EUREKA STREET

Vol. 5 No. 1 January-February 1995 $5.00

The choice of summer

Seamus Heaney
Peter Porter
Gerard Windsor
Trevor Hay
Kerryn Goldsworthy

EUREKA STREET v QUADRANT

Results of inaugural cricket match, Walker Street no.1 Oval, Parkville, Victoria. 11 December 1994

Eureka Street

Shane Doran b D. Manne	4
Peter L'Estrange lbw Carroll	21
Morag Fraser b Carroll	1
Paul Sinclair c Thomas b Spooner	47
Brad Halse c N. Kemp b de Carvalho	35
Laurie Norwood c A. Kemp b Fitzgerald.	18
Paul Rodan lbw Spooner	2
Siobhan Jackson c/b Spooner	1
Marco Bass c de Carvalho b Gerster	2
Paul Chadwick not out	17
Tim Stoney b D. Manne	17
Ken Sundries (7b, 2lb, 3w)	12
Total	177

Bowling

	O	M	R	W
Robin Gerster	2	0	11	1
David Manne	8	2	34	2
John Spooner	8	0	28	3
John Carroll	3	0	20	2
George Thomas	4	1	16	0
David de Carvalho	6.5	0	36	1
Brian Costar	5	1	18	0
John Fitzgerald	2	1	2	1

Brendan Metherall substituted for Brad Halse

Quadrant

Robin Gerster c Rodan b Bass	18
John Carroll run out (Stoney)	9
André Kemp b Doran	12
John Spooner b Doran	18
David Manne b Sinclair	8
John Fitzgerald st Rodan b Sinclair	0
David de Carvalho c (sub) Metherall b Chadwick	9
Robert Manne c/b Doran	5
Nicholas Kemp b L'Estrange	11
George Thomas c Norwood b Chadwick	1
Michael Kelly not out	0
Ken Sundries (3b, 2lb, 4w)	9
Total	105

Bowling

	O	M	R	W
Tim Stoney	4	1	13	0
Brad Halse	5	1	7	0
Marco Bass	5	0	25	1
Shane Doran	6	1	25	3
Paul Sinclair	3	2	3	2
Laurie Norwood	3	1	13	0
Paul Chadwick	3	1	8	2
Peter L'Estrange	0.4	0	2	1

Michael Kelly substituted for Brian Costar

StumpCam: Bill Thomas

EUREKA STREET

Volume 5 Number1
January-February 1995

A magazine of public affairs, the arts and theology

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'Oscar Wilde once said that he drank to keep body and soul apart. But you've got to think of poetry as an effort to bring body and soul together. In an in-*static way, as it were.'*
—Seamus Heaney

See *God moves in mysterious metres*, p24.

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MORAG FRASER

The wheel turns

WITH THIS NEW YEAR JANUARY-FEBRUARY issue, *Eureka Street* begins its fifth year of publication—something to celebrate, and something for which to give thanks. Monthly magazines have a remarkable history in Australian public life, as forgers of opinion and stirrers of the national pot, but longevity has not always been their most striking characteristic.

The fifth year also gives us an opportunity to thank the many enthusiastic readers and contributors—writers, columnists, correspondents, photographers, graphic artists—whose great energy and dedication keeps our wheels turning and spirits high.

When *Eureka Street* began appearing on the newstands, in 1991, Australia was heading into deep recession, pitching downward to the low part of the cycle of boom and bust to which we seem fated, or addicted. 1995 looks a more promising year, but one which has begun with some ominous signs. The economy is volatile, and unemployment, although not the front page issue it was 12 months ago, is still the serious social problem that it was and it is now in danger of being ignored as the debates about taxation get going in earnest in the New Year.

The international precedents for sane and humane taxation policy are not encouraging. Clinton's America has switched into punishment mode. Its citizens are so wounded by the deterioration of their salary and living standards that they are finding scapegoats among the weakest and most vulnerable members of their society. There is talk, for example, of reestablishing public orphanages so that benefits to single parents can be dropped. The other side of that social equation is, of course, a New Year bundle of tax cuts for the middle class.

We have an opportunity in Australia to retain the social cohesion for which we are remarkable by adopting policies that will lead to more equitable distribution of wealth and benefits. But it is a brief moment and the opportunity may pass us by if we if we do not seize it, and talk about tax as citizens who have the collective welfare of the country as their prime concern.

—Morag Fraser

The next issue of *Eureka Street* will be published in March.

FRANK O'SHEA

Rituals of the tribe

Three ruins of a tribe: a lying chief, a false judge, a lustful priest.

THIS QUOTATION FROM THE *Triads of Ireland*, a 9th century book of proverbs in which items are grouped in threes, has been widely quoted in Ireland over the past few weeks. Like the prophecies of Malachy and Nostradamus, it appears to summarise in uncanny detail events that unfolded in rapid and public succession during the last months of 1994.

The saga began with an attempt by the then Prime Minister, Albert Reynolds, to appoint his Attorney-General, Harry Whelehan, as president of the High Court. The Labour Party, in uneasy coalition with Reynolds' party, Fianna Fáil, opposed the appointment. In part Labour was unhappy with Whelehan's role in a long-running tribunal examining the beef industry, but mainly it objected to his record on social issues. In February 1992, for instance, he had prevented a pregnant 14-year-old victim of sexual abuse from going to England for an abortion.

Dick Spring, the Labour leader, was unpopular for what was perceived to be leftwing posturing, and Reynolds steamrolled Whelehan's appointment through cabinet. But in the meantime a more serious question had arisen about Whelehan's fitness to head the High Court. In April 1993, his office had received warrants for the extradition to Northern Ireland of a priest, Brendan Smyth, on charges of child sexual abuse. And two weeks later the British Attorney-General, Nicholas Lyell, had written to Whelehan about the matters raised in the warrants.

Whelehan maintained that he did not become aware of the warrants, or of the letter from his British counterpart, until the matter 'entered the public domain' more than seven months later. Labour was not convinced, believing that his tardiness reflected a reluctance to embarrass the Catholic Church. Officials of the Attorney-General's office said the warrants had not been acted upon because they involved matters going back more than 30 years, so "... we had to ensure that he (Smyth) was going to receive a fair trial." They delayed further when they were told the priest was going to return voluntarily to Northern Ireland. Eventually he did so, to receive a four-year jail sentence. Exit the lustful priest.

In the Dail, where these events were discussed, all the proceedings were televised live. The country watched in fascination as Reynolds refused to withdraw his support for Whelehan, arguing that the Attorney-General could not be expected to take personal responsibility for all the business dealt with by his officials. Crucially, he also claimed that part of the reason for the seven-month delay was that this was the first case of its kind to have arisen since the passing of the Extradition Amendment Act in 1987. That Act, however, also imposed certain key duties on the Attorney-General when such warrants were issued. Clearly, if Whelehan was to be believed, the least that could be said was that the requirements of the 1987 Act were not part of the systems operating in his office; in fact the Act was effectively being ignored. Reynolds resigned in favour of his Finance Minister, Bertie Ahern, but declined to advise the President, Mary Robinson, to dissove the Dail for an election. Exit the lying leader. The same day, after a week in office, Harry Whelehan resigned as president of the High Court in order, he said, 'to prevent the office being further embroiled in public controversy'.

Exit the false judge—and game, set and match to Dick Spring.

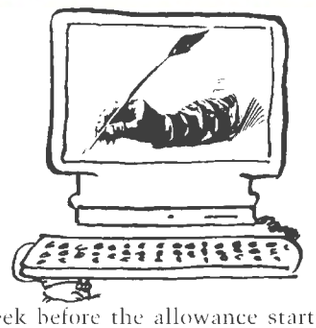
The ruin of the tribe: self-portrait by the 18th century Irish sculptor, Hugh Douglas, showing his Cupid and Psyche. *In a letter to his mentor in Rome, Canova, Douglas complained that no one in Ireland appeared to be interested in subjects of this kind.*

WHAT EFFECT WILL ALL OF THIS HAVE on the peace process in Northern Ireland? Very little, in my view. The contributions of Reynolds and Spring to the original ceasefire cannot be ignored, but these two have become more or less irrelevant. The proof lies in the fact that progress towards a political solution has not slowed down. The running from the Irish has been taken over by Gerry Adams, whose cool chic hides a brilliant political brain, and by his equally astute fellow nationalist—even if of a less bloody genre—John Hume. Neither the squabbling parties in Dublin nor the rudderless Unionist establishment in Belfast has anyone close to those two. ■

Frank O'Shea teaches at Marist College, Canberra.

Childcare divides the nation

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.



From Professor Jim Barber, national vice-president, Australian Association of Social Workers.

The storm clouds have been brewing for months, but with the release of the International Year of the Family Council Report, there is now no avoiding a major showdown over the issue of childcare. The chair of the Council, Professor Bettina Cass, and the minister to whom the council reported, Senator Rosemary Crowley, are clearly at loggerheads over the issue and their troops are lining up behind them.

On the one side are women who want or need to work, on the other are women who want to stay at home to care for their children fulltime. And with the women's workforce participation rate now more than 51 per cent, the numbers are evenly divided for a fierce encounter. The crux of the argument is whether or not there should be a single childcare allowance paid to all parents (Cass's position), or whether there should be separate schemes depending on whether the child is cared for at home or in commercial childcare (Crowley's position).

In July of this year, the Federal Government introduced a childcare rebate for working parents who place their children in commercial childcare. The rebate phases in after $200 has been spent on childcare, and increases to a maximum rebate of $28.20 per week for one child or $61.20 for more than one child in care. The rebate is not means-tested and is paid through the Medicare office.

By contrast, parents who care for their children at home are eligible for the Home Childcare Allowance, which is paid through the Department of Social Security up to a maximum of $30 per week, irrespective of the number of children involved. Except where the family would be disadvantaged, the Home Childcare Allowance replaces the Dependent Spouse Rebate, so much of it is not new money. Moreover, unlike the Childcare Rebate, the Home Childcare Allowance is means-tested. The home childcarer can only earn $5.45 per week before the allowance starts to reduce; at $251 income per week the home childcarer would receive nothing.

There are three fundamental problems with these arrangements. First, it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that childcare has been assigned a different value depending on who provides it. The Federal Government is prepared to pay out a great deal more for commercial childcare than for home childcare. This is discriminatory and inconsistent with Australia's obligations, as a member of the International Labor Organisation, in relation to equal pay for equal work. Why don't commercial childcare rates also apply in the home?

There is great danger in this question for someone on Senator Crowley's side of politics because it forces her to concede that the new policies belittle the economic contribution of domestic labour. This is why the issue is such a vexatious one. Those who would resort to facile left/right divisions in order to resolve the matter will find that the problem is not so simple. Although Senator Crowley certainly has the support of many in the women's movement for trying to remove financial disincentives to women's participation in the workforce, she has incurred the ire of other activists for devaluing domestic (read women's) work in the process.

The second problem with the new system is that it virtually guarantees that many childcare providers will fall into the gaps. A young professional couple I know recently decided that they wanted to care for their newborn child at home. Accordingly, they both dropped down to half-time work in order to share the parenting. Their half-time salaries, although meagre, preclude them from Home Childcare Allowance, and the fact that they have not placed their child in commercial care precludes them from the Childcare Rebate. Compare this with what they could have received had they remained fully employed and placed their child in care. Not only would they have doubled their incomes, but the cost of commercial childcare would have been offset by the Childcare Rebate to the tune of $1546.

This case also illustrates a third weakness in the current system. Its target group is not clear, so that many of the wrong people benefit and many of the wrong people miss out. The wife of one of my more senior colleagues is eligible for the home Childcare Allowance because her husband earns enough money for her to stay at home and care for the children. Compare this with the lot of two low-paid factory workers who must both work to survive. Because they each earn more than $6500 per year, they are too affluent for the Home Childcare Allowance, and because they have a friend or relative care for their children to save on childcare, they are ineligible for the Childcare Rebate. Like my young colleagues, they too get nothing. What we have here is flagrant middle-class welfare, and I presume this is not what Senator Crowley had in mind when she introduced her new measures.

Senator Crowley must redress the situation before the cracks emerging in the community open into a valley of bitterness and resentment. She should scrap the new system immediately and amalgamate the two payments into one childcarer's allowance, to be spent however the primary caregiver wishes. The parent can put the money in her pocket or give it to a relative, friend or commercial childcare provider. It is entirely up to her. If the amount provided is set at Home Childcare rates, the money saved by abolishing the Childcare Rebate could be diverted into the Childcare Assistance scheme.

The Childcare Assistance scheme is a subsidy paid to commercial childcare providers for accepting children from low-income families. This payment is provided so that childcare centres can charge poorer families less. Unlike the Childcare Rebate, the Childcare Assistance scheme is very

well targeted to families who would otherwise have no financial incentive to work.

But if, as I suspect, Senator Crowley digs her heels in and fights for her new Childcare Rebate, the very least she must do is means-test it and ensure that when the necessary arithmetic is performed, there is parity with the Home Childcare Allowance.

Jim Barber
Hawker, ACT

For Joseph

From Natalie Harding, aged 11, Our Lady of the Nativity School, Vic
The recent story that you've published for *Eureka Street* (Dec 94) about Jospeh Cindric (by Andrew Stark and Michael McGirr) was quite interesting. I'd like to tell you that Joseph was one of the characters in the book *Millicent*, which was published in 1980. Jeanie Baker goes into the greatest detail in her books. It would be awful for Joseph, losing his son after the war in 1945 and being alone in a foreign country in the 50's with only his tools. Joseph would have been seen by many people who come to see the beautiful parks in Sydney. He would have been sitting around watching the world go by. I think it was an excellent story you put in for Joseph and I hope you can continue your good work.

Natalie Harding.
West Essendon, VIC

For the record

From Kevin Davis
Paul Ormonde's claim (Eureka Street, November '94) that I had asserted 'that the movement had never feared a Communist takeover in Australia' is totally false and is a figment of his imagination.

No wonder this claim 'was news to some of his listeners' at the recent Sydney conference on the great Labor Split. It was certainly news to me. Quite unpleasant news, because, if Ormonde's claim be true, then I am an insincere hypocrite, who, between 1951 and 1954 addressed hundreds of audiences about a Communist danger, in which I did not really believe.

I lodged a copy of my remarks with the organisers of the Conference. Did your correspondent attempt to verify his version of my purported speech or phone me to check what he proposed to write?

If not, 'your correspondent's' ignorance was clearly vincible. During the conference, I was happy to discuss with former Communist/extreme Leftists—all old protagonists—the 'battles long ago'. They widely acknowledged the personal sacrifices, which the Industrial Groups/Movement people were prepared to make in a cause they believed in. I paid a similar tribute to the Communist rank and file in my speech to the Conference.

It was left to a handful of ALP members—40 years after the events of the Split—to rake over the sectarian ashes of that period. Now in retirement, I am proud to have played a part in the defeat of Communist union power through the joint effort of the Industrial groups and the Movement. The DLP in NSW was small. Of course, it did not gain direct political power, but it was effective in one vital result; it prevented an Evatt-led Labor government from governing Australia.

Many of us expended a great deal of personal effort in this struggle; jobs were lost and careers were blighted, materially quite a few have never recovered.

Ironically, the Sydney conference revealed quite a measure of respect from the left, who no longer labour under the anti-Movement mindset of your correspondent.

Kevin C.Davis.
West Ryde, NSW

Paul Ormonde replies:
I taped Mr Davis's speech. I reported accurately what he said. Here is the relevant quote:

'The movement was not just Santamaria. Of course, he was a powerful figure. In NSW he appeared very little. It (the Movement work) was carried out by other people. They shared a certain vision—a fear—not that the Communists would take over Australia—that's nonsense. It was given some credence perhaps when the Chinese Communists under Mao took over China in 1949—that it may be coming closer.

'But basically, no ... no ... the view was that if a totalitarian party like the Communist Party was able to acquire power in the trade union movement, it would have immense powerful influence over the country, over governments, particularly Labor governments, and even non-Labor Governments as well.'

Clearly, that statement was not in the copy of his remarks lodged with the organisers. As I had a clear recording of what Mr Davis said, there was no need for me to check his remarks.

I do not believe Mr Davis was a hypocrite. I believe his motives were—

as were those of most of his supporters and most of his opponents - entirely honourable, given their basic ideological objectives.

But his memory of what he said at the conference—and more importantly, what the Movement spokesmen were saying at their five-minutes-to-midnight meetings and what Movement publications such as *Freedom* and *News Weekly* were saying in the 1940s and 1950s, is defective.

That the Communists had revolutionary objectives was not in doubt nor is there doubt that the Movement's founder and guiding philosopher, Mr Santamaria, having achieved outstanding success against the Communists, had a vision of using the Movement (in the early 1950s still a secret Catholic body ostensibly controlled by the bishops) to transform the Labor Party into a vehicle for establishing his version of a Christian social order in Australia.

Both the revolutionary Communists and the fundamentalist Catholics were dreamers. Without a Communist military invasion, a Communist revolution was a pipe dream. In a pluralist Australia, a Christian social order, Santamaria-style, was an equally preposterous fantasy.

Paul Ormonde
Brighton, VIC

Risks of the road

LAST YEAR, A SURVEY CONDUCTED by the Road Transport Forum found that most ordinary drivers consider truckies as hard working and likeable people, trucks as basically well-maintained and the trucking industry as highly professional. At the same time, most respondents to the survey said they had experienced at least one frightening driving incident that involved a truck. Holiday time finds many people out on the national highway system once again but real encounters between truckies and other motorists—the 'little wheels'—are a rare event.

Sometimes they happen in tragic circumstances. In late October, 1994, an accident involving a truck on one of the last winding sections of the Hume Highway killed a mother, father and two of their daughters. It prompted Dr Michael Sutherland from the intensive care unit of the Woden Valley Hospital in Canberra, who treated the survivors, to call for a 'far-reaching enquiry'. Sutherland recounted experiences of asking a truck driver, after another fatal accident, if he had taken any drugs in the past eight hours. The driver 'proceeded to produce a shopping list of stimulants and other drugs.' (*The Age*, 8/8/94.) Sutherland suggests that part of 'preventive intensive care' could involve random drug testing.

Photo: Bill Thomas

It's possible to see the road from another perspective. Take a look at an issue of *Truckin' Life* magazine. Each month its classified section includes a host of memorials—to Graham, who died this year 'in a brutal and tragic accident'; to Bobbie, who 'passed away suddenly'; to John, who 'failed to come home after a fatal accident east of Glen Innes'; and to Big Dave, who was 'tragically killed south of Biloela'.

Truckies can be victims on the roads as well as aggressors. By 1976, Ted Scarfe had already been driving trucks for 20 years. He used to take two or three days to drive from Newcastle to Adelaide in a vehicle that could do a maximum of 80 kmh. 'It was a 1948 model AEC Mandator but, because of the name, we called it the poofter truck. That's truckies' humour, you see.' One night in August 1976, however, Scarfe was towing a tanker of vegetable oil south through thick fog on the Hume Highway. The conditions meant he couldn't travel faster than 50kmh. He can replay every detail of what happened next. Suddenly a car tried to overtake a truck heading in the other direction. The car went under his front axle. A woman was decapitated. A young man who was due to return home to Scotland the following Wednesday died 14 hours later.

Years afterwards, driving a school bus, Scarfe can hear about an accident and have to pull over before he can continue. 'I was shattered.' Scarfe is now trying to build a network of drivers who have been in similiar situations. 'Sometimes you feel like getting on the phone and talking to someone.'

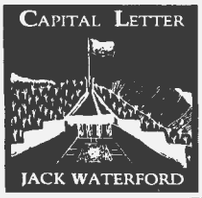
FOR MOST OPERATORS, however, survival is principally a matter of dollars and cents. The financial risks of the industry are legendary. David Cribb, executive director of NatRoad Ltd, the national body that represents long-distance operators, says that most interstate drivers working for firms gross between $40,000 and $60,000 a year. In 1991, a Bureau of Industry Report found that 10,000 trucks were registered for long haulage in Australia. Most of these are privately owned. The cost of a rig is greater than a house: they might start at $100,000 but the average price is about $260,000.

Many independent drivers are therefore managing two mortgages, as well as the strain of a job that might see them at home for only two nights in the week. The interest rates for a loan on a truck are higher than rates for housing loans, and loans usually need to be paid off within four years. Add to this the cost of insurance (between $7,000 and $10,000 per annum) and maintenance. And parts? A new gear box is worth $7000. Cribb says that legislation limits drivers to 72 hours a week on the road and that most work at least 60. They need to gross about $220,000 before they start to take anything home. Cribb concedes that the Transport Workers Union claim for a 15 per cent rise in haulage rates, spread over two years, probably does reflect the way that truckies have fallen behind other industries. Most drivers leave the industry, exhausted, before they reach 50.

Even so, at 55, Ted Scarfe is thinking about buying another truck and getting back on the interstate circuit. And the columns of *Truckin' Life* include appeals from the likes of Ashley Reynolds who, at 23, is pleading for a start in an industry whose insurance requirements keep most people waiting till they reach 25.

Reynold's father was a truckie and, before his parents' marriage broke up, Ashley used to go out with him. 'It's all I've ever wanted to do,' he says.

Michael McGirr SJ is the consulting editor of *Eureka Street*.



The big picture is getting fuzzy

THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD BE ON ITS KNEES, in both senses of the phrase. On the one hand, to give thanks that the Opposition is so absorbed in its own misery—and the press so absorbed in chronicling it—that not much scrutiny of government is happening. And on the other hand, because if the Government was subject to proper scrutiny it would be in very serious trouble.

In only one area did the Opposition make much headway during 1994—the shambles of the Civil Aviation Authority. This has been a disaster waiting to happen for years, but the political attack on flawed policy and inept ministerial reaction to events only happened after people had died, and even then it owed more to politicians with bees in their bonnets than to a disciplined Opposition attack.

Keating is highly vulnerable over the way his team has handled the mundane job of governing, and even his big picture had little added to it last year. And the improving economy, although it has taken some of the heat off unemployment, is bringing problems. The much-vaunted restructuring still cannot, it seems, handle economic growth of more than five per cent. Interest rates, which even as the economy was coming out of recession were very high in real terms, are rising to choke off demand. Monetary policy has lately been more like mortar fire than like sniper's bullets, and there are no grounds for thinking that those with their hands on the triggers are getting any better at it.

The other alternative, fiscal policy, is at the moment treated as an instrument that will bring government spending closer to revenue than one that will shape the economy. But cuts to government spending and some tax increases are clearly on the agenda: each can only embarrass Keating as the next federal election draws closer—especially against a background of promised tax cuts and old vows about meeting goals on time. The scope for cutting costs without actually abandoning programs and actual services is in very limited: for several years, the Department of Finance, at the very heart of the cut-the-size-of-government movement has been warning that the lemon is squeezed dry.

Sydney airport is a political disaster for federal Labor, and will help ensure the re-election of the NSW government. It is not so much that what was done was wrong (or that the other side can claim any virtue on the issue) as that the politicians failed to anticipate the enormous public reaction. That Laurie Brereton, whose only continuing political asset is Paul Keating's loyalty to him, is in charge of damage repair means that this one will get worse rather than better. There are also major problems looming for the Government in industrial relations, in Commonwealth-state financing on health care, and in the education contractions.

One reason why things are in a poor state has been poor day-to-day leadership. Paul Keating has been concentrating on his big picture. But the republic debate has gone no distance during the year. The idea of an Australian republic has probably become more popular, but there has been no progress in sketching in the details of a republican constitution. The post-Mabo package has gone no distance: indeed, by the end of the year, an Opposition which had been consistently wrong-footed on the issue, had ended up establishing an agreement with east-coast Aborigines who want a compensation package as focused on actual dispossession as on current disadvantage. This is a very tricky area, one not resolved by the type of moral posturing and bombast which had previously been so successful in pushing the agenda.

On relations with Asia, there are fine words on paper, but virtually every national leader in the region except Keating denies they actually mean very much or commit anybody to anything. Our future relations with Asia, including trade, are far more dependent on the domestic policies of Indonesia and of China than on any treaty.

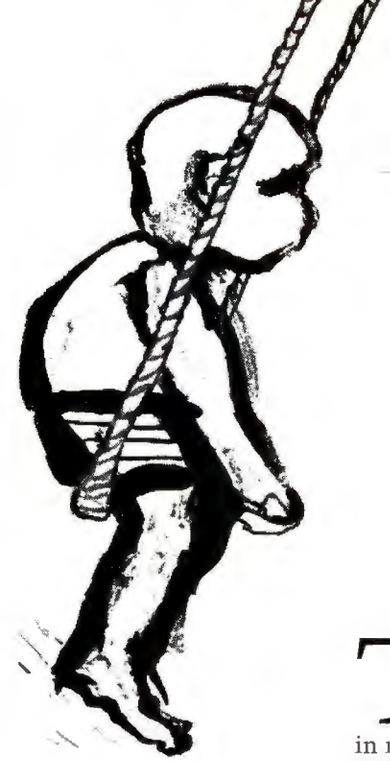
Little noticed too, but a major problem for the year ahead, is what is happening in Papua New Guinea, which is slipping fast into banana republic status—right down to being unable to pay its public service, army or police force, and to defaulting on its debts.

