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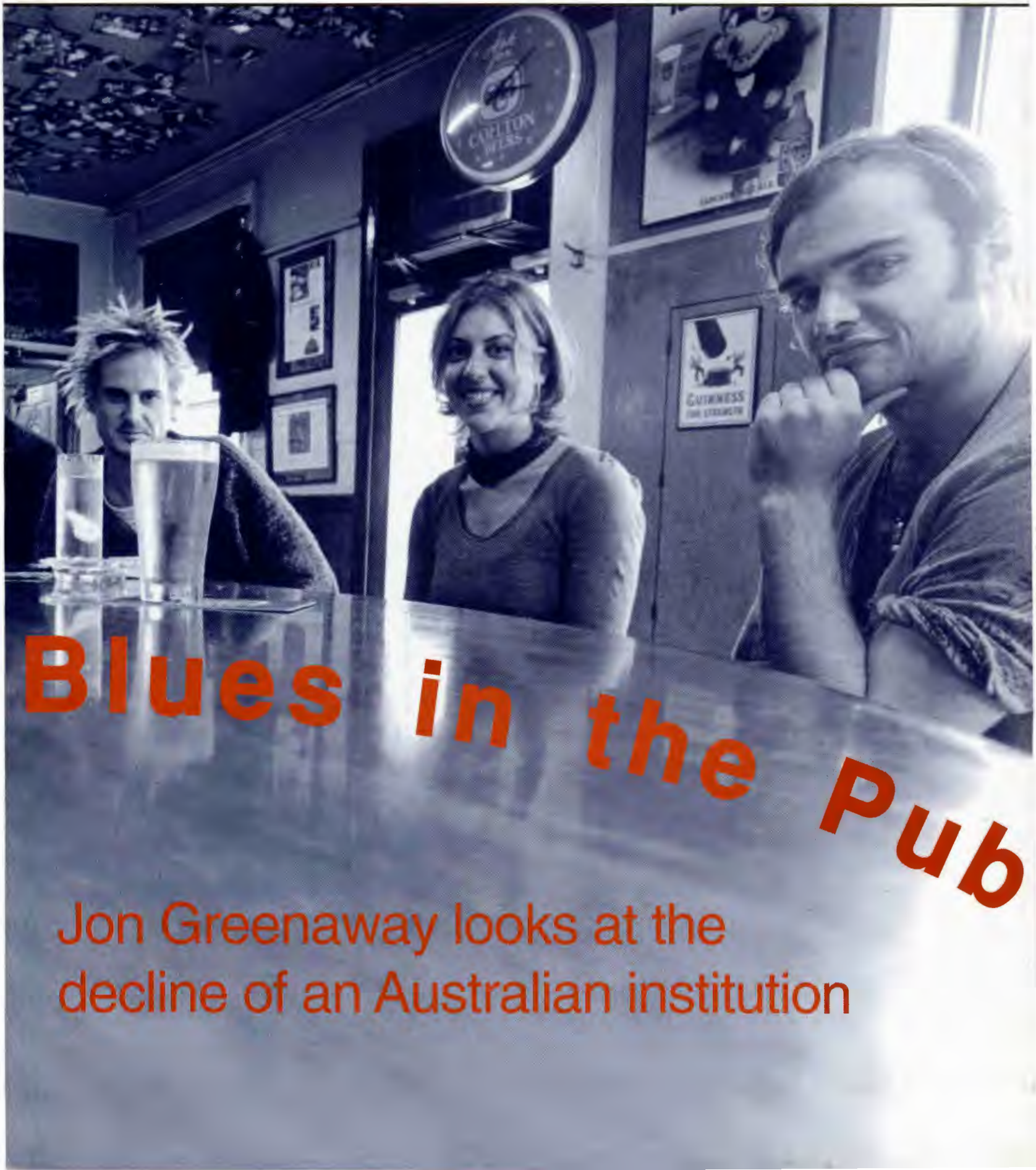

Blues in the Pub

Jon Greenaway looks at the decline of an Australian institution

EUREKA STREET

A magazine of public affairs, the arts and theology

Volume 6 Number 4
May 1996

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Towards 2001:

'Decisions such as the High Court's decision in Mabo *show how major social issues can be thrust before the courts for a solution if a political one is not devised ... while I suspect that the Australian community will continue to accept the High Court's decisions, one cannot assume that that would be so'.*

—John Doyle
Chief Justice of South Australia
See *Balancing acts*, p18.

Cover: An inner city local, the All Nations Hotel, one of a rare breed.
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COMMENT

PETER NORDEN

Dealing truths

VICTORIA'S KENNETT GOVERNMENT is not known for taking a holistic approach to social and community needs. However, the report of the Premier's Drug Advisory Council on the use of illicit drugs does just this. Its chairperson, Professor David Penington, former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Melbourne, privately acknowledged the prejudices about illegal drug use that he brought to the investigation as it commenced late last year. However, the 73 recommendations contained in the report made available in April of this year have surprised many social commentators.

Confronting the extent of illegal drug use in Australia was one of the factors that shaped the views of Penington and his advisers on the Drug Advisory Council. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare estimated that in 1990, 59,000 Australians were regular users of heroin, and a further 113,000 were irregular users. This estimation would suggest that two per cent of the 15 to 44-year-old Australian population have used heroin.

In contrast, the Victorian figures, as identified by studies by the Department of Health and Community Services in 1992 and the study by the National Drug Household Survey in 1995, indicate that 29 per cent of Victorians have smoked marijuana and that 12 per cent of the population smoked marijuana during the last twelve months.

Drug-related deaths in Victoria now approach, in number, the deaths due to traffic accidents, yet the government spent only $1.6 million last year on drug education, compared to more than $100 million on preventing road deaths.The vast proportion of drug offences related to cannabis rather than other illicit drugs, and most of these were for possession rather than trafficking.

It was this state of affairs that prompted the Premier's Drug Advisory Council to report that the present situation of drug control was simply not working. They came to a shared view that changes were necessary to policies, legislation and services if the community was to contain the problem, and, in time, to reduce the harm being caused by drugs.

As the Council's report stated: 'the emphasis must be on reducing demand, encouraging treatment, support and rehabilitation where possible, and concentrating law enforcement resources to curb the supply of all illicit drugs'.

There has been widespread public reaction and debate to the Penington report, just as there had been much community interest and participation in the three-month consultative process that formed part of the investigation. But the focus of public reaction and debate has centred, predictably, on the report's recommendation of the decriminalisation of possession of up to 25 grams of cannabis and of the cultivation per household of up to five marijuana plants, both for personal use alone.

Overlooked in this debate has been the report's emphasis on efforts to reduce demand for drugs and the education

of the wider community on the nature and danger of drug abuse. Many who have participated most vigorously in the debate have themselves failed to read the report.

The Premier initially indicated to the Council members that their recommendations would be accepted by the government. He delayed the publication of the report, however, until after the State election, and then dissociated himself from this earlier commitment, allowing the recommendations to be debated publicly and offering a conscience vote to the members of his party.

In the days following the release of the report there was much lobbying of local parliamentary representatives with arguments against the decriminalisation proposal. Such lobby groups seemed to disregard the present reality, in which 47 per cent of male Year 11 students and 37 per cent of females were found to be smoking marijuana. In the existing circumstances these students run the risk of criminal conviction for possession. They also risk associating with criminal elements who deal the drugs and who, more often than not, also offer a choice of heroin, amphetamines or ecstasy.

Many in our community cling to the hope that prohibition of drugs currently classified as illegal will solve our problems. Many believe that decriminalisation of marijuana for personal use will lead to increased use among young people and more widespread heroin use in our society. It was therefore illuminating to learn from the Penington Report that current marijuana use in Victoria is estimated to be higher than in the Netherlands, where some 2500 'coffee shops' are permitted to sell marijuana openly, but only 27 per cent of its citizens have used the substance. The United States, on the other hand, represents the harshest model of prohibition and reliance on law and order control measures. This has resulted in the criminalisation of high numbers of young Afro-American males, a dramatic increase in the national prison population—to over 2 million citizens—and an expanding population of people dependent on illicit drugs.

Singapore, since 1988, has regarded drug abuse as a social and behavioural problem, imposing hefty penalties on drug dealers, but allowing drug dependent persons to bypass the court system and the stigma of criminal conviction, and directing them to drug rehabilitation centres for treatment. By contrast, in Australian prisons, drug treatment facilities are available only to a tiny minority of the seventy per cent of persons incarcerated for drug-related offences.

It is heartening to see an academic of Professor Penington's stature present such an honest and balanced approach to drug control, but we will have to wait and see if politicians will exercise the same degree of leadership and courage in implementing the report's recommendations. ■

Peter Norden SJ is director of Jesuit Social Services, which conducts programs for drug-dependent young Australians.

COMMENT: 2

ANDREW HAMILTON

Don't fence me in

NEW MINISTERS SEEK CHANGES. Mr Philip Ruddock, the Minister for Immigration, is concerned particularly to re-examine the system of judicial review, by which asylum seekers and immigrants can appeal against unfavourable decisions. He has also criticised past political appointments to the review tribunal. That this matters to refugees becomes clear when you look at the present system, and at Mr Ruddock's options.

People who apply, in Australia, for refugee status are first interviewed by an officer of the Department of Immigration who then makes a decision on their status. If this primary decision goes against the applicants, they may appeal to the Refugee Review Tribunal, an independent body whose members are appointed by the minister. Each case is heard by a single member of the Tribunal, with applicants allowed to be present at the hearing. Some limited legal assistance—important in such a complex legal process—is available to asylum seekers at each of these stages.

If asylum seekers are rejected at this review stage, they may appeal to the Federal Court. As the Federal Court can judge only on whether the decision was properly made, successful applicants win no more than a fresh hearing of their case by the Refugee Review Tribunal. Funding for such cases is discretionary.

Mr Ruddock would like to exclude appeal either to the Refugee Review Tribunal or to the Federal Court. His dilemma is that it will be very difficult to exclude appeal to the Federal Court (the right to judicial review is guaranteed by the Australian Constitution) but the opportunity to appeal to the Refugee Review Tribunal is indispensable if asylum seekers are to obtain justice.

Before the Refugee Review Tribunal was instituted, the original applications for refugee status and the subsequent appeal were both under the ægis of the Department of Immigration. The Department's policy was to discourage people from applying in Australia for asylum. The lack of independence in the process fuelled perception that the members of the Department were pre-disposed to reject applicants. It also created great tension between the Department and refugee organisations and lawyers. Distrust of the impartiality of the process was intensified by some scathing court judgments of Departmental procedures.

Since 1994, The Refugee Review Tribunal, which has its own staff, has provided an effective and non-confrontational review of the decisions made by Department. It has, arguably, improved the quality of decision making and, because of its independence, has enjoyed the confidence of both the legal community and the asylum seekers. The

quality of its decisions has been variable but clearly impartial. If the Tribunal were abolished and decisions made entirely by the Department again, these decisions would not be perceived to be impartial and independent. Pressure on the Department would intensify, particularly if—as seems certain—numbers of staff available for heavier responsibilities are to be reduced.

The opportunity to appeal to the Federal Court is less important for most asylum seekers. Judicial review has, however, played a vital part in ensuring that governments treat the powerless lawfully, as shown by the shameful history of our treatment of the Cambodian boatpeople.

Mr Ruddock will find no easy solution to his dilemma. But the Refugee Review Tribunal should be inviolable. To make it part of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, or to make it responsible for a single primary decision about refugee status would be possible stratagems. But many asylum seekers are so traumatised that it is only at the review stage that they have established sufficient trust to be able to make their true case.

In the meantime Mr Ruddock should be encouraged to eliminate political appointments. Indeed, he should make both the appointment of the Review Tribunals and the hearing of appeals, particularly by East Timorese asylum seekers, totally free from government influence. ■

Andrew Hamilton SJ lectures in theology and has been chaplain to the Cambodian community in Melbourne.

COMMENT: 3

MAX TEICHMANN

Russian roulette

RUSSIA IS LUMBERING TOWARDS ANOTHER ELECTION—this time for its President. Yeltsin's idea of governing seems to be permanent electioneering—the mark of most modern populist democracies. But in Russia little legitimacy seems to be accorded by the people to any centre of authority, be it Duma, President, regional Governments or the Constitution.

This chaotic, potentially dangerous situation encourages false Czars like Zhirinovsky, or the now ubiquitous Mafias—including, until recently, Dudayev's Chechens. The Red Army tries to hold the ring, while making its own demands to hold on to *its* power. Ex-Party bureaucrats ply their trade in recently privatised enterprises—the fruits of economic rationalism à la World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Russia exhibits uneven development. There is the agricultural sector—nearer feudalism than capitalist agri-business—and the industrial and manufacturing base built on by Lenin and Stalin under a command economy. The KGB was needed to keep these sectors working.

The nemesis of the traditional heavy industries has been long approaching. Unlike their Western counterparts, they could not even supply the basic consumption needs of the masses. There were also advanced areas of the economy: space and the nuclear industries, military technology, the computer and information industries, which could not be slotted into the other traditional work hierarchies. These newcomers chafed against Party and Government control, functioning increasingly as segregated, semi-autonomous, affluent sections of the society. Then there was the grey-black economy which tried to remedy the production and distributional breakdowns of the command economy. These fixers, middle-men, entrepreneurs, budding capitalists, dealers in foreign exchange, private farmers, had to be tolerated, as was bureaucratic corruption and predation. That system is now collapsed.

Privatisation is being rammed through, with wages, prices, and profits being allowed to correspond to 'market realities'. Financial deregulation and a multiplication of private banking and insurance units have followed. Subsidies are being phased out. A host of hikes in essential items and services have eaten up the resources of the poorer classes; inflation has destroyed the savings of the poor and the modestly endowed. Unemployment has soared, while free education, health, affordable housing—the whole Communist safety net—has been withdrawn and pensions made semi-worthless.

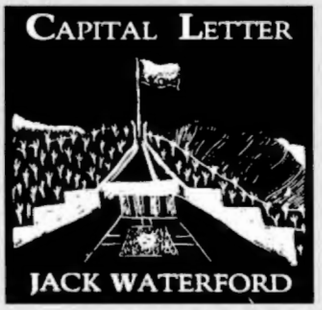
A class of new rich, conspicuously consuming, and a network of Mafias quite out of control is all many citizens experience of the New Order. Russians were promised by Lenin and then by Stalin that people here and now might suffer and sacrifice, even be sacrificed, to create a glorious future for their children and grandchildren. Many Russians felt cheated—it never happened for them. Now they are being made to go through it all again. The KGB is replaced by the lash of the market. But more and more Russians are refusing, as they did in Hungary and Poland, to co-operate.

Yeltsin will probably win. All the smart money, especially American money, is on him, as it was on Gorbachev until he dug in his heels. The media is bribed or regimented, reporting little of substance concerning Yeltsin's opponents except to demonise them. Zhirinovsky would bring Fascism, anti-Semitism and Great Russian Imperialism and expansionism. The new Communists would want to restore the old Communist order, no matter what they now say.

But in fact the new Communists probably wouldn't, or couldn't. Their problem would be *how* to govern all the disparate groups—for Russians are enduring a combination of the Enclosures, the Industrial Revolution and the computer-information revolutions. Plus Weimar's inflationary collapse of 1922 and the 1929 Depression. Powerful Western groups seem determined to enforce Western agendas on the Russians, and have *their* appointees in power. This is a recipe for a kind of slow-motion civil war. A Yeltsin victory would, most likely, be a pyrrhic victory.

Which is not to say that the New Communists and Nationalists have the answers, but they do more truly echo the sighs of the poor, the disinherited, and people protesting against another moral and cultural wasteland. ■

Max Teichmann is a freelance political commentator and reviewer.



A false start

IF FIRST FORAYS ARE ANYTHING to go by, the wave of fear going around Aboriginal communities about how they will be treated under a Howard Government is amply justified. Not because conservative governments are inherently hostile to Aboriginal interests, with a secret agenda to grind them into the dust, but because politicians have demonstrated yet again that they have little understanding of the problems, let alone solutions to them.

Like many a minister for Aboriginal Affairs before him, Dr John Herron has a good heart and not a little sympathy for Aboriginal interests. He even knows something about the conditions under which Aborigines live and the fact that the modern-day equivalent of perhaps $25 billion in special purpose expenditure over 25 years has produced very little physical or social capital in Aboriginal communities, because of a manifest failure of service delivery. He also knows that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission is in bad odour in Aboriginal communities. He is aware that there are some who have lived from the grants ATSIC has doled out who have long histories of rorting, and, in some cases, of violence, extortion and sexual assault. He means to put a stop to it.

So far so good. But having background in Aboriginal affairs and personal knowledge of conditions has never seemed much of an advantage in the area. On my (fairly short) list of ministers who have any claim to effectiveness in Aboriginal affairs, only one, Fred Chaney, had any previous background in the area and he found that no help. Few of the ministers with close experience—people such as Gordon Bryant, Clyde Holding, Gerry Hand and Robert Tickner—will be held up as having achieved much for Aboriginal affairs.

The last three of these covered the span of the last Labor Government, during which there were landmarks such as Redfern, Mabo and the Parliament's passage of a law which theoretically acknowledged the possibility of native title. But none of this had much to do with them. And most of the time Aborigines were actually going backwards compared with non-Aboriginal Australians.

But Senator John Herron, and John Howard, who has given some explicit blessing to the approach his minister has taken, may already have missed the best chances going to make effective changes. Even if they thought there was some urgent need for action about some kind of rorting (about which the administrative side of ATSIC has been complaining, unavailingly, for years), they might have listened first, if only to shore up some of the support which was actually out there.

Had they paused to listen, they might have spared themselves, Aborigines, and the broader community some of the nonsense which they are currently spouting about accountability, and some of their nonsensical plans to achieve it. They might be proceeding, with rather more confidence, to make changes far more radical than they now propose, and with some constituency in both Aboriginal Australia and amongst those for whom sound policy on Aboriginal affairs is a litmus test for civilised Government.

Accountability is a very big problem in Aboriginal affairs. But not the sort of accountability that the Government is now talking about. The ticking off and proper acquitting of each item of expenditure is a cult that has been imposed on ATSIC and its predecessor bodies to an extent without parallel anywhere else in Commonwealth or state administration. Perhaps as much as 20 or 30 per cent of grants to Aboriginal communities is chewed with book-keeping and auditing.

Of course there is some misfeasance. ATSIC operates chiefly by giving grants to community groups, many of which are not well equipped to manage money. But even where dishonesty is clear, police, others, and sometimes a compromised ATSIC political structure have generally been reluctant to act. But the fact is, of course, that ATSIC would be a mess even if every dollar spent had been scrutinised with the utmost rigour.

This is because a massive accountability regime is focused on checking the inputs rather than the outputs. So long as the money is disbursed in a properly accountable way, it is going to get a clean bill of health. But the problem with ATSIC is far more fundamental than a bit of creative accounting. ATSIC was set up by people who believed that the major reason for failure of programs was that Aborigines, the true experts on their situation, were not being consulted enough. This was and is a problem, but it is not the major one. The major problem is about effective delivery.

The misdiagnosis meant that an unwieldy, undemocratic and unworkable political structure was created. It was not permitted or encouraged to devise integrated plans for communities or families. Both the political and the administrative structure found themselves standing on functional mountains, giving out money for specific purposes to scads of incorporated bodies, themselves both short on administrative expertise and having problems of accounting to their own constituencies.

Neither ATSIC nor the bodies it funds complements the authority structures of Aboriginal communites, and they are not accountable in the wider sense of the word, either to the Aboriginal constituencies or to the wider community.

Nothing on the Herron or the Howard agenda seems likely to change any of this. Indeed, it may even entrench it and deprive the system of whatever flexibility and imagination is possible. The only good that could come out of the affair is that a few old power brokers whose activities have long been a scandal might at least be discredited so that a newer generation might have a go.

BUT THERE COULD BE one other effect. The glory of an ATSIC, from Labor's point of view, was that when anything was wrong in an Aboriginal community, the minister could shake his head and explain it was not his fault—the priorities were set by ATSIC, and they divvied up the cake. It was usually done with such skill that no one ever looked at the size of the cake.

It was different once. As Ian Viner, or Fred Chaney, or Peter Baume could attest, there was a time when a Minister for Aboriginal Affairs was under personal assault for each and every problem uncovered. Wittingly or not, John Herron and John Howard may have restored this situation. ■

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

Strictly Jane

From Geraldine Perriam

I greatly admire Juliette Hughes' devotion to the works of Miss Austen but I found her review of the film *Sense and Sensibility* a little unforgiving. To misquote the Rev. Patrick Bronte, 'Do you know Emma has written a screenplay and it is much better than likely?'

To be sure, there were minor irritations but Emma Thompson did a first-class job of adapting a sometimes wooden novel for the screen. *Sense and Sensibility* is not the most even of Jane Austen's novels. The male characters are one-dimensional and Elinor too restrained even for an Englishwoman. David Cecil commented that, in the novel, Edward Ferrars and Colonel Brandon 'lack life and individuality', and A.C. Ward found Edward 'no more alive than a ventriloquist's doll'. Through expanding the role of the youngest Dashwood, Margaret, Emma Thompson has cleverly provided a foil for Edward's more rounded role. Such a pity they cast Hugh Grant. Although Juliette Hughes found the actors 'exactly in looks' as she had pictured, the lamentable choice of Hugh Grant as Edward was unlike Miss Austen's own conception of him as a rather plain man. The Jane Austen Society objected to Hugh Grant in the role of Edward because he was too handsome. Far happier was the casting of Alan Rickman, who plays Brandon to perfection but I am prejudiced, having been in love with his voice for years.

One of the great strengths of *Sense and Sensibility* is its restraint, despite the fact that Elinor weeps openly in front of Edward. The restraint of the film is contrasted by the most recent series of *Pride and Prejudice* in which the role of Mrs. Bennet has been conceived as a shrieking harpy who would be more at home in a Music Hall, and the terrible film of *Northanger Abbey* recently screened by the ABC, complete with synthesised late 20th century lift music.

Sense and Sensibility has been well adapted for the screen, particularly since it caters for those who have never read a word of Jane Austen and those who have never stopped reading her work.

Geraldine Perriam
Ormond, VIC

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.

Austentacious

From John Gartlan

Having just seen *Sense and Sensibility*, my suspicion was confirmed that Juliette Hughes' review (*Eureka Street*, March 1996) is useless to the prospective filmgoer.

Juliette fails to review the film as a film. Condemning the film on its lack of exact fidelity to Jane Austen's plot and script is as shallow as condemning one of Shakespeare's historical plays because Shakespeare gets his history wrong.

The film is far more than a plot. In its portrayal of the universal issues of families and love and passion, the film has emotional soul. In her novels, Jane Austen explores the same issues with exquisite subtlety but more impact than the most explicit of today. That is her genius.

Judged by that standard, the film is one of utmost fidelity. Less subtle on film, for obvious reasons, but still subtle by film standards.

Had the film remained absolutely faithful to the plot but did not convey this underlying soul, I think the novelist could have been justifiably critical because the film would have been only an empty shell. But would she have been pedantic about the plot which is, after all, only a means to an end and which most filmgoers would not know or remember? I think not.

Of course, the plot cannot be ignored lest the exhibitors be guilty of misrepresenting *Sense and Sensibility* as something which it is not. But even your reviewer does not suggest variations to that extent. Why not, then, tell us something of the film, of its essence which the reviewer refers to and then ignores.

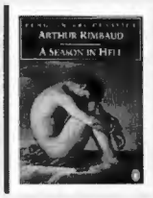
John Gartlan
Eltham, VIC

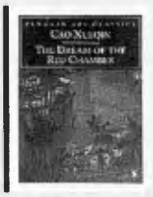
Truly believable?

From Paul Rodan

Reading the contributions of Brian Toohey and Ross McMullin (*Eureka Street*, April) one could be forgiven for thinking they were writing about two different governments. The former advances the view that Labor screwed its own constituents and paid the penalty while the latter lauds Keating and compares his government's fate with that of Chifley's. McMullin also seems to echo the line (Goss *et al.*) that a government which avoids scandal and incompetence might expect to be re-elected.

Well, put me in the Toohey camp. I would have thought that on the issue of delivering to their core constituency, Chifley and Keating were about as far apart as it were possible to be (key word here: banks), but maybe I'm missing a link. And it would be





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uncharitable to draw attention to personality differences too, notably in the area of humility. It can be contended that the Chifley government went down fighting for something resembling Labor values while the Keating government just went down, but not before its leader had dragged the Australian centre so far to the right on economic issues as to make Howard's agenda possible. And I wish that McMullin, Kennett and others would stop describing any change they support as 'reform'.

It is a sad state of affairs if Labor governments are content merely with avoiding scandals and providing competent economic management, the latter of course defined exclusively by those who benefit most from the free market. If that's all that matters, rather than protecting the less well-off and challenging vested interests, we should just elect accountants. If the lesson of 1996 is, in part, that Labor governments have to deliver more to their constituents (as Toohey suggests), that's a good lesson!

The same *Eureka Street* reported the travails of Martin Ferguson, now anointed as a likely 'leader' of the left. If this is the same gentleman who presided over a drop in the unionisation rate to less than a third of the work force, his accession to any leadership role is not necessarily good news.

One final point about an aspect of McMullin's piece. If there were prominent Chifley government identities 'amazed' at the party's defeat in 1949, they certainly weren't those who increased the size of the House of Representatives (to save threatened incumbents) and introduced proportional representation for the Senate to save Labor's majority there. Those 'prominent identities' were expecting to be beaten.

Paul Rodan
East Malvern, VIC

Loving spirit

From Peta Wellstead

Paul Collins (*Eureka Street*, March 1996) elucidates clearly the linkages between power, authority and sexual dysfunction as they operate within the Church. There is no doubt, as Fr Collins points out 'that some priests have seriously abused their position of influence and trust' and this presents some difficult issues for the church, both pastorally and legally.

