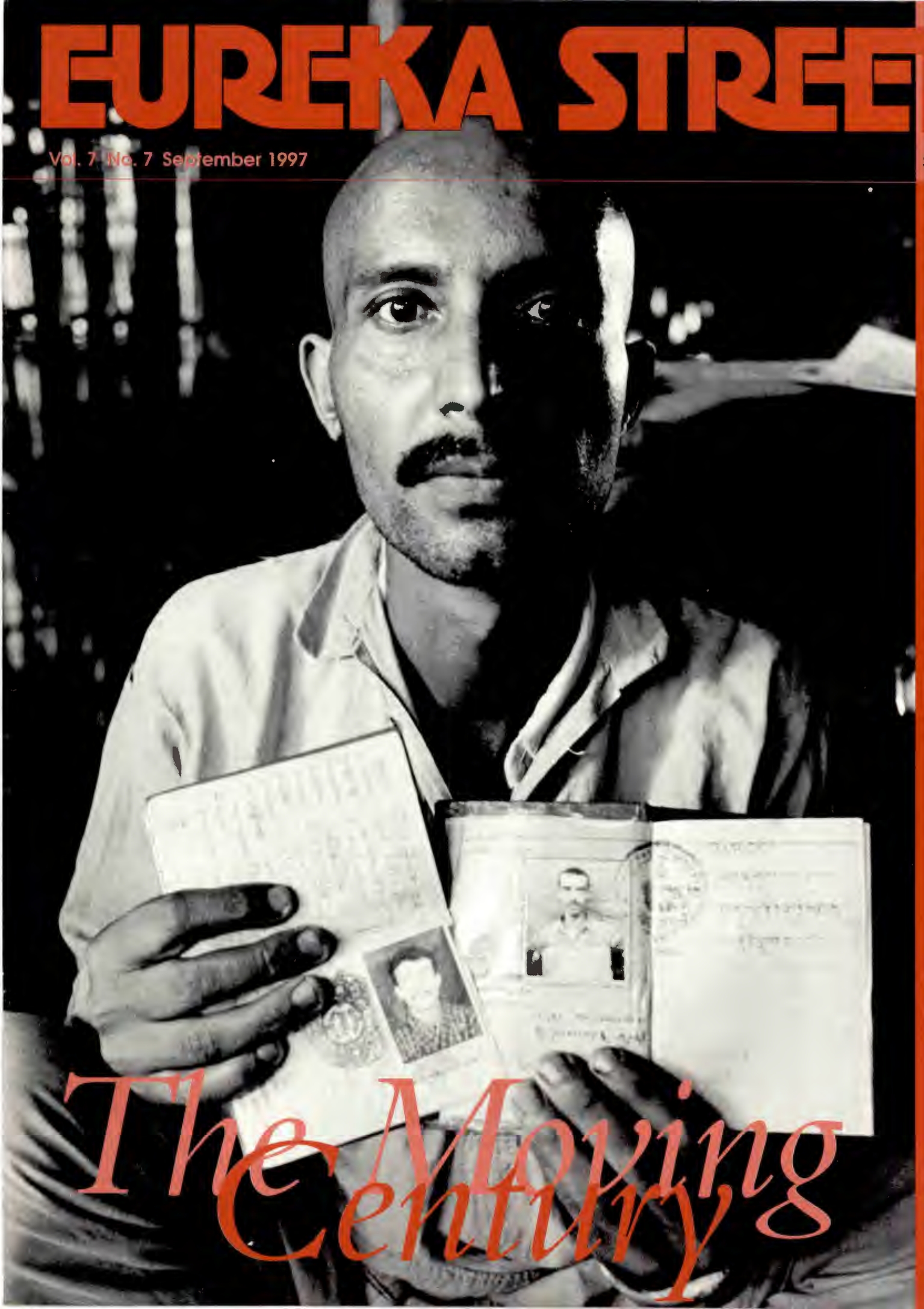
EUREKA STREET

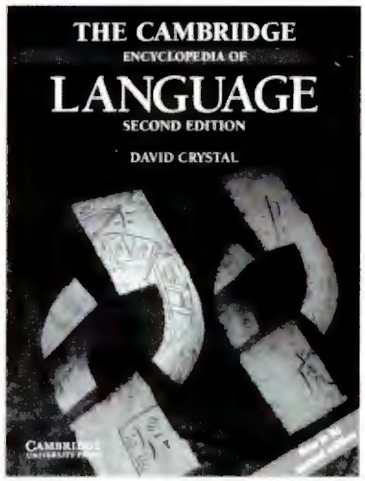
Vol. 7 No. 7 September 1997

$5.95



The Moving Century

EUREKA STREET & CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS



Described as 'the most successful study of language ever published', this new edition raises all the questions about the language that is rapidly becoming the global lingua franca, and answers more than its fair share of them.

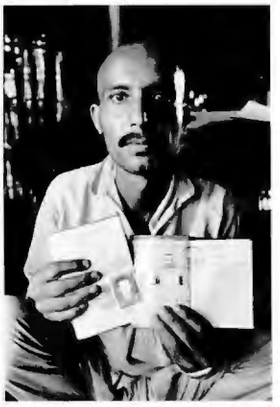
Special book Offer

THE CAMBRIDGE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF LANGUAGE

SECOND EDITION

DAVI[illegible] [illegible]'STAL

Thanks to Cambridge University Press, *Eureka Street* has 8 copies to give away, each worth $39.95. Just send an envelope marked '*Eureka Street* September Book Offer', to PO Box 553, Richmond, VIC, 3121.



EUREKA STREET

Volume 7 Number 7
September 1997

A magazine of public affairs, the arts and theology

'Given that in the 19th century, science was overwhelmingly the preserve of men, what led Amalie Dietrich to comb Birri Gubba country, taking the bones of their ancestral dead from hollow trees and burial platforms? In 1990 the editors of the Bulletin *were inclined to answer that question by drawing a blunt parallel between Dietrich and those women who later willingly participated in Nazi genocide.'*

—Paul Turnbull

See 'The body and soul snatchers', p34.

Cover: The passport saga of a Bhutanese refugee.
Back cover: Children playing in their refugee home away from home.
Photographs by Mathias Heng

Graphics pp5, 16, 20-22, 46 by Siobhan Jackson.
Cartoons pp8, 14 by Dean Moore.
Photograph p19, 41 by Bill Thomas.
Graphic p24 by Liz Dixon.
Photographs pp29-33 by Mathias Heng.

Eureka Street magazine
Jesuit Publications
PO Box 553
Richmond VIC 3121
Tel (03) 9427 7311
Fax (03) 9428 4450

CONTENTS

EUREKA STREET
A magazine of public affairs, the arts and theology

Publisher
Michael Kelly SJ

Editor
Morag Fraser

Consulting editor
Michael McGirr SJ

Production editor
Lynda McCaffery

Production assistants:
Paul Fyfe SJ, Juliette Hughes,
Chris Jenkins SJ, Siobhan Jackson,
Scott Howard, Genevieve Wallace

Contributing editors
Adelaide: Greg O'Kelly SJ
Perth: Dean Moore
Sydney: Edmund Campion, Gerard Windsor

South East Asian correspondent
Jon Greenaway

Jesuit Editorial Board
Andrew Bullen SJ, Peter L'Estrange SJ
Andrew Hamilton SJ
Peter Steele SJ, Bill Uren SJ

Business manager: Sylvana Scannapiego
Advertising representative: Ken Head

Patrons
Eureka Street gratefully acknowledges the support of Colin and Angela Carter; the trustees of the estate of Miss M. Condon; Denis Cullity AO; W.P. & M.W. Gurry; Geoff Hill and Janine Perrett; the Roche family.