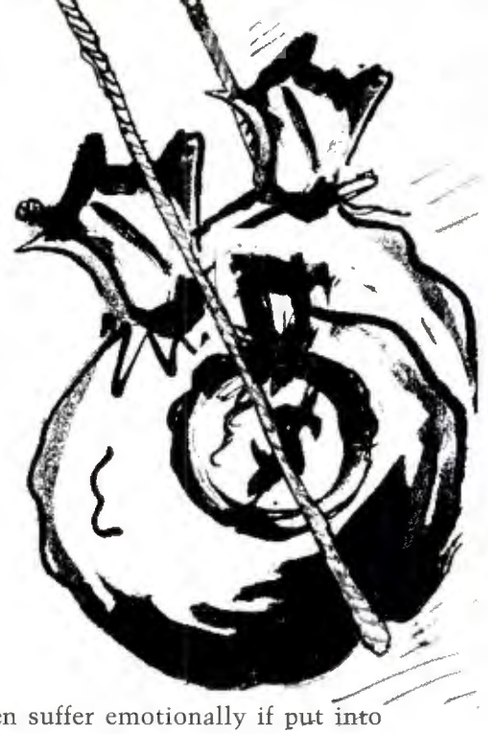
But the Government has felt under hardly any pressure. Who would? It was turmoil within the Opposition that set the pace for most of the year and may do the same this year, regardless of leadership changes. The Liberals began last year with a wounded leader unable to command his troops, and finished in much the same position, even though the leader had changed.

Those who have observed the institutional deficiencies of the Liberal Party, and the poor schooling it gives its leaders, might expect that the next election, is over bar the shouting. But it should be remembered that the coalition stands quite close in the polls to Labor; where there is a marked difference is in perceptions of leadership, and it is these that are likely to give the incumbent an edge in campaigning. But this stage in the life of the Parliament, incumbency is a mixed blessing because of the 'it's time' syndrome—provided that the Opposition can stay out of trouble and avoid itself being the issue. Any new leader, however, will have to cope with those factors within the party that made it so open to attack from the Government. It will be increasingly difficult to win elections without detailed, well-costed policies, a philosophical framework and party discipline. ■

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

DAVID DE CARVALHO





You get the families you pay for

THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE FAMILY succeeded in moving family policy from the periphery of social and economic policy to somewhere closer to centre stage. This has been the result of the happy coincidence of 1994 being the year in which the Prime Minister, Paul Keating, delivered the long-awaited White Paper on employment, *Working Nation*.

This event has focused attention on the relationship between changing patterns of paid employment and their impact on family life and gender roles, and the implications of their interaction on both the economy and society.

There has been a plethora of family policy proposals suggested and implemented over the year, often amid great controversy. Most recently has been the commitment by the federal government to a maternity allowance for all mothers for the first twelve weeks after giving birth. Penelope Leach's claim that children suffer emotionally if put into child-care at an early age added fuel to the debate over the relative merits of the new Child Care Cash Rebate (CCCR, see table 1) and the Home Child Care Allowance (HCCA, see table 2)

The former is a new measure which allows working parents to claim child-care expenses as a legitimate business expense, and to receive up to $61 a week to assist with child-care fees, regardless of their income. The HCCA, on the other hand, is not really a new measure, but the old means-tested dependent spouse rebate cashed out and paid to parents who stay at home to care for children.

A strong grass-roots lobby group, led by Adelaide mother Carole Carroll and South Australian Liberal Senator Nick Minchin, campaigned against the CCCR on the grounds that it 'holds out a $61 carrot' out to mothers to enter the workforce and put their children into child-care. At the same time, the maximum HCCA of $30 a week, which exceeded the dependent spouse rebate which it replaced by $2.88, was described by Minchin as the 'dependent spouse rebate with a hamburger thrown in', and as such, gave no recognition to the valuable social contribution made by parents who stay at home to care for their children. The economic value of housework, also unrecognised, was recently estimated at $350 billion annually by a Melbourne University academic, Dr Duncan Ironmonger.

Carroll's argument is that all parents should be treated equally by government, so that their decisions to enter the workforce or to stay at home are not distorted by financial carrots and sticks offered by government. This prin-

TABLE 1

One Child		Two or More Children	
Weekly child-care cost	Rebate	Weekly child-care costs	Rebate
$	$	$	$
20.00	1.20	40.00	7.20
40.00	7.20	80.00	19.20
60.00	13.20	120.00	31.20
80.00	19.20	160.00	43.20
100.00	25.20	200.00	55.20
110.00	28.20	220.00	61.20

Child-Care Cash Rebate: *paid to families in which both parents (or a single parent) are working, studying or looking for work, and who have children under 13 in paid child care. The parents pay the first $16 of child-care costs, and then receive a rebate of 30 per cent of the balance, up to a total of $220 for two or more children in care, or $110 for one child. The rebate is not income-tested.*

ciple of providing no artificial incentives to one form of work or the other has much to commend it, but there are many people who believe that in fact traditional single-income families with dependent children being cared for by the non-employed partner ought to be positively encouraged through financial incentives.

B.A. Santamaria and the Australian Family Association (AFA) believe that the traditional family needs such support if it is to fulfil its vital role as the primary provider of welfare to individuals, and impart strong moral values. They argue, and I agree with them, that the financial pressures on low and middle-income families are such that it is difficult to provide for a family's physical, educational, recreational and cultural needs on only one income.

Many parents who are in the paid workforce would prefer to be at home if they could afford to give up the income they get from employment. Helping such parents to go back to the home where they want to be would also have the additional benefit of opening up employment opportunities for others, especially young people.

At issue, of course, is the question of what is the best and fairest way of doing this. Santamaria wants the government to pay a home-makers' allowance of $130 a week to parents who stay at home full-time to care for dependent children. If such a proposal were taken up, it would effectively undermine further calls for formal income-splitting to provide tax-relief for single-income families.

Even the Opposition Treasury spokesman, Peter Costello, has rejected income-splitting on the grounds of loss of revenue (an insufficient reason, in my view, if it's judged worthy on equity grounds). But Santamaria rightly points out that the wealthy already make use of legal forms of income-splitting through family trusts, and to allow formal income-splitting would only deliver them further benefits.

The lower a family's single income is, the less benefit they gain from income-splitting, therefore a direct non-means-tested payment to the stay-at-home parent would be more equitable. Although this goes some way to overcoming problems of 'vertical' equity, it still leaves unsolved the 'horizontal' inequity of single-income families on a certain gross income being disadvantaged by the tax system compared to the two-income family with the same income. The Melbourne Roman Catholic Archdiocesan Committee for the International Year of the Family recently released the statement 'Let's Put Families First', which argues strongly for reform of the tax system by introducing a Family Unit Tax similar to the system that applies in France.

A method of assisting families which contains elements of both a tax-based and a benefit-based solution is a 'universal tax credit', suggested by Barry Maley of the Centre for Independent Studies. He advocates granting tax payers a tax credit of say, $2,000 per child, so that if one's tax bill were $10,000 then this would be reduced by $2,000 for each dependent child under 16. If one's tax bill were less than one's total tax credits, a cash refund equal to the difference would be paid to the family. For example, the tax payer with three dependent children and a tax bill of $4,000, would in fact pay no tax and receive a cash refund of $2000. The system is administratively simple, and would replace the current complex system of family payments. It may even be revenue-positive depending on the amount of the credit. The principle behind this proposal is that every child would attract the same amount of assistance. Maley is opposed to any welfare payments that could be considered as a government wage to parents for carrying out caring work in the home, which is what the AFA is proposing.

The AFA's proposal represents a universal extension of the targeted parenting allowance (see box 3) for low-income families introduced in the White Paper, *Working Nation*. But the AFA does not address the issue of at-home parents who earn some income, whereas the government's allowance also reduces if the at-home parent earns income.

The government argues that this measure gives low-income families greater choice as to whether they wish to have both parents in the labour force, because it alleviates the financial pressure for two incomes.

TABLE 2

Fortnightly Income $	HCCA $	Fortnightly Income $	HCCA $
0 -10	60.00	150	25.20
25	57.70	175	19.00
50	50.20	200	12.70
75	44.00	225	6.50
100	37.70	250	1.00

Home Child Care Allowance: *replaces the former Dependent Spouse Rebate, and is paid to parents who stay at home to care for children under 16. The maximum payment is $60 per fortnight for an at-home parent who has a fortnightly income of less than $10.85, and the amount paid reduces by 25c for every dollar earned above that. Partners of people in receipt of unemployment benefits, a sickness allowance or the special benefit are not eligible, but will receive the* Partners Allowance *(table 3).*

Yet this measure is not without its critics. Eva Cox of the Sydney-based Women's Economic Think Tank (WETT) believes that the real agenda behind the parenting allowance is further to marginalise poorer women from the paid labour-force. She argues that paying low-income women to stay at home for sixteen years or more is a disincentive for them to seek education and training which will enhance their employment opportunities and make them less financially dependent on their husbands.

TABLE 3

Partner's Fortnightly Income	Parenting Allowance
$	$
462	265.30 p/f
500	238.70
550	203.70
600	168.70
650	133.70
700	98.70
750	63.70
755 or more	60.00 (HCCA Component)

Parenting Allowance: *This will be introduced on 1 July, and effectively extends the 'partner allowance' (Table 2) to at-home parents who are partners of low-wage earners. Until then, such parents will be eligible for the Home Child Care Allowance. After 1 July, the HCCA will be incorporated into the Parenting Allowance. There is speculation that the parenting allowance will be lower than unemployment benefits, so that at-home parents will have an incentive to look for work. If it is set equal to unemployment benefits, at current rates the allowance would have a maximum rate of $265.30 per fortnight, and reduce by 70c for each dollar the working partner earns above $462 per fortnight. The HCCA component, which is not affected by the partner's income, will be subject to a new income test on the income of the at-home parent, who will be able to earn $30 a week without the Parenting Allowance being reduced.*

Rather than promote a bias in favour of paid employment through child-care assistance, or a bias in favour of staying at home through a parenting allowance, one solution suggested by Eva Cox may be to abolish all of these complex measures and proposals and simply make the universal basic family payment far more generous than it is currently and pay different amounts according to the age of the child. For example, we could give all parents a payment to compensate them for the financial costs of either professional child-care (for the working parent) or for income foregone (for the at-home-parent). The payment should be higher for those years in which these child-care costs are highest, namely in the pre-school years. When the child enters school, and the time or money required to have them cared for would reduce drastically, so the payment could reduce, and if secondary school hours were extended, then the payment would reduce again when they reached that age.

Currently the basic family payment is $21.30 a fortnight for the first three children, and $28.40 for each additional child. Now if, for each child of pre-school age, parents received, say, $75 a week (these are not Cox's figures), then the average family would receive $150 a week to help meet either child-care expenses either in the form of fees to professionals or income foregone by staying at home. Once the children reached primary school age the payment could reduce to say $50 per week and $25 per week for secondary students. This could be funded in the same way that Santamaria suggests his home-maker's allowance should be, that is, by returning payroll tax revenues to the Commonwealth, as in the original family allowance system established by Menzies.

This solution would not be free of anomalies nor please everyone. Some people might feel uneasy if it were construed as paying or compensating women for having children, as if they were a burden rather than a joy. Children are indeed a joy, but they also need to be fed and cared for, which is a time-consuming (that is, an income-foregoing) activity, particularly when they are very young. It would be a great pity if, for lack of some financial assistance in rearing children that this joy were diminished or beyond the reach of poorer couples.

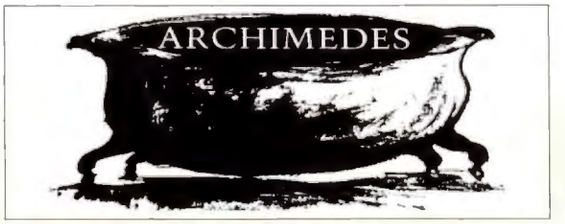
OTHERS WOULD BE UNHAPPY that this measure does not actively encourage mothers to stay at home and discourage them from going out to work. This unhappiness stems from a view of the pivotal role of the nuclear family in society. This is a view I hold myself, but the principle that should operate is that the decision to stay at home to care for children ought to be based precisely on this view and not be coerced or distorted by artificial financial incentives. What is the political context? In July last year, the Social Security Minister, Peter Baldwin announced that he was looking into ways of simplifying the complex system of family support grants. 'Ideally I would like to see us be able to boil a large part of this structure down to one single generic category of family assistance, eligibility for which would be a function of family

structure, the number of children, etc.' The solution outlined above would seem to meet his criteria, and is similar to the recommendation of the National Council for International Year of the Family, that the Home Child Care Allowance and the Child Care Cash Rebate be amalgamated into a universal (non-means-tested) Childcare payment to families with children under six years.

This payment would continue to be paid if the principal carer is outside of the workforce, in part-time work or full-time employment. In this way, the direct costs of childcare can be offset, and the indirect costs of care recognised for home-based carers, without discouraging women from moving into employment, and without increasing the hours of their employment. This payment should also provide recognition of, and better recompense for, the unpaid work of care which all carers undertake. In addition, such a payment would better recognise the transitions in the lives of parents caring for children until primary school age, and not be discriminatory with regard to employment status.('Creating the Links', p44)

The economic rationalists will tell us that such a measure is too expensive, but those of us who are 'social rationalists' could not fail to see the undoubted benefits that this kind of reform would achieve. ■

David de Carvalho is a social policy officer with Good Shepherd Family Services.



Method re-acting

JUST BEFORE CHRISTMAS, an immunologist at the Australian National University, Dr Ted Steele, presented new evidence for his view that not all characteristics of organisms are inherited through the genetic material in the sperm and the egg. This is tricky, radical science and difficult to explain, even for Steele. But the *Australian Financial Review* knew what to do with it. Its headline billed Steele's work as yet another nail in the coffin of Charles Darwin.

Not a bit of it. As Archimedes understands it, Ted Steele is not disputing that evolution occurs. He has simply proposed an additional way of achieving it—other than the traditional process of sexual reproduction followed by natural selection. It is hardly news that Darwin got some of the details of his grand scheme wrong. In fact, Darwin's original model of evolution by natural selection has been under almost constant renovation in the 135 years since it was proposed—so much so, that Darwin would hardly recognise evolutionary theory now. But that doesn't mean the original model was bad science. Science is not a static creed or manifesto, but a process that constantly builds, modifies and refines.

It is a simple process: measure or gather information about an event which interests you, look for a pattern, generate an idea or hypothesis that would explain that pattern, make a prediction on the basis of your hypothesis, and test it to see if you were right or wrong. As long as the hypothesis allows you to predict what will happen, it is useful. But as soon as it makes a wrong prediction, it is time to build another model. So the process of science depends on scientists getting things wrong occasionally to keep it honest. A sure sign that someone has little knowledge of science is when they speak of it as though it were a person, a political party, or an unbending monolith.

For some years now this fictitious monolith called 'science' has been under sustained attack, in the United States, in Britain, and, to a lesser extent, in Australia. The groups with the most agressive attitude towards 'science' include some feminists, certain elements of the academic left, and the more radical of the environmentalists. Among other things, these critics maintain that 'science' is exploitative of the earth and deeply biased against women. The charges are levelled at a chimera, for 'science' does not exist; only scientific method does, and it is inherently neutral. The reason these critics are disgruntled is that until recently the users of scientific method have mostly been the dominant members of Western society, that is, politically conservative males, so the knowledge gained through their efforts has reflected their interests.

The answer to this problem is not to destroy scientific inquiry, but to white-ant it—to make sure that scientists are more politically aware, and that there are more women in their ranks. This is more than a pious platitude, it is a necessity, for the scientific method has several things going for it that make it important to preserve.

First, it is practical—the basis of scientific method is the test to see whether a hypothesis can give good predictions. And second, it can be self-correcting. Nothing is sacred to the scientific method, even 'established' science itself. And it is an urge which is impossible to repress. Hypothesis-testing starts when a baby first rolls a ball. ■

Tim Thwaites is a freelance science writer.

• See Paul Tankard on Ian Plimer's *Reason vs Creationism*, p47.

Shane Maloney

For those who go down to the sea in shorts

Photo: Bill Thomas

It all started with the Pier-to-Pub in Lorne. Then Portsea got into the act. Suddenly it seems there isn't a seaside town in the country without its own long-distance mass-participation deep-water swimming event.

This summer, from Portland to Point Hicks, thousands of otherwise normal people will strip down to their bare essentials, let total strangers write large numbers on their bodies, don painfully tight rubber caps, and charge *en masse* down concrete boat ramps into waters of Antarctic frigidity. Wave upon wave, like migrating eels, they will plough their way across kilometres of seascape while their loved ones cluster in huge crowds on the foreshore, egging them on. All this they will do for glory and a commemorative T-shirt.

Many of those who breast the waves will be superbly fit, disgustingly young and consummately experienced marine marathon veterans. Many will not. Quite a number will be old enough to know better—mature-age first-timers sallying forth on the strength of little more than a nodding acquaintance with the municipal lap-lane and a healthy dose of derring-do.

For the benefit of those intending to take the plunge for the first time this season, we publish the following advice.

If your fellow swimmers suddenly begin to kick wildly at your face, clamber violently over your body, push your head underwater and elbow you in the midriff, do not be alarmed. This merely indicates that the event has commenced.

The sea (also known as the Briny Deep, Neptune's Lair and Davey Jones' Locker) differs from your local pool in three important respects. There is no line along the bottom. You can't stand up. It has waves. Under these circumstances, disorientation and terror are perfectly natural feelings. Ignore your fear and concentrate only on one thing. That blurry thing you can vaguely discern on the horizon is the land. Head for it.

Race rules specify that all major place winners be professional stunt swimmers from Queensland under contract to a breakfast cereal manufacturer. So forget trying to finish in the first hundred. Keep in mind that the real places of honour are those with the greatest numerological significance, such as 666th and 1313rd. Try for one of these.

Iron men and women may shine in today's sunlight, but eventually they will rust. More abiding will be the victories of those in more exclusive groupings. Best Mother of Two from Kew, for example. Or Most Improved Purchasing Officer with a Touch of Asthma. Second Oldest Contestant from Murrumbeena. The true winners will be in one of these categories.

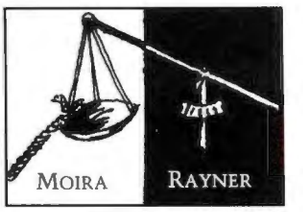
Sharks, stingrays, octopuses, moray eels, giant clams, and killer whales abound in Australia's coastal waters. These shy and sensitive predators rarely attack—unless provoked by the presence of human beings. Whether they are more likely to be attracted by the thrashing of pack swimmers or the pathetic floundering of the individual straggler remains a matter of debate. To be on the safe side, either swim by yourself or stick with a group.

Experts suggest that if affected by the cold you drink lots of warm tea or coffee, wrap yourself in a blanket and light a fire. If you are unable to do this and swim at the same time, it is recommended that you try to think of something hot. Or at least warm—Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman in bed, for example. Should you encounter a large white floating object with penguins standing on it, you are too far south.

So good luck, all you who go down to the sea in shorts. And when you stand in the fish-and-chip shop afterwards, renewing valuable bodily essences, be proud of that number indelibly Texta-ed onto your shoulder. But keep it under your T-shirt. No point in provoking the land-lubbers.

Shane Maloney is *Eureka Street's* aquatic correspondent.

It doesn't have to end with a whimper



And Satan answered the Lord, 'But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face.' And the Lord said unto Satan, 'Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life.' (JOB 2: 4-6, King James Version).

ALL HUMAN BEINGS NEED a space of their own; a place for doing private things and thinking private thoughts: somewhere on the other side of a boundary which we have drawn between our outer and our inner lives. Home is the symbol of our retreat. We can tolerate no intrusion on that private place.

This fundamental human need to be left alone, though it is essential to the quality of life we would fight for, is not well protected. With the increasing complexity of modern life it has become harder to decide what intrusions are or ought to be a reasonable price for a social existence.

The reasonableness fluctuates. We have, for instance, significantly reduced the protection we give to someone's home, that symbol of the public/private divide. We have broken with the tradition of thousands of years—where ownership of land means the right to protect the peaceful enjoyment, not just of its surface but the air above and the ground beneath, 'from heaven unto hell'. This tradition meant, of course, that aircraft flying over our homes were, strictly speaking, trespassing. By the 1950s and 1960s several Australian states decided that the benefits of air transport were such that it would be reasonable to restrict that right to a 'reasonable' height, so that the use of airspace over our quarter-acre block (complying, or course, with Commonwealth air regulations) would not automatically commit a civil wrong of trespass or of nuisance.

The price has become a terrible one for those so gravely misfortunate as to live beneath the flight paths of commercial airfields. This is especially so in Sydney, since the opening of the 'third' (and the closure of the second) runway at Mascot on 4 November 1994.

Since then about half a million people have been driven to cursing heaven and the ALP by the noise of aeroplanes taking off and landing, up to every two or three minutes, from 6 in the morning till 11 at night. At the Leichhardt Oval protest rally in early December, speakers virtually did not need to—indeed, could not—testify about the intolerable noise levels: every three or four minutes they were actually drowned out. For the wretches living in Sydenham their homes are, officially, now unliveable.

Their misery is the price of 'the community's' convenience: so that Moira Rayner, commuter, will make interstate appointments on time, and fly cheaply and often, and so that her carrier will trade profitably.

The price is too high.

On the same day that life became noisy hell for half a million people, a cruel joke was played on one, perhaps the dearest, of my friends. After a life filled with betrayals, disappointment and loss, she had found an inner and an outer peace, a home of her own beside the sea, the means which would allow her to retire, and, at long last, love and companionship. Then she was served notice that they were to be taken. As I write, she sleeps beside the Indian Ocean, ravaged by cancer. She is at home, but even there she has lost what she values the most, her sanctuary. The destruction within her body has made it impossible that she be left alone, even there. She has no withdrawing place. Those who love and care for her also rob her of that still, small place where she can be herself.

When I was 13 we spent and entire term in class studying the Book of Job with the school chaplain. I could hardly wait to find the answer—for there had to be one—to the capricious infliction of suffering. When he announced that we had made an end I asked, because I thought I must have missed it, what that 'answer' was. When he told me 'that we must endure and have faith' the wave of feeling which overwhelmed me began and has probably sustained my professional work over the ensuing 33 years. What kind of God was this?

Anger is transformable into 'a useful energy source' when it has a purpose. It directs much political action, as it has in Sydney where it has driven public meetings, a blockade and, no doubt, electoral revenge. The afflicted have probably never heard of the admirable Job, nor will they buy the promise of reward for suffering. It was not, they believe, unavoidable.

In this they are right, of course. As Laurie Oakes pointed out in *The Bulletin* (13 December) it was a conscious choice, in 1989, to direct flight paths over the northern suburbs rather than over the ocean. It would not only vastly increase Mascot's capacity but also permit deferring the development of Badgery's Creek, the proposed second major airport, for another 20 years or more. They knew what the human cost would be. Money meant more than ordinary people's peace.

I can do little but love my friend, who must regain her own inner space now that the outer has been denied to her. She has her own peace to find, her own courage.

We *can* do something about the living conditions of our fellows. The cause of their misery at least can be eliminated by our valuing their right to be left alone more highly than we value the privilege of flying for a few minutes, or a few dollars, less.