Fr Collins says that 'the widespread nature of this scandal [of sexual abuse] indicates that its causes are pervasive and deeply embedded in the institutional church'. I would agree that this is the case but have cause to wonder whether this has less to do with 'power, authority and secrecy' and more to do with the lack of formation of our priests.

It is true 'that most priests are [not] motivated by a lust for power' but rather most act from a genuine feeling of care and concern for the people they serve. My experience has taught me that our priests are not given the training, skills and ongoing support to allow them to do this work effectively in a supportive and caring environment. While compulsory celibacy may be an important issue in the debate, it is not the only issue.

When I was 23 I fell in love with a priest. I had had more trauma in my 23 years than most people get in a lifetime. My marriage was ending, I had suffered abandonment and loss, an abortion at 17, a stillborn child at 21, a long period in hospital to deliver a sick and frail child at 22 and I was 5,000 km from 'home'. Not bad for a 'good Catholic girl' from a 'good Catholic family'.

With my sadness, and a baby on my hip I began to attend Mass again—sometimes on Sunday, sometimes through the week—it depended on my mood really. Sometimes I would stay behind and sit quietly in the darkened church—trying to make sense of the sadness and loss in my life—trying to come to terms with my badness. One day through my tears, in the quiet stillness of a suburban church I received more comfort in half an hour than I had received in a lifetime. The arms that held me were those of a young priest from the community of the parish. He was 30.

My life was one of chaos and sadness but I was more than this. I was young and intelligent and full of hope. The young priest and I became friends. Our friendship developed, as friendships between young vibrant people with like minds do, and one day I knew, without a shadow of doubt that I was in love. How could I—the 'good Catholic girl'—be in love with the celibate priest? More badness, more sadness, more regret.

One morning after many sleepless nights I wrote the letter I knew I had to write—even with all my sadness and emotional fatigue I was so much wiser than he. I knew that an illicit affair would destroy us both, and it was only a hair's breadth away. Yes, he was in a position of power and trust, yes, I was emotionally vulnerable, yes, he should have been more discerning and objective.

But how does a young man, who leaves home at 16 to enter an all-male environment with no emotional and physical supports, learn about relating intimately to women? When most of us were fumbling with bra straps in the back of cars and hiding love bites from our mothers he was off learning how to be holy—learning how to serve his people.

So I wrote my letter and sent my love away. But he was more than my love—he was my best friend. In the two years of our friendship he knew more about me, understood me and cared for me more than any other on earth and I missed him. I missed him so much I thought my heart would break but it didn't. Life and love and loss continued and the babe on my hip is now 16. I have cause to reflect what it would be like for him if he was taken

Bad news

DURING THE EASTER BREAK Theodore Kaczynski was arrested outside Helena, Montana. A stooped recluse who lived in a cupboard-sized shack, Kaczynski has blundered into custody as the man possibly behind a mystery almost two decades old. The FBI believe they have nabbed one of America's most-wanted criminals, the Unabomber, who, since 1978, has mailed bombs to addresses across the US, killing three people and wounding 23.

The Unabomber—so called because many packages were sent to universities and airlines—diminished the mystery behind the bombings when a manuscript was sent to *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* late last year. In return for their publication of the 35,000 word *Industrial Society and its Future*, he would stop his bombing. Both papers decided to publish, at the risk of establishing a dangerous precedent. If Kaczynski *is* the Unabomber, then the decision to publish and so avoid bombings is unlikely to be tested: Montana still employs the death penalty.

The Unabomber's 'manifesto' mixes soapbox diatribe, socio-political testament, and paranoid cant, to promote a form of heady anti-system anarchy, opposed to the 'psychology of the modern left',which supposedly causes individuals to lead 'unfulfilled lives'. In the Unabomber's conception, modern leftism is synonymous with 'socialists, collectivists, politically correct types, feminists, gay and disability activists, animal rights activists and the like'. He postulates an enforced dependence in modern communities, with individuals unconscious of being kept on this 'psychological leash'. The bombings were intended to draw the public's attention, after which the threat posed by the Unabomber would ensure publication of his views. The public's attention would then be turned on itself.

From 1978 bombs were sent across America, predominantly targeting schools and research organisations. 'FC' was scratched on many of the bombs. When published, the 'manifesto' explained that the initials stood for 'Freedom Club'. As possibly the sole member of the 'Freedom Club', the Unabomber needed a murderous lever to achieve his ideals for society. If notoriety guaranteed publication then members might be recruited—and thereafter, social transformation achieved.

The Unabomber's 'manifesto' gives his terrorist actions a vocabulary. And the fact that he was prepared to kill the proponents of what he deemed evil makes him infinitely more dangerous than other lounge-room ideologues.

Whether Theodore Kaczynski is the Unabomber remains to be proven. What is certain is that no one in recent history has been able to manipulate the American media to such sinister effect. ■

Dan Disney is a freelance cyberphile. His e-mail address is daniel@iaccess.com.au

away into a world of men so he could serve the world.

At 23, in an emotional and vulnerable state, I was still wiser than my 30-year-old friend who had a position of power and trust. Those priests who abuse power and trust need to be sanctioned and assisted to learn more appropriate ways of relating to the vulnerable they serve. But they also need our compassion because more often than not it may well be a case of 'forgive them Father for they know not what they do'.

Postscript: The world works in mysterious ways and 12 months ago, 15 years later in quite extraordinary circumstances and a very long way from the 'scene of the crime' I reconnected with my best friend, who is no longer a priest. Over long dinners and numerous bottles of brandy we have done what most in our circumstances never get the chance to do, we have been able to talk openly, honestly and objectively about what happened and why.

It would be fair to say that his formation is still not complete—but we are working on it!

Peta Wellstead
Nedlands, WA

Who's right?

From John Barich

I am somewhat puzzled by Fr Collins' article 'Coming Clean' (*Eureka Street*, March 1996).

He claims that only 40 per cent of Australian Catholic priests live 'celibate lives'. Is he using the strict meaning of celibacy—not married or cohabiting—or the more popular meaning of 'not having sex'? If the former, this is patently inaccurate and if the latter who would know? All of us, including priests, are capable of sinning against the 6th and 9th Commandments, especially if such offences against chastity as masturbation, lust and homosexual acts are considered.

He refers to some bishops at the 1990 Synod of Bishops seeking to do away with mandatory celibacy. What he does not go on to tell his readers is that the bishops were more interested in how to increase vocations and how to form candidates than in the issue of celibacy. In my view, in *Pastores Dabo Vobis* the Holy Father explicates on celibacy in a more convincing way than Fr Collins detracts from it.

Fr Collins seems to imply that if mandatory celibacy were removed, the problem of sex abuse by the clergy would disappear. One needs only to look at other Christian churches to see that this is patently absurd. Sin will occur no matter what; therefore, why should we forego a gift of the Holy Spirit for the sake of accommodating a small percentage of problem cases?

Fr Roman Cholj in 'Clerical Celibacy in East and West' argues convincingly that the law on celibacy is not a mere disciplinary matter which the Church can change but 'that there is a solid doctrinal base for the law which can be traced back to the teaching of the apostles'.

There is no space to challenge Fr Collins' disparaging remarks about *Humanae Vitae* and the Pope's valiant efforts to elevate the moral standards of humanity. Suffice to say that I for one am more ready to follow John Paul II's agenda than that proposed by Paul Collins.

John Barich
Ardross, WA

Where is it?

From Paul Finnane

Max Teichmann's reviews in the April issue are gut-wrenching. I want to get *I Rest My Case* and I have ordered it from Mary Martin Bookshops but they just called me to say they can't get it, nor could they trace it. Not surprising perhaps, in view of the information in the review that the author had to get it published privately. My query—how can one get hold of the book please?

Paul Finnane
North Plympton, SA

Enquiries about Mark Verstandig's book are best directed to the publisher and distributor, Saga Press, *phone (03) 9819 0473, fax (03) 9819 0635. —Ed.*

Product of the Month

From the Fort Crazy US Cavalry catalogue: the French Foreign Legion Kepi. Limited stock,only slightly marked.

They can't be making legionnaires the way they used to.

JAMES NICHOLLS

Riddling Rwanda

SUNDAYS IN KIGALI are very peaceful, with little of the usual street hustle that exists during the week. Just about everything is closed except restaurants. You might take a late breakfast at the Cafe de Caravane but service is sometimes slow when electricity shortages delay your Omelette de Tomate.

You can't buy a newspaper on Sundays in Kigali because there is no one to sell one, and besides, the local media prints only once a week so you miss nothing.

You might think Rwandans have been peacefully residing in Kigali for centuries, given their local gestures of handshakes and hugs, and their friendly conversation. You'd never guess that just two years ago Kigali was the centre of the ferocious war that killed hundreds and thousands and drove two million refugees into neighbouring countries. The easy-going lifestyle makes it especially difficult to assess what has happened and what is happening now in this country.

A local friend, educated in France and Uganda, told me that poverty is very well hidden in Rwanda. The truth is that a majority of Kigali's 300,000 residents live in diseased, overcrowded, hungry and totally unserviced neighbourhoods. After the war it took the army weeks to get rid of the scavenging dogs feeding off the rotting corpses lying in the streets. People tell me things like this and I find it hard to believe, but I also know that it did happen because everyone keeps telling me.

The Rwandans have a cultural preoccupation with personal grooming and presentation. They are almost always immaculately turned out, unless of course you meet the poorest of the poor hidden in the back streets behind the main roads. But on just about any road you take, you see salons for men and women, which you don't anticipate when you arrive in this, Africa's most densely populated country.

Kigali's central prison is not far from the centre of town. Inside the prison an estimated 60,000 men are awaiting trial for crimes committed during the genocide. You drive from one such landmark to another, pondering what *might* have been for these friendly, laid-back people, had their past not been riddled with corrupt and benign colonial masters. There is a paradox on every corner.

For example, in the east of Rwanda there is a Confirmation service underway at the Gahini Anglican Church. The church is not unlike the sort you might find in country Australia. Except that today there are 50 people being confirmed by a survivor of the genocide, Bishop Alexis Bilindabagabo.

At the same time there is a soccer match kicking off at one of Kigali's two football stadiums. A team from the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) is playing against a visiting African Youth team who look ominously smaller. It just so happens that the new Vice-President of Rwanda is also in attendance, along with a couple of hundred RPA soldiers.

The 20,000 spectators at the ground don't like coming into this stadium. It was converted from a prison, where, in the 1970s, many Tutsis were tortured and killed. But memories are becoming clouded; there is some one-sided umpiring and in a torrential downpour, the Tutsis win 3-0.

There are contradictions in Kigali that you can't resolve. How do people continue to live and survive? What drives them? Have they been so desensitised by history that the murder of a million people doesn't dent their collective psyche? Or do they continue to hope?

RWANDANS ARE TALKING about development and how there will never be another war like 1994. There is a tribally blended new government, seeking peace, and justice. The time has come for traditional rivalries to cease and for the righteous to rule—that is the common plea of the people.

And when the lazy Sunday in the sun turns into another mild Kigali night, you can hear the echoes of political discussion reflecting from the surrounding hills and valleys. ■

James Nicholls is a Melbourne journalist who has just returned from Central Africa.

Patrick, the boy in the photo, above left, is one of Rwanda's survivors. During the war he was cut with a machete and left to die in a pit. He lived, and is now 15 years old.

Photograph: James Nichols

JON GREENAWAY

The last shout

Stayers: Pam Loe, Laurie Wooster and Bob Loe at the Ocean Road Hotel, Apollo Bay, Victoria.

Photograph: Bill Thomas.

I CAN REMEMBER THE FIRST BEER I drank in a pub. I had to fight to get it down, my guts objected to its foreign, bitter taste. I had tried to drink beer before then, stealing cans of Tooths KB out of the busted old fridge in the garage at home, but after a couple of sips I'd usually give up and toss what was left into the neighbour's backyard. But I was in a pub now, and you finished your beer.

The second was not so bad, and I reckon the third tasted okay: I relaxed a little. I was too nervous to take a look around me when I got in. All I wanted was to be served without the barmaid asking me for ID. Tiles were everywhere, sweeping down the walls, across the floor and up to meet the horseshoe-shaped bar like a wave. The bar stools with their ripped seats seemed happy to surf. Off in the far corner was an island of three or four old-timers, one of whom was complaining loudly about a jockey 'who couldn't whip cream if he tried'. They looked just as I imagined they would, faces like burnt leather, covered in arbitrary splashes of red paint. But they also had a presiding air about them which I didn't expect, something like barnacles on a ship's keel.

The phone rang and interrupted my hazy thinking. The barmaid seemed to answer it and hang up in the same motion. She went down the end of the bar and told a bunch of guys sitting in the back bar that the licensing cops were on their way. She turned around, looked at me and said, 'and you'd better go too mate'.

'But I'm 18, and you've just served me,' I protested. She looked at me as though I was on the bottom of her shoe. A friend of mine rushed past and grabbed me by the collar and pushed me out the back-

bar door with the sound of the old blokes' laughter ringing in our ears. We ran flat out for a couple of minutes, then we collapsed, jelly-legged and laughing.

The pub was taken over and done up a few years later. It is very popular now with a very particular type of crowd. About the only thing that remains the same is the shape of the bar. I went there a few months ago to meet some friends, and I wondered as I stood there, shoulder to shoulder with the tanned and the terrific, what those old blokes would have made of it all. Would they be angry and indignant or just depressed? Or would they accept, with a shrug of the shoulders, that their casual institution had gone, and force their way through the throng and up to the bar.

Time was when drinkers would congregate at the Dog and Bucket or Toxteth Arms out of a loyalty which bordered on tribal. Often swills, they provided a neighbourhood with a hub that it loved and loathed in equal amounts. But as the landscapes of our cities have changed and new social backdrops formed, pubs have had to provide much more than quick service and a good hosing down. Many people will tell wistful stories of bloodhouses and dives where they used to have their benders but few seem to be doing it now, largely because the venues are no longer there.

WHAT HAS BEEN HAPPENING to the corner hotel in the '80s and '90s dates back to the early '60s when, in most states, poker machines were made legal in registered clubs. As a consequence the number of clubs skyrocketed, challenging hotels as the place for drinking and socialising. Relaxed opening hours brought changes in culture and the necessity of offering more to the customer. For a start women began to go in greater numbers, even though initially few of them were game enough to venture out of the ladies' lounge and into the public bar with the men. (The men weren't too keen about the reverse movement either.) Bands were setting up in the back bars amongst pool tables and pinball machines. Then, again with variations from state to state, came the introduction of random breath testing. With people no longer confident of being able to travel home 'safely' after getting a skinful, publicans had to do more to entice the punters through their doors.

Amidst all the atmospheric change and face-lifting of the last decade and a half, some corner pubs have managed to preserve the drinker not only as their core business but their main focus. Suzy Carleton has been the publican of the Bellevue Hotel in Paddington, Sydney for eight years, and before then she was at the Riverview Hotel in Balmain, which counted Dawn Fraser amongst its former licensees. To Carleton, pubs are like little towns:

'Over the years pubs have performed a social role—I saw this more around Balmain than I have in Paddington—of offering care, help and support.

'There were a bunch of blokes at the Riverview who were regular drinkers when we took it over. We closed it down and did it up and they walked back in on the day we opened up, took one look around, said "Lady, you've done a terrific job", and sat down as if nothing had changed.

'We'd cash their pension cheques for them but I would make them have a bowl of stew before they started to drink so they had something in their stomachs.'

After running restaurants, where there is not the same sense of ownership and belonging on the part of the patrons, Carleton found her notions of hospitality expanded by pubs:

'One of the first things I did after opening the Riverview was to throw a wake. The people there made it quite clear that it was my responsibility to put the food on for free. That was part of my role.'

The Bellevue has many of the trappings of a modern pub: a restaurant out the back, Pub Tab, and two or three poker machines. But Carleton has preserved an essential pub atmosphere. Its community of drinkers, she claims, come to the Bellevue out of choice, not because of location. This is the lot of the inner city pub.

'People don't use pubs like they used to,' she says. 'Pubs are now service providers.'

In close proximity to the Bellevue are a number of pubs which, as a result of renovations in the last decade, look more like boutique art galleries than alehouses. Indeed at first glance most of the fashion-conscious crowd seem to be peering at the walls and not their glasses. One quickly learns, however, that they are merely looking for someone more important to talk to. But Suzy Carleton believes that, even amidst all this, there is still room for an old style pub. Fittingly, soon after we spoke, the Bellevue put on a wake for Mick Young.

Ed Campion, a regular to this magazine and the Bellevue, fears for the future of the kind of pub where you can go and feel comfortable. Four generations of his family have been publicans. He himself grew up in a pub at Enmore in Sydney's inner west. His father bought into it when Ed was born, and he died in it 21 years later.

'Pubs used to be what churches were in medieval towns. They were social centres, places for R&R, marriage counselling. Tradition was—and you wouldn't see this nowadays—that the first hour with a new publican would mean free beer.'

According to Campion, the publican was a linchpin of the local community. He remembers the way in which pubs were referred to by the family name of the licensee. He has a story from the war years which tells of the respect that followed the publican:

'I remember a soldier coming up to the back gate and asking if my father was there. A lot of them were stationed at the transport depot down the end of the road before they were shipped out.

'My father came out and he handed him a hundred quid. "I'm going overseas tomorrow", he said. "Could you put this in the safe and in case anything

Many people will tell wistful stories of bloodhouses and dives where they used to have their benders but few seem to be doing it now, largely because the venues are no longer there.

'Pubs must have some sort of hook on the market. If they haven't got a particular hook, if they are not perceived to provide some unique or niche product or service then they'll struggle. 'You can very easily lose all your customers because you've changed, and you can very easily lose your customers by natural attrition because you didn't change.'

—Alan Giles, Australian Hotels Association

happens to me give it to my wife?" '

Ed Campion believes the chasing of trends has overlaid pubs with a modishness that obscures their past. Sydney has recently witnessed a resurgence of pool playing. He notes with regret the move that's on in pubs to convert the bedrooms upstairs, or the quiet snug bars downstairs, into spaces for pool tables. Take a look at these pool rooms and you could be forgiven for thinking the pub had been over-run by flat-backed cattle, grazing for money.

While it might be pool in Sydney, elsewhere it's the pokies. NSW has had gaming since the mid '80s, but its arrival in other states is more recent.

In Victoria, the effect that poker machines have had, since they came in during 1991, has been shaped by irregularities in the covering legislation. Limits are placed on the number of machines per pub but not on the number of outlets a group or individual can hold. With the TAB and Tabaret organisations deciding who can and can't have machines, consortiums have converted pubs into mini-casinos across Melbourne and the rest of Victoria.

JUST DOWN THE ROAD from *Eureka Street*'s Richmond office is the Bakers Arms hotel, which used to play host to an eclectic clientele and boast an iconoclastic interior decoration—Elvis competed with Jesus for wall space. It was sold for a markedly inflated price to a group which has a number of pubs across Melbourne.

The new owners' plans to install poker machines have been put on hold by local council after concerted opposition from local business people, residents and churches. The hotel lies in full view of the housing commission flats which dominate Richmond's skyline and are largely populated by Vietnamese immigrants. Ironically, shortly before the sale, the previous owners adorned the outside of the pub with a mocking billboard that read, 'Clown Casino'. The current owners are looking to present more acceptable plans to council in the near future.

Alan Giles, chief executive of the Australian Hotels Association, sits in his office in suburban Melbourne, and casts his eye over his hotel across the street. He doesn't believe that poker machines will come to dominate pub culture in Victoria, but agrees that their popularity is making an impact:

'Gaming is a good, strong business additive to the hotel industry for a limited number of hotels for a limited number of customers. It has identified a particular group of people in the state who want that product and service.

'It is rapidly becoming a core service. And it is a problem for hotels that are operating in an environment where perhaps one other hotel that they're competing with has gaming and they don't. It's a difficulty that we're trying to address.'

Giles believes that poker machines will provide hoteliers with the stimulus of much needed revenue:

'It's much harder for publicans to make a go of it now than it was during six o'clock closing days. For a start people aren't drinking as much as they used to. Also, these days it's a seven-day week for publicans and in many cases they're open from early morning to very late at night.

'Pubs are expensive to operate—they're more labour intensive. Not only have wages risen with the general standard of living increase, but because you're now opening twice the number of hours you were 30 years ago there is a greater impact on your operating costs.'

Every state and territory, with the exception of Western Australia, currently allows poker machines in pubs, or will in the near future. In most states there have been limits put on the number of machines and outlets by a combination of gaming commission regulation and aberrations of the market, caused by the control of the big players: Casinos, the TAB and Tabaret. Most of the representatives of the AHA that *Eureka Street* spoke to favour the free market system in operation in NSW and South Australia. In South Australia, gaming machines have been allowed since July of 1994, and already approximately half of its 640 pubs have pokies. The AHA believe that, far from starting a flood of poker machines, it prevents the problem of one pub dominating business because it is the only one in the area with gaming. In most pubs, they argue, there would be only a small, unobtrusive number of machines.

Alan Giles sees the advent of poker machines in pubs as the most recent stage in the battle every publican has to go through to maintain business:

'Pubs must have some sort of hook on the market. If they haven't got a particular hook, if they are not perceived to provide some unique or niche product or service then they'll struggle.

'You can very easily lose all your customers because you've changed, and you can very easily lose your customers by natural attrition because you didn't change.'

Giles suggests that around one third of hotels swap hands every couple of years, and of those, half should be out of business. But despite this, he believes that pubs, far from losing character in the struggle to attract customers, have developed a variegation that was once beyond them:

'For the first half of this century the pub was abbreviated in its services, because of six o'clock closing. We're now back to being a traditional hotel in every sense of the word.'

BARRY DICKINS, Melbourne playwright and newspaper columnist, who often uses the pub as the vehicle for his writing, is less than happy about the way pubs are going.

We talk in a characterless city hotel that rests in the bowels of a city office block. He sits underneath a poster of nubile women advertising a brand of light

beer, and sips a soda water while I down the draught. He feels that, by degrees, we are losing the corner hotel as a place of sanctuary, losing what they were in the suburb of Reservoir where he grew up:

'The men in the pubs in Reservoir went there to listen to the races and get away from their wives, and the wives went there to get away from their men, marooned all day in their dreary boarding house rooms and their Housing Commission flats. It's a place for peace and I went there for peace with them.

thing on it." "Yeah we'll get a bolt-cutter thing." The next second they've got a bolt-cutter and you hear the chain go and they wheel it out the door and had a ride on it down to Rathdowne St, sitting on it. And they're trying to do the Winfield button as they're rolling along until it fell over outside the hardware store. We all cheered from the door.'

To Dickins, a pub is about feeling at home, being able to talk with friends without being assaulted by the publican's version of hospitality:

No machines, no gimmicks. But there is footy tipping and a social club plus good bar food and plenty of regular customers—one of the few inner city pubs left that provides for all comers.

Photograph: Bill Thomas.

'There was a fabulous barman at Stewart's hotel in Carlton [during the Pram Factory days]. There was something utterly classless about him, he didn't sneer at the shitkicker or grease to the silvertail. He had an ease, and the ease is going. I don't go to pubs anymore because they're so unfriendly. There's a pub in Racecourse road [Flemington] where you've got to have $200,000 just to sit in the corner.

'The best place for me was Stewart's of all the thousands of pubs I've gone into. Friday night was crim night—they'd all come in and argue with each other. Lawyers, barristers, police informants: it used to hum.

'I used to always sit by the cigarette machine, and I'd sit there from four in the afternoon 'til two in the morning when they'd hose me out, with empty whisky glasses, and peanuts in my dentures, and cigarette ash all over me, crying and laughing—looking like a bag of shit but incredibly happy.

'One night two guys stole the cigarette machine in front of everyone. "No one's looking", one of them said, "let's have it". "Yeah there's a fucking chain

'You should be made to feel welcome; that's the whole meaning of giving them all that extra money for a beer. I'm old fashioned, I think it should be a place where old friends meet.'

Whether it's poker machines, pool tables or mechanical-bull riding, it all comes down to what Alan Giles describes as the need to remain relevant. Perhaps we no longer want a pub culture which revolves around a drink and a chat. We want entertainment, without going to the trouble of making it up ourselves. And we're all supposed to be fitter now, eating better foods and drinking less. Pubs are smoky and we know how we hate that. And what's the point of running a pub without guaranteed cash cows like a stack of poker machines or a good line-up of bands when a restaurant licence is much cheaper, and registered clubs get the tax breaks?

One hope for the lazy, laconic sort of pub lies with the arbiters of fashion: a quiet beer and a pleasant hum, and they just might understand what they've been missing. ■

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

MICHAEL MCGIRR

TOE-holds

Margaret Wertheim, above right, during her recent visit to Australia.

Photograph: Michael McGirr.

MARGARET WERTHEIM is currently writing a cultural history of space. She is exploring cosmology's new frontier, cyberspace. 'How do we human beings answer the question of where we are?' she asks.

'The great appeal of Cyberspace is that it contains the promises of a metaphysical heaven: a place where people become free from the sins of the body and the tyranny of distance. Cyberspace challenges us to learn how to talk again about the metaphysical realm.'

Wertheim, a Queenslander, has been stirring the possum as a freelance science writer in New York. It is not every New Yorker who thinks of cyberspace as the realisation of a medieval dream. She has written that virtual reality began in the thirteenth century when a monk, Roger Bacon, wrote to Pope Clement IV advocating the use of three-dimensional perspective in art.

Wertheim is skilled at turning around scientific perspectives. Take Albert Einstein. He may have made the nuclear age but he himself was made for television. His unkempt shock of hair, mysterious grin and distracted eyes fill the imagination. Ask most people to draw a mad scientist and, by and large, they will come up with something resembling Einstein.