Eureka Street magazine, ISSN 1036–1758,
Australia Post Print Post approved
pp349181/00314
is published ten times a year
by Eureka Street Magazine Pty Ltd,
300 Victoria Street, Richmond, Victoria 3121
Tel: 03 9427 7311 Fax: 03 9428 4450
e-mail: eureka@werple.net.au
Responsibility for editorial content is accepted by Michael Kelly, 300 Victoria Street, Richmond.
Printed by Doran Printing,
46 Industrial Drive, Braeside VIC 3195.

Unsolicited manuscripts, including poetry and fiction, will be returned only if accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Requests for permission to reprint material from the magazine should be addressed in writing to:
The editor, *Eureka Street* magazine,
PO Box 553, Richmond VIC 3121.

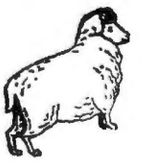
COMMENT

FRANK BRENNAN

A certain justice

IN 1993, THE POLITICIANS only just got home from Canberra in time for Christmas. Paul Keating kept them in so that his 127-page Native Title Act could be passed. Christmas 1997 will be a repeat performance now that John Howard has produced 264 pages of amendments in the name of workability and simplicity. The politics is even more complex than the law. The Howard government wants to wind back native title as far as the Senate, the High Court and the Constitution will permit. As for the Senate, that will depend on the ALP because the minor parties are happy to maintain a full-blooded recognition of native title.

During the winter recess, John Herron flew the globe assuring the international community that the government's plan was 'based on the non-extinguishment of native title on pastoral leases'. He wanted to stress that the proposed legislation 'does not extinguish native title on pastoral leases.'



If only this were so.

It must be conceded that the literalist Howard ministers are not proposing to extinguish native title themselves. They are simply proposing to legislate that States could do it in a racially discriminatory way and the Commonwealth would pay 75 per cent of the bill. The defence runs, 'We're not doing it. We're just turning a blind eye and paying them to do it.' It is called federalism.

They are proposing to allow states to extinguish native title on pastoral leases so that pastoralists may be given upgraded freehold title. When Pat Dodson took exception to this at the Australian Reconciliation Convention in May, the Prime Minister lost his temper and shouted, 'I, in the name of truth and in the name of a frank discussion of these issues have to repudiate the claim that my ten point plan involves a massive handout of freehold title at taxpayer expense. That is an absolute myth. It is absolutely contrary to the facts and I absolutely repudiate it.'

When Malcolm Fraser urged the government to rub out this part of the proposed legislation, Senator Nick Minchin replied that Fraser did not understand the measure. Fraser, like Ruth Cracknell and many other Australians, understands it all too well. Howard wants the Commonwealth Parliament to roll back the operation of the Racial Discrimination Act so that Rob Borbidge would be free to act in a racially discriminatory way, wiping out proven native title rights, not for a public purpose but for the convenience of a pastoralist with a lease on native title land. The city taxpayers would be left to pick up the tab.

Minchin argues that continued Commonwealth insistence that States not be permitted to act in this racially discriminatory way 'would represent a massive intrusion by the Commonwealth into the land management responsibilities of State Governments.' For their part, the

National Farmers Federation says they have never sought this upgrade of titles. They distinguish themselves from the Queensland National Party, which would like to extinguish native title completely on pastoral leases.

There is no way the Senate will agree to the freehold upgrade option. The government will leave the proposal in the bill so that its withdrawal can be a Senate bargaining chip. Also, John Howard would like to sheet the blame onto the Senate when the Queenslanders vent their spleen about their sovereign right to extinguish native title in a racially discriminatory way. Once the freeholding upgrade option is dropped, the key issue will be the balance of power between native title holders and miners. This is the issue which will cause greatest anxiety in the ALP ranks. It could also become the centrepiece of a double dissolution showdown on native title.

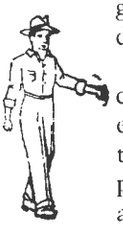
Western Australia's Richard Court has been prepared to accept racially non-discriminatory non-extinguishment of native title provided native title holders do not retain a right to negotiate with mining companies on pastoral lease lands. The right to negotiate was the major legislative gain made by Aborigines with the Keating government in 1993. Aborigines see it as the key to their economic empowerment. It is the one major benefit derived from having one's common law native title claim registered. The minor parties in the Senate will not agree to the taking away of this right, so the mining industry's only chance will be the caressing of the demoralised ALP.

They have some iron-fisted remarks by Labor luminaries in their velvet gloves. Bill Hayden, embittered by the Century Zinc experience, is on record espousing the replacement of the right to negotiate with a guaranteed royalty-type payment to Aboriginal communities. He sees the negotiation process as 'haggling over the size of pots of money for different things' which 'encourages excessive ambit claims to be made and perhaps to be rigidly pursued'.

The Queensland trio who are seen to be emblematic of what is needed for rebuilding federal Labor—Goss, Rudd and Swan—were clear in their approach in 1993. Goss wanted guaranteed extinguishment of native title on pastoral leases. Goss warned Keating before the passage of the Native Title Act that the right to negotiate was unrealistic and would result in lengthy delays. His September 1993 critique of Keating's legislation could well have been headed 'Ten Point Plan'. Presumably the ALP Left will hold firm on the right to negotiate. Also, the New South Wales Right, anxious to retain the Keating patrimony, should hold even though Keating never envisaged that native title and the right to negotiate would exist on the 42 per cent of the Australian landscape subject to pastoral leases. On 12 August, Gareth Evans told the National Farmers Federation Council that Labor would not countenance 'the removal of the native title holders' rights to negotiate, especially in the context of mining interests given the economic empowerment that the present right entails'.

Kim Beazley to date has restricted himself to general observations about the need for certainty for all players—Aborigines, pastoralists, miners, shire councils and taxpayers. With a realistic threshold test, native title claimants could be given automatic rights of access to pastoral leases and traditional usage rights including hunting, fishing, camping and ceremony but not within one kilometre of a homestead or improvements without permission. Pastoralists can be guaranteed the right to engage in their activities subject only to the Aboriginal rights of access and traditional use. There should be no extinguishment of native title. If states were to permit primary production and farmstay tourism on pastoral leases, pastoralists would have absolute certainty in return for which they ought to be required to permit continued Aboriginal access.

Where there is uncertainty about additional native title rights such as the right to build outstations and to run killer herds, (herds kept for the owner's domestic use) native title holders and pastoralists could reach agreements about living areas for resident native title holders in exchange for the suspension of other native title rights. With guaranteed access and use, the only major incentive for Aborigines to pursue the determination of a native title claim is the statutory right to negotiate. Without that right, the number of claims likely to be pursued on pastoral leases would decline markedly. Though there has been only one successful determination of native title so far, the National Native Title Tribunal is costing $24 million a year and the representative bodies receive $40 million a year of Commonwealth funds. Aborigines are anxious to retain guaranteed access to the federal tribunal for the determination of claims.



Since the High Court's *Brandy* decision, disputed claims at the federal level have to be processed at added cost through the Federal Court. Now that native title can exist on land covered by state titles such as pastoral leases, the Commonwealth government is anxious to divest the determination role as much as possible to the States. Imagine asking Queensland Aborigines to subject themselves to the indignity of a Borbidge-Connolly-Ryan-type tribunal process in the name of certainty and efficiency!

BEAZLEY WILL HAVE TO ADD justice to certainty. Labor will have to hold firm on Keating's right to negotiate and guaranteed access to the national tribunal despite the added cost.

By Christmas, *Wik* will be in the Senate and Beazley will be feeling the strain far more than Howard. That pressure will be increased by the lack of trust between government and Aborigines and between Aborigines and the other stakeholders.