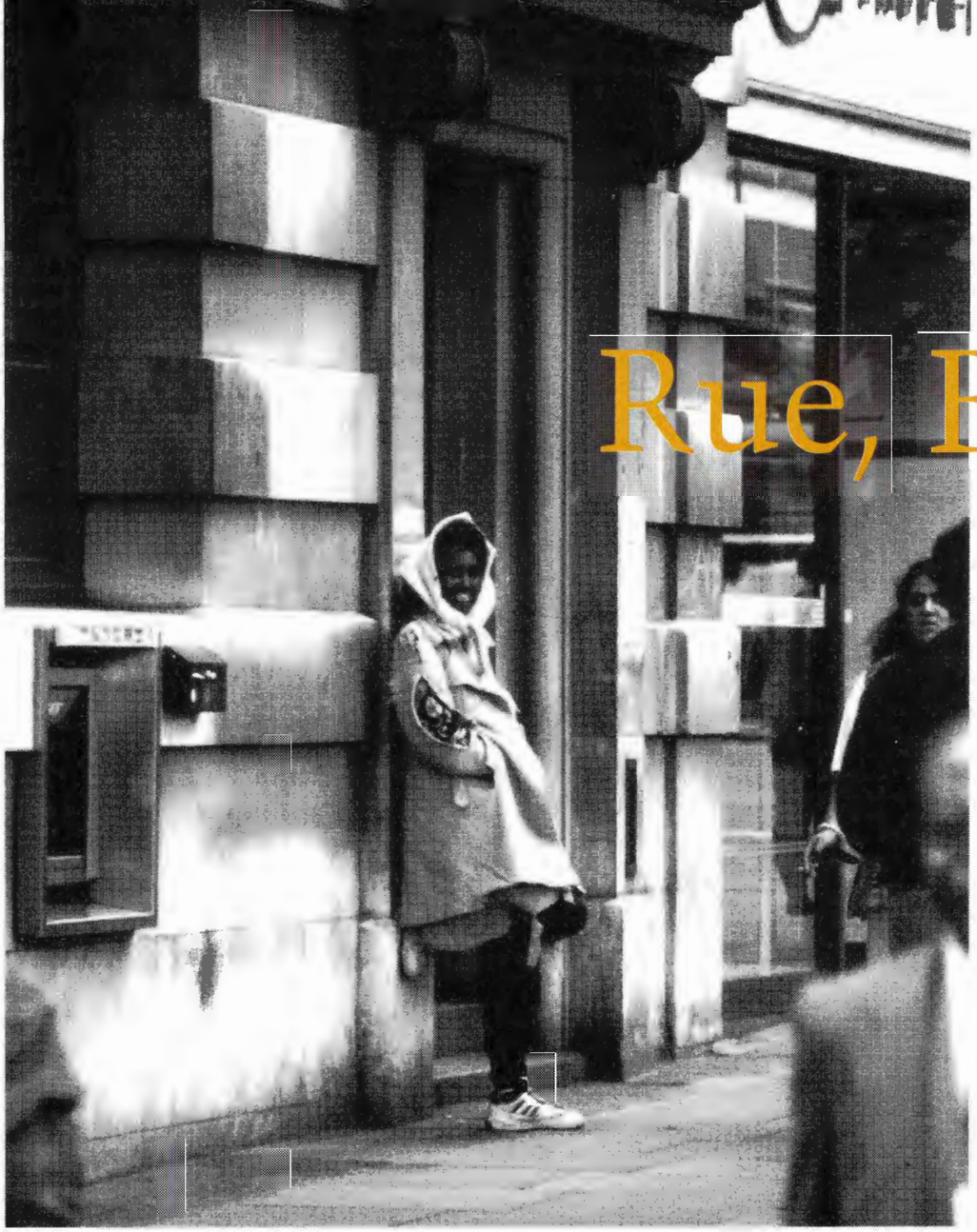
And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings.

—W.B. Yeats, THE LAKE ISLE OF INNISFREE ■

Moira Rayner is a lawyer and freelance journalist.

Rue, Britannia

In 1990, Margaret Thatcher handed the mantle of British Prime Minister to John Major—a mantle that now seems on the point of becoming a shroud. ***David Glanz*** *draws on his most recent visit to examine the state of Major's Britain.*



Free to be destitute: psychiatric patient outside St Pancras station, London. She has been 'released into the community' as a result of government cost-cutting.

Photo: David Glanz.

EVERYONE KNOWS MAYFAIR. It's the place with the highest rents and the most expensive hotels, the costliest spot in London. Its only connection with poverty is Old Kent Road, two squares further on round the *Monopoly* board.

That's one Mayfair, the Mayfair of the game: the fantasy land of an ordered Britain where a pound is still an amount to be respected and social classes are reflected in a neatly ascending and stable hierarchy of suburbs. And then there's John Major's Mayfair. As a concentration of enormous wealth and privilege it still has few rivals. But its once-spotless exterior is now blemished by the symptoms of an economic malaise so prolonged and so hated that it has begun to rot the British body politic.

The clue is to be found in the shopfronts. On Mayfair's fringe, in Marylebone High Street, there's still no shortage of places to squander disposable income. But here and there the charity shops and op shops are sprouting, touting for income for cancer research, for Third World hunger, for hospices. Their spread is not a sign of a growing social concern. Every one, in real estate agent's terms, represents a profitable customer gone to the wall, a vacancy that cannot be filled. And, like an urban dentist, the agents have slapped in a cheap filling, offering peppercorn rents to worthy causes.

Forty-five minutes' walk away from where the affluent gain a vicarious thrill by buying second-hand, the real poverty begins at Kings Cross. St Pancras Station is like a gigantic parcel, swathed from top to toe in builders' sheeting. Across the road, a black woman echoes the theme, wrapped all over despite midsummer warmth in a jumble of mismatched, ill-fitting

clothes. She stands in a catatonic daze on the pavement. She's a stranger, but nine out of 10 passersby would be able to tell you who she is—another mentally ill person pushed 'into the community' by government cost-cutting.

Outside Kings Cross post office, a heated argument breaks out between two men. They could be drug pushers, they could be pimps. One has a woman dressed in stereotypical prostitute fashion in tow, the other has two minders shadowing him. Passersby give the men a wide berth, some hurrying past with eyes averted, others gathering in a loose circle at a safe distance to see if it will come to blows. It doesn't and the crowd breaks up.

IT IS TWO YEARS since I was last in Britain. Two years is a long time measured against the babies I'm handed to cuddle who weren't even conceived when I was there last. Two years in the life of a nation should be a mere blink of the eye. But it isn't so. The decline is tangible, the demoralisation verging on universal. I meet two young people in Salford, part of the Manchester metropolitan sprawl. They're punky, cynical, literally hopeless. She's unemployed. It all seems to fit. What does he do? He works in an office, clocking up overtime, a steady job with a 'future'. It makes no difference. His vision is as despondent as hers. Would they like to emigrate? The answer is, sure, but where could they go, what would they do? This isn't a lost generation, it's a generation bereaved.

There are those who try to keep up appearances, like a tribe of distressed gentlefolk. I spend an evening in the function room of a West Country pub, watching a dozen women put on an end-of-year tap dancing show for their husbands and families. It's the kind of thing people think that people did before television. A few days later I walk along a country lane to watch the ritual of village cricket. This, surely, is the middle England of which John Major's dreams are made. Yet even in the south, widely regarded in the 1980s as a zone of prosperity that was leaving its poor northern cousins in its wake, there is a growing reservoir of economic despair.

The British government's own statisticians have calculated that the bottom 10 per cent of the population suffered a 14 per cent drop in real income during the Thatcher years, from 1979 to 1991. The next 10 per cent recorded no rise in living standards. In those 12 years the number living on incomes less than half the average soared from five million to 13.5 million. The result is that towns like Penzance, Hastings, Weymouth, and parts of east Kent and inner London have joined the smokestack cities of the Midlands, Merseyside, Tyneside and Glasgow as areas that qualify for regional aid.

The sense of decay, the sense that society is going backwards, is palpable in the industrial heartlands. When I moved to Salford in 1974 it was said that the row upon row of Coronation Street-style terraced homes included some that were standing when Friedrich Engels investigated the city before writing his devastating critique of the impact of the Industrial Revolution on English society.

Today it is safe to guess that those houses have probably gone. What is remarkable is how often what has taken their place is not new homes—although many have been built—but grass. This is an inner-city greening in which no one can take pleasure. In some places the brambles have simply cocooned the remnants of abandoned buildings. In others, the

Hogarthian street scenes have never disappeared from London, though a latterday Hogarth might not blame the booze.

Photo: David Glanz.

council has smoothed over the foundations and planted the area as a pocket of parkland. This was once the workshop of the world, the region where King Cotton meant muck and brass. As the fabric of that society begins to fade and tear, it is hard to find a more damning example of the ability of British society to deliver than in those abandoned building sites.

The British government's own statisticians have calculated that the bottom 10 per cent of the population suffered a 14 per cent drop in real income during the Thatcher years, from 1979 to 1991. The next 10 per cent recorded no rise in living standards. In those 12 years the number living on incomes less than half the average soared from five million to 13.5 million.

What, I asked my brother, sums up how things have changed since I was last here? His answer was simple: car-boot sales. In the middle of adversity somebody, somewhere, is making a tidy living from this latest social phenomenon. A car-boot sale is like a garage sale, except that cars, being mobile, can be brought together in large concentrations to create an instant market. They happen in school playgrounds on Saturday mornings. They happen on old aerodromes near convenient freeway interchanges. They are sources of delight ('You'll never guess how much I paid for that tool kit') and also signs of desperation ('A year ago they'd have paid my price—now they want to bargain').

BACK IN LONDON the homeless are touting a magazine on street corners to survive. *The Big Issue* is sold exclusively by homeless people, who get 30 pence of the 50 pence cover price. The magazine is anodyne, with little more content than some that are handed out free at Underground stations. But it is more polite, more sanitised, than most ways of begging, although the seller at whom I point my camera puts a copy in front of his face and keeps it there until he's sure I'm out of shot.

In the midst of this there are some surprising touches, signs that the '80s wave has not receded without leaving some evidence of yuppiefication. I take friends for a curry to Brick Lane, just off Whitechapel Road in the East End. It's an area synonymous with migration and poverty. This is where my relatives came when they disembarked from the ship from Poland, and this is where many of the postwar wave of Asian migrants ended up. It comes as a shock to find that the restaurants that dot the street feature Diners Club signs, with upmarket decors and prices to match.

At Del's Diner on Euston Road, everything is in place to shoot a scene from *Up the Junction*. The breakfast includes black sausage and fried bread; when mum and daughter behind the counter speak, it's pure London working-class. But the menu has widened since Nell Dunn's 1960s, and the greasy spoon caff now serves avocado, prawns and pastrami for those who don't want their eggs swimming in bacon fat.

Everyone thinks that Paul Keating's win in the 1993 federal election means Australia has effectively voted to become a republic. I'm forced to destroy that piece of perceptive Fleet Street analysis by pointing to one or two salient facts, such as the fact that the republic scarcely featured as a campaign issue. My information is greeted with dismay. The royal family has drifted so far into disrepute that people are disappointed that Australians are not giving them a better weapon with which to question its existence.

Politics has become enormously volatile. The Conservative government continually bumps along the bottom of the graph. Short of an epidemic sweeping away every Home Counties retired colonel and Grantham shopkeeper, it can fall little lower. But it's not at all clear that Tony Blair's Labour Party can take advantage of the Tories' woes. Its lead in the polls has approached 30 per cent, but similarly impressive figures have been thrown away in recent years. It doesn't take much to realise why. Even my true-blue brother-in-law can see that Labour periodically cuts its throat by emphasising its similarity with the right, rather than offering the alternative so many plainly want.

It may not be politics as the lobby correspondents understand it, but the 6000 who attend a socialist conference in London show that some of the left is still alive and wanting very much to be kicking. A young Muslim woman in a head scarf stands up and says she represents a group of friends. What does the party think of religion, she's thinking of joining. A middle-aged woman from the campaign to save the coal mines gets a rousing cheer when she spells out in forthright terms what she thinks of the trade union leaders who are dragging their heels. Groups of Poles, Russians, Koreans and Japanese cluster, their simultaneous translations creating a constant hum. At the end of the week I hear that the Muslim woman has joined.

I walk up to the stone-built primary school in the small country town where I grew up. I stand up against the cool wall where I used to hide from the sun and the bullies, and try to imagine that nothing has changed. It can't be done. I'm not the only one who has entered upon a path that has no return route. The town's shopping centre is gap-toothed with To Let signs (how many charity shops can you have in one such place?). The papers are full of bile. The car parks are choked and the bus service abysmal. The England of childhood and roast beef and yorkshire pudding seems as remote as Edwardian laughter on the eve of war. ■

David Glanz is a freelance journalist.

ROBIN FITZSIMONS

A rabbi in her place

Julia Neuberger is the second British woman to be ordained a rabbi, and the first to head a congregation. But she sees herself as building on Jewish tradition, not just as an innovator.

JULIA NEUBERGER COULD BE THE original contra-stereotype—Rhine-blond and Jewish, pastoral and polemical, British and Europhile, female and contrary. She is also a woman rabbi, and chancellor of the University of Ulster. Dressy and outspoken, she will never be mistaken for a church mouse in a synagogue. Neuberger is perhaps best known to Australians as the stormy, dissenting judge of the 1994 Booker prize.

There are now 15 British women rabbis, of whom Julia Neuberger was the second to be ordained. In America there are some five hundred.

After the American ordination of Sally Presand in 1973, Jacqueline Tabick was ordained in Britain in 1975. Julia Neuberger followed, as the second British woman rabbi, in 1977.

She became the first woman to be in charge of a Jewish congregation—in Streatham, South London. Simultaneously, she found herself juggling the intensely pastoral, the political (within Britain's Social Democratic Party), writing, and broadcasting. And one husband, two children and two parents.

She says that her original notoriety began because she was seen as 'a freak'. Now that there are so many women rabbis, the 'freak factor' has all but disappeared.

Rabbi Neuberger grew up within the orbit of Reform Judaism, in which the tradition of equal education for boys and girls dates from 1840 in England (where it paralleled a movement for better education for girls within the Church of England) and 1817 in Germany.

Not that Neuberger, as a young girl, felt the slightest 'vocation' to become a rabbi. She was much busier joining in general 1960s student protests—occupying the Cambridge History Faculty building, campaigning unsuccessfully to have men admitted to her single-sex Cambridge College (Newnham), and generally dreaming of life as an archaeologist in Iraq.

'I became a rabbi by accident. I was reading Oriental Studies, studying Assyriology. Then, in 1968-69 there was a public hanging of Jews at Basra. So when I applied to go and dig with the British, I was warned that it was not safe.

'The following year I applied to go to the British school at Ankara, Turkey'. But a British archaeologist had been suspected of stealing treasures, and so there was a four-year ban on British archaeologists.

And, even in the heady optimism of 1960s, the classified ads were not exactly overflowing with desperate pleas for half-trained British Jewish Assyriologists. So, with some reluctance, midway through her Cambridge degree, she decided to convert her minor subject (Hebrew—a very soft option, considering she knew much of it already) into a major subject and build an academic career.

In her third year she found herself becoming deeply interested in Jewish-Christian-Muslim relations in the medieval world, and in the ways that their respective writings interacted. Relations between these three religions have remained one of her ongoing concerns ever since.

She also found herself fascinated by the philosophy and legal system of Judaism. But when, towards the end of her third year, her Cambridge teacher, Dr Nicholas de Lange (who describes her as one of his most brilliant students) asked her why she should not become a rabbi, she thought the idea was crazy.

She did, however, attend classes at the Leo Baeck College (a non-Orthodox Rabbinical training school) in London, and was required to spend some time visiting Jewish congregations. 'As the intellectual conviction grew, I became more religious'. Jewish concepts of justice (especially social justice) caught hold. 'I began to find a vocation but I still thought I would end up as an academic'. Then, as she interacted with people with their individual problems, she decided that what she really wanted to do was to serve a congregation.

BY 1989 SHE FELT THAT the time had come for a change. So, she transmogrified into a health policy analyst. She took up a fellowship to analyse research ethics, and studied value systems within health education systems at Harvard. She also chaired a patients' rights' organisation. In a sense, this was yet another natural progression from Judaic studies. She now both teaches at Leo Baeck College, where half her students are women, and chairs a National Health Service (NHS) Community Health Services Provider Trust.

She talks of her old congregation—to which her family still belongs—with much affection. 'They were very equal opportunity, my old congregation. The walls of Jericho—or at any rate the pillars of

Streatham, did not cave in when they acquired the world's first congregational woman rabbi. Indeed, they came to terms (very rapidly) with having a rabbi's husband, and not a rabbi's wife who traditionally fulfilled much the same soup-and-coffee role as the Anglican vicar's wife. But one requirement differed—the rabbi's husband was more readily excused from synagogue attendance!

SHE REMAINS ACTIVE in inter-faith organisations, and served for many years on the British Council of Jews and Christians. However, she wants a trialogue, (to include Moslems as well), not just dialogue. Spirituality is generally not a prominent feature of Judaism, and she found herself particularly interested in the spiritual aspects of Christianity which she encountered in the hospice movement. She would also like Christians to know more about Judaism and Islam, and for non-fundamentalists from all three religions to become more involved in discussing the broad moral issues of our time.

'People have argued that the reason Paul was so negative (about women) was that he was Jewish. Well, yes, you can find some pretty anti-women passages in Jewish teaching of the time. But you also have to say that contemporary with Paul there was a much more positive attitude. I suspect he was just a misogynist. He would have known women who were literate in the Temple period. There was a tradition of learned women.'

—Rabbi Julia Neuberger

Paradoxically, she thinks that until recently the relative rarity of women rabbis in Britain made life easier for them than for American women rabbis. That may not continue. At one time in the 1980s all the British non-Orthodox rabbis were chaired by women—she was chairing the Liberal rabbinical conference while Jackie Tabick chaired the Reform rabbis. Despite their numbers, American women rabbis have not reaching senior positions.

But she also thinks that even in those domains where formal sexual equality is now the norm, the battle is not wholly over. Women and men approach many matters differently, and the peculiarly female forms of expression can be stifled, however unintentionally. To illustrate: 'We had a conference last year to discuss women's expression of Judaism, and we expected about 50 people. We had to close the doors at 500'. Entitled 'The Half-Empty Book-Case', the meeting addressed questions of opportunities. As have the many subsequent, also packed-out, meetings.

In contrast to the acceptance of women within her own Liberal Jewish community, there have been serious battles concerning the place of women within London's Orthodox community during the last ten years. Attempts by Orthodox women to hold their own prayer meetings were resisted by the Chief Rabbi (Jonathan Sacks).

She sees the polarisation now occurring between traditionalist Orthodox Judaism on the one hand and the more radical Reform and Liberal movements on the other as paralleling similar schisms within the Christian denominations, and, in particular, the Church of England.

So she has followed the Anglican debate on the ordination of women priests with fascination. And not simply because she is a close collaborator and admirer of a prime supporter of women priests, Dr Richard Harries, the Anglo-Catholic Bishop of Oxford.

When Liberal and Reform Judaism began to ordain women rabbis in the 1970s, their Synagogues were making a statement of unequivocating principle. So she finds the Anglican debate strange in its restraint. 'Listening to those who have wanted women priests—there is something which I'm not used to—which is a politeness when dealing with the Opposition. Instead of saying 'You don't want women priests—tough', what they're saying is 'We'll do everything we possibly can to accommodate you'. This is an intriguing comment coming from someone who also says that as she becomes older she often finds it harder to decide on issues, because she has come to see both sides of the case—as is indeed obvious from the televised ethical debates which she has chaired. But, on the ethical issue of the equality of men and women, she clearly sees no 'other side'.

As a Jew, she also notes from outside the paradox that it is the Catholic Church—comprising they who are led by the Pope—which has historically provided more opportunities for women than has the Protestant Church.

'I think we may see quite an interesting inter-faith movement for the advancement of women growing up in this country'. She points to those who are trying to achieve a greater role for women within British Islam.

THE PARALLELS BETWEEN JEWISH and Christian fundamentalism are obvious. Orthodox rabbis argue that Jewish law, as transmitted by the five books of the Torah, and interpreted in the Mishnah and Talmud, has divine authority, and that is not for human beings to change. She says that the resistance to change of Orthodox law became established largely during the ghetto period of the eighteenth century. Yet, in earlier, medieval times, there were substantial changes in Judaic law as a result or rabbinic edict. For instance, polygamy was technically legal within western, Ashkenazy, Judaism before c. 1000 CE. when it became outlawed by rabbinic decree. The approach of the current Reform and Liberal traditions is to con-

sider to what extent early writings might also have been influenced by the way in which contemporary cultural and value systems affected the writers.

As for the essence of her own Jewish belief? She replies with a neat and immediate riposte: appropriately it is a paraphrase of the two Great Commandments of Christian teaching: 'I believe in a creator, who makes certain demands upon us, in that we try to create a good world here. The rest is commentary, as they say'.

And an academic Jewish view of St Paul? 'People have argued that the reason Paul was so negative (about women) was that he was Jewish. Well, yes, you can find some pretty anti-women passages in Jewish teaching of the time. But you also have to say that contemporary with Paul there was a much more positive attitude. I suspect he was just a misogynist. He would have known women who were literate in the Temple period. There were women who were scholars—like (slightly later) Berueria, the wife of Rabbi Meier. There was a tradition of learned women. Within the apocrypha you've got Judith. Within the Hebrew Bible itself you've got characters like Ruth, Deborah. The low status of women assumed by Paul was not legally part of Judaism of that period. Women went back in legal status in Judaism, but post-Paul.'

She has an attachment to Israel, but no particular fondness for its government; her outspoken views have not endeared her to all members of the Jewish community—during the 1982 Lebanon conflict she received death threats. But attitudes have now changed. 'It is not now considered anathema in the (Jewish) community to say "Hang on. I think the Israeli government policies are wrong." ' She cried tears of joy and nearly crashed her car when, while driving in America, she listened to news of the Israel-Palestine peace-signing, yet she worries about conflicts developing with Israel's Jewish community. She has been vehemently criticised for arguing that one effect of the peace agreement has been to uncover previously camouflaged intra-Israeli Jewish schisms (and she notes that Jews are one people, not one race). She cites under-education of women and of Oriental (Sephardic) Jews in Israel and gross under-representation of women in Israel's Parliament and senior civil service. Not everyone agrees with her.

Her views cannot neatly be labelled as 'left' or 'right'. On the one hand, she clearly has a strong sense of 'social justice', which she believes derives from Jewish teaching. She is offended by the lack of proper opportunities (particularly in education) for many people both in England and in Israel. On the other hand, she thinks that the Tories have got things right in their attempts to make the civil service (in particular the Health Service) more accountable to the public. She particularly deplores the lack of patient choice within the NHS, in both its original and 'reformed' versions. She has also supported Lady Thatcher's criticisms of the West for not intervening to help the unarmed Bosnian people. In fact, her interactions with Margaret Thatcher have been at a slightly unusual level—they both actively work with a North London hospice in the former Prime Minister's old constituency. Neuberger disagreed with many of the Thatcher policies, and wishes that she had promoted more women; but she still thinks that she was in many ways unfairly caricatured and treated, probably because she was a woman.

For all her passionately held 'feminist' views, she believes that the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s was seriously misguided because it came to be directed against men, and failed to take account both of the importance of the protean forms of relationship between men and women, and of the burden of the caring load which still falls mainly on women.

As she argues in her book *Whatever's Happening to Women? Promises, Practices and Payoffs* (London: Kyle Cathie Ltd 1991): 'For most of us, relationships, across age barriers, gender boundaries and with member of our families and friends, are in the end what make life worthwhile. And that means being prepared to do some of the caring, some of the cherishing. But not all.' The solution for women, she believes, lies in sharing the caring; educating both boys and girls in parenting and adapting institutional thinking so that women do not (still!) have to make choices of a kind that would be unthinkable for most men—between career and families. 'Setting up old girls' networks' is her *Who's Who* recreation listing, and an important strategy for mutual support and advancement.

She is a strong supporter of marriage commitment, but also criticises those inward-looking families that fail to accept or care for those outside them. Divorce in impossible marriages may be inevitable and even desirable, but 'children do have a right to expect parents to make a pretty good effort to stay together.' Apart from which 'marriage can be enormously satisfying. It isn't all about sexual thrills, or even sexual thrall. It's actually about companionship and friendship and working together. In the Jewish marriage contract, it's about building a household within Israel'.

But she also thinks that women are, very rightly, going to place increasing demands on men within marriage—and not put up with 'rubbish' and an unbalanced load of commitments as in the past. So the survival of marriage will increasingly depend on proper education and preparation.

Rabbi Neuberger is nothing if not effervescent, full of laughter and polemical. Perhaps that is not surprising: she herself says that 'The fact that whenever you have two Jews you have three opinions is not a joke'.

Robin Fitzsimons is a physician and a freelance journalist.

The young ones II

Jon Greenaway talks with the future face of Labor

IT WOULD BE A BRAVE DINNER GUEST who would suggest that the Australian Labor Party in 1995 is the same as the party that won back in 1983. Over the competing clatter of coffee cups and port glasses the poor soul would be pilloried. What about the use of high interest rates, they shout, and the courting of the green vote? What about tariff reduction, privatisation and—the big one—enterprise bargaining? When a wit remarks that Hawke and Keating have turned Bill Hayden's drover's dog into a well-groomed Afghan hound, the gathering erupts in hysterical laughter. The transgressor sheepishly sips a *cafe latte*.

The Hawke era will probably be remembered more for the tears and recriminations, but it has also given Australia a Labor Party that has been consistently able to secure votes in the middle ground of the electorate. This base of support has allowed Keating to engage the party with issues that extend well beyond its traditional brief. His fixation with the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation group (APEC) is a prime example: a decade ago, the idea that a Labor government would push for a regional free-trade bloc would have been unthinkable.

Whether this electoral success represents a complete departure from Labor's blue-collar traditions, or an expansion towards a more inclusive party, it is a shift that is not restricted to the parliamentary wing. As I sat in a Carlton cafe, listening to three members of Young Labor confidently discuss their satisfaction with the state of the party, the new mood was striking.

Tim Holding works for the MLA for Dandenong, Jan Wilson, and he is the national president of Young Labor. Holding is quick to point out that there is strong support for the executive of the party among its true-believing youth: 'In terms of the republic, promoting better work opportunities for Australians, industrial relations, Medicare and Mabo, we've been in violent agreement with what our senior party has been doing.' However, he says this support has not always been forthcoming: 'Traditionally Young Labor has been characterised as being very radical and having a tendency to bag the party excessively. In recent years Young Labor has swung well and truly to the right.'

The right controls all state branches of Young Labor, and on the Victorian executive 11 out of 15 spots are filled by Labor Unity. In style and substance, Young Labor has moved with the rest of the party. Tim Holding denies, however, that the ALP has deserted its traditions. Rather, he argues, some of those traditions have simply gone: 'Australia does not have the blue-collar, manufacturing base that it had 20 or 30 years ago. The great postwar migration has changed Australia from a predominantly Anglo-Saxon country into one that is far more ethnically diverse. The Labor Party has changed as Australians have changed.'