Part of Einstein's mystique is the fact that his genius could easily have been lost in obscurity. He was the battler with a conscience: his concern for peace and his quasi-mysticism are still celebrated. It seems that Einstein alone could describe the patent office as 'that secular cloister where I hatched my most beautiful ideas.' Sayings such as 'God casts the die, not the dice' and 'God is subtle but not malicious' have become the catchcries of those wanting to explain the material world in other than material terms.

Margaret Wertheim was in Australia recently to discuss her book *Pythagoras' Trousers*. She tells the story of Einstein alongside that of Emmy Noether.

Noether was born in 1882, three years after Einstein, and, like him, came from a 'comfortable German Jewish middle class family.' She was instrumental in helping Einstein 'resolve his mathematical battle for a relativistic theory of gravity.'

Noether's theorem is still the basic tool for physicists seeking a unified theory of forces and particles. Nevertheless, the problems of Noether's career makes Einstein's difficulties look minor. One small aspect of those problems was undoubtedly Noether's untidy appearance. Also her total absorption in her work. It seems that what the world delighted in as eccentricity in a man was seen as slovenliness in a woman.

PYTHAGORAS' TROUSERS is a telling account of where women have been slotted in the history of physics. The book deals with the major shifts in human self-understanding over the course of the millennia.

Cosmology is interesting enough in itself but one of the reasons this book works so well is that it is also rich on the micro-level of human personality and incident. It creates any number of parallels. The figure of Pythagoras, whose mysticism revolved around 'mathematics, maleness and psychic transcendence' is paired with that of Hypatia of Alexandria.

Hypatia solved a number of mathematical riddles. She also wrote text books before she was murdered for her Neoplatonist views by Christians in 415.

The figure of Newton, a devout Anglican and a social misfit, towers over a landscape which includes Margaret Cavendish, Emilie du Châtelet and Laura Bassi.

Aspects of *Pythagoras' Trousers* are reminiscent of Germaine Greer's work on the history of women in Western art: it is laced with names of little-known women and asks who they were and why they are so obscure.

Wertheim's answer focuses at least partly on the quasi-religious nature of scientific exploration. She reports that Galileo, in spite of his famous run-in with the Vatican, was an effective operator who manipulated church patronage. More pointedly, Wertheim shows how male scientists and mathematicians have been perceived as working on a higher, priestly plane. The atmosphere in which such figures have gone about the search for the ultimate answer to life the universe and everything has been regarded as too rarefied for women. There is a marked historical similarity between the styles of scientific and religious authority.

But Wertheim's plea is not simply for more women physicists: 'There are plenty of physicists pushing the notion that they have the ultimate quintessence of truth imminently at their finger tips if only we would fund them $10 billion to build their particle accelerator.

'The idea that if we give them enough money, they will lead us unto the Lord is frankly offensive. The Christian God has been understood to have two roles, the first as the creator of the universe and the second as the redeemer of mankind. We have to be wary of physicists setting up as high priests to say that

God is only a creator.'

Wertheim explains that one contemporary holy grail, the celebrated Theory of Everything (TOE), is a search for a way to unify the theories of general relativity and quantum mechanics. She would love to see such a unification if it could be done at a reasonable cost. 'But it would not be really a theory of everything. It's not a theory of love, of aesthetics, of human culture and interaction,' she argues.

Along with Stephen Hawking and Leon Lederman, Wertheim lists Paul Davies as one who has been applauded for postulating a theory of God in which God is so diminished that He becomes 'not even vaguely interesting.'

Davies speaks for himself in the new book *The Big Questions*. Admittedly, his exchanges with the indefatigable Phillip Adams had an added appeal in the SBS series of which this book is the transcript. It was reassuring to see two gentlemen, however far into the Australian wilderness they went to test their ideas, and however far they wandered in abstract cosmology, still having to wave flies from in front of their faces.

The Big Questions reads like a Socratic dialogue. Davies is the lucid exponent of contemporary understanding of the universe and the role of the laws of physics in shaping it. Adams is the straight man.

Well, up to a point: 'Paul, among the laws that govern the universe there are three rather melancholy municipal regulations. Firstly, Murphy's Law. Secondly, Catch-22. And then there's the really bad one.'

The last chapter, which gets around to the subject of God, is, as Wertheim would suggest, the least interesting of the lot. But there are plenty of good pickings on the way. ■

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

Pythagoras' Trousers: God, Physics and the Gender Wars, Margaret Wertheim, USA Times Books/Random House, 1995. ISBN 0-8129-2200-x RRP $35.00

The Big Questions: Paul Davies in conversation with Phillip Adams, Melbourne, Penguin Books, 1996. ISBN 0 14 025937 6 RRP $14.95

ARCHIMEDES

Mad, bad and ugly

IT IS WITH MUCH HEAD-SHAKING that Archimedes views the carnage wreaked in the UK by bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) or mad cow disease. The only certainty, it seems, is that madness is infective—and definitely not confined to cows.

The mad cow saga has unfolded like a modern Greek tragedy, the matched fatal flaws being scientific inflexibility and political flexibility. Scientific inflexibility has resulted in scientists who refuse to give unequivocal answers, who use the language of probability, however compelling their argument. This allows more accommodating politicians to drive through the loopholes, selecting the most optimistic side of every analysis.

But politicians have also had to deal with the difficult proposition of a disease, like AIDS, which is a 'sleeper'. After infection, BSE takes between two and seven years to become evident in cattle. The proposed human link—the ghastly Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD)—takes more than 10 years to develop, too long for an electorate to link crucial decisions with their impact. This meant that politicians had to search for short-term measures to look as if they were doing something. In fact, the British Government dithered.

In the early 1980s, to increase milk yields, farmers in the UK began to feed protein supplements to their cows and calves. The best of these feeds contained soya or fish meal as the source of protein, but it cost less to substitute meat and bone meal from sheep and cattle. At about the same time carcasses began to be processed at lower temperatures to save money. Most researchers believe that through the conjunction of these two means of reducing costs, an infective agent which causes scrapie, a well-known brain disease in sheep, was able to jump species into cattle.

The first case of BSE occurred on a farm in Kent in 1985. Since then, more than 160,000 cases have been reported from England, Scotland and Wales. Studies have presented a complicated picture. But most researchers now think that BSE is caused by a small protein fragment known as a prion which stimulates changes in a critical protein in the cow's brain. The prion works like a bad apple in a barrel, slowly turning proteins bad.

The British government were not quick to act, and no wonder: public confidence in a $10 billion industry which provides 650,000 jobs was at stake. It took about three years (and several hundred cases) to make BSE a notifiable disease, to ban offal in feed and to order the slaughter of all cattle with BSE. Even then, in an economy measure, full compensation for slaughtered cattle was withheld from British farmers until 1990, another two years. Information from government-funded research was restricted. Researchers who challenged the government line or dared to suggest a link with CJD in humans were vilified.

In contrast, outside the UK, harder decisions were taken. Any herd in which any animal showed signs of the disease was immediately slaughtered. Stringent restrictions on the import of British feed or cattle were introduced. No other country has reported more than 250 cases of BSE, and almost all cases have been traced back to contact with Britain.

Even so, by 1993 the number of cattle succumbing to the disease in the UK was dropping, and the worst seemed to be over. That is, until early this year when a new form of CJD was discovered. Unfortunately, the fact that there is no hard evidence of a link with BSE, does not comfort the electorate. Nor does the observation that today's CJD victims would have contracted their condition before any beef industry action. Excessive past secrecy has ensured that no one believes the government any more.

At the time of writing, the lack of hard evidence leaves the British on the horns of a nasty dilemma. The government could, as seems likely, assume the disease was carried by offal, kill about 10,000 old cattle who were exposed to dodgy feed, and pronounce the scare over. But it would take some time to restore confidence in the beef industry—much longer if the list of CJD cases were to keep growing.The alternative is to follow Europe's advice to slaughter and incinerate the national herd at an estimated cost of $4.5 billion, even though this might turn out to be little more than a massive public relations exercise.

What a mess—but it's all so human, it could easily happen here. How about this for an example: the rabbit calicivirus, now running wild through southeastern Australia, is found in 40 other countries, and has been tested on 43 species. There are no reports of it ever infecting anything but European rabbits. Yet the Howard government wants three more species tested: koalas, echidnas and platypus. It's good PR, but what would the government do if koalas were found to be susceptible? ■

Tim Thwaites is a freelance science writer.

JOHN DOYLE

Balancing acts

THE YEAR 2001, THE CENTENARY OF OUR FEDERATION, is a focal point for the issue of constitutional reform, and in particular the issue of whether Australia should become a republic. It is an appropriate occasion for reassessment and renewal. What happens then is of great importance to all Australians. It will have some particular significance for the courts of Australia, and in particular the High Court.

I am not sanguine about the prospects of significant change being achieved by 2001. During its first century, our Constitution has been the subject of a number of comprehensive reviews, but none of these has produced major change. There have been two major reviews in the last 20 years.

The optimistic view is that there has been no significant change in our Constitution because there is no need for significant change. Events have shown that our Constitution is quite flexible. It was designed as a constitution for a federation in which the States were dominant components and the Commonwealth the weaker party. It now operates as a constitution in which those roles are reversed.

The relationship between the Constitution itself and that change is a complex one. The creation of the Commonwealth was itself an event likely to be productive of change, although those who drew up the Constitution could not foresee the direction which the change would take. Be that as it may, the Constitution continues to function for a nation in which the role of government is radically different from the role of government in 1900, and the relationship between the Commonwealth and States is radically different from what it was in 1900 and what it was expected to be. So, with some justification, it can be said that our Constitution has proved its ability to cope with change and that it will continue to do so.

BUT MANY COMMENTATORS CONSIDER that there is a need for significant reform in our constitutional arrangements. Most of our political leaders seem to agree that there is a need for change. There appears to be considerable agreement on some changes which should be made, but there is also significant disagreement on many matters. In particular, the role of the States and the relative power of the States as against the Commonwealth is a matter on which there is fundamental disagreement.

The debate today about our constitutional arrangements tends to focus on what is needed for Australia to prosper as a relatively small nation in the global economy, and internally there is a new emphasis on concepts such as subsidiarity (the principle that power should be exercised as close as practicable to the people who are the subject of the power), upon efficiency in service delivery and upon the striking of fiscal arrangements under which the States will have authority for raising a much higher proportion of the monies which they spend. Today there is probably an acceptance by most that the Commonwealth should be the dominant figure in the federation, but there is an ongoing debate about the proper role of the States.

To say that, in the light of today's concerns, our Constitution would be improved by a review and by renewal is not a criticism of it. It has served us well, but times have changed: after 100 years there is reason to consider new structural arrangements and new arrangements for the sharing of powers.

Constitutional reform will mean change. Otherwise there would be no point in it. At times we forget that in 1900 the people of Australia accepted a major change in governmental arrangements and power sharing. The people of the colonies surrendered significant powers to the Commonwealth of Australia, a new entity. They could not foresee where this would take them, and all sorts of limits, checks and balances were established to control the direction to be taken by the new nation. But still, it was a big step. I cannot help wondering whether, as a nation, we have the courage which our predecessors had to take a step of that magnitude. Perhaps the reality is that we are not convinced of the need for change.

In many respects change should now be easier than it was in the last decade of the last century. Think of the communication problems which were faced at the time by those who sought to persuade the people of the colonies of the desirability of Federation. Literacy levels were lower, movement around the country was far more difficult and, compared to today, means of communication were almost non-existent. But despite that, during that decade Australia's leaders managed to persuade the people of the case for change and to enlist their support for a complete new Constitution.

How did they do this? In a sense, the answer is simple. The leaders to whom the people then looked were able to reach general agreement on a package, which was itself a series of compromises, and then join in commending that package to the people. Even then, the task was not easy, and the package was not viewed with equal enthusiasm by all of the colonial leaders. But most saw the merit of the proposal, and were prepared to surrender individual differences and to concede individual reservations in the interests of achieving the desired result.

There remains a need for a process which is capable of formulating a package of changes acceptable to those whom the people of Australia today look to for leadership. That package would then, of course, be submitted to a referendum. Such a process of formulation *could* be one in which our political leaders are sole participants. Or the process could be one in which, at the other extreme, representatives of the people formulate proposals. I suspect that a process which is confined to the governments and political leaders of Australia, will fail.

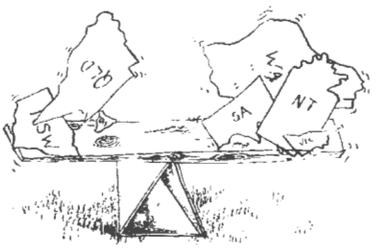
FIRST OF ALL, there are too many others in a position to exert a powerful influence on public opinion who would be excluded from such a process, and would react adversely to its outcomes. Secondly, I am inclined to think that agreeing upon and achieving real change requires a broader input. I do not pretend to have available the solution to this problem. In particular, I am not necessarily advocating a forum of the people as the solution.

But it does seem to me that unless we identify, quite quickly, a satisfactory process for change, nothing will be achieved by 2001. It is a sobering reality that unless we can agree upon the changes in the

life of the next Federal Government, it is unlikely to occur by 2001.

What has all this got to do with the High Court and other courts of Australia? The High Court's approach to the interpretation of the Constitution has enabled the Commonwealth to exercise powers of a width and over matters not foreseen in 1900. In itself this is unremarkable. Those who prepared our Constitution knew that they were devising an instrument of government to operate in circumstances which could not be foreseen. It is doubtful whether they contemplated the shift in the balance of power as between the Commonwealth and States, but they were content to trust their Constitution to work whatever the prevailing circumstances.

The relationship between change in Australian society and legal doctrine, including in particular the principles of constitutional interpretation, is a fascinating and complex one. The Constitution is neither an exact text requiring of the High Court only that it elucidate the odd verbal ambiguity or uncertainty, nor an empty vessel into which the High Court pours its own version of constitutional arrangements and Commonwealth powers. Developing the theory of how it is to be interpreted, and striking the right balance in the process of interpretation, is an enduring issue, and one that perhaps will never be resolved.



It is interesting, I think, to reflect on the fact that much of the criticism of High Court decisions rests upon unstated conflicts in the theory of interpretation. When is it proper to draw an implication and how does one do it? Should the powers of the Commonwealth be interpreted on the basis of any and what assumption about the balance of power as between the Commonwealth and States? Issues of fundamental principle like these underlie much of the debate about the validity of particular High Court decisions. One cannot help thinking that there must be a true theory of constitutional interpretation, and one that is all-embracing, but the reality is that, if there is, neither the High Court of Australia nor the Supreme Court of the United States has yet reached agreement upon its principles.

There is no doubt that the approach of the High Court to the Constitution and to its interpretation has been influenced by change in and external to Australia. It would be a reproach to the law if it were not. It is the extent of that influence, and the extent to which those changes properly influence interpretation of the text, which is the difficult thing. The link between these thoughts is that if the movement for constitutional reform does peter out, then the High Court will stand even more clearly as one of the most significant forces for change in our constitutional arrangements. By this I mean that if reform by referendum is abandoned, then the High Court's approach to the meaning of the Constitution will become ever more important to constitutional change.

I stress that, even so, the High Court will not be the only source of what amounts to constitutional change. Arrangements between the Australian governments can also achieve a great deal which is akin to constitutional change. For example, there are the arrangements for the raising of taxes and the distribution of revenue, and arrangements, becoming increasingly popular, for the co-operative exercise of powers such as the corporations power.

Whatever happens, the High Court will be important in relation to the workings of our Constitution, but its role will be critical if democratic reform is not achieved. For the last ninety-five years the High Court and the Australian nation have managed things this way, subject to occasional successful referenda.

But will we be able to jog along like this for our second hundred years, relying upon constitutional interpretation at the hands of the High Court as the main focus of constitutional change?

It is conceivable that under such circumstances the High Court might become more activist or adventurous, rather like the Supreme Court of the United States. On the other hand it is equally conceivable that the High Court might become less willing to be an instrument of change. In the last few years there has been an increase in popular interest in the work of the High Court, and an increasing amount of journalistic comment upon its work. To my mind this is a good thing, and by and large commentators have been accepting of the role of the High Court. But things can change, and the High Court can change with them.

Decisions such as the High Court's decision in *Mabo* show how major social issues which, arguably, should be solved in Parliament by comprehensive legislation, can be thrust before the courts for a solution if a political one is not devised. The *Mabo* decision also demonstrates the intensity of the debate which can follow upon such a landmark court decision. In the absence of appropriate constitutional reform, such potentially divisive issues might more and more be presented to the High Court for its decision. If this occurs it will present to the High Court a new challenge, and while I suspect that the Australian community will continue to accept its decisions, one cannot assume that that would be so.

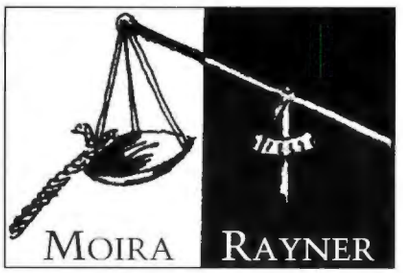
These days there is a fresh emphasis on judicial accountability, and to some extent this may be due to the fact that the creative power of the High Court has become more apparent in recent years. Its law-making role has become better understood. The accountability which is sought by commentators is frequently inconsistent with the essentials of judicial independence. Many people fail to see the difference between a judge and a legislator, at least when one is talking of constitutional interpretation. I make this point merely to illustrate the fact that concepts such as accountability have their part to play in the consideration of the judicial role in the interpretation of the Constitution.

For these reasons it seems to me that the outcome of the current movement for constitutional reform is of considerable importance for the High Court of Australia, and to a lesser extent for the other courts. It is important because the success of that movement may lead to new constitutional arrangements and provisions which the courts will again be required to interpret. The failure of that movement may lead to renewed pressure for the Court to be the instrument of change which cannot be achieved by referendum, and that in turn may expose the court to new pressures.

Meantime the High Court and all other courts in Australia face other, perhaps greater challenges. The efficient administration of justice, and the provision of justice in a timely fashion and at a reasonable cost is a major concern. Likewise, keeping the common law in tune with the needs of society, and interpreting in an appropriate fashion the torrent of legislation and delegated legislation. All of these are exacting tasks.

I am often struck by the frequency of allusions to the role of the judge in the Old and the New Testament, by the importance given to the role of the judge in the society in those times, and by the way in which the good judge and the bad judge are used as metaphors to convey a message. In today's Australian society judges still occupy a central role, but it is one which is often not understood by the Australian people. I believe that the courts face the task of reminding people of the centrality of their role, not for selfish reasons, but so that the people, like the biblical writers, will understand and cherish the principle of justice, one of their human rights. ■

John Doyle is the Chief Justice of South Australia.



Down by law

IT IS GRAVELY WORRYING that the Howard Government's first confrontation should be with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The justification for Cabinet's decision to appoint the next Chair of ATSIC rather than accept an elected head, to control ATSIC's grants to Aboriginal organisations through 'general directions', and to get the power to appoint a special auditor, was said to be complaints about funding rorts and mismanagement of indigenous organisations for which ATSIC is responsible.

Senator Herron, a compassionate and intelligent doctor with absolutely no experience in indigenous affairs, announced the proposals to tighten the fiscal fist in a media release which implied that the ATSIC Chair, Lois O'Donoghue, had been first consulted, and agreed. She had not. She hadn't even been asked for her own proposals to deal with the known problems.

The announcement damaged her authority, and ATSIC, which she has led bravely for five years. It got worse. After the Minister's first meeting with ATSIC Commissioners, Lois O'Donoghue was—rarely, for her—visibly very angry, and driven to comment on his lack of depth of knowledge and 'flippant' attitude. Former colleagues have described his manner as very decisive: useful, maybe, in professional interactions with lay clients. It is not helpful in Aboriginal affairs.

The meeting was ill-omened. A day or two before, the Minister had said he was prepared to consider abandoning self-determination in Aboriginal affairs in favour of 'integration' on a multicultural model. These were fighting words.

Nor was it conciliatory to announce his referral, to the police, of allegations of criminal activity by a 'close associate' of an ATSIC Commissioner. These moves were calculated to deepen the crisis, and prompted Ian Viner QC, Aboriginal Affairs Minister in the Fraser Government and co-chairman of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, to describe it as damaging and entirely avoidable.

ATSIC is responsible for funding Aboriginal organisations and projects, a task done very poorly by Commonwealth Government departments in the past. It funds about 2,000 Aboriginal organisations, and $136 million was allocated to organisations associated with some of its Commissioners last year.

There have been allegations of mismanagement, nepotism and conflicts of interest. Precisely the same claims are routinely made against local government councillors. Conflicts of interests necessarily arise when the elected representatives of a community

are closely associated with, and directly or indirectly involved in, the networks and business of their community: why else do real estate developers seek election? Of course most ATSIC Commissioners have ties to indigenous organisations: the Aboriginal and Torres Strait population is tiny, and its needs are enormous. They have little experience in handling the enormous political and personal demands of their constituency. How are they to learn, except through experience?

When I was Victorian Commissioner for Equal Opportunity, between 1990 and 1994, I encouraged my Koori staff's initiative, in response to expressed need, to offer training for elected members of Aboriginal Co-operatives in their duties as directors. We never went unless we were invited. It took years to gain their trust. This Minister may never get it.

Last year, Carmen Lawrence took back responsibility for Aboriginal health service delivery from ATSIC because of concerns about effectiveness. This year the Howard government seems to have Aboriginal Legal Services (ALS) in its sights. Interfering with self-managed legal practices is a much more serious matter: it is an interference with citizens' control over their own rights and responsibilities.

Aboriginal legal services began in the 1970s out of a white, small-'l' liberalism which was necessary and right for those times, not these. I was running a legal practice in Western Australia then, and speak from my experience of that ALS.

Many very senior, non-Aboriginal lawyers gave up remunerative private practice to work for justice for Aboriginal people: people like John Huelin, who gave up his senior partnership in a law firm; Graham MacDonald, who later became the first Banking Industry Ombudsman; and John Toohey, now a High Court judge. Scores more made significant sacrifices to work in the outback towns and fringes.

YOU NEVER FORGET SOME THINGS: the unconscious Aboriginal woman dragged out of the paddy wagon by her feet by a young city cop, her head bang, banging on the steps. When I protested he shrugged that she couldn't feel it, she was 'drunk' (she's probably dead now). There was the girl who hitch-hiked from Kalgoorlie to see her sick baby in a Perth hospital, slept out in someone's farm-shed along the way and was potted for three months by the local JPs for her first offence, the crime of trespass. The baby died before she got out.

I took referrals from the ALS. I knew nothing about Aboriginal culture and I made stupid mistakes. I couldn't get the facts from an Aboriginal client properly, or persuade a magistrate about the different standards to be applied to some kinds of ritual violence. I couldn't convince a judge that an Aboriginal kid should come out of the orphanage and go back to her mum, who wasn't 'unfit' because she had once been

'put on the Dog Act', that is, barred from town pubs because she drank, and was black.

By the mid-1980s the ALS had made a difference, and changed itself. It was run by Aboriginal people, not white lawyers, and they were claiming far more significant rights than the right to plead not guilty. One brilliant, hectic Friday we won an injunction to stop the SEC from desecrating a sacred site by driving a massive gas pipe through a river crossing. It was the most satisfying day of my life.

Ten years on, the future of indigenous legal services is looking decidedly bleak. There are claims that the ALSs have failed to provide adequate legal services, some of them valid; that they did not fund important cases (the Victorian service declined to fund the successful Northland Secondary College race discrimination complaint, in 1993-1994), or ran the wrong ones (defending violent Aboriginal men who bashed their equally Aboriginal wives).

Paul Coe, head of the NSW Aboriginal Legal Service, stands accused of conflict of interest in approving his own counsel fees; of high-handed dealings with opponents, and condoning racism towards non-Aboriginal staff. It was the NSW ALS which successfully ran the *Brandy* appeal, and won a pyrrhic victory in the High Court, arguing that determinations of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission were unenforceable under the Race Discrimination Act, and thus all anti-discrimination law was unenforceable.

The Victorian legal service is financially plagued, after an inquiry which found $700,000 unaccounted for, and three chief executives have left the service in less than a year. Alf Bamblett, then a Victorian ATSIC Commissioner, ran Koori Fleet Management, a private, profit-making corporation, in association with the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, in 1994. The *Age* showed how his relatives and members of his 'camp' ran Aboriginal affairs. He resigned from ATSIC, protesting that Aboriginal power-mongering is different. Senator Herron recently ordered an investigation into alleged mismanagement in the Brisbane ALS: 'Sugar' Ray Robinson, the heir-elect to the ATSIC chair, is accused of empire-building.

Claims of cronyism, inefficiency and conflicts of interest among ATSIC Commissioners have plagued the Commission. But it is not true that ATSIC has failed to act. The Minister had not examined the functioning of its internal Audit department, its references to police, its commissioning of independent investigations into irregularities in WA and in Queensland, and the 1994 Coopers and Lybrand audit, before he claimed the moral high ground.

Lois O'Donoghue wanted to separate the policy role of ATSIC Commissioners from funding decisions, but was never given a chance to explore this with the Minister. ATSIC commissioners have taken precisely the same 'precautions' against conflicts of interest as local government councillors do, by declaring their interest, and not participating in the debate, or votes.

It is hardly a revelation about black people that politicking and deals are always done outside meetings. It is a structural problem in all community-based governance, and equally true of local government.

In ATSIC the issues are the same: only the remedy is different. We accept conflicts of interest in local government because it is

familiar, and British, and the electorate is comfortable with the rhetoric of public interest and representative democracy, and so tolerates self-interested decision-making. If, however, it is a black electorate, the remedy is control by another constituency and, as Mick Dodson put it, a return to the Mission days.