It will be further compounded by the ambiguities and internal contradictions in the majority judgments in *Wik* in light of observations by Justice Gummow, one of the *Wik* majority, who, in the *Stolen Generations* case in the High Court said, 'Before federation, the common law as it applied in the Australian colonies had been, as the common law in Australia is now, in continuing development by the courts administering it. In the nature of things, from time to time legislatures perceive the common law as unsatisfactory and as requiring, in a particular aspect, abrogation or modification. Thus the doctrines of common employment and of contributory negligence propounded in English nineteenth century decisions and the state of the law before the Married

Women's Property Act 1882 (UK) invited and received legislative intervention. Other instances might readily be given.' Indeed they might. One is called *Wik*.

It is going to be bitter, even if it does not come to a double dissolution. The bleeding will be in the Labor Party.

Ideally, Labor will hold firm on a reasonable threshold test, access to the national tribunal, and non-discriminatory non-extinguishment. It will also, ideally, insist that the right to negotiate should be enjoyed by all native title holders whether their land is in town or in the bush, on vacant crown land or subject to a pastoral lease, in a national park or required for public infrastructure development by private corporations.

Sadly, with pressure from the states and industry, there is little hope of the Howard government's bringing its bill into the ballpark of justice as well as certainty. As in 1993, that will be the Senate's task in between Christmas drinks. If the Labor Party is to set a reasonable bottom line of certainty and justice, there will have to be considerable public sympathy for the ongoing political and economic costs to be incurred. ■

Frank Brennan SJ is Director of Uniya, the Jesuit Social Research Centre, Sydney.

COMMENT: 2

LINCOLN WRIGHT

Industry policy: naming the game

DAVID MORTIMER, TNT'S CHAIRMAN, must be pretty pleased with his short reign as the Howard Government's leading business philosopher. He has had a decisive influence over the hoariest debate in the economic pantheon, namely, just how far the government should intervene to push along economic development. As the architect of 'Going for Growth', one of the most important economic policy documents since Paul Keating's Working Nation program, Mortimer has helped shift the Howard Government's thinking.

Mortimer wants a revamp of Australia's business assistance, and a simplification of its delivery into five programs designed to improve investment and innovation, business competitiveness and the export industries. He has compromised cleverly, sticking with the Government's desire for fiscal restraint and sound monetary policy: gains for business will come from the funds released through bureaucratic simplification. As a result, his total package is costed at $20.1 billion over five years—slightly less, on an annual basis, than the current annual spending of $4.25 billion. Central to Mortimer's scheme is an investment fund, 'Invest Australia', to be located in the Department of Industry, Science and Technology, and funded with $1.1 billion over five years. There would be substantial monies for other programs as well—$3.6 billion for research and development assistance for example.

Mortimer is also recommending a range of new bureaucratic delivery vehicles to manage the estimated $20.75 billion five-year program. These include a centralised Investment Advocate who would coördinate new foreign and domestic investment projects through DIST and, importantly, a cabinet sub-committee on trade and industry to oversee the process. As well, Mortimer suggests there should be an American-style National Trade Negotiator operating out of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

At a conference in August, organised by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Prime Minister finally moved on industry policy. He told a fascinated Brisbane business audience that his Government was prepared to 'strategically intervene' to create 'competitive advantage' for business. (It was also the week of the Tax Reform initiative.)

Language counts in policy debate. When 'competitive advantage' and 'strategically intervene' popped up in the PM's speech, Mortimer and Industry Minister John Moore must have known they had finally advanced the cause of industry against bureaucratic opposition and rationalist orthodoxy.

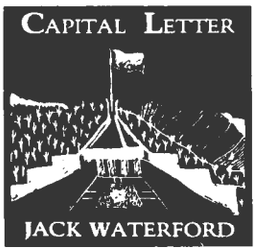
But Reserve Bank Governor Ian Macfarlane, who thinks government should stay out of the economy in terms of further assistance, especially now that the bank has relaxed the speed limits on economic growth, agrees with the economic rationalists. And Industry Commission chairman, Bill Scales, joined the debate in typical fashion, decrying the (purported) lack of analysis in Mortimer and the feasibility of Mortimer's setting a growth target to double per capita income over a 10-year period. Yet Mortimer and the Government's other business philosopher, Bob Mansfield (of McDonald's fame and Fairfax notoriety), would probably ask where all this rigorous analysis has got us so far. In fact Mansfield said just this in a 'corporate capitalism meets outdated economic theory' remark last month. At the same conference that saw the PM come out on strategic intervention, Mansfield declared: 'We have to face the reality that whatever we are doing now is not good enough'.

Apart from the technical merits of Mortimer's strategy, there is also the interesting question about why the hitherto non-interventionist Howard Government is flirting with industry assistance. Ten years ago the ACTU and the Federal Government's Trade Development Council tried to create a comprehensive industry policy. Called 'Australia Reconstructed', it fell flat with a fearful business community and a deregulationist Hawke cabinet. This time big business wants change.

The clue to the origins of the new policy climate does not come from Mortimer's report but from another one, prepared by the Economist Intelligence Unit for the Metal Trades Industry Association. Titled 'Make or Break', the report was based on interviews with top Australian executives, only 1 per cent of whom expressed confidence in current industry policy.

Corporations are worried about competition from Asia (they now know East Asia tilts the playing field), and new World Trade Organisation trading rules are making them nervous. They want an activist government to make investment in Australia more attractive. And maybe they are winning. ■

Lincoln Wright is the parliamentary finance writer for the *Canberra Times*.



Howard's second wind

PNEUMONIA—THE OLD MAN'S FRIEND—seems to have given John Howard a new lease of life, not to mention a boost in the opinion polls, but whether the burst of energy, or the appearance of leadership can be sustained remains to be seen. Some of the forces he has unleashed are beyond his control, and have every potential to give him deep problems.

Take tax, for example. In one sense, the High Court's ruling that state franchise taxes are unconstitutional excises, ought to suit perfectly an agenda for getting wholesale tax reform and a broad-based consumption tax, back on to the political agenda. The way that the Commonwealth raises—and pays most of the political price for—taxes spent by the states, is one of the major problems with the taxation system, and causes high irritation to any federal government.

The Commonwealth ought to have the states over a barrel. It has already performed a number of heroic short-term measures to maintain, at least for the moment, the lost $5 billion in revenue from state petrol, tobacco and alcohol taxes but has made no promises about preserving the system. When and if John Howard and his Government determine their position on the right mixture of taxes they can go beyond *Fightback!* (which did not dare talk too much about state taxes) and get together a package that can be marketed as promoting jobs, an export culture and which attaches tax power to spending responsibility.

Almost certainly, this should involve the states having to take some role (and odium) in income tax collection, with the Commonwealth significantly lowering its own rates but allowing the states to set theirs. The Commonwealth could engage in some constitutional fictions to allow the states to set their own GST (by collecting a uniform rate on their behalf) but this may make the packaging even more complicated.

But John Howard has already got significant political obstacles in the way of getting a popular coalition around tax reform at the Commonwealth level, a problem which will be compounded if he is simultaneously making enemies with the states. And the states, protecting their own patch, can be sure to make big problems. Labor's opportunism in continuing to oppose a GST, plus the problems created by John Howard's own version of Bob Hawke's fiscal trilogy, make a workable package pretty hard to attain.

Howard has promised no overall increase in the personal tax burden, lower income taxes, a GST and compensation for losers. His most significant problem is that if he is to satisfy most of the expectations, a GST rate would have to be so high as to be completely unsaleable.