Jaala McDonald, member of the Victorian Young Labor executive and a field officer with the National Union of Workers, points to the 11 years that Labor has been in power federally as an indicator that the party has been able to mature in government without losing its base support: 'I think the change has been the perception of the Labor party from being a blue-collar party to being one that represents everyone. Clearly that has changed the way that we draw support from all these groups: young people, women, ethnic communities. It's been to the benefit of the party but it is also reflective of the way the country is.'

Rachel Dapiran, president of the Victorian branch and an officer with the Shop Assistants Union, believes that the more conservative guise Labor is wearing at the moment has not prevented the party from attracting the youth vote: 'I think the Labor Party has tapped into issues which concern young people, one of the biggest being the environment. Also things like the rights of young people at work—we've taken on these issues which young people see as important.'

Tim Holding adds that, contrary to conventional wisdom, radicalism doesn't appeal to the young and that some within the party fail to recognise this. 'Sometimes you get this trendy set from the left that's essentially university-based, and they're quasi-intellectuals. But young people aren't fooled by that any more than the rest of the community is. They're concerned with bread-and-butter issues such as

Above: Jaala McDonald, Tim Holding and Rachel Dapiran. Photograph by Tim Stoney.

fair wages and a good industrial relations system.'

Unlike their counterparts in the Young Liberals, the trio will not be drawn into criticism of the party hierarchy. Even when the conversation turns to the problems Labor has at the state level, all three are quick to suggest they're being dealt with. 'Competent financial management is the key to running a state government', says Holding. 'The mistakes that we made in the '80s—not just in Victoria but in the other states as well—were that we tried to run counter-cyclical economic policies. John Brumby's recently released financial management paper reflects the fact that the state party has learnt from those mistakes and can only go forward now.'

Their praise of the federal party boils down to a belief that during the past decade it has presented the electorate with policies that can drawn on broad community support. Jaala McDonald asserts that this has been accompanied by a more measured approach to reform than that taken by the Whitlam government: 'The Labor Party has been able to enact longer-term strategies rather than a lot of quick change followed by a long period in opposition again. There has been significant restructuring in industrial relations and the economy. Things have been implemented, such as Medicare, which people now take for granted.'

HOLDING AGREES, ADDING THAT despite the long period in government the party is not at risk of running out of ideas: 'Even in the past two years we've had Mabo and the white paper on full employment plus the republic. We've got a government that year after year is able to reinvent itself and bring on new talent, in terms of new ministers. The future bodes well for us while we're able to do that.'

Dapiran contends that the party's success has as much to do with a grudging respect for Keating as it does with coalition leadership wrangles: 'Some people don't like his personality, they think he's a bit rough, but then they respect his competency. I think they respect his decency and [acknowledge] that he has a forward vision for Australia.'

McDonald also offers the preselection quota for women, passed at the recent party conference, as a structural change that will contribute to future success: 'I think in the longer term when the 35 per cent quota is met and the party has more women in parliament, women voters are going to look at the ALP as the party that really does represent them.' Dapiran concurs, and rejects criticism of the quota as a paternalistic gesture: 'Women make up 51% of the population, it's hardly tokenistic to have them in parliament', she says. 'The method you use to get them in there you can argue about, but the fact is that people will have to go out there, prove their mettle and work for the seat. All it is doing is facilitating that.'

Talking to these three young people, none of them over the age of 22, one is struck by how accurately they mirror their senior colleagues. They duck and weave round questions that require an admission of fault and turn the answers around either to focus on the inconsistencies of the coalition or to point to Labor achievements. When an opinion needs to be expressed they defer to the party line. Whereas the Young Liberals were reflective and questioning, Young Labor are disciplined to the point of being dogmatic.

The explanation for this may lie in the relationship they have with the respective party machines. Whereas people join the Young Liberals voluntarily, anyone under 26 years of age who joins the ALP is automatically a member of Young Labor. And, like Dapiran, Holding and McDonald, they tend to be employed by a union, an MP or the party machine. Rachel Dapiran sees her involvement in the party in terms of an apprenticeship: 'Whether you're working within the trade union movement or for a politician it does give you training and a career structure and I intend to rise up and learn different things along the way.' The Young Liberals may be known for their independence, but Young Labor is not so easily divorced from the rest of its party.

The ALP must believe that it has found the right magic to bewitch the electorate, and one gets the impression the spell has been passed on to the members of Young Labor: when they talk of issues such as Mabo, the republic and women in parliament, it is as though they are chanting a mantra. As long as the current incarnation of Labor continues to be elected, there is little doubt that not much will change and Young Labor, at least publicly, are not considering it.

But a lot can change between now and the time the current crop finds itself in the upper echelons of the party. After all, Paul Keating joined Young Labor when Arthur Calwell was leader. ■

Jon Greenaway is a *Eureka Street* staff writer.

God moves in mysterious metres

Seamus Heaney spoke at the 1994 Melbourne Writers' Festival

I WANT TO TALK about poetry and God's movement; poetry as movement, metre and making.

One of the religious statements that bears some relation to the making and meaning of poetry is St Augustine's: 'Our hearts are restless until they rest in thee.' I think that this restless condition is the basis of metrical poetry which is, after all, a poetry constantly on the move towards a closure that it doesn't quite want to happen. The metre, the movement, the making of the thing go, that's what it's all about. As each line comes to the end of its tether, the next one comes to its rescue, but then it needs rescuing in turn—the whole thing is a kind of musical pulley-system; or a series of safety nets of sound that catch one another in the nick of time and keep the time going. To be able to keep the system in motion, to make it move, is one of the tests of the maker of poetry. And the maker of the world, of course, faces the same challenge. He has a flux on his hands which is an eternal present in his conception.

Photograph (above) of Seamus Heaney, taken at The Malthouse, during the Melbourne Writers' Festival, October 1994, by Brendan Hennessy.

Anyhow, I'd like to remind you, to begin with, of a wonderful parable by Jorge Luis Borges. A prose poem called *Everything and Nothing* in which a writer—who was born in Stratford on Avon, or somewhere like that, tries to pretend to be an ordinary citizen. So he gets married and starts a family but feels unsatisfied and restless with that. So he escapes to London and becomes an actor and acts on the stage and is successful and is unsatisfied with that too. So he thinks he'll try to write a few plays and makes up a whole world but is restless and unsatisfied with that.

Then he has to die and he meets the supreme being and the supreme being says, 'All right then, what's the story ?' And he says, 'I'm sorry. I'm a complete failure. I didn't really do anything. I just made things up. I made up a marriage and a life. I made up myself as an actor. I made up plays. I didn't achieve anything.' God says, 'That's okay, I make things up too. It's all I can do. In fact, you're part of the make-up yourself. So, you know, ... shake'.

BORGES, IN OTHER WORDS, sees the appetite for fulfilled purpose that is inseparable from the artistic endeavour as equally part of the divine. So I suppose that is why several Romantic statements about poetry satisfy. The Coleridgian overkill statement about the imagination being a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal *I am*—it makes special sense when you think of it in relation to metrical action. Metre and rhyme, verse and closure, hanker after that repleteness of knowledge and being. There is an analogy with the religious quest, I think, in the simultaneous ongoingness and search for finish in metrical verse.

One of the great pieces of writing about Dante is by the Russian poet Osip Mandlestam, a critical fantasia, a kind of song in praise of Dante's procedures in the *Commedia*, called 'A conversation about Dante.' It sets out to contradict the image of Dante as a kind of huge, gifted computer that is fed with all of Thomism and all of Arabic philosophy and everything in classical literature, which it then starts to bring out in little parcels of three lines at a time, rhyming—tookchooka, tookchooka, tookchooka. This sense of Dante as a predetermined phenomenon—as a kind of processor of a pre-existing set of doctrines and orthodoxies of medieval Christianity—this is one way in which he is taught and thought about, but Mandelstam will have none of it.

Mandelstam quite rightly sees him as a religious *poet*, not as a religious warehouse. He sees the action of the *terza rima*, the sheer process of making the music, the joy of catching the rhymes on the wing one after the other, as fundamental to the poem. He revises ways of reading *The Divine Comedy* in relation to extrinsic concerns like theology or cosmology or as an exercise in allegory or as a hermetic numerical system or whatever. Mandelstam says thrillingly, no, you have to see this poem as an act of ecstatic crystallography. The little stanzas are as natural as crystals forming in a solution: they're a multitudinous eruption of three-sided crystals—one forms, then another, then another: *Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita/ Mi ritrovai per una selva oscura./ Che la diritta via era smarrita.*

It's a wonderful corrective and reminder that religious poetry is *poetry*, poetry as the *sensation* of revelation, the sensation of the mystery coming alive. Oscar Wilde once said that he drank to keep body and soul apart. But you've got to think of poetry as an effort to bring body and soul together. In an *in*-static way, as it were.

If you think of great religious poems like Blake's *Tyger* or Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus*, or George Herbert or Dante or John of the Cross or Emily Dickinson or Hopkins—you cannot altogether just *think* of them; you actually have a muscular reception of them too. Poems are a doing-in-language as well as a thinking-about in the head. When it comes to great religious poetry, or poetry which has religious appetites, poetry that's up against the mystery of things, then you're responding through the *madeness* of the thing as much as through the subject of the made thing. In these poets, their God does move in the metre. The metre enacts the neediness and vision and the reward at the same time.

I'll just read two poems in conclusion. I'll say this first one from memory because I don't have it with me. It's a short poem by Robert Graves. He doesn't mention the White Goddess in it, but she—or something like that bolt from the blue which represents God to Paul on the way to Damascus—is present; the small bang, so to speak, that makes this bright new world.

It's called *Dance Of Words*. It's about metre and the doing-in-language that is verse.

To make them move, you should start from lightning
And not forecast the rhythm: rely on chance
Or so-called chance for its bright emergence
Once lightning interpenetrates the dance.

Grant them their own traditional steps and postures
But see they dance it out again and again
Until only the lightning is left to puzzle over—
The choreography plain, and the theme plain.

I'll end with a translation of John of the Cross that I did. John of the Cross in Spanish is utterly lambent, and even though I don't think of myself as altogether a lambent versifier, I had a go. ... I once met in a confessional a character who belonged to the order of the Discalced Carmelites (How could you not fall in love with somebody called a Discalced Carmelite?). He was not only a student of the mystic John of the Cross but he had been transformed by the mysticism. He was the first person within my own experience of Catholicism and the institutional church who was radiant with what we often hear called the love of God.

There was no 'no' in him. He seemed to have entered the realm of 'yes' and to have made it credible—because quite often it's a mushy enough domain. He had entered what a friend of mine called the O-zone, in so far as religious poetry might be defined as poetry in which the exclamatory particle 'O' figures considerably. 'O' representing that ache and aspiration I was speaking of. Well, this man had entered the the O-zone and I met him in the last place where I expected to find affirmation and praise: in the confessional.

WHAT I'M GOING TO READ is from a long sequence called *Station Island*. It's got a typical Irish Catholic protagonist who's going around saying 'accuse me, accuse me, accuse me,' and suddenly he meets this character in the confessional. The penance that the priest gives is a translation of John of the Cross. This comes towards the end of the sequence when the protagonist is badly in need of blessing.

As if the prisms of the kaleidoscope
I plunged once in a butt of muddied water
surfaced like a marvellous lightship

and out of its silted crystals a monk's face
that had spoken years ago from behind a grille
spoke again about the need and chance

to salvage everything, to re-envisage
the zenith and glimpsed jewels of any gift
mistakenly abased ...

What came to nothing could always be replenished.
'Read poems as prayers ,' he said, 'and for your penance
translate me something by Juan de la Cruz.'

Returned from Spain to our chapped wilderness,
his consonants aspirate, his forehead shining,
he had made me feel there was nothing to confess.

Now his sandalled passage stirred me on to this:
How well I know that fountain, filling, running,
although it is the night.

That eternal fountain, hidden away,
I know its haven and its secrecy
although it is the night.

But not its source because it does not have one,
which is all sources' source and origin
although it is the night.

No other thing can be so beautiful.
Here the earth and heaven drink their fill
although it is the night.

So pellucid it never can be muddied,
and I know that all light radiates from it
although it is the night.

I know no sounding-line can find its bottom,
nobody ford or plumb its deepest fathom
although it is the night.

And its current so in flood it overspills
to water hell and heaven and all peoples
although it is the night

And the current that is generated there,
as far as it wills to, it can flow that far
although it is the night.

And from these two a third current proceeds
which neither of these two, I know, precedes
although it is the night.

This eternal fountain hides and splashes
within this living bread that is life to us
although it is the night.

Hear it calling out to every creature.
And they drink these waters, although it is dark here
because it is the night.

I am repining for this living fountain.
Within this bread of life I see it plain
although it is the night.

Question: *How much do you feel that your poetry is an expression of the religious tradition you grew up in and how much is it rewriting of things in that tradition that you find unsatisfactory?*

Seamus Heaney: I grew up in the Catholic faith. There was a great sense of mystery. A huge, jubilant sense of the supernatural dimensions of reality. A sense that one's own minimal cobweb presence was part of a shimmering infinity. And had every right to be part of it. A sense, too, of sanctifying grace as part of it. Something totally unknowable and elevating and yet attainable. Almost.

That, it has to be said, was part of the child-crystal world you accepted. As much of a reality for me as a poet as all the rest of the stuff that you hear so much about: the repression, the priest-ridden minds, the boarding schools, the straps, the Christian Brothers etc. Of course like most Catholics I tried to secularise myself. Then in middle years I thought to myself 'Why bother anymore'. Recently, for example, I've allowed the word *soul* and the word *spirit* to come back. Not only into my vocabulary but into my being somehow, after trying to evacuate them. So the poem I would like to write now would float free, and would have the bubble-like mystery of that Catholicism I described as the child vision.

But of course what I'm describing is a desire. You know, if you're a smoker you're always looking for the ultimate smoke; every cigarette you've ever smoked is a slight disappointment, even though it's an utter necessity. Well, in a similar way, every poem is a disappointed drag on the absolute.

Does the Orphic element in poetry run with or against the religious impulse?

There's an American classicist called Robert Segal who's written a book about the myth of Orpheus. Remember, Plato famously banished the poets from his republic, and Segal very neatly, and I think very credibly, sees this as a negative reading of Orpheus. Orpheus in one aspect is the ecstatic poet who moves not only human beings but creatures of the world by rhythmical sound. He chants. When he plays, the world becomes entranced. It's like playing an Irish jig—people start to beat their feet and begin to move. This is a perceptible fact: music moves along like that. And Plato said 'Not too good, that, is it? Poetry puts people out of their minds. Goodbye, Orph!'

But, says Segal, Orpheus can be seen in another light. If we take into account the way his music moved the heart of the god of death, the way the lyre was a kind of musical lifeline that almost hauled Eurydice back to life, then we can think of Orpheus as the figure of the poet who makes art encounter the fact of death and so, by extension, we can think of poetry as an art which is working its way along the upward gradient towards the light. It's entranced but it's also working. We want music to be doing a haulage job. We want it to have some relationship to the endured life as well as to being a call to the

envisaged life. So Orpheus in that aspect is the poet doing the labour of the upward slope, working against the gravitational pull of death and mortality and experiencing a tension that the poet Czeslaw Milosz described once, in a beautiful formulation: 'stretched between the contemplation of a motionless point and the command to participate actively in history.'

Aren't religion and poetry one and the same? Aren't poets trying to sacralise a profane world? Isn't that what poetry's about?
I just want to say that one of the things that was always vaguely part of the religious formation of my life was the injunction to 'make something of yourself'. Well, from the haiku to the epic, poetry is a making of something of the world. Which is to say that it *re*-makes it, and yet to use that phrase, 'remake the world', doesn't necessarily mean anything miraculous or superhumanly ambitious. It means to see it in a fresh light and come at it anew. For example, one of the poems of my own that I like the best sprang from a moment when I mistook one thing for another thing and found the world renewed and the imagination happily taking care of itself and its work. We were in a graveyard, which is one of the best places to go to contemplate things, and we thought there was a river at the bottom of the graveyard. We heard the sound of it but when we got there ... Well, this is the poem:

The river bed dried up half full of leaves

Us listening to the river in the trees

Is religious poetry about the lack of faith? The most outrageous claim ever made in words was surely 'before Abraham was, I am'. Can you say something about that?
Well, poetry would make the same claim. It manifests itself as language but it does have a similar covenant also with the prelinguistic, with silence. With the undertone of things, with what under-stands them. The necessary poem comes up from beneath the floor of language. So maybe the phrase 'religious poetry' is a tautology. None of us are talking about poetry as an apologetics or a restatement of religious faith. We mentioned Hopkins, who is often thought of as, so to speak, a Catholic poet, but I remember a very perverse and brilliant essay by Ivor Winters about Hopkins saying 'These Terrible Sonnets are supposed to be about crises of faith, but how do we know? They are clearly about some trauma but God knows what it is. They give the intensity of things.'

Gwen Harwood mentioned tone. Tone is all important in this. Tone is how we hear, read and judge the verity of poetry, of faith or whatever. It's a musical guarantee. Intonation, someone said, is the motion of the soul. Poetry is an intonation of trust finally. Trust that you can link up with the *I am*. The *I am*-bic pentameter, so to speak. ■

This is an edited and revised version of the talk Seamus Heaney gave at the Melbourne Writers' Festival during the 1994 poetry session sponsored by *Eureka Street*. The other participants in the program were Kevin Hart, Gwen Harwood and Robert Gray. *Eureka Street* gratefully acknowledges the cooperation of Simon Clewes and the Writers' Festival.

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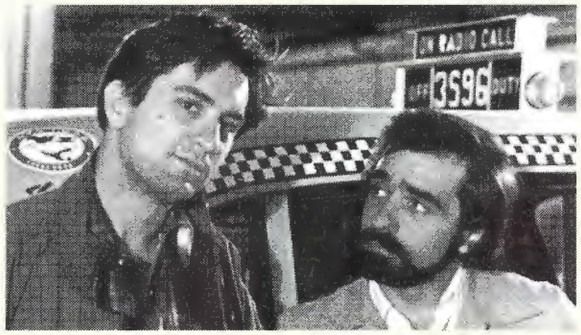
The Questions

1. Name three suburbs of Melbourne whose names owe their origin to the writings of Sir Walter Scott.
2. Which judge of the High Court of Australia was Jack Lang's Attorney-General?
3. What was the first play performed in Australia and what does it share in common with *Schindler's List*?
4. Who was the only non-Italian apostolic pronuncio to Australia?
5. Name two Australians who have won an Academy Award for cinematography.
6. When the Australian version of *60 Minutes* first go to air?
7. What do Caroline Chisholm, Henry Lawson and Kingsford Smith have in common?
8. Why do surgeons use the title 'Mr'?
9. Why did Australia make the international news as a result of Pope John Paul I's death?



10. Which famous Australian story ends with the line 'for we have already forgotten the name'?.
11. What was the first car exported from Japan? When was it sent? Where did it go?
12. Which Prime Minister described a journalist as a 'disguised troubadour, swearer at large, advocatus diaboli, rattling propagandist, untrustworthy and incompetent, as incoherent as unfair, a pelican in the wilderness'?
13. Which Prime Minister was so impressed by one of Paul Keating's early parliamentary speeches that he told him to get an education and take an honours degree?
14. Who are the people (not the characters) in the stills above?
15. Who was the only bachelor to be president of the United States?
16. When did women get the vote in the Northern Territory?
17. What words have Mary of Magdala and the town of Bethlehem bequeathed to the English language?
18. Where does the expression 'deaf as an adder' come from?
19. Whose effigy appears on the Purple Heart?
20. What is the origin of mayonnaise?
21. Who described their great love as 'a source of little visible delight—but necessary'?
22. Who said that conscience was 'the aboriginal vicar of Christ'?
23. In whose *Life* do you read, 'the act of dying is of no importance, it lasts so short a time?'
24. Who wrote their history 'so that time may not draw the colour from what the human race has brought into being'?
25. To what did Cat Stevens change his name?
26. Mr End Prohibition has been an independent candidate for local government in what region? Kooyong? Nimbin? Mile End? Great Western?
27. What NSW Rugby League team went out of the competition after winning a minor premiership and losing in the grand final?
28. Which Austrian-born architect is both the designer of Sydney's Blues Point Tower and an admirer of its counter-piece, the Sydney Opera House?.
29. Which Western Australian horse won the Melbourne Cup in 1905?
30. In *Gone with the Wind*, the southern soldiers have a special name for Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*. What is it?
31. Mary MacKillop is not the first saint whose remains have rested on Australian soil. Name another.
32. Where is Puer Point and why is it so called?
33. Which Australian-recorded single has received more overseas airplay than any other?
34. Only 57.9 per cent of the population voted in the federal election in 1922. But the turnout in 1925 was 91.3 per cent and in 1928 it was 93.6 per cent. What caused the difference?
35. Who is the longest-reigning world chess champion?
36. Who won the only Nobel prize for peace awarded during World War II?
37. Which newspaper, known as 'The city man's friend', was started by Kerry Packer's grandfather in March, 1919?
38. Who is the patron saint of bricklayers, stonecutters and headache sufferers?

1. Glen Waverley, Ivanhoe and Abbotsford.
2. Edward McTiernan.
3. The first performance of *The Recruiting Officer* by George Farquhar was the subject of a novel, *The Playmaker*, by Thomas Keneally who wrote *Schindler's List* (first published as *Schindler's Ark).*
4. M. de Furstenberg (1960-62).
5. Damien Parer and Dean Semmler.
6. 11 February 1979.w
7. Their portraits have all been removed from the currency.
8. They were originally barbers.
9. The pope's brother, Edoardo Luciani, was in Melbourne at the time, on an export drive.
10. 'The union buries its dead' by Henry Lawson.
11. The first Datsun was exported to Australia in 1935.
12. Alfred Deakin.
13. Gough Whitlam.
14. A Robert de Niro and Martin Scorsese (on the set of *Taxi Driver*); **B** Shelley Winters and Gene Hackman (*The Poseidon Adventure*); **C** Mae Clarke and James Cagney (*The Public Enemy*); **D** Norma Shearer and Clark Gable (*A Free Soul*); **E** Marlon Brando, Jean Simmons, Frank Sinatra and Vivian Blaine (*Guys and Dolls*).
15. James Buchanan, president from 1857-1861.
16. Women have voted in Legislative Assembly elections since their inception, in 1978.
17. *Maudlin* is derived from the repentant tears of Mary Magdalene and *bedlam* is a contraction of Bethlehem, the name of a notorious London asylum.
18. Psalm 58: 'They are poisonous as any snake,/ deaf as an adder that blocks its ears/ so as not to hear the magician's music,/ however skilful his spells'.
19. George Washington.
20. When the Duc de Richelieu captured Port Mahon, Minorca, in 1756, he demanded food on landing; in the absence of a prepared meal, his chef took whatever he could find and beat it up together-hence the original form *mahonnaise.* (source: *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*).
21. Catherine Earnshaw speaking of Heathcliff, in *Wuthering Heights* chapter 9.
22. John Henry Newman.
23. Boswell's *Life of Johnson.*
24. Herodotus.
25. Yusuf Islam.
26. Nimbin.
27. Newtown.
28. Harry Seidler.

29. Blue Spec.
30. *Lee's Miserables.*
31. St Peter Chanel.
32. It is where juvenile convicts were incarcerated last century in Tasmania.
33. *Reminiscing,* by the Little River Band.
34. Compulsory voting was introduced in 1924.
35. Emanuel Lasker, a German, was champion for 27 years from 1894-1921.
36. An award was made in 1944 to the International Red Cross Committee.
37. R.C. Packer, Sir Joynton Smith and Claude McKay started *Smith's Weekly.*
38. St Stephen, the first martyr.

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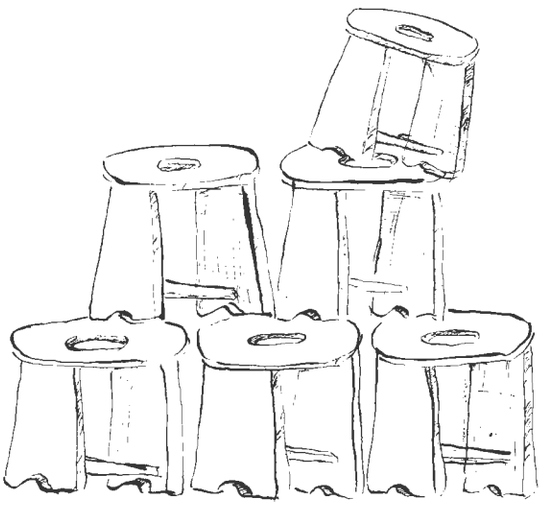
GERARD WINDSOR

My mother's house



WHEN I WAS A VERY SMALL BOY—it is one of my earliest memories—my mother took me out to Sans Souci to visit my Auntie Claude. Auntie Claude had been born in 1856. In fact she was my mother's mother's aunt. Auntie Claude's parents had arrived in Sydney from Stirlingshire in 1854 with an infant daughter. But the child died. In 1856 they had the first of their Australian-born children, and they called her Rose. When I first met Rose she had been a Sister of Mercy for over seventy years. By then she was Auntie Claude. All the girls from the upper Hunter, my mother said, went to school either to the Josephites at Lochinvar or to the Mercys at Singleton. Rose went to Singleton and then entered the convent there. So did her younger sister, Margaret. Margaret was my Auntie Gertrude, but she died in February 1947 and I have no memory of having met her. But Gertrude was a very capable woman, my mother always maintained, and she went from Singleton to found the Mercy Convent at Broken Hill.