ATSIC was created in 1990 because the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody concluded that 'the disadvantage of Aboriginal people is a product of the domination of Aboriginal people by non-Aboriginal people.' If indigenous people are to become self-determining they must find systems to protect themselves from individual weaknesses such as selfishness and greed, and the universal practice of protecting and promoting our own interests.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders need to be responsible for their own legal services, too. These must not become fiefdoms, or sexist men's clubs (and there's a fair bit of that!). Their clients are entitled to the best service, by the best lawyers. We cannot, however, go back to the 1970s, though it would do immense good to the souls of senior lawyers to spend a year or three in the service of the Aboriginal population.

SELF-MANAGED INDIGENOUS legal services work with an awareness of how the system affects clients' lives.They will lose their raison d'être if they are absorbed into 'mainstream' legal aid services, or left to the charitable ad hoc endeavours of the privileged professionals.

The Western Australian ALS exposed police brutality at Skull Creek in 1974, when truckloads of 'troublemakers'—Aboriginal people attending traditional ceremonies—were arrested and charged with public order offences. It demanded and won an electoral challenge in the Court of Disputed Returns and proved that Liberal Party workers deliberately intimidated Aboriginal voters out of voting in the Kimberley in 1976. It instigated the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody after 16-year-old John Pat died of head injuries after he was arrested in Roebourne in 1983.

These gains must be built on. If there be any doubt that the special needs of Aboriginal people to be protected against white justice, remember what happened to those kids who were threatened and dumped miles out of town by Brisbane police.

In the officers' criminal trials, the young Aboriginals were shouted at and badgered by defence lawyers and, finally, described by the magistrate as 'the accused' before he exonerated the police.

There is one land, one law, but different justice.

The new Minister has not worked with Aboriginal organisations and therefore has a refreshingly simple vision of what should be done about Aboriginal affairs: that they must be controlled. There is no doubt about the Minister's good intentions, but the road to Hell is paved with them.

Perhaps his extraordinary handling of ATSIC and attack on the ATSIC-funded legal services will give them a common cause: they may turn upon the foe, and not themselves. ■

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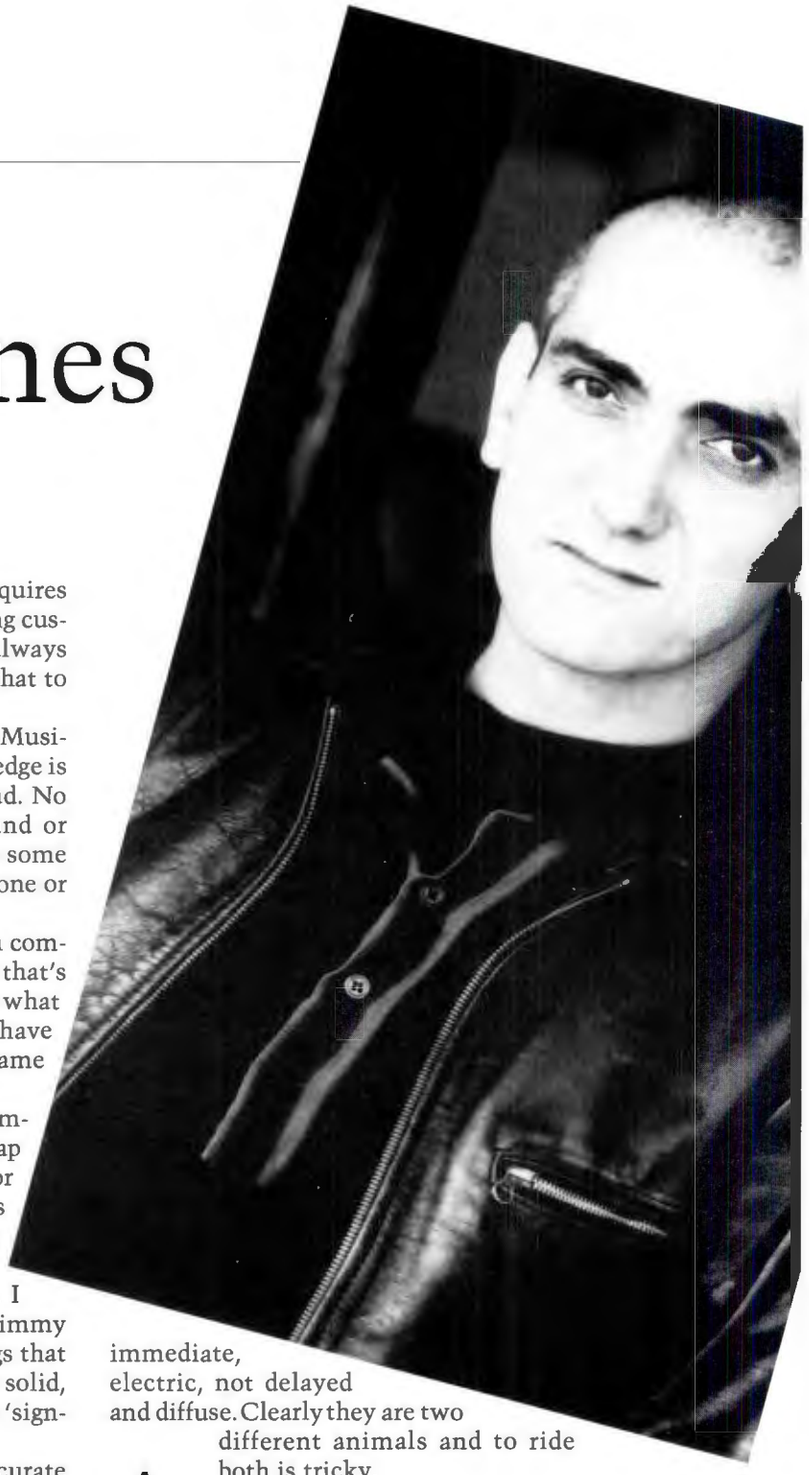
Melodic lines



EVERY TIME I HAVE TO FILL IN a form that requires me to state my profession—whether it's clearing customs or enrolling a child for kindergarten—I always have a moment of hesitation. I'm never sure what to call myself.

The usual labels spool through my mind. Musician? Sure, I carry a guitar but my chord knowledge is limited, I can't read music and I don't play lead. No one would ever hire me to play in their band or orchestra. To call myself a musician would be some kind of blend as if I was pretending to be someone or something above my station.

I once wrote 'radio star' on a customs form coming into the United States because I'd read that that's what Hank Williams used to write when asked what he did for a living. But the customs man didn't have much of a sense of humour and I couldn't name any radio stations that he knew.

Sometimes I write 'singer' because it's simple and it's what I do when I travel. But the gap between what I do and what I call singing—for example what Jeff Buckley does or Al Green—is too large for me to feel entirely truthful saying that.

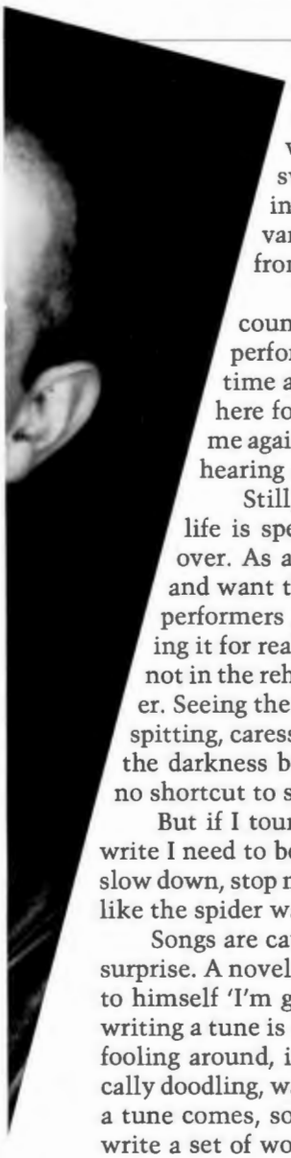
'Songwriter' is good. Kind of anonymous. I could be Jerry Lieber or James Van Heusen or Jimmy Webb—the backroom boys that 'write the songs that make the whole world sing'. 'Songwriter' has a solid, professional ring to it. It seems a real trade, like 'signwriter'.

'Singer-songwriter' of course is the most accurate label, but it takes up a lot of space and who wants to be called that these days? Too many whining guitar players in the corner of the room have given us a bad name. We're considered to be confessional, introspective, sort of folky. No one ever calls Prince a singer-songwriter though that's exactly what he is. Nirvana was two guys plus a singer-songwriter. It's a definition I'm happy to wear but only if I can stretch it.

The very term singer-songwriter embodies the dual nature of my job. I perform and I write. The demands of one are totally different to the demands of the other. A writer feeds on doubts, a performer on confidence. One works in solitude, the other with a crowd. Performing is much more physical than writing and is instantly grating. The response is immediate, electric, not delayed and diffuse. Clearly they are two different animals and to ride both is tricky.

ALTHOUGH WRITING A SONG may take five minutes or five years, essentially the process happens only once. The same can be said of a performance on record. Once done it's done. Public performance however is a process of repetition. Whereas a writer tries not to repeat himself, a performer must. It's his bread and butter, and it's what I do on average four or five months of the year. There is a constant tension then in my life between writing new songs and performing old ones.

I'm not a jazz singer nor are the bands I play in jazz bands. We don't improvise much on tour so the songs are not performed that differently from one show to the next. I thwart boredom by having a big



repertoire so I can change the songs each night, by dropping songs for a while when I'm sick of them, by switching from playing solo to being in a band, changing arrangements and varying slightly the line-up of the band from tour to tour.

Playing in new places and different countries keeps things interesting too. I performed in Europe last year for the first time and played songs there I hadn't done here for years. Old songs became fresh for me again because I knew the audiences were hearing them for the first time.

Still, the fact remains that a lot of my life is spent doing the same thing over and over. As a singer, striving for artistry, I need and want this repetition. This is the only way performers get better at what they do—by doing it for real in front of an audience each night, not in the rehearsal room or at home in the shower. Seeing the whites of the eyes in the front row, spitting, caressing and rolling those words out into the darkness beyond. There is dignity in this and no shortcut to skill.

But if I tour too much, I don't write songs. To write I need to be doing nothing for a while, need to slow down, stop moving, empty out my mind, become like the spider waiting for the fly.

Songs are caught, not made. A good melody is a surprise. A novelist may sit down at his desk and say to himself 'I'm going to write 500 words today' but writing a tune is less straightforward. It comes out of fooling around, in my case usually on guitar, musically doodling, wandering without intent. Sometimes a tune comes, sometimes not. And generally I can't write a set of words unless I have waves of phrasing or a tune to hang them on.

So without the melody I'm stuck, like a sailboat becalmed on the ocean far from home without a breeze. In the doldrums life can get pretty anxious.

The very elusiveness of a song, the fact that you cannot find one by taking a series of steps or following a set of directions makes it that much sweeter when you catch one. You feel connected to something outside yourself, something greater. It's almost as good as sex. Also, it lasts longer—and it pays the bills.

People often say to me 'Your songs are so Australian. How are they received overseas?' Many years ago I first heard a song called *Memphis, Tennessee* by Chuck Berry. It's a song about a man who cannot see his six-year-old daughter because he has split up with her mother. I'd never been to Memphis but I didn't have any trouble *getting* that song. Memphis was the background to the song just as the cities of Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney provide the backgrounds to many of my songs which speak of love, sex and loss (like songs the world over).

Curiously, a song of mine, *Bradman*, which I thought was indecipherable to anyone not from a cricketing country was widely requested in Sweden when I played there. I have no explanation for this. As far as I know they don't play a lot of cricket in Sweden. Maybe they just liked the tune, or the piano part in the chorus which was always my favourite bit. Or maybe they liked it because it was exotic—the way people here love *Guantanamera*.

Conversely, another song *Summer Rain* which I believed had no borders, puzzled a Belgian radio presenter I spoke to in Bonn. In the song a man waiting for his lover compares her to summer rain. 'Why would anyone long for rain in summer?' he asked, 'Don't you get enough in winter?'. I explained to him our long, hot summers, the days and days of temperatures hovering around the hundreds—I embroidered a little—the collective longing for a cool change. He smiled uncertainly. 'We get plenty of rain', he said, 'and summer's so short. We never want rain in summer.' The image of summer rain bringing sweet relief made no sense to him.

THIS PROVED TO ME THAT MY SONGS smell of home more than I know; that I am a regional artist not because of the place and brand names that litter my songs but because my birds fly north in winter, and that I will always be heard a little more intimately by my countrymen.

I regard this as an asset, not a flaw. Muddy Waters was a regional artist. So is Snoop Doggy Dog. Being regional has no limits. What the rest of the world may miss in nuance it gains in mystery.

I hear there has been discussion this past week on whether men can write from a woman's point of view and vice versa. I've written quite a few songs in a woman's voice simply because women singers have asked me to. They ring me up and say 'Write me a song'. It would be ungracious of me not to try. Writing songs is just a matter of keeping your ears open—and women talk to men. I might not know what women think but I know what they say and that's all I need for a song.

I enjoy writing for women—it's fun. All writing is a form of play and play can take you anywhere. ■

Paul Kelly's latest CD is *Deeper Water*. His lyrics are published by Angus & Robertson.

ANDREW HAMILTON

The next phase

IN THE RECENT FEDERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN, the generally muted topic of Australian identity was treated in contrasting ways. The more discursive and articulated vision of Paul Keating, with his interlocked themes of republicanism, engagement with Asia and a cultural compact within Australia, met a more abstract and less articulated vision of John Howard, with its reference to shared values, of decency, fairness and trust. On the margins was the brutal populism of Graeme Campbell and Pauline Hanson.

John Howard's reticence and avoidance of explicit discussion of larger issues were the most typically Australian. His lack of ease with the larger questions of why and how Australia should exist in the contemporary world, reflects a long-standing Australian suspicion of large rhetoric about national destiny.

Yet Australian reticence about larger questions of national identity contrasts with passionate debate elsewhere, particularly where national states face the threat of dissolution.

Despite the relative tranquillity of Australia, these questions may also be important here. For national boundaries have become increasingly irrelevant to the play of economic and cultural influences. In times of change, too, unarticulated notions of decency and fairness are liable to erosion by changes in cultural fashion.

Discussion of national destiny usually becomes popular in times of crisis, constituted either by the need to make choices or by national threat. Early debate about Federation invited a large rhetoric, most notably from the Congregationalist minister, James Jefferis. He grounded his advocacy of Federation in a keen sense of national purpose.

Jefferis defined the destiny of Australia by reference to its British inheritance and national character. While the genius of the Germans and Greeks was to seek excellence in art, philosophy and military conquest, Anglo-Saxons were : 'to perfect in the South that our fathers wrought in the North, and carry into the ages before us a freedom, a civilisation, a pure and beneficent morality, under which countless millions of our race may live in peace and righteousness and prosperity.' (This and following Jefferis quotations from W. Phillips, *James Jefferis, Prophet of Federation*, Melbourne, Australian Scholarly Publishing, 1993).

While he often described the Australian destiny as one of conquest over nature, Jefferis also perceived a possible imperial role in which Australians would: 'rule over the barbarous peoples who inhabit these seas, if they wish us to, with justice and moderation, and to found a peaceful empire, open to all the world.'

Jefferis' vision generally impresses a modern reader as characteristically Victorian: it adopts a high moral tone which justifies power and domination by appeal to a privileged national and racial destiny. This modern response to such rhetoric was shared by Jefferis' contemporary, Henry Bournes Higgins, one of the fathers of Federation and second president of the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration. (See 1907 Harverster judgment.)He saw in the appeal to national or imperial destiny a self-serving justification for military Imperialism:

> Others justify the new Imperialism on the convenient ground that it is the 'manifest destiny' of the Anglo-Saxon race to dominate others, and to teach them how to be civilised. The poet Lowell defines this 'manifest destiny' as being national recklessness as to right and wrong:
> 'an all this big talk of our destinies
> is half on't ignorance, and t'other half rum'.

Higgins himself defined Australian identity in terms of equitable relationships between different groups of Australians. His vision of these relationships was a moral one and emphasised equality: 'Our aim must be to guard this continent for the highest form of civilisation, to secure that produce of its soil, and of its appliances, shall not become the property of the few; to make it a land of equal opportunities for the coming generations.'

He endorsed an identity based on fairness and decency. His hopes for Australia were not dissimilar to those of Jefferis, but he would have regarded the latter's rhetoric of national destiny as an expression of sectional interest. So, in a way that became typically Australian, he dismissed it.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN JEFFERIS' larger view of national purpose and Higgins' preference for a more limited moral perspective reflected a long cultural history. The text which dominated the rhetorical treatment of imperial identity was the *Aeneid* of Virgil. It is understandable that English administrators and politicians, who generally enjoyed a classical education, should return to Virgil's self-deprecating evocation of Roman destiny:

> Others will cast more tenderly in bronze
> Their breathing figures, I can well believe,

And bring more lifelike portraits out of marble;
Argue more eloquently, use the pointer
To trace the pathos of heaven accurately
And accurately foretell the rising stars.
Roman, remember by your strength to rule
Earth's peoples—for your arts are to be these:
To pacify, to impose the rule of law,
To spare the conquered, battle down the proud.

Like Rome, England was to be less conspicuous for art and philosophy than for practical and equitable rule, and for the development of the resources of empire. Romans and the English were to be good administrators, economic managers and above all, judges.

The cadences of Virgil's lines are patent in Jefferis' prose. They can be recognised also in the Englishman of popular literature, who is not very clever, is at home on a horse and with a gun, and can be relied on in a tight spot. He is therefore equipped to rule the natives.

WITHIN ROMAN CULTURE, Virgil's view of national destiny was the stuff of conventional political piety. It drew criticism only after the toleration of Christianity, and then among Christian theorists. Elated by the dominance of Christianity within the Empire, some Christians, and notably Eusebius of Caesarea, discerned the hand of God in the choice and fate of the Roman Emperors, and claimed to be able to read God's purposes in the flow of Roman history.

Augustine dealt with these intimations of grandeur in the *City of God*. His scepticism about imperial or national destiny was astringent. He believed that, while societies and nations exist by God's will, no one could know God's political judgments. We cannot, then, identify the purposes for which God might give dominion and power to particular nations or rulers, still less regard them as sacred.

It was God who granted dominion to the Romans when he willed and in the measure that he willed. It was he who gave sovereignty to the Assyrians, and also the Persians ... The same God gave power to Marius and to Gaius Caesar, to Augustus and to Nero, the Vespasians , father and son, the most attractive emperors, as well as to Domitian, the most ruthless tyrant; and (we need not run through the whole list) the same God gave the throne to Constantine the Christian, and also to Julian the Apostate.

Augustine's juxtaposition of the most loved and loathed Emperors was deliberately offensive to his more patriotic hearers. It was as if he were to say that God had something in mind in giving power both to Roosevelt and Stalin, to Thatcher and Pol Pot. But we cannot infer anything from God's choice about the relative national destiny or merit.

Indeed Augustine went on to attribute the civic virtue of great Roman leaders to a moral defect—their love of glory. His own definition of human destiny was uncompromisingly in terms of personal service and love of God. He is radically sceptical about any evocation of national destiny. Positively, he identifies the health of a society with the choices of the human heart. Higgins would have accepted the negative aspect of Augustine's critique. He, too, regarded the language of imperial purpose as empty self-seeking. But, of course, he gave a higher value to prosperity and to its equal enjoyment than did Augustine.

It is difficult to think of any Australian reflection on national identity which catches the astringency of the Augustinian vision. Perhaps the one exception may be James McAuley, whose long poem, *Captain Quiros* continues to fascinate new readers because it is so large in its scope and so resolutely unfashionable in its vision. Here, Australian destiny is placed firmly in the country of the human heart, and the journey is inward:

Terra Australis you must celebrate,
Land of the inmost heart, searching for which
Men roam the earth, and on the way create
Their kingdoms in the Indies and grow rich,
With noble arts and cities; only to learn
They bear the old selves with them that could turn
The streams of Eden to a standing ditch.

In Australian discourse generally, a sceptical temper and fundamentally moral vision of citizenship has prevailed over a vision which would set it in the larger terms of national purpose. In this respect Higgins is recognisably more modern than Jefferis.

But despite the authority which the critique of national destiny enjoys, and despite the accuracy of much of its criticism, the broader, more generous and more seminal constructions of Australian identity have been made by those who have a strong sense of national purpose. The difference emerges when we compare Jefferis' understanding of national identity with Higgins'.

Jefferis' vision of Australia was inclusive, and was defined by its relationship to the region, and indeed to the world. He conceived the building of Australia as: 'the construction of a great Commonwealth, in which, as England has become great by the fusion of races, Australia also will become great by a mingling of the best characteristics of Asiatic and European,

with our own civilisation supreme: a commonwealth welded together in the strength of an empire which realises the Divine ideal of justice and freedom.

This vision led him to accept a controlled Asian immigration to Australia:

Higgins, on the other hand, defined Australia only by its internal relationships. A just society could be constructed only if the common interest prevailed over sectional interests. He identified coloured immigration with the desire of sectional interests for cheap labour at the expense of Australian working people. He did not restrict himself to this economic argument, however, but grounded his opposition to Asian immigration in a much more narrow appeal to the inherent difference between peoples and civilisations. Following his fellow liberal, Charles Pearson, he appealed to the instincts of the working classes:

> Where do you find the chief opponents of coloured aliens? Obviously, among the labouring classes. The latter have, with a truer instinct, resulting, no doubt from a more intimate experience and closer contact, discerned not merely the danger of lower wages, but the danger to our national character. The admixture of such differing types of civilisation is bad for both. Human life reaches its lowest degradation where two civilisations meet, and cannot fully blend.

The contrast between Jefferis and Higgins is pertinent to reflection about Australian identity today at two points. First, because Australia's economic welfare is so bound to her relations with neighbouring countries, Australian identity needs to take explicit account of these relationships. The broad analysis of Jefferis is more appropriate to our circumstances than the more narrow approach of Higgins. Secondly, the characteristically Australian emphasis on decency and fairness is particularly vulnerable to changes in intellectual fashion and national sentiment. These changes can imperceptibly weaken the effect and reduce the scope of these qualities.

The need to include external relationships in the definition of Australian identity is grounded in our changed circumstances. For however we Australians may choose to describe our identity, the economic and cultural conditions which help shape it are now intimately affected by our relations with other nations. Australia's economic welfare has always been connected with the health of other economies, but the consequences were relatively hidden when these economies were European or American. We were subject to the influence of those whom we saw as kin, to whom we gave a place in our construction of national identity. Australian economic life has more recently become intertwined with the economies of our region, and as the regional economies grow more interdependent, so will it become difficult to discuss Australian identity in isolation from the countries of Asia.

Our cultural dependence on other nations is also patent at the levels both of popular and of scholarly culture. Many publishing houses, journals and television stations have overseas proprietors, and much of their content is also provided from overseas. If we are defined to a large extent by what we see, what is put before our eyes will increasingly be cosmopolitan in its origin. Australian identity will need correspondingly to be defined by relationship to outside influences, as indeed it used to be previously by the special relationship to Britain.

These economic and cultural relationships with other nations will affect Australian life significantly. It will certainly be reflected in the temporary presence of a mobile group of managers working with the local branches of international businesses. The same permeability of national boundaries can also be expected to result in many Australians spending a significant part of their working lives outside Australia. This group, wealthy and influential disproportionately to its size, must be accounted for in any understanding of Australia.

Overseas programs for secondary students have grown enormously in recent years, and the provision of education for Asian students has become a big business. Some universities have set themselves the goal of ensuring that at any given time, one third of their own students will be overseas, and one third of the student body present will be on exchange from overseas. Significant experience at such an impressionable age must affect the way in which these students will see Australia.

The importance of personal relationships between Australians and the citizens of other nations is also evident in the way that trading links are developed. People do business within other societies most easily and effectively when they are familiar with each other's culture. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the recent expansion of trade with China has been largely shaped by the many Chinese who settled here after Tiananmen Square, and who immediately formed business relationships within their own country. The grant of residence to this large group was criticised at the time. The criticism was understandable, for those who define Australian identity narrowly by relationships between Australians, and justify immigration only by its effect on domestic economic activity, would find it hard to understand the benefits of the decision.

The Australian experience, too, has demonstrated how important it is for immigrant groups to relate easily to the communities from which they came, and to find these relationships respected in Australia. Where these ties are strong, where they feel accepted in Australia, and where the borders of Australia and their countries of origin are permeable to their relatives, their sense of Australian identity is more secure. The more these relationships are depreciated by other Australians the harder they find it to arrive at a stable and comfortable

sense of Australian identity. Many of the associations formed between Australia and other nations are driven by trade, and their potential influence on culture and on the definition of Australian identity is enormous.

If Australian identity is seen as composed in part by relationships with other nations, the resulting relaxed acceptance of diversity within Australia will create the conditions for prosperity.

The alternative to this broad definition of Australian culture is to define it narrowly in terms of relationships between Australians. This artificial definition bucks against the way in which Australians actually live.

The symbol of Australian identity is our immigration policy. It indicates how we define citizenship and how we see the boundaries of Australian society. The current basis of Australian immigration control is geographical. We are an island, and so can control immigration effectively by demanding that all visitors and new citizens have entry documents.

But at a deeper level, it is notorious that no man is an island. Peoples and nations which see their island status as a metaphor determining their identity pay a heavy price. Certainly, if Australia's physical boundaries are taken to be coterminous with our cultural boundaries, we cannot take adequate account of the importance of our external relationships. We shall see immigration and emigration as events to be assessed by current account costs and benefits, rather than as part of an evolving set of relation ships between people. As a result, we shall fail to take account of Australia's long-term interests.