Simply to replace the present indirect taxes would require a five per cent rate, seven per cent if basic items such as food were to be excluded. To take up the state revenue losses from the High Court decision would raise it another five per cent or so, and if unproductive taxes such as state payroll tax were to be thrown out, the rate would be well over 15 per cent. To replace the fuel excise levy—a cause particularly close to the National Party's heart—would add on another four or five per cent. The GST is then already well over 20 per cent and has not funded a single personal income tax cut!

If income tax were to be cut by, say $10 billion, a GST rate approaching 30 per cent might then be necessary, and if anyone could sell that as a net cut in the tax the average citizen pays, they deserve re-election. John Hewson could not sell one of 15 per cent, and that in an environment where people were sick of Paul Keating. Now in government, Howard has his own baggage: he can be portrayed at the next election as having secret tax plans, and will almost certainly find himself embarrassed by the detail of a GST. And then there is the question of whether the packages, however put together, can be shown to deliver employment.

In the next burst of leadership, Howard promised a new surge of market intervention and industry policy, though he was remarkably spare on details, apart from some conventionalisms about Australia's developing for itself a comparative advantage in the information technology sector. (The latter looks a little perverse given that his Government, in a big position to play market leader, is busily outsourcing its own IT needs to multinationals.)

The Government had, of course, already gone pragmatic on its free trade zeal so far as cars are concerned, and is now under heavy pressure from the clothing, footwear and technology industries. By his creation of expectations without any attempt to set any parameters on the debate, Mr Howard has probably invited every industry special pleader to push a barrow to Kirribilli House. But whether he can satisfy many of the expectations, or quash the strong feeling in business that the Government doesn't really have a clue where it is going, is another matter.

IN THE MEANTIME, OTHER CONTRADICTIONS are emerging. The Government's purist advisers are insisting that nagging unemployment will not go away, even with let-her-rip growth rates, unless there is further labour market reform. They are very unhappy with the compromises that industrial relations minister, Peter Reith, made to get things through. At the same time, however, the polling is telling the Government that general economic insecurity (particularly job insecurity) runs very strong, and is the major reason why there has not been the pick-up in consumer spending that low interest rates, low inflation and supposed prosperity ought to be producing. So the Government is sending out strong messages that nothing more can be expected on the industrial relations front. Indeed, a Government approaching mid-term may even be looking at some public sector job creation, particularly in regional areas.

A flurry of activity, and some impressions of leadership, energy and renewal, can work well in the polls. So can a few gestures to particular constituencies such as the intervention with the ACT heroin trial. But what Howard has put on the agenda are not like the supposed 'big picture' items—republics, reconciliation and so on—with which Paul Keating would occasionally distract everyone. Employment, taxes, job security, and the future of industry are what it's all about. Achievement in those areas, and on an election schedule, will test the leader far more than any speechmaking. ■

Jack Waterford is editor of the *Canberra Times*.

Baggage handling

From William Byrt

Each of us brings to our appreciation, assessment and interpretation of a book, article, play or film our individual values, attitudes and prejudices. Your reviewer Peter Pierce brought his—I do not know what they are—to his reading of Humphrey McQueen's *Suspect History* (*Eureka Street*, July—August, 1997) and found it 'a mess', '... a means of getting in to print parts of other books that McQueen may never have had the opportunity to write and of settling scores that have long festered.' Perhaps Professor Pierce has inside information as to the author's motivation—or is the judgment a result of in-depth (to use a favourite term of Norman Gunston's) linguistic analysis?

I brought my relevant intellectual baggage to my reading of McQueen's book and arrived at a different conclusion from Pierce. I have long admired Manning Clark as a person, writer and teacher, and welcomed McQueen's defence of him against his critics—'cultured and uncultured'—as clear, provocative, polemical and, to me, persuasive. Fair? At least he summarised the major charges against Clark and, after all, the critics opened the bowling.

The book of course is not without flaws. There are some lapses of taste and the final chapters appear, to me, to trail off. Why not make *ad hominem* attacks on the attackers? This has long been a feature of literary and of academic dispute. It is difficult to be 'unfair' to a 'head kicker' such as P.P. McGuinness—why not, if it is true, mention his employment by the Moscow Narodny Bank in 1966-67?

Who shames a Scribbler? break one cobweb thro'
He spins the slight, self-pleasing thread anew.

McQueen's statement of the three sources of enmity against Clark—academic resentment, unease with his personality and antagonism toward his politics—may or may not be true. I believe that it is scarcely 'bland'.

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. If submitting by e-mail, a contact phone number is essential. Address: eureka@werple.net.au

Clark, throughout his career, has been assailed by academics—some of whom fit neatly into Kenneth Galbraith's category of those who '...have gained high academic credit for the perception and scope of their unpublished works and the vividness with which they describe them'—for writing too much and without sufficient 'rigour' (a favourite academic 'buzz word'). Similar criticisms have been levelled at Geoffrey Blainey.

Clark had a difficult and tortured personality and appears to have looked for a solution to some of his puzzles in, among other things: writing; friendships; family; religion, particularly Catholicism; Leninism; showmanship; alcohol.

Apparently, he was never a member of any political party but, like many of his generation, leant to the 'compassionate Left'. John Howard and others seized gleefully on Geoffrey Blainey's 'black armband view' of history, ignoring the latter's reference to the 'three cheers view', which I regard as equally derisory.

Professor Pierce pays the ritual tributes to Clark but shoots a few barbs; his sovereign carelessness with facts, e.g. confusing Phar Lap with Peter Pan; his sentiments regarding Lenin were 'naive, hyperbolic, politely suited to their occasion; he *did* receive a Lenin Jubilee medal, if not the order of Lenin; he was snobbish towards popular culture, preferring to horse racing, cricket—he *was* 'a talented wicket-keep batsman' although hardly 'very tall'—and football, as played by the 'silvertail' Carlton club team.

This last is rubbish. There is more snobbery in the Members' Enclosures at Flemington and Caulfield than at even the Melbourne Cricket Club—compare the dressing and entertainment at the three venues. In my time as an academic at the University of Melbourne I encountered many football and cricket devotees. Geoffrey Blainey was, and probably still is, an ardent Geelong supporter. Professor Jim Perkins, transistor unobtrusively

This month,
the writer of each letter we publish will receive a six-pack of *Eureka Street* postcards.
Keep in touch!

glued to his ear, once interrupted a heated Faculty meeting to announce that Connelly had taken three wickets in two overs! I never met an academic expressing a keen interest in racing, although undoubtedly, there were some around.

Thinking of Clark, I am reminded of some lines (source forgotten) written about another difficult person, although of the Right:

God will pardon Paul Claudel
Pardon him for writing well.

William Byrt
Brighton, VIC

What if...?

From Jim Connolly

I refer to the article 'In a Word' by Desmond Manderson, *Eureka Street*, June 1997.

My understanding of the western democratic system of government is that it was developed from the Greek dialectic, the art of investigating truth by logical discussion and reasoning process.

Truth appears to be the first casualty in our parliamentary and legal systems, the adversarial system being closer to sophistry.

To quote from the poem 'If' by Rudyard Kipling: *If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken/Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools.* Perhaps one of your specialists in this field may care to comment on the development of the western democratic system of government, or clarify the advantages of the present system.

Thank you for *Eureka Street*, it's great.

Jim Connolly
Paynesville VIC

Noting the words

From Geoffrey Dutton

In Peter Porter's article on the fascinating subject of music's relationship to meaning (*Eureka Street*, July/August) he writes: 'A central concern of mine is with the relations music enjoys with words. It's a bullying relationship...'

Of course he goes on to qualify this, but intimacy seems to elude Porter, who is heavily involved with the larger scene of liturgical music, oratorio and especially opera. He seems to turn away from that loving relationship between words and music that exists, for instance, in Elizabethan songs, especially in the songs of Thomas Campion, a poet and musician of the highest calibre, whose own words and music have a perfect consonance. Porter's entertaining image of certain works of music clambering over words like mistletoe or convolvulus could not be further from Campion or Dowland.