Sans Souci was another initiative of Auntie Gertrude. My mother related that Auntie Gertrude wanted a holiday house for her nuns away from the heat and rigour of Broken Hill, so in 1939 she built a convent on a hill overlooking Kogarah Bay. In time nuns came to live in retirement and die there, as Auntie Claude did in 1953. The relatives of Sisters Gertrude and Claude never had reason to go to Sans Souci again. The visits were all another age. 'We went there by trolley bus', my mother remembered, and I saw myself outside a lowering porch, on a narrow strip of crisp lawn, dodging around yew bushes, and there was the black shape and the tiny face of a gnarled beetle who was my Auntie Claude.

✦

I rang my mother when I saw the notice. 'Under instructions from the Sisters of Mercy. Due to the Sale of the Property. Un-reserved Auction of Contents of Chapel and Convent.'

'Let's go out,' I said.

'I'll ring first,' she decided.

'There's a number for the auctioneer,' I told her.

'No, I'll ring the convent.'

'I spoke to a Sister Annette,' she said later. 'She said to be sure and introduce ourselves to her when we went out.'

Twice in the following week my mother spoke to me on the phone, and asked, 'Do you still want to go out to Sans Souci?'

✦

The row of box gums on the footpath had been shorn flat. The lines of the convent were unobscured.

'I don't remember the second storey,' said my mother.

'This looks much newer than 1939,' I said. But the honey and cream bricks and the unfussy Romanesque pilasters had not stained or worn or crumbled. This was the convent we had visited. The moat of lawn was there, and the yew bushes, dark green and conker-filled or lighter green under a yellow icing, and bare frangipanis and a white poinsettia in flower. This was a holiday home, on a corner block with a Norfolk Island pine outside the chapel. The mat at the front door said 'MERCY'.

There were auctioneer's signs and arrows everywhere, most of them saying, 'Please Respect the Sisters' Privacy'. We followed the directions, into the refectory. There was a kitchen at one end, and a group of late middle-aged women were talking there. My mother stood at the door and asked, 'Sister Annette?'

Sister Annette took us into the kitchen and introduced us. We stood around the great table with the nuns and they gave us coffee and reintroduced us as others of their sisters came in. They remembered Auntie Claude, but it was Auntie Gertrude they honoured.

'You'd hardly have known they were sisters.'

'Sister Claude was so tiny, with a very deep voice. She'd come into the chapel and say, "What's going on in here?" '

'Mother Gertrude was a lovely person, a wonderful conversationalist. So interesting to talk to about anything.'

'She could hold her own anywhere. Would've known exactly what to do with the governor.'

'When famous singers came to the towns, they'd always put on a special recital just for the nuns. Mother Gertrude would thank them, and she'd do it so gracefully.'

'She was a great businesswoman,' added my mother. 'My mother always used to say that about Auntie Gertrude.'

'Is there a history of the congregation?' I asked. 'A pamphlet, or a written account just for your own use?'

'No, no. Just what's in the archives at Parkes.'

'Do you have many novices?' I asked.

'Oh, people come and go. But we haven't had a profession in twenty years.'

I took photos of the nuns and my mother together in the kitchen.

'We mustn't take up any more of your time,' my mother said. 'If we could just have a look around.'

'It's been lovely to meet you,' the nuns all said. 'It's so good to meet people who remember the old ones.'

✦

My mother and I followed all the signs and all the arrows through and outside the house. A low-ceilinged, lock-up under the house was just one auction lot—about fifty old suitcases, then crutches, walking frames, commodes, wheelchairs, two walking sticks. 'One of these could well have been Auntie Claude's,' I suggested.

'Oh come out of there, Gerry,' my mother called.

We went upstairs, a circular metal staircase winding up a wall of glass bricks in a round, bright hub of a chamber. In the recreation room my mother pointed to the little internal casement windows that opened over the back of the chapel. 'For the elderly and sick nuns,' she explained to me, 'who couldn't manage the stairs. So they could get to Mass.'

In the chapel people were speaking at secular volume, strolling unrestricted, lifting, peering, tapping with their knuckles. We went into the sacristy first. Much of the floor was covered by a collection of old oak and pine stools, two-legged, oval in shape, with a small hole in the middle of the seat where the fingers could slip through and grip.

'They'd be good,' I said. 'Stools are always useful.'

My mother checked them against the catalogue, and we muttered and half-finished sentences, wondering how to assess such objects. I had no idea what stools were worth. Other items took our attention. Outside the chapel door 'a 19th century Wedgwood meat platter "Ivanhoe Overthrows the Templat" '. Beside the holy water font ' a carved hall stand and seat'. A curiosity I had never seen, 'a confessional kneeler', with its detachable piece of slatted board, to shield penitent from confessor.

My mother and I meandered our own ways through brassware and glassware and pews and statues and stacked pictures. We came together at the altar. I opened my mouth to speak and my mother spoke before me. 'This is very sad,' we both said.

The silver-plated tabernacle doors were just ajar. I opened them. The veil was drawn, but I slid my fingers between the two squares of material and tugged them back along the line of gilt thread. There was nothing inside but the padding. A hollow of quilted satin.

On the way out I saw one of the nuns. 'What were those stools in the sacristy used for?' I asked.

'We used to sit on those in the dining room. In the old days.'

'Deportment,' said my mother. 'Straight backs.'

'I'll go back tomorrow,' I told her.

She rang me at ten in the morning.

'I'm just going out the door, on my way now,' I said.

'Oh, do you really want to? You don't have to.'

'I'm going. Now what do you want me to bid on?'

'Well, I'd quite like the meat plate ... a stool ... '

'The hall stand?'

'Yes.'

'What are you willing to go to?'

"Oh I don't know. I'll leave it to you.'

'Well, for example, do I go to five hundred on the meat plate?'

'Good heavens, no! One hundred. I don't mind if I don't get it.'

'The stools?'

'What about forty?'

'OK.'

'I'll look after it,' said my mother.

The chapel was miniature and so bright. The transepts were only about four metres deep, and there was no stained glass, but open windows around the sanctuary, even behind the altar. The chapel was packed, pews and aisles and floor all jammed. Upstairs in their recreation room the nuns took up position, looking down through their casement windows. I stood at the front of the nave and leaned against the modern table altar. Beside me, on the floor, a man distracted two small boys with Coke and Fanta. I kept getting a whiff of cigarette smoke. Two dealers sat on the altar steps facing the people, in the twin prelatial seats, lots 2 and 3, each 'an oak carver chair'. The auctioneer took his place on the top altar step, and used a marble ambo as his rostrum. He apologised that due to the great response he had run out of catalogues but more had been printed. He thanked the sisters for this honour, he repeated a request from them for decorum, he related how after much prayer and consideration they had decided to put matters in the hands of Gray Eisdell Timms. Then he spun into action. He was good. He used his patter to establish his credentials. 'Rosemary, would you hold up the cruets. Look at her. Must have been an altar boy. Or learnt it from her two sons who were altar boys at Bexley, now both at St. Joseph's College. In fact we have a large Catholic representation at Gray Eisdell Timms. I'm sure no one here's going to hold that against us. I myself went through school first with the sisters, and then under the Christian Brothers at St. Virgil's, Hobart. What am I bid for this assortment of Mass cruets?'

He swept on. A large number of Our Ladys came up, each simply 'a plaster religious statue of Our Lady'. He sold the Queen of Heaven for $320, and Our Lady of Lourdes for $380, and announced a 'stone religious statue of Our Lady'. The figure was kneeling and her ankles and clogs

were showing and she held a pair of rosary beads. There was some murmuring and craning to see and confusion in the air, but one of the nuns, with sharp, bell-like authority, called from the casement. 'It's Saint Bernadette.'

Saint Bernadette brought $200 and the rhythm settled itself again. The dealers sat in their carved oak and with a grim nonchalance crushed any opposition for the classier, recyclable items. 'The bid is on the altar,' cried the auctioneer, and the dealers took all the pews for $570 each, and the marble font for $640, and an oak sick call box for $280, and a brass credence table with marble top, the only credence table the auctioneer had handled in ten years, for $780, and a pair of five sconce brass candelabra for $220 each. 'The bid is on the altar, here beside me on the altar,' called the auctioneer again and again.

The dispersal was relentless, and not cheap. The hall stand went for $380, the meat platter for $560, the crib figures for $600 to a 'lady', the stations of the cross for $600 to a young woman, an old girl of Loreto, Kirribilli, and her boyfriend, who were going to put them on the walls of their house.

In the whole room there were only two obvious groups of religious professionals. One man was addressed by the auctioneer as 'monsignor', but I thought it probably a trade nickname for there were several other dealers on terms of intimacy with the auctioneer, and 'the monsignor' was Middle-Eastern and wore lay clothes and a heavy gold chain around his neck. But he was a *bona fide* monsignor all right, a Chaldaean Syrian, and although he stood he was accompanied by three seated nuns, in full cream and caramel habits, all Iraqis. Immediately in front of him were three figures in full black. A slight sandy-haired man in tailored clericals stood throughout with a fixed half smile on his face. It broadened just a few degrees when items like Sacred Hearts were held up and he would give a slight, knowing roll of his eyes to his companions. Beside him was a nun, a handsome young woman with black glasses and a severe set to her mouth. To her right was a stout, curly-haired young priest who wore a European clerical soutane. He had a bidding card stuffed face down in the sash. For the first eighty items he did not touch it.

Then the auctioneer announced the centrepiece of the day's sale, 'a magnificently carved marble central altar'. The tabernacle was being sold separately, he said. 'An altar like this, if new,' he said, 'would cost you at least $50,000.' He paused and looked around, and his finger shot out. 'One thousand I have'. The dealers on the altar scanned ahead in their catalogues; they had no interest. It was a two-sided duel, the Chaldaean monsignor and the unnamed in the soutane. They traded blows evenly.

'Well, it'll be going to a good home,' said the auctioneer. The young priest lolled against the confessional kneeler. Lay seconds, or perhaps backers, even bankrollers, crowded at his shoulder, whispering. The monsignor kept smiling, but he was no match. At $5200 he gave in. For the first time the crowd applauded. The black nun was impassive, motionless. Only then I noticed the medallion on her chest—in copper relief, the profile of Saint Pius X. Ah, I realised, Archbishop Lefebvre's breakaway lot.

'We'll do the side altars separately,' said the auctioneer. 'The successful bidder has the option of taking the second at the same price. I should point out that in case the purchaser is not a religious body, the relics will have to be removed.'

The monsignor was unopposed. He took both altars for $650 apiece. The auctioneer was clearly relieved. 'No need now for the relics to be taken out.' He made another speech about the need for the separate purchasers of the main altar and the tabernacle to cooperate on the removal of the one from the other. But the cassocked priest got the tabernacle too, for $720. Again the crowd clapped.

When the auctioneer came to lot 91, 'a brass monstrance and case', he pointed out a delicate matter. 'There is a further piece to the monstrance which the sisters have withheld. Again, if the purchaser is a religious body, they will hand over this piece. If not, they will retain it. So the item you are now bidding for is the monstrance as is.'

The Chaldaean and the plump priest in the cassock went at it again. The monsignor ran his opponent up hard. The monstrance reached $1550 before it went to the Society of Pius X. The applause was sustained. 'Congratulations,' said the auctioneer, 'the most popular bidder in the room'. He made no public comment about whether the sisters would be handing over the missing piece to a schismatic body.

The Society of Pius X and its entourage left. We were running down towards the assortments of 'sundry bric-a-brac' and 'sundry religious prints etc.', and I had nothing. My resolve hardened towards the stools. I wasn't going to let go of Auntie Claude and Auntie Gertrude. We reached lot 121, the first stool. The option rule applied to all ten stools, said the auctioneer. He began slowly,

at twenty, but a young woman on the altar steps beat me up. She pulled out at seventy. But new blood came rushing in down the back.

'Eighty,' the auctioneer called.

I nodded.

'Ninety,'

His hand jabbed towards the back. 'One hundred.'

I couldn't go on past a hundred. Forty, my mother had said. I shook my head. The hammer fell. 'How many?' called the auctioneer.

'All of them,' I heard her answer.

The disappointment pummelled me.

'So, lots 121 to 130 at $100 each,' said the auctioneer annotating his sheets.

There was a flurry at the back. One of the assistants called out, 'The lady thought it was $100 for the lot.'

The auctioneer gave a genial smile. 'I'll put them up again,' he said, and began to scratch out in his sheets.

My resolve turned to iron. We would, we would sit down with Auntie Claude and Auntie Gertrude. They would stay with us, and we with them at whatever poor meal or feast there was. I nodded ruthlessly till there was no opposition.

'How many would you like?' asked the auctioneer.

'Five,' I said. My mother had five sons. Dimly I remembered the mother's voice asking, 'Shall my sons sit with you, on either side?'

'Would you like to choose them?' asked the auctioneer.

'Could I make that six,' I called.

The auctioneer nodded and scratched out, rearranging, redistributing his stools.

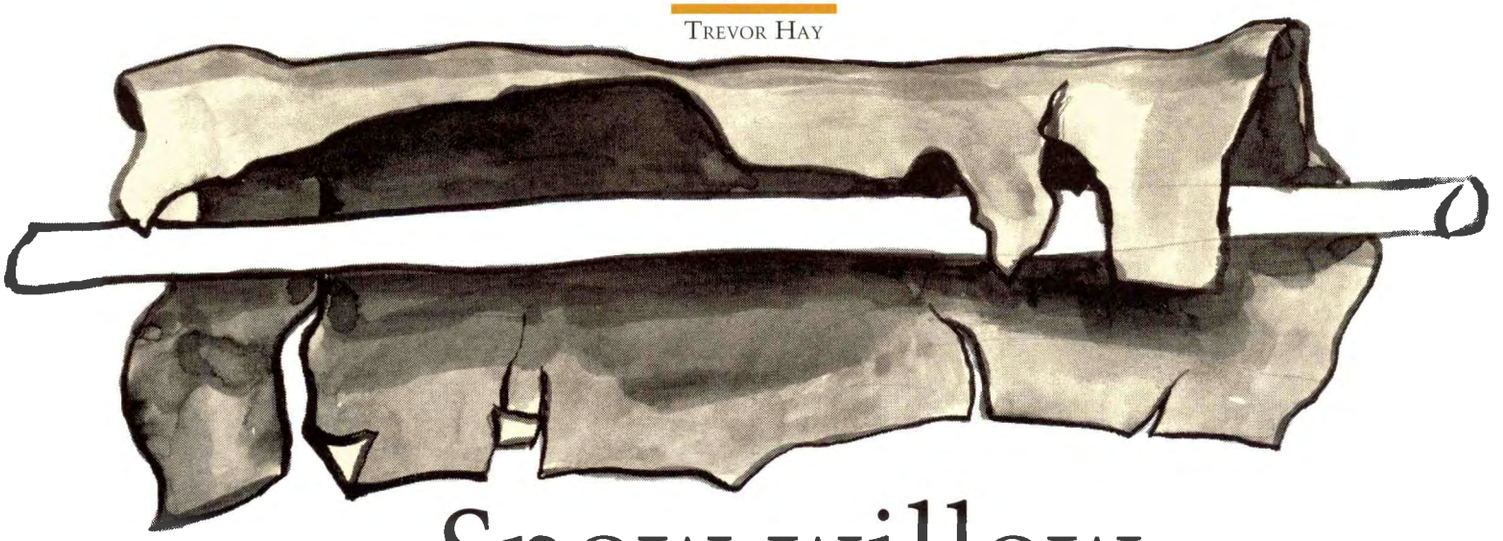
✦

'I'm so glad,' said one of the nuns. 'They would have been here at the beginning.'

A summer squall hit me as I drove away. Straight ahead, on the horizon beyond the end of Rocky Point Road, silver lightning jagged itself out as sharply as Constantine's cross. The wipers raced. The dry summer leaves whirled in the torrential rain. I could not get home quickly enough to drive with my wife and my son to my mother's house and to have each one of us carry in the stools, two by two, and set them before her. ■

Gerard Windsor's most recent book is *Family Lore*.

TREVOR HAY



Snow willow

FOR SOME YEARS NOW I have been collecting fragments of the life of a great star of the Peking Opera, a man who died ignominiously in the Cultural Revolution. I shall call him Sun because I'm not sure if I have invented him or if he has somehow made himself truly known to me since I began scattering his photographs and librettos around my study. It wouldn't surprise me if he has made a comeback, because I know he would have been far from satisfied with death as a farewell performance.

He was born at the turn of the century. That much seems clear enough because his earliest memories—recorded in a 'diary' that was probably written by one of his secretaries, since he was barely literate himself—include seeing heads dangling from the branches of trees in his native village, somewhere in southern Hebei province. It must have been the time of the Boxer Rebellion. His family couldn't afford to keep him so he was sold to the master of an opera school, Flayer Pang, and his wife, Sparrow's Egg. Pang's wife never tired of telling people she had been an imperial concubine, but the truth—at least the truth according to Sun's third wife, who was inclined to seriously underestimate the beauty of other women—was that she was a servant in the palace kitchens who'd been thrown out because she was too ugly to be seen anywhere near the food. Her face was too long, her eyebrows too coarse and she had freckles under her nose that reminded people of a sparrow's egg. What she most certainly did have in common with the imperial concubines, however, was a temper and a tongue.

Sun would have been about six or seven when he was sold to Flayer Pang and there's no doubt he was very fortunate indeed to be sold to a master with such a fine reputation as an actor of *wu-sheng* and *hua-dan* roles (military, acrobatic men, and lively, flirtatious young women, respectively). But Pang, in the tradition of so many before him, had been brutalised and sodomised as a boy, and knew no way to treat his students other than the way he had himself been treated. To make matters worse for Sun, the contract his father had signed with Pang specified that he could do with him as he saw fit. He could beat him to death and there could be no question of legal settlement. Although the other boys were still the property of their families, Sun was the property of the school, every bit as much as the costumes and the props.

He ran away once, back to his village, but he was caught and nearly killed. Pang used to flog him with ropes soaked in water, and if he cried out he would get an even worse beating, or Swallow's Egg would hold him down while her husband stuffed his mouth with rags. His training, like that of the other boys, was extremely harsh. He slept on a wooden board to make his limbs supple, and walked on ice to improve his balance. Weights were fastened to his ankles, bowls of water were placed on his head, and, during incessant beatings that followed every slip or mistake in recitation, Sparrow's Egg was always there to urge the Flayer on to greater feats of cruelty.

Some time around 1910, just at the death of the dynasty, Pang moved his opera school to Peking, somewhere in the south of the Chinese City, near the Altar of Heaven, so the troupe could perform in the streets among the tumblers and sing-song girls and drum and gong bands. Business wasn't good, so Pang decided to hire Sun out to weddings and funerals, to celebrate or mourn as required by

wealthy families. His very first engagement was a big funeral and he found himself in the middle of the rear row of mourners, so his comical appearance wouldn't give offence. His robe was far too big and he had to hitch it up round his waist and tie it with string to prevent it dragging in the dust. His boots were so big even his tough little feet quickly developed blisters as a result of trying to get a grip on them.

Each of the mourners was dressed in white and walked in front of the procession, bearing a willow staff wrapped in white paper. Behind them thirty-six bearers held a silver canopy aloft, swelling and snapping over the gleaming lacquered coffin like the sails of a great galleon. On and on they trudged, for miles, and Sun had no idea where he was going. When they reached the cemetery the mourners abruptly disrobed, tossed away their white sticks and made a beeline for the shops where they'd hired their costumes—where they would also collect their pay.

But Sun had no idea where Pang had hired his robe, and couldn't even find his way back to the school, so he wandered the streets for a day, still wearing his costume and too frightened to throw his staff away, in case the master had to pay for it. Passersby cursed him, and threw stones. Some spat at him. 'Get away from me, you scabby little turtle's egg! Piss off out of it! What the fuck do you think you're doing, trudging about the city waving that death-wand all over the place? Damn you! Are you determined to bring bad luck down on all our heads?' He spent the night huddled in a doorway in a narrow lane somewhere west of the school, near the old elephant stables. Snow fell, but he'd often been made to sleep outside in the worst of the winter, so the bitter cold was nothing new to him.

By mid-morning of the next day he'd managed somehow to find his way back home. The shrill voice of Sparrow's Egg was the first thing he heard as he swung open the great doors and stepped over the sill into the courtyard. 'What's this? Ai-ya! Master Pang, a ghost has come to call on us! Come quickly and show your hospitality!'

'Please, Mistress, I got lost ...'

'Aagh! It speaks, Master Pang, and it looks a little like one of our boys. But why is it dressed up like a ghost? Is this a new role? Has this ghost taken the theatre world by storm, and now returns to honour his old school?'

'Please Mistress, I just couldn't find my way back from the funeral ...'

'So! We couldn't make it to the funeral so you have brought the funeral to us. Clever ghost! But wait a minute!—Master Pang, is this not the most filial of sons? He goes grieving to the cemetery and then, not content with his official mourning duties, he keeps up a procession of his own and walks all the way home, still carrying his white mourning stick, the 'snow willow'. This is what we must call him from now on! Our very own little 'Snow Willow!'

Pang seized Sun around the back of the neck and forced him to the ground, where he began raining terrible blows down on his shoulders with the rope. Sparrow's Egg stooped, and with her marbled nose a few inches from Sun's grimly contorted face, screamed 'Snow Willow, Snow Willow, the most filial of sons! No doubt he didn't even ask for his pay for mourning! And just imagine how he'll grieve when Master Pang goes to Paradise. Don't they say "A teacher for a single day is a father for life?" Teach him well, Master Pang, so this filial son will never forget his father!'

Sun survived this and countless more beatings. It was always the mistress he hated most—after all, Pang *was* his teacher, he respected his craft and thought the day might well come when the courage and endurance he had learnt on the end of that remorseless rope might lead him out of the school and onto the stage, to play the part of beautiful and tragic young women. But this stinking fox-on-heat had nothing to offer but a big ugly mouth. She sprayed filth every time she spoke, like a dung beetle sneezing. But it was during one of her tirades that Sun conceived an idea so delectable that even the beatings seemed tolerable for a while.

Sparrow's Egg often visited her friends in the countryside, many kilometres south, in the Fengtai District, and he was made to accompany her, leading her donkey and carrying her parcels and gifts as she sat side- saddle like a great lady of the imperial household. One day, while the mistress was riding along in state on her celestial steed, fussing at her balsam-painted nails and dreaming of her halcyon days, Sun stooped to pick up a handful of dung beetles grazing in moist pats along the roadside. Then, when she dismounted to go in search of a quiet place to relieve herself, he took a long thread of cotton from his jacket and wound it loosely round each beetle, making a sort of living, wriggling rosary for revenge. He tied the thread around the donkey's tail, close to the source of provender, and waited for the mistress to return from behind the white pines and scholar trees that lined the road.

She mounted the donkey, and for some time all was normal as they made their way along. Suddenly the beast gave a violent shudder, screamed hideously and kicked its hind legs high in the

air, sending the mistress sprawling on her elbows and knees in the dust of the road. Sun rushed to her assistance, and helped her climb back into her position after she had kicked the donkey savagely in the belly and cursed its ancestors back to eighteen generations. Sun was getting worried now—this had been so successful that it could turn out to be either a huge joke or a terrible disaster. If things got out of hand and Sparrow's Egg were killed, perhaps he would be charged with murder, and executed at daybreak in the vegetable market with one of those great swords—the ones that were hundreds of years old: the ones they said were actually spirits that could sometimes be heard at night, singing of their dreadful deeds. He could see the executioner with his yellow leather apron, and he saw the men sprinkling lime over the blood-soaked stones before they opened the market for the day's trade ... but all was well for another ten minutes, and he began to relax. Then the donkey reared up again, screeching and snorting convulsively in some mysterious torment. Again the mistress went tumbling through the air, like one of those heroic women generals in the opera.

But Sparrow's Egg was no fool, it seemed. This time she examined the donkey's hindquarters very thoroughly. 'Aha, yes! I've heard that dung beetles will sometimes climb up the donkey's back gate in search of scraps from the kitchen, but I've never heard of these elegant insects fashioning themselves a ladder of cotton! This is a very skilled little troupe of dung beetles we have here—eh, Snow Willow?' She looked murderously at the boy, tugged the thread viciously from the donkey's tail and resumed her position. When they arrived back at the school late that afternoon, Sun allowed himself to scream and cry a little during the inevitable thrashing, to satisfy the mistress he was being suitably punished. But in fact, he really thought Pang was taking it easy on him for once.

