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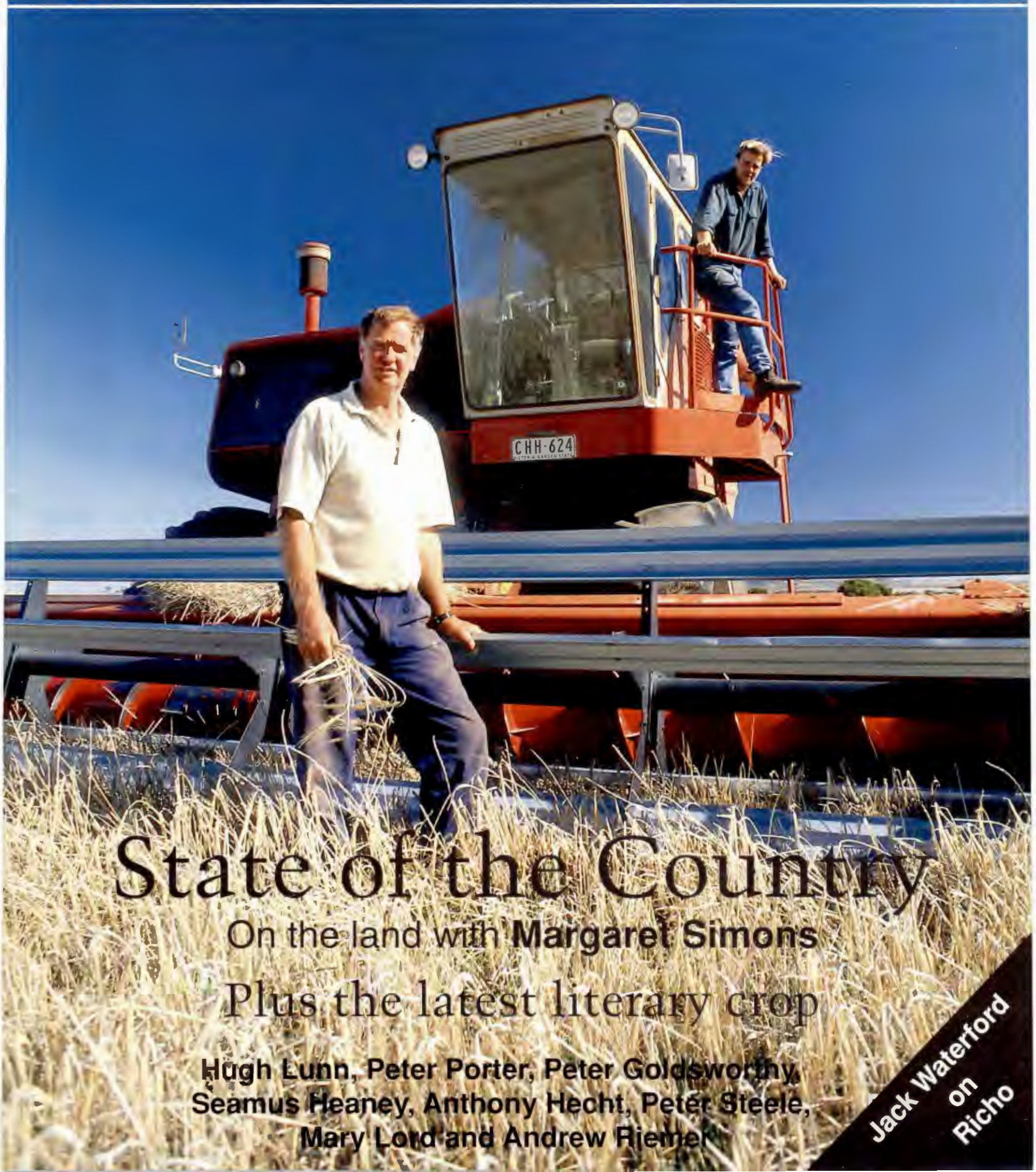


# State of the Country

On the land with **Margaret Simons**

Plus the latest literary crop

**Hugh Lunn, Peter Porter, Peter Goldsworthy, Seamus Heaney, Anthony Hecht, Peter Steele, Mary Lord and Andrew Riemer**

**Jack Waterford on Richo**


# EUREKA STREET

Volume 6 Number 2
March 1996

*A magazine of public affairs, the arts and theology*


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**Cover: Farmer, Eric Sharkey, harvesting with his son, Chris. Photograph by Bill Thomas**

Photographs pp7, 14-16 by Bill Thomas.
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# Up country

NO ONE WHO HAS DRIVEN OUT OF THE CITIES during the past summer could have missed the upswing in the country. The crops are spectacular, and for once they are the right crops at the right time, and in a period of rising commodity prices—enough to put a grin on the face of the most hanrahan-ish Australian farmer.

This is news of national importance, but it has been displaced by months of electoral obsession. If you were lucky you might have found some coverage of the state of the country buried on a left-hand page up the back of the news sections of the dailies, or parked in a specialist television or radio program broadcast at an unmentionable hour.

Because good land management and agriculture are so vital to Australia's prosperity and its own vision of itself as an environmentally sound economy, *Eureka Street* went bush this month to gather some of the details of the quality of the incoming crops and an analysis of the land-care problems that linger even in a good season. Margaret Simons lives in country NSW and writes with first-hand experience. You will find her on p12. Bill Thomas took the photographs.

If anything has become clear during these recent months of political ambit claims, it is that Australians, from both country and city, are sick of façades in politics and terminally disillusioned with regimes of power that are not balanced by integrity and a sense of responsibility. When interviewing people of different ages with diverse experiences for our feature on what Australians want from Government (p17), the emergent theme was a wish, rapidly consolidating into a demand, for honesty and straight play in politics.

Shifty or defensive politics is as soul-destroying as devious or defensive cricket. Where are the David Boons of the front benches? Have we seen the last of the politicians who will risk it and mix it with a skilled heckler? How many more Graham Richardsons can the Australian political system tolerate? This March issue of *Eureka Street* tackles these questions in commentary, in reviews (Jack Waterford looks at Richo and what he represents and misrepresents, p49) and in debate (Chris McGillion and Ray Cassin give contrary readings of the latest publication, by John Warhurst, from the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, *Politicians and Citizens: Roles and Responsibilities).*

Australia is changing, so stay with us as we track the shifts. And welcome to our sixth year of publication.

PS: On March 10 we begin a new venture, co-sponsoring, with the *Sydney Morning Herald* and The Museum of Contemporary Art, a season of readings by Australian and international writers. Details p2. See you at the Museum, Circular Quay at 11.30am on Sunday morning. ■

**—Morag Fraser**

COMMENT: 2

FRANK O'SHEA

# Ireland: exploding backwards

Pandemonium followed the explosion: security alarms and sirens and the screams of frightened citizens. And in the background, the sounds of people talking—all at the same time and all saying the same thing. In the tinkling quiet that followed the removal of bloodied and wounded Londoners you might hear the words: 'We told you so.'

David Trimble and the Unionists emphasised how often they had warned that the IRA could not be trusted. John Major and the British government pointed out how right they were to question the permanence of the ceasefire, how wise to demand that Semtex be handed in. Nationalists told how they had repeatedly cautioned that slowing the peace process would weaken Gerry Adams' hold over the IRA and give the upper hand to the hard men.

The voice of Tim Pat Coogan may not have been heard above the din. He is a mere writer, a long-time chronicler of the killings and bombings and frustrating peace attempts. Writing in *The Troubles*, published late last year, he said: '... the consensus in Republican circles ... is that if the ceasefire does break down, the war would be resumed not in Ireland, but in Britain.'

When bombs go off, money runs faster than people. The IRA's most spectacular success was the April 1993 bombing of Bishopgate in the heart of London's financial district. There is a body of opinion within the IRA, and possibly within Sinn Fein, that holds that this was what brought the British government to the table in the first place. Keep bombing, their logic goes, and the Brits will eventually pull out of Ireland.

The explosion has set back the peace process, perhaps irrevocably. It has given the British government and the Unionists good reason to renew their call for decommissioning before any meaningful talks. It has taken the IRA back to their comfortable ground of political immortality. The Mitchell Report is irrelevant; the Downing Street Declaration will have to be sold all over again; American help has been rebuffed in the most violent way.

Many people blame John Major for the breakdown that led to the bombs. But although his plodding caution was maddening at times, he deserves praise for his political courage and astute balancing of political opposites. He succeeded in bringing the Unionists, if not to the table, at least to the door of the building. It is difficult to move a group for whom the status quo is victory, for whom peace without political progress gives the best of all worlds.

Major's relationship with Albert Reynolds was one of the key factors in unblocking many bottlenecks in the lead-up to the ceasefire. The untimely departure from office of the pragmatic and hands-on Reynolds, in the fallout from the Fr Brendan Smyth affair, may yet be regarded as one of the great what-ifs of modern Irish history.

And where does it all leave Gerry Adams? Either he knew of the bombs beforehand and lied to the Americans—an unthinkable scenario, surely—or he was bypassed and ignored by the leadership of the IRA. In either case, it is difficult to imagine that he can be taken seriously by his own side or by the Unionists in any further negotiations. After years of physical danger, gruelling work and political acumen he is left with nothing except the physical danger—greater now than it has ever been.

There is another sound to be heard in the background after Canary Wharf and the London bombings—the quiet despair of well-meaning people, watching years of hard work shatter: Major, Reynolds, Adams, Dick Spring, John Bruton, Jean Kennedy Smith, John Hume, the unsung heroes like Fr Alec Reid and the dozens of civil servants from all sides who have genuinely sought the impossible. If they can continue from here, they deserve our blessing ■

**Frank O'Shea** teaches at Marist College, Canberra.

COMMENT: 3

ANDREW VINCENT

# Inching forward: the Middle East

THE RECENT PALESTINIAN ELECTIONS in Gaza and the West Bank are really all things to all people. To Western governments and media they are an important sign that the peace process is still on track (if a little behind schedule) and all is going well among the Palestinians in their steady march toward democracy and possibly even statehood, somewhere in the distant future.

The elections have also helped to reinvent erstwhile guerrilla leader Yasser Arafat, who, with a respectable 88 per cent of the vote, is becoming a more acceptable statesman day by day—the kind of man you could invite to a state visit without any qualms at all. This transformation has been truly remarkable, because only a few years ago Arafat seemed to personify the unacceptable face of terrorism, and his checkered headscarf or *keffiyeh* became a symbol of protest and dissent around the world. Like Anwar Sadat before him, Arafat has now received that most prized symbol of Western acceptablity, the Nobel Peace Prize, so the transformation is almost complete.

The six hundred or so international observers of the election testified to its general fairness and decorum, and without a doubt, the Palestinian election was considerably freer than others in the Arab World. After all, Arafat received only 88 per cent of the vote, not 99.98 per cent.

There were some discordant notes however, and the international observers criticised the bullying tactics of Arafat loyalists and of the Israelis themselves, especially in Jerusalem. This latter took the form of a heavy military presence at the polling booths, and rumours that Palestinians who voted would lose their right of residence in the Holy City. As a result, the turn-out in Jerusalem was considerably lower than in the rest of the territories, possibly through fear. Israelis are reluctant to accord any legitimacy at all to Palestinian claims to East Jerusalem—an issue still to be raised in the ongoing negotiations.

To the Israelis, still reeling from the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin last November, the elections were a vindication of the 'peace process' initiated by the slain leader and an important milestone in that process.

Israelis can probably be divided into three broad groups on the issue of the Palestinians. By far the smallest is that minority of leftists and peaceniks who fervently hope that the elections will lead to Palestinian statehood, righting an historic wrong that has festered for half a century, and the two states, Jewish and Arab, will live happily side by side.

The second group of Israelis, much larger than the first and including all kinds of militants, settlers and crazies as well as more respectable elements from the Israeli right wing, are reluctant to return to the Palestinians even an inch of what they see as *Eretz Israel*. Some of them are so paralysed by the very real fear that Palestinian statehood may be the end result of the process that they will lash out, fight and indeed kill even other Israelis to prevent this. Mordechai Amir, the killer of Prime Minister Rabin, falls squarely into this category, but there are many others.

By far the largest of the three groups consists of the Israeli Government and those Israelis who will try, for pragmatic reasons, to prevent Palestinian statehood from coming. These people (and I feel Prime Minister Rabin would be in this camp were he still alive) see the elections and the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) as a viable if less than perfect solution to the intolerable burden of Israeli military occupations of the territories. A solution, moreover, which has opened the way to Israel's making peace with her Arab neighbours. There is already a new treaty with Jordan, and talks proceeding with Syria —very important indeed for the new Israeli Prime Minister's re-election prospects.

For the Arab states, both front-line states such as Jordan and Syria, as well as those states more distant such as the emirates of the Gulf or the countries of North Africa, the Palestinian elections have removed the one major obstacle which has always stood in the way to their making peace with Israel. For years the issue of Palestine was a 'motherhood' issue in the Arab world, and popular opinion, or the feelings of the Arab 'street' on the issue were strong enough to prevent governments from openly dealing with Israel no matter how much they would have liked to. (King Hussein of Jordan has reputedly had years of secret talks.) Anwar Sadat may have earned the Nobel Peace Prize for his Camp David Agreements with Israel, but he also paid for getting too far ahead of 'street' opinion in his homeland.

The Oslo Accords, the 'peace process' in general, and more particularly the involvement of Yasser Arafat and the PLO in the recent elections have removed this stumbling block and made it possible for the governments of the Arab states to make their own separate peace treaties with Israel. For this, Arafat is being criticised by some segments of his own population. Major factions, such as the Islamicists of Hamas and the rejectionists of PFLP have boycotted the process, while leading Palestinian intellectuals such as Edward Said have heaped scorn on the whole exercise, as he did in his recent book, *Peace and its Discontents*.

This criticism of the 'peace process'—and it is very important criticism—should not be underestimated, for in the end it may carry the day. The criticism can be summed up in two ways. To begin with, it is claimed that Arafat has abandoned those Palestinians not fortunate enough to be living in the Occupied Territories, such as those in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and the diaspora.

These are Palestinians who founded the resistance organisations back in the 1960s, and it was they who formed the PLO's main constituency. It was these Palestinians who, using terrorism and violence, fought to put the question of Palestine on the international agenda, and succeeded. They have been denied a vote in the recent elections, and from all accounts they will never be allowed to return to the 'Palestine' Yasser Arafat and the Israelis are creating in the Occupied Territories. They could become a persistent irritant.

More importantly, Arafat is accused of acquiescing in a system of apartheid, even as South Africa, which gave the world the term, becomes a multi-racial state. According to its enemies, Arafat's PNA is a quisling-type collaborationist regime, doing no more than the security bidding of Israel and having no real prospects for statehood. According to this view all that can be expected from Arafat and the PNA is the creation of a kind of Palestinian *Bantustan*, never a Palestinian mini-state.

These are harsh words indeed. But it must be said that the jury is still out. Perhaps Arafat really will be the 'Father of His Nation'. Whatever happens let us not fall into the triumphalism of the Western media over events in the Middle East; let us be a little cynical, and let us try to read between the lines. ■

**Andrew Vincent** is the Director of the Middle East Studies Centre at Macquarie University.

ANDREW HAMILTON

# The game is not the same

THE PHILOSOPHERS OF CRICKET CLAIM that the game furnishes an admirable image of life. If so, the recent Sri Lankan tour of Australia presents two different conceptions of life. It also provided a parable of the hard questions associated with national identity.

Years ago, watching test cricket in Colombo with local enthusiasts, I was struck that they commented mostly on manners, and very little on skill, aggression or craft.

Here, the traditions of cricket were essentially ethical and aesthetic, and the task of players and administrators was to ensure that cricket preserved the metaphor of a life nobly lived. Players were responsible for embodying this tradition, and umpires and administrators were to maintain it. The latter were guardians of high propriety and unimpeachable fairness. Players were expected to accept the claims of these values, even if they were not expected fully to realise them.

Australian cricket has come to represent another conception of life. It is a metaphor of life seen as a ruthless economic struggle. It teaches that you must be single-minded to win, that your victory will be always over an enemy, and that the most memorable victories are those in which you outwit your opponent. Like tax avoidance and tactical litigation in business, what is not forbidden can freely be indulged. Administrators and umpires are like Adam Smith's invisible hand. The fiction is that they keep out of the way of the competitors; the truth is that as a rule they tacitly and unconsciously favour the more powerful.

When the Sri Lankans toured Australia, the events were much as you might expect from the clash of these two metaphors. The Sri Lankans, who were not expected to draw crowds, were therefore despatched to prepare for their test matches on unprepared wickets in remote areas. Meanwhile, the press had made the main focus of the tour the legitimacy of one of their best bowlers' actions.

The first test was well won by Australia, but during it the umpires accused the Sri Lankans of ball tampering yet allowed the evidence to be destroyed. The Australian authorities allowed the charge to be made public, and had to withdraw it. By Australian standards the incident was insignificant; the Sri Lankans, however, believed themselves charged in a frivolous and deeply improper way.

In the second test, the Sri Lankan bowler was called by one umpire for throwing a range of off-breaks. In a later game, he was again called, for a variety of balls, including leg-breaks—which most players find quite difficult to throw. Most critics find it hard not to believe that the umpires had been persuaded by the publicity that there was a problem, and had decided how they would act prior to seeing the deliveries which they no-balled. The Sri Lankans brought forward evidence in support of their bowler, but evidence was not considered germane to the case.

So the tour proceeded in an increasingly fraught atmosphere, in which a variety of decisions by the umpires and exchanges on the field angered the Sri Lankans. The Australians were clearly the better side, and were led with dignity by Mark Taylor who, one suspects, would be equally as admirable a captain of industry as of cricket. But by the end of the tour, the Sri Lankan team were showing signs of learning, awkwardly, the Australian version of cricket in preference to their own metaphor.

The exchange illuminated the difficulties in articulating Australian identity, and particularly of describing the ways in which, in Australia, a multiplicity of groups and cultures relate to the nation. The One Australia document recently formulated this relationship as a compact between Australia and Australians of different origins. According to this theory, all Australians agree to respect the culture and individuality of other Australians, in return for their acceptance of the institutions and structures of Australian public life.

The Sri Lankan tour showed the flaw in this view of national identity. It does not recognise that in practice institutions and structures express a prevailing vision of life, with the result that acceptance of institutions is equivalent to accepting the view of the more powerful. This is what the Sri Lankan cricketers found to their cost.

The lesson from the tour is surely that discussion of Australian identity must include a moral component, and debate about what is good. Moreover, in a confrontation between conceptions of identity, all must be assumed to be committed to choose the better.

BY THIS EXACTING STANDARD, the sadness of the tour lay in the suspicion that the Sri Lankan tourists were coming to regard their expectations of high standards of propriety and impartiality as romantic and idealistic. The hope which it offered lay in the number of Australians who recognised that the structures of their own game had resulted in visitors being treated shamefully. Like asylum-seekers, in fact. ■

*He chucks? Two spectators discuss the action of Sri Lankan off-spinner Muttiah Muralidharan at the MCG. Photo: Bill Thomas*

**Andrew Hamilton SJ** teaches at the United Faculty of Theology in Melbourne.

# A difficult peace

*From Joseph Symonds*

I returned to Australia six months ago after living 15 years in Israel. As a fourth generation Australian of Jewish descent, I believe I have a modicum of original Aussie fairmindedness in viewing the question of 'Tomorrow's Israel' (*Eureka Street*, December 1995). The article addressed the future only at the end and then in a way appealing to liberal slogans of peace and symmetrical compromise. Unfortunately the situation for Israel is anything but symmetrical.

Unlike the situation for its Arab neighbours, both internal and external, the future of their country—for Israelis, is intimately bound to both peace and survival. And the context in which peace is being negotiated is, in John Levi's words, one in which Israel faces an enemy that 'hated and loathed their very presence in the Promised Land and still continually call for a "holy war".'

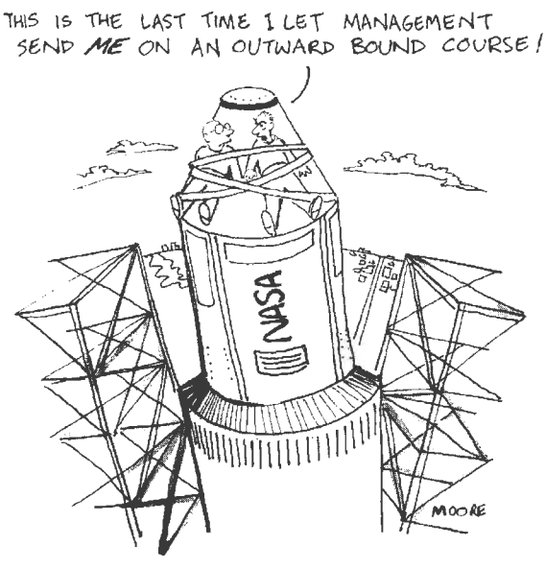
The picture depicted by the press, of Israeli leadership as representing a nation united in its support for the 'peace process', except for a few militant extremists, is inaccurate. Israelis, almost to a person, want peace. Religious Jews pray for peace three times a day, but as demonstrations across the nation over the last couple of years have shown, many Israelis, perhaps even an absolute majority, believe that current Government policy constitutes unilateral land concessions without genuine peace on the horizon.

The despicable assassination of Rabin represented the extremist tip of an iceberg of discontent within the populace. The concern for survival as a nation and as individuals is difficult to understand from a detached, secure, liberal viewpoint.

A strong Israel with geographically defensible borders is seen by many Israelis as the precursor to true peace. If this situation is obtained and hope of military annihilation renounced by its neighbours, then peace will inevitably flow as a consequence of commercial, tourist and scientific interaction on a face-to-face basis.

**Joseph Symonds**
Bondi, NSW

*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.




# Very wide awake

*From Sally McGushin*

It was actually on 21 July 1969 that those hundreds of small boys would have clustered around the half-dozen or so television sets at Ray Cassin's Marist College, Perth, to watch the first Moon landings (*Eureka Street*, December 1995).

History records the events as occurring on 20 July 1969 because that was the date in America when the event occurred.

I was similarly crowded around a school television set. It is because I recall what it was I was doing at the time that I would like to set the record straight.

**Sally McGushin**
Queenstown, TAS

# The moon and I

*From D.L. Swingler*

Your writer, Ray Cassin should always partake of the proven combination of tea and madeleine cakes before ever again trusting to his memory. The astronauts landed on the moon on 21 July, 1969.

**D. L. Swingler**
Park Orchards, VIC

*Ray Cassin replies*

Perhaps WA was already running on US Pacific time in preparation for the subsequent makeover of Perth and Fremantle as rest-and-recreation resorts for the sailors and marines of the Seventh Fleet. But it is reassuring to know that accurate geophysical measurements were taken in Queenstown, Tasmania, where the hillsides scarred by mining are curiously reminiscent of a desolate lunar landscape. No wonder the locals were so absorbed by what Neil Armstrong *et al* were doing.

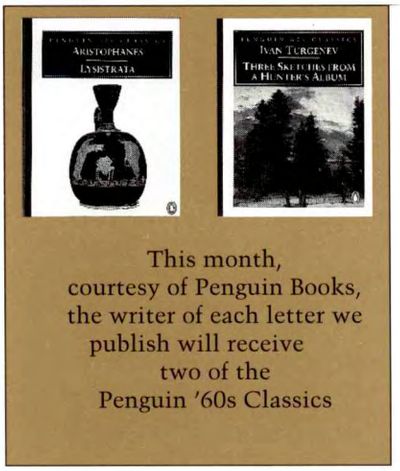
**Ray Cassin**
Moonee Ponds, VIC

# Women on the line

*From J.G. Santamaria*

In his article 'The Line on Women' (*Eureka Street*, December 1995) Father W.J. Uren, SJ, asked the question 'What will be the likely effect of this latest pronouncement from the Vatican?'. The 'pronouncement' was the answer given on the 18 November 1995 by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to a question relating to the status of the teaching in the apostolic letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* that the church does not have the authority to confer priestly ordination on women.

Father Uren does not answer the question he asks. Rather, he recounts two anecdotes, one of which he describes as 'pessimistic', the other as 'optimistic'. The 'optimistic' anecdote related to the comment made by Mr Chris Sidoti during the 1993 ABC television program on the encyclical *Veritas Splendour* in which Father




Uren and Bishop George Pell participated. Father Uren's account of what Mr Sidoti said is an abbreviation. What, in fact, Mr Sidoti said was:

'The Pope is right in saying in the encyclical that there is a crisis in the Church. He identifies it as a crisis of dissent, that is, people don't agree with what I think. The real crisis, though, is the crisis of assent. And that is that the vast majority of Catholics in Australia have withdrawn their assent to being led by this Pope and most of these bishops. Now it is all very well for Bishop Pell to draw his line in the sand but the fact is that the vast majority of us don't care about his line in the sand. We are not going to be excommunicated, and we are not going to leave. It is our church. And what this encyclical wrongly identifies as a crisis of dissent is a crisis because we no longer have confidence that those who proclaim leadership are capable of exercising it.'

Father Uren's evident approval ('the most illuminating and encouraging comment in the whole discussion') of Mr Sidoti's ancient and much discredited theme is difficult to fathom. Moreover, he says that Mr Sidoti's intervention was elicited by remarks made by Bishop Pell about '"drawing a line in the sand"—presumably defining boundaries for church membership'.

In fact, it was not. The expression 'drawing a line in the sand' was not used by Bishop Pell. It formed part of a question asked by Andrew Olle. Bishop Pell may have assented to the proposition contained in the question, but the question had nothing to do with church membership.

Much more important, however, is what Bishop Pell did say about Church membership. He did not say anything to suggest that the inability of Catholics to abide by the moral teaching of the Church was a reason for excommunication. During the program, Professor Peter Singer—of all people—had suggested that, given the publication of the encyclical *Veritas Splendour*, the Australian bishops would have to withdraw their 1974 statement about contraception and some Catholics would be forced out of the Church. Bishop Pell answered Singer's suggestion as follows:

'....the '74' statement of the Bishops said quite a number of different and balancing things. One thing it did say was that, if a person did not follow the teaching of the Church on contraception, there was no obligation for them to be excommunicated, to be driven from the Church and because of the comparative importance of the issue, I'm sure that, today, everybody would stand with that. But it also made quite clear in that statement that people should conform their consciences to the official teaching which had been given by the Pope. If they decided to differ, one of the consequences that no-one was going to try to apply was excommunication or to remove them from the Church.'

Given the Catholic understanding of excommunication—and this may not have been Mr Sidoti's—it would have been astonishing had Bishop Pell used a public discussion, either expressly or by implication, to threaten it. It would be unfair to suggest that he did.

Bishop Pell did point to the injustice inflicted upon Catholic children in their being denied access to the Church's teachings. It may be that those responsible for this injustice should not continue to hold teaching responsibilities in the Church. But that has nothing to do with excommunication.

**J.G Santamaria**
Hawthorn, VIC

*Fr W.J. Uren replies*

I commend Mr J.G. Santamaria, QC, for his diligent researches into the archival footage of the *Veritas Splendour* discussion, in which I participated with Bishop Pell. I do hope that he had access to the full 90-minute tape rather than the edited version produced by the ABC.

There are, however, two aspects of his subsequent commentary that I find somewhat chilling. The first is his oblique recognition of the significance of the recent pronouncement of the Sacred Congregation concerning the 'infallible' status of the Apostolic Letter on the (non) Ordination of Women for the contraception debate. If *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* is infallible, why not *Humanae Vitae*? Even though the official spokesperson of Paul VI, Monsignor Ferdinand Lambruschini, immediately after the promulgation of *Humanae Vitae*, said that the encyclical was not necessarily irreformable, many theologians of a right-wing persuasion have argued that it is, and precisely on the grounds invoked by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith for *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*. The prophetic insight of Professor Singer—'of all people'—was not necessarily misguided on this point at least.

The second chilling aspect is Mr. Santamaria's discussion of excommunication. He notes that Bishop Pell stated that: '....if a person did not follow the teaching of the Church on contraception, *there was no obligation* for them to be excommunicated'. There is no obligation to be excommunicated, to be sure, but is this not now a much less remote possibility? Bishop Pell said of the 1974 statement that: '....one of the consequences that no-one was going to try to apply was excommunication or to remove them from the Church', but can he or Mr Santamaria be now so secure in this belief?

Whoever would have thought even in October, 1993, that within thirty months it would be officially forbidden for Catholics even to debate the possibility of the ordination of women, and that an Apostolic Nuncio would enforce this stricture at an

international conference of Catholic Women in Canberra at the weekend (cf. *Age* February 10, 1996). Granted the present constituency of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the much more frequent recourse of the Vatican to invoking the highest levels of authority in its pronouncements, I wish I could be as benign as Mr Santamaria in rejecting the possibility of the threat of ecclesiastical penalties.

**W.J. Uren SJ**
Hawthorn, VIC


# Questionable

*From Tony Winkelman*

Father W.J. Uren's report of a communiqué issued by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (*Eureka Street*, December 1995) has some surprising aspects, one of which I should like to discuss below.

