundamental conclusions.

Take, for instance, the account of Evatt's handling of the Australia First Movement. In 1942, when Evatt was Attorney-General, this band of pro-fascist, anti-semitic cranks, led by the writer P.R. 'Inky' Stephensen, was deemed by security to be a national threat and interned by government order. Evatt's critics have long pointed to this case as an example of the double standards that beset Evatt's much vaunted civil libertarianism. Crockett even suggests that Evatt's actions were motivated by personal animosity towards Stephenson.

By Crockett's own argument, however, the case against Evatt would seem to be rather hollow. Throughout this episode, Evatt argued that the Australia First internees could appeal their cases through existing administrative channels. He viewed sympathetically the cases of those who chose to do so. But he refused to give ground to the movement's leaders who chose to hold out for a symbolic, public trial. Evatt's decision can be understood against the backdrop of the movement's dubious aims and the crisis Australia faced in the Pacific. It also highlights his unshakeable faith in what he believed to be due process.

Without doubt, great contradictions ran through Evatt's life. This is as clear from Manning Clark's word portrait as it is from Crockett's book. In their own way, however, both accounts remind us that for every one of his foibles, Evatt had a strength, for all of his failures, significant achievement, and for each of his defeats, a victory of sorts.

One of Crockett's most salient observations on Evatt's character and career is, sadly, buried in the last pages of the book. Evatt was, Crockett argues, a politician who 'thrived in the exigency of conflict, attracting followers and detractors by his immersion in controversy ... He found conflict reinvigorating.'

For this reason, Evatt was prepared to take enormous political risks, to put himself above party regulation and loyalty, whether in pursuit of high ideals or base self-interest. It goes a long way to explain the passions he aroused among his colleagues and opponents, not to mention among those who have sought to interpret his life and vision since. In this way the ideological row over Evatt is a strangely fitting tribute—it may in time prove the key to the regeneration of his historical image. ■

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The Rise and Rise of Kerry Packer
Paul Barry, Transworld, Sydney, 1993. ISBN 186 3590 757 RRP $39.95

PAUL BARRY IS AT HIS STRONGEST, in this well researched and cleverly constructed book, when dealing with Australian media history.

It is good to see Barry stressing the pivotal role in establishing *The Women's Weekly* and Consolidated Press of ex-Queensland premier and federal treasurer E.G. ('Red Ted') Theodore, along with his unlikely business partner Sir Frank Packer. Although the book strangely ignores Frank Packer's role during the war, it is also useful in helping us remember the crucial role that Frank Packer and Donald Horne played in the 1965 election victory of the new NSW premier, (Sir) Robert Askin. As Askin wrote to Horne, who was then the editor of *the Bulletin*: 'We could not possibly have won the election without the tremendous contribution made by your organisation ... You have played a very important part in helping to change the course of events in this state and I will always be grateful.'

Barry is also strong in dealing with the relationship between Sir Frank, his wife Gretel, their eldest son Clyde and especially Kerry, the youngest. The latter as a child was severely ill with polio and rheumatic fever. For nine months he was in an iron lung in a Sydney hospital. As Kerry Packer explains: 'I don't remember much about it except having lumbar punctures—that's my most vivid recollection—I was lucky that my problem was diagnosed quickly ... But I couldn't walk, and they thought I was trying to get out of school, because I loathed school.'

As a child, Kerry, who later in life came to realise that he was dyslexic, found it difficult to communicate. Perhaps this explains his legendary bad temper. Asked once why he shouted at people, Kerry thought for a while and then responded that he supposed it was because he didn't know what to say to them. It may also explain his response on Radio National to Phillip Adams, who was explaining the nature of astronomy and black holes. Packer

said 'That's what I have: a black hole inside me.'

Significantly, Packer was also a fervent admirer of Queensland premier Sir Johannes Bjelke-Petersen. Being fervently anti-socialist, anti-union and anti-handouts, Joh, he thought, 'really knew how to take care of things and get things done.' Consequently, along with his friend John Singleton, in 1987 Packer helped support the 'Joh for Canberra' push.

As Packer vividly explained, at the end of a hard day's work he liked nothing better than to come back home, slump in a chair and watch *Charlie's Angels* or *Starsky & Hutch* on television. By then he had done all the talking and socialising he wished to and by implication was thus too tired to talk to his family: 'He never read because he was dyslexic, rarely went out because he didn't drink, and had time on his hands because he was a lonely man with few friends. Instead of books, his library at home had videotapes. So each evening he would sit on his sofa and watch television. At the office, there would always be a screen playing in the background. He would boast of his viewing habits to rival executives, claiming that he always watched at least four hours of television a day.'

Even after his much publicised heart attack, and despite his acknowledged inner emptiness, in the Kerry Packer at least of this book there appears to be not a skerrick of awareness of either spiritual longing or imagination: 'I've been to the other side, and let me tell you son, there's fucking nothing there' (October 1990).

Perhaps the emptiness of a thoroughly human heart is writ large in the life of Sir Frank's supposedly 'boofhead' son, Kerry Packer. Although anger and rage are often close to the surface of his life, Australia's richest and most powerful man, who cleaned up Alan Bond (as he boasts 'You might get one Alan Bond in a lifetime and I've had mine') seems so very, very sad. **—Ross Fitzgerald** ■

Isaac Isaacs, Zelman Cowen, University of Queensland Press, 1993. ISBN 0 70222 4537 RRP $29.95

ISAACS ISAACS WAS THE FIRST Governor-General of Australia to live in Canberra throughout his term in office, and to make his home at Yarralumla. Even more importantly, Isaac Isaacs was the first Australian-born Governor-General. Sir Zelman Cowen was the sixth. Ten years after this book was first published in 1967, Malcolm Fraser proposed that Cowen be appointed Governor-General, as a successor to Sir John Kerr.

It is appropriate that Cowen the lawyer-academic, like Isaacs also an Australian Jew, should have been Isaacs' biographer. Isaacs' appointment as the first Australian-born and resident Governor-General—engineered by John Scullin—had been a matter of sharp and vehement controversy. Concerns were voiced over the propriety of appointing a 'local'. By 1977, that issue was well and truly resolved, but bitter dispute surrounded the office in the aftermath of Sir John Kerr's exercise of the constitutional power of dismissal.

Born in Melbourne on 6 August, 1855, Isaac Alfred Isaacs was the first child of Alfred and Rebecca Isaacs, poor immigrants who had arrived in Australia only a year before his birth.

Isaacs meant more to his mother than did her husband, and his mother meant much more to him than did his own wife and family. One of the highlights of Cowen's book is the revealing nature of Isaacs' very personal letters to Rebecca and from the mother to her adored and adoring son. Indeed, Rebecca's death was the low point of Isaac Isaacs' life.