Sun did go on to become a famous performer in the Peking Opera, with a troupe of his own, named after himself. His heyday was the 1940s and 1950s and he was much-loved and admired in the northern provinces as a player of the *hua-dan* roles. You can still find some old people in Peking who talk with passion about his portrayal of Li Yaxian, a prostitute in an opera called *The Embroidered Jacket*. Li Yaxian falls in love with a scholar, the son of a very respectable family, who has spent all his father's allowance on medicine to cure her of disease. The father is so enraged with his son's profligacy in squandering money on prostitutes that he beats him to death in the street. Li Yaxian overhears the family servant buying a coffin for the unfortunate scholar, and follows him to the poor broken body of her lover. There she bends over him and weeps and weeps, until her heart-rending tears miraculously revive him. Everyone loved Sun in this part. They say his voice was nothing special, but his movements and gestures were enough to melt a stone lion.

In the spring of 1947, while he was performing the role of Li Yaxian at a great private banquet in Peking, news reached Sun of the death of Sparrow's Egg. He heard also that Master Pang was now too poor to pay for her funeral. So he went to see the old man. I heard the story of this meeting from Sun's driver. Apparently Sun instructed him to proceed into the lane, although there was barely enough room to squeeze the shining black American limousine between the walls of the houses. Pang greeted him at the school gates and they sat together drinking tea in that courtyard where Sun had so often been flogged senseless. They spoke of the old days and laughed and laughed over the business of the donkey and the dung beetles.

Before he took his leave of the old man, Sun asked the driver to fetch something from the car. He brought back a piece of heavy silk, embroidered with 'one hundred sons'—little boys fishing, flying kites, comparing crickets and carrying gay lanterns outside the walls of a great, rich household. Inside the silk was a willow rod, and some yellowing fragments of white paper. Sun handed Pang enough money to pay for a splendid funeral for Sparrow's Egg and said, 'You see Master, I do not forget. I am the most filial of sons, after all'. Then he asked Pang to buy a beautiful coffin of ancient pine and place the snow willow on top.

The driver went to some pains to describe the touching expression Sun had on his face, and the elegance of his gesture as he passed the rod to Pang. He showed me how he had held it reverently in both hands, bowing deeply to his old master. Then he went on to tell me how Sun had never forgotten his bitter-poor origins, or the tragic lives of the despised and downtrodden class of artists and performers before Liberation. I'm sure all that is true, and perhaps I've become obsessed with Sun's roles, with all those saucy, clever servant girls and last-laugh courtesans, but when I imagine this scene Sun's face has all the sly sanctity of a temple monkey. ■

Trevor Hay is the author of *Tartar City Woman* and co-author of *East Wind, West Wind*. He is currently writing a series of short stories based on the Peking Opera.

As long as you've still got your 'ealth

'MOBILE PHONES AREN'T EXACTLY WHAT I EXPECTED to be the dominant feature of this place.'

'You *are* naïve sometimes. Mobile phones are the dominant feature of every place.' Celia stifled a laugh just as it began to hurt, and eased herself back onto the narrow hospital bed. 'What did you expect, anyway?'

'I don't know. Moaning and lamentation, I suppose. General indications of distress. With perhaps a little help from advanced technology in the form of illuminated signs that tell you where to find things, like "Pain and suffering this way" and "Lots of interesting drugs that way". Instead all that happens is that we sit in a cubicle for four hours eavesdropping on people's phone conversations.'

'So was it any different when you worked in a place like this? Apart from the arrival of mobile phones, I mean.'

'Of course. We always knew it was a hospital because there were always general indications of distress. From the staff if not from the patients. And we even had helpful signs on the walls. Not electronically illuminated ones—they were painted—but at least did they told people where to find suffering and drugs and so on.'

Celia assessed this claim with that most devastating of ripostes, the raised eyebrow.

I did some fine-tuning of the relevant memories. 'Well, all right. They didn't actually mention suffering or interesting drugs. They said things like "Oncology" and "Dispensary". But the meaning's the same.'

'Did patients get left in an examination cubicle for four hours without being examined?'

'They may have spent a lot of time waiting. But the system somehow contrived to persuade them that they hadn't been forgotten. There'd be nurses walking in and out, pretending to be doing things but mainly just keeping contact. And outside the cubicle there'd be other people with trolleys and trays. Mops and buckets, even. Anything to maintain the idea that the place was run by people ...'

'Who presumably said reassuring things like "We're from the government and we're here to help you"?'

'Well if they had said anything like that they would have been right.'

Celia tried to prop herself up on one elbow, and then thought better of it. 'Mmm. The people here now would be half-right if they said it, too. It's just that there aren't enough of them.'

And that, we agreed, was where the government came in. Or more precisely, failed to come in. We settled back to listen to some more phone conversations.

The woman in the next cubicle, the most prolific user of the portable communication device, seemed to be dialling her way through her entire extended family. Each of her relatives got the same speech, an expletive-ridden diatribe against the hospital, and against the doctor who still had not seen her. In itself this was not remarkable, but it contrasted markedly with her attitude when the doctor eventually appeared. She switched immediately into patient mode, with expletives deleted and replaced by 'Yes, doctor,' 'No, doctor,' and of course, 'Thank you, doctor.'

Which courtesies were no less than the doctor deserved. After all, she was doing the best she could to get from one patient to another. And it was not her fault that she was the only doctor working in the hospital's emergency department that day. It was a Saturday, so perhaps some administrator somewhere thought this an appropriate level of staffing, even for the principal women's hospital in a city of three-and-a-half million people. After all, how many emergencies happen on Saturdays?

When the doctor appeared in our cubicle, she continued the administrator's little joke. 'I'm sorry you had to wait so long. But we had an emergency here this morning.'

I suppressed a smile. Celia, who might have been amused had she not been the person waiting for attention for four hours, opted for mild sarcasm: 'And an entirely appropriate place to have an emergency, too.'

The doctor, who was preoccupied with kneading and squeezing Celia's abdomen, took a while to register the comment. 'Eh? Oh yes, I see what you mean.' Doctors have their own tone for sarcasm. She did not respond to Celia in the manner of Sir Humphrey Appleby—'Very droll, Minister'—but she did not need to.

The examination, once begun, was quick and efficient. A strained ligament was decreed to be the cause of Celia's pain, and a scan confirmed that the child was in no danger. For a moment we forgot our own anxieties as we gazed in wonder at the screen, renewing our acquaintance with the image of the tiny being inside her.

A brief medical inquisition completed the exercise. Had Celia been lifting anything she shouldn't?

'Uh, well, there was the tyre I changed this week.'

The doctor rolled her eyes, explained that six-months pregnant women did not change tyres, and demanded to know why I had let my wife attempt this feat.

'I wasn't there at the time,' I pleaded weakly. We were both thus admonished, but felt better for knowing the cause of the problem. It was what we had suspected to be the cause of the problem, but like good old-fashioned patients we felt a lot better having a doctor's word for it.

On the way home, we plotted a revolution in the health-care system. Or a restoration of it.

'You know, I'm still glad we're going to the Family Birth Centre,' said Celia. 'But I think that in other things interventionist medicine has a lot going for it.'

I nodded assent. 'I'm fully prepared for all eventualities, though. You have to be these days.'

'How so?'

I produced a piece of string from my pocket. 'I'm told it's just the thing for tying umbilical cords. In an emergency, I mean.'

Celia wrenched the string from my grasp and pitched it out of the car window. She really does believe in interventionist medicine, doctors 'n' all. ■

Ray Cassin is the production editor of *Eureka Street*.

What Low Kinds Exist Without

When Sylvia Plath called Daddy out
She would have had to call him out again
And go on calling and insisting but
Dying instead she straightway statued him.

Thus Robert Lowell's mind, 'not right',
Rehearsed the same not-rightness when improved
And got not right again and felt the warmth
Of going over ground not-rightness mapped.

Keats saw the chase eternalised
On his Greek Urn and chiselled it still deeper
And when his mad pursuit was at an end
The rest of us came up forever panting.

Poetry readings are obscene:
The poet stands before you tearing up
His heart like old bus tickets and goes home
With rotting bits of living on his tie.

Pain and joy occur once only—
Shout at Hamlet that the king's a villain,
He'll be the same foot-dragger next performance.
Like river water, art's different and the same.

The clock's uncomfortable, the heart
Keeps going and when it's done another heart
Takes up the beat: the artist's the only one
Who stops the clock to keep it ticking on.

Peter Porter

This Year In Sybaris

Rivers are diverted and the fields
are full of shoe-shops; migrating cranes
attempt mast-high nesting on gold eggs;
balloons bring milk-fed lambs to town
through labyrinths of arches;
horticulture is entailed
for dancers' pension rights; the moon's
an animal in their folklore and its flutes
are keyed or over-blown; calyx
and pistil shine in artificial green
on balconies enticing mist;
our screaming ghosts are dhows of
Sybaris adrift from old regattas;
we import herms at silly prices,
applaud the stories sailors tell
of where the sun goes when it dies;
the very Greek we hear is laced
with Epirate effusions; silver stags
are chased down rows of poplars
while the galaxies have learned to speak.
Crotonians! We must shortly make our move.

Peter Porter

That Give Delight And Hurt Not

When Christina Rossetti, that gentle Italian lady
Who loved the Anglican God,
Was dying of cancer, her faith couldn't tame her body
And her screams went abroad
Wider than her fame to upset the neighbours—
Need her agony have been so imitative of her Saviour's?

Apparently none of the mercantile pious understood
That the heavenly listening post
Which picks up all signals through space and cloud
Recycles them for the Lord of Hosts
To hear as acceptable homage, a depiction
As comfortably harmonised as Stainer's Crucifixion.

Peter Porter

OWEN RICHARDSON

Run aground in the colonies

Georgiana: A Biography of Georgiana McCrae, Painter Diarist, Pioneer, Brenda Niall, MUP, Melbourne 1994.
ISBN 0 522 845 134 RRP $39.95

THE LIFE OF GEORGIANA MCCRAE has something of the atmosphere of a romantic novel. She was the natural daughter of a duke, and her marriage plans were thwarted by an oppressive stepmother; but the strong-willed young woman struggled to make her way against the conventions of the time, and set out on a journey to the end of the earth with two small children in tow. Brenda Niall's biography of Georgiana also has something of the appeal of a novel: Niall's style is clear and unobtrusive, allowing her to engage with the subject without imposing on the reader, in whom it evokes a similar engagement.

Georgiana Huntly McCrae was born in London in 1805, daughter of the Marquis of Huntly, later to become the fifth Duke of Gordon, and Jane Graham, a commoner of whom we know almost nothing and who seems to have played a small part in Georgiana's life. For those like myself, who know of her only as the diarist of pioneer life—snakes in the outhouse, etc—her early pre-colonial life is especially fascinating.

The duke did not repudiate any

of his natural children (this before the fall of Victorian darkness) and it was the way of the Gordons to live in affectionate sprawl with ex-mistresses and their children all provided for—sometimes, as in the case of Georgiana's grandfather, the fourth duke, on the ducal estate.

Georgiana grew up among, and was educated by, the French emigrés of the new London suburb of Somers Town (she was to retain a slight French accent all her life, and her prose is full of French expressions) while also at one point taking music lessons from the radical daughter of a friend of the Godwins and Thomas Paine. Living at some distance from conventional society, surrounded by exemplary men and women, it seemed far less unusual than it might otherwise have for Georgiana to take to painting not simply as a decoration to attract the eye of a suitor but with some thought to a career.

Here of course appeared those obstacles whose familiarity don't make any them less depressing to read about. It was thought bad taste for a woman to make a career of anything; a woman could not be too aggressive in pursuing commissions; a woman might not take on any of the unconventional ways that were acceptable and perhaps invigorating to male artists; and by the time Georgiana was of an age to consider a career her father had married Elizabeth Brodie, who did not take kindly to the living record of her husband's attachment to another woman.

Disapproving noises started to issue from Gordon Castle. Georgiana's courtship by a Catholic of Spanish descent, Perico, was thwarted by the evangelical duchess. And in 1830 she married Andrew McCrae, a young Edinburgh lawyer, instead. Eight years later, having failed to make much of a fist of his legal career and inspired by the tales of a family friend, Thomas Mitchell, about the wealth to be found in Australia, Andrew McCrae set sail for Melbourne. In two years Georgiana was to join him.

Andrew McCrae doesn't emerge an altogether likeable figure from this biography. In 1840, when, after many delays caused by the illnesses of one or other of her children, Georgiana and her family finally set sail, she had not heard from her husband for 10 months. As far as we are able to tell (Niall allows that we know little of him, since he plays so small a part in Georgiana's journal) McCrae seems to have been a moody, self-centred man. This judgment is also suggested by Georgiana's 1830 portrait of him.

The McCraes immediately became an integral part of what passed for Melbourne society. Indeed it would have been surprising had they not, as a fair part of that society was composed of Andrew McCrae's brothers and sisters and their families, who had emigrated

about the same time. Through these figures we glimpse that peculiarly Australian combination of pioneer rawness on the one hand and genteel decorum on the other: the serial bankruptcies, the feuds (Andrew's brother, Farquhar, was horsewhipped on the steps of the Melbourne Club), the striving to keep the systems of exclusion and hierarchy going even in a world of slab huts and roads of mud and straw.

'Mrs Lyon Campbell,' Georgiana wrote in 1843, 'is circulating a report (on the authority of her cook who was dismissed from St Helier's for improper conduct) that Mr Curr married his Cook—and that she can neither read nor write!!!' Georgiana and Andrew were of a more liberal and imaginative cast than this: later, at Arthur's Seat, Georgiana and her children grew close to the surrounding Aborigines and came not merely to take a sympathetic interest in their way of life but to share in their happiness and, more frequently, in their sorrows.

The couple's fortunes were erratic. Andrew had visions outstripping his prospects and, apparently, his talents. Niall reports that an enormous property on the Yarra at Abbotsford was taken on 'on nothing but hope', and when that house was lost Andrew took the family to land at Arthur's Seat, more for its Romantic sea views than for its suitability as a farm.

This insecurity, and the distance in Georgiana's relationship with her husband, seems to have taken its toll. She was a talented artist—some of her miniatures reproduced in Niall's biography are works of exquisite taste and skill, and the drawing in her views of Gordon Castle and the Australian properties is sure and satisfying. After Arthur's Seat, however, she never really worked again.

To read through this biography is an increasingly melancholy experience; the latter part of the McCrae marriage was spent apart, with Andrew taking various farflung government posts in the absence of anything metropolitan. When the Duchess of Gordon's will was read after her death in 1864, it was discovered that she had not honoured the dying wishes of her husband.

The substantial legacy to which Georgiana had pinned so many of her hopes for herself and her children came to nothing, and she was insultingly left the same amount as various old servants of the Gordon estate. It was not only financial disappointment: the sense of having been cruelly cut out of a family of which she had considered herself to be an equal member darkened her own last years.

Georgiana is admirable in every way. Besides being a first-class example of the biographer's art, it is also a very handsome book. The plates are beautifully reproduced and splendidly catalogued by Caroline Clemente, and the typeface and design are of an elegance rare among the repulsive postmodern gewgaws that now often clutter the pages of otherwise worthy publications.

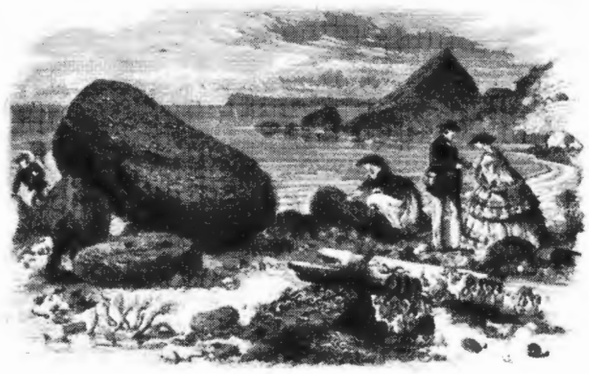
Owen Richardson is a Melbourne reviewer.

Photo p40: Bill Thomas

KEITH CAMPBELL

The great collector

JOHN GASCOIGNE, an historian at the University of New South Wales, has given us a beguiling and valuable book. It is an account of the scientific side of Joseph Banks' life, set out not chronologically but by a series of themes. The chapter titles make the plan explicit: after a Biographical Sketch we are treated to descriptions of the Limits of Enlightenment, then of the transition From Virtuoso to Botanist, and From Antiquarian to Anthropologist. There follows an account of The Principles and Practice of Improvement, and at last of The Waning of the English Enlightenment.



Joseph Banks and the English Enlightenment; Useful Knowledge and Polite Culture, John Gascoigne, Cambridge University Press, 1994. ISBN 0 522 845 134 RRP $49.95

The format makes for occasional repetitions, forgivable in what is otherwise an enjoyable book to read.

I suspect that I shall not be alone in thanking Gascoigne for revealing to us a Banks who is a much more substantial and admirable figure than emerges in the superficial caricature of the rich, impetuous and arrogant young man—whose excessive demands led to his rejection from the scientific team on Cook's second (Discovery) voyage—transformed over the years into the rich, pompous and snobbish old man who held the Royal Society in a time-warp like a fly in amber.

Banks *was* rich. He was a landholder, principally in Lincolnshire, but in other counties also, on a substantial scale. That no doubt gave him an outlook. But he showed, again and again, the pure Enlightenment spirit: what is should be both kept and improved. And without his private income Banks could not have done for us what he did do. And he probably did stay on too long, becoming by 1820 the anachronistic representative of a period now over. Would that that were the worst one could say of other powerful figures.

What did Banks do? His significance is as one of the first effective facilitators of scientific endeavour. During his lifetime, and in no small measure because of his unflagging and indefatigable energy, the amateur decencies of the virtuoso and the antiquarian were transformed into the professional callings of botanist, zoologist, anthropologist, and archaeologist.

What Banks did for us, as human beings in general, is retailed in this book. What he did for Australia and Australians in particular awaits fuller treatment in subsequent work: Banks and the Imperial connection—he was, for instance, immensely influential in the choice of Governor for New South Wales—will be a theme for further work this author has in train.

What did Banks do? His significance is as one of the first effective facilitators of scientific endeavour. During his lifetime, and in no small measure because of his unflagging and indefatigable energy, the amateur decencies of the virtuoso and the antiquarian were transformed into the professional callings of botanist, zoologist, anthropologist, and archaeologist.

For forty years Banks was the central node of not one but several networks. He employed, or encouraged, or exchanged material and data with, an enormous range of collectors, correspondents, and colleagues. His own house was the grand clearing house for botanical specimens and anthropological reports from all the world. He kept up his interest in the Pacific and Australia of course, but Banks had collectors, often in his own employ, in both the Americas, and connections in India, in the Middle East, in Russia and thereabouts. The upshot of all this exchange of information was a genuine explosion of knowledge in the life sciences.

The range of his concerns is astonishing to a modern; he felt no need to specialise. But he did recognize and foster the inevitable specialisation of the generation coming after him. Daniel Solander's career, for example, was not only professional in a modern way Banks' could never be: Solander was Banks' employee for most of his life.

Banks was also the first Chief Scientific Adviser to His Majesty's Government (though of course there was no such formal title). Banks had the ear of the ministers—and of the king himself—as a result of which there emerged an Imperial botanical improvement policy. That gave us the futile, if dramatic, program to transport breadfruit for the West Indies slaves. It also gave us Kew Gardens in their modern form, as a repository and clearing house for the world's botanical resources. Banks was, in fact if not in name, Kew's founder and director for a critical period in its development.

BANKS' TIMES WERE FORTUNATE ONES for a mind such as his, given to furthering improvement whenever and wherever it is to be had. Cynics are apt to dismiss the altruistic motivations of anyone whose policies do have an element of personal advantage. But as Gascoigne makes convincingly clear, at that time

policies of improvement did not present themselves as a choice between personal and public profit.

Banks busied himself with draining fens, with improving coal mine pumping equipment, with identifying viable coal seams, with improvements in tanning which would aid the British balance of payments, with steam power for flour milling. His friends included Boulton and Watt (which says something about how little he was an old-style snob). He doubled the annual income from his own properties by pursuing the mining option.

He was a gainer in all this. Yet he was able, in good conscience, to hold that everyone else was a gainer also.

In another way, his times were propitious; he lived in the age of improving innocence. The ambivalences of the knowledge-based revolutions in the human condition, which we all feel so acutely, had not emerged, and so were nothing to the members of the English Enlightenment.

Gascoigne's account of Banks' scientific life and times tells a further story: how important then—and now—are intermediate social groupings, that is, voluntary associations midway between those two unchosen groupings, the family and the State. Banks' work was conducted through the Royal Society, the Society of Antiquaries, the Royal Institution (which Davey and Faraday made famous), and societies for the improvement of the lot of the poor. For ten years Banks was even President of the Merino Society, neatly combining personal Lincolnshire interests with his genuine Australian and Imperial concerns.

In reviewing a book that offers much, it seems churlish to ask for more. But more I would have. We are given, in some detail, the story of the triumph of the Linnaean classificatory scheme during Banks' lifetime. And we are made to understand vividly how the enormous acceleration in the rate of recording new forms made a workable taxonomy a matter of urgency.

So far so good. But how, when, and why, did the Linnaean scheme wither and die? It would be good to have an account of that, not least because, according to much currently received anti-realist doctrine, we make our classifications on our own basis, without significant external constraints, so we can, will, and must, group biological items according to our pre-existing schemata. Which would imply that a scheme, once adopted, will endure. An historian of science as learned as John Gascoigne would be well placed to dispel such myth-making. ■

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BOOKS: 3

MAX TEICHMANN

'I don't have a dream'

Diplomacy, Henry Kissinger, Simon and Schuster Australia, 1994. ISBN 0 671 65991 X RRP $49.95

HENRY KISSINGER WAS AT THE centre of America foreign policy-making from 1969 until early 1977, and has enjoyed the status of chief guru of US international politics ever since. Having adroitly sidestepped the disasters that befell his chief, Richard Nixon, and many colleagues at the time of Watergate, Kissinger required no extensive rehabilitation—at least, not in the eyes of his fellow Americans.

Diplomacy is a very long book—more than 900 pages—and it is erudite, interesting and well-written; but it should perhaps have been two separate productions. Not because of the sheer length, but because of the basically different subject matter contained within its covers. So magisterial are his historical analyses of the different diplomatic styles of Bismarck, and of French and British politicians from the time of Richelieu up till 1914, and so interesting and mellifluous are his accounts of the actors and forces from Versailles to 1945, that we may have been persuaded to accept his diagnoses of the Cold War, the Communists, Vietnam and the final American triumph embodied in the coming down of the Wall with deference and feelings of certitude.

This would be to commit a mistake. Kissinger was deeply involved, ideologically and professionally, in the Cold War and the anti-Communist struggle, in Vietnam, and in all the policies that accompanied them. He is no detached historical commentator, nor could one expect him to be. The author, having driven us to the fork in the road, takes us down the path of his choosing without even changing gears. Not all the passengers noticed.

Almost all of the author's moral reasoning about diplomacy and foreign policy-making revolves around the two main traditions of thought—the 'idealist' or Wilsonian analysis and that of *Realpolitik*, or *raison d'état*. This being a softer version of E.H. Carr and Ilans Morgenthau's dichotomy between utopianism and realism; that is to say, how far can morality be introduced into matters of statecraft, or of peace and war? Should the goals of the statesman at least include moral ends, if not means, or is it really just a matter of survival, and power? Are there no permanent friends, only permanent interests?

Kissinger writes as though the Americans invented idealism and moralism in international politics, while the Europeans, the English and most others have been content with their national interests, playing both ends against the middle and seeing

morality as a hindrance to totally realistic action. Or else just a cloak.

In fact the Catholic Church always sought to remind rulers of the role—even, at times, the primacy—of morality in politics and war, and the other churches followed. The English had, and still have, a major headache about isolation or interdependence, intervention or non- intervention, balance of power arrangements or collective security, or world war. The result is that the Anglo Saxons come out as far more hypocritical, or self-deceiving, than many others. They want to win, but it should be in a good cause, and their motives should be morally acceptable, if not good. And, being democrats, the people have to be convinced, not just mobilised.

No permanent friends (or enemies), just permanent interests: Kissinger and Le Duc Tho, in Paris for the Vietnam peace talks, January 1973.

BY TEMPERAMENT AND CONVICTION, Kissinger is an advocate of *Realpolitik* and balance-of-power doctrines, but living in America he has had to accommodate Wilsonianism. It hasn't been the sacrifice that he might have feared. The US has an image of itself as the only truly virtuous and selfless nation in the world system, but the rest of the world regards the matter as rather more complicated. In reality the US is a superpower—since 1991, the only superpower—and its political, economic and cultural hegemony is backed by overwhelming military power. Having established that America was and is the main moral force in the world, (though the English had their points) Kissinger presents the past 60 years in the form of a morality play, with the content a pulsating process of *Realpolitik*.

He makes clear that America's national interest is the lodestar, but that just happens to coincide with the interests of the Free World, Democracy and World Peace. And it shall continue to do so. Within a domestic system, we have become accustomed to a party or a pressure group equating its interests with those of the nation, as being for the common good. So we should expect the same kind of malarky here.