A RELATIONAL VIEW of Australian identity stresses the importance of family reunion in immigration policy. This is not simply a humanitarian concession, but an appropriate expression of national identity. A relational view, too, will find more appropriate ways of treating on-shore asylum seekers than imprisonment. Asylum seekers are the victims of broken relationships in their own countries; a sound refugee policy will look to mend old and make new relationships.

The proper treatment of asylum seekers is at least as important in encouraging respect for human rights by our neighbours and ourselves as is the establishment of defence and trading links. The muddled treatment and impoverished lives of so many East Timorese asylum seekers in Australia makes clear enough the need for a consistent policy.

My second argument for an unfashionably broad definition of Australian identity is the vulnerability of abstract, unarticulated notions of fairness and decency. Higgins passionately defended decency and fairness in relationships between Australians, but was persuaded by an exclusive focus on Australian circumstances and a fashionable social Darwinism to leave Asians outside the sphere of these values. That is not to blame Higgins. The significance of his argument for a White Australia is that he did not notice its incompatibility with the principles of decency and fairness which he upheld so strongly. His blindness illustrates how easily a genuine concern for decency and fairness can be eroded when placed under pressure by circumstance or by intellectual fashion.

A central reason why values like decency and fairness offer little resistance to forces which weaken their reach is that these are familial values. We interpret them instinctively through the metaphor of the family, and imagine their scope as having first to do with domestic and close relationships. They are warm values. But their reach is controlled by what we associate with the family, and how we contrast the sphere of the family with all that lies outside it.

The metaphor of family has many associations, each of which evokes its opposite. The family is seen as the private sphere, opposed to the public sphere. It includes family members, who are contrasted with strangers. The family lives in the home, but goes out into the city to work. The area where the family lives is local, while unfamiliar places are foreign. Relationships within the family are governed principally by charity; those outside, by justice.

PEOPLE WHO APPEAL TO DECENCY and fairness usually have a strong commitment to the family and its claims. But the play of these virtues will depend on the sharpness of the opposition drawn between the family and all that lies outside it. These relationships can change imperceptibly from ones of complementarity and mutual enrichment to mutual incompatibility. In times of acute change, like our own, the relationships between family members and strangers, between home and city, between the local and the foreign, are generally perceived as more adversarial. At such times, we are concerned less to seek fairness for strangers than to demand protection against them.

In many respects this appears to be increasingly the situation of contemporary Australia. What is familial—the individual, the private and the local—is opposed to the public sphere, the stranger, the city and what is foreign. When family is defined sharply against the public and the city, it becomes axiomatic that the familial should not be taxed to support and develop the city, because the city is composed of strangers. Government should simply confine itself to provide security in the potentially threatening relationships between family and strangers. Fairness and decency are primarily family values, and have only a negative connotation in other relationships.

It is natural, also, for the public area to be seen increasingly as threatening. Coming once to New York from El Salvador—a genuinely dangerous place—I was struck by how much more vivid was the perception of danger in New York. People spoke of the public areas as dangerous, as they do increasingly in Australia. Public parks were places where you could be mugged

or your children kidnapped. Public transport provided traps where you could be stalked or harassed. The streets were places where you must avoid eye contact with strangers lest something dangerous befall you. Public toilets were sources of disease or worse. Even the public service could be a term of opprobrium, and was redefined as the distribution of commodities to private citizens, preferably by private citizens.

The attitude to the public sphere is summed up in the telling modish phrase, *out there*. *Out there* is a scary place, one into which we go alone as strangers. It is not a place where we expect fairness or decency, but where we hope for protection and safety. The city is not seen as a meeting place of fellow citizens, but as a jungle. A place where you open your door with fear rather than with welcome, and where every call for help is a potential threat to one's family.

Now this nightmare scene clearly represents neither the general experience nor perception of Australians. But it perhaps represents the fear of an increasing number. To the extent that it is shared, the distinction between family and strangers will

become sharper. Strangers become enemies, potential criminals against whom society needs to be defended, from whom we seek protection in the name of fairness and decency.

The list of strangers who are outside the family is long. They can comprise the unemployed, single mothers, the chemically dependent, indigenous Australians, refugees and immigrants who steal our jobs. Many people who are decent and fair within their intimate world do not believe it appropriate to measure treatment of these strangers by the same standards.

In Australia, and in particular in Victoria with which I am most familiar, there are many signs that the disjunction between family and strangers, between the private and the public is becoming sharper. The movement towards a more populist approach to criminal justice, with harsher mandatory sentences, participation of victims' families in sentencing, and more control over the judiciary, the traditional guardians of standards of public decency and fairness, by the Government. The Government sees itself as the defender of the familial and the private, and attacks any groups which claim to represent the public interest. In any society, jails are the visible symbol of the distinction between the family and its enemies. They can be expect to grow and multiply in a victory of private over public.

The appeal to racist feeling in the recent Federal Election in successful attempts to win election also indicates that the distinction between family and strangers has become sharper. So, too, does the lack of discrimination in current attacks on political correctness. While any attempt to outlaw particular kinds of argument by moral blackmail is fair game, some critics of political correctness want more than this. They want to be free from criticism when they display towards minority groups less than the standards of fairness and decency which they claim for themselves. One might agree that they have the right to show disrespect. But to win respect, both arguments and people need to show some sign of moral distinction.

The list could be extended. But the central point is clear enough. Justice and fairness are offered little protection when they are conceived in familial terms. An understanding of national identity which speaks of the Australian family is vulnerable to the oppositions which separate family from stranger, public from private, city from home. Where there is a narrow definition of family, there will be a restrictive definition of the nation, and diminished views of fairness and decency.

It is for this reason that the larger questions of national identity and purpose are appropriate and helpful. To ask about national purpose and destiny is to be impelled to look beyond the metaphor of the Australian family to consider the complex relationships by which Australia is in fact constituted. Questions about national purpose make it clear that the public sphere is not simply a field where people move temporarily out of their families to seek their living, but is a place of common building. It asks what Australians are building for. To that question, the familial answer that we are protecting the family is clearly inadequate for two reasons. It cannot give an adequate account of what is shared by all Australians, and it cannot encompass the qualities which define Australians by their relationships to other nations.

One Sunday in March, two events took place on Princes Park. Princes Park is public land. From the oval in the centre of the park, people set out on a family walk. The oval has recently been renamed Optus Oval, and is controlled by the wealthy Carlton Football Club, the organisers of the occasion. It was an old-fashioned Aussie day in its good humour, its faces and its symbols.

On the same day, other people set out from tents at the margins of the park. They were engaged in the Walk against Want, collecting money for overseas projects. It was a cosmopolitan event in the mixture of faces, foods, and passions. Different gatherings: different images of Australia. But the more marginal made the more seminal statement about Australian identity. ■

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Gerard Windsor

Encounters with religious Italy: Lombriasco

For nine years Giorgio Rossi and his family lived further down my street in Sydney. Giorgio came to Australia in 1969 as a 20-year-old. He was a builder and his first job was on the electricity cabling between Muswellbrook and Tamworth. The first girl he ever took out in Australia he met at St Joseph's, Murrurundi, the church in which my mother and my grandmother had grown up. Giorgio says he went to Mass there to meet girls.

In November 1992 Giorgio and his wife and two daughters went back to live in Italy. It was the start of the swimming season and I missed the Rossis at the local pool. Our family myth had it that Giorgio had taught my son, Harry, to swim. Harry's first, unbuoyed strokes across the surface of the water had certainly been from Giorgio's arms. Yet Giorgio had never learnt to swim himself. The River Po was a short walk across a field from Lombriasco, the village in Piedmont that had been his childhood home and to which he had returned. Sonia, Giorgio's elder daughter, told me that in summer she had certainly seen people sitting on the banks of the Po, under umbrellas, but she could not remember seeing them swimming.

Giorgio took his family back to what he felt was home, and to be near his mother who was eighty. They lived with her, and when she died two years later they stayed on. For Giorgio at least the sense of belonging here was as great as ever. His unmarried sister, Maria Vittoria, still lived in the old home. His eldest brother, Nino, a priest, taught in the *Istituto Salesiano* across the road where Sonia and Susanna were pupils, and Nino's room had the front windows on the first floor that looked down on to the street. At seven o'clock each morning Nino came out and went to the shop and bought a copy of *La Stampa* and took it up to his sister, Maria Vittoria.

For three years I threatened, I promised to visit the Rossis. Lombriasco, and the area covered by a semi-circular arc to the south of Turin, has nothing calculated for the tourist. I asked them to book me into a pensione in the village. They told me, when I arrived, that the nearest pensione was 20 minutes away and permanently full of workers who commute to Turin. The Rossis squeezed up in their tiny house and took me in.

Lombriasco looks out on the plain of the Po, runway flat. There was no sign of life yet in the grey-brown fields. Along the settled sections of the roads there were no winter gardens or shrubbery or lawns. Giorgio took out his guidebooks and his maps. He shook his head. 'You need a month,' he said. 'There is so much to see in Piedmont. My father took me.' His father had been a tailor, specialising in clerical outfits and habits, above all for the Salesians, and had taken Giorgio to many holy places. Now Giorgio took me, revisiting many of them for the first time since his own childhood. In every church we entered he lit a candle for his mother.

He had been in a Salesian minor seminary in Chieri and this, he told me, was the town of churches and saints—modern saints: Luigi Gonzaga, Giovanni Bosco, Domenico Savio. So he took me to Chieri and into its Duomo on 14 February.

'Look,' he pointed, his face crinkled with amused wonder. There was a glass display coffin and it held a skeleton. I read a modest printed sign: '*Il corpo di San Valentino.*' The saint of love lay on a tilted scarlet mattress, covered by a fine gauze, the radius and ulna of his right arm bound in ageing sticking plaster. The carved cherubs strained at their swollen kisses, but the gilt was flaking from their wood. Saint Valentine had been exhumed, the sign said, by Pope Clement XII and had been presented to a Count of Chieri who passed him swiftly to the Fathers of this church. Yet his shrine was poorly lit, and there were no flowers or special adornment to mark his day. At the door of the church we fingered our way down its directory looking for this most honoured of saints.

'*Niente*,' said Giorgio.

We went to the Dominican church. Don Nino, Giorgio's Salesian brother, told us we should see it. We asked a friar if there was any chance of seeing the cloister, but he said there was no cloister, and he shrugged and half-smiled. Even when I saw cloisters they were bare and unwalked, and all the vital rooms adjoining them were abandoned. The *Certosa di Pavia*, for example, was wondrous in its rectilinear vastness—a cloister around a soccer pitch cordoned by grape vines. Yet the Carthusians left this *Certosa* in 1947, some Carmelites took it over for a while, then it was vacant, now there are ten Cistercians there, but they live nowhere near the old cloister. At San Domenico in Chieri, in place of any cloister Giorgio led me to *Il sacro cingolo di San Tommaso d'Aquino*. It had a chapel to itself. Behind the altar a large 19th century narrative painting gave us the miracle. Thomas, a novice, young and lean, was being girded by two angels, sentient, even sensual beings rather than pure spirits. 'There,' pointed Giorgio. In a niche to the side the reliquary for the *cingolo* was splendid. Perhaps 150 cm high, it rose in an unencrusted Gothic spire, and at its centre an angel stood behind glass, the actual *cingolo* draped over her outstretched hand. I peered at the *cingolo*. It was more fine string than anything else. I could not make out whether it was just a belt as the painting would have me believe or, because there were tiny knots along its length, a discipline. If it were a discipline, I was surprised that the friars of the 13th century thrashed themselves so delicately. I was reminded of the San Marco fresco where the young stripped friar on his knees scourges himself under the gaze of Christ at the Pillar. Christ himself is bound but not being scourged, and he looks down on his devoté with a tenderness even in the awkward twist of his body.

We travelled beyond Chieri, north towards the Alps, where decayed Romanesque sites are legion. In the *Abbazia di Vezzolano* there remain only cloudy fragments of the frescoes. As early as 1924, some tourist was scratching the date of his visit just below the wood of the cross. On the glassed-in board by the gate of the *Abbazia* Giorgio and I found only one notice that was fresh and unfaded: a hand-inked message that read 'Puppies to give away. The Caretakers'. In the *Abbazia di Staffarda* the cell block had been a child-care centre, but it had just been condemned as unsafe and closed down. Restoration work had been begun and abandoned. In the refectory only St Peter and St John were still there, at the Last Supper.

THE NORTHERNMOST GOAL OF GIORGIO'S TOUR was the *Sacra*. The *Sacra Abbazia di San Michele* grows from a needle of rock high, very high, above San Ambrogio at the start of the *Val di Susa*. A millennium old, it was the second in a triangular line of great pilgrim abbeys dedicated to the archangel. There are three monks at the *Sacra* now. We parked half a kilometre below the summit, slithered on the ice and clumped our way through the snow to the abbey. Framed newspaper cuttings near the entrance showed John Paul II visiting the *Sacra* and proclaiming 'The world needs places like this'. The *Sacra* is the best-lit house of God in Italy: the natural light pours in. The church is crooked; the bottom of the nave swings away from the chancel at a 45° angle—to accommodate itself to the lie of the rock. The least-faded fresco defeated the understanding of both Giorgio and myself. A woman, perhaps a nurse, held a swaddled baby in each arm. Only one of them was at the breast. Another woman, more ornately dressed, stood detached. An attendant of the *Sacra* materialised.

'Who is this? What is going on?' we asked, pointing to the women and children.

He peered and shrugged and then he disappeared again somewhere into the rock. Outside, Giorgio and I leant on the ramparts and caught the clarity and chill of the air far above the movement on the pencil lines of railway and autostrada running out of Italy along the *Val di Susa*. I scooped up the snow lying fresh and even on the stone and clamped it into a ball and lofted it as far as I could out, down into the world. Giorgio told me a story about the *Sacra* and its eminence. A young woman called Alda had been praying late at the *Sacra* when she was assaulted. To escape her ravishers and trusting in the Mother of God she leaped from the precipice. As she plummeted an angel swooped and caught her. She told her fellow villagers of this miraculous delivery, but they refused to believe her. 'Well then,' she told them in exasperation, 'I shall leap again, and you shall see.' So she leaped. But the Mother of God was not to be presumed upon, and this time no angel appeared.

Giorgio and I crisscrossed the plain of Piedmont, at times blind in the fog, at other times bursting into strong frosty sunlight. Beside these rural roads, teetering at the edge of the culverts or sitting on stools in lay-bys and gypsy camping-sites, there were always prostitutes. According to Giorgio they were Nigerian, all illegal immigrants, all paying, or having paid for them, up to five million lire for work permits or identity passes or some means of establishing themselves in Italy. Last year, he said,

there had been a case where 55 of them were found to have acquired all the necessary papers by posing as a group of religious pilgrims. In big numbers they rode the trains between Turin and Milan, endlessly strolling through the carriages and photographing one another. On a day trip to Milan, by myself, I had a seat next to one girl and she talked volubly for an hour to a colleague who leant against my head rest. They spoke a language that included blocks of English and no elements of Italian. I picked up a strong recommendation of a particular doctor. A man strolled up to them, presumably Nigerian also, in cream suit and camel hair coat, and he did little more than stand there. With an air of cheerful inevitability the woman beside me took 10,000 lire from her purse and gave it to him. He moved off. Half an hour later he returned and, wordlessly, passed her three cakes of Saura antiseptic soap. She checked them and dropped them into her handbag. Then she unloaded a plastic container at her feet and miraculously fitted two single litre cartons of milk into the same handbag. She pushed and shook and tapped at the edges until the cartons were quite swallowed up and she clipped the bag shut. In her other hand she grasped a two-litre bottle of Coke and made ready to get out.

Giorgio and his wife Jeanne said that when they heard I was coming they decided to coincide the First Communion of their second daughter, Susanna, with my visit. Susanna was eleven. I had been present at her older sister, Sonia's, First Communion back in Sydney. They had a word to the parish priest, also a Salesian, and a teacher at the school with Don Nino. On the Sunday, after Mass, Susanna made her First Reconciliation, to the parish priest. On—as far as I could see—the spur of the moment her mother Jeanne, who was not a Catholic, also made her First Reconciliation. Giorgio and I mooned about the dark rear of the church.

The following night I got out my suit, the one extravagance of my luggage, packed in case I was taken somewhere important. Everyone looked dressed up, but Susanna wore grey slacks and a short green coat. At eight o'clock in the evening we went into the private chapel, once the ballroom of the old castle, in what was now the *Istituto Salesiano*—mother, father, two daughters, Aunt Maria Vittoria, and I. The parish priest, Don Marcello, was assisted by Don Nino. Susanna sat on a high stool and we flanked her, while the two priests sat opposite within a hand's grasp. 'In the first months of my life,' Susanna read to us, 'I did not eat at table. But then, one fine day, I too shared in the dinner and the supper. I had grown up. And now I am invited also to the supper of the Lord.' Giorgio took the role of Peter, and Don Nino that of John, and they recalled the evening of the first eucharist. 'From that day,' read the parish priest, 'the Church has never ceased to celebrate it. Christians have gathered to repeat the gesture of Jesus, to remember his infinite love, to announce his death, and to proclaim his resurrection in the hope of his return.'

Just as Mass was finishing a third priest rushed in, flustered and even slightly upset. He was the singing master and he had a fine voice. Irritated and apologetic, he explained to the parish priest, in front of the altar, that his journey, in the parish priest's own car, had been longer and messier than he had anticipated. He had been to arrange about some prizes in a competition, and he had been forced to bring the prizes, a piglet and two goats, back in the car. I couldn't work out whether he was apologising for the violation of the vehicle or for missing Susanna's Mass.

GIORGIO TOLD ME THAT MANY PUBLIC POSITIONS in Italy were designated for invalids.

'Really?'

'Yes. You're supposed to have a handicap to get them.'

'Really?'

'But what happens is that they go to people who've got nothing wrong with them. The invalids miss out. Beaten again and again. Like the cripple where the angel moved the water.'

I thought of caretakers and booth attendants and watchmen I had encountered. 'There are certainly invalids in some of the jobs.' I tried to weigh up some of the implications of this. 'Which are preferable? The invalids or the frauds?'

Giorgio blew his nose on a large trailing handkerchief and gave a dismissive flick of the cloth. 'Italy is a Third World country,' he said. He laughed, judgment and tolerance and tribute spinning together from his eyes.

Home, Giorgio, home. ■

Gerard Windsor visited Italy in February, and Lombriasco is his second subject. His first—Florence—appeared in the April issue. His next book, *Heaven Where The Bachelors Sit*, will be published in September.

Jim Davidson

Big picture men

Tom Roberts, Humphrey McQueen, Pan Macmillan, Australia, 1996.
ISBN 0 7329 0835 0 RRP $60.00

The central paradox of Tom Roberts' life was, as Humphrey McQueen puts it, that the old adage about great men dying twice—the first time as a man, the second as a reputation—applied to Roberts all right, but in reverse order. 'He had', McQueen writes, 'acquired a posthumous reputation before he died'.

Contrary to myth, this was not the result of exhaustion following his painting of the Big Picture, *The Opening of the First Federal Parliament*. Rather, it is a story of misdirected ambition, an epic of misplaced persistence: the dominant presence in the neo-Impressionist Heidelberg School wanted nothing so much as to hang a mythological narrative painting on the walls of the Royal Academy, London. When nearly fifty, he set about shaping his life to this end.

It is sometimes overlooked that of the four famous Heidelberg males, only McCubbin was born in Australia. Roberts left England at the age of thirteen, and had much of his training here, but returned there to study for three years at the Royal Academy, and more permanently in 1903: of his seventy-five years, thirty-five were spent in England. Moreover, his background was distinctly Tory. His father, a successful journalist, wrote to uphold the traditional order in two of the least progressive counties in England, Shropshire and Dorset. As McQueen remarks, Roberts was primed from birth to do business with the establishment: painting their portraits was therefore a much more obvious course for him to take than it was for the others in the group.

McQueen goes further, and shows how it was not by any means predetermined that Roberts should be a painter. His paintings were not always well-executed: that can be seen at a glance at the National Gallery of Victoria's new acquisition, *A Mountain Muster*. James Smith pointed to a clumsy arm in *Reconciliation*; McQueen to the awkward rider in *The break away*! Indeed, the author says that Roberts had little visual imagination, in that he had great difficulty in painting anything that was not directly in front of him. Although he worked in photographers' studios, he could not handle a camera to save himself. Yet writing came easily to him—an ancestral skill—and on more than one occasion he dashed off travel pieces for the press.

It is McQueen's contention that Roberts was a painter of limited talent, but great force of personality; at one point he says he could have been a great critic or teacher. A natural leader, Roberts recognised the cultural predicament of Australia in the 1880s, and was deeply hostile to the way the public would buy up British paintings 'dumped' here in much the same way as British manufactures. When Roberts sold *Shearing the Rams* for 350 guineas in 1890, some 17,000 guineas had just been paid for British potboilers in the previous eleven weeks. The colonial cringe was second nature, even to Roberts: while angry with the way the trustees of the National Gallery of Victoria were inclined to fob off local talent with prizes, rather than purchases, he himself on occasion could endorse their purchase of what now seem to be conventional British paintings.

Even so, the famous 9 x 5 [inches] exhibition of 1889 was, as McQueen puts it, 'intended to educate Victorians to discern local effects as much as it was to confound them with Parisian principles'. The great plaint, as is generally known, was that these paintings on cigar box lids were unfinished. McQueen is rightly charitable here, pointing out that since four-fifths of the paintings have vanished, it is distinctly possible that—given the youth of the artists involved—many of them were, in the memorable words of James Smith, 'a pain to the eye'. There must have been an in-ya-face element about the venture, rather like Barry Humphries' Dada exhibition.

In a very useful interchapter—almost a detachable essay—McQueen explores the question of why the reaction was so hostile in many quarters. He shows how, in the late 19th century, while Wagner had aimed at fusing the arts, others were simply confusing them. As George Moore put it, 'For the last hundred years painters seem to have lived in libraries rather than in studios.' Paintings had to tell stories; effects had to be 'poetic'. McQueen tells us that in the 1890s there was an evening at Melbourne's Princess Theatre entirely devoted to stage realisations of various paintings, including McCubbin's *Down on His Luck*. So when Smith described the 9 x 5 impressions as 'illegible', his meaning was more literal than may at first seem.

Unmediated impressions—with emotions triggered by a painting's tones, rather than its story—were truly, for 19th century Australians, the shock of the new. Narrative and mega-realist paintings offered an Ariadne's thread, connecting the colonial viewer with the world left behind. This new art threatened to

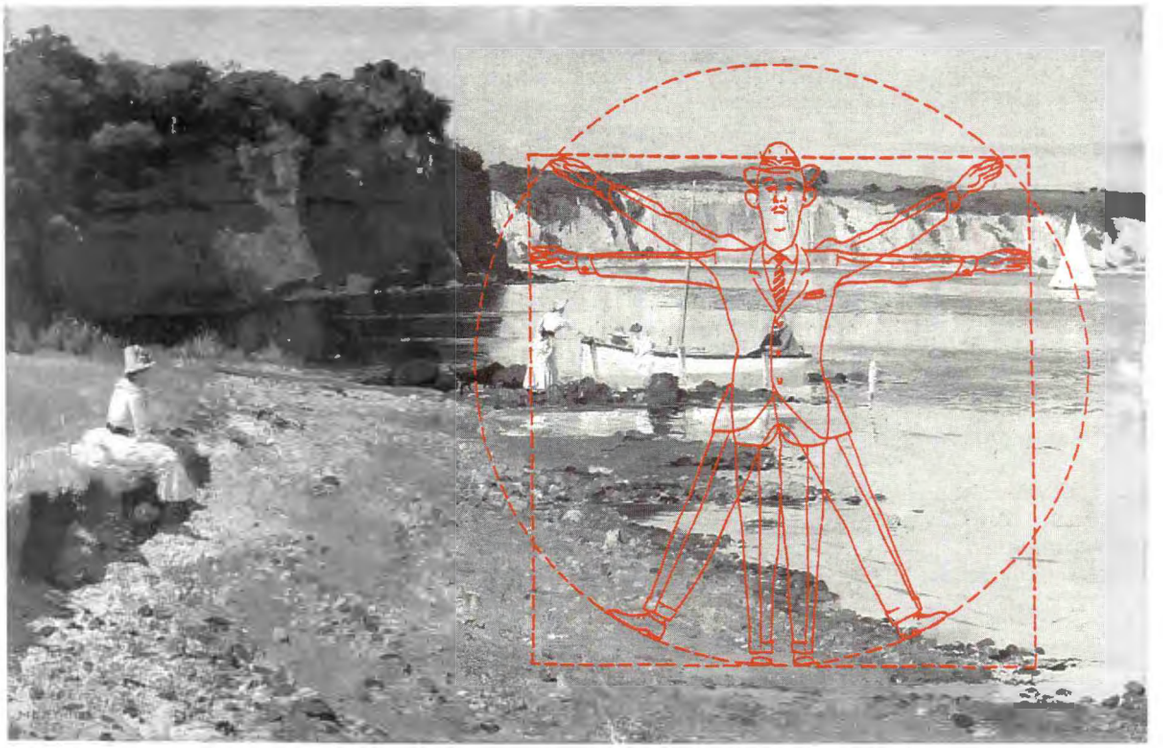
snap that: instead, these daubings required a committed imagination to connect them with a new environment. Hard work.

McQueen shows that Roberts was by no means a committed impressionist. Indeed, while one-third of his paintings to 1890 were landscapes, they can be matched by another third consisting of portraits, so a case can be mounted for Roberts' importance as a 'facemaker', even without the Big Picture. Roberts was to urge on Deakin the importance of establishing a national portrait gallery, over and above an unsuccessful angling for commissions. A national project was never far from his mind at this stage: he talked of the need to set down vanishing colonial ways, as the origins of a 'young country' which was 'going to become a great nation'. So there is no impressionism in *Bailed Up*, for example: on the contrary there is a tad too much stillness, as though it is already akin to declaratory mural art.