In 1882, when he was almost twenty-seven, Isaacs commenced practice at the Victorian Bar. He remained in active practice until the last quarter of 1906, when he was appointed to the bench of the High Court of Australia. He argued his last reported case in the High Court less than a month before he became a judge. When Isaacs first came to the Bar, the High Court of Australia was not in existence and he found his practice in the Victorian courts and later, occasionally in the Privy Council. From 1892 until his appointment to the High Court Bench he was continuously involved in parliamentary politics: from 1892 to 1901 in Victoria for more than half that time in government office, principally as Attorney-General under George Turner, the first native-born Victorian to become Premier of the colony. From 1901 to 1906 he was a member of the Commonwealth House of Representatives, and for almost a year and a half Commonwealth Attorney-General.

At the Victorian general election of April 1892, Isaacs was elected to the Legislative Assembly as a member of Bogong. The district included Yackandandah and Beechworth, where he had spent his childhood years and adolescence.

Isaacs held office under Turner as Attorney-General from September 1894 until December 1899. The ministry fell on a no-confidence motion, but returned to office eleven months later. Isaacs once again became Attorney-General until his resignation to enter the first Commonwealth House of Representatives.

An active member of the Australian Natives Association, he did not smoke and drank very little alcohol, his only excess being tea-drinking Those who recall his personal habits say that he was always good for a 'cuppa', which he was indefatigable in seeking out.

EARLY IN 1920 Isaacs became the senior Puisne judge, and in April 1930 he succeeded Knox as Chief Justice. He resigned from the court in January 1931 on his appointment as Governor-General of Australia.

In December 1930 Herbert Vere Evatt and Edward Aloysius McTiernan came to the High Court just as Isaacs was leaving it. The decision to make these appointments was taken by the Labor caucus over the opposition of Prime Minister Scullin and Attorney-General, Frank Brennan, who were in England when the appointments were announced.

After months of controversy over his appointment, on Scullin's say-so, Isaacs took the oaths of office as Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia on 22 January 1931. Ironically, Governor-General Isaacs had to swear in the new Lyons government in January 1932.

Not long before the dismissal of

Imprints

Roger Trowbridge

Stamping ground

MOST KIDS IN MY YOUTH collected stamps. Not obsessively, but it filled a gap. It was good for parents, too: a quiet Sunday painstakingly soaking the sixpennies off a small pile of envelopes, drying them and manipulating awkward stamp hinges into place. It was a pastime which was closely linked to family life: Sunday afternoon in the lounge room; envelopes from relatives (birthday cards and post cards mainly), with a few from exotic places contributed by family friends; and grandfather's old album to supplement the collection.

On a more recent Sunday we went with friends from interstate who were keen to visit Melbourne Central. It was new to all of us: to join a largely mesmerised sea of humanity moving slowly and endlessly—filling every space. We drifted with the crowd around the anomaly of the Lead Shot Tower—a fragment of Melbourne's industrial past sealed as an exhibit within the retail spire, not unlike the manner in which Sydney's convict past or Fremantle's dockside past have been scrubbed up and preserved within the tourist and shopping precincts of the Rocks and South Street respectively. At midday, the clock cranked out its routine and the doors of the Daimaru department store swung open. Exquisite timing.

Below us was the 'entertainment'. Youngsters of all ages were swarming across the stage, licking minute pieces of paper in patches of colour on a gigantic wall depicting a landscape of pre-history - complete with inevitable dinosaurs. Stamps! The kids were making a mural out of stamps, in the process promoting The Dinosaur Era stamp issue from Australia Post. This philatelic graffiti, we later discovered had been organised by the Australasian Stamp Dealer's Association. It was designed around an attempt at a Guinness record: the largest mural composed entirely of stamps.

Since my collecting days, stamps for kids has taken on many new dimensions. It has now apparently been absorbed within a mega-dollar international entertainment industry directed, at one level, by Steven Spielberg, and marketed by our own post office. *The Guinness Book of Records* was a nice touch—Melbourne has the biggest used-stamp mural. A modest contribution to the city in need of a spectacle.

The adoption of a 'dinosaur' theme also marked a further stage in the blurring of the public/private/community/commercial divide. It compounded our current economic and cultural complexity: one all-encompassing marketplace of products, services, experiences. The setting provided a new public forum for the personal and usual activity of stamp collecting. It was now located in the midst of the multi-dimensional world of Sunday shopping—a spectrum of retail trade-cum-enteratinment which extends from trash-and-treasure stalls to international conglomerates.

Sunday afternoons have changed forever. Private leisure is public culture. We walked out into the street. On stage the youthful performers from Johnny Young's Talent School began the next segment of entertainment ... ■

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the 'Big Fella', Jack Lang as NSW premier in March 1932, Isaacs in company with Sir Philip Game and other State Governors attended the ceremonies marking the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Captain de Groot rode up to the official ribbon which he eventually severed with his sword proclaiming, 'I declare this bridge open in the name of His Majesty the King and the decent people of New South Wales'.

Isaacs was Governor-General during the Great Depression, from 22 January 1931 until 23 January 1936, when his successor Lord Gowrie was sworn in. Isaacs was then 81.

This scholarly, well-written biography should be read by all Australians wanting an insight not only into Isaacs but the urbane and witty Sir Zelman Cowen as well. For those of us interested in the arcane it should perhaps be registered that Sir Zelman is currently number one ticket holder for St Kilda. ■

Ross Fitzgerald is associate professor of history and politics at Griffith University.

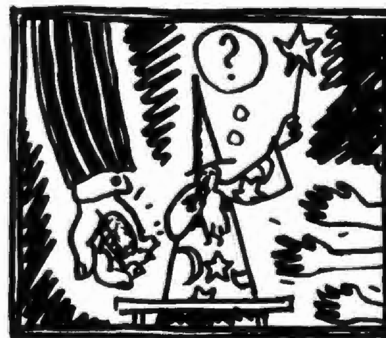
Books: 4

Brian Toohey

Some more equal than others

Economic Inequality, Frank Stilwell, Pluto, Sydney, 1993 ISBN 1 86403 000 3 RRP $11.95; **International Best Practice; A critical Guide**, Peter Ewer (et al) Pluto, Sydney, 1993, ISBN 0 949138 93 2 RRP $5.95

FRANK STILWELL PACKS A LOT into his 100 pages. He pulls together the evidence pointing to a growing disparity in the distribution of income and wealth in Australia and puts the case that halting the trend need not entail a trade-off against economic efficiency. He emphasises the tension between democratic notions such as 'one vote, one value' and the existence of extreme divisions of economic power. He examines underlying causes and advances an agenda for change.



Along the way, he is careful to note the arguments of Ann Harding and others that government spending in Australia has significant redistributive effects. This is contrasted, however, with changes which have made the tax system less progressive during Labor's eleven years in power. Nor have Labor's adjustments to the social safety net been sufficient to prevent the emergence of the growing underclass identified by Stilwell.