It is difficult not to feel some sympathy for Kissinger and his friends over Vietnam. The war had very nearly universal support in the beginning. Even much later, more than 61 per cent of Americans considered themselves to be hawks, while 70 per cent favoured more bombing, not less. Suddenly, the public decided the war was unwinnable or at least likely to be a protracted affair. The soldiers were fed-up and disillusioned, and casualties far heavier than expected.

Past misinformation, endless announcements that victory was within America's grasp, eventually soured the general mood. The Great Public turned on their leaders, demanding a quick end to American participation. But they wanted two incompatible things—an immediate end to the war, and America not to capitulate.

Kissinger betrays a certain confusion on this war. He says that Vietnam proved one exertion too many—yet he talks as though the Vietcong were on the ropes, that more bombing and more pressure could have saved the situation. He cheerfully describes the endless bombing and defoliation of the Ho Chi Minh trail, but never mentions that he lied about bombing Cambodia and Laos for two years. And he sits on both sides of the fence as to whether the domino theory ever held water or not.

THE AUTHOR HAS OBVIOUSLY KEPT extensive files on his eight years service with Nixon and Ford, yet there are some interesting omissions. He barely mentions Allende, and he doesn't discuss the attempt to overthrow the neutralist Makarios and replace him with a pro-Western government that would link up with Greece and its colonels, (with whom America seemed to enjoy a friendly understanding). This half-baked Machiavellianism merely led to Turkey's intervention and the division of Cyprus.

He does not mention the whistle-stop tour of the ASEAN capitals and Australia that he made with Gerald Ford, just before Jakarta invaded East Timor, nor his request that Indonesia lay off until his plane had left for the States. Nor would one realise that he stormed in on Aldo Moro, demanding that he abandon his 'opening to the left', whereby the Italian Communists, the leaders of the Eurocommunist alternative to Moscow, would be brought into the governing coalition.

This would have broken Italy's electoral deadlock, and may have checked the growth of crime and corruption in the system. Likewise, Kissinger's account of his role during the Watergate period reads as somewhat disingenuous. Henry is really quite forgetful.

As for the long Cold War period, the nuclear-arms race, Star Wars and the thousand billions being spent every year on arms by the time the Wall came down, he expresses complete satisfaction:'we' won. Whether the conflict needed to have lasted as long as it did, whether procuring the total destruction of Russia—economically, socially and psychologically—was the price that had to be paid for victory, and whether the dimensions and implications of this total collapse were foreseen by the great statesman of the West,

is not discussed. We won: that is enough, just as it was enough that we finished Japan by nuking her. Whether the Cold War was necessary in the first place is a subject not fit for discussion.

The key to all this is to be found in the state of Europe, and secondarily, the rest of the world, at the end of World War II. And, even more important, Anglo-American perceptions thereof. Britain and the United States saw the Soviet Union entrenched in central Europe as the result of the Red Army's victories and the allied agreements at Yalta and Potsdam. The Soviets disposed of ground forces that the Western powers judged themselves incapable of resisting. Their only counter, they thought, was their nuclear armoury.

This strategic imbalance was there, irrespective of the Soviet Union's intentions, or even of the fact that she was Communist. Ideology is unimportant if one reasons in terms of the balance of power, and of a world governed by power. Kissinger thinks this way, as, for better or worse, do most ruling élites. The only alternative to this position would have been general, verified disarmament—nuclear and conventional.

In a recent interview, Sir Mark Oliphant recalled how he and Robert Oppenheim had urged their masters to take up Gromyko's 1945 offer to scrap all nuclear weapons and establish a proper inspection and verification system. Evatt spoke for other Western leaders when he testily replied, 'Don't be ridiculous, we might want to use it on them'.

In order to disabuse the peoples of the world, especially Americans, of the belief that real peace and cooperation were possible, a Great Threat and a Real Danger of Soviet Attack had to be produced. It was and continued to be self-fulfilling.

The changes to Western political culture, the continuation of the monopoly of decision making by Anglo-Saxon élites, the military-industrial complex, the intelligence community and McCarthyite thinking followed as secondary formations that, in time, became vested interests with agendas of their own.

But it all follows from balance-of power-analysis, which can turn into the de facto hegemony of one great power. Kissinger believes in nation states, which are the building blocks of the edifices he constructs. He is neither an internationalist nor a cosmopolitan, and would never approve of America sacrificing her national interest. It is all right to speak of world peace and collective security, and of preferring democracy and human rights, so long as you control the outcomes. The same applies to GATT, APEC, the IMF and so on.

To return to earlier times, Kissinger is ambivalent about Roosevelt's insistence on unconditional surrender by the Axis, for it helped the accretion of Soviet power. And we shouldn't punish Germany, Italy and Japan—we needed them to help to restore the balance of power.

WHEN DEALING WITH the Soviets, however, the insistence on unconditional surrender remained. The Soviet Union was seeking détente from Khrushchev's time, but the American aim was unconditional surrender—by setting the Soviet Union economic, political and military tasks that would, in the end, destroy it. In Kissinger's view, this was a famous victory.

But how to stop the Russian core of the old Soviet empire from rising again, and creating a new imbalance? This is the present preoccupation of Washington and some of the Europeans. Should Russia be incorporated into Europe, or be allowed to drift along—poor, demoralised, a ship with a toy rudder?

Russia is a land where, as Solzhenitsyn said to the Parliament, the average person now has the choice between starving and becoming a criminal. Kissinger criticises the provocative and draconian treatment of post-World War I Germany, and applauds the kid-glove treatment of the Axis after World War II. But Russia, which is being treated like a defeated country, is different. Like the Germans before them, the Anglo Saxons are looking for a way to remove Russia as a threat.

Kissinger works within a closed system—politics and history—and their lessons. No economics, not a mention of most of the pressure groups who push and twist foreign policy, nor mass psychology.

As for ecology, exploding populations, uncontrolled migration and refugee flows, and their consequences for his nice neat global system—nothing. He rarely asks whether there is another way of conducting human affairs. Perhaps this is wanting too much, but we have to keep asking.

Diplomacy is a book that should be bought and studied. ■

Enter, stage left and stage right. Not long after it was exit stage left only.

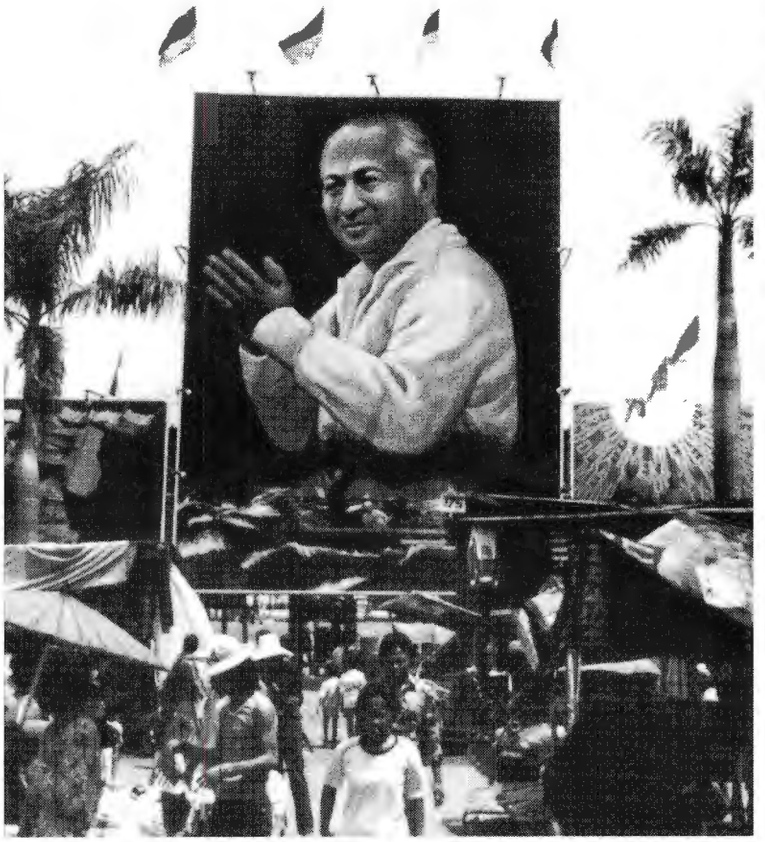
Max Teichmann is a Melbourne writer and reviewer.

DEWI ANGGRAENI

Under the influence

Indonesia's New Order, The Dynamics of Socio-economic Transformation, edited by Hal Hill, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1994. ISBN 186 373 2292 RRP $29.95

WHILE THERE HAVE BEEN English-language books on Indonesia covering its various aspects, Hal Hill's new book is ideal for those who want a general volume on the country. Hill has been able to gather extensive up-to-date material from contributors who are authorities in their respective fields. The result is a wide yet far from shallow overview of Indonesia's New Order era, now approaching the end of its third decade. The book covers politics, the economy, demographic perspectives, resource utilisation and environment, cultural expression and local society and culture. While giving credits where achievements were made, the writers do not shy away from criticising failed policies and indicating areas where massive problems are still unsolved.



General election Poster for President Soeharto 1982. Photograph: Jeremy Evans

Jamie Mackie and Andrew MacIntyre, in the chapter on politics, detail the Soeharto-style administration, including his increasingly agile *pas de deux* with the Armed Forces. Mackie and MacIntyre credit President Soeharto with the highly centralised processes of government that have evolved since 1966. It is his sensibly pragmatic planning mechanism and economic strategies that have brought a great deal of political and economic stability to the chaotic Indonesia of pre-1966. In foreign policy, his government's rapid swing to the right brought aid and foreign investment into Indonesia again. However, the president is also held accountable for tolerating or even encouraging the corruption and repression of opposition or dissent in the country. The administration, according to Mackie and MacIntyre, is not entirely solid. The Dili massacre and its aftermath are one example used to illustrate its inherent fragility and brittleness.

Equally elaborate and incisive is the chapter on the economy by Hal Hill. While Indonesia is still a very poor country and remains in the World Bank's 'low income' group, the New Order's record over the past quarter century has, by and large, been a resounding success. Hill's optimism for Indonesia's ability to adjust quickly to the inevitable cessation of oil exporting in the near future, is tempered by several challenges that lie ahead: labour surplus and inequity in the distribution of wealth, to name two.

One of the Soeharto administration's achievements is its successful family planning policy. In the chapter on demographic perspectives, Terence H. Hull and Gavin W. Jones record falling fertility rates despite the numerous problems encountered by the government in this field. Achieved also is a decline in infant mortality rates, as a result of improved nutrition, environment and health services. Jones elaborates however, that while fertility was declining, there are still many who were born before the period, entering the labour force. So the immediate problem of labour surplus is real and looming.

Being endowed with rich natural resources does not automatically make life easy for Indonesians. Joan Hardjono reveals New Order management of these resources, in distribution as well as utilisation. Lack of controlling legislation over exploitation of resources caused negative impact on the environment. While Government Regulation concerning Environmental Impact Analysis was passed in 1986, it was only toward the end of the 1980s that government began to make progress in environmental issues.

Like the economy, cultural expression in the New Order era experiences spatial swellings and contractions. Barbara Hatley identifies three major institutions that facilitated and dominated modern Indonesian literature and the arts: the literary journal *Horison*, the Taman Ismail Marzuki arts complex, and the new publishing houses beginning at this time. After the initial freeing-up period, which witnessed the birth of various theatre groups and schools of arts, the latter part of the 1970s saw the tightening of the freedom of expression. Student leaders were arrested, university campuses were occupied by the military, Rendra was imprisoned—charged with threatening public order. Hatley also regrets the passing of regional popular entertainment forms giving way to more bland national forms.

IN THE LAST CHAPTER, Patrick Guinness traces the impact of state-sponsored changes on local societies and cultures, which struggle to main-

tain their identities. They have to contend with pressures of state directives and global culture. According to Guinness, under the New Order, local cultures have lost their depth, merely floating on the surface. One effect that the government might have unwittingly achieved is the unification of the more differentiated ethnic groups in East Timor. The authorities' vilification of the more animistic traditional religion has pushed the population to the established Roman Catholicism, which only had marginal influence when the Portuguese left. While under the Portuguese the local priests represented an élite hardly connected to the general population; under the Indonesian state they have become involved in the struggle for justice for the local people.

The book puts many problems—including human rights, highlighted in the Australian media—into perspective. ■

Dewi Anggraeni is the Australian correspondent for *The Jakarta Post* and author of *Stories of the Indian Pacific*.

BOOKS: 5

PAUL TANKARD

A doctrine straight out of the Ark

Telling Lies for God: Reason vs Creationism, Ian Plimer, Random House , 1994. ISBN 0 09 182852 X RRP. $14.95

IAN PLIMER IS THE PROFESSOR of Geology at the University of Melbourne. He is best known to the educated general public as a vocal critic of the scientific and religious ratbaggery that is promoted under the name Creation Science, or Creationism. In this book he levels enough charges at the proponents of this particular brand of wackiness to keep them off the hustings for some time.

But, of course, it won't work; not because there is anything important to dispute in Plimer's book, but because of the kind of book it is, and the kind of phenomenon Creationism is. *Telling Lies for God* is not likely to be read by the sort of people who follow Creationism, who are, as Plimer asserts, 'simple ill-educated folk' (p222, 285).

Creationism is the belief that the earliest chapters of *Genesis* give a literally—scientifically and historically—true account of the origins of the universe, the earth and humankind. The Creationist doctrines with which Plimer most concerns himself are that of the 'Young Earth', that is, that the universe is about six thousand years old, and of the worldwide 'Great Flood'. Creationists as a matter of principle reject the theory of evolution, and the conventional scientific dating techniques. To my mind, Plimer deals pretty conclusively with both of these ideas. To believe in either of them is tantamount to rejecting anything that can be shown by science.

Plimer's main contentions are that although Creationism purports to be science, its teachings are—overwhelmingly, inarguably, even ridiculously—scientifically untenable, that it is promoted for religious rather than scientific or educational purposes, and that its leaders have at best dubious scientific qualifications and are knowingly dishonest.

However, Creationists represent a wider range of opinion than Plimer describes. Not all Creationists, for instance, are Young Earthers, or believe that Noah's Flood was what we would call worldwide. This lack of a systematic overview, and clear definitions and distinctions, are the main problems of the book. Plimer's lengthy lampoon of a fastidiously literal reading of the Great Flood story quickly moves from being amusing to seeming pointless. If the story is *so* idiotic, we wonder how anyone at anytime can have regarded it as at all significant, much less sacred and in some sense true.

What is more interesting is Plimer's exposé of the leaders of the movement's various and sometimes conflicting organisations. Plimer names names, and no doubt hopes for a few writs for libel. The American and Australian Creationist gurus possess no scientific qualifications, or inadequate or inappropriate ones (eg. the biochemist who writes about palaeontology) or have bought them from unaccredited American mail-box 'universities'. They do no research, they do not publish in professional journals, their writings in their own journals are credulous and inadequately referenced. Their most academic-looking journal aims to look to lay people as if were aimed at scientists, in the same way that *Dolly* magazine aims to look to 12-year-olds as if it were aimed at 18-year-olds.

For this reason, Plimer calls Creationism a cult. It is, he says, aimed particularly at 'the lost, bereaved, traumatised, prejudiced and uneducated' (p. 267) But he brings out such big guns to deal with it, and is so lacking in perspective, that the reader ends up feeling just a bit sorry for them. In a society where reason and religion have become divorced, and most people believe in neither, there is already a tendency to see fundamentalists as quaint. The educated reader (that is, the only reader) of Plimer's book, unless they have a commitment as strong as Plimer's own to knowledge, may conclude that Creationism is a harmless way of consoling the simple and alienated.

PLIMER BELIEVES CREATIONISM to be not only wrong, but dangerous. His title is deliberately confronting. While it appears to be—at least by implication—anti-religion (suggesting that God is a cause for whom lying is necessary), it mirrors Plimer's contention that Creationism brings Christianity into disrepute. Most Christians would agree with this. But Plimer's own position with regard to orthodox Christianity is difficult to identify. Towards the end of the book he says, 'In my view, the Bible is not true. However, it is the Truth.' (p. 289) This deeply mysterious, isolated remark is not explained; and together with the book's Fore-

word by the Anglican Archbishop of Brisbane, Peter Hollingworth, it seems to be an after-thought, in recognition that an attack on Creationism from an avowedly atheistic perspective would not have the same force as one which shows at least some sympathy for religious views of life.

Plimer would argue, I imagine, that his personal religious views are not relevant, and that he is a geologist, not a theologian. But his book is not a book of geology—or even of science—and the reader has a feeling that he hasn't quite come clean. Whilst he criticises the literal reading of *Genesis* (although sometimes he expands this to the Old Testament, or the Bible, as a whole) as anti-theological, he offers no explanation of the real meaning and purpose of such writings. Like Creationists, he makes no distinction between the specific tenets of Creationism (in its narrowest form) and the belief that the world was made and is sustained by a wise and loving God. For instance, he names a Victorian primary school as having on two occasions promoted Creationist materials. The first of these was pretty standard teaching in the R.E. program about God having made the world, the trees, the birds, etc.; hardly Creationist. (The second instance, as it took me one phone call to discover, was an isolated incident in which a grandfather of one of the children volunteered to talk to a class who were studying dinosaurs. (The school neglected to ask if he was a Creationist.)

PLIMER'S QUALIFICATION for writing the book is as an academic educator and geologist who has studied and engaged with the Creationist movement and its literature. He has pursued these characters, received their newsletters, investigated their credentials, followed up their claims, gone to their meetings, and publicly asked them questions (when they've let him). The book describes in the first person his adventures at Creationist meetings, his triumphs in correspondence and debates with the hapless Creationists, and the tricks he has played on them. These parts should have been highlighted, in a section of their own, and the book divided more clearly into detailed refutation of Creationist teaching, exposé of their academic fraudulence, description of their methods, etc., as well as a chapter (perhaps by someone else) on how *Genesis*, Chapters 1-11, can be read profitably, faithfully and seriously.

But not only is Plimer not a theologian, he is not a writer, and his book has been edited very badly, or in a hurry, or not at all. (I presume that it has been rushed into print to capitalise on a couple of documentaries about Ark-hunters, which have been on television in recent months, and in which Plimer plays a prominent role.) It drifts from detailed scientific discussion, to ridicule, to anecdote; it sounds as if it were composed at a tape recorder. Terms are employed and only later explained. Plimer seems to think that 'incredulous' means 'incredible' (59, 159). Quotes are introduced as examples of one point, and then pursued as examples of a number of others. This lack of continuity entails frequent repetition. His headings are not very useful, and there is no index—something for which he castigates Creationist publications. And are works by Hitler and Goebbels in the Bibliography just to be funny?

My main disappointment with *Telling Lies for God* is that it ought to have been a much better book than it is. It should have clarified the relationship between science and religion, but instead suggests that sensible people will see them as irrelevant to each other. While religion ought not to imply dogmatic wish-fulfilment, science should not require block-headed materialism.

Post Script: The column by the Archbishop of Melbourne, Keith Rayner, in the December 1994 issue of the *Melbourne Anglican*, is an excellent clarification of the issues. ■

Paul Tankard is a Melbourne reviewer.

PHOTOGRAPHY

M.J. CRENNAN

The eyes have it

Through Irish Eyes, Australian and New Zealand Images of the Irish 1788-1948, Patrick O'Farrell, with contemporary photographs by Richard O'Farrell, Aurora Books/ David Lovell Publishing, 1994. ISBN 1 86355 042 9 RRP $24.95

PATRICK O'FARRELL IS Australia's most distinguished historian of the Irish in Australia and of Ireland itself. He is also responsible for the wittiest title of any book written about Ireland: *Ireland's English Question: Anglo-Irish Relations 1534-1970*. He has now turned his attention to a book of photographs of the Irish in Australia, not as an illustration of his historical themes but, as he puts it, a meditation. He says of the book 'Its way of telling is to display rather than to attempt to explain.'

The introduction goes a little further, influenced by Susan Sontag, to say that 'given that "deduction, speculation and fantasy" are individual exercises of the private mind, fed by that particular, unique, and variously informed source, to impose external and other directions on that invitation would be to negate the process. Nevertheless, some at least introductory sharing is inescapable'.

After the postmodernist longueurs of the introduction the book settles into a generously annotated volume of photographs and other illustrations. There are seven titles under which the material is organised; evocative headings such as The Travelling People, Spiritual Refuges, Imperial Ruins and Monuments.

Generally speaking, the provenance of the photographs is adequately given, although at times more detail would have been appreciated. In a brief notice such as this it is impossible even to mention a sampling of the treasures within. One interesting feature of the photographs is that they are either, on their face, distinctively records of Irish-Australasian occasion, or bear no immediate internal evidence of ethnicity: the presence of a piper or of a Cardinal with a small girl clutching his hand denote the former whereas the genre photographs of workmen, whether at the mouth of a tunnel (see above) or perched on mining works on precipitous cliffs belong to the latter. They could be, although they are not, anyone.

The photographs are not chosen on aesthetic grounds although many of them are quite beautiful and haunting. My own favourites include the Roundstone Co. Galway cottage surrounded by huge rocks, or the Glenshesk potato field with its steep slopes, its furrows, its girls at their back-breaking work and its gnarled bare trees. The modern photographs are a mixed bag, associated with the historical material, but lacking the latter's resonance.

This is a book I thoroughly recommend. It is not only an absolute bargain, but a visual record to which the reader of history will return again and again. ■

The Otira tunnel, nearing completion. The tunnel—over five miles long through the Southern Alps of New Zealand's South Island—was constructed by a predominantly Irish work force and opened by an Ulster born Prime Minister, W.F. Massey, in 1923 (Canterbury Museum).

MJ Crennan is a Melbourne barrister and writer.

GEOFFREY MILNE

No more threepenny operas

As 1994 DREW TO A CLOSE, Australians were deluged by arts-policy statements. Arts practitioners (or 'arts industry personnel', as the new rhetoric describes them) responded with either optimism and pessimism, depending on where they found themselves on these maps of the future drawn up by federal and state governments, and by several of Her Majesty's loyal oppositions. The statements also revealed some alarming discrepancies between declared government intentions for the arts and actual practice.

The statements began appearing in October, with the release of the Federal Opposition's *Cultural Frontier* document, which was soon upstaged by the Government's long-expected *Creative Nation*. Less than a month later the Victorian government launched *Arts 21*, described by its subtitle as a 'strategy for the arts into the 21st century'. The WA Department of the Arts made an acerbic response to *Creative Nation* that, as a leading Perth arts bureaucrat suggested to me, seemed to be based in part on the assumption that the state had voted 'the wrong way' at the last federal election and was being punished in the allocation of Australia Council grants.

Not surprisingly, these policy documents tend to stress the economic benefits of the arts. 'This cultural policy is also an economic policy,' proclaims *Creative Nation* (p7). 'Culture creates wealth'. Whatever the context, however, it is good to have such documents: it's far better to have actual *policy* than promises that evaporate after an election. As the authors of *Creative Nation* stress more than once, 'This is the first Commonwealth cultural policy in our history. It is long overdue.' (p7)

That said, however, there is a vagueness and lack of detail in the policies announced, and an uncritical acceptance of new technologies. All refer to such wonders as the 'information highway' as if it were simply a new name for Exhibition St, North Terrace or Hay St, and to the benefits of 'CD-ROM' as if it were simply some new way of getting bums on seats or of selling 'cultural product' abroad.

Creative Nation , for example, is strong on 'Baz Luhrmann's [video of] *La Bohème* and the tour of Baz Luhrmann's *Midsummer Night's Dream*'. Apart from questions about authorship (are these not also works by artists other than Luhrmann? Is Luhrmann the production company?), the facile equation of a videotape reproduction with a live performance indicates a lack of understanding of what actually goes into the different kinds of 'cultural production', and what they mean to an audience.

Arts 21 might have been tainted by the Victorian Premier's bizarre pronouncement, at the launch of the document, that under his gifted leadership Melbourne would join London and New York as some kind of world cultural triangle in the 21st Century. Are *no* cities in non-English-speaking countries worthy of comparison? Is this 'cultural cringe' or 'cultural strut'?

Nonetheless, the commitment of funds to such initiatives as commissioning new work (more then $2 million across the spectrum of arts practice, and not only literary works) and increased touring and marketing of Victorian arts production (a similar sum for national and international programs) strikes me as being beneficial to artists, organisations and audiences alike.

Victoria's eminently sensible Arts Minister, Haddon Storey, gave no specific detail on these programs; nor should he, at this stage of policy formation. Given the diminution of performing arts companies in Victoria since the launch of *Arts 21*, however, it is hard to know which organisations will have the opportunity to do the developing and touring of such newly commissioned work. It is one thing to commission work from an artist; it is quite another to nurture it into fruition, let alone convert it to CD-ROM or an Indonesian tour.

There is much rhetoric in *Arts 21* and *Creative Nation* about individual artists and arts organisations,

but one struggles to find specific reference to any of them, either by kind (actors, writers, dancers, composers, singers etc) or by professional practice (rehearsal/workshop/compositional conditions, income-tax arrangements, professional infrastructure etc) in a way that suggests that the authors of the various documents understand what is involved in artistic practice. Again, it is one thing to *market* and *manage* 'product' but quite another to provide the circumstances in which the creation of 'product' (how I am coming to hate that term!) can flourish.