In the communiqué, according to the report, a question is posed and an answer is given. The question is whether a particular doctrine 'must be believed in a definitive way so as to be considered as belonging to the deposit of faith'. The answer is that the doctrine has been 'proposed infallibly'. This is surprising language, to me as much as to Father Uren. But whereas Father Uren appears to be dismayed by the answer, I am rather worried about the question. The question, it seems to me, jumps the gun, at least in so far as it invites a decision as to the doctrine's infallibility. For before such an invitation could be issued, one would expect to have an affirmative answer to the definition of papal infallibility at the first Vatican Council.

The dogma of papal infallibility relies on a distinction between statements about faith (or morals) and statements about other matters; and, within the category of statements on faith and morals, a further distinction is made between statements that may (have) be(en) emphatically endorsed, so to speak, by the pope and those who may not (have) be(en) so endorsed.

These distinctions are clearly drawn in order to *restrict* the exercise of papal infallibility (or else the pope might for most practical purposes be reduced to silence), though until the term 'faith or morals' and the circumstances of what I have paraphrased as 'emphatic endorsement' are defined, the extent of such a restriction cannot be exactly known nor will it be possible to make particular applications. As regards the definition of 'faith or morals' one might say in general that, prior to the promulgation of papal infallibility, the expression could have been defined as 'the sort of thing the pope normally talks about', and it appears that the communiqué's question presupposes some such definition. After the declaration of the dogma, however, this type of definition has become unusable. For if one were still to use it, the dogma of papal infallibility would in effect be saying that the pope is (in certain circumstances) infallible when he talks about the things he normally talks about, which wouldn't be a very illuminating statement. Besides, proceeding in this way could reintroduce into the list of tenets precisely those papal pronouncements, whether concerning matters of fact or scientific theories, that are considered to have been erroneous.

For this and other reasons the dogma of papal infallibility has become, perhaps not entirely intentionally, a kind of watershed on the history of the Catholic Church. Yet many commentators, both conservatives and liberals among them and apparently including officials, seem to express themselves at times as if the Vatican I formulations did not exist. Partly as a result, I suppose, not a lot of progress has been made in elucidating the term 'faith or morals'.

Tony Winkelman
Kew, VIC

# IMAGINE

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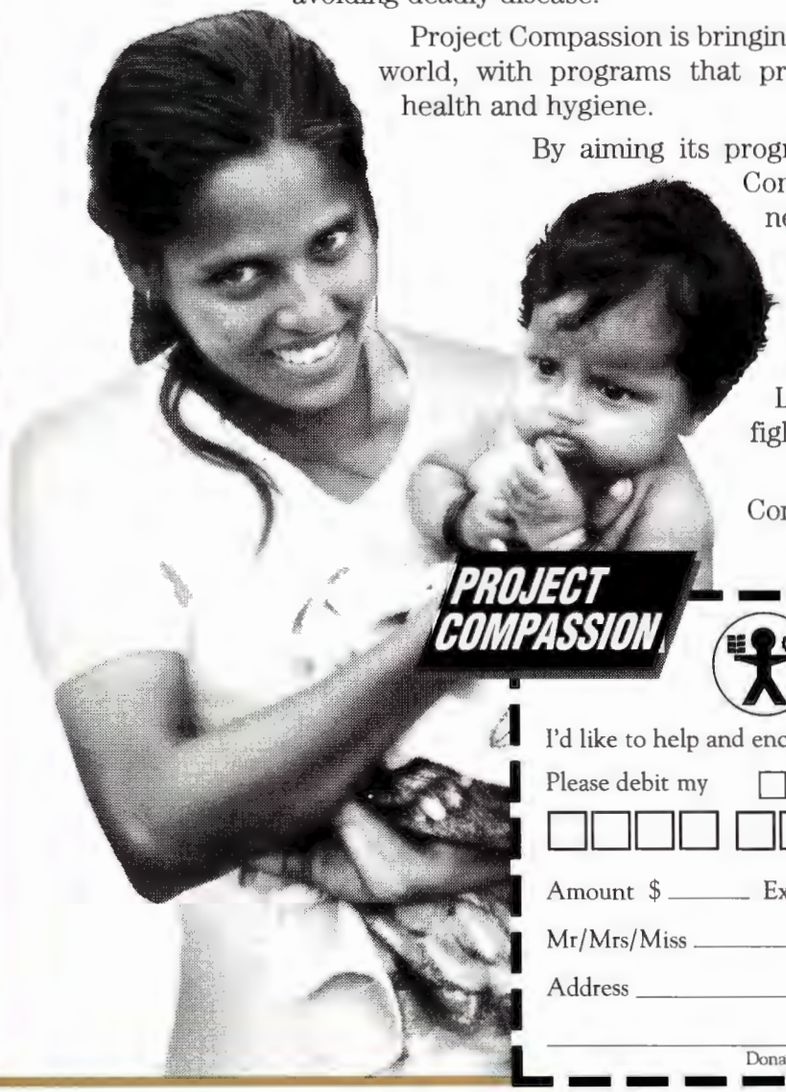


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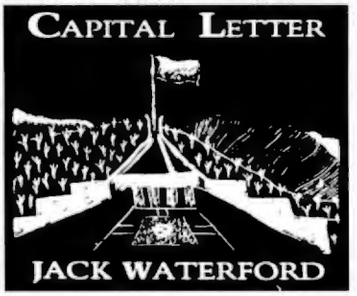


# Guarding the change

DURING AN ELECTION campaign the public service goes into retreat—sometimes literally. A skeleton staff works on the briefs—one (for a returning minister) discussing issues which have come up in the past two months, another (new minister, same party), outlining the broad functions, policies and programs of the department and tactfully suggesting a few priority areas for action, and a third (new government) with a comprehensive run-down of everything on the plate, and eagerly suggesting ways of implementing published policies. Others go to seminars or hold navel-gazing sessions at Bateman's Bay or Bowral, and others pick up projects which have never been able to command priority.

On paper, the public administration is in pretty fair shape. The departmental secretaries and most of the senior managers are able and likely to be responsive to any whim of their masters and mistresses. The broad structure of the service is in fairly reasonable shape, but flexible enough to accommodate the need of a prime minister to fit an oddball here or to give the impression of a flurry of activity on a particular problem there.

A host of changes—some of which actually qualify as reforms—to the service over the past 15 years means that the broad structure and style of the service is much as either party would want it. The only threat of a change of government is the impulse to put a few key people at the top of some of the key departments. But just what such people want is, by and large, just the sort of public service plastic they have to play with.

Australia is actually a world leader in many of the developments in the public service, by no means all of which are bad. There is a closer focus on results and attempts to measure effectiveness and quality of service; a far greater transparency of decision-making, a breaking down of centralised and hierarchical structures and new flexibilities in regulation which put the emphasis on results rather than on mere compliance.

But one can only say probably, because the changes have brought their own costs, and not everything goes on the balance sheet. Even the enthusiasts for the changes, for example, tend to agree that the most neglected areas involve personnel management issues and morale. Even if some of the changes have produced quick and measurable improvements in productivity, it is not always clear that the long term has been as well looked after.

A big focus on devolved management and on letting people organise themselves around their particular concerns has portended the erosion of a service-wide perspective and core public service values. Pressures on 'performance' and attempts to establish salary and performance contracts and performance-based pay, have caused enormous problems. Many public servants find performance pay downright insulting. Others wonder whether the public servants on a contract might lose a sense of balance between a need to serve the public interest and to please a superior or a minister. The loss of permanency and the vaunted 'mobility' of the service often means that whole areas of government have lost their institutional memories and are not able to give wise advice based on experience. The bright young things with instant solutions are often long gone, upwards but elsewhere, before their solutions become unstuck and new generations try to reinvent the wheel.

And, despite increased transparency of decision-making, the lines between ministerial and managerial responsibility have become very blurred. Whatever the rhetoric of encouraging 'risk taking', managers have learnt by bitter experience from, say, the pay television affair, that ministers will not shoulder their share of the blame if anything goes wrong.

While the parties have been electioneering, senior public servants have been working away on a fresh statement on public service ethics focused, in part, on some of these problems. They are willing, for a change, to canvas some of the real problems, such as difficulties between public servants and ministers.

It is still in the drafting stages, in more senses than one. and the problem of how it is addressed is unresolved. Should it be a long political science essay canvassing all of the values and all of the pitfalls? Should it be very practically focused, giving model advice on typical problems? Is its focus on setting broad parameters or on particular hot spots? Is it to be simply another document with an underlying message reinforcing departmental hierarchy and authority: we know that God exists because the Council of Trent so ruled in 1546?

THE DRAFT SO FAR IS A BIT OF ALL of these, but is a worthwhile effort all the same, the more so for giving some practical teeth to words such as selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and fair dealing. None of these are, of course, new ideas, least of all in the public's service, but how they are applied in modern cases is not always clear.

Would a public service somewhat more assiduous in the public interest, and somewhat more tough-minded in its approach to the issues, be a challenge to government? The answer is yes. It is the minister's office, and the ministerial relationship to both the parliament and the public service which has been least 'reformed' or adapted to changing circumstances in recent times.

The pressures ministers are imposing upon the system, and the changing demands on public servants are raising serious issues of conflicting loyalties. Do they serve for the public interest or the public at large? The target group for a policy or program? The law? The parliament. The minister, or to the employer?

The answer, of course, is all of them. Even a conscientious public servant can find that a juggle. If she or he is better armed, some of the pressures will be back where they belong. ■

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

# Bumper yields

*While all eyes have been focused on elections, the grain has been growing into the best harvest Australia has seen in years. But will a good harvest be succeeded by improved land management and agricultural policy? **Margaret Simons** reports.*

YOU'D THINK IT WOULD BE A SIMPLE BUSINESS: wait until the soil is wet with autumn rain. Plant a seed. Wait for more rain. Watch it grow. Sell the crop.

But in Australia it's a long time since it has worked that way. In fact, this year is the first time for a decade that the economics of wheat farming have made sense for the majority of farmers. Travellers over the Christmas holidays would have been able to see the signs, if they knew what to look for: butter-yellow fields, combine-harvesters working well into the night. Very different from the summer before, when the crops looked like moth-eaten blankets—bare holes the paddocks, wheat that barely reached your knee. Hardly worth harvesting.

There are, of course, still regions of Australia in drought, but nevertheless this year's crop has been a bumper—16.6 million tonnes on the latest estimates, compared to a ten-year average of 14.9 million tonnes. For the last ten years, when the crop has been good, the price has been bad, and vice versa. Take 1990-91, for example. The crop yield was above average, but world prices were the lowest they have ever been—averaging only $US128 a tonne. In 1991-92, the price was right at an average of $US164 a tonne, but the crop was hit by the first in the series of El Niño droughts that have been plaguing us ever since.

Most galling of all, the season before last, the export price was pushed to a record average of $187.50—just at the time when the biggest wheat producing areas of Australia were hit by the worst drought in living memory, and the crop was all but written off. This year, though, the butter-yellow of the wheat fields in early summer signalled a true good year.

Quantity is not the only factor bringing a smile to farmers' faces. Even more significant than the size of the crop is the fact that for the first time in a long while, the price on the export market is right. This year's crop is expected to add around four billion dollars to the gross national product, and with about 70 per cent of the crop to be exported, it will make a major impact on the balance of payments.

The weather and the strength of the crop can make all of a politician's promises and management skills look like chaff. Bob Hawke reaped the benefits of a break in a drought when he came to power. Whoever wins the March election will be able to ride the benefits of the bumper crop well into their first term.

Not all farmers are out of trouble. New South Wales, the nation's largest wheat-producer, actually


*This year's crop is expected to add around four billion dollars to the gross national product, and with about seventy per cent of the crop to be exported, it will make a major impact on the balance of payments.*

had a slightly below-average crop because northern farmerswere still in drought. Meanwhile, their colleagues further south were reaping the best harvest in years. As well, in areas of central New South Wales, there was a higher-than-average proportion of high-protein wheat—the stuff that is best for bread. The lift in protein levels is caused by a relatively harsh year, and the resulting grain attracts a premium price. Queensland was also well below average with many farmers there still in drought. Many will now not recover from years of poor incomes. But Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia all had well above average yields, in spite of late rain damage to some of the West Australian crop.

Not only was the crop the best since 1985, but prices on the world market were at record levels.The USA crop was hit by wet weather, and the Canadian crop was set back by a heatwave. Overall, the world wheat crop yield was one of the poorest since 1988, and below anticipated world consumption. World stocks of grain are at their smallest level in 20 years, and in real terms are at their lowest ebb since the world food crisis panic of the mid 1960s.

As well, after years of Australian wheat prices being undercut in key markets by subsidised American and European grain, both the European Commission and the USA have reduced or delayed their subsidies for wheat exports. This has an enormous impact on the income of individual farmers, and the nation. The American wheat subsidy program—the subject of heated but largely ineffectual protests at diplomatic level—is a form of vote-buying. It provides American farmers, who almost all vote, with financial assistance. Meanwhile the urban poor who often don't register to vote, are ignored.

This is a neat reversal on the Australian situation, where the majority of the population is urbanised, almost everyone votes, and it is the farmers who tend to be neglected and ignored. OECD figures show that in 1992, Australian farmers got only about 11 per cent of their income from government assistance, compared to 44 per cent in the USA and 46 per cent in the European Economic Community.

According to figures presented at the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics Outlook conference last month, the future looks bright for grain exports for the decade ahead. Australia grows about three per cent of the world's wheat, but captures about twelve per cent of global market share through shrewd marketing. Export subsidy cutting can only help Australian marketers.

HOWEVER, THERE ARE BIG CHANGES looming in the way Australian wheat is marketed. The Wheat Board, which for decades has been the only seller of Australian wheat, was in 1987 deregulated to allow farmers to sell to whomever they wished on the domestic market. On the ground, this means that farmers taking truck loads of wheat to the silos can make a load-by-load decision as to whether to take the Wheat Board price, or the price offered by one of the flour multinationals. The Wheat Board, however, has retained its monopoly over exports. Historically, this has been justified on the grounds that it gives the Australian grower more muscle in the world market place.

This reasoning has now come under scrutiny as part of the government's anti-monopoly moves following the Hilmer inquiry. Government monopolies now have to justify themselves on the grounds of national interest, or face the chop. Already, most

*Peter Bufton (left) has farmed for 40 years and says in terms of price and yield the crop is the best in ten years.*

*Eric Sharkey (above, with his son Chris) says that this year's yield will finally give him the chance to consolidate.*

*Photographs by Bill Thomas.*

*Peter Bufton, above, knee deep in sheep. Bufton calls this year's crop and prices 'a rare combination'.*

*Photograph by Bill Thomas.*

agricultural marketing boards have been deregulated. The Wheat Board remains the most protected in the country. The Wheat Board itself has proposed privatisation, but with a continuation of the monopoly, but common sense suggests that political support may be lacking. Why should parliament guarantee power over such a huge market, worth up to four billion dollars a year, to a private company controlled by farmers? The Federal Opposition has said they will exempt the Wheat Board from competition review, but the Minister for Primary Industry, Bob Collins, has been urging an investigation into whether the advantages gained in overseas negotiations by having a single seller can be gained in other ways.

Apart from the political and economic machinations, there are other worrying trends underlying the wheat industry.

Australia, the most urban of nations, still rides on the back of its agricultural and mining industries, but the ride is getting increasingly rocky. For the last four decades, Australia has had one of the lowest rates of increase in wheat yields in the world. The main reason is soil degradation. These days, most farmers are only too aware of the problem. Soil protection measures, such as rotating wheat paddocks with legume crops, are common, but it all costs money. The effects of the US price subsidising have meant that many wheat farmers have been forced into sowing paddocks more often, and more intensely, than prudence would suggest.

But growers are adaptable, and the variety of crops being sown on Australian soil has increased. A 1994 farm survey showed a marked decrease in land sown to wheat, and an increase in other crops such as canola, lupins and soy beans. This year however, high wheat prices combined with the fact that wool prices have fallen are likely to cause more pasture to be sown to wheat.

UP UNTIL EARLY THIS CENTURY, many marginal areas were opened up in a spirit of optimism, and have been struggling ever since. The early settlers believed 'rain follows the plough'—they thought that rainfall was likely to increase over ploughed land. Good years encouraged them to clear country that in most years is marginal. These days, even in the good years, farmers cannot afford such simple optimism. ■

**Margaret Simons** is a freelance journalist and frequent contributor to *Eureka Street*.

# What we want from government

*Australians are fed up with political fixers and fixes, as reactions to the federal election campaign made clear. But what do we want instead?* Eureka Street *asked seven Australians what they would like to see from government between now and the centenary of Federation.*

Lincoln Wright is the finance editor of the *Canberra Times*.

I THINK GOVERNMENTS should accept that they have a central role in creating prosperity. To deny that, for the sake of an economic theory, is to cheat the citizens. The government owes the community a system of economic management that will give everyone a reasonable shot at a good job, and a decent social wage.

But at the same time I think the forces that militate against a government's doing what it should are global, and extremely powerful.

Even Japan, the world's greatest economy, is under pressure to change the role of government in its system. So what can Australia—a very small country without any of Japan's dynamic industries or clout—do? Ideally, I'd like to see the government change its direction, from one which says we are all so inefficient, to one with a social approach. I want to see the government saying this is our country, let's look after it, let's not sacrifice ourselves for the sake of the finance sector. But all this may be unrealistic, given our economic policy directions at the moment, with APEC, with the obsession about wiping out the budget deficit, and with very strict monetary policy, which, in many ways, is not very different from New Zealand's.

Once you set those economic policy courses the government paints itself into a corner. (Although the softening of the Liberals' trade and industry policy does show that manufacturers are getting fed up with tariff reductions.) The people who own our factories and industries are finally making themselves heard in Liberal Party circles. The Liberals are not talking Hewsonian negligible tariffs, they're talking pragmatism. They will keep the industry policies put in place by the ALP.

But really I don't think we can expect much from either Party.

**—Lincoln Wright**

Ellie Robinson is a youth worker in the city of Darebin, Victoria.

I FIND IT DIFFICULT to pay attention to politics, even though I know I should.

My lack of interest stems from the current regression by our senior politicians to childish name-calling, bickering and nonsense. I don't believe them either, and I don't believe that anyone in federal politics is really prepared to tackle the hard issues. Instead they seem more interested in quick-fixes and vote-winners.

Exceptions to this rule are issues which are deemed 'flavour of the month', such as youth homelessness in the past and youth unemployment today.

This is not good enough for the growing number of Australian young people in genuine and diabolical trouble. Politicians and society in general have an obligation to improve the standards under which these young people live.

Politicians need to offer unconditional assistance to help stop the downward spiral for disadvantaged young people. This involves not just moves towards decreasing youth unemployment, but completing the big picture. For example: increasing accessible, supported long-term housing options; better choices for young people who struggle with the mainstream schooling system, and funding youth-oriented recreation for recreation's sake.

These initiatives need to be supported with patience and understanding, not just for young people but also for workers with young people. This patience and understanding comes from realising that the most difficult cases often produce the least number of measurable outcomes—something which is incompatible with most funding guidelines.

**—Ellie Robinson**

Fr Greg O'Kelly SJ is Headmaster of Saint Ignatius' College, Athelstone, South Australia.

WHAT DO I HOPE that the Federal Government might achieve during the next Parliament?

**Reduce the gap.** The Federal Government might enact provisions to reduce the impact of the growing gap between rich and poor in Australia. Those in poorer economic groups do not have sufficient access to affordable good health care and justice. Lawyers' growing fees and shabby hospitals in poorer areas disadvantage growing sectors in our society.

**The strengthening of family life**. So

many ills are attributable to breakdown of stable commitment in family life. A family in Australia with several children should be able to maintain a good lifestyle even when only one parent is working. A family nurtures the genuine human values of love and commitment.

**Successful pluralism.** We have passed the point of no return with multiculturalism, but the prime culture continues to integrate Asian and European people more easily than Aboriginal. There is a need to express the Australian identity to peoples who have never shared the stories of the British, Scottish and Irish forebears, the Bush, Ned Kelly, Anzac, Kokoda and the Depression. The Republic must be declared, in a style and manner that enthuses all sectors of Australia, as a phenomenon of natural development rather than a rejection of something very dear.

**A true Federalism**. There should be a move away from the centralisation of Australia into a Sydney-Melbourne axis, exacerbated by the High Court as it increases the power of the Federal Government which sees its own principal bases in two *megalopoleis*. We need to rediscover the role of the Senate as the House of the States.

**The Act of Reconciliation**. The term of the Parliament takes us almost to 2000, and the drive to effect a rapport between the original Australians and the later settlers should be resumed so that some real resolution might occur before the Centenary of Federation.

**Honest politics.** The Federal Government should adopt a code of ethics for parliamentarians, so that cynicism concerning the honesty and truthfulness of politicians will abate.

**—Fr Greg O'Kelly SJ AM**

Glenys Pascoe is the owner and licensee of the *All Nations* Hotel in Richmond, Victoria.

ONE THING I'D LIKE TO CHANGE would be the sort of withdrawal from the average person that occurs with the Government being in Canberra. I feel that local government and state governments know more about what is happening. I think that instead of living in their ivory towers they could come down and see how each state is suffering.

I also believe that we should have a national policy for education so that you don't have a the kind of segregation that comes where certain states are behind in this and certain states are ahead in that. We become a whole nation instead of a segmented nation. Even when you are overseas you get this kind of questioning: 'Where do you come from?' I say from Australia. 'But which bit?' Well, I come from Australia and I think people should be looking more towards that than insisting that 'I come from Queensland, Victoria, Western Australia.' And who's better? It doesn't matter who's better.

I think federal politician should work more closely with state governments. As it is we are over-governed. We are governed once by the state and then by the federal government. That leads to over-taxing, If they all worked in conjunction you would have one payout for hospitals, for example, not the federal government giving this amount and this state getting more than that state. There just doesn't seem to be an overall view. I'd like to see one if we want to celebrate our federation.

In the hotel industry at present there are too many industrial levels. There should be just one award, not different state and federal awards. People are doing the same job. We should simplify industrial relations.

About politicians: I understand that you probably can't be a politician and tell the truth. But I think they should care about it a bit more. We did elect them.

**—Glenys Pascoe**

John Coyle is an export marketer of scientific equipment in Castle Hill, NSW.

THIS NEXT TERM of Federal Parliament will not particularly affect me personally. I don't have dependants, so more of my income is disposable. And neither major party is promoting a policy of personal taxation that sets the Government's effect on me apart from the other. From my employer's point of view, we are no longer small business so most of the fiscal incentives being touted in the run-up to the election are not significant.

I have a problem with voting for minor parties. I believe they should be supported by preferences, but they are a control mechanism rather than a dynamic influence. And I suppose that Government dynamism is the most important factor that will influence my vote. We have no time for conservatism. Traditions that are meant to survive will survive.

I am aware that, in an age when historical alliances in trade and international politics are no longer sacrosanct, Australia's position in the world economy will have a greater bearing on my future than anything else. The capacity to market this country to our neighbours, in spite of cultural difference, is a vital skill. To do so with dignity and solid resolve is a major challenge for Government Asian markets take no prisoners.

And societal change doesn't happen fast enough unless reaction motivates debate. A lot of that which is great in Australian society is a reaction to the mistakes observed in older Western societies. The advantage of white Australia's youth is that we aren't dragging insurmountable legacies. We have some significant historical debts, most particularly to the Aboriginal people. But these problems are definable, and if the Government is brave enough to keep placing them in the public arena there is hope that they will be cured.

If the Government does not strive to instigate change, there will be no testing of the status quo, no reaction, and less debate. With a dynamic government striving to change, people would be regularly forced to rethink their situations and the debate that ensues will allow fewer opportunities for the development of the society and the country to slip past unnoticed.

**—John Coyle**

Peter Ingham is an Auxiliary bishop in the Archdiocese of Sydney.

I SHOULD LIKE TO SEE our Federal Government give unqualified support for families and not overly interfere in family life. What I want is a government that will respect the individuality and human dignity that grow from a strong family tradition.

Our indigenous people, and so many of our multicultural community, teach us how fundamental and basic the family and extended family historically are. I really believe the family, as a sound community reality, needs all the support it can get. The family has always been our most readily available welfare safety net.

I would like more insistence on the already accredited marriage preparation courses being more widely used by those preparing for marriage. Prevention is always better than cure. The contribution that families make to the welfare and prosperity of our nation is reason enough for the family to have an important priority in government planning and expenditure.

**—Peter Ingham**

Fran Barber is an arts graduate and Bachelor of Divinity student at the United Faculty of Theology in Parkville, Victoria.

WHEN LOOKING AT FEDERAL GOVERNMENT from an historical perspective it's tempting to think that nothing happens that hasn't happened before, and so it's a pointless exercise to consider this time period as different from any other. However I think the next few years *are* quite important for Australia and will present issues which will be worth thinking about. One area of crucial importance is the whole ecological question—how we look after our resources and how our behaviour affects other countries in our region.

At times none of the major parties seem willing to look at the interdependence that exists between countries: economically and, more importantly, ecologically. The fact that much of our foreign aid is tied to the servicing of debt repayments is a somewhat cynical response to these regional issues. I'd like to see the government move towards a much more co-operative international model where aid is tied less to the boundaries of nation states than it is to need. However the predominant climate of privatising public utilities does not lend hope to this model of community building. Perhaps the churches have a role to play in influencing public policy to bring about this aim, for neither major party seems too concerned with this facet of government.

Whether this can be achieved in the short term remains to be seen.

**—Fran Barber**


# Have maths, will travel

CHEESE SPREAD IS A GOOD INSULATOR. It takes a long time to cool after it is cooked. But if the temperature of the spread is not brought down from about 85°C to less than 25°C as soon as possible, it tends to spoil.

So, after filling glass jars with cooked cheese spread, Kraft Foods sends them through a tunnel where they are cooled by a series of water sprays. The temperature of each spray must be carefully controlled, because if it differs too greatly from the temperature of the cheese spread, the glass in the jars will crack. If the product is not cooled in the right way, it can thicken and brown, and won't taste the way it should. Spread can also boil in the jar, leaving unsightly bubbles which whiten as fat migrates into them.

These are not trivial problems. More than 60 per cent of the cheese spread Kraft produces is shipped overseas, much of it to Saudi Arabia. The market is worth well over $30 million a year.

So, having just built a new factory for producing cheese spread at Strathmerton in northern Victoria, Kraft wanted to know more about how the cheese spread cooled under the water sprays. Who did they call? A bunch of mathematicians.

Last month the Mathematics-in-Industry Study Group, 200 applied mathematicians from Australia and beyond, met at Melbourne University. They worked not only on cooling cheese spreads, but on the most efficient way to cook cereal grains, how best to deliver and store reels of paper from the mill, how to blend talc, how to wind optical fibre cable, how to breed trees and how to prevent bubbles from forming in wine labels.

They came up with some very creative solutions. For example, having modelled the heat flows in cooling cheese spreads, they came to the conclusion that the cheese in the centre of the jar sometimes boils because the cheese on the outside cools too quickly and creates a vacuum. The solution seems somewhat perverse—use slightly warmer sprays at the beginning of cooling process to prevent the outer cheese from cooling so quickly.

As well as discussing the problems of manufacturing industry, the mathematicians found time to talk about the concerns of their own trade. In particular, they discussed a recent report prepared for the Australian Research Council (ARC) entitled *Mathematical Sciences: Adding to Australia*. The report paints a sanguine picture of the state of mathematics in Australia: our researchers are responsible for more than two per cent of the world's publications in mathematics, in a country with less than half of one per cent of the world's population. And Australian papers in mathematics are 10 per cent more likely to be cited than the world average.

It is also clear, says the report, that the mathematical sciences are critical to Australia's economy and are used in every industry sector. A management strategy emerging from a mathematical assessment of the risk of bushfires will save the Electricity Trust of South Australia up to $250 million.

But it is this widespread applicability of maths that generates one of the major grumbles that mathematicians have about their lot: there is no specialist research centre in mathematics. Despite angling for a Co-operative Research Centre for Industrial Applications of the Mathematical Sciences, mathematicians feel hard pressed to attract the necessary commercial backing. 'You need a muscular industrial supporter with deep pockets,' says Dr Noel Barton of the CSIRO, editor of the report.

At base, the issue of a research centre for mathematics comes back to image. As Noel Barton says, 'If I say I'm a mathematician, I can still stop conversation at a party.' Unfortunately this image problem is translating into fewer enrolments in mathematics at universities. That is serious. As one delegate from South Australia pointed out, 'We're not within a bull's roar of training enough mathematicians to satisfy the future needs of the information technology revolution.' ■

**Tim Thwaites** is a freelance science writer.

CHRIS MCGILLION & RAY CASSIN

# What we expect from government

I RECENTLY READ the latest offering from the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council (ACSJC), *Politicians and Citizens: Roles and Responsibilities* by Professor John Warhurst. I had assumed the bishops were making an unusual (for them) but valuable contribution to the current debate about our disillusionment with politics. I was wrong. The only contribution it makes is to the study of poorly executed social justice initiatives.