Porter mentions (how could he not) the special affinity between words and music in Schubert's songs, but he does not refer to the tender or boisterous relation, of mutual greatness, between Heine and Schumann in the *Dichterliebe*.

In a quick paragraph, where with modesty that is not quite disarming, he admits his lack of knowledge of popular modern music, he is right in saying that in this music 'the partnership of language and music is a more equal one.' However, he does not convey, for instance, that Cole Porter wrote both the words and the music of his incomparable songs. Noel Coward, who did the same, and generously said that it was Cole who made the whole thing roll, does not rate a mention from Porter.

And what about the music that flows from the words in the composer's own titles, especially that of Debussy or Ravel? And words that sing, like Verlaine's '*Chanson d'Automne*', or Tennyson's lyrics from 'The Princess', which were certainly not bullied by Benjamin Britten.

And then there is the highly complex area of what music means to writers. Porter hardly touches on this, although he quotes a remark of Stravinsky's which manages to be both inane and bitchy, about Proust's love for Beethoven's late quartets. *Eureka Street* highlights this, no doubt giving equal offence both to admirers of Proust and to devotees of Stravinsky. Then Porter compounds the crassness, by saying, in one of his concluding 'few assertions': 'Literary men must be expected to misvalue music.' What *is* this very literary fellow up to?—especially when a few lines later he is quoting some lovely stanzas from Auden, 'one poet who loved music'.

Despite its length and learning, Peter Porter's article fails to address some key elements in the *ménage à trois* of music, words and meanings, and seems wilfully to muddle others.

Geoffrey Dutton
Melbourne, VIC

Bravissimo!

From Sophie Masson

'If we love music enough, we will always know what it means.' Perhaps only a poet, attuned to the music of words, could put it so perfectly. Peter Porter's wide-ranging, delicately balanced essay on music (July/August) is one of the first I have read that expresses so well the essence of music without freeze-drying it in words. (Another wonderful, extended essay on the subject is Anthony Storr's 'Music and the Mind'.)

As a writer who passionately loves music (it is always a real tussle to decide between a new CD or a book!) and who was brought up surrounded by it from babyhood, I have always struggled over expressing what Porter expressed so well. The temptation for a writer is to kill with kindness; to attempt to express the 'meaning' of music. Yet the meaning of music is

music, as he says. No more, no less.

The implications of that are challenging, even terrifying. They can suspend a verbal person over the gulf of total silence. But Porter's exquisitely calibrated words both bridge the gulf and acknowledge its existence. Bravo!

Sophie Masson
Armidale, NSW

Uneasy listening

From David Salter

Eureka Street's willingness to publish substantial essays on difficult themes must be applauded, but surely the space could be more usefully employed than by printing Peter Porter's preening display of flawed, aimless and distinctly amateur erudition. 'Literary people have written comical things about music' he says, and I can only agree.

The self-centred cultural snobbery of his disjointed attempts to define 'meaning' in music is breathtaking. For Porter, 'music' is confined not just to *Western* music, but to Western *classical* music. The entirety of the world's ethnic music is dismissed in a single word. So, to cite just one example from hundreds, the extraordinary emotional range and subtlety of Indian music is completely ignored, presumably because Porter cannot recognise its 'language'. Does he turn his back on the poetry of Rilke and Rimbaud on the same basis? Nevertheless, from within his extremely narrow and subjective parameters, Porter presumes to draw useful speculation as to 'meaning' in music. *All* music. It is like attempting to define the 'meaning' of all sport armed only with some rudimentary knowledge of lacrosse.

Porter's cultural prejudices are also fuelled by undisguised élitism. As early as his second paragraph he dismisses the genuinely popular forms of music as 'decidedly low-lying'. Charming. The inescapable implication is that, for Porter at least, the music which the vast majority of the world prefers *has* no meaning. Thus, the ordinary 18th Century Austrians who adored their rustic *heurige* bands and *cafehaus* orchestras were condemning themselves to musical vapidity while Count Esterhazy and his salon must have been absolutely *drenched* in 'meaning' because they could afford to have Haydn write them string quartets. Similarly, in an astonishingly superior gesture, Porter waves away all forms of popular music—the unpretentious music of the people dealing with love, lust, kinship, drinking, dancing, motherhood, joy and grief—which has always held far more 'meaning' for its contemporaries than anything played in the concert halls of the classical *cognoscenti*.

There are a number of passages which betray this insufferable snobbery, not the least of which is Porter's declaration that 'the despoilers of musical significance don't so much overvalue music as prostitute it'. Chief among these pimps, it seems, are the composers of film scores. Everything Porter hears at the cinema is 'inflated and undistinguished hyperbole'. It seems to have escaped him that the John Williams seven-note Indiana Jones *leitmotiv* is more loved and recognised around the world than anything from the entire Ring Cycle has ever been, (and Wagner is still the undisputed World Champion of 'inflated hyperbole'). Music is not axiomatically without merit or 'meaning' because it is accessible and popular.

Porter's profound love of classical music is obvious, and I share it with him. But along with millions of others with more open minds—and ears—I find equal depth of feeling in African chants, late-medieval troubadour music, Romanian gypsy bands, Jimi Hendrix, Jobim, Mississippi Delta blues, Miles Davis, Argentine tangos, Irish reels, Bechet, Gamelan orchestras, Sting, Ellington, Clapton and hundreds of others. How their music achieves 'meaning' I'm not sure, but that it *does* is undeniable.

It is precisely this refusal to see music in its broad social context which leads Porter to such silly and romanticised notions about the craft of composition. The idea that composers are also 'artists' is quite recent. The first musician to claim this special status with any seriousness was Beethoven. Palestrina, Monteverdi, Haydn and Mozart all understood 'art' well enough, but still considered themselves *craftsmen*—and were certainly treated as such by their employers and patrons. They wrote music to order, or they starved.

It is all very well for Porter to proclaim that 'No-one has ever

believed in *Gebrauchsmusik* ["utility music"]' but there are at least 750 years of musical history to prove him wrong. Generations of monks only enjoyed the comfort and protection of their monastery because they could devise new and beautiful music for the liturgy. Vivaldi churned out hundreds of bland concerti as instructional exercises for his pupils at a girls' orphanage in Venice. Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* was written not as 'art' but as a manifesto arguing for a particular keyboard tuning system. Lully wrote his operas for cash and was even granted a patent for that form. Much of Telemann's delightful instrumental music was created as little more than an aid to the digestion of the royalty and aristocrats who paid him to play it during their banquets. It wasn't just Socialist orthodoxy which led Hindemith, Krenek and Weill to adopt the term *Gebrauchsmusik*, more a realistic reassessment of the composer's role after the 'art for art's sake' excesses of the turn-of-the-century Aesthetes.

Indeed, Porter clings so passionately to this highly romanticised ideal of the artist/composer that he invents a ludicrous theory of 'transferable value' to excuse Bach's (and just about every other composer's) perfectly understandable habit of borrowing their best old ideas for use elsewhere. The plain truth is that the occasional resort to melodic recycling was Bach's pragmatic response to impossible deadlines. For long stretches of his career he was required to produce—in addition to hours of instrumental music—a new Cantata for every feast day of the year. Is it any wonder he re-used some of his favourite tunes? But, still deifying Bach, Porter also wishes us to believe that the slow movement of the Italian Concerto was so perfectly formed that it 'adjures addition or deviation'. Absolute tosh. There's no doubt that Johann Sebastian himself improvised ornamentation on that melody—and to suit the tastes of his audiences. If he wishes to philosophise about particular pieces of music, Porter should at least acquaint himself with the performance practices of their period.