Turning to the national scenario as expressed in *Creative Nation*, there are lots of apparent good news ('hurrah' features, as one might call them), some non-news and some ominously ambivalent news ('boo' features, perhaps).

Let us begin with money. *Creative Nation* is at pains to sell the idea that a massive injection of additional funds will go to the arts during the next three years. The actual sum is generally quoted as something in the order of $250 million to the Australia Council (Hurrah!). The estimated total Commonwealth expenditure on the arts in 1994-95, through the Minister for Communications and the Arts, is quoted at 'more than one billion dollars' (Hurrah!). 'Financial support to the arts is dominated by funding to the Australia Council of $59.2 million'. (: Hmmm! Funding to the Australia Council in 1993-94 was $58.2 million and in 1992-93, $57 million. There is some evidence of a slight increase towards 1994-95 but there's a long way to go before we reach a triennial increase of a quarter of a billion.)

Of course, there is more: $7.4 million goes to the Australian Opera (about the same as usual) and some millions to the National Institute of Dramatic Art and the Australian Ballet School, direct from the Australian Cultural Development Office, which lies outside the umbrella of the Australia Council. There is also, in a sense, less. In 1992-93, $51.547 million of the Australia Council's income of about $57 million (about 90.4 per cent) was spent on grants to artists and arts organisations; in 1993-94, only $49,218,244 of an increased total allocation of $58.185 million (or about 84.56 per cent) found its way into arts grants. There is nothing in *Creative Nation* to inspire confidence that the diminishing percentage of the arts dollar that goes into the arts pocket will be reversed.

If anything, the contrary might be true. As part of a well-argued case for more stable funding for the Australia Council and for major clients, *Creative Nation* proposes that council be enabled to provide triennial funding for a number of major arts organisations through the establishment of a Major Organisations Board (Hurrah!). Needless to say, membership of the MOB (as it has come to be known, with some of the acronymic connotations intact) is seen to be a very good thing, but we don't yet know who will be in it. Presumably, the state theatre companies will be; so, too, one imagines, will the Australian Ballet, maybe the Australian Opera and probably such icons as Circus Oz and, rumour has it, the previously largely *un*-funded Bell Shakespeare Company.

On the whole, one might say, Hurrah! But there are hints that all is not rosy with potential MOBsters: we are told that 'The Board [the Major Organisations Board?] will address the underlying financial difficulties of certain major companies' and that 'some organisations will need to receive an injection of funding to overcome current financial difficulties before they are placed within the Board. Once within the Board, the organisations will receive guaranteed funding for up to three years.' (p16) It doesn't take much imagination to figure out that if companies like the Melbourne Theatre Company (with a deficit—or 'financial difficulty'—quoted in the daily press of upwards of $2.8 million) are to join the MOB, then there are going to be funding problems of considerable proportions. (Boo!)

Let us read further: 'While we expect the MOB to be widely welcomed, the Government recognises that smaller organisations and individual artists would benefit from a greater level of support ... The Government will increase the council's base funding level to provide additional assistance for individual artists'. Again, hurrah for the rhetoric. But consider what actually happened in the funding round immediately after the fine words of *Creative Nation* were published.

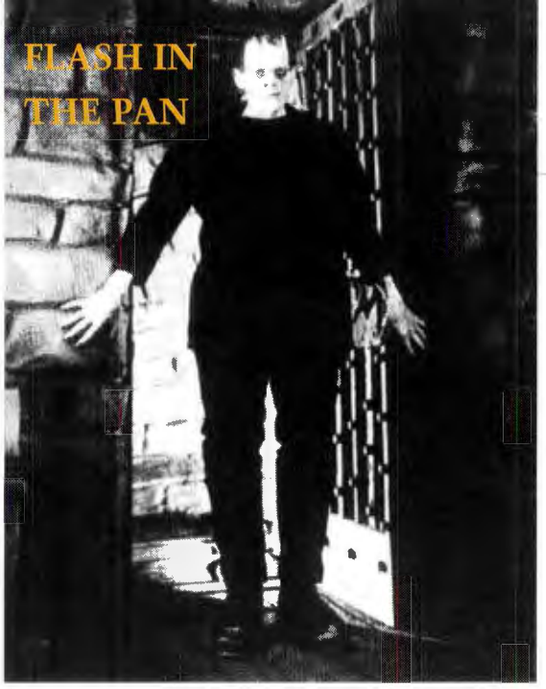
In Melbourne, 'smaller organisations' like Australian Nouveau Theatre and the Woolly Jumpers were slashed (no funding at all) and Danceworks cut by 48 per cent; in Perth, funding for the Perth Theatre Company was cut to zero and for the Chrissie Parrott Dance Company (a major organisation if ever I saw one) by 27 per cent, and the WA Ballet forced to renegotiate funding *up* to 80 per cent of its previous allocation. (To add to the joy of the hunt, the Victorian government nicked $20,000 out of the 1995 budget of a company which regularly commissions new work, the Melbourne Workers' Theatre, reportedly against its Drama Panel's recommendation.) Elsewhere, TasDance and a number of other contemporary dance companies lost $300,000 from their collective allocation. And all this despite *Creative Nation's* expressed commitment to excellence in dance, which amounts to the Eurocentric Australian Ballet's apparent admission to the MOB.

Likewise in opera: Baz Luhrmann and the Australian Opera are glowingly acknowledged, and I have no objection to them as such; but why is there not a syllable about Chamber Made Opera, the Met or any of the other new music theatre groups?

I could go on, but the point is clear. *Creative Nation* will shore up the major 'high-art' organisations (whatever their repertoire or financial condition) and commit the rest to the whims of market forces and state governments. Boo! ■

Geoffrey Milne is head of the Division of Drama at La Trobe University.

Creative Nation is strong on 'Baz Luhrmann's [video of] La Bohème and the tour of Baz Luhrmann's Midsummer Night's Dream'. Apart from questions about authorship (are these not also works by artists other than Luhrmann? Is Luhrmann the production company?), the facile equation of a videotape with a live performance indicates a lack of understanding of what actually goes into the different kinds of 'cultural production', and what they mean to an audience.



Frankly, no

Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, dir. Kenneth Branagh (Hoyts and selected cinemas). In a year in which there has been a dearth of good comedies, Kenneth Branagh has certainly done justice to Mary Shelley's great comic novel *Frankenstein*. This account of Dr Victor Frankenstein (hereinafter referred to as 'Vic') and his unnamed monster mate is hilarious.

Vic is dead keen to demonstrate that life can be instilled into inert matter. After a few raids on burial vaults and local charnel houses, where he collects the necessary bits and pieces, he cobbles them together and sticks them in a huge pressure cooker.

Now I remembered what my mother did to peas, carrots and potatoes using her pressure cooker and I held out little hope that Vic would succeed. But no, a miracle occurs and what comes out of the pressure cooker lives and breathes and looks like Robert De Niro, just after he lost the world title in *Raging Bull* . He looks awful and he's got more stitches in him than a Sherrin football.

The monster is huge, more than eight feet tall, and if Geelong had had his services in the ruck in this year's Grand Final there would have been no stopping the Cats. But then I suppose he wouldn't have been allowed to play because of the 'no blood' rule. The monster is decidedly grumpy about what young Vic has done to him, particularly the stitching of some of his facial features. He rapidly sets about making Vic an orphan and reducing the size of his immediate family.

To stop this carnage Vic agrees to cobble together a bride for the monster, who is keen to keep the new breed of eight-footers going, presumably because he senses that in about 200 years' time, the National Basketball Association will be formed and there'll be big bucks in it. Vic starts to stitch up and pressure-cook the girl of the monster's dreams but then welshes on the deal. The monster and Vic then carry on a running dogfight that ends in the North Polar region.

This film involves heaps of shouting, running and bleeding, and at times sweeping strings overwhelm everything, including the dialogue, although this doesn't matter much. For example, Vic's fiancée, Elizabeth (played by Helena Bonham Carter), is given such riveting lines as 'I want more than anything to be your wife but now you must go and do the great things that you must do. I will be here on your return.'

On the credit side, the sets and special effects are splendid and Robert De Niro makes a pathetic monster.

Perhaps the last word should be left to T. L. McCarthy's poetic summary of the book:

Before he died aboard the ship,
Vic left this very useful tip
For those who wish to fabricate
Mammalia:
'Had I my time to live once
more, I'd make my monster
four feet four
And wouldn't bother with the
genitalia'.

—Gordon Lewis

Eureka Street
Film Competition

Above we see the late Boris Karloff, in James Whale's original screen *Frankenstein* (1932). Tell us what Boris would say on meeting Robert de Niro as the monster in the Branagh version, and we'll award two tickets, to the film of your choice, for the answer we like best. The winner of November's competition was Jenny Hocking, of Como, WA, who thought Jorge Luke was saying to Burt Lancaster, 'Don't you see that the ontological proof is the only one with permanent validity!'

Deep *and* shallow

Shallow Grave, dir. Danny Boyle (independent cinemas). Intercut an early draft of *Macbeth* with *Jules et Jim*, drain out the passion but leave in the fright, give the hybrid to a postmodern Alfred Hitchcock to direct, in Scotland, and you'd have something like Andrew Macdonald and John Hodge's *Shallow Grave*. The surprise is that the film is halfway to being very good indeed.

A very modish trio—accountant (Christopher Eccleston), doctor (Kerry Fox) and journalist (Ewan McGregor)—live in a high-toned TARDIS of a flat in Edinburgh's elegant New Town. They are pleased to bits with themselves and with one another, so pleased that they make the audition of a new flatmate a sadistic ordeal. Only the saturnine Hugo survives it. But he is very short-lived and turns, on cue, into a perfect Caravaggio corpse, naked on red silk in their blue room. Hugo also inadvertently bequeaths to his landlords and lady a suitcase of banknotes and an ethical dilemma. They opt for greed, draw lots for the mutilation required to disguise the body, bury Hugo in a beautiful Birnam wood then go back to their Georgian fastness and begin to disintegrate.

Writers Macdonald and Hodge put together a sharp, dark script and found themselves a director and an editor (Danny Boyle and Masahiro Hirakubo) who keep the film lean. Just as you feel a dose of the Greenaway chics coming on the camera shifts and the action turns.

The camera is crucial— playing with ideas as well as surfaces, lavish,

edgy and terrifying. And the acting is a good as you'll find—sinister cameos Dickens would relish (Ken Stott, as mad Detective Inspector McCall, and Hodge himself as PC Mitchell) and nail-gun performances from the three principals. Kerry Fox is seductive and savage, Christopher Ecclestone, as the paradigm Edinburgh accountant-turned-dismemberer, is more frightening than Anthony Perkins at his psychotic best.

Shallow Grave raises all the interesting questions about film noir. These three characters continually engage and then disengage one's serious interest. How far *can* a writer or director push black farce and keep an audience? Taste it and see.

—Morag Fraser

Inverted Arnie

Junior, dir Ivan Reitman (Greater Union), In the halls of academe and in seminaries, ethicists used to conduct the *disputa*, a hypothetical case study to be used for moral insights. Nowadays we can all debate because our moral hypotheses are up there on the big screen and, instead of serious syllogisms, we have comedies that make us laugh while winning our hearts and minds.

Junior may well capture the hearts and minds of moviegoers who have resisted Arnold Schwarzenegger as Conan the Terminator, and found true lies to be false. Maybe the film is a ploy to inaugurate his run for the presidency—he has never been so likeable.

And the film is funny. Yes, he is a serious doctor whose funds are cut off and who agrees to an experiment: to become pregnant. (Enough *disputa* themes there, with inverse IVF, decisions about carrying the baby to term, parent care.) But the gender reversal is pleasingly done and Arnie is so sweet, and so much more subtle than usual, that he is likely to win a Golden Globe for best actor in a comedy.

Actually, scenes of Arnie pregnant, experiencing morning sickness and mood changes, and wearing his maternity clothes are humorous and endearing. Ivan Reitman (who also directed him in *Twins* and *Kindergarten Cop*) wisely keeps Arnie subdued and unflaunting. Danny de Vito relies on his reliable used-car salesman style. Emma Thompson (who has to do some role-reversal stuff) does a jaunty-awkward Joyce Grenfell-like turn. And there's a cheerful joke to make us smile as the final credits come up.

—Peter Malone MSC

Splat all the way

Pulp Fiction, dir. Quentin Tarantino (Village and some independents), is an intoxicating combination of bubbling dialogue, a narrative that blends four or five stories into one, and a succession of scenes that interweave the ordinary and the extraordinary.

The film is well served by a roll-out of stars who appear to us as the desperate, the dangerous and the manic. John Travolta is very good as the hitman, Vincent Vega, and leaves the freshness of his *Saturday Night Fever* character lying in his wake as he does a dance with Uma Thurman (Mia Wallace).

Bruce Willis as Butch, a boxer, double-crosses Marsellus Wallace, a crime boss who paid him to lose a fight, and in the process shows us what's right and wrong in an upside down world. And Harvey Keitel comes in as Winston Wolf, problem solver. In giving Keitel a turn on screen, Tarantino is making a connection with his earlier films, as if to give *Pulp Fiction* a stamp of approval; particularly as Tarantino himself indulgently appears alongside him.

But the core of a film that spreads far and wide is Vincent's partner, Jules (Samuel Jackson) and a mysterious briefcase. As he struggles to find the righteous path he carries with him the root of evil, which he has retrieved for Marsellus.

When Jules disowns his way of life, after being saved by what he thinks is a miracle, you are presented with a simple and timeless moral fable. But there is far more going on than just that, it is at the same time a splatter movie, an essay on the collision of circumstances, and even a comedy of manners.

As a clever montage of several different films, *Pulp Fiction* could be labelled a nihilistic wank. True, it has more to do with film-making than story-telling but it succeeds, simply because it is great visual entertainment. **—Jon Greenaway**

Old 'n' familiar

The Slingshot, dir. Åke Sandgren (independent cinemas), is the latest in a long line of films about the world as seen through the eyes of a pre-adolescent boy. It is also the latest in a long line of films made about working-class characters by people with middle-class sensibilities, and it has not escaped the condescending tone of many of its predecessors.

Set in Stockholm during the 1920s, the filsm tells the story of Roland, the 12-year-old son of a socialist father and a Russian-Jewish mother. Roland is pressured to conform in various ways, rebels, and is punished. He learns his most valuable lesson from his father, who teaches him not to be cowed by the expectations of those around him. And, true to the conventions of the coming-of-age yarn, this is precisely the sort of self-assertion that earns Roland his punishment in the end.

Essentially, he is a strong character who refuses to bow to the brutal, conservative forces around him. But the film's final image appears to contradict this, as Roland finds personal freedom by accepting that he must adapt to the environment in which he finds himself. It is an odd way to conclude a film that hitherto has at least had the virtue of consistency.

So *The Slingshot* fails to rise above its genre; but that won't stop it charming many of the arthouse audiences who will flock to see it.

—Tim Mitchell

No Worries

If you're looking for some alternative to shredding the kids this summer, we recommend you take them along to see David Elfick's very fine Australian children's film, *No Worries*, which won the Bear for Best Children's Film at this year's Berlin Film Festival. It's screening at the Lumière in Melbourne, and if you make enough noise your local independent distributor may pick it up, too.

Christmas always leaves an aftertaste

'TIS THE SEASON TO SUBSIDE and veg out in front of the teeve, remote controls at the ready and left-over Christmas treats to hand. One of my sisters specialises in a particularly lethal colour-co-ordinated Christmas crystal sweeties bowl: Jaffas, Kool Mints, Crown Mints, Mint Leaves, those things that look like raspberries and those other things that look like milk bottles, if she can find them, and every other red, white and green object made of sugar that you can think of. This is only a small example of what goes on back west in the parental home; come February every year I struggle behind the steering wheel and roll home to Melbourne sporting a size 24 tent dress, half a tube of Clearasil and tiny black teeth.

And a shrunken, pulpy brain like a victim of Mad Cow Disease, for this is after a month of January television and Fa la la la la is about the size of it. We are into the non-ratings season and all the stations are trotting out the swill they wouldn't have dared to show in August: *The Partridge Family Goes to Dunedin*, *The Magic of the Spotted Hyena*, *Liberace's Texas Christmas*, and *Still More Bloopers, Rejects and Dirty Bits*. You know the kind of thing.

This year, however, at least there's *Northern Exposure*, daringly brought back by Ten to its grateful fans in the off-season. The *Age* TV critic, Philippa Hawker, has observed that there are two kinds of people, *Northern Exposure* fans and everybody else, and she says that if she personally wants to watch a show with a moose in the opening credits then she'll go for *Rocky and Bullwinkle* every time. I am of the other persuasion, and the weekly episode of *Northern Exposure* was for one whole long winter the highlight of my TV week, but this time round it's looking a little slow.

Then there are the Christmas-specific one-offs: *Carols by Candlelight*, the King's College carol service, and the assorted Christmas movie classics dreck. And, of course, the Queen's Message; by the time you read this she will have said whatever she's going to say this year, poor sausage, but I can't at this stage imagine what. I wish that just once she would let rip: take off her glasses, look straight into the camera, project that voice from the lower diaphragm, and tell us how she really feels.

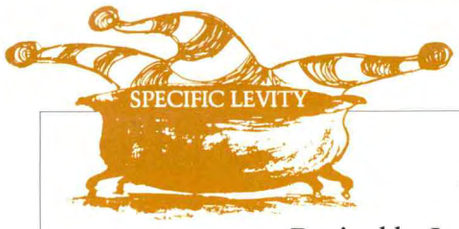
Carols by Candlelight on Christmas Eve is a bone of contention in the family home; my family likes to watch it and gets very cross when I sit there and sneer and twitch while some satin-clad 17-year-old howls her or, worse, his way through a retro-reggae version of *Santa Claus Is Coming to Town*. Then somebody with a great voice comes on and sings the *Coventry Carol* or *O Holy Night* and I burst into uncontrollable sobbing while the siblings laugh and point. (Or, as Dorothy Dunnett once remarked, 'Music, the knife without a hilt.') *Carols by Candlelight* also needs to be factored into the family Christmas schedule, slotted into place among the rituals of present-opening, champagne-for-the-ex-neighbours, the STD call queue, Christmas dinner, the Relly Rally, and at-least-one-person-dropping-in-unexpectedly-possibly-someone-from-the-country-town-we-left-in-1966.

From Boxing Day onwards, summer television is mainly tennis, cricket and bushfires. This year as every year, no doubt, we will be treated to shots of brokenhearted people standing amid the smouldering ruins of their homes while journalists with imaginative hair and IQs of room temperature shove microphones under their noses and ask 'How do you feel?' The point, one assumes, is to goad these people to tears and then get the cameras in tight for a close-up shot. The question of why viewers would want to see people in tears, or perhaps bleeding, dead even, deserves a whole column to itself, for there is no doubt that we do; in the meantime I am not by nature a punitive woman but I like to think there's a special compartment in hell—something involving toenails—for all producers, directors, journalists and camera crews who have ever been involved in this unspeakable practice. I'm still waiting for the day when the victim responds with 'How the #@!*&! do you *think* I feel, you stupid sod, get outta my face,' and the footage ends up on the screen instead of the cutting-room floor.

That leaves the cricket and the tennis. I saw Allan Border take those seven wickets against the West Indies, back whichever year it was, and a few summers later I saw the whole five-set five-hour gladiatorial marathon between John McEnroe and Emilio Sanchez, the one that put McEnroe in hospital on a saline drip (he won). One watches the tennis and the cricket because one knows that, at some indefinable point, whatever one is watching just might develop into something like that.

Test cricket has a particular charm for the literary critic; it has a great deal in common with the 19th century novel, what with the leisurely narrative development, the minutiae of character and the unexpected twists of plot. Brian Matthews in his lovely book *Oval Dreams* has derided the commercial televising of test cricket, but from the narrative angle it has its compensations: the lavish spending results in a plethora of camera angles and slow-motion repeats, closely analogous to shifts in narrative point of view and the musings of an omniscient narrator on the ramifications of a particular gesture or remark. Merv Hughes is Dickensian, Michael Slater is like one of those lively boys in Jane Austen, and Graham Gooch is straight out of Hardy; the Chappell brothers' commentary has a Flaubertian clarity and elegance; and you don't have to go far in, say, *Middlemarch* to find the narrative equivalent of Stump-Cam. If anyone can find a place in this analogy for *Frankenstein*, *Wuthering Heights* or Bill Lawry, I would love to hear about it. ■

Kerryn Goldsworthy is a Melbourne writer and teacher.



Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 30, January/February 1995

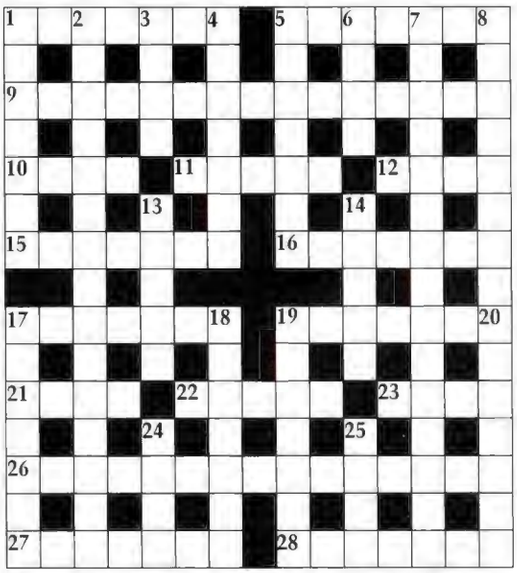
Devised by Joan Nowotny IBVM

ACROSS

1 Hang the delay! (7)
5 Herein you'll find that when I am in, I cable for a modest taxi. (7)
9 The winning combination for brave group with the strike —at the Australian Open, perhaps. (4,3,3,5)
10 Often blamed the subject of them? (4)
11 Flourishing days for friend of mine. (5)
12 The sound of bat on ball, perhaps begins with Hayden and McDermott. (4)
15 Doctor should remedy such dryness. (7)
16 Mother embraces a man. It makes her blush purplish-red? (7)
17 Many of these will fall during 2-down. Somehow we stick with them nevertheless. (7)
19 What Shane Warne does at leg-stump for 17-across. (7)
21 Endlessly regretting disaster! (4).
22 They could be Granny's problems. (5)
23 Old king of Mercia is part of family of man. (4)
26 Anyhow, I like to treat Eva to a present. She can make the choice. (4,2,2,5,2)
27 She is very indecisive about shirt for Ed ... (7)
28 ... whether to leave a band on it or not. (7)

DOWN

1 Sounds as if he quoted the passage about not being blind. (7)
2 Inspect totalizer in long game season? (6,2,7)
3 Simple midshipman goes to sea in a mess at the end of the day. (4)
4 Take away and repair CD. Treat with care from now on. (7)
5 Give small car to mother. It's the least you can do. (7)
6 Count the items without hesitation? How insensitive! (4)
7 It seemed to be a sign: strangely, the cat flinched. I ran to take this and so won the match for our team. (5,2,3,5)
8 In this country, it's not so eccentric to be off the beam.Oh, I live as an artist! (7)
13 She covers herself in milk of magnesia. (5)
14 A portal of stone. (5)
17 Were we bested by the better team, or the opposite? Defeated, anyway! (7)
18 Lying serpentine in the sun, debt-reminders seem devious diversions. (7)
19 He sat on her and hurt her kneecap. (7)
20 Nat hits back to show his upbringing was austere. (7)
24 The formal procedure sounds correct. (4)
25 To begin with, what a climax! A ground for the final test in 2-down. (4)



Solution to Crossword no. 29, December 1994

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

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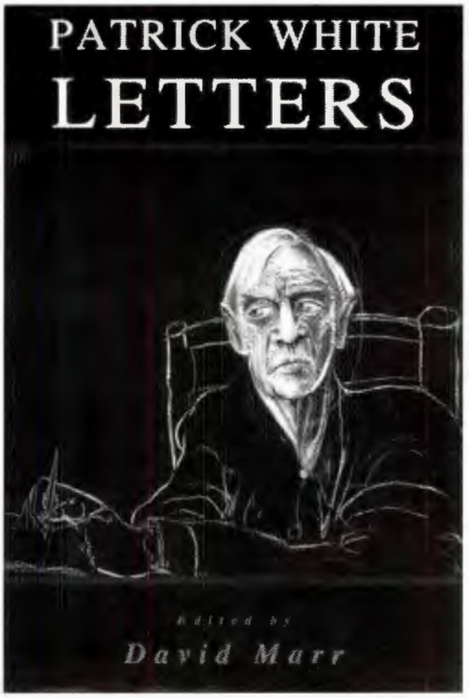

Patrick White Letters
edited by David Marr

'A volume of letters is a radically open text, a miscellany which different readers will shuffle and sort in different ways. Some will like the gossip—which is plentiful and bitchy and fierce. There are not many set pieces ... my favourite is the lunch on the Royal Yacht Britannia, with its splendidly duchessy tone towards the Queen ... another excellent lunch is the one at which he was made Australian of the Year and his "lower false teeth broke up on a savoury boat" ... The letters reveal a man who found out rather quickly what his necessities in life were, and answered to them with great purity and ruthlessness ... '

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