Consider the 'launch'. The ACSJC showed some media savvy in scheduling the release of *Politicians and Citizens* for January. This is a time of the year when journalists and their editors are grateful for anything that passes for news and will usually give even the most esoteric, if also 'weighty' subjects a good run. But a kind of peep-show mentality seems to have overtaken those involved with the paper. So much of it was exposed beforehand (in the ACSJC newsletter *Justice Trends* and in an explanatory article by Warhurst in *The Australian*) that most media commentators had passed judgment on what the ACSJC had to say before they even had completed copy of the paper on their desks.

*Politicians and Citizens* was duly launched on January 23 and rose without a trace. What makes this all the more telling is the fact that 'integrity' in political life was one of the main themes of the paper and one of the main campaign slogans of the subsequent Federal election campaign. The one was never raised in connection with the other.

The style of the paper didn't help. *Politicians and Citizens* prefers generalisations to specifics and clichés to incisive comment. It is defensive in approach and was not addressed to any particular audience—which means it could be ignored by all of them. As much of the paper is devoted to justifying why the church chose to speak out on moral and social issues as is spent on outlining the paper's main recommendation. This pre-emptive strike did not discourage criticism of the ACSJC for its efforts. It simply suggested a line of attack to less imaginative critics.

But the most obvious problem with the paper is its lack of substance. *Politicians and Citizens* argues that to restore confidence in our political system, politicians must uphold professional standards. It proposes to codify these to commit politicians to maintaining personal integrity, listening more to the voice of the people, making modest promises, avoiding personal abuse and acting with courage and decisiveness. This is such an anodyne list of desirable qualities that it's hard to mount a case for or against it. Why bother? What politician would deny that he or she lives up to those standards now? How would such a code affect the institutional processes that encourage politicians to behave the way they do?

MUCH COULD HAVE BEEN SAID to illuminate the causes of today's political disenchantment—and to add the moral weight of the ACSJC to remedies worth considering and debating. Take, for instance, party pre-selection practices. More often than not these work to the detriment of local branch democracy, of new and imaginative political candidates, even of truly representative ones. Is the gross under-representation of women in both the major parties not a serious cause of disillusionment? Is it not also a worthy subject for social justice comment?

Or take the growing gap between 'politics' and 'administration'—two sides of the process of governing. Ideally the former involves fashioning a collective will from a plethora of disconnected interests in order to give momentum and direction to the latter. But the connection is breaking down. These days politics is the art of managing demands from the bottom (the electorate) in a way that leaves the top (politicians and bureaucrats) free to get on with the 'real' job of decision-making. One thing that might reverse this trend is greater transparency in government. Why, then, not some concrete suggestions about more liberal freedom of information laws or whistleblower protection legislation?

Then there's the media. The modern media afford politicians the opportunity for mass exposure but ironically, at the cost of the kind of close, personal, kissing-babies type of contact that was once their stock-in-trade. Saturation coverage also tends to overwhelm and complicate the consumers at whom it is aimed. The ACSJC could have encouraged a more responsible media treatment of politics by affirming—that is, naming—the better journalists and media outlets. It might have been suggested putting the not inconsiderable media resources of the church into the service of a new style (open access, more informative) of political coverage.

In the event, these kinds of ideas were not even canvassed, ACSJC was left licking its wounds, and *Politicians and Citizens* was left to gather dust in church offices and on the back shelves of parliamentary libraries. The whole enterprise broke the first rule of social justice advocacy: if you've got nothing of consequence to say, don't open your mouth. ■

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**Politicians and Citizens: Roles and Responsibilities**, by John Warhurst, is no. 27 in the Catholic Social Justice Series. ISBN 1 86420 056 1 RRP $4.95. Available from Catholic bookstores.

When Tony Fitzgerald released the report of his commission of inquiry into corruption in the Queensland police, he was criticised in gung-ho sections of the media for not having named enough names. Much of Fitzgerald's report was an analysis of the culture of corruption that permeated public life in Queensland, with proposals for educating police and other public officials in ways that might eventually change the culture. This, insisted Fitzgerald's earnest journalistic critics, was a worthy waste of time. What really mattered was catching the bad guys and punishing them.

I suspect that John Warhurst's *Politicians and Citizens: Roles and Responsibilities* may meet with similar criticisms, at least among such journalists as are in the habit of reading discussion papers issued by the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council. But if so, Warhurst should feel heartened, for incomprehension of this kind neatly underscores the malaise that his paper seeks to diagnose.

The objectors I am imagining might complain that *Politicians and Citizens* is insufficiently specific; that it contains too few recommendations about things that politicians and citizens might actually do, and far too much speculation about their self-image and how they acquired it. Well, yes. This is not a discussion paper about the merits of, say, incorporating a bill of rights in the constitution, or the means by which political parties might restore to their rank-and-file a sense of genuine participation in the democratic process. Warhurst takes for granted that such questions will form the context of political debate, and pursues a more fundamental problem: what sort of people do we have to be in order to reflect and act effectively on questions of this kind when they do arise?

The reason why some people will be irritated by this sort of approach is that there is a straightforward but, they fear, nebulous answer to the question I have just asked—we have to be good people. And notoriously, in pluralist societies like Australia, there is no general agreement about what the good life might be. Liberal democracy rests on the assumption that visions of the good life are inextricably bound up with the private projects of individuals, as does liberal politics—both the left-leaning and the right-leaning.

But as liberalism's communitarian critics—again, some on the left and some on the right of the traditional political spectrum—point out, it is difficult to characterise the kind of 'security and opportunity' that individuals are supposed to need without referring, at least implicitly, to a shared vision of the good life. The individual of liberal theory, so communitarian jargon has it, is the product of a 'thin' account of human agency; which amounts to saying that this liberal individual is a bloodless abstraction, lacking many of the beliefs, motives and desires that make human agents recognisably human.

Warhurst wisely avoids being drawn into the liberal communitarian debate. The ACSJC discussion papers are aimed at a general readership, not at political philosophers. But *Politicians and Citizens* shares at least one assumption with the communitarian critique of liberalism: that the division between the public spheres is at best a fluid one, for the same individuals are actors in each. As readers of Marian Wilkinson's biography of Graham Richardson can attest, the lineaments of our private selves can be traced in both the style and the substance of our public lives.

At the heart of *Politicians and Citizens* is what Warhurst and the ACSJC publicists call a code of conduct for politicians. The term is an unfortunate one, evoking as it does some Decalogue-like list of shalts and shalt nots. Warhurst's 'code' is more an examination—not a mere list—of civic virtues, the qualities of character necessary for effective leadership in a democracy. Is this, like the proverbial commendation of motherhood, a catalogue of qualities that politicians can pay lip service to and then act as they please? Those who may be inclined to dismiss Warhurst's code in this way should cast their mind back to Bert Newton's interview with Paul Keating during the federal election campaign. Newton asked Keating whether conspicuous personal wealth was a particular problem for a Labor leader (for all leaders of a democracy, argues Warhurst). It was one of the few times I have seen Paul Keating squirm. ■

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many young people, like Jason, are alienated from politics and from the community. Some have little interest in enrolling to vote. A major task in the years leading up to the centenary of federation ought to be a restoration of community belief in politics, especially among the young. The initiative for such a project needs to come from both politicians and citizens, each holding respect for the other. Politicians have the honour and privilege of representing the people. Citizens have the honour and

PETER PIERCE

# A day at the races

AT THE KYNETON RACES, on the first afternoon of a summer that had seemed indefinitely postponed, it was a day for Young Thoroughbreds. Some were horses. The rest crammed under a marquee and spread over the lawn opposite the furlong post, drawn by one of the more attractive promotions by which Melbourne racing clubs are trying, urgently, to revive attendances. Marketing co-ordinator for the Kyneton and District Racing Club, Sharni Officer, had secured us the last couple of tickets. For $30 each, we were members for the day; had our own enclosure, bookmaker and tote; cold meats, salad, beer, wine and champagne (it nearly goes without saying—Carlton, white, Great Western).

Finding the track wasn't meant to be easy. A sign to the south of the by-now-by-passed town notified us of an exit in one kilometre. After ten (a country mile?) we re-entered Kyneton from the north, asked directions twice, and eventually found one of the prettiest courses in Victoria. Set in a bend of the Campaspe River, Kyneton has a long stand of century-old oaks and elms. They have raced here since 1866, after 'gentlemen desirous of forming a racing club' met at the Junction Hotel in town. Once an alternative attraction, the go-carts have gone, but the meetings of the Woodend Racing Club have been held at Kyneton for more than a decade, since the Woodend course went as part of the rationalisation of country racing.

Lunch was not yet on when we arrived, so we sampled the public facilities: a tourist booth promoting the region; first-rate sausages and hamburgers for a dollar and no extra charge for sauce (take note, Flemington); old-fashioned civility from gatekeepers who welcomed us to the course; a spacious saddling paddock filling with horses that will seldom see a city track again in earnest. John Hawkes had sent half a dozen horses up, and scored in the fourth when Talk Turkey, a proven city loser, fell in. There were winners for the stable at Rosehill and Sandown too, where Darren Gauci brought both The Golden Greek and Stalk with beautifully-timed runs from last on the turn.

In the first at Kyneton, the well-named Grobbelaar (by Average Game) took a dive, but Baroda Star—brought across from Kilmore by former jockey Len Hope—won so well that a metropolitan outing beckons. There were bread rolls in plenty, and fine chutneys—only meat was missing. It was at last discovered under a tablecloth carpeted with flies. The ham and roast beef were ceaselessly replenished. If there was never a large queue for the tote, the food and drink were hammered throughout the afternoon. All this to the accompaniment of strolling players who at one point made a fine, presumably postmodern rural joke by strumming 'Duelling Banjos', the theme song of *Deliverance*.

Leaving the marquee for the mounting yard, travelling past the Lucky Beam Bar, we saw Rhonda Rees bring back her first winner, Trellini; one-time city jockey Danny Kavanagh trotting around exposing the 'Kav' sewn onto the rear of his breeches; and the bearded Arthur Robertson legged aboard King's Feast for the Blazer Menswear Handicap of 1887m. It was the eleven-year-old gelding's 127th start. He came to Kyneton after running twelfth of sixteen at 100/1 at Warrnambool last time out. 'Others better', the *Truth* form guide tersely advised. No matter. Following the unexplained scratching of the favorite Bickers Court, winner of the Burrumbee and Gunbower Cups at his last two outings, King's Feast came from the rear to win hard-held. The tote odds were better than 100/1. 'Youse thought he couldn't win', the jockey exclaimed. He was right, but country racing is still much more fun and less of a mug's game than pulling the handle of a machine.

Back at the marquee, 200 young Thoroughbreds were showing signs of distress. We stayed for the seventh race—a sprint for fillies and mares. I fancied Russet Glory and asked for the 5/1 each way from the genial bookmaker, Cam McCutcheon. 'Well you're in front at the moment', he observed, letting me on even though the field had gone half way. Unfortunately for the bookie, Russet Glory held that position.

On Kyneton Cup day (which is held on the Wednesday after the Melbourne Cup and was once *the* racing holiday in the district) more than the town's population of 4900 turn up. This Saturday the crowd was light, but they had been treated to excellent hospitality, racing to delight the sardonic of heart, a setting to please any eye, and the taste of a slowly vanishing Australia, authentic in detail, not confected as another theme park. ■

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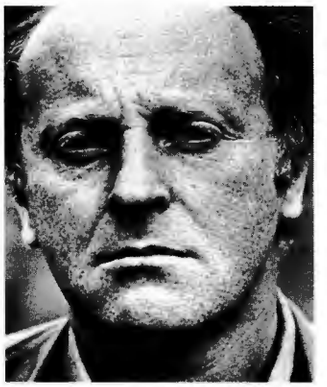


## In Memoriam: Joseph Brodsky

*Given the advent of trouble, you thought of snow—*
*so much barred and calloused water,*
*so much friable, glazed vitality. Hatred,*
*indulged untested, blocked veins*
*with blood transformed to pomegranate blisters,*
*and Thule reigned, thumb to heart.*

*Still, you are off, as the master said of another,*
*at the dead of winter. Its frosted cobbles*
*puncture darkness, the gape of its chilled yawn*
*declines to welcome so outré a figure—*
*exile, comedian, chider, estranger, maker.*
*You outface ice as it brims in space.*

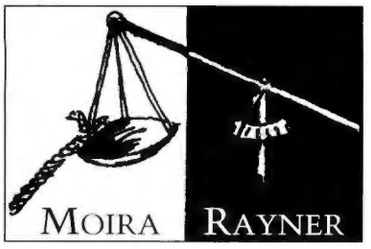
*Life, as you learned amidst croquettes or pig-swill,*
*goes on crying itself up,*
*and Death, everyone's faithful lover, emerges*
*from night's crystalline void, with nothing*
*in mind but nothing, a lifted fist melting*
*to a talon, the years dripping away.*

*If, in some fluent limestone tract contrived*
*for Wystan's sake you meet at last*
*the brilliant riff-raff of your dreams—Dante,*
*all scowl transformed to song, Marina*
*nosing eternity's forest like a wolf,*
*the other Joseph, a throttled goldfinch—*

*Sing for the rest of us, not in a chevronned parade*
*of angels at canticle, but in your old*
*perturbed, provocative fashion. 'Everything has*
*its limits, including sorrow', you said;*
*but stand up there, as once down here, to say*
*you give us tongues, in God's name.*

**Peter Steele**

Nobel prize winning Russian poet and writer Joseph Brodsky died in January. He had been living in the US since his exile from the Soviet Union in 1972.




# By-passing the people

*Democracy means government by discussion but it is only effective if you can stop people talking.*
—Clement Attlee.

THE VICTORIAN PREMIER DELIGHTS in being disconcerting. After more than three years his subjects are somewhat attuned to this quirk. They might have been appalled, but should not have been surprised, by his January 29 announcement that he planned to abolish by-elections. Listening to the voice of the people is not one of the *leitmotifs* of Kennett-style government, as thousands of ratepayers discovered when he abolished local government councils and installed commissioners in place of elected representatives two years ago.

Mr Kennett has a schoolboy propensity to produce a proposal, then, if it causes a stink, to declare it was just a 'dead cat'. Though every newspaper editorial and political commentator—even John Howard—held their noses at this one (Malcolm McKerras was so moved that he seemed not only to have lost his temper on ABC TV but wrote in the *Australian* the next day that Kennett must be 'fought'); and though there are rumours that there might be what passes for a revolt in his party-room, none should assume he will bury poor Felix. A bill amending the Victorian Constitution might well be introduced, if not when Parliament resumes in March (as he promised), then in the dead of night of some marathon Parliamentary sitting. It's happened before.

Kennett's timing was nice: just after Australia Day, a few days after the NSW Premier's controversial decision to appoint a part-time, bungalow-dwelling governor; and just two weeks before Queensland's Goss government was by-elected out of office. His justification was consistent with his known haughty views. Nearly 12 months before, reviewing the managerial achievements of his government in a speech to the Asia Society in New York, he concluded that:

> The single most important lesson of our experience is that governments must have confidence to stick to the direction they have mapped out. They must not vacillate at the whim of every interest group. To do so is to compromise the very reason for being in government—and that is to govern in the interests of all your constituents. Around the Western world—Australia included—there has been a glut of populism at the expense of good government. Such an approach also precludes another of the core characteristics—that of common-sense, which will serve these times far better than extreme ideology.

Is the 'extreme ideology' the concept of consultation?

Mr Kennett has tried this before. A few days after his administration was swept into power in October 1992, he had sent out a minister as forward scout. An uncomfortable and unconvincing Haddon Storey, a former Attorney-General, president of the Victorian branch of the International Commission of Jurists, and a Liberal of the old Victorian school, was commissioned to explain to a sceptical mob of journalists why abolishing by-elections would be a Good Thing. The idea was shelved, temporarily, as the government got on with reshaping Victoria's culture—restructuring and slashing the public service and removing obstacles to development. Now the cat is back out of its bag.

The apparent enormity of his proposal should be measured against his proffered justifications. In summary they are *efficiency*—by-elections cost a mean $140,000, and since they very rarely really change which party governs, the money is 'wasted': *precedent*—mid-term Senate vacancies are filled by nominees of the departed Senator's party, and Tasmania doesn't hold by-elections mid-term either; and *convenience*—there would be no interruption to the business of government if the party which 'held' a vacated seat nominated a replacement, provided only that the government of the day had a least a five seat majority.

These should be evaluated against the different nature of Senate representation (State or Territory representatives elected by the entire electorate on a proportionate basis) and the Tasmanian franchise (the candidate who was pipped at the post in the original election moves up the ranks on a recount). Whether or not the efficiency/convenience arguments stand up depends on whether or not, and to what extent, we really value the vote.

Government in the '90s is largely a matter of executive will. The checks and balances upon that power are to be found in the institutions of Parliament and the Courts, and democratic traditions. The vote is an affirmation of the principles of representative democracy which the High Court has found to be implied in the Federal Constitution. In a democratic society, ultimate power rests with the people.

In a representative system of government such as ours this power has largely been usurped. (Rousseau considered that, 'the moment a people allows itself to be represented it is no longer free'.) For us the opportunity for a direct say in government arises only at election time.

Australians are plagued with elections in which they are obliged to participate: Commonwealth, State and local government. Nonetheless we still seem to value the vote. In the 1986/87 National Social Science Survey, 48 per cent said that they disagreed that 'the average citizen has considerable influence on politics', 54 per cent did not believe that they had a great deal of influence on government decisions, and almost the same number said that whatever interest politicians had in their opinions at election time, they rapidly lost touch once they were in office. In the 1993 Australian Electoral Survey 72 per cent of the people surveyed believed that public officials generally 'didn't care much about what people like us think'.

Yet an earlier Electoral Survey, in 1987, which asked respondents how they felt when they went to a polling booth to vote, found that only 6 per cent felt annoyed or that it was a waste of time, another 25 per cent said that they voted out of a sense of duty (not necessarily an objectionable one), and just 6 per cent only wanted to avoid a fine. Nearly half (48 per cent) said they got 'a feeling of satisfaction from it'. Perhaps, given the cynicism about politics, this is the sweet savour of revenge from the slighted. Nonetheless, ten years ago 77 per cent of actual and future voters (from age 14 up) told the Electoral Commission that they thought that the vote was the most important right a person has.

WHY DO WE VALUE THE VOTE? Elections are hardly a satisfactory way of making governments genuinely accountable. Once a government has clamped down on information, or shut down schools, or committed future generations to vast expenditure on public infrastructure, or (in Victoria's case) sacked judges and altered the balance of power in the Constitution, reversal might be impossible. Local issues may be drowned in general election themes. This is far less so in by-elections, where a leaking hospital roof or absence of cops on the beat becomes a politician's deepest concern. In a general election, if a particular government has an authoritarian or bullying style—the Bjelke-Peterson model, for example—the electorate may have become apathetic. In a by-election, the voters have Daddy's attention, for a little.

In some societies there has been experimentation with more direct forms of participation than voting in general elections. In some US states and parts of Europe there is provision for a lawmaking *initiative*, which lets people draft a law and, if they get enough signatures for it, require it either to be put to the voters directly, or indirectly, by being submitted to the legislature. Citizen-initiated referenda are not favoured in Australia (a Democrat proposal was defeated on Party lines in 1977, in the Commonwealth Parliament) though some local government bodies have tinkered with the idea. New Zealand had a farcical experience of a citizens' initiative in 1995 when they were asked to vote for an incomprehensible ballot over desirable numbers of fire-fighters.

Voting on local issues keeps political agendas wider than parties' institutionalised agendas; maximises citizens' feeling that they are involved; lessens apathy and alienation, and is a positive incentive for parliamentary representatives to remember they only have a job if they can persuade people to vote for them. By-elections—whether or not they make or break governments—provide a chance to express political sentiment, and keep the people's representatives sensitive to the feeling of their electorate. They enable minority parties and independents to test local feeling on parochial issues. They may give independents parliamentary seats (extremely irritating to the party machines) or, as in the Mundingburra by-election in Queensland, the power to decide who governs at all.

Jeff Kennett might very well proceed to change both the franchise and the Victorian Constitution. All that is required is a majority vote in both Houses of the Parliament, both of which the Coalition completely dominates. Whatever academics, political commentators, columnists, his own party, the Opposition or interest groups might have to say about democracy, and responsible government, a powerful Premier who is not genuinely at risk of losing that power may achieve his desire through a Parliament which does not function as a forum for debate.

All that remains is challenge through the courts. A statutory Constitution, such as Victoria's, is only an Act of Parliament, and can be changed by another one. There is no statement of civil and political rights and freedoms on which to rely. In theory, Mr Kennett could sponsor the passage of laws which deprive blue-eyed people, transsexuals or people who did not own property from the franchise; could abolish the State's Supreme Court entirely, or establish local government as a department of administrative services (which he seems to perceive it to be anyway: in early February he was reported to have told one of the few remaining democratically elected Councils which had not decided to accept a large government 'loan' that it would be dismissed if it did not vote to accept the money, and its conditions.) Only convention and the possibility of an interventionist High Court—which has already implied democratic principles into our Federal Constitutional structure—stands between such will, and its expression.

How much do we value our vote? In his inaugural address Lincoln said that the country and its institutions belong to its people, and that when they tired of its government they could exercise their constitutional right to amend it, or their revolutionary right to dismember or overthrow it. Years before, he remarked that no human being is good enough to govern another without that other's consent. Mr Kennett and other managerialist politicians would do well to remember their origins, and be humbled. ■

**Moira Rayner** is a lawyer and freelance journalist.

# Into the ring

*You don't become a dissident just because you decide one day to take up this most unusual career. You are thrown into it by your personal sense of responsibitlity , combined with a complex set of external circumstances. You are cast out of the existing structures and placed in a position of conflict with them. It begins as an attempt to do your job well and ends [with your] being branded as an enemy of society.* —***Vaclav Havel***

I HAVE IN MY POSSESSION a favourite photograph from the sports pages of the *Sydney Morning Herald*. You can see variations of on these pages. It shows a middle-aged man in full horizontal flight, arms and legs outstretched, and just beneath him a large bull that is charging in the opposite direction. What appeals most is the caption:

> An unidentified spectator leaps over a charging bull to avoid being gored, after jumping into a Madrid bull-ring from the stands. He was not hurt and later apologised for his impromptu urge to fight a bull.

In the aftermath of the ordination of women in the Australian Anglican church, this picture is for me a perfect metaphor of the Anglican dissident. It captures the wild idiosyncratic impulse that can pick up a previously passive onlooker and hurl her headlong into an encounter with the institution. It emphasises the strength of impulse that is needed to start up social change against the inertia of established custom. We will probably never know the particular set of 'complex external circumstances' or personal needs that transformed our friend from intrepid spectator to would-be toreador. But I can remember the particular circumstances that catapulted me into the 'bullring' with little assurance that any would follow.

It was in 1975, almost a decade before the national movement was founded. Some initial discussions about women's ordination with the curate at my local church had left me in no doubt of our respective positions on the male-only priesthood. A week later, as I sat in the front pew on Sunday with my husband and children, the curate used the opportunity as preacher to deal with my dissent. His strategy had the advantage of altitude, posture and no audience participation. From his elevation he dictated the received theology on men's headship and women's subservience. His display of conviction supported Nietszche's contention that 'convictions are more dangerous foes of truth than lies.' I listened intently but heard the flap of angel wings. I thought of this sermon being multiplied in a hundred parishes, and a dissident was born. The bull had to be confronted.

I was not in contact with any groups involved in women's ordination, but decided that I would start working towards such an end in the Anglican Church. It would necessitate a vote from the National Synod

to change the law that followed in the train of Church laws excluding 'women, children and imbeciles' from being candidates for ordination. I remember looking across at the man who was the main Synod representative in our congregation and saying to myself 'One day I will be where you are and I will have to be better than you.' I remember shuddering at the thought of what he would think if he could read my predatory thoughts. Seven years later I was to stand in his very place in the Sydney Synod to present the committee report on women's ordination that he as chairman of the committee should have presented.

In our own limited way, the Movement for the Ordination of Women (MOW) was to experience in those seven intervening years of lobbying, debating, protesting, studying and praying, what Vaclav Havel had learned as a dissident in occupied Czechoslovakia. Poet, playwright and eventually President, he found what he called 'a new model of behaviour' that is critical in any reform.

> When arguing with a centre of power, do not get sidetracked into vague ideological debates about who is right and who is wrong; fight for specific, concrete things, and be prepared to stick to your guns to the end.

It's hard to take the initial stance and with it the wall of flak concentrated on such strategic borders. On the opening night of the 1983 Sydney Synod, we nailed our theses 'that a great wrong was being done in the Church' to the door of our own St Andrew's Cathedral in Sydney. We declared our intention to debate publicly the theological basis of women's equal calling, and to challenge the all-male priesthood. Every argument that could be mustered was brought to bear on the concrete proposal that the Anglican church should ordain those of its women who were trained and fitted for ministry.

The first objection raised was that it was better to educate the local congregation first about women and equality, and thus prepare the ground. The second was that it was wrong for women to agitate for the right to be priests themselves—they should wait for others to do it, or for God to do it. Some said it was wrong to seek the exalted position of a priest. Shouldn't a Christian be a servant? Others agreed that change was called for, but said that forming a visible movement within the Church was a hostile act that would divide the Church, and moreover we should wait for the Catholic Church to do it first. Still others said that ordination of men was wrong anyway.

We became increasingly convinced that to reverse the legal exclusion of women from the priesthood was not only right in principle but necessary for us as Christians. Moreover, it was possible in the Anglican Church because of its national autonomy and constitution. Real women candidates for the real priesthood, renewed or unrenewed, was a legal possibility. There had already been women priests in other parts of the Anglican Church for 12 years.

Public advocacy by women had the same effect as touching the hip-pocket nerve of the rich. Male theologians moved to debate the problem of clericalism while continuing to be priests themselves. Lawyers mouthed legal complexities about property and constitutions. Women whinnied at the microphones of the synod about their support of male leadership, and disowned as unseemly the antics of the dissidents. And in the diocesan committees that controlled key decisions, a purge began of those not prepared to toe the conservative line. It was not uncommon for candidates for roles completely unrelated to women's ministry to be rung up before synod elections and asked their views on the priesting of women. Openness, tolerance, and a respect for basic human rights quietly slipped out the back door.

As a missionary doctor in Africa, I had witnessed the disabling effect of the domination by one class of another in the hierarchy of missionaries over nationals. I had concluded that a vital part of the egalitarian project of 'handing over to the nationals' was handing over the right to make the same mistakes as missionaries had made. Why talk of waiting for a renewed ministry for women while still ordaining men to an unrenewed ministry? It says more about the view of women than the ideals of ministry.

***Dr Patricia Brennan*** *was the founding President of the Movement for the Ordination of Women in the Anglican Church, launched in 1984 in the Sydney Diocese. At the end of 1989, she handed over the leadership of the national movement to* ***Dr Janet Scarfe*** *who saw it through its difficult final days before the ordination of women in 1992, stepping down herself in 1995.*

No change to established tradition comes about without great struggles by individuals. There was substance to some of the objections, especially those about the nature of the ministry and the whole problem of the priesthood sequestering power and privilege. But I reached a point where I had no doubt that behind the order and the piety of holy orders lay the same hierarchy of men over women and children that whispered obscenities and dealt ugly blows in the back streets. As a doctor, I have seen the bodies broken and used in subordination. I could no longer buy my ticket to see the men run the show. For me the case the case was building towards the conclusion that it

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was a moral necessity for women to tackle the priesthood.

It was necessary because it was deemed right and was possible. The theological and legal impediments were no longer considered valid by an increasing number of Anglicans. In 1974 the Doctrine Commission of the General Synod agreed by an overwhelming majority that there were no theological objections to the ordination of women. Limitations were being placed on women not by nature any longer, but by carefully manufactured constraint and legal control.

The second reason was what I call the 'Oliver Principle', that is, the core moral value of participating in the decisions that control your destiny. 'More', said Oliver, holding his soup bowl high, and the planet shifted slightly on its axis. Education, health, and politics cannot flourish until all receive. Greed lines up to ask for more on the same queue as poverty. Thus it has been with ecclesiastical power.

The creation of an all-male priesthood has required the active exclusion of women from theological education for centuries. Where they were not totally excluded, as in some religious orders or in places of privilege, they were still under male control. Theological formulation surrounding the female body reflected the ignorance of men about women's experiences. The fact that the Church didn't manage to suppress completely the religious imagination of women does not excuse the tyranny of thwarting growth in a healthy organism.