Not all of Stilwell's proposals will appeal. In the wake of the state bank disasters in Victoria and South Australia, little would seem to be achieved by expanding public ownership of business enterprises. On the other hand, his proposal for a guaranteed minimum income could well prove attractive but needs far more work. Whatever approach is adopted, it is hard to dispute his contention that any serious attempt to improve the opportunities available to the disadvantaged—the miracle of economic growth notwithstanding—will require Labor to drop its perverse commitment to cutting taxes.

Its last budget gave further tax cuts, reinforcing Australia's position as the lightest-taxed country in the OECD. Now the push is to reduce tax levels to those applying in some of the more flint-hearted of the 'tiger' economies. A Confucian focus on family responsibility, we're told, should obviate the need for a government-funded safety net.

The obstacles to recovering even a minor portion of the large tax cuts handed out in recent years have been

highlighted by the recent outcry against the proposed jobs levy to help the long-term unemployed. Curiously enough, one of the most outspoken opponents of the levy has been the former deputy governor of the Reserve Bank, John Phillips, who led the discussion on unemployment at a conference on social justice sponsored by the Catholic bishops in Sydney last July. Phillips is not without qualifications on the topic. As the Reserve's chief anti-inflation hawk, he did as much as any other single person in Australia to help push unemployment past the one million mark.

HIS ANTAGONISM to the levy is reflected in the attitudes of Labor appointees to advisory positions in the Reserve Bank, the Treasury and the Industry Commission. The mindset is typified by the commission's disparaging references recently to the 'warm poor' who had made the quite rational decision to move from cold, southern cities bereft of job opportunities.

The 24-page pamphlet by Peter Ewer and five co-authors deals with that favourite catchphrase in the federal bureaucracy—international best practice. Unless we match international best practice, we are constantly warned, jobs will continue to be lost to the newly industrialising nations.

The pamphlet does not reject the need for increased competitiveness, but criticises 'reform' programs which see a preoccupation with cost-cutting and job 'shedding' as synonymous with international best practice. Despite its brevity, it manages to put a compelling argument that something more imaginative than trying to get down to Bangladeshi wage levels—or abolishing paid meal breaks as suggested by the Bureau of Industry Economics—will be needed if reasonable living standards are to be enjoyed by the great bulk of Australians.What both publications remind us is that a concern with inequality need not be motivated by the 'politics of envy'. It is possible to remain unperturbed about someone else having more money than you do, and still feel an obligation to those at the bottom of the heap. ■

Brian Toohey is a Sydney journalist, columnist and commentator.

Bare-faced Madonna

IDOLS

CATRIONA JACKSON

Photo: from the Girly Show *program*

LATE IN 1992, just after Madonna released her extravagantly publicised *Sex* book, *60 Minutes* reporter Richard Carleton flew to the US to get the lowdown for Australian viewers. Halfway through the interview he asked her 'But what about where you're straddled across the mirror?' 'What about it?' she replied. 'But it's disgusting!' The smile spread across her face: 'I think that says a lot more about you than it does about me.'

Whether or not you share Carleton's disgust, Madonna's answer amply demonstrates the fact that her greatest talent lies in her ability to provoke reactions. The fiction would have us believe that authors and journalists stand at an objective distance from their subjects; the fact is that few of them are immune to provocation. Most of what's been said and written about Madonna (and there has been an avalanche of it) does indeed say more about the author than it does about the subject.

There are a number of explanations for this. Much of the material is so vacuous that it says very little about anything, including its supposed subject. But, more importantly, although Madonna may bore some people she mostly either attracts or repels with an intensity that turns writing about her into a highly personal—and sometimes extreme—reaction. *The New York Post* responded to her semi-documentary film *In Bed With Madonna* with the headline: 'What a Tramp! Vulgar Madonna is the Degenerate Queen of Sleaze.' Perhaps more subtle, but no less venomous was the *Good Weekend*'s captioning of a particularly unflattering photo: 'Pop god-

dess Madonna is only 35, but her real age must be measured in celebrity years, which, like dog years, mount up in a short time.'

These are extreme reactions, but they point to the problem: discussion of Madonna suffers from more than the usual restrictions or complicating constraints of biography. Outrageous she might be, but despite, or perhaps because of her fame, Madonna herself seems personally rather boring. The clearest look we've had at her to date was *In Bed With Madonna*, released in 1991. In the film she seems bossy, petulant, obsessive and funny only in the meanest and easiest ways. The scene in which she and comedian-friend Sandra Bernhard 'hang around' in Madonna's fantastically pricey suite discussing their 'entertainment options' gives us a devastating picture of the life she leads.

But, paradoxically, it is impossible to know what Madonna is 'really' like because she is such a public person. Warren Beatty, no stranger to fame and display himself, comments during *In Bed With Madonna*, 'She doesn't want to live off camera ... much less talk'. So if biography is in part about revealing what is hidden, or private, what do you do if very little seems to fall into the category? Why bother writing at all? It is clear from the attempts made to chronicle her life so far, that this is not a question her so-called biographers have pondered deeply.

In order to say anything of interest about Madonna, you need to be fully aware of the nature of her talent, and of her fame. Writing on the inner sleeve of Madonna's 1990 release, *The Immaculate Collection*, Gene Sculatti complains that the media has concentrated on everything except 'her specialty—the pre-eminent thing is that she makes music'. Madonna herself does not expect us to be quite so naive. Towards the end of *In Bed With Madonna* she says: 'I know I'm not the best singer. I know I'm not the best dancer. But I'm not interested in that. I'm interested in pushing people's buttons.' Although some pretend to be outraged at being so manipulated, it cannot be said we were not fully informed. The world has swallowed Madonna whole—as a singer, dancer and actor, but primarily as a *provocateuse*. And it is the breadth of her popularity, and her influence, that demands our attention.

Vogue maintains that every eight-year-old from 'here to Manila knows her name', while English academic Hilary Mantel says her appeal is to children between 10 and 12 years old. But she is not just an unusually long-lasting pop-sensation. Courses on Madonna are taught at universities all over America, including Harvard and the University of Colorado. Dreams about Madonna, from women aged between 13 and 61, have been collected and published by an American post-graduate student. And the book shows that reactions to her are surprisingly varied. Most women dreamed of her as a friend or adviser, to some she took the role of a critic, and, inevitably, some dreams about her were sexual.

I don't want to get my power by planting my foot on a man's chest in front of tens of thousands of people, but I don't think Madonna is telling us this is the only way. If she is, surely we are smart enough to ignore her.

This diversity of appeal and influence was reflected in the composition of the crowd at her *Girly Show* concert in Melbourne last November. The expensive front seats were filled with Melbourne's gay establishment, both male and female. Further back were pockets of teenagers wearing baseball caps and pants wide enough to launch a ship. Some very young kids had their parents along. Others, like me, were old enough to remember when Madonna wore bobby socks with lime-green court shoes.