Unfortunately McQueen becomes somewhat carried away with this idea, and having decided that Roberts' 'best known images offer a snapshot of European Australia', he then roundly declares that if these seven listed pictures were taken away, then 'the remaining thousand would not have established any of Roberts' reputation'. This is as arbitrary as it is hyperbolic: personally I would question the inclusion of *Shearing at Newstead*, with its gaping spaces, and regret the exclusion from a list of Roberts' best works *A Summer Morning's Tiff*; or *Daddy Halloran* and *Madame Pfund*, to mention just two of the portraits. Fortunately, Roberts' own approach was never so reductively programmatic.

Nor, to be fair to McQueen, is his—for most of the time. Indeed, his own approach is best described as a passionate inclusiveness. This is a big book (730 pages) with big ideas. At the same time, he has spread his canvas so widely that he is not only concerned with the broad sweep of history (complete with money and class), but provides an attention to detail that is almost remorseless. You won't find here much discussion of brushstrokes and painterly qualities, nor even much engagement with the controversies over Impressionism in Australia or the kinds of clippers 1890s shearers would have used. These storms in teacups are calmed and then put aside. Instead, the details of the paintings themselves are scrutinised and accounted for, so that they become windows on to worlds. The exposition of *Allegro con brio (Bourke Street)* is quite masterly.

There are some shortcomings in this biography. There is not as much on Heidelberg as one would like, while the detail of Roberts' later life sometimes seems too great. On the other hand, the very full account of Roberts' father in rural England functions as a deposit of conservative sentiment that can be drawn on implicitly all through the book. But there is also some fine writing. The portrait of Richard Roberts, just before he disappears from the narrative, is evocative and well-placed. Effective, too, is the essentially domestic context of Roberts' Edwardian years in London: desperately trailing after the Big Picture, owned after all by the King. Roberts' repeated rejection at the hands of the Royal Academy—until he finally made their exhibition after seven years of disappointment—makes depressing reading. As does his preoccupation with the Arabian Nights world of *The Sleeper Awakened*. The awakener himself now slept, or at least dozed, having lost his dreaming.



Boyd's Modular Man *measures himself at Roberts'* Mentone

The erudition apparent in this book is enviable: whether it is discerning the kind of cab used in 1880s Melbourne, or the mechanics of sheep-shearing, McQueen seems to have all the answers. That his wide-ranging sources are paraded at the bottom of the page—something I never expected to see again in a new publication—acts as an enhancement. The book is splendidly indexed, as befits a *tour de force*.

★ ★ ★

Robin Boyd: A Life, Geoffrey Serle, Miegunyah/Melbourne University Press, 1995. ISBN 0 522 84669 6 RRP $29.95

INCREDIBLE AS IT may seem now, social radicalism in Australia at the end of the Menzies period was more likely to come from advanced liberals than from the Labor party. Spearheading the republican movement

of the day were Donald Horne (still a professed Liberal), as well as Geoffrey Dutton and Max Harris; while around 1960 Jim Cairns was told that membership of the Immigration Reform Group was incompatible with the White Australia Policy the Labor party still upheld.

Underlying a lot of this radicalism was a desperate desire for Australia to be seen as being sophisticated. While the cringe towards Britain was abating, it was replication in the form of a fairer, more egalitarian Anglo-Celtic society that was seen as desirable, rather than anything startlingly new. The tones on the ABC were still what was termed Educated Australian, and dislike of the local accent was general. (In 1974 the editor of *Meanjin* told a writer working in his office that she should have elocution lessons). Australian theatre and film, of course, had not yet emerged, and would change much of this when they did. But by the mid-sixties literature and painting in Australia had made great advances, there were stirrings in classical music, and, in architecture, the Opera House was going up in Sydney. A locally-grounded high culture was the motivating ideal then, and it is the eclipse of that goal—or its supersession—which explains why the mandarin figure who seems now to most embody it has, in recent years, faded away for the general public to become little more than a name.

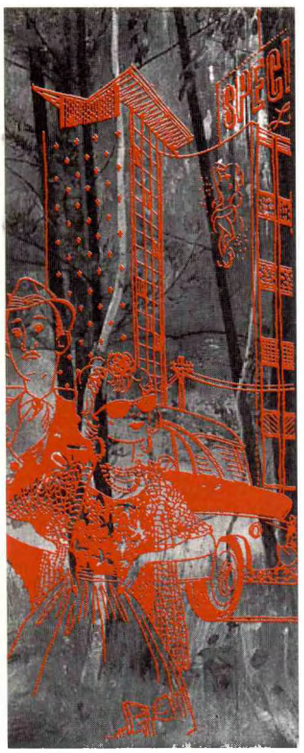
Right: Roberts' Artists' Camp *is overrun by Boyd's* Australian Ugliness.

Robin Boyd is less famous now than his novelist uncle, Martin, to say nothing of his painterly cousin Arthur. (One could imagine his mouth twisting wryly at the mere idea of being Australian of the Year). He drew deeply on his background as one of the Boyds—more deeply than he or most people realised, perhaps, for as Geoffrey Serle points out in his biography, his interests were not wide: he had relatively few books, and (apart from jazz) little interest in music.

But the cultural capital provided by his family—the only capital they did provide—gave him both authority and amplitude, and this, allied with his fastidiousness, wit, and writerly capacities, were to make him Australia's most distinctive social critic so far. Distinctiveness, or quality, was what he most sought: it was differentiation from ordinariness that led him to write the sleevenote for Barry Humphries' first recording.

Although always keen to consider himself first and foremost an architect, Boyd's itch to write and act as publicist was evident from the very beginning. While studying at Melbourne University, he revitalised the existing student publication and launched another—*Smudges*—which created such an impact with its discussion of contemporary issues that it was commended in America. Then followed *Victorian Modern* (1947), a book written by Boyd to trace a radical pedigree for himself by looking at the most innovative Melbourne architecture from the beginning of white settlement. His next book, the hugely successful *Australia's Home* (1952), provided a highly readable account of local domestic architecture; it also served, in its disparagement of Victorian taste and lingering ornamentalism, to act as a statement for the necessity for contemporary architecture, with its spare effects and clean lines.

BOYD ALSO CONTRIBUTED to the international debate on that architecture. His account of the ideas of Walter Gropius so impressed that architect that when his New York publisher was looking for a biographer, he suggested the Australian. This was not to be; but Boyd's book on Kenzo Tange—the first on a Japanese architect by a Westerner—did well abroad. Similarly *The Puzzle of Architecture* (1965), a discussion of modernism and its consequences, was widely praised when retailed in America. When Boyd died aged 52 in 1971, the Japanese media carried the news in their bulletins.



Serle rightly points out that much of Boyd's 'originality and discussion lie in his combination of International Modernism with intense local interest.' His desire was not only to be contemporary, but to sheet that concern home. Instead, he saw a shambling amateurism much in evidence, which he thought of as the last vestige of colonialism. And while he was prepared to concede that ugliness in the built environment was not exclusively an Australian phenomenon, he had no doubt that advertising tended to be more obtrusive here than anywhere else.

Boyd wrote of 'Austerica'—an Australia of Americanisation, never completely of the moment but tamed by two years' out-of-datedness—a place where featurism ran wild. 'You can never afford a good home', he wrote acidly, 'but you can always afford another nice feature'. Much of Boyd's most famous book, *The Australian Ugliness* (1960) is an elaboration of this argument. In it he became, more clearly than ever before, a social critic. 'Architecture', Boyd wrote, is the mother art, reflecting society the more strongly because it is unguarded.'

Boyd's importance as a writer has tended to overshadow his own work as an architect. Right from the beginning he made an impact, as director of the Small Homes Service of the *Age*. This advisory service would, in 1951, be responsible for one-eighth of all the houses built that year in Melbourne; J.M.Freeland described it as 'the best public relations venture that the architectural profession has ever had.' Boyd meanwhile had gone into partnership with Roy Grounds and Frederick Romberg, the firm surviving Grounds' defection. Although there were stories of Boyd buildings developing leaks and faults, Serle states that Boyd's work was no more prone to these mishaps than that of other architects; indeed, possibly less, since his work generally drew admiration for the ingenuity of the solutions he would come up with to overcome the problems presented by difficult sites.

THE BOYD *OEUVRE*, however, was not large: Serle puts it at 95 houses, 17 commercial projects, and 8 major buildings. Indeed his ceaseless scribbling—which almost ran to the writing of a biography of his uncle Martin—clearly affected his image more than it consumed his energies. Boyd found that he was constantly being pushed into the role of acting as publicist for other architects—when he said he would prefer to design buildings of his own. Worse, it led others to distrust his architectural capacities.

Boyd, who regretted that architecture was becoming less and less of an art, sneered that the talents necessary now for a successful architect were 'administration, golfing and finance, in that order'. These were the talents he did not have; towards the end of his life the practice began to founder. Boyd thought of taking an academic position—with great reluctance—and ruefully remarked that he would become 'what Australia wants me to be—the Max Harris of architecture'. Death claimed him first.

Geoffrey Serle was an acquaintance rather than a friend of Robin Boyd. You won't find much relating to Boyd's private life here, for Serle says few letters have survived. This is a biography of a public life, very revealing of Boyd's networks. It is also good on the workings (and dismemberment) of Grounds, Romberg & Boyd, and benefits from the convergences in the lives of author and subject, such as staff membership at Melbourne University and the foundation of the National Trust. Boyd's war experience in New Guinea (where Serle also fought) is vividly brought to life.

BUT THERE IS LITTLE SENSE of personal intensity, or much attempt to look beyond Robin Boyd's repressive elegance. Nor is there, in the text, much detail about the buildings; but Jessie Serle's excellent captions, in what is a sumptuously illustrated book, go a long way towards redressing the balance. Finally, the inclusion of extracts from Boyd's own writings makes the case as best could be for his flair, polemical talent and incisiveness. ■

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What Borromini Saw

Something appropriate to being Bernini's butler,
An upstart world of feigning ecstasy,
An inflammatory geometry growing ever subtler,
The foothold of angels on the slope of a pea.

The House of Melancholy as A Temple of Reason,
Concavity, in shape as a recessive gene,
The Mass compressed to just Kyrie Eleison,
Earth's curve, Sky's line, Man in between.

From the latin 'caedo', a stonecutter's suicide,
But loved by materials on scaffold or in hod,
Rome's bridegroom ditched by his hard-faced bride,
The Phoenix Basilisk of an Incarnate God.

Peter Porter

PETER STEELE

Big cat

On Grief and Reason: Essays, Joseph Brodsky, Farrar Straus Giroux, New York, 1995.
ISBN 0 374 234 15 9 RRP $43.95

THE PHOTOGRAPH OF Joseph Brodsky on the back of this book's jacket shows him cradling a cat. Years ago, another photograph, this time on a cassette of the poet reciting his poetry, offered him with a leaner and perhaps a younger cat. I thought of the Irish monk who wrote of his White Pangur, the two of them assiduous mousers, the one after a meal and the other after meanings. And I thought of Montaigne, the great shape-shifter, who asked whether he played with his cat or she with him.

The game grows more elaborate if you look at the front of the jacket this time, where there is a reproduction of a lion rampant, taken from a coat of arms which decorated Sheremetev Palace in Leningrad, 'for many years the residence of Anna Akhmatova.' She, a sponsor of the youthful Brodsky, was no pussy-cat, whatever the ripple of imagination running through her work, and he, as both admirers and enemies were to find out, had a more ambitious agenda than merely strutting his stuff.

On Grief and Reason, among its other attractions, offers Brodsky at play and Brodsky on the roar. Properly, much of his poetry and many of the essays in his earlier *Less than One* attract admiration, and something approaching reverence—doubly fitting towards a writer who was amply gifted with both qualities. He could be leonine, imperial, in his enthusiasms, and he could do grandeur without grandiosity. But he could also play the hellion, flourish chutzpah, be the anarch for a while, and he made no compacts as to when this side of himself would or would not be given a run. In a recent poem in memory of Brodsky, Paul Muldoon refers to his 'great peaches-and-diesel tenor.' As far as prose can do it, *On Grief and Reason* gives the whole spread, from solemnity to insobriety.

There are twenty-one pieces here, and their occasions are various. One of them, the shortest, is the acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize in literature: another, 'Speech at the Stadium,' is a commencement address at the University of Michigan, where Brodsky taught for eight years: a third is an open letter to Vaclav Havel, enjoining on him the view that 'it seems more prudent to build society on the premise that man is evil rather than the premise of his goodness:' a fourth, 'An Immodest Proposal,' delivered at the Library of Congress, urges that 'Fifty million copies of an anthology of American poetry for two dollars a copy can be sold in a country of 250 million.'

This last concludes in characteristic, though unpredictable, fashion:

> A quarter of a century ago, in a previous incarnation in Russia, I knew a man who was translating Robert Frost into Russian. I got to know him because I saw his translations: they were stunning poems in Russian, and I wanted to become acquainted with the man as much as I wanted to see the originals. He showed me a hardcover edition (I think it was by Holt), which fell open onto the page with 'Happiness Makes Up in Height for What It Lacks in Length.' Across the page went a huge, size-twelve imprint of a soldier's boot. The front page of the book bore the stamp 'STALAG #3B,' which was a World War II concentration camp for Allied POWs somewhere in France.
>
> Now, there is a case of a book of poems finding its reader. All it had to do was to be around. Otherwise it couldn't be stepped on, let alone picked up.

On offer here are several elements which themselves bear the stamp of Brodsky at work. There is personality, front and centre, to bear witness. Brodsky would have found both craven and ludicrous the notion that that old hack the Zeitgeist, in whatever contemporary rig it can muster, could plausibly get the writing done, and then lie there marmoreally as Text. He found it natural to keep on standing up on the page, wielding selfhood, however ragged. This is a conspicuous feature of his poetry, from quite early until the end, and there is a continuum between much of the poetry and much of the prose.

And there is, in the passage, a characteristic relish for life's extravaganza, its perpetual violation of decorums, its addiction to minglings and medleys. Brodsky could, as the title-essay of this book shows, be thunderstruck by Frost, as he had been by Donne and by Auden, let alone Russian predecessors: but what typically happened when he was in their grip was two-fold.

On the one hand, language could romance him almost into delirium—he was like a zoo-born seal being shown the ocean; on the other, he was one of those people whom language beds down more and more emphatically into things and the way they go. The psychic liberation of Frost's 'stunning poems' is pitched against the boot's encasement, the camp's imprisonment: and there they were, two living men shadowed by two others, one known and one unknown, making what they could of life's maelstrom, which is none the less so for sometimes moving slowly.

And thirdly, there is the touch in the last sentence—rueful, ironic, but revealing. Brodsky was to retrieval what Edison was to invention. He loved to get things back from between Time's teeth, not just to beat that Cyclops, but to find them still current, germinal, regal. Amongst the pieces in *On Grief and Reason*

are 'Profile of Clio,' 'Homage to Marcus Aurelius,' 'Wooing the Inanimate,' 'Ninety Years Later,' 'Letter to Horace,' and 'In Memory of Stephen Spender.' None of them is just that necessary, good but limited thing, a decent verdict on something and someone now done with. They do indeed have something of the mantle of Montaigne about them—a garment whose warp and woof of gravity and gaiety gives us the mind's shot silk. The best pictorial analogy I know for Brodsky's acts of retrieval is Stanley Spencer's 'The Resurrection: Cookham,' where a churchyard's motley array is tumbled out, still full of its own character, to deal with absolute novelty.

Novelty aplenty there is when Brodsky comes to town. 'How to Read a Book' was delivered at the opening of the first book fair in Turin, in 1988. It begins, 'The idea of a book fair in the city where, a century ago, Nietzsche lost his mind has, in its own turn, a nice ring to it,' and it practically ends with, 'A hundred years hence, nobody's insanity will matter much to the multitudes whose number will exceed by far the total of little black letters in all the books at this book fair put together.' A lot happens in between, much of it a celebration of poetry—for example, this paragraph:

> The more one reads poetry, the less tolerant one becomes of any sort of verbosity, be it in political or philosophical discourse, in history, social studies, or the art of fiction. Good style in prose is always hostage to the precision, speed, and laconic intensity of poetic diction. A child of epitaph and epigram, conceived, it appears, as a shortcut to any conceivable subject matter, poetry is a great disciplinarian to prose. It teaches the latter not only the value of each word but also the mercurial mental patterns of the species, alternatives to linear composition, the knack of omitting the self-evident, emphasis on detail, the technique of anticlimax. Above all, poetry develops in prose that appetite for metaphysics which distinguishes a work of art from mere *belles lettres*. It must be admitted, however, that in this particular regard, prose has proven to be a rather lazy pupil.

This piece of prose is itself a handsome piece of behaviour, pliant to a rapidly moving mind, disciplined in its rhetoric, elegant in its juxtapositions, vivid enough in its metaphorical life to lend authority to its insights, but never lingering on any metaphor long enough to rob the

paragraph of its muscular pacing. As such, it is vintage Brodsky in one of his prose moods: anyone can see that his back-of-the-hand to 'mere *belles lettres*' is not the gesture of someone uneasy about his own competency as a prosaist.

IT IS ALSO THE WRITING of an expositor, and sometimes a proclaimer. The young Brodsky wrote a truly extraordinary poem which was both an emulation of and a lament for John Donne: and although he was and remained in many ways miles away from Donne's religious allegiances, he made his own Donne's role as herald. Brodsky is more concerned with actualities and necessities (including the necessity of freedom) than with plausibilities—hence the allusion to the 'appetite for metaphysics'—though of course, like Donne, he wants to lend his positions all the plausibility he can muster. The ancient, and recurrent, ambition of the poet to be both enchanter and enlightener finds plenty of expression in Brodsky's prose. God knows what they made of it all at the book fair.

Or, come to that, in January last year, when, at a symposium organized by the Foundation for Creativity and Leadership, in Switzerland, he announced that he detested the very term 'creativity,' and went on in a creative enough way to explain why. Enchanter though he could be, Brodsky could take a sombre pleasure in disenchanting. He had a lot of Beckett in his system, a lot of Kierkegaard: and although, both in prose and in verse, he had a love for masquerade, he rarely confused mask with person, gambit with mind.

For some years I have supposed that his poems could best be called 'Mutability Cantos', both because this throws a Brodskean glance back over a few centuries at the Spenser who wrote just those, and because it seems to me that if his poetry has a hero, it is Proteus, the Mutability Kid. Accordingly, it was a double pleasure to come across 'Letter to Horace,' part fantasia and part apologia, in which Brodsky addresses the ancient poet and, conceding his distinction and that of Virgil, and Catullus, and Propertius, and Lucretius, plumps outright for Ovid—'Publius Ovidius Naso.' The reason is clear:

> ...what Naso was after wasn't even a metaphor. His game was morphology, and his take was metamorphosis. When the same substance attains a different form. The main thing is the sameness of substance. And, unlike the rest of you, he managed to grasp the simple truth of us all being composed of the stuff the world is made of. Since we are of this world. So we all contain water, quartz, hydrogen, fiber, et cetera, albeit in different proportions. Which can be reshuffled. Which already have been reshuffled into that girl. Small wonder she

becomes a tree. Just a shift in her cellular makeup. Anyhow, with our species, shifting from the animate to the inanimate is the trend. You know what I mean, being what you are.

For all the flourish, this is more than frolic: Brodsky means it—says it, equivalently, too often elsewhere for it to be an accident. He has an imagination which is at once extraordinarily vigorous and entropic. He was fascinated by Venice, which he saw through the lens of his native city, Petersburg, and about which he wrote an array of poems and a whole prose book: it was largely because of the city's interplay between mobility and stasis.

He liked intricacy, formality, elaboration in the construction of his own poems, and when, in *On Grief and Reason*, he examines at length the work of Frost, or of Hardy, or of Rilke, he moves instinctively to indicate these things in their poetry: but he can rarely talk about those made shapes, those pyramidal monuments, without finding them volcanoes after all, the lava rising, the fire spilling.

If one stuck so clumsy a label as 'materialist' on his work, it would have to be on the clear understanding that his nom-de-guerre would be 'Heraclitus': and once you get a Heraclitus loose in the imagination, anything can happen—witness Hopkins.

Brodsky wrote a lot about travel, some of it jaunty, some rueful, some intense, and there are samples of all three types in this book; the being physically on the move matched in some degree the being emotionally and intellectually on the move. Scattered through the pages, with a lavish hand, are dicta which bear out the love for 'epitaph and epigram,' and it is striking to see how often they betoken at once movement and conclusion. Almost at random, I find, 'In a manner of speaking, we all work for a dictionary;' 'A free man, when he fails, blames nobody;' 'The more one travels, the more complex one's sense of nostalgia becomes;' 'Everything that displays a pattern is pregnant with boredom;' 'A target cannot accept a bullet;' 'Of all the parts of your body, be most vigilant over your index finger, for it is blame-thirsty. A pointed finger is a victim's logo—the opposite of the V sign and a synonym for surrender;' 'The most definitive feature of antiquity is our absence;' 'Out of the past there is only one route, and it takes you into the present.' This is a crystalline imagination, the edges sharp, the structure growing.

The epigraph to this book is a quotation from Auden, Brodsky's *genius loci*, the place being the world. It runs, 'Blessed be all metrical rules that forbid automatic responses, force us to have second thoughts, free us from the fetters of Self.' I would set this beside the conclusion of 'Uncommon Visage,' the Nobel Lecture:

> ...there are times when, by means of a single word, a single rhyme, the writer of a poem manages to find himself where no one has ever been before him, further, perhaps, than he himself would have wished to go. The one who writes a poem writes it above all because verse writing is an extraordinary accelerator of consciousness, of thinking, of comprehending the universe. Having experienced this acceleration once, one is no longer capable of abandoning the chance to repeat this experience; one falls into dependency on this process, the way others fall into dependency on drugs or alcohol. One who finds himself in this sort of dependency on language is, I suppose, what they call a poet.

What is at issue here—as in Brodsky's still more distinguished earlier prose volume, *Less Than One*—is poetry as a passion, with both tilts to that word—something undergone, something discharged. At a time when mulish Sancho Panzas are intent on deposing imagination once and for all, such thinking may seem doubly quixotic: but then, Brodsky was never a very suitable subject for bullying. Some things, he knew, take time to come to their fullness. As does reason. As does grief. ■

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BOOKS: 3

PETER PIERCE

A language of their own

Tassie Terms: A Glossary of Tasmanian Words, Maureen Brooks and Joan Ritchie, eds; Oxford University Press, 1995. RRP $24.95 ISBN 0 19 553812 9

In the concrete gully at an Alice Springs motel, where coaches deposit and collect parties of ageing tourists, elderly couples whom chance might soon seat across an aisle introduced themselves.

One pair of retirees was from New South Wales, the other from Hobart. For the latter, the bare notation of his home city was not enough. 'It's not a bad little place, Tassie', the man announced to the party at large. This was a moment whose poignancy time has not blunted for a fellow, if embarrassed Tasmanian. His words had to be understood as a matter of intonation, a defensiveness mildly, but resolutely expressed. They had less to do with diction, than attitude.

Essential cadences of the speech of Tasmanians will always elude both the outsider and the most conscientious of lexicographers. That is not to say that the recent 'glossary of Tasmanian words', tweely titled *Tassie Terms*, should not be welcomed warmly. A production of the

Australian National Dictionary Centre, it is—according to the editors, Maureen Brooks and Joan Ritchie—'a deliberate and constrained effort in regional lexicography'. Their aim was not comprehensiveness. Moreover, extensive reading for the published usage of words discovered not so much their peculiar incidence south of Bass Strait, but 'a probability that these terms will occur more frequently in texts written in Tasmania'.

Sample double pages give the sense of what riches the editors discovered. In the Gs, for instance, cluster references historical, biological, colloquial and controversial. 'Governor of the Straits' was the ominous, self-bestowed sobriquet of 'the infamous sealer James Munro', who—by forcing Aboriginal women into concubinage—unwittingly helped to keep the race alive. 'The 'Great Lake paraglaxias' is another original, a blotchy fish found only in the lake from which its name derives and in the Shannon Lagoon, waters well known to the angler, Malcolm Fraser. This page also yields 'greasy luck', an expression of the hope of good fortune before a whaling voyage. Not that one always needed to go far. In the 1820s, whales were regularly caught in the Derwent River. That was the economic zenith of the colony. It has been downhill ever since.

One explanation for that might be conjectured from the last entry on the page. 'Greenie' is 'a conservationist'. The term is at once a badge of honour and a sign of bitter contempt. The *Australian National Dictionary* records its first use as long ago as 1973. 'Not exclusively Tasmanian', as these editors note, it is 'of particular significance in this State which has seen considerable conflict between conservationists and developers'. A terrible history is masked by this cautious explanation. Elaborated, it would reveal how the electorate of Bass passed from Labor's to Liberal's safest in a decade; how families in the timber industry (most of whose jobs are anyway doomed) turned from the staunchest of Labor supporters to the group most disaffected with the party; how the political career of Bob Brown, which brought minority government to Tasmania and him to the Senate, began in the forests of the north-west. In the rancour and loss of which it speaks, this is a veritable Tasmanian story, if hardly a joke. And one word, as *Tassie Terms* commendably shows, is sufficient to start the tale.