ORDINATION WAS NECESSARY because every form of exclusion is connected to every other form of exclusion. The exclusion of women from decision-making and theological formulation comes from the same stable as the violation of women's bodies that continues to this hour in domestic violence and sexual assault. They are both based on doctrines that render women the objects of male control, and contribute to cripplingly low self-esteem. Such low self-esteem encountered in the ranks of Anglican women guaranteed they would never enter a struggle for autonomy, let alone conceive of themselves as achieving it.

It was necessary because prior to the existence of the Movement for the Ordination of Women, the woman question was the domain of a limited élite who were chosen predominantly from white male clerical ranks. Even those men who were sympathetic to change were forced to wheel and deal in the privacy of doctrine commissions, or through the obfuscating legal process of synods. The Movement flushed the debate out of the back room.

The debate raged around what was 'true'; somewhere along the line, the way people actually treated each other was overlooked. By the time women were being ordained in dioceses other than Sydney, the debate in Sydney had calcified into a moratorium and an obsession with 'truth' that kept women out. I was reminded of this when reading an address given by Father John W. O'Malley SJ in Sydney in September 1994. He compared the motto of Harvard University, which is 'Veritas', with the motto of Jesuit schools: 'Veritatem facientes in caritate'—doing the truth in love.

Those who find themselves in long-term relationships of dissidence have to keep reminding themselves that although they are cast out of the existing structures and placed in a position of conflict with them, they remain intimately connected by their very dissidence. It is a safer location than to stay silently enmeshed in a system where you have to deny your best religious impulses.

Last month an MOW leader in the Armidale diocese, a feminist and sociologist, took her own life in a state of profound depression. Her funeral service was taken—she would probably have concurred in this—by the bishop who had consistently opposed her twelve-year campaign to see women as priests. In his sermon, the bishop listed three things about her: that she continued in regular public worship, that she expressed her convictions without destroying relationships, and that she showed great concern for the downtrodden. One couldn't help but wonder at what price she had held them all together.

While it remains impossible for a woman to preach and teach authoritatively, or preside at the eucharist, for whatever reason, the church continues to valorise the male and denigrate the active female, maintaining the ancient belief that women are more fallen. There is nothing from which the male is excluded because he is male. We can forget the equal-but-different argument. Motherhood is a female biological function, not a state of grace that the church dreamt up as the female equivalent to the priesthood. Indeed in the Catholic church, the traditional requirement for celibacy for both priests and nuns freed women from motherhood—but such freedom never led to the priesthood.

Once the priesthood is possible for women, at least one factor that has fuelled the notion of women's nature as inferior is resolved. What remains then is real choice to be or not to be ordained; a choice not about the nature of women but about the meaning of ordination itself.

And for me, behind all the debates, law courts and clerical collars is the certain hope that our spiritual dreams are more than power struggles. That however long it takes the church to set the places, the eucharist increasingly will be a 'feast as mends in length'.

> Come my light, my feast, my strength, Such a light as shows a feast, Such a feast as mends in length, Such a strength as makes his guest.
>
> —**George Herbert** 1593-1633

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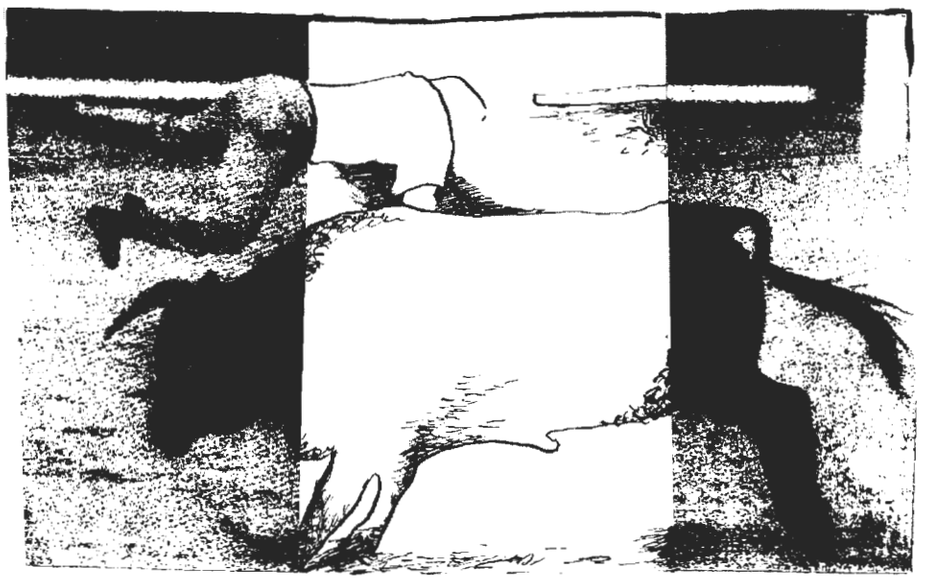
JANET SCARFE

# Necessary, but not sufficient

EARLY IN THE MORNING, on the first day of the week, the women went from the tomb...

So it seemed ten years ago. Sunday 9 February 1986 was the day on which women were first made deacons in the Anglican Church of Australia. It dawned with all the expectation and exhilaration of an Easter morning. Somehow, it seemed, the world would never be quite the same. Well, if not the world, then certainly the church.



In 1986 it had been almost a decade since the General Synod agreed in 1977, using the negative language which characterised the debate, that there were insufficient theological reasons to prevent the ordination of women. In hindsight the double negative language was instructive about the level of acceptance of women's ordination, then and now.

The General Synod of 1985 defeated a bill to ordain women to the priesthood by the narrowest of margins. Almost immediately members overwhelmingly endorsed women as deacons, the step prior to priesthood.

The Archbishops of Melbourne (David Penman) and Perth (Peter Carnley), and the Bishop of Tasmania (Philip Newell) announced they would ordain women in February 1986. Notwithstanding a protest to the Appellate Tribunal and opposition threats of an injunction against Archbishop Penman of Melbourne, women were ordained deacon for the first time in the Anglican Church of Australia in Melbourne, Hobart and Perth on 9 February 1986.

Media attention focused on Melbourne, where Archbishop Penman ordained senior woman minister in the diocese, Marjorie McGregor, and others who, like her, had had years of experience in ministry. A bomb scare forced the evacuation of the packed cathedral shortly before the service. The bomb hoax added immeasurably to the drama of the occasion and dominated the headlines.

The Movement for the Ordination of Women Freedom Bus from Sydney and Canberra was led, as if by a star, to park right beside the cathedral. Decorated in banners and dust, the bus brought joy to some Melbourne members of MOW and angry consternation to others. MOW in Melbourne had requested and received twenty-five seats in the cathedral. It seemed a very small number, but it was twenty-five more than Archbishop Carnley of Perth allowed MOW at the first ordination of women as priests in March 1992.

The day was fraught with countless public and private dramas, including the threat of court action (a terrible reality in 1992) and dissension among women's ordination supporters over decorum and respectability, focusing on the bus.

My own recollections are completely dominated by the opening procession into St Paul's Cathedral. It seemed to go on forever. 'Through gates of pearl streamed in the countless host ...' So many in the procession were women—young women like Kate Prowd in her mid-twenties, older women like Elizabeth Alfred in her early seventies and a deaconess for forty-two years.

IT WAS ASTONISHINGLY MOVING. The memory remains so. It was the precise moment at which for me the ordination of women was transformed from an intellectual exercise (the 'insufficient objections') into an imperative, an essential matter of the faith involving the way the church regards all women in its community of faith, and indeed all women in the community.

*Archbishop George of Adelaide preached on 'Change and decay all around I see', and reverted to exclusive language in the liturgy ... In Bendigo Bishop Wright expressed his concern that flower petals would stain the sanctuary carpet.*

We have been included, I thought. We have been acknowledged as part of the countless host. We are at last visible. When the opening procession finally passed by, I was quite ready to go home, rejoicing.

It was a trifle premature.

In 1986 I was intent on respectability. I clearly remember wishing the MOW Freedom Riders had put their bus through a car wash. By November 1992, when the General Synod of which I was a member finally agreed on a formula that allowed dioceses to ordain women as priests, I could find only shame in the processes. With everything in me, I yearned for a statement from the Synod president, Archbishop Keith Rayner, apologising on behalf of the Anglican Church for the shameful way in which the Church had gone about this matter, apologising to women called to priesthood, to all women in the Church and to all women in the community at large. But publicly at least he held up the process as a model of decision-making for society at large.

MORE OFTEN THAN NOT THE ORDINATIONS I attended in December 1992 (six in five cities in three weeks) suggested that even strong supporters of women's ordination saw the changes to the priesthood as cosmetic. Archbishop George of Adelaide preached on 'Change and decay all around I see', and reverted to exclusive language in the liturgy, while at the celebrations senior clergymen delightedly welcomed the women with genuflections. In Bendigo Bishop Wright expressed his concern that flower petals would stain the sanctuary carpet. In the Canberra-Goulburn ordination, the women disappeared into a rugby scrum of male priests, words were said and they emerged as priests. In Melbourne, where there were three ordination ceremonies because of the numbers of women and where the applause was long and loud, many clergymen expressed to me their delight that the task was now complete.

It had barely begun.

The ordination of women as deacons in 1986 and priests in 1992 was a watershed in the life of the Anglican Church. It has been an absolutely necessary step for its integrity, and for its credibility in the community. But the ordination of women as deacons, priests and bishops is by no means sufficient for the transformation of the church so that women are fully and equal participants in every aspect of its life, and so that it speaks and acts honestly and justly in the community at large on matters affecting women—violence, sexual abuse, poverty, for example.

MOW has never seen the ordination of women as an end in itself, but as a crucial element in a reform agenda that encompassed inclusive language, feminist theology, the participation of women in the churches' decision-making processes and theological debates.

But while increasingly visible, women remain largely inaudible. We are rarely heard to be speaking with the authority and authenticity of our own experiences. We are rarely cited, whether it be as authorities, illustrations or exemplars. We are more likely to be spoken for by men or passed over for comment than to be allowed room to speak for ourselves.

The ministries of both ordained women and lay women are concentrated in personal pastoral situations, the domestic or private realm. The public world of consultation and policy-making, teaching in the forum of ordinations, consecrations, synods and theological colleges continues to belong almost entirely to men.

And it should not be forgotten that women are not always visible. When the new Bishop of Bendigo was consecrated recently in St Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne, there was only one woman among the thirty-four bishops, lawyers, clergy and officials in the formal photograph.

Women in the episcopate is on the agenda in the national Anglican Church and in the Diocese of Melbourne. That debate will reveal a great deal about the extent and perceived nature of women's authority.

Ordination is certainly not sufficient to give women access to the positions and salaries clergymen expect. The injustice and inequity of ordained women's working conditions demonstrate that very clearly. The majority of ordained women are non-stipendiary—unpaid—though they may receive some car and telephone expenses. This economic exploitation is in spite of theological qualifications and extensive professional experiences readily transferable to parish and other ministries.

A few say their unpaid status suits their financial circumstance, but others wish it were otherwise, and some desperately so. Many ordained women tell of the financial generosity of their husbands. Some have jobs outside the church in addition to their parish responsibilities on Sundays, Saturdays and week nights; they also have equal or primary care for their

families. In the Brisbane Diocese of Archbishop Peter Hollingworth, in 1995 ordained women calculated that 80 per cent of their number are non-stipendiary compared with 20 per cent of their male colleagues. In Sydney, women have far greater difficulty than men in even securing interviews for parish positions. In Adelaide, raising the possibility of payment, even in jest, can incur anger, indignation or scorn.

The economic inequities between women and men will likely become even more firmly entrenched. Fewer and fewer Anglican parishes can support two paid clergy, a rector (commonly male) and assistant (commonly female). Economising by dispensing with the assistant may further disadvantage women. Moreover, a strong tradition of voluntary ministry by ordained women is already established on the strong tradition of voluntary ministry by lay women. It may already be strong enough to prompt church leaders to preselect financially independent women candidates for ordination.

Does an independent financial status give ordained women the opportunity to be more prophetic about the church and its role in the community? This argument is the darling of bishops endeavouring to justify non-stipendiary ministry for others. In practice, non-stipendiary women are less likely to be prophetic as they hope against hope to be found a paid position before they retire.

'Watch out,' said a non-church-going colleague in January 1992 amid the court case against women's ordination. 'You want to be careful that these women don't end up with just a title and a sash.' The beauty queens of the church—that was precisely what we did not intend.

THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN in the Anglican Church has been an essential step in encouraging Catholic feminists to work for the renewal of priestly ministry in the Catholic Church. Friendships and mutual support have been very strong between prophetic women in the two traditions. However for some Catholic feminists, the Anglican experience has not been a sufficiently radical challenge to the prevailing male theologies of priesthood or to the male and hierarchical structures of the Church. They point to ordained Anglican women in black clerical dress with high collars, authoritarian attitudes, and close identification with clergymen as proof that women have been co- opted and compromised through ordination. Their acutely sensitive anti-clerical antennae present many challenges, particularly to the *via media* rationales of Anglican support for the ordination of women. Has the Anglican Church simply allowed women into the existing priesthood as a matter of equality? Or is the Anglican Church committed to a renewal of priesthood, prepared not just to tolerate but seriously encourage unfamiliar images of priesthood and diverse forms of preparation for it?

In her visit to Australia last June, feminist theologian Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza was asked many times if she supported the ordination of women in the Catholic Church. She replied with another question: Is the ordination of women good for women, implying strongly that the answer was 'no'. For me the answer is 'yes'. It is very good for some ordained women, whose ministries, confidence, talents, health, and capacity to empower others have blossomed. It is even better for the church, whose professional ministry is being infused with women's perspectives, life experiences, expertise, and awareness of previously undiscussed topics.

There is no doubt that the Anglican Church's experiences of the ordination of women are very significant to the Catholic Church at all levels—bishops, feminist groups, and people who encounter ordained women at ecumenical services, funerals and weddings. Similarly Catholic feminist liturgies and writings, for example by Miriam Therese Winter, may play a small but significant part in freeing Anglican liturgy and theology from their over-powering male bias.

It is ten years since a small number of women were first ordained in the Anglican Church of Australia. Some 300 have been ordained or licensed in the past decade, half of them priests and the other half deacons by either choice or circumstance. The individuality of their calls is striking. Relatively few were aware of the debate about the ordination of women in the wider church, fewer still openly participated in it. Most took a highly personal, particular path to ordination. They met a few like-minded women on the way, but almost all their guides, cartographers, and experts were men.

They are the first women in a profession which had previously excluded them. They are without doubt pioneers. But pioneers domesticate the land, clearing existing natural growth, building fences, and planting familiar food crops.

The Anglican Church needs prophets—dissidents—as well as pioneers. It must listen to the prophetic voices that insist that the ordination of women, while necessary, is by no means sufficient in itself to eliminate the sexism and clericalism that saturate its every corner. ■

*In 1986 I was intent on respectability. I clearly remember wishing the MOW Freedom Riders had put their bus through a car wash.*

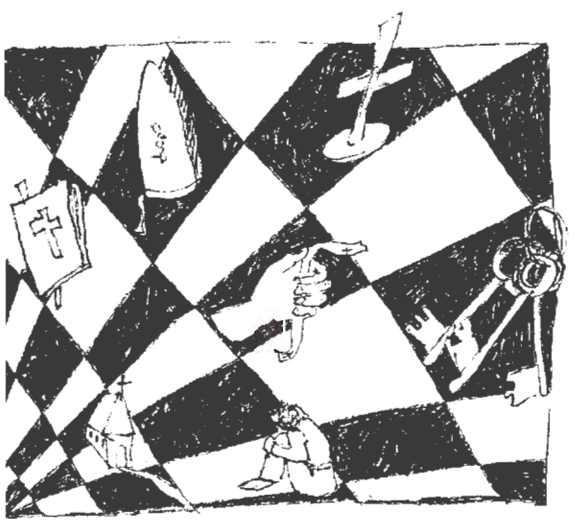
**Janet Scarfe** is an historian. She was National President of the Movement for the Ordination of Women from 1989 to 1995. She is currently writing a group biography of women ordained in the Anglican Church of Australia.

PAUL COLLINS

# Coming clean

THE CLERGY HAVE BEEN IN THE NEWS a lot lately, with official apologies from church leaders for the crimes committed by priests and religious. Then there was the 1995 English film *Priest*. While the movie stirred some controversy in the US among conservative Catholics, here it seems to have escaped a great deal of criticism. While it was hardly complimentary to either the hierarchy or the clergy, it at least placed its priestly protagonists in unromantic and real situations and showed them engaged in aspects of genuine ministry. It was hardly Bing Crosby and *Going My Way*.

Actually, *Priest* helped me clarify why the books of A.W. Richard Sipe (*A Secret World. Sexuality and the Search for Celibacy*, New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1990 and *Sex, Priests and Power. Anatomy of a Crisis*, London: Cassell, 1995) had really annoyed me. Sipe shows in both books that there is a widespread disregard of obligatory celibacy throughout the contemporary church. He claims that, at most, only about 40 per cent of clergy in the US are living celibate lives. The same is probably true of Australia. It is the secrecy that Sipe emphasises particularly: 'Exposure has begun to reveal how secrecy and power operate across the board within the celibate/sexual system' (*Sex, Priests and Power*). Because of the intimate nexus between secrecy and power, Sipe argues that once secrecy is broken clerical power will be challenged.



*Priest* helped me sort out my ambivalence about Sipe's work. Much that he says is true, especially the connection between celibacy, clericalism and power, and the way in which this is all maintained by secrecy and compromise. Perhaps my ambivalence is because I am a priest and cannot face the hard truth about myself and the clerical system. But my life is not defined exclusively in terms of sexuality and, like everyone else, I would not want to be judged by my worst behaviour. In those circumstances who of us would ' 'scape whipping'?

But I do feel that Sipe's exclusive focus on sexuality ends up distorting an even more complex issue. Nowhere does he mention the massive process of change and adjustment that priests have had to face over the last thirty years. In fact, the priests of the last three decades have had to face more complex situations, both institutionally and ministerially, than probably any other generation of clergy before them. Not the least of the issues that they have had to confront is voluntary disempowerment as they hand over more of their former role to the laity.

None of this historical context is to be found in Sipe. His focus is on the secret world of clerical sexuality. He is not the only one to write about this. Recently, there has been a spate of books, some serious, some merely 'kiss and tell' narratives, about relationships between priests and women.

Having said this, there is nonetheless a sense in which Sipe is right. There is a connection between secret sexuality and power, even though most priests do not experience themselves as powerful. In fact, many of them feel powerless and frustrated, caught as they often are between the expectations of the laity and the immobility of the established church.

However, it is clear that some priests have seriously abused their position of influence and trust. It is becoming almost commonplace now to open the newspaper to read of another priest found guilty in the courts of criminal sexual misbehaviour. What is happening in Australia can be seen across the world. The accusations reach to the top of the hierarchy and include an Austrian cardinal and an Irish bishop, but it is largely in common law countries, such as the US, UK, Ireland, Canada and Australia, where culprits are being brought to book.

The widespread nature of this scandal indicates that its causes are pervasive and deeply embedded in the institutional church. Its repercussions affect not just bishops and religious superiors, but the whole Catholic community. The blame for this cannot be

shifted to the media, or to anyone outside the church. It is a problem embedded at the core of its institutional and clerical structure.

Many priests justifiably feel that they are the 'fall guys' who have to bear the understandable but often undifferentiated anger of laity, not only over sexual issues, but also over the way in which renewal of the church has stalled. As the most accessible Catholic authority figures, priests feel that their good names, personal relationships and ministries are unfairly on the line.

Certainly, many of the present bishops and church leaders are not responsible for what went on in the past and a number of them have tried very hard to respond honestly and adequately to a situation that has not been experienced before in the church. But most of them seem paralysed and the public scandal is greeted with silence, no doubt on good legal advice. There is clearly a real conflict for church leadership between this legal advice and the obligation of pastoral honesty. These two demands clearly need to be weighed up carefully.

But genuine pastoral leadership demands that eventually the truth will have to be told. Any experienced journalist will always tell you 'Tell the truth, and then you'll never get caught'. It reminds us of Jesus words 'the truth will make you free'.

The danger is that the church's leadership is actually divorced from a realistic comprehension of the perception the wider community has of the church, and specifically of the clergy, that comes as a result of these scandals. Most people outside the church are genuinely shocked. In the media the reputation of the Catholic Church is being subsumed to the problem of sexual abuse. Clerical abuse of children is not just a post-Vatican II phenomenon. It obviously reaches back for centuries. People are asking: what has been going on among priests all these years? This is compounded by the widespread non-observance of celibacy.

IN MY VIEW THE TIME HAS COME for us to stop kidding ourselves about the so-called 'witness value' of clerical celibacy and the priestly life-style. At best, it is perceived by the wider community as a witness to nothing; at worst, it is seen as a symptom of sexual dysfunction. Married clergy and the ordination of women might not be the solution to every problem, but an honest and public appraisal of these issues would at least move the discussion on from the present impasse.

The real problem lies not so much with the local bishops and church leaders, who are struggling to deal with these issues. The real problem is the attitude of Rome. For example: in Ireland over the past few months the Alice in Wonderland attitude to celibacy on the part of the Vatican has been publicly manifested. Ireland has been shocked by a series of clerical scandals of which the Bishop Eamon Casey case was only the first. Last year the Prime Minister of Ireland was forced to resign over the attempted coverup of the extradition to Northern Ireland of Brendan Smythe, a priest found guilty of abusing children. At present, public discussion in the Irish media is dominated by clerical scandals.

As a result, Bishop Brendan Comiskey of Ferns and at least four other bishops have modestly suggested that obligatory celibacy is an issue that needs to be openly discussed for the good of the church. For their pains these bishops were quickly assured that this issue was 'beyond discussion'. Comiskey was summoned to Rome and carpeted, and also publicly chastised by the Irish Primate, Cardinal Cahal Daly. The bishops probably would have got into less trouble if they had openly questioned the existence of God!

Bishop Comiskey has had the courage to stick by his guns. In Australia, also, a couple of the bishops have spoken honestly about the problem. Bishop Brian Heenan of Rockhampton, for instance, has said that priests 'would really want the option of celibacy to be offered, because they have seen some of their very best brother priests ... go off into marriage. Most would say we want these priests to come back' (*The Tablet*, 15 July 1995). Bishop Patrick Power, Auxiliary of Canberra-Goulburn, was courageous enough to discuss celibacy on *Sixty Minutes*.

At times I feel sorry for the bishops, caught as they are between the apocalyptic agenda of the pope, and their responsibility to the victims of abuse, the local church and the community. But some of them lose my sympathy when, looking behind their backs to Rome, they publicly 'discipline' a theologian, or someone who says something not in accordance with the prevailing Roman line. The church has cosseted the child molesters for years, but when a creative person tries to relate belief to culture, which is the task of theology, the paraphernalia of ecclesiastical discipline falls upon them.

But all of this is a symptom of something deeper. The crisis of obligatory celibacy and clericalism points beyond itself, for both are key elements in the institutional structure of the church. It indicates that at the heart of the hierarchical and clerical lifestyle there is a pervasive malaise which is slowly becoming more obvious. The issue is not one of individual priests, but of an increasingly dysfunctional institution which serves neither the needs of those within it, nor the needs of the ministry.

Abusive priests are actually a symptom of the disease at the centre of clericalism. One is reminded of Hamlet where the imagery of disease and rottenness points beyond itself to the secret corruption at the core of the state. To understand how this is a symptom of something deeper in the hierarchical structure, we need to examine clericalism in the light of recent research into dysfunctional and addictive families. This can help us understand what is happening to the church.

The present-day clerical structure of the Catholic church can be compared to a problematic and dysfunctional family. In this comparison the addictive father sets up a pattern of control and abuse. In order to survive, the rest of the family collude in this and try to appease and placate him by turning inward to protect the family's reputation. The dominant abuser determines everything that the family will do and think; loyalty to him becomes the test of family membership. In this process everyone becomes co-dependent in the addiction and thus the system continues.

The only way to break this pattern is for someone in the family to have the courage to recognise what is happening, name the reality and break out. This can give courage to others to follow the same path. But it can release terrible anger, all types of accusations, expulsion from the family and attempts at revenge—not an easy path to take.

THERE IS, OF COURSE, no exact comparison between clericalism and the dysfunctional family, but there are suggestive parallels and connections. In order to tease these out I want to begin with something apparently unconnected—the ecclesiastical priorities that have emerged during the Wojtyla papacy.

Pope John Paul II is the most powerful pope in church history, largely because of modern communications and his demonstrated personal ability to project his power and priorities throughout the church. Over the last few years, as Edward Schillebeeckx pointed out recently, the Pope has increasingly identified his personal theological agenda with the established teaching of the church.

In this context it is significant that he has consistently highlighted the importance of the sexual and reproductive issues linked to *Humanae vitae* and contraception. He clearly sees *Humanae vitae* as infallible. But in the process of emphasising this he has seemingly distorted the traditional theological priority given by the church to questions about God, the divinity and humanity of Christ, the role of the Holy Spirit and the living of a faith commitment.

Also, his apparent conflation of the ordinary and the infallible magisterium, clearly distinguished at Vatican Council I (1869-1870), is very worrying. He has made issues like loyalty to *Humanae vitae* and support of obligatory celibacy litmus tests of genuine Catholicism. This is a call to close ranks and 'protect' clericalism. Women are totally excluded from the process.

The Pope's patronage of the so-called 'new religious movements' (Opus Dei, Focolare and the Neo-Catechuminate), his seemingly apocalyptic vision of the coming millennium and his patronage of the Fatima apparitions indicate an apparent lack of connection with the mainstream of the Catholic tradition of theology and ministry. The Brazilian theologian, Jose Comblin, has perceptively pointed out that John Paul is not trying to restore the pre-Vatican II church, but that his views have distinct overtones of nineteenth century traditionalism and the extreme ultramontanism of writers like Joseph de Maistre.

What is the connection between the papal agenda, the increasing dysfunctionality of institutional Catholicism and problematic families? Firstly, it is clear that the Pope is willing to force his personal agenda on the church, to make it normative for all loyal Catholics. Any dissenters, especially those who are perceived as having an important role in the church, are expelled and, at times, destroyed. An example of this is the scandalous treatment of the French Dominican, Jacques Pohier, but there are many better-known theologians, such as Charles Curran, who have been driven out of the Catholic system, or forced to teach in secular and Protestant universities. Bishops are not exempt from this vindictiveness, as Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen of Seattle and, more recently, the French Bishop Jacques Gaillot have discovered.

This threat of expulsion and punishment goes right through the system. Local hierarchies and superiors of religious orders are expected to toe the line and 'deal' with critics and dissenters. They might resist for some time, but they normally give in 'for the greater good' of the family. What is really encouraged is external conformity. It does not matter what you think personally, or say in private. As long as you never confront problems publicly.

But there is a highly critical underground. Anyone who knows priests knows what they say to each other about the Pope, their superiors and the system in which they work. Most of them feel powerless to change anything. But no matter what they say in private, they are rarely willing to speak out when given the opportunity. The malaise has pervaded the whole clerical system. And because it is pervasive, it is hardly ever noticed.

Abusive families reflect this type of a dysfunctional system. Abuse of children is not about sexuality, but about power. It is the way used by an inadequate person to assert power over a physically weaker person. The behaviour of the priest abusers points straight to the abusiveness inherent in the system. Richard Sipe argues that control of sexuality has historically been used by the church as a form of power over people, especially women.

This is not to say that most priests are motivated by a lust for power. In fact, the contrary is true. Even the most healthy priests feel powerless in the face of the hierarchical institution that employs them. They feel they cannot change the system and are forced to make constant compromises to remain within it and to continue the ministry to which they have given their lives. A considerable number feel trapped in the only lifestyle that they know. Some think themselves unqualified for anything else.

Is there a way out? Yes, there is, but it is going to take a lot of courage on the part of the laypeople,

priests and bishops who make the first moves. To step outside and to leave an abusive situation and to name it requires a clarity of mind, a stubborn determination as well as considerable tolerance, charity and understanding. Many priests who have left the clerical ministry and married have already done this. They now exert pressure from the perspective of the wider church.

But this confrontation is also going to have to be carried out from within the institution. The Chicago priest, John Lynch, is quoted by Tim Unsworth in his *The Last Priests of America* giving an example of what I mean:

> In 1990 some African, Asian and Canadian bishops at the Synod [in Rome] on the priesthood asked the Vatican to do away with mandatory celibacy for the sake of the church. They went hat in hand, respectfully, and were told in advance that the topic could not be discussed. My scenario is that they will soon go back and they'll leave their hats at home. They'll still be refused, of course. But they'll come back and ask again. Then a year will come, soon, when they won't come back at all. They'll simply change the rules for the sake of the church ... They will decide to be loyal to Jesus even though it means losing their heads.

My comment would be that they probably won't 'lose their heads'.

They will find that the hierarchical church is really a paper tiger. I find this all rather ironic because I knew a French missionary bishop in the Pacific who talked openly in the mid-1970s about ordaining the married catechists upon whom the church in his country was built and depended. He proposed ordaining them just before he retired! Sadly, out of respect to his successor, nothing came of it.