The concert reminded me of something that—if you don't see her live—you will never know about. As a performer, Madonna is terrifically good fun. And the rigours of live performance cut through the layers of gloss and hype. Surrounded by tens of thousands of dancing fans at the MCG, she looked very much like a girl having a damn good time. Some of the much promoted and discussed 'sexual' material from her latest album, *Erotica*, didn't quite work, not because it was too shocking but because it was a little dull.

In order to keep the world in thrall and entertained, Madonna has dashed frantically through opinions, hairstyles, and whole images. Her talent for such rapid and dramatic public change has bought the word 're-invention', once academic-speak, into common usage. She has been accused of cynically marketing herself to minority groups with no real understanding of their plight. Certainly her flirtation with bisexuality, and her oft-expressed desire to be black does nothing to quell this suspicion. British columnist Julie Burchill accuses her of being a fraud, preaching about down-and-dirty issues from an ivory tower. Certainly, Madonna has seen little of the seamy side of life. Despite her stories of a rough street childhood, she was brought up in a middle-class home and educated in Catholic schools.

But you can drown in discussions of what Madonna 'means'. Seeing her live reminds you of what you liked about her in the first place. I was 15 when *Like a Virgin* became Madonna's first number-one single, and after an adolescence filled with the *Major Tom* austerity of David Bowie, and the pap of ABBA, I found her enormously refreshing. She stuck out her tummy like a child, and danced madly, all the time displaying vigorous female sexuality. So when people ask what all the fuss is about Madonna I think the simplest, and most demythologising answer is that she can get up in front of an MCG full of people and make them happy, make them feel good about themselves.

I don't want to get my power by planting my foot on a man's chest in front of tens of thousands of people, but I don't think Madonna is telling us this is the only way. If she is, surely we are smart enough to ignore her. ■

Catriona Jackson is a freelance journalist.

GEOFFREY MILNE

The musical rampant

Towards a national theatre

ANYONE WHO PAYS even passing attention to the performing arts will be aware that the Australian stage is awash with musicals. (The same thing, of course, is also true of London and New York.) Since the mid-1980s, hardly an Australian citizen could have escaped the barrage of advertisements for shows like *Cats*, *Les Misérables*, *Phantom of the Opera*, *42nd Street*, *The King and I* or *South Pacific*.

Hundreds of thousands of Australians have responded by brandishing their plastic cards for tickets and even for interstate bus and plane packages to see these block-busting entertainments. For example, when the London-based impresario Cameron Mackintosh announced back in1986 that *Cats* (his hit show which was running to capacity business in Sydney at the time) would under no circumstances ever leave that city, hordes of Melbournians and Brisbanites immediately booked special tourist packages to Sydney, so as not to miss out on that peculiarly vacuous but seemingly compulsory night out.

Only a few months later, *Cats* moved into Her Majesty's in Melbourne and Sydneysiders who had missed it started flocking to Melbourne. Since then, the show and a dozen others like it have attracted huge box-office business in all the major Australian cities, usually with record advance sales and publicity.

And pretty much every time a show has moved out of the Theatre Royal or Her (or His) Majesty's after seemingly endless tenure, another has been instantly ready to take its place. An extreme example of this occurred last July when *Phantom* packed out of The Princess in Melbourne after 31 months (en route for Sydney's Theatre Royal); the stage crew simply refitted their lights and their T-shirts and received a brief return season of *Cats* (en route for South-East Asia). Mackintosh's *Phantom*, of course, had in turn replaced his previous Princess occupant, *Les Mis*, which had, in its turn, replaced *Cats* in Sydney's Theatre Royal back in 1987!

It should be made clear that this seemingly cosy arrangement for the staging of overseas musical comedies is not the sole prerogative of Cameron Mackintosh (like a latter-day J.C. Williamson) and that it is not restricted to the recently penned effusions of the Tim Rices and Andrew Lloyd-Webbers of this world. The truth is that Australians are flocking to musicals of all kinds and from all eras. Even the subsidised State theatre companies are getting in on the act that their commercial brethren have opened up, many of them clubbing together to mount interstate co-productions or simply 'buying-in' saleable 'product' from their successful (and risk-taking) interstate colleagues.

Until the end of October last year, 22 large-scale musical productions were staged in Australia by major commercial and/or subsidised theatre companies. This number, incidentally, corresponds almost exactly with the 1992 national figures and at least 10 of the big shows that were going around in 1992 were still on offer somewhere in Australia last year. Much the same was true in 1991.

I should point out that my figures here are based on personal observation (I see upwards of 150 professional theatre productions a year in Melbourne and a number interstate) and on study of The Australian and New Zealand Theatre Record, an excellent monthly published by the Australian Theatre Studies Centre of the University of New South Wales.

The point will not be missed that Australia has almost reverted to its theatrical touring heyday of the turn of the century, inasmuch as virtually every big musical that is staged nowadays is destined for a national tour. *Cats* and *Les Mis* have been seen just about everywhere; *42nd Street* is on target for the same fate. The so-called RQTC/MTC production of *High Society* (adapted from the MGM movie by Carol Burns, initially for the State Theatre Company of South Australia in 1992) was seen in Melbourne until early February 1993, then in Brisbane at the Suncorp Theatre (February/March), then in Canberra (at the Canberra Theatre) in late March.

After a recess (and some re-working and cast-changes), it recommenced life in Perth (at His Majesty's) in September; it transferred to Her Majesty's in Adelaide for most of October and then to the Lyric in the Queensland Performing Arts Complex for a season in later October/November before returning to Melbourne for Christmas in the Comedy Theatre.

Similarly national exposure was achieved by Australian dancer David Atkins' *Hot Shoe Shuffle*, which also began life in 1992, in Sydney. In 1993, this tribute to the tap-dancing heroes of American song-and-dance shows was seen by adoring audiences in Melbourne (at the Maj, in January and

February), Sydney (at The Footbridge, from May to July), Adelaide (the Maj, in August and September) and even at the Seagulls Rugby League Club on the Tweed in September and October.

NOT TO BE DENIED, Australian singer John Waters managed to find enough interest throughout 1993 in his tribute to John Lennon (*Looking Through a Glass Onion*, which also premiered in 1992) to take it to Perth in January, to Adelaide in February, to Brisbane in June, to Sydney in July/August and to Hobart later in August. The West Australian Aboriginal musical, *Bran Nue Dae* (which had also been seen in Sydney, Canberra and elsewhere in Australia after its premiere in Perth in 1990) finally made it to Melbourne in 1993, courtesy of the MTC and Playing Australia, the Commonwealth Government's admirable initiative designed to foster the touring of high-quality Australian performing arts material.