Regrettably, our essayist's transparent keenness to impress with the sweep of his musical knowledge leads him to further errors. The division of octaves does not give us keys as Porter asserts. An octave is an interval which occurs in any key but defines none. A chromatic scale has no tones, only semitones, (that's what makes it chromatic). Modality is not hundreds of years 'different' from Beethoven. Ludwig himself liked to write in modes (and in any case, the Ionian is our plain old C major scale, and the Aeolian is still the model for the minors.) The 'masters' *often* 'referred to the grammar of music'. Like painters and silversmiths, they took great pride in the mechanics of their craft. Most composers also taught composition; some even wrote highly technical books of theory and practical instruction, now prized as precious musicological sources.

But the most tendentiously offensive aspect of Porter's search for meaning in music is the notion that we are born with an inherent understanding of its 'language'. This is 'pre-ordained knowledge', elsewhere in the essay described as 'pre-existent reality'. Porter believes 'we discover the meaning of music by experiencing it'. Presumably this magical capacity is genetic and occurs in all peoples, of all cultures. But some problems arise: did the children of the Incas immediately 'understand' the exquisite harmonies of Gesualdo when sung to them by the Conquistadores? Did the offspring of Japanese/American marriages at the end of WWII dig the music of *Kabuki* or Count Basie? The proposition is clearly preposterous.

It's impossible to demolish Porter's thesis on 'meaning' in music because he doesn't *have* a thesis. Instead, we are treated to a meandering and sometimes incoherent stroll through the author's private garden of favourite pieces and theories. In ten, type-packed pages there is no room for a sustained and supported argument. The most glaring omission is any discussion of rhythm—the wellspring of all music—and still its most potent element. Likewise, tempo scores just a single passing mention. Perhaps Mr Porter has never tapped his foot.

Finally, when he runs out of twaddle, the author favours us with a collection of his glib *pensées* on the matter at hand. Porter's profound conclusion: 'The meaning of music is music'. That's it? I trudged through 10,000 words for that half-baked banality? Now, who was it said 'literary people have written comical things about music'?

David Salter
Sydney NSW

Recherché

From Dr Edward Duyker
Honorary Consul,
Republic of Mauritius

I read Robert Barne's impassioned but cogent critical article on the new strategic direction of the National Library (*Eureka Street*, March 1997) and Warren Horton's equally impassioned defence in the May issue.

Over the years I have written many articles in the National Library's own magazine, celebrating the diversity and richness of our national collection. I now have serious concerns about the extent to which this richness and diversity will be ensured in the future. I appreciate the budgetary problems of the management and the need to respond to the demands of new technology. I also appreciate that the National Library cannot collect 'everything'. Nevertheless, the previous collection policy served scholars well.

I am an independent historian, without borrowing rights in any university library. I am currently engaged in research for a biography of Jacques-Julien Houtou de la Billardière (1755-1834), naturalist on Bruny d'Entrecasteaux's expedition of 1791-1793 in search of La Pérouse and author of the first published flora of Australia: *Novae Hollandiae plantarum specimen* (Paris, 1804-1806, 2 vols.).

Having found evidence in a letter to James Edward Smith that La Billardière was in Italy in 1796, I had a hunch that he may have been involved in a commission established by the Directory to plunder the museums of Italy in the wake of Napoleon's military victories. The French plunder included the Mona Lisa. I knew the names of some of the special commissioners and found the biography of one, the chemist Berthollet, at the National Library: Sadoun-Goupil, M. *Le Chimiste Claude-Louis Berthollet, 1748-1822*, Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, Paris, 1977.

I was amazed and enormously satisfied to have my guess confirmed within ten seconds of opening this book. In the chapter on Berthollet's mission to Italy, La Billardière was mentioned in the first paragraph as another special commissioner.

The National Library holds the only copy in the country of the only biography of Berthollet that I know of. In the twenty years since this book was published, no other Australian state, university or public library has acquired a copy.

I could cite numerous other examples of such seemingly esoteric works, to be found only at the National Library, which I have found profoundly important in writing *An Officer of the Blue* (my biography of Marion Dufresne, the first explorer after Tasman to reach to Tasmania) and *Nature's Argonaut* (my forthcoming biography of Daniel Solander, the Swedish naturalist on the Endeavour).

Yes, I did read what was published about National Library's new 'strategic plan' in the *NLA News* in December 1993, but I could only guess at the implications. I may be wrong, but I think there is a very real probability that books like the biography of Berthollet (published in France in French) will no longer be collected and Australia will be the poorer for it.

Edward Duyker
Sylvania, NSW

The big question

From Helga Kuhse
Director, Centre for Human Bioethics,
Monash University

In his letter (*Eureka Street*, July/August 1997), Father Bill Uren refers to a nationwide survey conducted by myself and four colleagues on euthanasia and other end-of-life decisions (Helga Kuhse, Peter Singer, Peter Baume, Malcolm Clark, Maurice Rickard: 'End of Life Decisions in Australian Medical Practice, *Medical Journal of Australia*. 17/2/1997). I take strong issue with Fr Uren's suggestion that we deliberately withheld some results because they show that 'the overwhelming majority of doctors believe that the present laws precluding euthanasia do *not* interfere with or inhibit their preferred management of the patient at the end of life'.

There are two points to this. The first one refers to our alleged reasons for not publishing the results; the second to Fr Uren's belief that the responses to the AMA questions support the anti-euthanasia case:

Our study was intended to compare the incidence of various medical end-of-life decisions in Australia with data from the Netherlands. In the Netherlands voluntary euthanasia is lawful; in Australia it is not. To this end, we employed an English translation of an otherwise identical questionnaire used in a 1995 Dutch study. But, at the request of the Australian Medical Association, we added two new questions to the Australian questionnaire.

The results of these two questions were not published in the *MJA* article—not because we wanted to withhold the results (in fact, we had included some discussion in the article we originally submitted to the *MJA*), but rather because the editor of the *MJA* asked us to remove this discussion from the text. The reason was explained in a letter by the editor of the *MJA* and the president of the AMA to *The Australian* (20/2/97): 'As these two items in the questionnaire were initiated by the AMA, an editorial decision was made that the AMA should take responsibility for their validity and publication. As a result Kuhse and her colleagues were requested not to include that information in their final article'.

Will the results of the two AMA questions support the anti-euthanasia case? While a more detailed report on the results will appear in a forthcoming issue of the *MJA*, the following figures have already been released.

AMA Question 1:

Did your perception of the law, as it applies in your State or Territory, inhibit or interfere with your preferred management of the patient and end of life decisions?

Ninety-two respondents (8 per cent) answered 'yes'; 1008 respondents (91 per cent) answered 'no'; 12 respondents (1 per cent) did not answer the question.

Now, this result shows, as Fr Uren correctly suggests, 'that the overwhelming majority of doctors believe that existing laws precluding euthanasia do *not* interfere with or inhibit their preferred management of the patient at the end of life'. But does it also show that all is well? Hardly. The fact that 8 per cent of responding doctors thought that existing laws precluded them from providing optimal end-of-life care is of great moral significance. It suggests that many Australians die in suffering and pain and provides a powerful *prima facie* argument for law reform. This argument receives further support from the answers given to the next question:

Only those who answered 'yes' to Question (1) were instructed to answer Question (2). In fact, however, 563 doctors addressed Question (2):

Would enactment of laws providing defined circumstances in which a drug may be prescribed and/or administered to patients with a terminal illness, with the explicit purpose of hastening the end of life, have enabled your patient to receive better or more appropriate care?