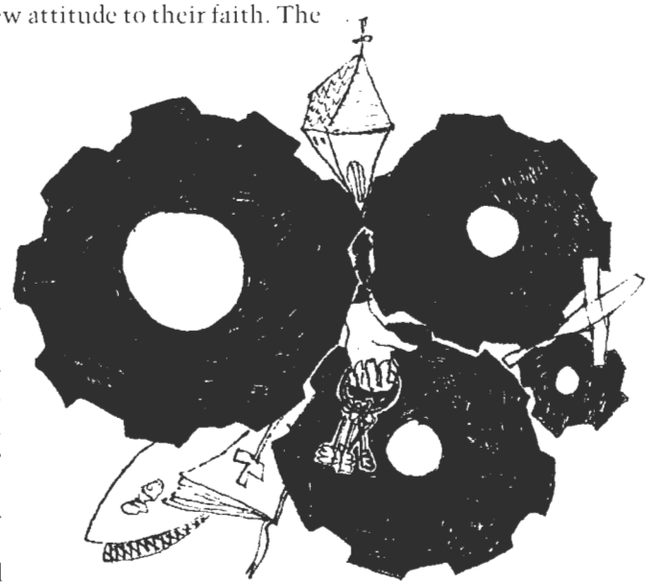
The challenge that faces us today is the rediscovery of the real nature of priestly and ministerial leadership in the Catholic church. In the process of doing this we will have to jettison destructive and dysfunctional clericalism and re-discover the reality that celibacy is a charism, a gift, given to a few. Its connection with ordination must be decisively broken.

We also need to remember that this present papacy will not last for ever. Particular papal agendas tend to be buried with the popes who invented them. At the same time we forget that such a large and traditional institution as the Catholic church is not changed in a decade, or even in a lifetime. But when the decisive move away from the old model comes, it will probably come suddenly and swiftly. But that will only happen if those of us upon whom the responsibility for the change rests are faithful to the process of handing on the tradition that we have received.

Information is a key element in the process. The great advantage that we have today is a democratic tradition and a free media. No wonder Pope Gregory XVI in the encyclical *Mirari vos* (1832) attacked 'that deleterious liberty, which can never be execrated and detested sufficiently, of printing and publishing writings of every kind'.

Fortunately, we live in a different kind of society where a free media is a protective shield against the arbitrary use of power, both political and ecclesiastical, and is a potent instrument in flushing out evil and illegal activities.

Already many laypeople, priests and bishops have freed themselves from chronic dependence on narcissistic clericalism. At the level of the ordinary church the people upon whom the real renewal will be built have already formed a new attitude to their faith. The answer is not to leave the church, but to hang on in order to move it in a direction that is genuinely and characteristically Christian.



But we should not fool ourselves that this will be easy. I agree with the diagnosis of the future outlined by Morris West in his 1994 Veech Lecture of (*Eureka Street*, August 1994). He says that 'under the present pontificate ... the schism of indifference will spread'.

On the one hand rigorist groups will emerge that are 'louder and more emphatic in their professions of allegiance to the ancient ways of the church by which it seems that many understand only what happened after the Council of Trent'. On the other hand we will see the growth of charismatic prayer groups.

> But the deep hurt and division within the church will remain within the post-Vatican II generation, who will see the fading of the hopes they had invested in the updating and renewal of the church. They will continue their tillage... but some of the heart will have gone from them ... Meantime by the mere fact of shortage of vocations the faithful will be distanced still further from the ministry of the word and of the sacrament.

West's picture is not optimistic, but it is realistic. However, it must always be contextualised by the hope that is at the core of our faith. And this hope will only be realised if Catholics are loyal to the truth that will eventually set us free. ■

**Paul Collins MSC** is a priest, writer and broadcaster and the author of *God's Earth. Religion as if Matter Really Mattered* (1995).

HUGH LUNN

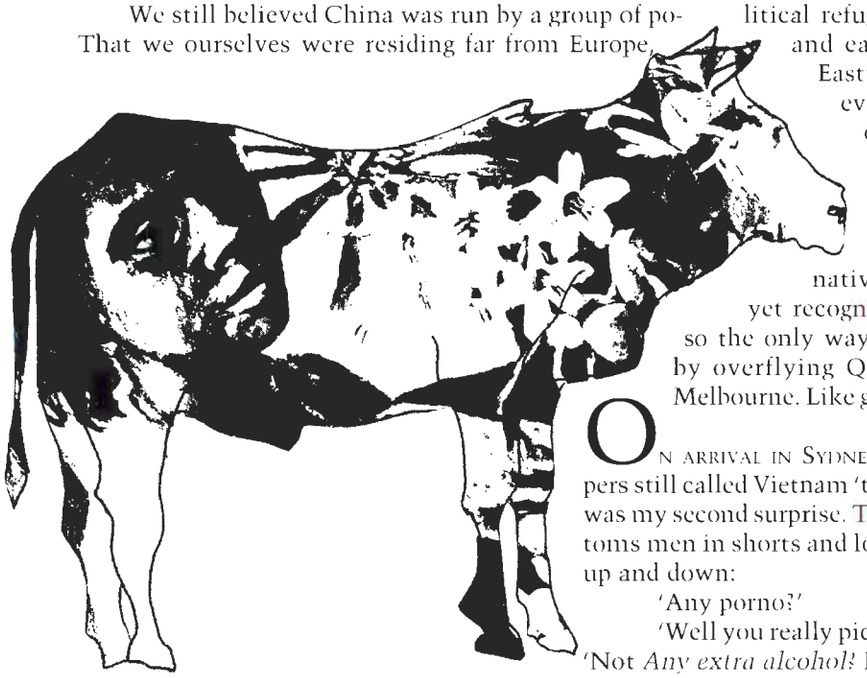
# Brisbanal

WHEN I RETURNED TO BRISBANE IN 1971 AFTER SEVEN YEARS' WRITING OVERSEAS, nothing much had changed. Stagnant cows stood in the paddocks next to the aerodrome; concrete air-raid shelters and horse troughs marked 'the shops'. The neo-classical City Hall stood out against a green tropical horizon, a pure blue sky, and anything Red was yet an enemy.

This was before clothes came with words on them. Before community organisations developed a desperate need for a logo, a sponsor, a slogan ... and a government building.

A time when Australia was, like the past, someplace else.

We still believed China was run by a group of political refugees inhabiting an island. That we ourselves were residing far from Europe, and east of Britain in 'The Far East'. In 1971, Australia hadn't even absorbed what the rest of the world had known for three years: that the Vietnam War was long and lost, and long lost.



In this time before native gardens, Qantas hadn't yet recognised the State of its birth: so the only way home from overseas was by overflying Queensland for Sydney or Melbourne. Like going to London via Iceland.

ON ARRIVAL IN SYDNEY, to my surprise newspapers still called Vietnam 'the Winnable War'. But that was my second surprise. The first was when two Customs men in shorts and long white socks looked me up and down:

'Any porno?'

'Well you really picked me, didn't you?' I said, 'Not *Any extra alcohol?* Not *Any gold?* Not *Any plants?* Or *Any pork sausages?*'

I knew that lots of things were banned in Australia: like roulette wheels, and that roulette wheel of life, homosexuality. Plus fortune-telling. And hundreds of books like *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *Lolita* and *Kama Sutra* and *Naked Lunch*. You could easily tell the books banned at home: they were all the ones you could buy in Paris.

The book I was carrying was *The Human Species* by an Oxford University professor of biology. I bought it after reading *The Naked Ape*. The Customs men took my book and, after a careful search, found a photo of a nude woman. I quickly read out the professor's scientific explanation for the photo on the opposite page.

'Say, that's pretty heavy stuff,' said a Customs man who handed it back.

It was going to get worse in Queensland. The Force was still with us. Queensland Police had not changed their title to Police Service. They were still rigorously enforcing laws against criminals who defamed Princes, let African women dancers perform topless, read tea leaves, collected *Playboy* magazine. It was, in short, the sort of place back then where you didn't really oughta step out of line.

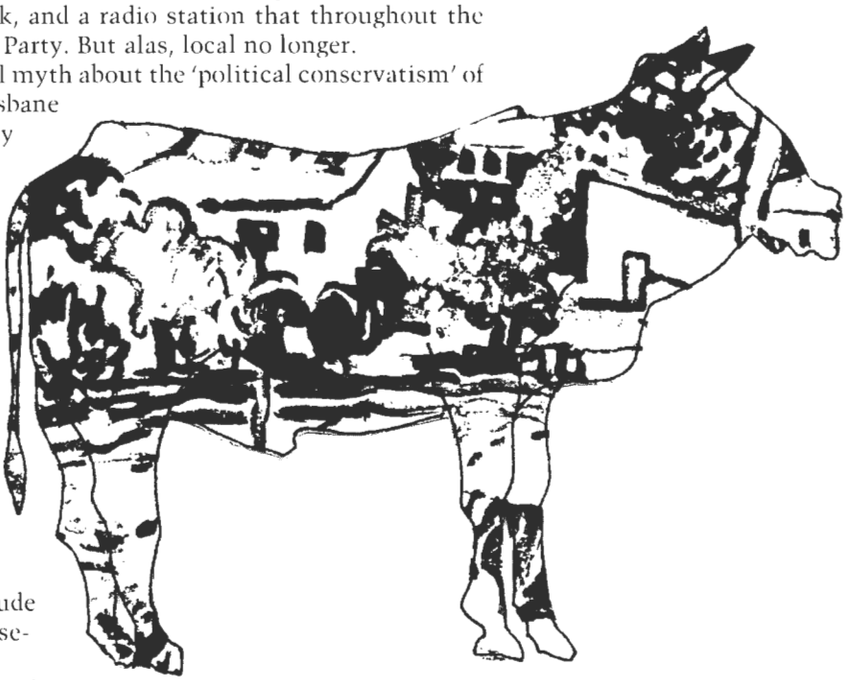
Unless you were a uni student. In 1971 not everyone went to university, so there was just one: the University of Queensland. And only the well-off or the brilliant went fulltime. I had spent five years trying to finish a degree at night in the early 1960's when male students wore shoes, trousers, and a white shirt and tie. But when I returned just seven years later, U of Q students wore thongs or sandals, had long hair, and dressed like hippies. While we had learned our lecture notes off by heart in order to pass, they dared to march through the streets against the democratically-elected minority-ruled oxymoronic state government.

These thoughts wafted like cigarette smoke through my mind in January as I paid $5 to park at Brisbane's latest concrete air raid shelter: the South Bank Cultural Centre. Strange that the Museum and the Art Gallery should be built on the debris and the clan memories of the Cremorne Theatre and the Blue Moor Roller Skating Rink—both vividly important in my 1950s' childhood.

THAT'S WHAT I WAS SUPPOSED TO BE HERE FOR. To remember Brisbane. To see the Queensland Art Gallery's exhibition titled: *A Time Remembered: Art in Brisbane 1950 to 1975*.

Inside the magnificent watery Gallery interior, a sign listed, of course, the sponsors: a Queensland bank, a Canadian-owned Australian TV network, and a radio station that throughout the period in question was Brisbane-owned. By the Labor Party. But alas, local no longer.

The Exhibition brochure was annoying. The usual myth about the 'political conservatism' of Brisbane compared with other Australian cities. Brisbane votes have always counted less, but, in fact, the city has a long history of voting ALP. And the brochures's reference to the circle of artists in Brisbane being 'more insular': much more likely that they were marginalised and ignored. Sydney is so parochial.



Is it true that the guards at the tick gates at Tweed Heads confiscated paintings from Queensland cars as well as fruit?

I didn't really get a sense of Brisbane remembered from the paintings on display. John Rigby's *Queens Street 1959* could have been Hong Kong 1964. Andrew Sibley's *City of Brisbane 1961* to me could have been from the Mediterranean: despite the domed copper roof of the City Hall. His *At the Show* was very evocative of the Ekka, but only if you knew what 'the Show' was. Gordon Shepherdson's few brushstrokes brilliantly capturing a nude woman (1972) could, of course, have come from elsewhere.

Portraits by Betty Churcher and Sam Fullbrook, and colourful abstracts by Roy Churcher, could have been from anywhere. For me, what made them especially Brisbane was that, during this time remembered, I once had afternoon tea with the Churchers at their home in Indooroopilly. Plus dinner one night with Sam Fullbrook *sans* bow tie at Auchenflower. Fullbrook's *Norman Behan 1966* was so outstanding I went to another part of the Gallery to see his connection with Matthew Flinders: his positive purple portrait of Ernestine Hill.

Maybe this is what gives art its sense of place: the comforting knowledge that great art is not just done someplace else. But can be, and is, done by the bloody people down the road. ■

**Hugh Lunn's** most recent book is *The Over the Top with Jim Album*.

REVIEW ESSAY

PETER STEELE

# Leaning towards the lyrical

**The Redress of Poetry: Oxford Lectures**, Seamus Heaney, Faber & Faber, Great Britain, 1995. ISBN 0 571 17562 7 RRP $35.00
**On the Laws of the Poetic Art**, Anthony Hecht, Princeton University Press, USA & Great Britain, 1995. ISBN 0 691 04363 9 RRP $59.95

IT IS A COMMONPLACE THAT WHEN POETS write at large about their art they are likely to be writing autobiography. Through their minds, as they speculate and formulate, swim memories of making—of a phrase, of a verbal cadence, of the honed and polished final thing. Anthony Hecht and Seamus Heaney, poets of uncommon reflectiveness and intelligence, take this for granted, and both turn the more-or-less inevitable to highly distinctive advantage. For all that Hecht's *On the Laws of the Poetic Art* and Heaney's *The Redress of Poetry* join the company of earlier celebrations of poetry, the air of each is that of someone who brings to the venture the freshened sensibility and pungency of intellect which one is accustomed to find in their poetry.

A natural avenue into these books, then, is via a poem by each. First, Hecht's 'A Cast of Light' (at a Father's Day picnic):

A maple bough of web-foot, golden greens,
Found by an angled shaft
Of late sunlight, disposed within that shed
Radiance, with brilliant, hoisted baldachins,
Pup tents and canopies by some underdraft
Flung up to scattered perches overhead,

These daubs of sourball lime, at floating rest,
Present to the loose wattage
Of heaven their limelit flukes, an artifice
Of archipelagian Islands of the Blessed,
And in all innocence pursue their cottage
Industry of photosynthesis.

Yet only for twenty minutes or so today,
On a summer afternoon,
Does the splendid lancet reach to them, or sink
To these dim bottoms, making its chancy way,
As through the barrier reef of some lagoon
In sea-green darkness, by a wavering chink,

Down, neatly probing like an accurate paw
Or a notched and beveled key,
Through the huge cave-roof of giant oak and pine.
And the heart goes numb in a tide of fear and awe
For those we cherish, their hopes, their frailty,
Their shadowy fate's unfathomable design.

And then, Heaney's 'The Pitchfork':

Of all implements, the pitchfork was the one
That came near to an imagined perfection:
When he tightened his raised hand and aimed with it,
It felt like a javelin, accurate and light.

So whether he played the warrior or the athlete
Or worked in earnest in the chaff and sweat,
He loved its grain of tapering, dark-flecked ash
Grown satiny from its own natural polish.

Riveted steel, turned timber, burnish, grain,
Smoothness, straightness, roundness, length and sheen.
Sweat-cured, sharpened, balanced, tested, fitted.
The springiness, the clip and dart of it.

And then when he thought of probes that reached the farthest,
He would see the shaft of a pitchfork sailing past
Evenly, imperturbably through space,
Its prongs starlit and absolutely soundless—

But has learned at last to follow that simple lead
Past its own aim, out to an other side
Where perfection—or nearness to it—is imagined
Not in the aiming but the opening hand.

Reading Hecht's poem, I find that a span of considerations comes to mind, each of them prompted by other work, early and late, of this remarkable fashioner and appraiser of experience. The first of these is what might be called a taste for supple formality. A Hecht poem never lolls, but nor does it merely put in time at a routine. A long time ago, military officialdom told me that morale was 'internalised discipline'; in Hecht's case, we see the obverse of this—that disciplined structure can be the expression of imaginative morale. The elaborate stanzas he has been making for a poetic lifetime brace, rather than constrict, the experience they attest. Part of the evidence for this is a frequent brio in rhyming—'green' twinned with 'baldachin', 'paw' with 'awe'—which is the natural show of imaginative élan.

THEN THERE IS THE PACKED CHARACTER of Hecht's writing. His poems, for all their tautness and thrust, are abrim with sounds, notions, sights, objects, perspectives. Some of this is adornment, and all the better for that, but what much of it attests is a density of being—something tightly-knit and compacted, through which intelligence tries to make its way, testing its own authority the while. Itemising may, in poetry as elsewhere, amount to nothing more than that, but it may also, as habitually it does in Hecht's work, be a way of identifying the pressure-points of comprehension. To linger, for instance, on 'perches', or on 'daubs', or on 'chinks' is to have this come home.

A third, crucial element in this poem is the omnipresence of light, or at least of our hunger for it. There are, literally, dozens of Hecht's poems in which the hankering for, or the rejoicing at, illumination has an intensity which one might associate either with Plato or with the writer of the first few verses of *Genesis*.

Here, light and life are virtually interchangeable notions, so that the gift or the withholding of the one is eloquent about the fortunes of the other. To speak of this address to light as though it were no more than a convention would be to miss the degree to which Hecht has made light's astounding beneficence his own. When, for instance, he invokes 'the splendid lancet', any motions he is going through are enjoined immediately by a force by which he is seized as originally as Benjamin Franklin was by the lightning.

Given such instances of vividness, of vitality—and it is, throughout, a *charged* poem—it is natural to notice how frequently expectations are raised, expectations of insight, of vindication in its various forms, of fit. Hecht is a master of this raising of the imaginative and conative ante: for all his decorum, he is a fueller of desire. But what often, as here, turns all dramatic is the inhibition, or at least the menacing, of desire. It is as if, in his imagination, *The Song of Songs* is the ante-room to *The Book of Job*—and this, not because of any sourness of spirit, but because the pitch of mortals towards immortality must inevitably be, if not confuted, at least chastened. The 'tide of fear and awe/ For those we cherish' exhibits all that is best in our spirit, and must in this poem as in life itself be held to up to the last, a 'shadowy fate's unfathomable design.'

I am in distinguished company in supposing that Hecht is the best of living American poets. Whatever of such ratings, it would be hard for anyone to deny Hecht's uncommon authority in the fierce testing of expectations in his poetry. If he is a verbal alchemist, one's eye, when reading him, is above all on the fiery crucible of event. No poet is less disposed simply to disport himself, or herself, than Hecht. Magus he may be, but if so it is as a magus of the terrible.

It would not be hard to establish a *convivium* between Hecht's poetry and Heaney's, but let me, instead, point to some representative features of 'The Pitchfork'. It is worth noting that it comes from a volume called *Seeing Things*, a title whose significance pivots between the physical and the intellectual,

the sensory and sense. This has always been Heaney's primary country: in or out of bogland, in or out of ancient occasions or modern encounters, he has been at the intersection of flesh and spirit. Objects hefted in his poems become the weightier for the handling, but the lighter for the comprehension. It is entirely in character that, within the first couple of lines of 'The Pitchfork', that tool should have the stockiness of an 'implement' and be able to point to 'an imagined perfection'. It is a kind of yardstick between the gripped and the comprehended.

CLOSELY CONNECTED WITH THIS is the sort of thing forwarded all through the third stanza—an interplay between nature's givens and human intervention. The steel neither made nor riveted itself, the timber had to be turned: and even though nature and artifice meet where the wood is 'sweat-cured', the very existence of the pitchfork is something tensional, recognised in 'The springiness, the clip and dart of it.' In everything he writes, whether in verse or in prose, Heaney has an eye to this tension, this blend. It is there when he speaks of speaking itself, or of speech's record: the human organism, voicing itself, is also voicing an intent, an intervention upon the natural and the social world. And it is there when (for instance) he writes of 'A Basket of Chestnuts' or of 'Wheels Within Wheels', where attention's rhythm moves between the world's givens and the mind's gifts.

Beyond scrutiny and analysis, there is relish. 'The Pitchfork' might, for a number of reasons, remind the reader of that important influence on Heaney's work, Hopkins, and not least Hopkins the savourer and celebrant. For the Irish poet, such policies and practices are at the heart of his venture: the poetry, like many of the things it encompasses, is prized for its own sweet sake. When he writes, 'So whether he played the warrior or the athlete/ Or worked in earnest in the chaff and sweat,' the play and the work have equal significance. This is in fact a major theme of the poetry as of the prose—the interplay between what Yeats called 'life's own self-delight' and what he called 'the spiritual intellect's great work.' Heaney's *The Redress of Poetry* resumes the question more frequently than any other, and in doing so pursues an enquiry which has engaged him for the whole of his writing life.

A last introductory point to be made about Heaney's work is touched by that word 'probes.' He is greatly given to the business of taking soundings, reaching into the untested, trying to get reverberations from another side. The context may be domestic, as in poems about water-divining or kite-flying: or political, as in handlings of Unionist or Republican, Ireland and England: or psychological, or metaphysical; but the demeanour is ordinarily one of high-keyed attentiveness, in hopes that something will break through to him, or he to it. In fact, the question of what 'probes that reached the farthest' might be, and how be attained, or recovered, is a staple of the poetry and, at least implicitly, of the prose. Just how the perfect probing is to be had 'Not in the aiming but the opening hand' is perhaps the question that engages Heaney most of all.

These sketchy outlines of poems and poets may help the understanding of things most at issue in their prose books. They are both highly skilled expounders, Heaney in such works as *Preoccupations* and *The Government of the Tongue*, and Hecht in *Obbligati* and in his large book on Auden's poetry, *The Hidden Law*. What they now offer are their modellings of poetry in its own right, and in relation either to other arts or to life at large. Hecht's is the more overtly systematic: it is the text of his Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, six pieces each of which tautens attention between different poles—'Poetry and Painting', 'Paradise and Wilderness', 'Public and Private art', and so on. Heaney's book offers ten of the fifteen lectures which he gave while Professor of Poetry at Oxford, and it, on a mere glance at the list of contents, also promises challenges: '... Extending the Alphabet', 'Orpheus in Ireland', 'A Torchlight Procession of One'—things, surely, will be astir here.

And so they are, in both cases. I have referred to such features of Hecht's poetry as its subtle formality, its packed character, its stake in light's presence, its raising and testing of expectations. But none of that would have led one to expect his first general epigraph to the book, a quotation from *Our Mutual Friend*, in which Mr Wegg says, 'when a person comes to grind off poetry night after night, it is but right he should expect to be paid for its weakening effect on his mind.' This is more than whimsy; it is a token of the esprit which informs Hecht's formidably-titled book. That spiritedness can show itself as edge—as when, for example, praising a poem called 'The Rebirth of Venus', by Mary Jo Salter, Hecht says, 'There is so much to admire about this poem that it only adds to the joy to think how much Plato would have hated it', or as when, in the chapter called 'Art and Morality', he observes that:

> Hazlitt wrote of the comedies of Sir Richard Steele (remembered in our time only as the author of polite essays) that they 'were the first that were written expressly with a view not to imitate the manners but to reform the morals of the age.' The consequence of this laudable missionary zeal is that nobody reads Steele's comedies, and any modern director who proposed to stage one would be suspected of lunacy.

But Hecht has never had Mephistopheles for sponsor, and the 'Spirit that denies' could no more have prompted this prose than he could have dealt out the poems. The 'imaginative morale' mentioned earlier has its best expression in poetry, but it is there to be seen, too, in Hecht's expounded insistence on drama and dialectic. When he says, after Schopenhauer, on the second page of his first chap-

ter, that 'The arts almost invariably express or embody conflicting impulses, not simply in their meanings but in their very natures', he is establishing a leitmotif for his book, but one which aspires to a subtler intellectual coherence rather than merely rejecting a coarser one. When, in his chapter on 'Poetry and Music', he quotes Robert Frost as saying of 'the figure a poem makes' that 'It has dénouement', he catches up in Frost's three words his own strong sense that pluriform experience need not issue in chaos—and is, in fact, forbidden this by any poet who knows the business.

Long-time beneficiaries of Hecht's poetry will recognise in this book many longstanding enthusiasms—not only for the grander human accomplishments and momentous institutions, but also for passing flourish, for the mind's flash and the heart's. It is entirely characteristic that 'A Cast of Light' should be located 'at a Father's Day picnic', with its combination of the festive, the poignant, and the transitory; all of us are consigned to live in time as our element, but it takes a Hecht to make it his métier. Again and again I have been struck by the ways in which, in his poetry, he alternates between plucking something from time's fire and re-inserting something in that fire for further tempering. It happens in 'A Cast of Light'—the title itself says so—but it also happens in the prose of this book. He says, for example, that:

> The intimacy of the linkage between architecture, number or proportion, and music was expressed in the Greek myth in which Amphion, by his skill in playing the harp, was able to summon the stones of the walls of Thebes to assume their proper places,

which accounts for the title of an early book of poetry, *A Summoning of Stones*, but also weds stability and mobility, founding and dance.

And it may be this above all that many readers will take from *On the Laws of the Poetic Art*—not the learning, so thoroughly appropriated, not the tempered passion, not the unillusioned relish, but the example of winged intelligence, often stricken, still flying. The last words of Hecht's last chapter, quoted from Yeats, refer to 'The beating down of the wise/ And great Art beaten down.' To be prepared to address that recurring development has always been the *pons asinorum* of the poet: Hecht makes it across, and on a grander beast than any ass.

*continued p42*

## The Western Canoe

*We are all in it together, paddling downstream*
*as in that clip from* Sanders of the River,
*but with no-one around to shout 'Come on Balliol!'*

*Undoubtedly, here's history in the Steiner sense,*
*so late into creativity that commentary*
*gets the prizes, the sexy must of lecturing.*

*And Bloom's great gun booms heartily*
*making up for all those snubs, and if he seems*
*a kosher butcher, at least he's not the Theory Fairy.*

*In truth, this is a well-equipped canoe,*
*brother to the Gulf War one, and in attrition*
*weakens Gibbon, the crew is laser-limning history.*

*Films are shown on board:* Sophocles' National Service,
Pico and Vico at the Deux Magots,
Alkan the Alien—*but what's so terribly difficult*

*is starting up afresh. How did they do it, Emily*
*and friends, out there in the sticks, knowing that a gang*
*of snobs and clerics had turned the signposts round.*

*Bliss in that dawn! And if our dawns are chemical*
*some things never change: a Suburban Sports Reporter*
*enjoys the engine capacity of a Dickens.*

*As the canoe beats the rapids to enter the vast*
*waters of the Eco Pool, drums are calling*
*for a TV war replete with ice and orphans.*

*Dangers of shoals and drifting debris, reading habits*
*of electronic shoppers—and for the academically-inclined*
*dropping buoys off in The Swamp of Likenesses.*

*It reminds us of Maurice Bowra cruising the Aegean—*
*Daphnis and Chloe Country for the educated—*
*and what are our lives but a narrative of metaphor?*

*Approaching us, a war canoe half Lady Murasaki,*
*half state-of-the-art modem, and in a dream*
*the 'Waratah' still on her maiden voyage.*

*Hot in headphones, brushing off the monkeys,*
*Mr. Kurtz hears what the King of Brobdingnag*
*told Gulliver. He'll reappear upriver.*

**Peter Porter**

As for things 'astir' in Heaney's book, consider a claim of George Santayana's: 'There are books in which the footnotes, or the comments scrawled by some reader's hand in the margin, are more interesting than the text. The world is one of these books.' Part of Heaney must want to take issue with this, the part that probes and embraces, the auditor of distant signals and vector of intimate communings. But another part, surnamed Orpheus, must make concessions: Heaney the intervener, the recipient of summonings, the triggered. Early in *The Redress of Poetry*, he plays the 'professor' in the strongest of senses, and writes:

> I want to profess the surprise of poetry as well as its reliability; I want to celebrate its given, unforeseeable thereness, the way it enters our field of vision and animates our physical and intelligent being in much the same way as those bird-shapes stencilled on the transparent surfaces of glass walls or windows must suddenly enter the vision and change the direction of the real birds' flight. In a flash the shapes register and transmit their unmistakable presence, so the birds veer off instinctively. An image of the living creatures has induced a totally salubrious swerve in the creatures themselves.

Now this really is dramatic: forms of alertness are seized, wielded, found consequential, prized, assayed: it is as if the physical pitchfork of Heaney's poem has become an instrument of the imagination, 'sharpened, balanced, tested, fitted', to catch things from the spill of experiences flung towards it. Or, to skew the metaphor in a way familiar to Heaney, the device that culls multiplicity becomes the device that inscribes it: fork, spear, sword, coulter, becomes pen.