Even the not-so-successful revival of the 32-year-old *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* managed to move on from its Footbridge Theatre premiere in Sydney in January to tour to Brisbane in May and to Perth in June. Another revival, the Rice/Lloyd-Webber *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat*, was seen by audiences in Melbourne (at the State Theatre in January), Brisbane (at the Lyric in March) and Sydney (at Her Majesty's in a season beginning on 1 May).

Others were not so lucky: Melbourne critics wondered why *Grease* was done at all in a two-week transfer from Sydney to the State Theatre in May/June while a proposed tour of Dan Goggin's *Nunsense II* (a sequel to the tackily-billed 'funny nunny musical' *Nunsense*) failed to survive the mauling it received in Sydney during its 13-day season for Malcolm C. Cooke and Edgley Ventures at the Metro over the same period in May/June.

Even Lloyd-Webber had a rare flop with the much-vaunted Gale Edwards' Australian production of *Aspects of Love*, which died early at Melbourne's Comedy Theatre in May after transferring from Sydney's Theatre Royal, where it had premiered the previous November. This one-tune-wonder ('Love; love changes everything') was never going to be rescued by high-technology staging or big-name performers.

A couple of all-imported black American tribute shows also enjoyed only modest success in 1993. These were the rather tired and lacklustre Fats Waller tribute, *Ain't Misbehavin* (which played in Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney from February to May) and the slightly brighter *Five Guys Named Moe*, a tribute to the songwriter Louis Jordan, which opened in Melbourne's Athenaeum in October and hung on until early in the new year.

Undaunted, other entrepreneurs preserved with the genre, notably the Sydney Theatre Company and the Victorian State Opera. Neither of these has been reluctant in recent years to embrace the commercial possibilities of the musical, and 1993 was no exception for them. The STC weighed in with a production (delayed by problems inherent in high-technology staging!) of Stephen Sondheim's *Into the Woods* in the Drama Theatre of the Sydney Opera House from March to May. Why, one wonders, do we see so little in Australia of Sondheim's work, since he is arguably the most effective of modern-day American exponents of the musical genre? The fact that the one other professional Australian Sondheim production in 1993, *Follies*, got only a one-night stand for the Melbourne International Festival of the Arts in September—in a concert version—adds force to this question.

THE VSO BROUGHT US not one (as is customary) but two old musicals in 1993—the surely dated *Annie Get Your Gun* in September and the oddly even more old-fashioned, albeit more recently written, *My Fair Lady* in November. *West Side Story* is to follow in 1994.

As if to rub salt into the wounds of an avowed non-lover of tired old foreign musicals, the 44-year-old classic of the American musical stage, Rogers and Hammerstein's *South Pacific*, has begun doing the rounds of the now well-trod circuit of state performing arts centres and commercial theatres (beginning in the Adelaide Festival Theatre in June, like *The King and I* a couple of years ago) and is due into the State Theatre of the Victorian Arts Centre in January, by which time I shall be safely on holidays. Over Christmas, however, I did manage to catch (and to enjoy considerably) a splendidly produced musical adaptation of the evergreen Dickens story, *Scrooge—the Musical*, in the Princess Theatre.

It is clear that musicals are all the rage—the genre for the nervous 1990s, as some have put it. Leonard Radic, writing in *The Age* (1 January 1993), points to the recession as a reason for the popularity of the musical. 'In hard times,' he argues, 'people look for distraction'. This may be true, but musical entertainments have been popular in Australia for a very long time. What has certainly facilitated the success of big shows in recent times has been the enormous development in theatre technology, such as computerised scenery and lighting changes. Likewise, there is now a chain of sophisticated new theatres in the various state arts centres (together with a network of energetically entrepreneurial arts centre trusts) which complements the chain of older commercial theatres and newer commercial managements.

It is interesting that blockbuster revivals like *The King and I* and *South Pacific* have been collaborations between the commercial Malcolm Cooke and the state-subsidised Adelaide Festival Centre managements. In other words, there is a strong infrastructure that is supportive of large-scale touring and audiences are demanding and getting value for money in terms of production values, even if what they are seeing is often the triumph of form over content.

All of this is making it increasingly difficult for the non-musical sector, but not entirely impossible. For musicals still do not constitute the entirety of the Australian theatre repertoire, however rampant they may be at the moment. I shall return to the question of content next month, beginning with Australia's leading playwright, William Shakespeare. ■

Geoffrey Milne is head of the division of drama at La Trobe University and a drama critic for the ABC.

Top of the list

Schindler's List, dir.Steven Spielberg (Greater Union, and some Hoyts and independent cinemas) In *Schindler's List* Spielberg largely avoids the sentimentality that ruined *The Colour Purple.* This is no mean feat, given the subject matter—the Holocaust—and his personal attachment to the story.

Based on Thomas Keneally's Booker Prize-winning novel *Schindler's Ark*, the film tells the true story of Oskar Schindler, a German businessman and rake who went to occupied Poland in 1939 to make his fortune using forced Jewish labour. Schindler oiled the Nazi war machine with bribes, wine, women and charm, but slowly came to see his workers as individuals. He later risked his life and blew all his money saving the lives of more than 1100 of 'his' Jews.

Spielberg's penchant for special effects is here sublimated into passion for detail—real locations in Krakow, such as Schindler's former factory and apartment, and realistic sets for the Plaszow labour camp. Unlike most films set in World War II, this has an authentic look (shot by Janusz Kaminski in black and white with a lot of hand-held camera work) and even an authentic texture (18,000 costumes in tweed, lace, fur, silk, rough cotton and soiled rags).

Irish actor Liam Neeson (*Ethan Frome*) brings a big, raw-boned resemblance to the part of Schindler, coping well with the mindshift from exploiter to saviour while being no saint. British stage actor Ralph Fiennes both repels and fascinates as the psychopathic commandant, Amon Goeth, but the central performance comes from Ben Kingsley as Itzhak Stern, the dour Jewish accountant who ran Schindler's company and quietly needled his conscience.

The film runs for an often-harrowing three hours 15 minutes, enlivened by hope and occasional grim humour. It brings home the horror of the Holocaust—and the echo of today's resurgent xenophobia—because the ensemble cast turns victims into characters with individual stories (as did the book).

—Mark Skulley

Remains to be seen

The Remains of the Day, dir. James Ivory (Hoyts). James Ivory and producer Ismail Merchant have made a career out of turning impressive works of literature into impressive films. This is the latest translation and probably the best yet.

The literary target this time is the Japanese writer Kazuo Ishiguro, whose novel of the same name tells the story of a loyal English butler in a large aristocratic household. The butler is reflecting, under a new American employer, on his years of unquestioning fealty to an amiable, dim-witted aristocrat (played with stylish, if predictable, vacancy by James Fox) who used his home and position to promote Nazism in Britain before World War II.

Critics have begun to complain that the Merchant/Ivory films are too pretty; that the film makers' fascination with the vanished worlds and upper-class social orders they portray results in a glamorisation, and even endorsement, of pretty unpleasant values. Sometimes there is a little truth in this, but not much, and in the present instance very little indeed.