Ninety-six respondents (17 per cent) answered 'yes'; 467 respondents (83 per cent) answered 'no'

While Fr Uren is correct when he points out that the fact that respondents ignored the instructions on the questionnaire is problematical in a statistical sense, this does not entail that the results are insignificant. The fact remains that a very considerable number of doctors who chose to answer the question thought that the decriminalisation of euthanasia and/or assisted suicide *would have* allowed their respective patient to receive better care.

The last point—the link between the provision of optimal terminal care and the option of voluntary euthanasia to a small but significant number of patients—was also prominent in a recent survey of 1120 general practitioners by the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners. More respondents (45 per cent) 'would personally wish to have the option of voluntary euthanasia' than not (36 per cent); and 68 per cent of respondents believed that euthanasia can be an act of caring. (*Australian Family Physician*, April 1997).

Helga Kuhse
Clayton, VIC

Giving an inch

From John R Barich

I am compelled to comment on Liz Curran's article 'Wrong way on rights', *Eureka Street* (July-Aug 97).

It may interest your readers that an all-party-committee of the Federal Parliament is currently examining all treaties to which Australia is a signatory. They are currently taking evidence on the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

It is not right to say that Australia's report to the UN on this convention was 'CURSORY' as it was over an inch thick. Also the Alternative Report was highly inaccurate. For instance, it said that Australia had no Departments of Child Welfare. In fact these have existed for over 100 years.

If the CONVENTION needs 'watering down' it is because it is seen by many as a threat to parent/child relationship.

John R Barich
Ardross WA


THE MONTH'S TRAFFIC


Making Their Own Fun

'Casino', I said to the cab driver, and winced. The visit could be postponed no longer. After all, I had a $20 stake from *Eureka Street* in my pocket. A continued refusal to darken the doors of Crown seemed like an increasingly pointless and perverse gesture. Anyway, I had always been a fan of casinos, as any teenage reader of James Bond novels is likely to be. The casinos there imagined constituted a small, glamorous, cosmopolitan alternative to the world outside, one which offered opportunities for wealth and seduction. Bond never chooses to manage one without the other, although on a memorable occasion he was 'beaten and cleaned out' at the tables until kindly Felix Leiter of the CIA staked him for another spin of the wheel.

Thus it was that, thirty years ago, I had waited anxiously and pessimistically for the result of a Tasmanian state referendum to establish a casino in Hobart. This would not be the first in Australia. Everyone knew of the notorious, state-protected 'gambling dens' of Kings Cross, but Tasmanians were to vote on whether they wanted a legal, public casino by the Derwent. It seemed impossible that the 'Yes' side would win, that wowsers would be confounded. And what of parochial considerations: why should the people of Launceston or the North West Coast give already pampered residents of the capital down south a chance to enjoy themselves in this exotic fashion? But they did: the casino proposal was strongly endorsed, as Tasmanians grasped at yet another straw to save the state from its apparently inexorable economic decline. It was then a matter of only a few days before I was writing pompously to the *Mercury* to demand that the roulette wheels for the proposed casino should have one zero (the European style) and not two (in the American fashion, which guarantees a greater percentage for the house).

By the time I started university in 1968, the casino was open, having mostly swallowed the buildings of the old Wrest Point Hotel. Many a teacher studentship cheque found its way to the tables, or so it was direly rumoured. At the casino I was delighted to indulge what had been no more than fancy, and to play blackjack and roulette as if these were trades that long ago and effortlessly I had mastered. Once I threw five heads in a row at two up, to the amazement of the grizzled Anzacs in the betting ring. Sadly I was not present on the famous evening when the renowned Tasmanian-born artist Geoffrey Dyer incurred a life-time ban for depositing a bouncer on the roulette table as the first act in an all-in fracas. Several of Geoff's paintings nevertheless hang in the Hobart casino; others adorn a private room in Crown, where he *is* welcome.

After a while, Launceston secured a casino of its own and then numerous cities wanted and got one. Alice Springs' casino is in the desert; Adelaide's above the one-time main railway station; Canberra's in what would be the centre of the town if there were such a thing. The Townsville casino prospers on the custom of the locals, but its counterpart, or rival, in Cairns is floundering, in receivership, because tourists evidently would rather be whisked away to the rain forest and the reef. Melbourne's casino dwarfed all of these when it occupied a temporary site. The veritable Crown is now one of the biggest buildings in the Southern Hemisphere. The renovation of the Yarra and its inner city banks that began so splendidly under the Cain government, has been jeopardised and over-shadowed by the huge bunker that Lloyd Williams has built.

I was travelling to a place that I had frequently seen as the train pulled in or out of Flinders Street Station. Many of the myths associated with the casino were also already familiar. There were the tales of children abandoned in cars, miserable and suffocating, while their parents played on through the night. This was one of several codes for the misconduct of Asians who are supposedly given to inveterate gambling. While families starved, or subsisted on thin mince and saveloys, while small businesses crumbled in the suburbs, predators allegedly fell on the lost and broke in the casino's car parks, offering punters cash for their vehicles so that they could get back inside. Once there, in crowds of Melbourne Cup density, they are said often to prefer to urinate standing up at the tables, rather than to lose a prized position.

With these lurid stories in mind, we alighted in Clarendon Street, entering the Crown Casino from what is known among the *cognoscenti* as the Highpoint, or *lumpen* end, where the gaming machine is sovereign and its musical eruptions and spills of coin drown the noise of shuffling moccasins. From this point, my wife and I trudged for what felt like half the length of the river to the Oak Room, where the 'quality' can play in comfort. In truth, this was a social progress of a narrower scope, from throngs of *lumpen-proletariat* to their fellows of the *lumpen-bourgeoisie*, many of the latter being escapees from the lower middle class who have come to the casino chiefly to be seen, but as what, one wondered? Disdaining to follow us into posh precincts, my under-age

daughter and her friend nonchalantly had wins at roulette in the casino's vast, unrestricted area.

Since entry to the Mahogany Room was by invitation only, and my credit rating among the set of international 'highrollers' was suspect, I had decided to commence my adventure in the Oak Room, whose walls are hung with three giant bronze coins. These depict scenes of heroic rather than ludic action, lions, and warriors on horseback, as if in tribute to the wonderful Assyrian exhibition which had been staged at the National Gallery of Victoria not long before. The conditions in the Oak Room were pleasant. All of the staff appeared affable. Not far from the roulette table, my wife was hunched in front of an armless bandit, as if in some grim or blackly jesting rehearsal for old age. At my table I had fallen among desperates. One man actually set aside his mobile phone during a call in order to spread chips indiscriminately over what he could reach of the table. He lost. Another, whose three hideous gold and glittering rings were at least in the aesthetic spirit of the place, covered 22 individual numbers. The uncovered number 23 came up to mock his deliberations.

On all sides there were diversions. Beginners could take free lessons in blackjack and roulette, rather than being sent entirely unprepared to the tables. Escalators led upstairs to the 24-hour cinema complex. Television screens at the bar either previewed those movie attractions, or showed a trots meeting somewhere in the dwindling world of rural Australia, and far from Crown. In this ambience, chardonnay is accented on the last syllable. The bar was fake marble, I gauged, but there was a real coffee machine. And there were so many staff: how could the unemployment rate of Victorians just have risen from 8.8 per cent to 9.2 per cent when one was surrounded by this uniformed, gainfully occupied bunch? I came upon a group of Crown's finest outside a lavatory, thence to be afforded a glimpse of the pseudo-*élan* that is part of the training of First World menials. An earnest meeting was in progress in which four tyros with 'Contractor' badges were being instructed—not on how to play the tables, or to smile while evicting drunks—but on the most efficient means to clean fouled toilet bowls.