In my opinion, which I would not want to father upon Heaney, it is just this practice of poetry which makes it seem to some demonic—this insistence upon dispersal and concentration, both, at once, again and again. I think that poetry is the drastic art, whose insignia lie sometimes in metaphor and sometimes in other devices or measures, but whose métier is the unappeasable. Considerable poetry both signals and precipitates considerable psychic shifts, and any Plato who desires an unperturbed commonwealth would be wise to preclude it. This is the order of attention which Heaney, like Hecht, brings to bear upon it: this is the 'shock of the new' which they look for in poetry of distinction, whatever its birth-certificate may say. Heaney, citing Keats's notion that poetry surprises by a fine excess, says that Keats:

> did not mean just a sensuous overabundance of description. What he also had in mind was a general gift for outstripping the reader's expectation, an inventiveness that cannot settle for the conventional notion that enough is enough, but always wants to extend the alphabet of emotional and technical expression.

Some readers of Heaney's book, having relished vividness of detail or felicity of notion in his poems, may be happy to pass on such matters, and may look for exemplification, small being beautiful. They will not be disappointed in *The Redress of Poetry*, where a phrase or a phoneme can be brought to deliver the goods. At the same time, and as befits the describer of 'a javelin, accurate and light', Heaney closes in on that least pretentious of poets, John Clare, saying:

> I am reminded of a remark made once by an Irish diplomat with regard to the wording of a certain document. 'This,' he said, 'is a minor point of major importance.' In a similar way, the successful outcome of any work of art depends upon the seeming effortlessness and surefingeredness with which such minor points are both established and despatched.

The traditional way of talking about a minor point of major importance is to say that it is cardinal—that the hulking door swings on the small, precisely-fixed hinge. There is a real sense in which the whole of Heaney's thought and art, like that of his looming, outgrown anticipator Yeats, works in virtue of just such hinges. It is the combination of precision of placement and liberty of swing that makes both for insight and elation in the gratified reader.

Heaney has been at the game too long, and in too dismaying a social and political milieu, to suppose that there is any magic to be had in its practice, or to issue from its display. In the last pages of his book, dated 23 November 1993, and therefore with much violence in mind across the Irish Sea, he says both, 'There is nothing extraordinary about the challenge to be in two minds', and (of the series of lectures):

> I wanted to affirm that within our individual selves we can reconcile two orders of knowledge which we might call the practical and the poetic; to affirm also that each form of knowledge redresses the other and that the frontier between them is there for the crossing.

It seems to me significant that two poets, originating in different circumstances, and blooded imaginatively in different wars, should so tenaciously be intent on coming to terms with what Hecht calls 'the contrariety of impulses'—significant, but not surprising. The dismaying, inescapable truth is that artists of distinction inscribe themselves in our personal being, in which, this side of the grave, there is no peace to be had. ■

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MARGARET SIMONS

# Regarding Helen

**The Demidenko Debate**, Andrew Riemer, Allen and Unwin, NSW, 1995. ISBN 1 86448 109 9 RRP $14.95
**The Demidenko Diary**, Natalie Jane Prior, Reed Books, Australia,1995. ISBN 1 86330 538 6 RRP $12.95

ON THE STEPS OF the New South Wales library during the Sydney Writers' Festival, I told Andrew Riemer that I had been given the task of writing about his book. He was encouraging. 'If you think it an evil and pernicious book, you say so,' he said. 'We have to get to the stage where we can criticise each other's work without it being personal.'

Recounting this conversation to a mutual acquaintance later in the day, I was told: 'He would have meant it, too. Don't doubt that he would have meant what he said.'

And I don't doubt it, because Riemer's book is largely a plea for a civilised and moderate debate, free from personal vilification. It was hard not to like the moral presence (a phrase to which I shall return) of this book. Riemer is rigorous and genuine. He is courageous in tackling issues many would be tempted to shirk. He is never shrill.

Nevertheless, I disagreed with many of his premises, and there were times when his book irritated me intensely.

One of the reasons the controversy over *The Hand that Signed the Paper* deserves our continuing attention is precisely because it is not *only* a literary scandal.

*The Hand* is a political novel—a rare thing in Australia, where the domestic and intimate are more common subjects. As well, the events which have surrounded its publication and promotion—Helen Darville's public statements, her pretences and her lies—are political and moral events as well as literary ones.

Riemer states that the Demidenko controversy 'raises questions about the moral and cultural health of our society', and I agree. Where we differ is that he sees this as a pressing reason why the debate should be contained within the limits, or at least grounded in, literary discourse. I see it as a reason why the debate should also be moral and political.

Riemer argues that to insist on a primarily literary, text-focused debate 'is not to take refuge behind irresponsible aestheticism...but to ensure that any condemnation will be conducted along rigorously argued lines, rather than being allowed to flow out of distress and outrage.'


He does not seem to consider that politics (in the broad sense of that word) can also be rigorously, if passionately, argued. He characterises the political debate as 'ideological', and as 'dogma'.

Riemer is sometimes squeamish and sometimes utterly horrified by this wider debate. Like Leonie Kramer, he describes much of the comment from the book's critics as totalitarian in nature, and an attack on freedom of speech.

I find this argument, which seems to be gaining ground, offensive.

Part of the problem, I think, lies in a failure to distinguish between those who abhor the book, but would defend the right to publish it, and the very few who have called for it to be suppressed and censored.

At a deeper level, Riemer seems to be suggesting that only certain kinds of discourse—literary, and moderate—deserve to be recognised as an exercise of one's rights in a liberal society. If you are too vehement, too strong in your opinions, too political, too determined to convince others, then you are not exercising freedom of speech but rather you are an agent of totalitarianism. You have broken the 'rules'.

But surely it is also breaking the 'rules' to suggest that those who vigorously disagree with you are, by this act, totalitarian? It seems odd that those who are most supportive of Helen Darville's right to publish her disturbing book are at the same time so intolerant of those who wish to publish criticism (whether or not it is well-founded) of the book, its author, and its supporters.

Riemer seems to want to both privilege and minimise the importance of literature. He asserts that *The Hand* is 'only a novel', and 'a mere novel' or 'no more than a book, a work of fiction', implying that it therefore should not have aroused much controversy.

It would be too crude a caricature to say that Riemer believes that only one sort of debate should be had—a literary debate—that being a debate that doesn't really matter in the wider world.

A better and more complex picture emerges from a middle chapter, where Riemer compares the views of Aristotle, who saw 'poetry' as being on a higher plane than ordinary

life, with those of Plato, who believed the arts were suspect, and should exist, if at all, only to serve society.

Riemer comes down on the side of Aristotle. Literature is a superior yet a delicate beast.

Speaking about the more vehement participants in the debate (Guy Rundle, Alan Dershowitz, Gerard Henderson and Louise Adler), Riemer says 'Literary culture is defenceless against such rigidity. The literary sensibility is attuned to ambiguities and paradoxes, to those aspects of the human experience where certainties and convictions fail.'

*As Riemer says, tolerance for views we abhor is a touchstone. However, the publishing of contrary views and strong criticism does not in itself constitute intolerance. It is simply part of the push and pull of free speech.*

Riemer has trouble understanding why those who were not personally touched by the Holocaust should have been so distressed by the book. He suggests various motives, including (and this is tentatively advanced) the involvement and influence of Melbourne's allegedly more sectarian and conservative Jewish community.

He also believes that the critics of *The Hand* have unfairly made this 'mere novel' bear the entire weight of their dislike for the spirit of the times: postmodernism, moral relativism, and the lack of respect for tradition and wisdom. Riemer shares the suspicion of these trends, but in the voices of more vehement commentators he sees no way forward. Only a futile desire to turn back the clock.

Riemer sees the Demidenko debate as almost entirely negative. 'The atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust [the debate] has created has done much to pollute cultural life: the fug will take a long time to clear. Hostility between the literary world and political analysts, commentators and journalists is more pronounced than at any time in the last thirty or forty years.' he says.

One might also remark that it is the first time for many years that the literary world has been involved in a political debate, and that this controversy is the first time in decades that political commentators, journalists and littérateurs have engaged with each other at all, or paid each other much attention.

Personally, I see these as good things, which is not to say that all the resulting debate has been sensible, fair or free of tedious self-righteousness. Of course heat as well as light has been generated. Such is the nature of strong disagreements about things that matter.

Is literature in the modern world really destined to remain in a sort of privileged ghetto of higher feelings, where the only discourse is between people of similarly attuned sensibilities? If so, then a novel is 'mere' indeed, and I imagine large numbers of people will give up reading them. Perhaps they already have.

ANYONE WITH A COMMITMENT to a liberal, free-thinking society can only agree with Riemer when he absolves the artist of the need to 'serve society' in the narrow sense, or to promulgate only those views acceptable to the dominant group in society.

As Riemer says, tolerance for views we abhor is a touchstone. However, the publishing of contrary views and strong criticism does not in itself constitute intolerance. It is simply part of the push and pull of free speech.

Riemer states (correctly) that Robert Manne, Henderson, Dershowitz and so on did not base their criticisms primarily on aesthetic judgments, but on ideological ones: 'That they were encouraged to do so may have been the result of their lack of familiarity with literary discourse, being lawyers, historians and media commentators whose interests do not usually engage with literary or cultural matters.'

I found this passage patronising. Stewing over it kept me awake for two hours. But just as I thought Riemer had terminally irritated me, I was taken aback by his courage and independence of thought. His discussion of the plagiarism allegations is the first sensible analysis I have seen.

Several instances of so-called plagiarism were in fact clumsily handled anecdotes from historical sources, which were acknowledged. Other instances were trivial and quite possibly accidental. Given that Helen Darville does have a record of plagiarism, it is possible that further evidence will emerge, but on the material to hand it is quite proper, as Riemer states, that the allegations concerning *The Hand* were dismissed.

Riemer also bravely and convincingly examines and criticises the claim that the Holocaust should be given a special place in the annals of horror and suffering. At every stage, he resists the temptation to oversimplify.

Focusing on the text, Riemer and the novel's critics disagree fundamentally in their reading. Where Robert Manne and others have found a 'lack of moral landscape'—a cold and almost pornographic retelling of horror with no authorial voice to condemn—Riemer interprets the book in the light of secular, sceptical 20th century literature, in which the God-like authorial voice is hardly ever employed, and irony is the only weapon left to the author to indicate moral stance.

Within these bounds, he finds that Darville did indeed indicate attitude through the overlapping voices of her characters. He also points to the occasional and sudden insertion of an omniscient authorial voice.

I differ from Riemer here. The 'slippage' in narrative voice seemed to me chiefly an indication of a writer not in control of her material. When it did indicate authorial attitude, I found the implications disturbing.

The book starts off being narrated by Fiona Kovalenko, who is researching her family history. Yet once the tale moves to Eastern Europe, we hear voices and gain knowledge that Fiona could not possibly have access to.

Judit, the doctor who refuses to treat Ukrainians on the grounds that she is not a vet, is the most obvious example of an unsourced 'voice'. She is also the only Jewish character who has a voice, and she is an example of the linking of Jews with the cruellest face of Communism.

The insertion of Judit's voice, together with other examples of

'slippage', undercuts claims that the text is about anti-Semitism, rather than being anti-Semitic in itself.

Riemer believes that the novel probably is anti-Semitic, 'but in a limited and on the whole tolerable sense'. By 'tolerable' I understand him to mean that since the book does not incite violence or race hatred, it falls within the spectrum of opinion and expression that ought to be tolerated by a liberal society.

It may be because I am a journalist (therefore by definition not used to the rules of literary debate), but in thinking about 'The Hand' I am not entirely able to separate the text from what I know of the author whom I met at the Varuna Writers' Centre when she was Helen Demidenko, before the controversy over her alleged anti-Semitism broke out.

When I told her how deeply the cold telling of horror in her book had disturbed me, she said she had to restrain what she described as a 'journalistic' impulse (she knew that I was a journalist). She said she had to resist the impulse to sensationalise, to 'make the readers throw up in their cornflakes'.

In a separate conversation, she talked about the youths of Logan City, who, she claimed, walked around wearing T-shirts with the slogan 'Shit Happens'. This, she implied, was the correct 'real life' way of regarding horror. Other attitudes were 'middle class'.

'Shit happens' is the modern equivalent of the Hobbes quote that appeared in the frontispiece of her book ...'the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish and short.' So I am more inclined to Manne's view—that the novel lacks moral landscape, or denies the existence of a moral landscape—than to Riemer's claim that Darville, albeit inexpertly, reveals a moral bias towards condemning the actions of her murderous characters.

Perhaps, in this debate, a distinction should be drawn between a 'moralising' novel, which is tedious and didactic, and a novel's moral presence.

I see no problem with an attempt to tell about evil from the evildoer's perspective, but the comparison with *The Hand* that springs to my mind is Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow*, which is also a product of the literary times in that irony and a perverse point of view are the only signals to authorial attitude.

Darville is, of course, younger and less skilful than Amis, so the comparison is unfair, but nevertheless there is a fundamental difference in the sensibilities of the two writers. Neither book 'moralises' in the narrow sense, but they have vastly different moral presences.

The moral presence of a book is, surely, a legitimate topic for both literary and political criticism.

Inspite of all my arguments with it, Riemer's book is a complex and valuable addition, not only to the debate over Demidenko, but also to a wider discussion about the spirit of our times. It is the first genuine attempt to focus the furore and put it in context, and should be read for that reason and many others.

One doubts whether it is ever possible to separate the author from the text, since


at present the main way used to bring a book to our attention is to promote the author.

In the case of *The Hand that Signed the Paper*, the motivation, character and public statements of Darville-Demidenko, particularly her claims regarding her fictitious family's persecution by Jews, are a proper topic for debate, even if some literary critics wish to maintain that the author is irrelevant to the text.

Whether or not the text itself is anti-Semitic (and Riemer and I agree that it probably is), it is fair to conclude from the interviews on the public record that Helen Demidenko was prejudiced against, and paranoid about, Jews. Whether these things are also true of Helen Darville is a more complicated question.

It remains of legitimate concern to the moral and political debate that while we know a great deal about a person called Demidenko, we know very little about Helen Darville.

FOR THAT REASON, I am less willing than some commentators to condemn Natalie Jane Prior's *The Demidenko Diary* out of hand. The book sheds some light on Darville and her motivations. If Prior can be trusted, the book shows a woman with a compulsive need to lie. It lends weight to the theory that she was self-deluded, rather than calculating.

Unfortunately, the *Diary* raises as many questions as it answers. 'I did not research this book. I lived it.' Prior says, and one can only agree.

Prior has breached implicit understandings of confidentiality. The only possible moral justification would be if the book served some overwhelming public interest. Unfortunately, the *Diary* fails this test, and can thus perhaps be regarded as a lost opportunity.

As well, the rushed editing has led to a bevy of grammatical and spelling mistakes, leading one to the suspicion that whatever the author intended, this book was rushed onto the market for less than public-spirited motives.

It may well be that there is a place for some quality journalism aimed at finding out more about Helen Darville. Probably, such a project would reveal more about the society in which she lives than it would about the author. Therein would lie its value.

*The Demidenko Diary* fails the test, appropriate to journalism though not to fiction, of public usefulness. ■

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ANDREW HAMILTON

# Satan's seed

THE DOINGS OF DEVILS inevitably makes more interesting reading than those of gods. For the office of destroying order encourages far more creativity than does that of merely maintaining it. Any book which claims to explain the origin of Satan therefore promises much, not least in the number of copies sold.

Elaine Pagels, a scholar of Gnosticism in the early church, has written an admirably clear book about the figure of Satan. While the book does not quite deliver the promise of its title, that it will define the origin of Satan, it does treat in an interesting way the way in which Satan and the demonic function in a range of Jewish and early Christian texts.

Pagels' interest in Satan reflects more than intellectual curiosity. It is sustained by a moral sense which is revolted by the murderous consequences of treating social groups as demonic. She is concerned that Christian tradition has encouraged this process, particularly in the development of anti-Semitism.

The focus of her book is therefore the social function of demonic imagery. She argues that Satan and the demonic come to assume a prominent place in religious language at times when social groups come into intense political or religious conflict. Where devils are claimed to inspire particular groups, the conflict of which they are part is written into heaven and becomes part of a cosmic conflict between the forces of good and evil. Persecution and war to the death are the logical consequences of such untrammelled conflict.Pagels traces this process through significant Jewish and Christian texts. Early Jewish texts present Satan as one of the God's ministers, who nevertheless places obstacles in the way of human beings. Such obstacles, of course, can be beneficial if they protect the good; other hindrances, like Job's sickness, are more ambivalent.

**The Origin of Satan,** Elaine Pagels, Random House, New York, 1995. ISBN 0 679 40140 7 RRP $39.95

Later, Satan was seen simply as the adversary, and was identified with the external powers that threatened the security of Israel. Some texts, however, identified the demonic fatefully with factions within the people—with what Pagels finely calls the intimate enemy. This process appears to have been resisted within the writing which forms the Old Testament canon, but later Jewish movements like that of the Essenes regularly characterise rival Jewish factions in demonic terms.

Pagels argues that the Christian Gospels, in particular, identify Satan and the demonic with the enemies of the community. This was not a necessary step, for early variants of the Jesus movement, such as the wisdom tradition reflected in the *Gospel of Thomas*, focus on the individual human heart.

But when the allegiance to the community and its fate are seen as of central importance to God's purposes, competing factions are readily identified with God's enemies.

Mark's Gospel, for example, reflected the struggle that followed the fall of Jerusalem, when many followers of Jesus were found among the Jewish groups struggling for the conscience and the correct interpretation of Judaism. Mark identified the Pharisees, the contemporary enemies of the Christian community with Satan, so associating the struggle of his own group with the cosmic struggle of God against evil.

The later canonical Gospels display a successively more hostile attitude to the Jews, whose association with demonic forces is also presented more dramatically. Moreover, Christian texts place later conflicts within the Christian community in the same matrix, depicting both pagans and heretics as the agents of Satan. But within Christian tradition, the demonic inspiration of enemies is cumulative, so that even after they cease to threaten the community, Jews, Romans and heretics retain their roles in the apocalyptic drama of God's struggle with evil.

Pagels concludes that Christian texts and communities have tended to treat their opponents as demonic and as beyond redemption because they associate them with malign opponents in a larger history. While she recognises within Christian texts countervailing strands, such as the command to love one's enemies and to pray for their conversion, she believes that the tendency to see enemies as satanic carries more weight, and so can be used to legitimise warfare or extermination.

PAGELS IS SURELY RIGHT to be concerned about the encouragement that persecutors have found in Christian texts which associate their victims with the devil. Her claim that any group which is seen as demonically inspired is vulnerable to persecution is also undeniable.

To put the point clearly, if Matthew and John had the opportunity to revise their Gospels today in full knowledge of the use which has been made of them, they would be morally obliged to amend their texts to protect Jews from the physical, and Christians from the moral, effects of an unintended misreading of them.

This claim, however, could be interpreted minimally in the sense that all authors whose texts become influential are hostage to their readers. Pagels, however, implies more than this, arguing that the authors of Christian texts bear a heavier responsibility, because they chose to associate rival groups with the demonic. They could have done otherwise, as indeed, did other early Christian groups who identified

Christian faith with personal enlightenment, and not with the survival and flourishing of a Christian sect. This identification, resulting from their turbulent society, led the Evangelists to see their enemies as God's enemies and as diabolically led.

This claim assumes a controverted view of Christian origins which is held widely, although not exclusively, by North American scholars. The view generally seeks the origins of beliefs in social conditions, and represents the Christianity of the early church as imposed upon the variety which is found in the books of the New Testament. These texts themselves compose a relatively narrow slice of the broader range of belief found in the sources and contemporary documents, like the *Gospel of Thomas.*

Many scholars, indeed, identify Jesus as an itinerant teacher of wisdom, and attribute to the Gospel writers the belief in the imminent coming of the kingdom as the decisive stage in the battle between good and evil. Mark is said to have written after the first Jewish war and to have represented in his Gospel the beleaguered position of his own community among both Jews and Romans.

I am not persuaded by this view of Christian beginnings because its foundations are so hypothetical. It is notoriously difficult, for example, to date and locate Mark's Gospel, and even if his Gospel was written after the Jewish war, it is impossible to say how this war affected his community and how he perceived its effects.

Furthermore, the sources on which Mark and the Evangelists are said to have relied cannot be found outside the Gospels themselves. They are an abstraction, with the result that an analysis of Christian belief before the writing of the texts, and especially one that separates from Jesus the belief in an imminent time of judgement on Israel, is highly tendentious. *The Gospel of Thomas,* moreover, is more naturally read as an attempt to turn the sayings of the canonical Gospels in a Gnostic direction than as representing faithfully an independent tradition that precedes them.

IN PARENTHESIS—to name my own prejudice—I am not persuaded by this account because it is too comfortable. If you were asked what view of Christianity would be congenial to departments in religion in the North American Academy, could you think of a hypothesis more satisfactory than that of an itinerant and counter-cultural preacher whose power lay in powerful and witty rhetoric, who was critical of the political, religious and academic establishments of his day, who directed himself to the individual conscience, and did not believe in an imminent judgment? And of a fluid movement whose original freedom in belief and organisation was gradually made sclerotic by an imposed uniformity of practice and doctrine? A worthy founder, no doubt, but would people give their lives to or for him?

For these reasons, positive or negative, the view that eschatological elements of the Gospel, with their demonic aspects, come from Jesus himself, even though they were sharpened by the Evangelists, still merits respect.

To say this, however, is to write the demonic into the heart of Christian origins and to deny the possibility of an earlier form of Christianity which is a demon-free zone. While the later Gospel writers might have been guilty of directing the demonic against the Jews, they did not introduce it into their texts. It is Christian faith which is guilty, and not simply individual texts.

I believe, however, that the matter is more nuanced than this. For when seen from a broader perspective than that adopted by Pagels, the Gospels set the demonic in a more complex context. For they attribute to demonic forces not only the work of hostile groups but also sickness and physical handicap. That this belief that all manifestations of evil, physical as well as social, can be identified with the demonic is the consequence of seeing at the heart of our experience a struggle between good and evil. Because so much is under the dominion of the forces of evil, the attribution to particular groups of demonic inspiration is less significant than it would be if they were more narrowly targeted.

The Gospels, moreover, do not place their emphasis precisely on the struggle between good and evil, but rather on God's decisive victory over evil. Christians therefore, live in a world where the victory has already been won, and are freed from desperation in their own struggle against evil. They can be confident that they have already won. So they are—logically, at least—entitled to take a relatively relaxed view even of groups who are agents of evil powers.

Finally, while the Gospels may present an increasing hostility to the Jews, they also contain an increasing emphasis on loving and forgiving of enemies. The Jesus of Luke's Gospel, for example, forgives

*'Instead of envisioning the power of evil as an alien force that threatens and invades human beings from outside, the author of [the Gospel of]* Philip *urges each person to recognise the evil within, and consciously eradicate it.'*

**—Elaine Pagels**

*Evil incarnate: detail from* The Betrayal *by Giotto, in the Arena Chapel, Padua.*

the Jews from the cross, while John identifies the following of Jesus with love. In the light of these emphases those who appeal to warrant from the Gospels to justify persecution are guilty of a wilful misreading of the texts as a whole. Furthermore, while the rhetoric of many later texts is vituperative, others depict Christians and Jews in courteous, if tense debate, despite the depth of the issues which are felt to be at stake.

These qualifications do not make the hostility to Jews any less deplorable or ameliorate its later consequences, but they show that it is neither as central, critical nor unmitigated a phenomenon as Pagels' narrow focus may seem to imply.

Coincidentally, while reading *The Origin of Satan*, I was also studying the treatment of asylum seekers, and was led to wonder what in fact is achieved for the victims of discrimination by unmasking Christian texts which have supported discrimination. When we survey the whole panorama of contemporary massacre, torture, imprisonment and persecution which is directed against disfavoured groups, how significant is the wrong interpretation of Christian texts?

From this perspective, xenophobia and factional bitterness appear characteristic of all societies, and are supported by a panoply of metaphors, of which demonic inspiration is only one. Nor are these metaphors necessarily influenced by Christian texts. The Chinese, for example, have referred independently to foreign devils, while other societies appeal to purity codes (foreigners smell!), to metaphors of health (foreigners are cancers in the body politic), or more recently to ecological metaphors (foreigners threaten the biosphere), or even by moral metaphors (unwanted strangers are queue-jumpers).

Moreover, even when we might reasonably suspect a European influence in contemporary horrors, this influence often owes more to currents of thought which vehemently rejected Christian texts than to those which cultivated them. Pol Pot's practice of government, for example, was surely influenced by his reading of the French Revolution. One of the remote factors in the massacre in Rwanda, too, may have been the Social Darwinism of the early colonists. They reputedly preferred Tutsis because they regarded them as Semitic and so as higher on the evolutionary scale. If therefore the roots of horror in our age lie in movements which unmasked Christian tasks last century, these roots are likely to remain undisturbed by similar unmasking in our century.

Certainly, I cannot conceive that imprisoned asylum seekers in Australia will gain much from analyses of this kind. The roots of their mistreatment do not lie in Christian texts, but in the myths of national sovereignty, national security and managerialism. The unmasking of Christian texts will do no more than provide a convenient scapegoat which assigns discredit of distant persecution, while distracting attention from evils closer to hand.

On the other hand, if Christian texts were to become a source of conventional wisdom about such matters as the assertion of human dignity and the costly command of love, it may be that a few prisoners would be set free. ■

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BOOKS: 3

JACK WATERFORD

# Whatever it takes

*'THROUGHOUT GRAHAM RICHARDSON'S TWENTY THREE YEARS IN POLITICAL LIFE, from his first days as a young party organiser in Sussex Street right through to his last days in the cabinet room, he never learnt the finer points of ethical behaviour. He had always traded in favours, mates and deals. There was little in his world that was black and white but there was a lot of grey. And it was in the grey areas, between the blurred lines of right and wrong, that Graham Richardson had always operated, both personally and professionally.'*

**— Marian Wilkinson**

**The Fixer: the untold story of Graham Richardson**, Marian Wilkinson, William Heinemann, Melbourne, 1996.
ISBN 0 85561 685 7 RRP $35.00

ANYONE WITH AN ULTIMATELY forgiving, even slightly amused view, of the internal machinations and corruptions of political parties, particularly the Australian Labor Party, would be well advised to read *The Fixer*. It tells you that some of the machine men play it hard, some of them very hard indeed. Some play it so hard in their pursuit of power that they will use violence, fraud and break the spirit of almost every law in the country, or they will use the services of men who will do it in their interest. Graham Richardson worked alongside such people and almost certainly knew more of what they did than has ever come out.

Marian Wilkinson has crafted a devastating indictment of Graham Richardson, for 23 years one of the major fixers in Australian politics. If she cannot quite fix him with the hardest deeds done behind the scenes, she can show him and his faction as the beneficiaries of the deeds, him as a close traveller of the doers, and as having the most elastic notions of

what is right and wrong when it comes to questions of power and influence. It also shows him shameless.

The shamelessness is such that one can imagine the subject actually enjoying the book. Whatever nastiness it may say or suggest about it, the book reinforces the view that he was a man of power and an unseen hand holding everything together. Graham Richardson has aways relished the image of toughness—willing to play politics past the conventional decencies—about him: it has helped make others fear him, and, even now, when he is formally out of politics, it brings him business.

It never seemed to do Graham Richardson great harm that there was a very dark side to the Labor Party to which he had close connections, from whose activities he always had the greatest difficulty in convincingly distancing himself, and which would stop at nothing to hold or to achieve power. Anyone who dealt in power as crudely as Graham Richardson knew that menaces were as much a part of the armoury as charm. Just how much he controlled those dark forces, or whether they controlled him, was always a matter of the deepest speculation. But that the forces existed, and that Richardson was associated with the exercise of their will was always clear enough—indeed he revelled in the unease and fear that this created and it was always at the base of his power.

In Labor politics, the real politics is at the base. Graham Richardson is best known for his machinations at the top levels of federal politics, not least his role in deposing two federal leaders of the party. In the NSW Party to which he came as an organiser and of which he ended as state secretary, the real action was at the trade union level. Control of trade unions meant votes in the councils of the parties, and majority control meant that when the party had power at local, state and federal levels it was able to pull the levers, particularly in rewarding friends and in punishing enemies.

Richardson was a tribalist of a somewhat different order from some other Labor politicians of his generation, such as Laurie Brereton and Paul Keating. His father was an active trade union secretary, most of whose waking days were involved in byzantine power struggles against both the left and forces of the National Civic Council. His household was a headquarters of such struggles and shifting alliances, and his son grew up watching the arm put on others, learning when and how much you could trust others, and leaning from experience some of the great mottoes—not least that 'no act of betrayal could ever be forgiven or forgotten.'

It involved, as many have commented, the politics of the tribe. It was also entirely devoid of any idealism—Graham Richardson, a child of the 1960s was entirely unmoved or unaffected by any of the currents of political ideas it threw up—and, so far as Richardson was concerned, it was entirely cynical. There were only two occasions in Richardson's career in which he was ever seen in association with any ideals and with both of them he went out of his way to be openly pragmatic. He embraced the environment, with some zeal and later a passion that surprised himself, but only because he saw it as part of a strategy of winning votes which were being lost, not least from people who had become disillusioned with the realpolitick of people like himself. And he embraced improvement in Aboriginal health, promising that he could do it when hundreds had failed. Within a month or so, he had to cut and run because the old ghosts looked as if they had finally caught up with him, and he abandoned the interest without a second thought.