The portrait of the butler, Stevens (Anthony Hopkins at his best), is painful and moving, and much of our sympathy for him comes from insight into the ways in which his stiff life of devotion has maimed him. This is not only in relation to the ghastly politics of his master (and its implications for the employment of Jewish servants, for instance) but as concerns his own capacity for love.

Enter Emma Thompson as the housekeeper, Miss Kenton. Mutual attraction founders on the rock of Stevens' dedication to an unbending ideal of 'dignity' fixed in his conception of his role. It is this stultifying role morality that he begins, painfully, in what remains of the day, to see through and—just possibly—to break free of.

—Tony Coady

Eureka Street Film Competition

Hey, it's the International Year of the Family! Or, as they would have put it in *The Godfather*, 'Ya gonna marry my daughter, huh?' Write a suitably witty caption to this charming still from Mr Coppola's movie, and we'll award two tickets, to the film of your choice, for the answer we like best. Send entries to: *Eureka Street* Film Competition, PO Box 553, Richmond, VIC 3121.

Growing pains

The Snapper, dir. Stephen Frears (independent cinemas) is the second of Roddy Doyle's Barrytown novels to be filmed, and like Alan Parker's film of *The Commitments* it successfully captures the qualities which have made that Dublin working-class family, the Rabbittes (here renamed the Curleys), heroes to millions, Irish or not.

Though the films differ in tone and are the work of very different directors, each respects the essential strength of Doyle's work, an ear for authentic dialogue. In part, no doubt, this is because Doyle himself wrote both screenplays but it is also because Frears (*My Beautiful Laundrette, Dangerous Liaisons*, *The Grifters*) and Parker (*Bugsy Malone, Midnight Express, Angel Heart*) have been able to restrain themselves from too much

cinematic tinkering. (Though not from chicanery with the paperwork: the Rabbittes became the Curleys because Alan Parker's production company for *The Commitments* now owns the name 'Rabbitte'.)

The common cast member of the two films is Colm Meany, who is superb as the Rabbitte/Curley *paterfamilias*, Dessie. In *The Snapper* Dessie must contend with the pregnancy of his eldest daughter, Sharon (Tina Kellegher), and with the prospect that the father of her child may be their odious middle-aged neighbour, George Burgess (Pat Laffan). The film tells how Sharon, in Roddy Doyle's phrase, turns an accident into an achievement, and how Dessie, his wife Kay (Ruth McCabe) and the rest of their brood rise above the various kinds of petty-mindedness that a single mother can bring out in communities where everyone knows everyone else's business.

The Snapper proclaims that family life is A Good Thing but, unlike the legion of Hollywood films which do the same, it manages to endorse its exemplary family without drowning them in sugar syrup. And *that* little achievement is A Good Thing, too.

—Ray Cassin

Change of life

Mrs Doubtfire, dir. Chris Columbus (Hoyts). Male actors doing the gender shuffle are nothing new. Think of Jack Lemmon and Tony Curtis in *Some Like It Hot*. Or, if you're a little younger, Dustin Hoffman as *Tootsie* comes to mind. Now it's Robin Williams donning the make-up. *Mrs Doubtfire* presents him with a role tailor-made for his eccentricities, and Williams, in the role of out-of-work actor Daniel Hillard, exploits it beautifully.

After 14 years of marriage Hillard's wife, Miranda (Sally Fields), has resumed her career in interior design and is on the way up. One afternoon she comes home from the office to find that Daniel has hired a mobile zoo for their son's birthday. Amid mayhem she kicks the animals out, and then Daniel as well.

Divorce proceedings end with Miranda gaining custody of their three children. Daniel has access visits but being a Saturday father is unendurable, and when Miranda advertises for an after-school housekeeper he resorts to desperate measures. Daniel gets his hair done, slides into a body suit and knocks on the door of his former home as the 60-year-old Mrs Doubtfire, complete with dubious English accent.

Will the children find out, will the parents get back together again, will Miranda's developing romance with an old flame take off? Columbus manages to keep a fair degree of uncertainty in the viewer's mind, although well before the end of the film some sort of happy ending seems inevitable.

Mrs Doubtfire tackles the complex and sad reality of marriage breakdown and its effects on children. There are some none-too-subtle messages about the need for partners to communicate and the importance of loving your kids. Nothing we didn't already know, but it doesn't hurt to hear it again.

—Brad Halse

Junk food

Addams Family Values, dir. Barry Sonnenfeld (Greater Union); *The Beverly Hillbillies*, dir. Penelope Spheeris (Hoyts); *Robin Hood: Men in Tights*, dir. Mel Brooks (Hoyts). Nostalgia can provide sustenance when thoroughly modern fare seems indigestible, and this summer the filmgoer's diet is loaded with calories meant to stir the memory. Among the comedies there is the southern-fried goodness of *The Beverly Hillbillies* and that exotic second course, *Addams Family Values*.

Unfortunately the taste is sour. *Addams Family Values* does not do justice to the '60s television series. The quirky one-liners are fine in a half-hour sprint but can't carry an unimaginative script for 90 minutes.

Uncle Fester (Christopher Lloyd) is the centre of this poorly directed story. He becomes infatuated with the nanny whom Gomez (Raul Julia) and Morticia (Anjelica Houston) hire for their new baby. The nanny (Joan Cusack) turns out to be one of the many female serial killers now running around film sets and tries to bump off Fester for his millions. The saving grace is a bit of spirit shown by Christina Ricci as Wednesday Addams.

It's hard to determine how *The Beverly Hillbillies* differs. It too is a resurrected television show about an extended family unable to fit in with society; it too features a *femme fatale* trying to steal the bucks; and it too has a cast that flounders except for a lone hand (in this case Lily Tomlin as Miss Hathaway). The cameos by Dolly Parton, Zsa Zsa Gabor and Buddy Ebsen as Barnaby Jones provide a bit of interest as do the out-takes that are packaged with the closing credits. The actors' asides beat their scripted lines hands down.

On the other hand there is Mel Brooks' *Men in Tights*. Not only does it send up other Robin Hood films but along the way it takes a poke at *The Godfather*, Malcolm X, the Rodney King trial and even the Kennedy assassination. The fun is propelled by a mixture of offbeat humour and sight gags in the tradition of *Get Smart* and *Blazing Saddles*.

What separates this film from the others is that there is no second-rate storyline to retard the humour—Brooks just doesn't bother with a plot. He also gets a good response from his cast. Cary Elwes (Robin), Amy Yasbeck (Maid Marian), and Roger Rees (the Sheriff of Rottingham) deliver theatrical camp which is complemented by the idiocy of Dom Deluise, Dick Van Patten and Mel Brooks himself.