Another hope of Brooks and Ritchie was that the terms they gathered would 'collectively, reflect in some way the ethos of the island'. As their study amply illustrates, that 'ethos' has often been confected, or imposed from without. Tourism is responsible for the promotion of the adjective 'convict' to qualify the material world of bricks, buildings and settlements, as well as to invoke a sinister, if nebulous 'past'. 'Mainlanders' are to blame for such disparaging nonsense coinages as 'Taswegian', a word no self-respecting native would utter. Brooks and Ritchie find impositions of much older origin in the many English place-names for parts of Tasmania. The hoary and sentimental assumption, here implicitly endorsed, that Tasmania is 'a little England', ignores how many of these signifiers are properly and more precisely Scottish, courtesy of Governor Lachlan Macquarie. From him (and for his relatives and their land-holdings) came names of towns—Ross, Bothwell, Campbell Town—and regions whimsically translated to southern latitudes, so that Tasmania acquired a Highlands of its own. The 'apple isle' has suffered not only from outsiders' forgetfulness, but from their too solicitous attention.

Mutant Proverbs

Nine stitches are a waste of time.
It's the early worm who gets caught by the bird.
A Mossy stone gathers a Rolls.
Sleight of hand makes many work.
There's no police like Home.
Space for the goose is spice for the gander.
Butter the devil you know and batter the devil you don't.
The child is farther from the man.
When in Rome do the Romans.
A bird in the Strand is worth two in Shepherd's Bush.
An apple a day is not a doctor's pay.
A friend in tweed is a friend in need.
No fuel like a cold fuel.
Vedere Napoli e poi mentire / See Naples and lie.
Pour encourager les auteurs.
Après le déluge, c'est moi.
Blood is quicker than mortar.
Spokes of the devil.
In drains begins responsibility.
Too many cocks spoil the brothel.
The family that prays together slays together.
From cleanliness to godliness, what next?
Apotheosis of the dons.
A rose by any other name would cost much less.
A diamond is for Eve.
Jam yesterday, jam tomorrow, logjam today.
Life is a dram.
By their frights ye shall know them.
Dying will be a great invention.
Sweet are the uses of advertising.
Virtue is its own regard.

Peter Porter

Editing *Tassie Terms* along established lexicographical principles, finding usages only in printed sources, has led Brooks and Ritchie into unwitting or perhaps unavoidable distortions of their material. Belated attribution is prime among these. Take 'nointer', a term more of affection than reproof in my Hobart seed-time, which comes from 'British dialect' and is defined as applying 'to young children and roughly synonymous with brat'. That gives a slightly false shading to the period usage of a word now seldom overheard. The editors' source is the Hobart *Mercury* for August 1994, where a term no longer seen in print (and scarcely ever likely to have been) is resuscitated as a linguistic curiosity. Too much of this goes on, but in large part because there is no certifiable way of tapping the rich usage of ageing Tasmanians, to whom 'nointer' and many other regional words and phrases come as naturally as the impulse to make them part of stories of their land, and its lore.

A consequence (which any editor would think it unsporting to mention) is the omission of key Tasmanian terms which define and evoke the state. Where is 'cobber', that signature of Tasmania, a term of endearment long ago abandoned on continental Australia, but which at home carries none of the ritual emptiness of such epithets as 'mate' or 'good bloke'? Where is that hideous arachnid of backyard woodheaps, the huntsman, misnamed tarantula? Whose feelings are being spared when those resplendent euphemisms for death and madness—Cornelian Bay and Lachlan Park (respectively the Hobart cemetery and the lunatic asylum up the Derwent River)—are omitted? Perhaps dark secrets are better not divulged to the makers-to-be of gazetteers for visiting mainlanders. *Tassie Terms* has no knowledge of Black Bobs, the *locus classicus* of in-breeding jokes for a whole nation, not just for a state.

The prosaic Tasmanian drinker calls his beer glass a six, eight or ten (ounce) still. No sign of those measures is to be had. Many 'King Island' food products are puffed, but the pinkeye alone of potatoes gets a guernsey. What of the kennebec and pontiac, names which strangely transplant not only the tubers, but memories of Red Indian warrior tribes? There is no trace either of 'the Tasman Limited', one of the world's slowest trains, which took five hours on a good day to get from Hobart to Launceston. It has long since ceased to whistle, but lexicons are intended as repositories of lost objects, forfeited hopes, vanished worlds.

Humbler words and phrases have also escaped the editors' trawling. Where is the favourite fish in fish and chips? Euphemistically called 'flake', it was 'gummy shark' to those who hooked it. Where are 'goitre tablets', those weekly supplements taken by every Tasmanian school child to counteract iodine deficiency in the water? And what of 'bank homes', which survive as unlovely suburban smudges on hillsides, but brought the chance of cheap, detached housing to so many after the Second World War? Tasmanian irony is also under-represented. In which other state are the pretensions of large landowners punctured by calling *them* 'cockies'?

In primary school, we knew that already large classes (sixty-plus in Grade Three in 1958, as I remember) would grow further late in March when the children whose families had 'gone hop-picking' returned reluctantly. It is a complex metaphor, which *Tassie Terms*—in a more inclusive and extensive format—might have teased out: whole families *did* travel up the Derwent Valley to pick hops in season. Yet the phrase is a joyous expression of delinquency too, the Tasmanian equivalent of 'gone fishin', indicative, as is much in this book, and more that urgently needs setting down—of what wealth of words the island state has given to a less than grateful nation. ■

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Books: 4

John Honner

Rahner's legacy

The Ecclesiology of Karl Rahner, Richard Lennan, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995. ISBN 0 19 826358 9 RRP $110.00

Why is this book important? The short answer is simple enough: Lennan has richly restored the appealing portrait of the church in the modern world that had been put together under Rahner's influence at the second Vatican Council.

His book offers reasoned encouragement to those who were caught up in the disturbing and thrilling changes that occurred in the Roman Catholic Church in the 1970s and who now feel some despondency as the church struggles to keep the fires of those spirited times alive.

A long answer requires a more roundabout route. A few years after the conclusion of Vatican II in 1965, Ralph Wiltgen completed a history of the Council which was eventually published in 1977 as *The Rhine flows into the Tiber*. Wiltgen's title reflected the influence of the German-speaking bishops on the Council and the unique significance of Rahner's contribution.

He observed:

> Since the position of the German-language bishops was regularly adopted by the European alliance, and since the alliance position was regularly adopted by the Council, a single theologian might have his views accepted by the whole Council if they had been accepted by the German-speaking bishops. There was such a theologian: Father Karl Rahner SJ.

Rahner was indeed at his peak at the time of Vatican II, but even then his energies only just met with success. In one lengthy debate, for example, Rahner's case was won by a vote of 1114 to 1097, a majority of a mere seventeen votes. The continuing struggles for identity and power in the Roman Catholic Church since Vatican II should therefore come as no surprise.

With extraordinary prescience Wiltgen also noted the beginnings of

a reaction to Rahner's theology already stirring in the person of the young Father Joseph Ratzinger.

Father Ratzinger, the personal theologian of Cardinal Frings and former student of Father Rahner, had seemed to give an almost unquestioning support to the views of his former teacher during the Council. But as it was drawing to a close, he admitted that they disagreed on various points, and said he would begin to assert himself more after the Council was over.

Because of Rahner's influence at Vatican II, the fortunes of his writings and the Council's teachings have become more closely entwined. Growing opposition in some quarters to the consequences of that Council can conveniently be aired as criticisms of Rahner.

If weaknesses could be exposed in Rahner's theology then doubts about Vatican II could be accented, all of which might lead to a revival of the static hierarchical church order that existed prior to the Council. In recent years, therefore, a number of critiques of Rahner have appeared in various Catholic publications. For example, a series of articles, called 'Rahner the Untouchable', appeared in the popular magazine *Thirty Days*, in 1993: the general thesis of his critics is that Rahner is 'most dangerous' for the church.

Richard Lennan's book, on the other hand, celebrates how good Rahner is for the church: how Rahner understands the nature of the church as the sign of the presence of Jesus Christ, a sacrament of hope and freedom for the world; how the church is a place not of uniformity but of reconciled diversity; how faithfulness to tradition does not imply repetition of what has already been done; how the church is to learn from the movements of the Holy Spirit among its people and from the contours of history; how the church can never be a closed system; how the church is holy and sinful at the same time, and how the church might choose to live in a pluralistic future of humanity. This is why his book is important.

At points Lennan is critical of Rahner: for example, while noting the skill with which Rahner moves between rigid conservatism and facile progressivism, Lennan suggests that Rahner tends to lean more towards the authority of the institution than to the activity of the Spirit. I believe that Rahner is justified, nonetheless, in his enunciation of the delightful paradox that the church must have an authoritative magisterium, for a magisterium is a sign that the church is continually changing under the Spirit: if there were no change there would be no need for a magisterium, since there would be nothing new to be said. Those who are committed to the magisterium, therefore, are equally committed to a church that can change, a church that is open to the Spirit.

On the other hand, Rahner argues quite openly against aspects of church authority. If the church is to be the sacrament of freedom then its structures should mirror such an identity. A pope, says Rahner, is not outside history and can never, therefore, have an absolute authority. He urges that offices in the church are works for the service of the church, and that bishops and popes should hold office only for limited periods. Rahner was also a strong defender of the rights of local bishops and national synods over against Roman authority. Further, Rahner argued that the church had to emerge from below, and not be imposed from above upon its members who had made adult commitments to remain in the contemporary church. Again, he argued for the reformation of theological education and a demythologising of the clerical office, pleading that priests be not set apart from the church, and suggesting the institution of new ministries.

But Rahner was also passionately loyal to the church's traditions. He was critical of Hans Küng, for example, and the policies of schism, believing that plurality was more important than any conformity in any direction. Nor was Rahner one to turn the church into a secular power: his acceptance of the interplay between revelation and history rested always on his conviction that God is the origin and end of all human activity. Secular history can also be salvation history, but only if we maintain our sense of the transcendence of God in proportion to our equal belief in God's immanence in history.

Karl Rahner (1904-1984) was an extraordinary figure in the modern church. Sufficient proof of this can be found in the bibliography of his own publications, numbering nearly 5000 individual titles in various collections, translations and re-editions. Putting it another way: a publication by Rahner was appearing, somewhere in the world, every three or four days continuously for nearly fifty years.

What is most appealing about Rahner's theology is his ability to hold together apparent opposites: the human and the divine, the secular and the sacred, nature and grace, matter and spirit, authority and freedom. What makes Rahner's argument compelling is the combination of a deep knowledge of the most venerable traditions of the church with a profound intellectual rigour which insists that theology must begin from human experience, especially transcendental experience, which includes the wonder of divine grace.

Lennan spares us the details of Rahner's philosophical foundations. Instead, he offers a more practical account of Rahner's views of the constitution of the church, the graced character of the impact of the 20th century upon the church, and the future of the church.

The book is wittily written and easy to read. I recommend, however, that readers begin with the last chapter, then read the opening paragraphs and closing reviews of each chapter, and then proceed to read the work as a whole.

Richard Lennan teaches theology at the Catholic Institute of Sydney. His book has deservedly been very well-received internationally and is a credit to Australian theology. It is a pity that, while perfectly produced, it is so expensive. I look forward to an affordable paperback edition. ■

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JOHN CARMODY

Strains of Wagner

RICHARD WAGNER'S OPERAS can, quite validly, be regarded as propaganda.

Tristan and Isolde is a pæan to free love while *The Mastersingers of Nuremberg* is a seductively potent argument for the power and goodness of pure German Protestant art. Many have seen the four operas of *The Ring* cycle as an admonitory allegory of the evils of capitalism and the relentless pursuit of power.

From another aesthetic standpoint it can be convincingly argued that all of Wagner's mature operas are autobiographical. They commonly concern the entry of a mysterious—almost magical—stranger into a settled world or society with disruptive but profoundly creative results.

In *The Mastersingers*, the young Franconian knight, Walther von Stolzing, bursts into the smugly settled musical guild of bourgeois Nuremberg and (in the way that Wagner saw his own salvational powers for German music) challenges their rule-bound, sterile conceptions of art through his own free and romantic approach with its source in nature and the people. The Flying Dutchman, Lohengrin, Tannhäuser, are other examples of these creative, youthful, vigorous, revivifying men, all of whom are, of course, portraits of Wagner himself. The most repellent case of all is *Parsifal*, where Wagner, Parsifal and Jesus Christ are all conflated into a single redemptive character.

I want to take this interpretative approach a stage farther and to argue that—for all his dream of being a prophet (which, in a ghastly way, he was)—Wagner was very much a self-interested man of his time who forcefully campaigned for the hegemony of the German nation. He was a ceaseless pamphleteer and proselytiser on an extraordinary range of topics and was fiercely and unremittingly anti-Semitic. Virtually all of his operas are anti-Semitic, Germanic triumphalist tracts.

It has been persuasively argued by Barry Millington ('Nuremberg Trial: Is there anti-Semitism in *Die Meistersinger*?', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 1991) that the two keys to understanding that so-called comedy, *The Mastersingers*, are to recognise, firstly, that Sixtus Beckmesser, the captious Town-Clerk and rival to Hans Sachs, is a Jewish caricature whose music is commonly a parody of the Cantorial style (which is, incidentally, vanquished at the end by the Protestant choral music which Sachs inspires from the people). Secondly, the otherwise baffling conclusion to Act One—where Walther, standing on the Master's ceremonial chair, regards with satisfaction the rumbustious chaos he has provoked in St Katharine's Church—is to be understood from the Grimm Brothers' savagely anti-Semitic story, *The Jew in the Thornbush* (to which Wagner alluded in his text).

Like the writing of philosopher Schopenhauer, the Grimms' stories—German folk material to complement German intellectual wisdom—had an enormous influence on Wagner; so did the theatre of Classical Greece, especially the plays of Aeschylus. This was partly because of the use of myth in those dramas and partly because of the profound public role which he realised that these works filled for their community. In his extended essay, *Art and Revolution* (1849) he wrote:

> The public art of the Greeks, which reached its zenith in their Tragedy, was the expression of the deepest and noblest principles of the people's consciousness...to the Greeks, the production of a tragedy was a religious festival where the gods bestirred themselves upon the stage and bestowed on men their wisdom.

He wanted his operas to act, likewise, as a mirror of his own society, to serve this same philosophic role for his own countrymen; it was inevitable, therefore, that he wrote their texts himself (he called them his 'poems').

The redoubtable cycle of four operas, *The Ring of Nibelung*, is accordingly myth-making (or re-making); it is Wagner's grand and grandiloquent attempt to provide an artistic German pre-history and contemporary self-image. 'Myth', Robert Graves once wrote, 'has two main functions. The first is to answer the sort of awkward questions that children ask, such as 'Who made the world? How will it end? Who was the first man? ... The second function of myth is to justify an existing social system and account for traditional rites and customs.' For Wagner, there was a third function: to argue for a new social system. He wanted a new Germany and he wanted it purged of Jews.

THE HEART OF the *Ring* cycle is Siegfried's successful reforging of the shattered sword, *Nothung* ('Salvation in Desperation,' that is, for emerging Germany). Do not forget, incidentally, the circumstances of its destruction in *The Valkyrie*. In the fight between Hunding and Siegmund, in which Hunding wants revenge for the incestuous seduction of his wife Sieglinde (the passion which begets that mindless Aryan, Siegfried), Wotan—believing, like Wagner, that erotic passion should have precedence over everything else—had wanted to support Siegmund and destroy Hunding. His wife, the caricatured Goddess Fricka, believes otherwise and forces Wotan to abide by his responsibility for the honour and stability of society. Siegfried's reforging of that sword (something of which the Jew, Mime, was incapable) represents a form of revenge and vindication for Wotan.

When Siegfried successfully achieves that first aspect of his destiny, he sings, 'Firm and stiff as before, this hard and masterful steel will soon cause blood to flow, this Nothung, the sword which will provoke great envy'. That is all nineteenth century militant nationalism, Bismarck's *Blut und Eisen*. Siegfried will, indeed, soon use it to slay Fafner, the dragon who is passively guarding the Rhinegold, Germany's untapped source of wealth and power which (in Wagner's view) had to be released for exploitation by the new generation of warrior heroes; the power and riches which (in *The Rhine-Gold*) the Jew, Alberich, stole from the Rhine-Daughters, its natural German guardians whose home is that most potent German symbol, the Rhine itself.

Wagner drew the plot of this cycle of Oresteian operas essentially from two sources: the Grimm brothers' translation of the *Poetic Eddas*—the 12th century Icelandic lays of gods and heroes which have been described as 'the original source of Germanic mythology'—and the *Nibelungenlied* ('The Song of the Nibelung')—the tale of the Burgundians who ruled the magnificent Rhineland between Worms and Xanten—which was written for the Austrian court around 1300.

In that Nordic mythology, the world (like Aeschylus' drama and this operatic cycle) was divided into three parts: *Niflheim* (or Niebelheim), the northernmost or subterranean land of clouds and shadows whose residents were often depicted as covered with hoar-frost; to the south was *Muspellsheim*, the superarching kingdom of brightness and fire which gave rise to the sun, moon and stars; in between lay *Midgard*, the middle abode and world of men. Water, icy mists and fire: elements which are all-pervasive in *The Ring*.

This tripartite world was bound together by Yggdrasil, the immense ash-tree with its three roots: one penetrating into the realm of the Aesir, the race of the gods; a second into that land of frost-giants; the third into the domain of the dead. The spring or fountain of all wisdom and understanding lay beneath the root which entered Niflheim. It was guarded by Odin's maternal uncle, Mimir, and the three Norns: Fate, Being and Necessity, who used its water to nourish this all-important tree.

Left: SS troops sounding the fanfare from the Festspielhaus balcony.

From Frederic Spotts' Bayreuth, A History Of The Wagner Festival.

In order to have a single drink from this mystical spring, Odin [Wotan] paid the price of one of his eyes. He was thereby possessed of all wisdom and, through the regular reports of his two crows, Hugin (*Thought*) and Munin (*Memory*) who daily traversed the universe on his behalf, he also was all-knowing.

This world is, after much suffering, fated for destruction, but this is no tragedy because from it a new and more beautiful one will emerge, peopled by men and women purged of meaner spirits. This idea is central to the Nordic myth and is crucial to Wagner's philosophy and conception.

So far as I am aware, the only plot element which does not appear in Wagner's sources is the encounter between Alberich and the Rhine Daughters in which he forswears love in order to gain possession of the gold and its power. Throughout that scene these three nixies have been describing Alberich, the repellent Nibelung, in terms redolent of the language which Wagner used to characterise Jews in his horrible essay, 'Judaism in Music' ('*Das Judentum in der Musik*', 1850). They describe his speech as 'snorting' and see him as a 'swarthy, scaly sulphurous dwarf, (Wagner was obsessively fond of alliteration). 'We always felt instinctually repelled by any actual, operative contact with the Jews', he wrote in its opening paragraphs and then proceeded to explain and defend this feeling.

This most vain, sybaritic and avaricious of men had the gall to upbraid Jews for love of money and its power: 'never does the Jew excite himself in mutual interchange of feelings with us but only in the altogether special egotistic interest of his vanity or profit'. He attacked the 'be-Jewing of modern art' and the 'Jew-created art-bazaar'. A Jew, in his view, could never be a real artist because, irrespective of the country he lived in, he would always be a foreigner, speaking the language as an alien, 'necessarily debarred from all capability of expressing himself idiomatically'—hence the impossibility of his making poetry. He decried the 'outlandish and unpleasant Jew's production of voice-sounds, which is a creaking, squeaking, buzzing snuffle ... which never rises to the ardour of a higher, heartfelt passion'. He obviously had this preju-

dice in mind when creating the character Beckmesser, and like his remarks about Jewish singing, the comments apply to Alberich as well:

> Who has not been seized with a feeling of the greatest revulsion, of horror mingled with the absurd, at hearing that sense-and-sound-confounding gurgle, yodel and cackle, which no intentional caricature can make more repugnant than as offered on full naive seriousness?... What issues from the Jews' attempts at making Art must necessarily therefore bear the attributes of coldness and indifference, even to triviality and absurdity.

It is clear that, in Wagner's view, only a Jew could be so devoid of feeling and moral sense as to be capable of forswearing love to gain unfettered power. It is relevant that Wagner was associated with the *Junges Deutschland* ['Young Germany'] literary and politico-philosophical movement of the 1830s and 40s, and at least two of its leading figures—Karl Gutzkow and Heinrich Laube—were very well known to him. I have read a particularly telling extract from Gutzkow's essay, 'Plan of a new *Ahasuerus*' [Ahasuerus was the most popular name of the condemned Wandering-Jew, the model for Wagner's *Flying Dutchman*]: 'The Jews were not damned to wander over the earth because they were not Christians, but because they lacked the stirrings of moral, noble, beautiful human feeling, because they lacked love.' There, I believe, is the philosophical kernel of Alberich.

Wagner was obsessed with what he saw as the physical and moral corruption of Germanic stock by racial interbreeding. In a late essay, *Heroism and Christianity* [1881], he wrote about,

> ...the special attributes of those noblest races through whose enfeeblement they lost themselves among ignoble races ... whilst yellow races [among whom he included the Jews] have viewed themselves as sprung from monkeys, the white traced back their origin to gods and deemed themselves marked out for rulership ... these white races, having been obliged to mix with [the lower races], suffered more from their loss of purity than the others could gain by the ennobling of their blood.

He sums up the essay by,

> ...charging the purblind dullness of our public spirit to a vitiation of our blood, above all by the tainting of the hero-blood of the noblest races with that of former cannibals now trained to be the business agents of society ... no blaze of orders can hide the withered heart whose halting beat defiles its issue from a union pledged without the seal of love, be it never so consanguineous.

WAGNER HATED the politicians of his time with an almost equal ferocity. On a personal level this might have been prompted by the Bavarian ministers who interfered with Ludwig II's besotted generosity to him, but it has a wider, 'principled' dimension: he was, for instance, enraged in 1871 when the Reichstag decreed 'The equalisation of the rights of all German citizens, without regard to differences of denomination', thereby giving Jews full religious and civil rights. Not only was this unremitting pamphleteer and propagandist also obsessed with the need for a revolutionary transformation of German society—necessarily involving the complete extirpation of the Jews—but he fiercely believed that these compromised and disgraced politicians had to be destroyed in the process. The obliteration of the soiled Gods in the destructive transformation at the conclusion of *Götterdämmerung* was the metaphor for this conviction.

For this reason, it is a fundamental misunderstanding to regard the end of the world as tragic: the triggering event was certainly Alberich's forswearing of love but the social structure and conditions needed to be swept away (as they are by flood and fire: those elements again) with the promise of love—the prophesy of the so-called motif 'Redemption through Love' [*Liebeserlösung*] as the final musical word. This promise of a new and better world is immanent in the very mythical infrastructure of the opera, a better world which soon enough was corrupted in such ghastly fashion by Hitler's 'Final Solution' [*Endlösung*]. Wagner did not see it as a tragic conclusion to the tetralogy, and Hitler, whose reign of terror can truly be seen as Wagnerism-in-action, saw it all as inspiration.

With Hitler it was more than an almost morbid fascination with Wagner's music, more than taking his title, *Der Führer*, from Lohengrin's closing injunction to the people of Brabant when he restored Gottfried to them: '*Zum Führer sei er Euch ernannt*' ('Let him be taken as your leader'). The atrocities of the Third Reich were the logical conclusion of Wagner's philosophy, a philosophy which is inextricably embedded in his operas as *must* be the case with a composer librettist who wrote so much socio-political prose, who was inspired by the social importance of Greek theatre and who wanted his own operas to play the same role for the German people.

The paradox and the temptation of these operas is that, despite their acknowledged longueurs, they contain so much dramatic and gloriously inspirational music. But we must look beyond that seductive beauty into their moral core. The Nuremberg rallies were, without doubt, superb theatre, if that is all one chose to look at. But they were also evil and corrupting propaganda for everything that the rebarbative régime stood and campaigned for.

I acknowledge that Wagner was an extreme case of the anti-Semitism which infected so much of Europe and beyond for so long; after all, every Good Friday Catholics used to pray for the conversion of the 'perfidious Jews'. Surely we expect more of our great artists—insight, enhancing prophecy, moral affirmation—because the arts are a profoundly moral activity or they are nothing. ■

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An extended reference list is available on request for any reader interested in the sources which Dr Carmody gratefully acknowledges as having stimulated and informed his arguments on Wagner.

GEOFFREY MILNE

Seasonal menu

LAST MAY, I commented here on some recent Australian drama dealing with the experience of migration. In recent months, several Melbourne theatre companies have revisited this territory in very different ways. There was one play from the first wave of immigration drama, celebrating survival in a new land despite myriad hardships, one from the more disturbing second wave, in which immigrants return to the 'home' country after many years, in search of their roots, and a third, examining the moments leading up to the point of departure from the 'home' country. All three address the notion of where home is in important ways.

The first of these is Graham Pitts' *Emma*, a stage adaptation of the autobiography of Emma Ciccotosto, which has been seen in many Australian cities since its première for Deck Chair Theatre in Fremantle in 1991.

The most recent production was by Rosalba Clemente for Playbox Theatre in February and March of this year. In the first act, the central character Emma is cooking *pasta con piselli* for her granddaughter's wedding and drawing us artfully into her reminiscences about her past life in her native Abruzzi in Italy and later in rural Western Australia, where her family migrated when she was in her teens. Fifty years later, she is living in relative peace and comfort in Fremantle. Along the way, her husband Peter, her mother Mariannina, her mother-in-law Concetta and many other relatives are woven seamlessly, as ghosts from the past, into her life-story. Accompanying the relived enactments of Emma's story are the songs of her homeland, sung by a huge choir of Italian women. After an interval (during which we get to eat her excellent pasta) the second act makes us guests at the wedding itself.

What we bear witness to in this play is actually a quite ordinary life, or at least a quite typical one for many Italian immigrants to Australia. One of the incidents relived is the incarceration of enemy aliens during the war years—including the men of Emma's family—which left the women to work the land as they had in the old country, despite the promises and dreams nurtured before migration. Thus Emma Orlando comes to meet and marry her charming neighbour Peter Ciccotosto, who later turns out to be a gambler, drinker and philanderer—but still a charmer.