The NSW right was always a breeding ground of ruthlessness and cynicism—sometimes the more so since they were pragmatic and organised primarily in reaction to

*Graham Richardson interviews Prime Minister Bob Hawke on Sydney radio 2KY, in September 1991, three months before Richardson backed Paul Keating's successful bid for the leadership.*

the left (for most of the 1970s the only engine room of ideas in the party). Brereton and Keating or Bob Carr could be as crude as Richardson in the expression of a lack of faith in ideas or ideals, but they always gave some impression of actually wanting to put power to some sort of end. Richardson was more effective in delivering power but mostly seemed to have little idea of what one then did with it, apart from favours for the mates who had made it all possible.

His focus was on numbers and on raising money. In Wilkinson's account the struggle for control of unions and party branches involved any amount of branch-stacking, use of false, and in some cases forged ballot papers, and in many cases cash obtained from businesses who wanted particular outcomes. Such money never figured in any published accounts but was available to fund union election campaigns. The other side was as accomplished in the dirty tricks, and the fights on the floor became extremely nasty with the bashing of the Left's own Richardson-like manipulator of the time, Peter Baldwin, no more than a good example of what was happening.

There were lots of murky figures in this dirty business, and one of Richardson's problems was that, in forming alliances with them, he often became enmeshed in their affairs and compromised by what they had done, which after all, had generally been in his interests as well as their own. He had, in any event, an attraction for and fascination with criminal rough trade, and was incapable of taking advice about being compromised. Sometimes, perhaps, tribal loyalties meant he could not betray them. Sometimes, perhaps, they actually had compromised at least a freedom of action: he was in their financial or moral debt and they knew too much.

Over more than a decade, some of the relationships began to unravel—Marian Wilkinson's skill is more in putting the threads back together than in describing anything hitherto unknown—but Richardson's power and Labor's capacity to use the power it had even to compromise the law meant that he always narrowly escaped.

The pettiest—and the most prevalent—form of the moral corruption involved turned on what providing open or secret party or faction funds delivered. Richardson was adamant that what he did was not corrupt. One could not buy favours. Getting favours ultimately turned on persuasion, not donations. But he made no bones about money buying access. Those who had shown themselves as friends could get access and a chance to put their view to anyone in the party. And the friends of the party undoubtedly prospered in their affairs.

The willingness to help was not confined to business donors. Richardson was willing to use his ministerial notepaper and his time to arrange introductions for friends and relatives, even at times to appear to negotiate on their behalf. It was the continual whiff of scandal about such interventions which eventually made him quit.

But does this reinforce the image of Richardson as the ultimate fixer? Not necessarily. Richardson played almost no role in the battles for ideas: even when he was marshalling numbers for those, such as Keating, who became interested in ideas, he rarely adopted them. His capacity to get numbers and party funds, and some


*Early days (above) : Graham Richardson, Annita Keating, Paul Keating and John Ducker. (NSW Labor Party archives)*
*Last days (right): Richardson with wife Cheryl and daughter Kate at his final NSW Labor conference. (News Ltd)*

gut campaigning instincts, may have helped Labor win the odd election, but the stench of just such power plays was for most of the period something which was also stripping votes from the party. The fascination of journalists with power plays—and Richardson's willingness not only to be a source but to have his role dramatised—sometimes made him seem far more important than he really was.

He is quoted as saying 'The Labor Party was my life. You've got to understand that. It was the whole of it. There was no time for any extension of your existence beyond its boundaries and so to further it, to get it over the line in an election, was what you lived for.' What does it profit ... ?'

Whether, by the end of his career, the end was worth it for others is another question. The party, thanks to brokers of his ilk, had lost much of its capacity to inspire people, though, perversely, that had the effect of increasing the power of machine men such as himself. By now, of course, Richardson is using his reputation for other ends, and has not seemed too discomfited by Labor's current problems. ■

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

BOOKS: 4

MICHAEL MCGIRR

# Strange talk

**Wish,** Peter Goldsworthy, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1995. ISBN 0207 189100 RRP $17.95

PETER GOLDSWORTHY WRITES with disturbing calm. One of his recent stories, 'Jesus wants me for a sunbeam', tells of an orderly family. There is a mum and a dad, a boy and a girl. They live conscientiously, reading good books to each other and turning their backs on any violence that may confront them on television. Sadly, the girl is diagnosed with leukaemia. Her slow demise is moving. Then, suddenly, the story gains what cricketers call an extra yard of pace. The dad decides to kill himself along with the girl so that wherever she is going she will not have to travel alone. The progression to this point is so logical, the prose so effortless, that it is difficult to count back and find the precise point at which moral chaos got in under the brick veneer: did the confusion start with a suicide pact seen on TV or with stories of sacrifice heard at church?

Goldsworthy's new book, *Wish*, similarly works towards an untoward finding. It does so with such a poker face that it implicitly dares the reader to fault one of the more bizarre endings in recent Australian fiction. Those familiar with Goldsworthy's *Honk if you are Jesus* will recognise the kind of brinkmanship he plays with plausibility. In that book, Dr Mara Fox becomes involved in a project of biological archaeology that makes *Jurassic Park* look flabby. She is head-hunted by Queensland's Schultz Bible College and works towards the re-creation firstly of the Tasmanian Tiger and ultimately of Jesus. Whilst the story takes current medical research and tips it ever-so-slightly over the edge of science fantasy, it is also a real-life satire of the kind of fundamentalism which woodenly believes that living creatures are exchangeable parts that can be moved from one historical context to another.

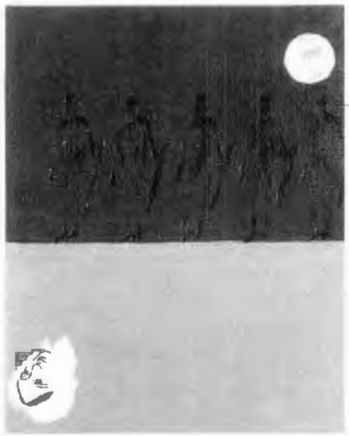
*Wish*, in the same vein, is as much about language as it is about the frontiers of biological science. J.J the story-teller, is the child of deaf parents. He grew up more comfortable in 'the dance of sign' than speech: 'even now I can say things with my hands that I could never squeeze into words'. He learnt English from television, translating movies for his parents with his hands. As he begins the story, he is tempted to draw shapes on the top corner of every page and let the reader flick them to create a 'jerky animation.' But, 'Sign is lifeless the moment it hits the page... it's no longer even Sign. Sign moves and breathes, whispers, shouts, pirouettes, jives.'

J.J's adult life is banal. His marriage has failed and he negotiates the relationship with his daughter, Rosie, with difficulty. His personal life is marked by awkwardness: he is a large man, lives at home with his parents and teaches Auslan (one of the versions of Sign) at an adult education institute.

Nevertheless, he strikes up a raport with two of his students, Stella and Clive, who have ostensibly joined the class to learn how to communicate with their daughter Eliza. As a guest at Stella and Clive's place he comes to learn that Eliza is, in fact, a gorilla. When she was *in utero*, she had the adrenal glands, which apparently limit the growth of the brain, removed. Now they have adopted her and intend bringing her up as a human. Once she learns Sign, she becomes capable of a full range of interactions with people. She and J.J fall in love.

Goldsworthy's characterisation works along clean lines. Nicknames are often used and tend to reduce characters to a single dimension. The gorilla knows her chubby boyfriend as 'Sweet-tooth', J.J's boss at school is called 'Miss-the-Point'. Clive is exclusively cerebral. Nevertheless, the book is vibrant because it is driven by a raft of dilemmas about human identity. Most novels work by creating recognition and association between the reader and a world which is, increasingly, not even a stone's throw of the imagination from where you happen to be sitting with the book. This is an exceptional novel because, ironically, it works by novelty. It is, in the strict sense, an essay. That is, it's a try on. ■

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





JIM DAVIDSON

# Eliza Fraser's mutating myth

**In the Wake of First Contact: The Eliza Fraser Stories**, Kay Schaffer, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1995.
ISBN 0 521 49577 6, RRP $35.00

EACH AGE CREATES its own myths, finds meaning in new figures. In our lifetimes we have seen the invention of the *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, first in a novel and then as a film, those schoolgirls almost becoming virgins sacrificed to the spirit of the land. We are now witnessing the first stages in the apotheosis of Lindy Chamberlain—now that an opera is being written about her—just as surely as the mythologisation of Ned Kelly started in the instant plays put on immediately after his capture. And what mythic ingredients the Chamberlain story has—the icon of the Rock enveloped by indigenous mysteries, the ambiguous dingo (an apology for a Grecian monster), and then the central figure of the maligned mother. Indeed the sense of persecution added to her own deep loss might eventually make Lindy an archetypal representation of the burdens of motherhood—her sense of endurance itself being very Australian.

Endurance is also the key to another Australian myth, the subject of Kay Schaffer's excellent study, *In the Wake of First Contact: The Eliza Fraser Stories*. Here, though, the element of myth-making, and just plain fibbing, was evident from the very beginning. Eliza Fraser was the survivor of the wreck of the Stirling Castle off the coast of Queensland in 1836, who spent some five weeks living with the Badtjala people before she was rescued. Eliza was not the only survivor, but she was the only woman among them, and therefore caught the public's imagination. (This was as well, for she was to draw freely upon her own). As the widow of the ship's late captain, wearing her widow's cap like a badge of office, Eliza Fraser represented not so much exalted womanhood but hearth and home to a colonising nation. She epitomised the soft under-belly of imperialism. Schaffer points out how universalist the terms of opprobrium visited on the Aborigines were, a point driven home by noting that once the story leapt across the Atlantic, the illustrations for the New York version of the story were remarkably similar to those for an American captivity narrative. In a Eurocentric world, Indians and Aborigines were virtually interchangeable.

By mid-century, however, Eliza Fraser had been virtually forgotten. The female figures of most use to Empire now were people like Grace Darling and Grace Bussell, who in England and Australia respectively put out to sea to rescue people from foundering ships. That was much more practical—and instructive—and so the two Graces, mere slips of girls, became as it were matrons of imperial maintenance.

So Eliza Fraser went into limbo and stayed there, first because she had been overtaken, and then because once the imperial drive slackened there was no framework to give the story added meaning. To Australians earlier this century she was but a curiosity: a shipwrecked sheila who had lived among the all-but-vanished blacks. When it began in the 1960s, the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* could not see its way to include her even as it trawled for 'samples of the Australian experience'. Indeed the first modern book directly addressing the subject was Michael Alexander's *Mrs Fraser on the Fatal Shore*, written by an Englishman.

What was needed was a new element of identification. That ominous shore, after all, was Australia—as perceived from the outside. For the story to acquire resonance once more, the old metropolitan standpoint had to be inverted. The person able and happy to do that was the painter Sidney Nolan, who heard the story from the locals when he went to Fraser Island in 1947. Having already demonstrated in the Ned Kelly series a gift for essentialism and a capacity to produce new ikonic forms, Nolan soon began on the first of four series of Mrs Fraser paintings.

Nolan had read all he could find on Mrs Fraser, and so had come across Russell's 1888 account of the story (erroneous, as is now generally


accepted) which ignores the achievement of the official rescue party, and instead endorses the claim of the convict Bracefell that he guided Mrs Fraser back to the settlement at Moreton Bay. This he had done in exchange for a promise of freedom—only once the journey's end was reached, Eliza threatened to denounce him to the authorities, and so he ran back into the bush. This

variant of the story answered Nolan's needs: the introduction of a male figure seemed to complete it, while the elements of bargain and betrayal added mythic force. Moreover, he could identify with Bracefell—a Ned Kelly of the north—and transfer to Mrs Fraser some of the hostility he now felt towards another Protestant lady trading on her class, Sunday Reed, whom he felt had betrayed his love. Bracefell was thus important as providing the leverage to make Mrs Fraser's an Australian story, rather than an imperial one; but it was a white Australian story. Aboriginal elements were marginalised, and remained so in Nolan's Fraser paintings until the very end of his life.

They remain so in what is the most famous literary treatment of the tale, Patrick White's *A Fringe of Leaves*. White's interest in Mrs Fraser was sparked by Nolan, and at one stage he had hoped that an Eliza Fraser opera (sets by Nolan, libretto by White, music by Sculthorpe) would open the Sydney Opera House. But it was in a novel that Eliza Fraser was to be transformed by White into Ellen Gluyas, and downgraded from a redoubtable gentlewoman to someone of lowborn country origins. The novel explores the unpeeling of Ellen, as she modulates from one station to the other and even beyond. In the process it becomes a metaphor for embracing the new environment (which offers up the Bracefell figure, Jack Chance). In *A Fringe of Leaves* the Eliza figure comes to see the arbitrariness of all social conventions, and to fully know and accept the darker side of her own nature. But she does not really integrate with the Aborigines. In the novel they remain unindividuated, unnamed, capable only of a chattering communality.

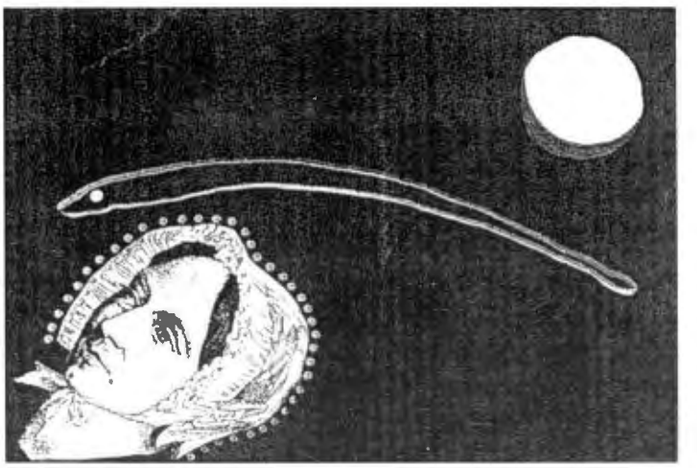
How very different is the novel by the Afrikaans writer Andre Brink, which also appeared in 1976 in its English version. *An Instant in the Wind* (like the Canadian Michael Ondaatje's long poem) was directly inspired by the Nolan treatment of the story, thanks to a Thames & Hudson monograph. Here the bargain struck assumes primal importance, for lady and convict in the African context become white woman and black man. The Eliza Fraser story—duly transposed to the eighteenth century—is made to carry the whole burden of South African race relations. Brink's is a fine novel, the pastoral elements provided by the seemingly empty African interior balancing anguished exchanges akin to those in Fugard's duologues. Each comes to see the complexities in their relationship, given the tainted values of the Cape they have come from. Here the betrayal comes across as particularly brutal, for effectively it is the long arm of the apartheid state, reaching back as well as reaching out. Endurance here takes on quite another meaning.

There is now an indigenous reading of the Eliza Fraser story. Fiona Foley is an acclaimed artist who comes from the Badtjala people of Fraser Island, and for her Eliza is simply the precursor of the disaster of white invasion. So the bonneted head of Mrs Fraser appears in many of her paintings—disembodied, guillotined even, sometimes upside down and placed in a corner, like a discarded queen's head. There is often a wry caption; and a juxtaposition with rat traps—perhaps alluding to the verminiferous spread of the invaders.

FOR THE REST OF US, though, Eliza now carries most meaning as the embodiment of a reconciliation myth. After all, we can't go back to Britain, despite Germaine Greer's recent urgings; rather, we have to make sense—humane intelligent sense—of our collective life on this continent.

Recent developments of the Eliza Fraser myth (as in Allan Marett's Noh drama, for example) are important for three reasons. First, they involve an acceptance of the land, together with a greater ease in it. As a corollary of that they have come to encourage, secondly, an acceptance by whites of the Aboriginal people (and hopefully the reverse). This in turn entails not repatriation for us, but reparation for them. Australia is in need of a reconciliation myth as much as South Africa, and thanks to the various shifts in interpretation that have occurred over the past fifty years, Eliza Fraser seems best able to provide it.

Kay Schaffer has done us a service by giving a detailed account of the whole story, from examining Mrs Fraser's background in the Orkneys and Sri Lanka (both of which she visited) to a thorough analysis of all the variations of the tale—including, for example, Tim Burstall's ockerish film. She has deconstructed elements of the story as it has been handed down, and has done so profitably—pointing out, for example, the scant evidence for the old chestnut that Eliza installed herself in a Hyde Park booth and charged people to have a look at her. Schaffer has also usefully taken on board the nature of pre-contact Aboriginal society, thereby demonstrating that a great deal of Mrs Fraser's hardships had to do with the harsh conditions all experienced, rather than being cruelties deliberately inflicted on her. One effect of this is that we might now begin to see more overtly feminist readings of the tale: hitherto, with stories still airborne of the cruelty of Eliza's treatment, one form of progressivism ran the risk of being ranged against another, the Aboriginal struggle. Still, there are moments where Schaffer seems to cross herself at every wayside shrine of political correctness, and engages in that exasperating tool of the literary critic, the word-surf for resonance and meaning. Nonetheless this remains an illuminating book. ■



*The various representations of Eliza Fraser, by Fiona Foley and a less scrupulous cover designer, are an additional pleasure in Schaffer's book.*

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JON GREENAWAY

# Notes on the blues

**The History of the Blues: the roots, the music, the people from Charley Patton to Robert Cray**, Francis Davis, London, Secker and Warburg, 1995. ISBN 0 436 20185 2 RRP$45.00

**The Picador Book of Blues and Jazz**, James Campbell (ed), London, Picador, 1995. ISBN 0 330 32755 0 RRP $39.95

As a 17-year-old with pretensions to being a bit of a lad, I used to venture with my schoolmates to an unfashionable pub in what was then the increasingly fashionable Sydney suburb of Balmain. The attraction was twofold—the tight and sweetly crafted rhythm and blues of the Foreday Riders and the opportunity it presented for a bit of adolescent bravado on Monday morning:

> 'What you do on the weekend?'
> 'Saw the 'Riders on Friday.'
> 'Don't they play at the Cat and Fiddle?
> 'Yep.'
> 'Isn't that the Bandidos' pub?'
> 'Yep.'

I never positively identified that crest, made infamous by the mid-80s gunfight with the Comancheros, much as I strained to make out the various names that adorned the backs of the biker jackets that passed by in the gloom. Once I thought I glimpsed it through the crowd, but it belonged to a fellow opening the door to let in two aging hippies. Since simple courtesies had to be beyond outlaws I paid it no regard.

*Muddy Waters...sang the anthemic* The blues had a baby and they called it rock 'n' roll. *Like all children it grew up and did things that made the parents scratch their heads in disbelief*

What we were thirsting for, in our naivety, was experience: the chance to be somewhere when something happens, thereby compressing our lives into a moment. To that end blues is something of an anthem. The familiar circularity of the chords and rhythms and the raw emotion of the music are universal constants, while the players add something to the mixture, joining it with the mood prevailing in the crowd. For an enthusiast, like myself, a good blues band can be a point of self-definition.

As many histories and biographies have noted, the blues (music possessing a 12-bar three-chord tonic structure) is much more than a musical genre. It sprang from the cultural weave of African-American sharecroppers in the south which matured in the urban ghettos of the north. Of course musicologists would argue, quite rightly, that all forms of music have a cultural base. Few however were as closely linked to a people as blues is to black American history, and why the poet and novelist Maya Angelou titled her story of growing up on the wrong side of the tracks in a southern town *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings*.

Francis Davis in *The History Of The Blues* is conscious of how the music was brought about by circumstance and is at his best when he tells tales of the legendary figures of the blues that fit into this overall picture. Quite often the early blues artists, or 'songsters', were only afforded the opportunity to play music because they could avoid hard work. Blind Lemon Jefferson, as his name suggests, could hardly see past his nose and so had licence to move around the south and play for black workers when they were cashed up after a harvest. Charley Patton—who, Davis suggests, would have become a much larger figure in the blues if the technology used to record him had

not been so poor—had a relatively wealthy step-father who ran a lumber hauling business. Davis records interviews with other blues men of the time who were sometimes spiteful in their remembrances but always referred to Patton as an influence. Son House, whose slide guitar has all the yearning the blues can offer, spoke in the 60s about that 'son of a bitch' who was always bragging about how many women he had bedded, strutting around on stage playing his guitar behind his head, and breaking time when he felt like it. Patton could well have been the first of that species now rendered all but extinct by the expansion of rap and hip hop: the guitar hero.

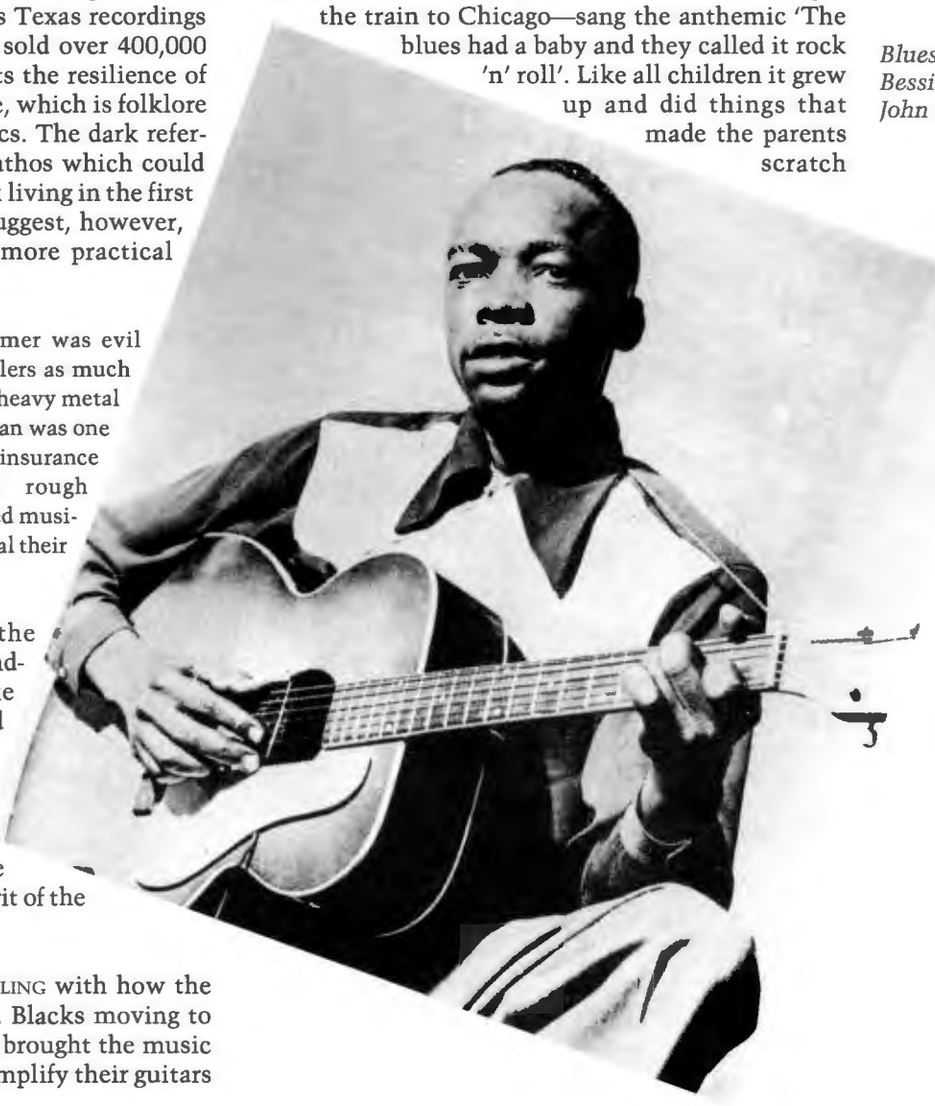
None has emerged from the pre-war era as large as Robert Johnson. Legend has it that after being laughed offstage as a young man, he learnt to play the blues by striking a Faustian bargain at the infamous crossroads. Keith Richards from the Rolling Stones believed Johnson to be so talented a guitarist as to be barely human, and Davis measures his stature by describing him as 'the great delta transcendentalist'. A reissue of his Texas recordings in 1990, 52 years after his death, sold over 400,000 copies in six months. Davis credits the resilience of his appeal to the mystery of his life, which is folklore in itself, and the power of his lyrics. The dark references and vocal tension have a pathos which could only be evoked by a Southern black living in the first half of this century. Davis does suggest, however, that his words may have had a more practical purpose:

> Maybe the notion that a performer was evil incarnate titillated juke joint revellers as much as it does the audiences for rap and heavy metal today. Or maybe the belief that a man was one of Satan's minions amounted to an insurance policy against some of the rough customers...many of whom regarded musicians as pampered dandies out to steal their women.

Davis delights in making the point that Johnson was not the founder of the blues and that he, like everyone else, played songs based on others' work. For Johnson, Charley Patton and the ever popular Big Bill Broonzy were the main sources. But he could easily have made a case for Johnson being the spirit of the blues.

THE BOOK HAS ITS PROBLEMS DEALING with how the blues changed after World War II. Blacks moving to northern towns in search of work brought the music with them and musicians had to amplify their guitars to compete with the noise in the bars and juke joints. Electrification spawned performers such as Little Richard, Jerry Lee Lewis and Elvis. The blues was also exposed to the influences of gospel and soul (the recordings of Brownie McGhee and Sonny Terry from the late '60s and early '70s bring them into effect beautifully). Muddy Waters, regarded as the unofficial King of the blues in the '50s and '60s—and one of the very bridges the music passed over, having learnt guitar from Son House back in the delta before he caught the train to Chicago—sang the anthemic 'The blues had a baby and they called it rock 'n' roll'. Like all children it grew up and did things that made the parents scratch

*None has emerged from the pre-war era as large as Robert Johnson. Legend has it that after being laughed offstage as a young man, he learnt to play the blues by striking a Faustian bargain at the infamous crossroads. Keith Richards from the Rolling Stones believed Johnson to be so talented a guitarist as to be barely human...*



*Blues greats: Bessie Smith and John Lee Hooker.*

their heads in disbelief. But in this case the child led to the rediscovery of mum and dad. The blues revival of the '60s brought whites to the music as listeners and performers, mass appeal, and in turn a lack of clarity about its cultural underpinnings.

Just how to define what the blues represented after whites got in on the act has troubled more writers than Davis, but most have made a better fist of it. His problem seems to be that he has not been able to overcome the myopia of the enthusiast (in his case directed towards five or six black performers) to regard white players as anything but fraudulent copies. This response usually indicates that the writer is 'in denial'. Not willing to admit that the blues is the musical equivalent of Latin, Davis claims the recent success of black guitarist Robert Cray proves the music can be revived again. Palpably frustrated at the lack of popularity of the blues amongst black America, Davis blames it on the pollution of the music by 'gloomy white guys'. Those who get closer to the mark concede that with a few notable exceptions, the blues has ceased to be living folk music. In its place is a self-sufficient musical genre, played by exponents who more often than not are faithful to its origins, which can still make its impact on an audience when performed well, no matter who is up there on the stage.

*The Story of the Blues* is mainly about men, since they came to dominate the music, however there is mention of Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey, popular singers of the '20s, particularly as the latter's 'Crazy Blues' was the first recording of what was called 'race music' by the record companies (a listen to Bessie Smith's 'Down-Hearted Blues' followed by Janis Joplin's 'Trouble In Mind' gives an indication of the lasting impact these women had). They were around at a time when blues and jazz were evolving from vaudeville, medicine and minstrel shows, and the distinction was less certain. Ownership of Smith and Rainey is competed for by blues and jazz historians alike.

SMITH AND RAINEY ARE WELL REPRESENTED in *The Picador Book of Blues and Jazz*. This eclectic volume, put together by Edinburgh jazz critic James Campbell, both confuses and delights. As a reflection on the nature of black music it is difficult to follow. A typical example of some of the strange juxtapositions that pop up in the book is an extract from Michael Ondaatje's *Coming through Slaughter* on the death of one of the early jazzmen Buddy Bolden, which rubs shoulders with a piece on the origins of the word 'jazz'. Light conjecture on etymology doesn't complement the heady prose of Ondaatje. It delights, though, by having such a broad resource. Expect to be titillated by it,but confused about its intentions.

One could be churlish and suggest that the presence of blues in the title is a token gesture—or a shrewd bit of marketing on the part of Picador—as Jazz dominates the volume (Campbell might defend himself by saying that 'blues' is an overarching cultural term often used to describe both strains, but ask any muso and they'd set you straight quick smart). The few pieces which do squeeze their way into the volume appear to have been rushed in at the last minute to fill up space. James Campbell seems to have used a more careful hand to pick the jazz-related writings but, hey, jazz always did get better press than its unsophisticated cousin from the backwoods.