—Jon Greenaway

Alas, poor Adolf

Daens , dir. Stijn Coninx (independent cinemas) is a tale about the Catholic Church and its discontents: priest takes papal social teaching seriously and encourages poverty-stricken parishioners to resist their lot; priest's actions horrify powerful conservative Catholics, who lobby against him in Rome; priest is repudiated by church authorities.

Sounds familiar? It could describe many parts of the Catholic world today, but in this case the priest is Adolf Daens, who tried to organise textile workers in the Belgian city of Aalst during the 1890s. Daens was a sort of Flemish Romero, though his martyrdom took the form

of ostracism rather than murder.

On the principle that a bit of history can make people think harder about the present, *Daens* should have had a lot going for it. Unfortunately, it hasn't. The events of Adolf Daen's life don't need to be turned into melodrama for audiences to get the point, but a cornball melodrama is what Stijn Conninx has made.

I managed to find the noble Daens (Jan Decleir) tiresome by about a third of the way through the film; it really isn't necessary to play stirring music every time an actor walks into frame, and to place an aura round his head, in order to let us know that he's the good guy. Nor is it necessary to have the fiendish factory owners puffing on cigars or wolfing down cream cake every time they plot to discredit poor Adolf—we already knew that they were rich *and* bad.

Most of the cast seem to be comfortable playing cardboard-cutout characters, though there are scenes when Jan Decleir hints that he is capable of more. When he preaches at Mass, and when he addresses the Belgian parliament, Decleir displays the kind of oratorical passion which must have made Adolf Daens much-loved and much-loathed. It's a pity Conninx had to waste this talent in the rest of the film.

—Ray Cassin

Encore, encore

Tous Les Matins du Monde, dir. Alain Corneau (independent cinemas). So many directors slap on music like pancake makeup, to patch their technique. Corneau is not one of them. Music is the *raison d'être* of this sable piece of French film making, set on the Jansenist country edges of Louis XIV's *Grand Siècle*, and starring some of France's finest actors at full stretch.

The story sets two professional musicians in collision. The older, violist Monsieur de Sainte Colombe (faultlessly played by Jean-Pierre Marielle), is in a state of obsessive mourning for his wife, and deflects the energy of his misery into his playing. Or perhaps it is the other way around: his playing fans his solipsism.

Into Sainte Colombe's life, and that of his two beautiful and musically accomplished daughters, Madeleine and Toinette (Anne Bochet and Carole Richert—both perfect performers) comes young Marin Marais, a precocious and worldly talent in search of a musical master, and a lot else besides.

Plot it yourself from there. But what you won't anticipate is the density and richness of the script, which combines a provocative exploration of music and aesthetics ('there is something not quite human about music') with Gallic disdain for the short attention span. Nor could you conjure the sensuous gravity of the cinematography. Think of Vermeer.

The film covers almost the lifetime of its principal characters, giving Corneau licence to use Guillaume Depardieu and his father, Gérard, as the young and the aged Marin. Their performances are too good to draw any accusations of gimmickry. Depardieu *père* is ageing as fruitily as Marcello Mastroianni, so his Marin, pounding out Lully's *March for the Ceremony of the Turks* in Louis wig and an excess of lace, is rancid and tragic. But St Colombe's Jansenist austerities, too, have their brutality. The bridge, for the two men, is the truth demanded of them by music.

And what music! Played and conducted by bass violist Jordi Savall, it is so extraordinary that I'd happily watch the film again with my head in a bag.

—Morag Fraser

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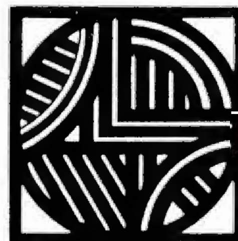

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Conversations

Edmund Campion

The right note of hilarity

The night before she died she wrote me a long letter about our friendship. A covering letter told of her last hours. She had been admitted to hospital once again, and her friends rallied round so well that her room in the hospital seemed like an open house. Aware that she was dying, she telephoned more friends and wrote to others. On her bedside table were a photograph of the family, the AA prayer (whose opening line, 'God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change', was apposite) and a postcard I had sent from Sydney to say people here were praying for her.

One of her doctors spoke of his disappointment that results had not been better. She reassured him that failure would be worthwhile if it led to success later on: better to have tried and failed than not to have tried at all. If they kept at it, some future sufferer would benefit.

So she got through the last night of her life. She persuaded a friend to take over her Meals on Wheels roster; and arranged for someone else to play the piano at the next senior citizens' party. The local priest looked in and offered to hear her confession; instead, she jokingly wanted to hear his sins, and embarrassed him with her questions. She finished her letter to me at 12.30 in the morning.

It was the most extraordinary letter I have ever received. For it faced death with open eyes and with what the men and women of the Middle Ages called hilarity. In modern English hilarity is a somewhat debased word, connoting mindless cheerfulness and high jinks. But to the Middle Ages it was a prime virtue which recognised the hand of the Maker in all life's journey; which gave the intellect's assent to the high and the low notes of life; which saw that all of life is a gift and gifts demands thankfulness; and that death is a part of life. Hilarity is the virtue of a mature adult person, a full-throated, yea-saying to the mystery which lies at the heart of being. Given the cruel abruption of her life, I could have expected that final letter to be deep-dyed with a mood brewed from range, frustration, begrudgement and complaint. Instead—hilarity.

The next day her friends were back at the bedside. Later one of them wrote to me.

'On Sunday just after 1pm she was talking to me and then just lay back on her pillow and was silent for a long time. Then she smiled. When I asked her what she was thinking that was funny, she said, "Just my life. It just seems to be passing right before my eyes—everything that has happened—only it's clearer, like I knew the reasons for it all happening. It's just so clear now!" And with that she slipped into unconsciousness. Several doctors shifted machines of all sorts into the room. One of them, a good friend of hers, said, "I promised her two months ago that if her heart stopped beating I had to make every effort to get it started again. Because she said it wouldn't be her heart that would let her down." So the minute her heart stopped, he and several others worked to get it going again. He succeeded and after a few minutes a very ghastly white-faced woman looked up and said, "It was worth it—tell Ed." And that was it. She was gone.'

I thought back, then, to the afternoon she had come to the presbytery door, a pretty young woman with a tiny voice. Soon after her husband died, she had discovered she was pregnant and friends had encouraged her to come to Sydney for an abortion. I think by that time she knew she was carrying twins. All morning she had walked round town, tossing the question back and forth in her mind until she lobbed up at the cathedral, where a priest suggested she see me. I don't remember what was said, although from later experience I imagine that she did most of the talking, using me as a sympathetic sounding board. Anyway, she went back to Melbourne and in time had the twins and I began to get used to her telephone calls late at night. Thus we came to know each other over the telephone.