Some typical family tensions become apparent in the second act, although young Bruno's success at Australian Rules Football is one of the factors which helps the family thrive in the new culture. Similarly, Emma's job in the Mills and Wares biscuit factory in Fremantle not only gives her financial independence from the unreliable Peter, but also helps her to maintain her own cultural life through her association with compatriot workers.

The tone of all this is mostly warmly nostalgic and the mood good-humoured and celebratory, despite the hardships of immigrant life. But *Emma* is not without bitterness, particularly in the relationship with her stubborn mother-in-law Concetta, who disapproved violently of her son's marriage and refused ever to eat a morsel of Emma's food. Typical of this tension is their struggle to convince us as to whether the *melanzane* of Casalbordino (Emma's contention) or those of Vasto (Concetta's) are best. Here, the question of 'home' is very strictly delineated and neighbourly conflicts in the old world are carried over into the new world. Neither woman would ultimately disagree, however, that the eggplant is the pope of all vegetables: it is infallible. They are united in their Italianness but separated by their regional customs and enmities, refracted through the food, the play's principal motif.

BUT THEY ARE ALSO united in the end—especially through the second and third generations of the family—by their Australianness. The rapprochement between the two women hinted at in the play's finale is one of its most moving and satisfying moments. This is classic first-generation migrant drama and the fine Playbox production was generally as well received as its Fremantle, Darwin and Sydney predecessors.

The third play in Janis Balodis' trilogy of Latvian migration to Australia, *My Father's Father*, was premièred by the Melbourne Theatre Company (in a production by Roger Hodgman, who has directed all three of the trilogy) less than a fortnight

after *Emma* opened. It was generally panned by a hostile Melbourne press.

The trilogy opener (*Too Young for Ghosts*) brought a disparate group of displaced Latvians to Australia in the late 1940s to work as indentured labourers in the northern Queensland sugar-cane fields. (It is interesting to speculate if any of them cut cane with the originals of Roo and Barney, those canecutters from another seminal Australian drama.)

Having served out their time, settled some of the scores of their European pasts and lost some of their original members, the Latvians remain in Australia. Crucially, two of them—Karl and Ilse—have married in the new country and, at the end of *Too Young for Ghosts*, Ilse gives birth to a son. Along the way, they have fought the locals, the climate and the language barrier (and fought among themselves). The birth of the first Australian member of the family seems to provide an opportunity for these conspicuously deracinated people to put roots down in new soil.

Again, this was typical first-wave migrant drama.

KARL AND ILSE become the central focus of the second play (*No Going Back*), in which a female Latvian cousin, Lauma, flies out to Australia in 1979 on a holiday which severely disrupts the now cosy, middle-aged and Australianised lifestyle of Karl, Ilse and especially their old friend Edvards (who has become more than a 'friend' to Ilse, as it happens). In the meantime, Karl's and Ilse's son, Armand, has been abroad and his return home (that is, to Australia) prompts him to question his identity and his roots. Ilse and the hard-drinking and hard-gambling Karl debate the question of returning 'home' but fear that there is no going back.

In both of the earlier plays, the German explorer Ludwig Leichhardt's ill-fated travels in northern and central Australia provided a poignant counterpoint to the peregrinations of the Latvian immigrants. Leichhardt's pig-headed inability to turn back paralleled Karl's with particular appositeness in the second play.

In this final play (set in the present, by which time the original immigrants are elderly and the Iron Curtain is well and truly down), Edvards dies and leaves Karl and Ilse enough money to make their long-mooted trip home; interestingly, their son Armand goes with them. Karl's motivation for the return journey is (as always) profit-driven. Ilse desperately wants to resume cultural and familial ties with friends and relatives. Armand wants to find out about his father's life and especially the details of his grandfather's death.

Leichhardt and his disembodied comrades turn up, rather risibly, in top hats and tails to view the Australian Opera version of Patrick White's Voss.

The scenes in Latvia are the best in this play and some of the best in the trilogy. The lake of Karl's childhood memories is reduced in reality to a puddle; 49-years-delayed family reunions are passionate embraces which give way instantly to 49-years-delayed score-settling and family bickering; worse still, Karl's land turns out not to be his to claim after all. And, worst of all, the fate of Armand's grandfather was not at all what it was claimed to be. This is very much a play about disappointment, but it is by no means the disappointment its critics have claimed it to be.

It is certainly over-written and far longer than it needs to be to make its points. Too many issues are canvassed too fleetingly. Likewise, there are probably more ghosts from the past here than an audience unfamiliar with the earlier plays can comfortably cope, with.

The aimless wanderings of poor old Leichhardt seem to have lost all connection with the main plot, especially by the end when he and his disembodied comrades turn up (rather risibly) in top hats and tails to view the Australian Opera version of Patrick White's *Voss*.

I suspect, however, that even this criticism misses the point, which has to do with the way we must live with the consequences of past decisions and the way our lives are reconstructed by memory. For all its faults, I found it a powerful and rewarding play.

THE THIRD PIECE was Renato Cuocolo's *The Blue Hour*, an IRAA production which premièred at the Adelaide Festival before playing a short season at the company's headquarters in Alphington in March and April.

More in the form of a performance piece than an orthodox play, *The Blue Hour* is a meticulously crafted series of vignettes of Italian family life, presented in the style of the Polish theatre director Tadeusz Kantor. The incidents from the past are endlessly repeated and re-ordered by a single figure (played by Cuocolo himself) whose control of the action depends on his elusive memories of the events and of the people involved in them.

The key image throughout is a gorgeously performed, slow-motion entrance of the remembered characters into a room at twilight, the 'blue' hour of the title, to the strains of Mahler's First Symphony. However, the final vignette—an elaborate staging of a last supper ritual—gives way to a slow-motion exit.

This is the point of departure from the home of memory on a journey to... where? We have already seen an earlier play by Cuocolo, entitled *Far from Where?*, in which a rootless group of characters wander the world with suitcases. Clearly, *The Blue Hour* is a precede to that play and a third play promises to resume the story at the point of arrival in a new home.

It has been a remarkable month in the Melbourne theatre, one in which a rich vocabulary of stage imagery has given concrete expression to the intangibility of memory. ■

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FLASH IN THE PAN

Funny, no point

Broken Arrow, dir. John Woo (Hoyts). The last *Broken Arrow* I saw was the first movie to concede that the only good Apache was not necessarily a dead one. Well, in the ensuing 46 years we've moved on from arrow heads to nuclear war heads, as the film makers claim that 'Broken Arrow' is a Pentagon code term for lost nuclear weapons.

In this *Broken Arrow* the ubiquitous John Travolta plays Deakins, a less than gruntled Stealth bomber pilot who arranges for a couple of nuclear weapons to disappear with a view to obtaining a ransom which presumably will exceed his likely superannuation benefits. He achieves the loss of the nuclear devices on a test flight during which his very surprised co-pilot Hale (Christian Slater) is ejected over the desert. Hale meets up with a passing park ranger, Carmichael (Samantha Mathis), and from that point this duo uses incredible ingenuity to frustrate the schemes of the evil but utterly charming Deakins.

The engaging thing about *Broken Arrow* is that no-one, including the director, the writer or the actors seem to take it seriously. That figures when you see who they are. Ex-Hong Kong action movie director, John Woo would rather blow up an actor than slow down the action in any way. John Yost, who wrote the incredible but thrilling *Speed*, has never been troubled by logic or basic physics. For example, *Speed* would have ground to a halt at the 20 minute mark if Keanu Reeves had shot either the bus driver or the tyres, but we all know what Alfred Hitchcock would have said about that! Yost's script seems designed to demonstrate that helicopters should never be anyone's preferred means of transport. But then by the time Woo has finished, you have to ask what is?

The actors Travolta, Slater and Mathis have a good time in the traditions of Indiana Jones. Advanced and often stunning special effects and photography threaten to reduce the leading players to mere puppets, and Travolta's feat in developing the Deakins character merely confirms his awesome screen personality. Like Gary Ablett on a lead, Deakins is to be avoided at all costs.

In short John Woo's film doesn't ask to be believed, just watched and enjoyed.

—Gordon Lewis

Dark and brooding

Nadja dir. Michael Almereyda (independent) Watching vampire movies in the dark is not my idea of a good time. I had moments watching this film when I wished I could run down the hall to Mum and Dad's bedroom and shut the door on the baddies. But there were more moments when it was all just too bizarre.

Nadja (Elina Löwensohn) is a vampire, and a very good one despite a certain reluctance. She blames her father for her predicament and wants a more simple life. Her father has a wooden stake driven through his heart by the twisted vampire killer, Dr Van Helsing. Martin Donovan's character Jim is sandwiched between Dr Van Helsing, his uncle, and his wife who becomes Nadja's lover. To top it off Nadja's reclusive twin brother is drawn into the fray along with his live-in nurse. Being a thoroughly modern crew, they take a 747 off to Romania to resolve it all in some good blood-sucking action.

This film is a hybrid of the stoic characterisation of Hal Hartley and the weird scenarios dreamed up by David Lynch. Indeed David Lynch is the producer, and both Elina Löwensohn and Martin Donovan are Hal Hartley regulars. Unfortunately something has gone wrong in the mix. Probably, its the lack of any sort of a spark in a very hackneyed story. About the only thing that rates special mention is the quirky performance of Peter Fonda as Dr Van Helsing. *Nadja* is so stylised, right down to the grainy black and white cinematography, that it ends up being self-defeating. One would think that the point of gothic is to transport the viewer to some dark place of the imagination. Instead *Nadja* is like flicking through a glossy magazine full of bizarre pictures.

—Jon Greenaway

Frills and spills

The Birdcage dir. Mike Nichols (Hoyts, Village and independent

***Eureka Street* Film Competition**

Nicole Kidman presents a little differently these days than she did back in 1983 when this film, *BMX Bandits*—a personal favourite of the editor's—was made.

If you can name two other movies in which Kidman has starred where transportation plays a part in the plot, you're a show to win this month's prize of $30.00.

The winner of the March competition was Ian Hawes of Carindale Qld, who correctly named *Sabrina* as the film, recently remade, which originally starred Humphrey Bogart. Ian also got it right with Bogart's co-stars: William Holden and Audrey Hepburn.

cinemas). Until I saw this film I had always thought that The Birdcage was the name of the crowded, but rather merry, enclosure at

Flemington Racecourse where you dress up in the your finery during the Spring carnival to go and stand in the weather, sip champagne and queue for the toilet. I assumed they must have such venues in France as well because I was told that *The Birdcage* was to be a remake of a French farce, *La Cage aux Folles,* which I had hitherto escaped.

It begins with scenes of ladies in frills and feathers preparing for some kind of outing. I was licking my chops in anticipation of seeing these belles cope with a sudden downpour during the second leg of a difficult double when, imagine my surprise, they reveal themselves not to be belles at all, but beaux. They work in a bar run by Armand Goldman (Robin Williams) who lives in considerable style over the shop with his boyfriend, Albert (Nathan Lane) and the help of his bright young retainer, Agador (Hank Azaria). Armand has a son, Val (Dan Futterman) who, in spite of the possibilities suggested by his name, is as straight as the last four furlongs.

This film is not remarkable for its restraint, nor very much for its humour, until Val decides to marry the daughter of Senator Keeley (Gene Hackman) and his wife Barbara (Dianne Wiest). I guess there's no point in dressing up if there isn't anybody left to scandalise. The Keeleys are certainly great scandal fodder. They also happen to be going to the Goldmans' for dinner so the place needs to be, as it were, straightened out. There's much harmless fun once you get beyond the elements in *The Birdcage* which try a little too hard. Of course, I won't know what to think next time I'm at the races watching high heels and stockings negotiate a heavy track. But perhaps I never did.

—Michael McGirr SJ

Stitched up

How To Make an American Quilt, dir. Jocelyn Moorhouse, (Greater Union). A Strong Woman hasn't lived in vain if she's managed to record her Significant Happenings on a quilt. Or so it seems. Movies created on these principles can always hope for a twilight existence on secondary school syllabuses because of their generally worthy air and the fact that they talk about women's issues without ever using big words or threatening the status quo.

You see, quilts are Like Life. A 'poet' in the film, (whose effort would make Rod McKuen blush) says that old lovers don't ask perfection, they just sew together the scraps of life into a patchwork. Someone reads this out in the film, and no-one then throws up or shoots anybody, which I found unconvincing.

How this movie ever got Steven Spielberg's backing is a puzzle. He must have had an attack of the Color Purples again: *American Quilt* is *Color Purple* out of *Steel Magnolias* with a dash of *Golden Pond*. Without the wit, or Dolly Parton. Perhaps the sheer simplicity attracted him. All he needed was a bunch of Strong Women with names like Glady Jo (Anne Bancroft); Winona Ryder to make the intergenerational thang happen; and of course a lot of needles, cotton and bits of material.

There are some men in the film but they're only there to present the Strong Women with Challenges and Serious Choices. Unfortunately Winona Ryder chooses the dull fiancé over the delectable and naughty Latino boy. Her brain is presumably addled from applying the quilting bee to her thesis on tribal women's handiwork, and the added trauma of having to listen to all the philosophising. We are left with something that makes *Little Women* look blokey. Winona at least ends up with a kitschy quilt.

—Juliette Hughes

The weird west

Dead Man dir. Jim Jarmusch (independent). Movies often prompt an unsettling exchange between the figural and the literal, confusing our notions of artistic depiction and lived reality. All the more so when representations of sex and violence are in the mix. Jim Jarmusch's new film *Dead Man*, walked a line too fine for the Australian censors who banned the film, although not for long, (it has now been released uncut). But long enough to concern those who care to see films as considered and challenging as *Dead Man*.

Harrowing and confronting, *Dead Man* is a most strange and wonderful tale. Young William Blake (Johnny Depp), an accountant from Cleveland, is chasing a job in the frontier town of Machine, the last stop on the line. He finds his job already taken. The brutality and corruption of the town leave Blake knee-deep in mud, blood, and trouble. So, wounded and on a stolen horse, he rides out of town—pursued by three infamous bounty hunters. Before long Blake encounters the strange but sagacious Native American, 'Nobody' (Gary Farmer). It is then that the film's heart really starts to beat.

Guided and encouraged by 'Nobody', Blake takes on the identity of outlaw killer and poet (assuming the connection with his English namesake), and embarks on

a violent, comic and profound journey. While Blake begins to understand the fragility of his physical presence in the world the audience is moved to consider the connections between art and violence and innocence and corruption. Jarmusch doesn't draw clear lines; rather he respects our ability to negotiate these issues.

The film has an illustrious ensemble cast. From Crispin Glover's dirty faced, coal-shovelling profit of doom, through Robert Mitchum's mad, town kingpin, to John Hurt's cruel office manager and Lance Henrikson's cannibal bounty hunter, they pack a very dark punch.

Jarmusch's films have always had menacing characters lurking in the shadows of laughter. *Dead Man* sees them chased out into the light, grinning to Neil Young's perfect score.

Some people claim death is the only certainty. I would dare to suggest that the continuing strangeness of Jim Jarmusch's imagination is another.

—Siobhan Jackson

Shakespeare on ice

A Midwinter's Tale, dir Kenneth Branagh (Hoyts). This is the most recent in a spate of films—including *Vanya on 42nd Street*, *An Awfully Big Adventure* and *Cosi*—to use a stage production as the setting for a film. Writer-director Kenneth Branagh has gathered a group of relatively unknown actors to create a witty, gentle film reminiscent of the superb Ealing comedies of the 1950s.

The plot is simple and familiar. After a series of theatrical failures, Joe Harper (Michael Maloney) puts his last resources into a Christmas production of *Hamlet*, using an abandoned church in a small English village, auspiciously named Hope. He collects around him a group of actors ranging from the inexperienced first-timer Nina (Julie Sawalha) to the crusty old Henry Wakefield (Richard Briers) who is nearing the end of his career.

Despite a spectacular lack of talent, constant arguments, no set design, the threat of eviction and little chance of anyone getting paid, the actors all agree the show must go on.

A Midwinter's Tale asks the simple question: why do people devote their lives to a profession which leaves so many impoverished, frustrated and disappointed? Branagh clearly believes the process of producing a play, whether successful or not, offers valuable lessons about human experience. It is his sixth film as director and the first in which he has no acting role.

Shot in black and white, the film brings a refreshing humanity to its exploration of such issues as realtionships, insecurity and expectation.

—Nick Grace

Innocence lost

The Run of the Country dir. Peter Yates (independent). A film which unites the talents of actor Albert Finney and Shane Connaughton, scriptwriter for *My Left Foot*, has got to have something going for it. The movie shines for their efforts, but one wonders whether *The Run of the Country* couldn't have done just a bit more, given the talent on offer.

In a village just south of the border with Northern Ireland a woman dies, leaving a husband and son . At the wake, Danny (Matt Keeslar) is disgusted by his aunt's trying to loose the wedding ring from his mother's corpse, but his father (Albert Finney) shrugs: 'When someone dies in Ireland the relatives turn up to rob the corpse.'

The pragmatism of the father is matched by the confusion and denial of the son. 18 years old, with the chance to go to New York to study, he has 'the run of the country', but instead he wants to stay put and see if the beautiful Annagh (Victoria Smurfitt) and the equally beautiful countryside of County Cavan can heal his pain.

'The personal is political'—that pet phrase of social theorists—could be appropriated and turned on its head by this film, to read 'the political comes from the personal'. Lurking in the background while Danny is negotiating his particularly difficult passage to maturity is the violence and division of Ireland at war. Danny discovers that his larrikin friend Coco, (Anthony Brophy), who dies in a tractor accident, was in the IRA. Annagh's Protestant links split the pair after she becomes pregnant.

But it is the suspicion and misunderstanding between father and son which is the crux of the film. In one fabulous scene Danny's father, a policeman, breaks up a cock fight at which Danny is a reluctant observer. To escape capture, everyone wades through the river to the other side of the border. Father and son stand there regarding one another from either side of the bank.

Ultimately, Danny overcomes his challenges, but there are so many of them that they lose dramatic value. Some powerful acting is needed to keep this kind of a film rolling, but apart from Albert Finney—and even he seems lethargic at times—most of the performances are flat. But there is just enough in the story and the rustic Irish scenery to keep the audience interested.

—Jon Greenaway

Three cheers for the prosecution

THANK GOD FRY & LAURIE are back. The new series, *A Bit of Fry & Laurie,* (9.30pm Wednesdays, ABC) is fresh and angry, even though it is nearly two years old. There are heart-warming diatribes about the decay of good things in Britain: life under the Tories is declared to be enervatingly ghastly, creating the conundrum of the Splendid Rant, whose energy prompts the sobering thought that maybe we have to lose good things to know them.

The best sketch uses Capra's *It's A Wonderful Life.* Stephen Fry plays the angel who shows Hugh Laurie's character what would have happened had he never been born. But instead of the decent Keynesian businessman portrayed by Jimmy Stewart, it is a foul-mouthed Australian media tycoon who is shown what kind of world has evolved without him. 'Rupert' (as he is called by the angel) is taken around cosy pubs full of genial multi-racial crowds enjoying a pint and each other's company, free of inflammatory tabloid exploitation of their differences. There is still good television, the tycoon is told; the world is not filled with satellite dishes beaming out wrestling and *Wheel of Fortune;* newspapers are literate and positive. 'Rupert' grabs a tabloid and rips it open; 'Where are the tits?' he snarls. Eventually he sees possibilities in this new Eden, and in the midst of his appalling plans for it, is heaved into the river by the angel. There was strong applause from the live audience, some of whom possibly remembered something Dennis Potter had said in his last interview before dying.

It was with interest, then, that I reran the tape of Jana Wendt interviewing an Australian-born newspaper magnate in the pilot of her ambitious public affairs program, *Witness.*

Wendt, thoroughly prepared, put her questions almost eagerly: like a good barrister, she never asked a question to which she did not know the answer. Her subject sat smiling for the most part, evidently unfussed, ready with a smooth, practised answer every time.

Occasionally he seemed to acknowledge her expertise by going ad hominem (or feminam): 'What would *you* do? *You'd* know about this, you're a professional.' It was a fascinating interchange. Wendt framed her questions the way one does with a self-consequence as vast as Murdoch's: how would you reply to those who say *x*? do you acknowledge that it appears as if *y* is the case? He must want the program to succeed because he answered each one.

That ploy never worked with the politician he so admired, Margaret Thatcher: 'Who *are* these people who say these things?' she rapped out to a hapless George Negus in the mid '80s. 'Show them to me—what are their names?' He was given only the glum satisfaction of showing viewers how unpleasant it can be to witness power's arrogant exercise against those perceived as unimportant.

It is all too easy to give a journalist a hard time if you hold all the cards, just as it is all too easy for a journalist to bully the powerless. We have the ugly memory of *A Current Affair's* unworthy persecution of the Paxton family to act as a paradigm of reprehensible journalism, precisely because it is a counterfeit of what good journalism should be.

I am reminded here of the fierce, determined questioning of the Saudi ambassador on a recent *Four Corners* screening taken, I think, from *Panorama.* And we did see something of that sort on the first edition of *Witness*: the coverage of the Moura mine disaster was a bravura piece. Paul Barry's grilling of the BHP spokeman was productive, satisfying some need for admission, and retribution. I wished however, that it had been Brian Loton sitting whey-faced and stammering under Barry's cross-examination, instead of a company fall-guy. At certain points the very quality of such a program became a problem, largely because of the requirement for commercial breaks: I'm sure I wasn't the only one to wince when the ad for Victoria Bitter, immediately after, included a scene of miners emerging from a shaft.

SUBSEQUENT EDITIONS of the program have continued to be of high quality: the exposé of the abuse of women in Pakistan was rivetting, appalling, and important to see. The ruined Halloween mask of an acid-attack victim's face was contrasted ruthlessly with Wendt's chiselled beauty. Look, the camera said. See what the victim *should* look like.

It was confronting, and so it should be. Benazir Bhutto's face—closed, heavily made-up—was lingered over in the same clever way, crossing with shots of Wendt's, fresher, more open face. The right questions were asked, but fielded, not answered. Something was being conveyed about honesty and coverups.

Witness is ambitious—many things are being attempted. The producers send Wendt to take on the meaty political side of the program: politicians of the Israeli-Hezbollah conflict; Murdoch; the irony of Prime Minister Bhutto's complacency given the position of women in Pakistan. These are Wendt's territory and she covers it well. Other reporters do Björk and Richard Gere and Attention Deficit Disorder. It is heartening to see something beginning on commercial television that isn't flabby soap opera, infomercial, or yet another edition of *World's Worst Commercials.* ■

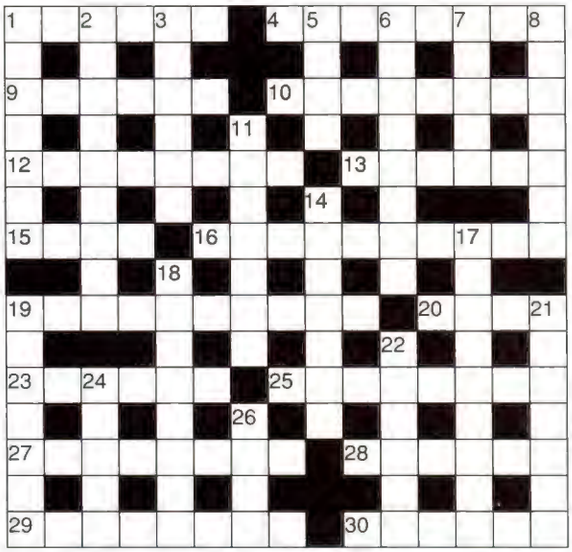
Juliette Hughes is a freelance writer and reviewer.

Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 43, May 1996

Devised by Joan Nowotny IBVM

ACROSS

1 Must Aunt, in her confusion, lose way and fall? (6)
4 It will be productive to till the turf if Lu breaks up the soil. (8)
9 Goes on holidays with all permissions granted. (6)
10 Rome clip, shown on TV, confused the crossword-maker. (8)
12 Were the policies of former Premier, half American, as light and flimsy as this? (8)
13 Soft choir rendered music mysterious and even oracular. (6)
15 With a stern look, took note of us. (4)
16 Happening by chance? It could be natural! (10)
19 By arrangement, field-rules control old French royal arms. (5-2-3)
20 Caterpillar food? (4)
23 The reddish-brown colour of 1- and 9-across. (6)
25 Scowl about fish being allowed to thrive. (8)
27 Flood the press with the gossip about a sister on an assignation! (8)
28 Alternative business is such a trial! (6)
29 Democracy involves not just mother Eve, nor ye peasants descended from her, but all the people. (8)
30 Oliver's novel turns. (6)



DOWN

1 Everyone, for instance Ed, Tom and Dick, made assertions. (7)
2 Somehow turn mates against change. (9)
3 Mad Ena wildly celebrating the Bacchanalia! (6)
5 Threesome in revolt! (4)
6 Brought in the meaning intended. (8)
7 In your desire to fulfil cherished ambitions, you should not vulgarly steal. (5)
8 Such a cry I'll translate into poetic form. (7)
11 A guru could not be a cheater! (7)
14 In Paris, I blessedly found such nonsense laughable. (7)
17 Diners sat in random groupings because of their late arrival. (9)
18 After such an unexpected find, rely on the help of those who are co-operative. (8)
19 If tree on the left blossomed, it could be 4-across. (7)
21 Surprisingly, he's bold in looks! (7)
22 On his anxious brow there is the mark of endless worry about unfinished fur trading business. (6)
24 Perhaps the quiet muse inspires me to write poetically of sea-spray. (5)
26 What a knock-out! I'm silly enough to rise to it. (4)

Solution to Crossword no. 42, April 1996

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

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