An attraction of this volume is the great number of contributions from artists themselves. Billie Holiday describes life working the tables for coins before success came her way. Dizzy Gillespie tells a good one about how his trumpet was bent at a riotous party when a friend fell on it. Instead of cracking a fit he discovered he liked the sound. In a way it is the same story of others who used harmonicas the wrong way, jugs, washboards, and now turntables to make music. Anything near at hand had possibilities as an instrument, which is fitting, considering improvisation is at the heart of both blues and jazz. Included also are offerings from Eastern European musicians who describe jazz as a sort of mute protest against the social disciplines of Communism and Nazism.

There is not a great deal of commentary but then not much more is needed than that offered by Ralph Ellison in which he takes to task LeRoi Jones, author of *Blues People*. Ellison's *The Invisible Man* is a classic work which delves deeply into the African-American psyche and his critique praised Jones for pitching the book towards explaining the relationship between blacks and mainstream American culture through music. However, Ellison sensed that he had been overly empirical and had ignored some important observations for the sake of classification and definition:

> It is unfortunate that Jones thought it necessary to ignore the aesthetic nature of the blues in order to make his ideological point, for he might have come much closer had he considered the blues not as politics but as art. This would have still required the disciplines of anthropology and sociology...'

He continues:

> 'For the blues are not primarily concerned with civil rights or obvious political protest; they are an art form and thus a transcendence of those conditions created within the Negro community by the denial of social justice.'

Perhaps as younger generations of black Americans have turned away from them as forms of expression in favour of music with more obvious political protest, preserving blues and jazz as art forms does them the justice they deserve. Music is all things to all people—so let the band play on. ■

**Jon Greenaway** is the assistant editor of *Eureka Street*.

MARY LORD

# Split stage

TO THE INNOCENT OUTSIDER, the writing of biography may seem to be an intriguing task for the sedate and scholarly, a productive if passionless literary activity in which the discovery of unwelcome truths is unlikely and the dangers of speculation are few. Perhaps this is how Peter Fitzpatrick faced the massive task of researching a biography of Louis Esson, the so-called father of Australian drama, a major figure about whom, until now, surprisingly little was known.

Esson died in 1943 and there are people still alive who knew him, yet there remains much that Fitzpatrick was unable to uncover and about which we can only guess—his sources of income, for example.

I suspect it was not until his research was well advanced that Fitzpatrick discovered the importance of Esson's second wife, Hilda Bull, in promoting her husband's ideals, ideas and plays. And the more he learnt of the activities of this remarkable woman the more it would have become inescapable that she, as much as her husband, was entitled to a biographer's attention. Except for her editing of a memorial volume of some of her husband's plays, *The Southern Cross and Other Plays* (1946), Hilda Bull Esson finds no place even in a work as comprehensive as the *Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*. It was the existence of the memorial volume, along with a book of reminiscences and Esson letters published by Vance Palmer in 1948 (*Louis Esson and the Australian Theatre*) that kept Esson's contribution to our drama alive after he himself had died.

And so, propelled by the efforts of his wife and his best friend, literally the keepers of his flame, the legend of Louis Esson, pioneer of serious indigenous drama, took firm hold in spite of the fact that he never became a major dramatist and his list of first-rate plays is small. The legend has been sustained by a gradual recognition of Esson as a crusader, a socialist and a writer with a strong sense of purpose, one determined to contribute to the developing culture of his newly federated homeland. But this biography seriously qualifies the legend to reveal a man whose inadequacies outweigh his strengths to such an extent that he cannot successfully play the leading role in his own life. It may well be that his crusade was not so much self-generated as wished upon him.

**Pioneer Players: The Lives of Louis and Hilda Esson,**
Peter Fitzpatrick, Cambridge University Press, Australia, 1995.
ISBN 0 521 45010 1 RRP $29.95

He was born in Scotland in 1879 and raised in Melbourne by his unmarried aunts and uncles, in the home of his uncle, the artist John Ford Paterson. Louis was an indifferent scholar at Melbourne University but became a successful freelance writer, poet and essayist. His interest in the theatre seems to stem from his meeting with W.B.Yeats while he was on the European tour mandatory for young, affluent antipodeans at that time. Yeats urged him to work for an indigenous Australian drama which would depict real Australian life and define the true Australian character. He saw a promising model in the thriving drama emanating from Dublin's Abbey Theatre, a consciously Irish drama which had sprung up in reaction to the drawing-room dramas and comedies favoured by English audiences.

Back in Australia and fired with enthusiasm, he joined with other left-wing intellectuals, Vance Palmer and Stewart Macky, to form the Pioneer Players in 1921 with the shared aim of producing plays reflecting ordinary Australian life and recognisably Australian characters. Esson wrote plays for this group largely because there few or no plays around which reflected his ideals. He soon discovered that there was neither an audience for this kind of theatre, or the kind of creative criticism that would encourage one. The Players effectively came to an end in 1923.

Esson was in a predicament ironically reflected in the title of his most fully achieved full-length play, *The Time is Not Yet Ripe*, a witty and stylish political satire in the Shavian manner. It was unrealistic to expect the playwright to produce and direct his play, organise costumes and scenery, publicity, a venue and drum up an audience, yet this was how the Pioneers operated. It is

not surprising that they were undone by their amateurism.

After the collapse of the Pioneer Players, Esson continued to work at playwriting though his literary career was in decline and the Essons' finances were such that Hilda, a qualified doctor, at last took up her medical career. While the physically frail Louis was retreating into a myth of heroic failure, Hilda was pioneering in the field of immunology. She also formed a loving relationship with her superior, John Dale, a relationship she managed with exceptional tact and discretion. She also became a power in Melbourne's politically and theatrically radical New Theatre.

This book is so well-written and so interesting that it is difficult to review without giving an abbreviated version of the plot, because a well-plotted drama it is, complete with sub-plots, romantic love stories, mysteries, ironic reversals, tragic heroes and triumphant heroes. The lives of its two subjects sometimes run parallel and sometimes at tangents.

When Louis' sense of failure grew as the theatre offered him no opportunities and he vacated the field by moving north, he became a kind of elder statesman of Australian letters in Sydney. At his best, Louis was a lively and witty conversationalist with a capacity for inspiring loyalty. His gift for attracting friends like Vance and Nettie Palmer in his younger days continued when he was older and frailer in Sydney. He made new and true friends among the gatherings of the Fellowship of Australian Writers including Frank Dalby Davison, Xavier Herbert, Dymphna Cusack, the playwright Catherine Duncan and Miles Franklin. Although his separation from Hilda was accepted in the conventional sense, they wrote to each other every day. When she visited him in Sydney they were 'only good pals, not lovers'. Still he revelled in 'her companionship, her sympathy, her intelligence, her intuition, her joyousness [and] her fascinating personality' and 'missed her dreadfully' when she was gone.

Devotion to her husband's well-being and their shared ideals seems to have been a guiding principle in all Hilda's decisions. He was an inadequate husband and father and could be a neglectful friend, yet there was something in him which bound his admirers to him in spite of all. Louis always came first with her and after his death she continued to fight to gain him the recognition she believed was his due.

In the struggle for fairness and balance in this double biography, Fitzpatrick may have tipped the scales in Hilda's favour, which is certainly preferable to the dismissive mentions she has collected hitherto. However, Louis' slow decline into depression and withdrawal made him seem, even to himself, pallid and ineffectual. Yet his was the noble failure of a man who attempted to found a genuinely Australian theatre before the country was ripe for it. That his unwavering determination to swim against the commercial theatrical mainstream was premature and doomed to disappointment, does not reduce his significance in our cultural history nor the value of the plays he left us.

Hilda, for so long invisible on the public record, is accorded the fame she would have easily acquired in a less materialistic world than ours. The playwright Catherine Duncan wrote of her that:

> Hilda belongs to that rare company of cultivated beings without whom artists cannot exist and grow, and without whom no people can boast of a national culture.

Peter Fitzpatrick has unravelled all that can be discovered of the lives of these two idealists and left speculation about the blanks to his readers. A very wise move. ■

**Mary Lord** is a Melbourne writer whose biography of the novelist and playwright Hal Porter was published by Random House in 1993.


## Last call

*Leaving Las Vegas* dir. Mike Figgis (independent cinemas). Life is rarely seen through the bottom of a glass as elegantly as it is in *Leaving Las Vegas*. It's the story of a drunk's ride to oblivion, accompanied by a hooded but beautiful prostitute, through the Casinos and bars of Las Vegas. Alcoholics and street-girls tend to be over-represented in movies but what makes this film watchable is that someone has finally done it right.

Ben Sanderson (Nicolas Cage) is a failed script-writer in Hollywood who throws his belongings in the front yard, including a photo of his long-departed wife and son, and burns the lot. He jumps in his car with all his money and heads to Las Vegas to drink himself away. On his arrival he nearly runs a girl down in his drunken haze. After a chance reunion with Sera (Elizabeth Shue) during a more sober moment he asks her to sleep with him for $500. Instead they drink and talk. Sera comes to recognise in Ben's drunkenness the same resignation and acceptance of fate as in herself and tries to reach him as he gradually slides away.

The performances of Cage and Shue are well measured and to the point. At times their charisma obscures the seaminess of their characters, but the script and direction manage to remind the viewer of where things are at.

What makes this film so different is that it is not weighed down by the morals of conventionalism. We don't know their history and they're not trying to change or seek redemption for their wicked ways; they just are, and the rest is left to the viewer's imagination.

**—Jon Greenaway**

## No kidding

*To Die For* dir. Gus Van Sant (General release). 'Wicked' was the way Nicole Kidman described director Gus Van Sant (*Drugstore Cowboy, My Own Private Idaho)* amidst the 'ums' of her Golden Globe Best Actress acceptance speech. 'Wicked' denotes total evil; but it is also used in an affectionate sense to denote an ironic seemingly bad which is really good. 'Wicked' is a good description of this interesting and entertaining film.

American media, especially television, in an easy satiric target and some of the jokes here are quite obvious. But the clever surface humour covers quite some depth. In fact, I would suggest that this is an allegorical critique of the American white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant way of life. Kidman's Suzanne Scott (both pretty and lethal in pink) is the ingenuous upper-middle-class girl whose version of the American dream is to be on television. (What's the use of doing anything worthwhile if it's not seen?)

As her pre-packaged ambitions and her success-ethic ruthlessness take over, she will let nothing get in her way. People who are obstacles are seduced, discarded or murdered. The three unteachable teenagers she befriends and uses discover the difference between image and reality.

Nicole Kidman gives an assured performance, intelligently caricaturing the all-American TV weather girls (no 'ums' in her many speeches here). Buck Henry's screenplay presupposes knowledge of current US TV programming and uses the media (video and television) all through the film, especially as people in Suzanne's life are interviewed. Her parents and her husbands discuss the case in a talk show. Suzanne's own genuinely wicked interview is a highlight.

Many perfectly cast supporting actors, led by Matt Dillon as her nice, hapless husband, give a strength to what might have been uncontrolled farce. As it is, it is a witty, disciplined, black comedy.

**—Peter Malone MSC**

## Framed Jane

*Persuasion*, dir.Roger Michell (indpendent cinemas). 'Nothing happens! It's so flat and televisual,' moaned one ABC reviewer of this glowing adaption of one of literature's subtlest evocations of the currents of human feeling.

He has a point. Jane Austen wrote rotten film scripts. Too many words, and most of them double-edged. In *Persuasion* no disembowelling takes place. There isn't an icepick used for anything other than its intended purpose, and the camera doesn't luxuriate in exploding roses as Martin Scorsese did to give passion a *National Geographic* sheen in his *The Age of Innocence.* No one shoots a gun either, though you *can* hear

***Eureka Street***
**Film Competition**

Humphrey Bogart (above) looks a little worse for wear in this scene from John Huston's 1953 classic *Beat the Devil.* If you can name the film Bogart starred in which has just been remade, you're a chance to win the *Eureka Street* movie prize of $30.00.

P.S. If you can also tell us who co-starred with him, you'd be in with a better chance.

The winner of the December competition was Harry Coyle of Castle Hill, NSW who correctly picked Peter Finch as the only Australian actor to win an academy award with a posthumous gong for his role in *Newsfront.*

off-camera static from the Napoleonic wars. Mostly, men and women just live their lives, loving, loathing and despising one another. In place of 'action' you have to be satisfied with intensity.

It was quite enough for me: I've rarely been so richly satisfied in a cinema. Michell and his screen playwright, Nick Dear, understand the poignant urgency and the severity of this late novel of Jane Austen's and have given it rich and astute cinematic expression.

*Persuasion* is about second chances. Its heroine, Anne Elliot, allowed herself to be persuaded out of her first chance for an equal and passionate life with the man of her choice, Captain Frederick Wentworth (Ciaran Hinds manages to be both wholesome and saturnine in the role). When the film opens you register immediately the price of her prudent obedience. Michell begins with sailors rowing ashore in the flush of dawn and victory. Some of them, like Wentworth, have had their lives and prospects improved by war and seafaring. In Anne Elliot's home, Kellynch Hall, the only change is an enforced change of scene when her spendthrift family are forced to retrench by removing to Bath and letting their house to a prosperous admiral. Anne's world is the psychogically cramped one of a dependent second daughter of a vainglorious baronet whose life is given over to surfaces. In one splendid moment the camera catches him preening in his raised silver table knife.

*Kate Winslet, above, who plays a winsome and convincing Marianne in* Sense and Sensibility.

Michell's cast are all accomplished actors, some of them, like Corin Redgrave (as the incorrigibly venal Sir Walter Elliott) spectacularly so, but none of them is a star name. So there is the additional pleasure of discovery. Sophie Thompson, as Anne's hypochondriacal sister Mary, can make a prune of her mouth and a mess of her children's upbringing without becoming a complete monster. Michell has caught the register of Austen's charity and her unsentimental severity exactly.

The lives of these women and men are full of affection and familial jostle but hemmed in by circumstance and fraught with longing for a better, freer kind of life. The longing is focused in Anne, and in Amanda Root's fine performance you see it articulated in the subtle play of expression, or in intense, enclosed conversations between characters.

This is a film about duty and constraint, but it is a human comedy not a tragedy. Its rewards when they come—and they do—are pungent and unconstrained.

**—Morag Fraser**

# Dear Jane

*Sense and Sensibility* dir. Ang Lee (Hoyts Cinemas)

Dearest M.,

How Vext & Astonish'd I am you may judge for yourself when I tell you of the eagerly-awaited *Film* of my book. Altho' Mr. Lee's impressions of *Scenery* & *Dress* are irreproachable, yet the *reconstruction* of my tale for *Thespian Performance* left much to be desir'd. Indeed, despite finding much to praise in the *Outward Seeming* of the *Film*, there was that in the *Essence* which I scorned to claim as mine.

My story was prun'd, with a *certain Harshness*, by a Miss Emma Thompson, who, not content with her *Omissions*, then *inserted* some poor Inventions of her own fancy: the role of the Child, Margaret, being so expanded as to render her unrecognizable; & all to assist a long, gratuitous Phantasy concerning the early Acquaintance & Attachment of Elinor & Edward.

That same Miss T., who undertook the *onerous Task* of *improving* my work, also acted the role of Elinor. In it I fear she was as unable to conceal her want of Taste as her excess of Years (for indeed Elinor was scarce twenty-one by the *end* of the book)!

Let me not be *all* ungenerous, however great the provocation; the *young* Lady, Miss Kate Winslet, was in every way admirable as Marianne. Indeed, the other Actors were exactly in Looks as I had pictur'd, & when they were *allowed* speech of *my* creation, the experience was delightful.

But to excise utterly the parts of Anne Steele & Lady Middleton! To substitute for the dramatic *Midnight Visit of Willoughby* some fustian about Elinor's exhorting of her near-dying Sister to *'Please try, Marianne'*! To display Elinor in a violent Boo-hooing upon the receipt of the News that Edward was free! (In my book, I had her *retire decently* from the room before *giving way* to her Emotion.)

I staid from Politeness; but were I to name *this* Work anew, it should be *Nonsense & Insensibility*.

Yrs Aff'ly, J.

**—Juliette Hughes**

# Gangstar

*Get Shorty*, dir. Barry Sonnenfeld (Village). The revival of John Travolta's career—like Sean Connery, he improves with age—will always be dated from his appearance in Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*. But Sonnenfeld's gangster film, which gently spoofs the pretentions of Tarantino and other Hollywood luminaries, is actually a better showcase of Travolta's dramatic talents, and of much else besides.

Like *Pulp Fiction*, it is replete with allusions to other movies: sometimes deliberately invoked by characters in the film, sometimes as *hommages* for the delectation of film buffs. For this is a movie about movie-making, or to be more precise, about the sleazy, glitzy film factory that is Hollywood. *'Pulp Fiction* meets *The Player'*, some critic in need of a grab has perhaps already intoned, or even, 'By Tarantino out of the Coen brothers.'

Yet *Get Shorty* is actually by Sonnenfeld out of an Elmore Leonard novel, which is why it is much

more fun than any plod through post-modern pastiche with Tarantino, the Coens or the aging Robert Altman. All the buffery is mere flummery, and never obscures the fact that this is an exercise in what the old Hollywood, in the heyday of the gangster movie and the western, did best: narrative entertainment.

People who take film theory and other arcana seriously will do well to ask themselves why this tale from the middlebrow Mr Leonard dazzles, while the products of the Coen brothers' self-consciously erudite imagination seems increasingly leaden. Meanwhile the rest of us can sit back and enjoy watching a clutch of Hollywood stars co-operate as their usual screen *personae* are sent up rotten. Danny de Vito's pompous midget is memorable, and Gene Hackman's idiotic, would-be tough guy is even better.

**—Ray Cassin**

# Flamboyant grief

*The Flower of My Secret*, dir. Pedro Almodovar (independent cinemas) This is an unusually low-key Almodovar. All of his motifs and preoccupations are evident, but some of the more outrageously camp elements are only quoted, as it were. There is great attention to detail—sound is very important; the plot is as intricate as in his former movies, but this time there is a masterly sureness of touch.

The film opens with a counselling session. A woman is being informed that her 16-year-old son is brain-dead, and the question of organ donation is being broached, carefully. The woman cannot accept this; her grief and limited command of medical facts make her completely dependent on the two doctors. But nothing is as it seems on the surface in an Almodovar film, and this one has more depth than most.

Leocadia, a writer, (Marisa Paredes) must learn to accept that her marriage is dead, and must also deal with a crisis in her writing. It would be giving too much away to say exactly what the crisis is, but Almodovar explores all the implications with customary thoroughness, and a certain gentleness.

This is a splendid movie—funny, warm, honest, and beautifully made. There is a great richness in small observations—the clatter of the lacemakers' bobbins, a snippet of a contemporary flamenco ballet that has amazingly controlled Oedipal overtones (worth seeing for that alone). I hope Hollywood doesn't rip this one off the way they did when they transmogrified *Matador* into *Basic Instinct*.

**—Juliette Hughes**

# A hard row

*Dead Man Walking* dir. Tim Robbins (independent cinemas). Films about retribution and redemption are usually hard and fast action flicks that reserve far more time for the nerves than they do for the emotions. *Dead Man Walking*, Tim Robbins' second effort as director after *Bob Roberts*, is an exception. The private worlds of a group of people trying to come to terms with a violent crime are given such voice that the politically charged context of the story is but that—contextual.

Based on the true-to-life experience of Sr Helen Prejean (Susan Sarandon) it follows her through the changes as she is drawn from her work in a black housing project in New Orleans into the world of a convicted criminal, condemned to die for the murder of two young lovers. What begins as letter writing develops into a series of visits, in which Sr Helen gives support to Mathew Poncelet (Sean Penn) simply because she sees it as part of her mission to help the poor. As she becomes involved in Poncelet's cause to commute his death sentence, she is compelled to visit the victims' parents who are suffering for the loss of their children.

Sr Helen is torn between helping a forgotten man on death row and the innocent but equally neglected parents. In a confronting scene with the mother and father of the dead girl the resulting tension is played out beautifully.

Sarandon gives a driven performance of a deeply spiritual woman, who comforts people with very different pains. Her scenes with Sean Penn have some moments of real class. Tim Robbins balances this story delicately enough so that the rights and wrongs of capital punishment do not obscure the variety of human suffering that lie just beneath the surface. Helped by a fabulous soundtrack, he sets the mood for reflection well.

**—Jon Greenaway**

# Wood nymph

*Mighty Aphrodite* dir. Woody Allen (independent cinemas). Lenny Weinrib (Woody Allen) is a New York sportswriter. His wife, Amanda (Helena Bonham Carter), is an art curator who wants to own her own gallery.

Amanda wants children, but doesn't want to take a year away from her career, so, against Lenny's wishes, she adopts a baby. Both become devoted parents and their child, Max, turns out to be something of a whiz-kid.

As Amanda becomes more involved in her career, Lenny develops an obsession for finding Max's birth mother. He can't understand how people who could produce such a clever child would ever want to give him away.

His search leads him to Linda (Mira Sorvino), a talentless aspiring actor who works as a porn star and hooker to support herself. Despite her limitations Linda is unswervingly optimistic.

Lenny finds himself drawn into an unusual friendship. He plays a modern Henry Higgins, desperately trying to get Linda to give up her seedy life so when Max grows up and wants to look for his mother he won't be ashamed of her.

Every step of the way Lenny is accompanied by a Greek chorus, who slip between serious quotes from and flip, Allenesque lines.

*Mighty Aphrodite* lacks the sharp edge of *Bullets over Broadway* and *Husbands and Wives*, but Lenny is far less self-obsessed than many of Allen's previous leads. Perhaps as he ages he is becoming slightly less pessimistic about the future. Fans of Allen's previous work will enjoy this film and first timers won't be disappointed.

**—Nick Grace**


# Diminishing returns

WE ARE WATCHING LESS TELEVISION. It's official: the average of 22 hours or so admitted to by survey respondents has shown a drop of ten minutes a week since 1991. When you look at the latest election coverage it's hardly surprising that people are finding something else to do. After all, it's just a prolonged competition, like *Gladiators*, *Sale of the Century*, or even more like the annual dreariness of the Oscars, the Logies, the Golden Globe Awards and the Miss U.S.A. Pageant.

Politicians are not so attractive, or athletic, or knowledgeable. Perhaps we're tired of the sight and sound of them auctioning off the last rags of their souls. There has been little drama or heart in the campaign—competition between the journalists has been just as fierce, just as public and almost more interesting. John Howard insisted on Ray Martin and Channel Nine for the Great Debate, giving himself the appearance of a certain obstinate cowardice—Kerry O'Brien would surely feed him to Keating, the Big Bad Wolf. So the national carrier was deprived of the opportunity to host the meeting of our national contenders for power.

The debate probably got better ratings that way—there are tellies out here in viewer land that have had no neural pathways for Channel Two since Kerry bought the cricket. And it wasn't a joyride for Howard—Ray Martin acted tough: he had something to prove if he ever wanted another Logie. In subsequent encounters with Howard his manner bordered on the truculent, without, however, causing any great discomfort to either side. Keating surfed his questions with a practised dodginess available only to instinctive performers. Howard, on the other hand, looked dreadful for the first few minutes until the adrenalin subsided. His voice shook, and whenever the going was tough his mouth stretched into a grin of assumed amusement, contradicted by the line of white around the irises behind the glasses. Keating adopted the pugilist stance: jaw jutting, arms folded tightly. No-one was getting past *him*.

A pity then, that he failed to capitalise on an open misère given by Howard's assertion that he was going to solve youth unemployment by removing the fetter of unfair dismissal laws from small business. The obvious rejoinder (one that Kerry O'Brien surely wouldn't have missed even if Keating and Martin did) was that *surely* he couldn't mean that employers were going to be able yet again to sack staff as they turned 18 in order to hire cheap juniors. The fat would have been fairly in the fire then, and it would have been a better, bloodier show. (But I'm forced to watch SBS for really violent excitement. The Japanese manga *Ninja Scroll* was truly appalling in its Tarantino-like goriness—after all, he's a Wayne Wang fan—and yet had an extraordinary beauty...)

*Four Corners*' exploration of John Howard was better viewing. The similar program on Keating was not so good, fewer insights, rather anodyne in its predictability. But Liz Jackson got the bit between her teeth and went after Howard about his changes of direction. It was really amusing to watch the interchanges, which went along these lines:

Liz (intently, leaning forward a little): Why have you changed on X?

Howard( leaning back, face set): I haven't changed on X at all.

Liz (reading from some research on her knee): But you said in 1994 that X was terrible.

Howard: Er, I don't recall saying that at all.

And so on.

The program was clever in subtle ways: shots of him campaigning for the Liberals around 1966 showed a nerdy young zealot, full of a kind of enthusiasm that is tempered now—not so much the ideologue as the would-be demagogue. That he has had plenty of image-makeover folk talking to him was shown in the rather pathetic way he described himself to Liz Jackson in terms such as, 'I'm an honest type' etc.

The snippets with Peacock, and a Very Smooth adviser, showed why he has had to wait until now to get his run. The 'L.A. Law' men (in the Great Debate Howard accused Keating of being an 'L.A.*W*. Law' character) exist in Howard's party too. And Malcolm Fraser's impassive endorsement lacked the enthusiasm of the very old stagers who agreed with the 'Honest John' image.

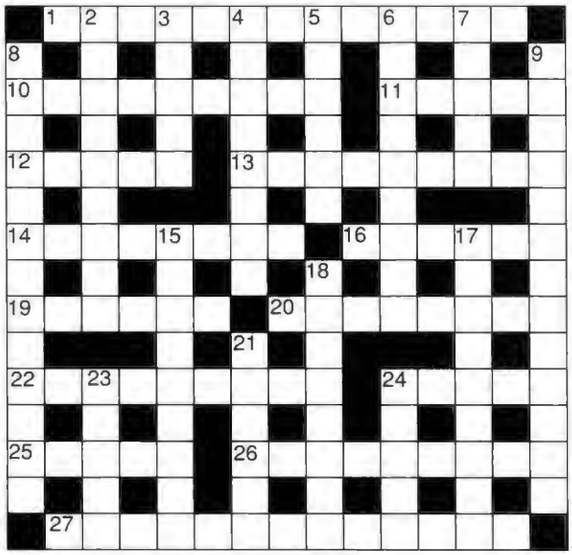
HOWARD HAD BEEN THE KIND OF YOUNG MAN that the *old* men of the party liked: a solid, conservative young fellow, not a dasher, a reliable young chap. The program suggested, without ever having to come right out and say it, that winning office might be less difficult for Howard than keeping it.

Miss U.S.A. at least knows she's only got a year in office. All she has to do is avoid pregnancy, too-obvious affairs with politicians and keep her weight down and then she can relax. This year Miss Louisiana won, in a gown that looked more like a mummy-bandage with holes, after saying in answer to the Big Question (Do you think Women's Liberation has gone far enough?) posed by the judges to the three finalists, 'Oh yeahs! We hev *arrahved*!' Just shows what Not Being Negative can do for a gal. ■

**Juliette Hughes** is a freelance writer and reviewer.


# *Eureka Street* Cryptic Crossword no. 41, March 1996

**Devised by Joan Nowotny IBVM**



ACROSS

1 First-rate clergyman who wins the party prize? (5,8)
10 Nowadays fit and powerful enough to adjust to different conditions. (9)
11 Public relations fuss at the Museum! (5)
12 Set up a working party in the part of La Scala Borgia used. (5)
13 Perhaps it's a rebel who ultimately frees his countrymen. (9)
14 Because a job consumed all his time, he became a non-believer. (8)
16 Sailor on a boulevard in a foreign land. (6)
19 The eastern heavens are bright, the picnic is prepared in cool storage. (6)
20 Southern voter is choosy, perhaps. (8)
22 After a broken rest, dines as usual though afflicted with fatigue. (9)
24 Left about the beginning of Easter and went fast. (5)
25 Possibly I'd air my grievances if my arm-bones were broken. (5)
26 On the left of the manuscript is the leather case. (9)
27 In this re-constituted house, girls can go in for probing their inner selves. (4-9)

DOWN

2 An accident could cause this—blood, rack and ruin everywhere. (9)
3 A second on the hill is enough for this vehicle. (5)
4 With a change of leader, the aristocracy achieve facility of movement. (8)
5 Has poor Ed been in trouble? He can get help if ___ ___ . (4,2)
6 The spoilt pears are such that they can be divided. (9)
7 Decree token action included therein to be lawful. (5)
8 By a new arrangement, I am nearly part of this democratic process. (13)
9 A large number on the team have a fixed allowance, it's thought. (13)
15 Trample on philosopher of liberty for promoting such a monotonous routine? (9)
17 Help Anton, who's confused, find the place marked here. (2,3,4)
18 He can tell me a more certain way to make calculations about size and shape. (8)
21 Folk who plop around with ease, apparently! (6)
23 Road I travelled in search of a transmitter. (5)
24 The A.I. generation of computers? Or a Beethoven symphony? (5)

**Solution to Crossword no. 40, January-February 1996**

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