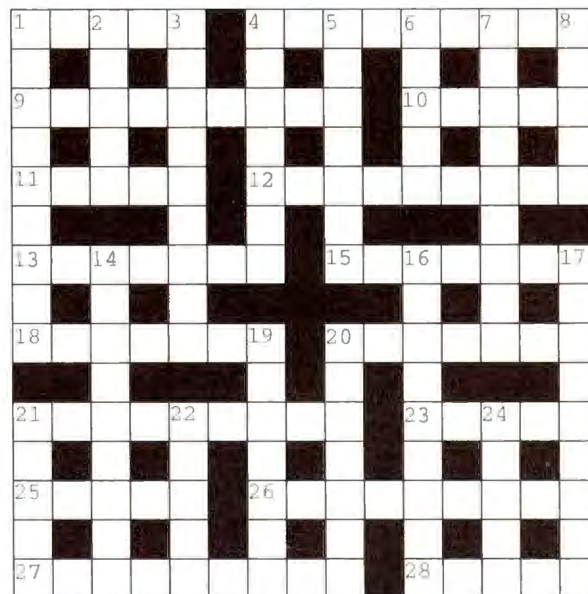
She had been a science student at Melbourne University when she met a seminarian, who soon became an ex-seminarian and married her. They had two girls and then her husband died in a car smash. Her family was wealthy, so she was able to go back to university, enrolling in medicine. She was a brilliant student, well able to keep up with the work. Her aim was to become a gynaecologist, to serve women poorer than herself.

Nevertheless, life continued its sport with her. She would telephone to tell me the latest mishaps, although for some events that word is too light. In her catalogue of disasters the worst was when her twins were killed in freak accidents. Across the late night telephone connection I would strain to hear her faint voice and offer some response. I began to expect trouble when she rang.

Nothing, however, prepared me for the call I got at the end of a long weekend. It was a Melbourne hospital trying to make contact with her. She had been booked into the hospital for the next day, possibly to begin a course of treatment. But she was undecided whether to undergo the treatment or not—it was some new drug with unknown consequences—and she had said she must first fly to Sydney to discuss it with me. I was not in Sydney, alas, having gone to the country for the weekend; and so I missed her.

Distressed at missing her, I flew to Melbourne a few days later. We had lunch at Florentino's and then I took her to the National Gallery of Victoria. The new gallery buildings had opened only a few years earlier and I loved going there. This day I figured that if our conversation got too heavy we could distance ourselves from it by looking at paintings. So it proved. In particular, we kept coming back to a

Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no.20, February 1994



Devised by Joan Nowotny IBVM

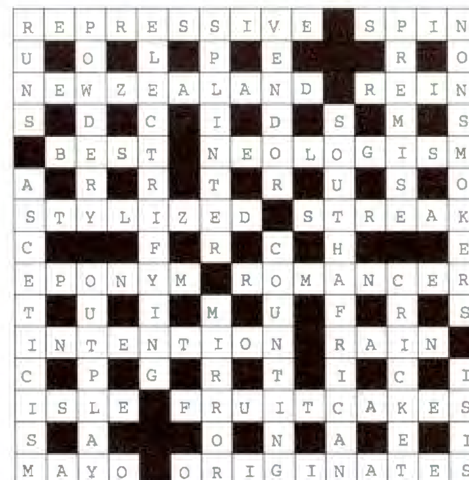
ACROSS

1 Net 100 for the tragic king. (5)
4 In the conflagration, George sacks the fighters. (9)
9 After the terrible scene, rant madly, springing up again. (9)
10 Allude to freer arrangement. (5)
11 Do I see a colder creation? Sounds like it! (5)
12 At the Astoria an evening of chaos? Nevertheless, preferable to these health farms (9)
13 'I'm holy.' A wicked lie! (7)
15 Remark about road excavation was cruel but incisive. (7).
18 Des holds piece inside, and goes out. (7)
20 The family, a model tribe, mingled in church to see the priest wearing this head-piece ... (7)
21 ... and singing 'Onward_____ soldiers'. (9)
23 Afterwards they heard him preach pompously at zero speed! (5)
25 'If you case the joint for the auditor, I'll worry about the Tsar's edict.' (5)
26 Land of curious, plain, trees, without right foliage. (9)
27 Possibly take ship with British leader; alternatively use wheels on these ways (4,5)
28 Evidently, it was only too easy—nodding off in the church assembly. (5)

DOWN

1 In a mad fit, 'e cried wildly; 'e ought to be registered mad! (9)
2 What a rotten nuisance—producing boredom! (5)
3 The river rose in the storm, and flowed into the dam (9)
4 Boldly confronts the animals—about right (7)
6 At the beginning, put your fist right in and you'll win. (5)
5 In the place he sat, an icicle formed. Sounds devilish!. (7)
7 Storm, fire, confusion are the result of such corrective practices. (9)
8 Breezes rise round the 'Y' in this country. (5)
14 Father takes each to the rear to make exchange for hard cover. (9)
16 In disorderly riots, toes of these creatures become slow-moving. (9)
17 Final resting place in England—in more ways than one! (9)
19 Pins up, over the favourite, an item of news. (7)
20 Messes up the packages by taking out 500 and putting in a grand. (7)
21 Spirit provided between the second of October and the third of February brings a scrap—of comfort, perhaps. (5)
22 Watch out! The step round east is precipitous. (5)
24 Arrange a line for the extra-terrestrial. (5)

Solution to Crossword no.19, December 1993-January 1994



Chinese porcelain temple statue which I loved and had got used to calling the Princess. It became an emblem of our friendship. Years later, I heard that during her last stay in hospital she had come out of a coma to find her father bending over her. Was there anything he could do for her? Yes, she said, get the Princess for Ed. Understandably, her father was puzzled.

On the day we made the acquaintance of the Princess together, our conversation was concentrated. Towards the end of the previous year she had noticed a persistent tiredness, which she put down to too much study. The man she loved persuaded her to see a doctor and tests revealed a rare disease, the details of which I never understood. The doctors told her there was little hope of a cure, except for a recent wonder drug. So far, this drug had had no successes but its inventors were sure they had sorted out the problems. Would she try it? It would take 12 months to see if it worked. So far as I recall that afternoon in the gallery, she did most of the talking, her strongest argument to me being that science would never advance unless people like her gave it a chance. Even if it failed, she had made a contribution. So she said yes to her doctors.

Back in Melbourne some months later, I went out to see her at home, taking a good bottle of claret for lunch. She promised to match it next time we met; but that was to be our last meeting. In her farewell letter she recalled that bottle of claret, saying that she had instructed her sister to fulfil her promise to match it. There was no need: her letter was better than the finest bottle of claret. ■

Edmund Campion is a contributing editor of *Eureka Street*.

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Pauline Spirituality - Joseph Grassi, S.S.L.
Process of Catechesis - Anne Marie Mongoven, O.P.
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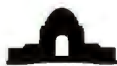

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Published by Collins Dove in conjunction with Orbis Books
RRP $95.00 hardcover
766 pages, indexes, bibliography
ISBN 1 86371 313 1