Making my way back into the central concourse, I was jostled by people with their hands full—a bucket of chips in one, a bucket of coins in the other. All of this space resembled a grandiose, preposterously large foyer, the ante-room to a show that is never going to open because this *is* the show. New cars in daunting numbers rise above the gaming machines, there to be won by some mysterious means or other. 'Free' offers abounded, whether of 'delicious' snacks or European coach holidays for those 'seniors' to whom Crown gives a special welcome. The Crown Club merchandise shop specialised in penguins and polar bears. The first suggested a Phillip Island tourist tie-in, but I could not figure the Arctic connection.

Along every wall, menacingly alight and noisy, were gaming machines. Besides the casino staples—blackjack, roulette, kino—there were exotic entertainments as well. Sic bo, pai gow—these Asian trials of skill by dice reminded me of the 1890s *Bulletin* cartoon in which a fiendish Celestial, in the body of an octopus, threatens Australia's innocence with tentacles labelled 'opium', 'child slavery', 'pak ah poo' and 'fan tan'. The two latter are notorious Asian games of chance. According to family legend, my maternal grandfather regularly lost the profits of his engraving business in fan tan nights with his Chinese neighbours. Hanson might nod her head sagely at this iniquity, but I was again reminded of how 'Asian' and Australian domestic life in this country have been longer and more deeply entwined than her sense of history would enable her to fathom.

The Crown Casino proves emphatically that the Australian social ideal of 'making your own fun', which was re-enunciated by Donald Horne in the first volume of his autobiography, *The Education of Young Donald*, has decisively collapsed. Its demise is bathetically demonstrated on all sides in Crown, in the too-determinedly grinning young couples, in the fake insouciance of city professional men and women, in the solipsistic mien of gambling desperates who would never believe in such a maxim even if they had heard of it. Beneath all this sad self-exhibition is the certainty of tax by gambling, the sure and perfect realisation of private and government greed.

Outside the casino, along the bank of the Yarra, are five towers, like miniatures of the World Trade Centre towers in New York, or thin books with water streaming down their surfaces. At hourly intervals the towers ignite, throwing off radiant heat as flames from them curtsey in the air, red against the black night sky. Purportedly this show costs $10,000 for each synchronised burst of fire. It is small change. The cost of the Crown Casino rose, after all, from a projected $750 million to $2.3 billion. The real economic costs will never perhaps be known, any more than the sum of the profit that will accrue to the casino's developers. The social bill appears to be in no-one's interests to call for or to calculate.

In any event, accuracy is beside the point when what is in reckoning is such a desolate dream. **—Peter Pierce**

Cambodia adrift

THERE IS NOT MUCH outwardly showing in Phnom Penh now from the 'incident' of 5th and 6th July; on the way in from the airport my car tyres give off a steady burr as they run over the tank tracks. At the crossroads, by the University dam, there's a large black patch where, my colleague tells me, a tank was burned. On the second night, I missed my way to a rendezvous, and found myself riding down the street where Prince Ranariddh's house stood. A whole row of villas is strangely dark; a close look through the gloom shows shattered windows, and here and there, awnings perforated by shrapnel.

Tourists are noticeably fewer, though whether the ganja-smoking crowd at the Capitol even noticed anything untoward going on, is an open question. The streets are no less thronged, although most of those with luxury cars seem to be keeping them parked at home for the time being.

The internal damage is far more pervasive. Two days of artillery fire, and several more nights of armed men prowling and plundering reawakened the anxiety that is never far beneath the surface here. Nearly everyone has a looting story to tell; three weeks after the event, many are still shaken.

Brai brul—the words crop up again and again in conversation. They mean changing, uncertain, unstable. There's a sense of needing to move cautiously in all things.

Through the windows of the domestic departure lounge, we watch workers neatly re-concreting a mortar-pitted patch of the tarmac; neat signs on the exit doors express the regrets of the Cambodian Airports Authority 'for any inconvenience caused during rehabilitation'. ASEAN's flag carriers are already starting to return, like ungainly migrating birds.

Stung Treng, near the Lao border, is barely 45 minutes away for the two dozen who can afford air tickets today. Here too, things are decidedly *brai brul*, through politics is a very small part of it. Here the

Sekong and Sesan rivers meet the Mekong; the rain has hardly stopped since the wet season began three months ago, and the slopes, stripped of cover by Indonesian loggers, are pouring their runoff unimpeded into the rivers. The Mekong is already near the top of its banks, a full two months before it normally peaks.

As we set out from Stung Treng's main quay for Siem Bok, 25 km downstream, our longboat looked uncomfortably like a blue peapod bobbing in a stewpot, but the river exerted its inevitable magic as we wove past jungle-clad islands, watched the kingfishers swoop, saw the odd flash of orange through green where monks stood on the banks, and as always, simply sat agape at the sheer size and power of the current.

For formality's sake, an armed police guard came on board at the district centre. The vice-governor himself had told us that the local Khmer Rouge were usually the children of families we'd be dealing with, and would not try to hinder any real aid to the villages. He'd traced with his thumbnail a line on the map across the roadless north of the province. Here, it was said, the KR had been seen moving through the forests from Ratanakiri, for the last great showdown with Hun Sen's men at Samraong, far to the west. Or maybe not.

On Koh Kroch—Pomelo Island—we squelched across the fields to the headmen's house for the village meeting. Rain fell in sheets; the river lapped higher and higher, and deep pools formed in every footprint. My colleague called to a group of women transplanting rice to come and join the meeting. '*You* come and help us transplant *this* lot', they laughed back. There was a good showing of both men and women nonetheless, and no hesitation in telling us where assistance is needed. Last year's rice was nearly all lost to flood; if the water keeps rising, this year's will go the same way. Will we lend (not *give*—their emphasis) them seed rice to replace it if that happens? And maybe come up with a few tools and some supplementary food so they can build the road and bridge they've got planned for the dry season?

Language here is mostly Lao; and, as in Laos, we are served neat rice spirit before departure, and white threads are tied around our wrists as the blessings are invoked—for long life, prosperity, good health, and a safe journey.

We had every need of blessing as we headed home. First, the motor died—a fish had clogged the works. There were tense moments until, with the single paddle, we steered close enough in to grab overhanging branches and pull out of the current long enough for repairs.

Half an hour later, bolts sheared, and the motor slid off its housing and dropped to the floor of the boat. This time, the current spun and accelerated us alarmingly. Finally, after several tries, we hauled into the bank.

The best thing about travelling with Khmers is that any survived peril or hardship of the journey becomes a huge joke. We laughed ourselves silly as we disembarked, with monsoon rain sheeting down, the river fast rising, and night coming on. A young couple made us welcome in their thatch shack in a clearing, while the boatman crouched over repairs. The wife, as it turned out, was from Takeo province, in the dry south east, and shared several acquaintances with one of my colleagues, whose

home village was only a few miles from hers. Husband and wife in turn regaled us with stories of boat accidents and drownings nearby. The events in Phnom Penh got slight mention; there's been a few more soldiers come up the river by boat; a bit of talk in the market for a few days' and that, really had been that.

We draggled back into town long after dark; raided the night market for cooked rice, braised pig's ear and pickled marrow, and sloshed home through the now flooding streets.

It took a while next day to track down the Head of provincial agriculture. He wasn't at the provincial offices up the hill; we hired a boat to take us down his street, eventually bobbing through a gap in his gardenia hedge to the porch, to be told he'd gone by bicycle—through chest-deep water—to his own office. With no staff in sight to assist, and the bare minimum of communications equipment, he already had clear estimates of damage to the crop. We talked figures for an hour, and he said, wryly, that this year the central government had no funds of its own to put up—it would cost, after all, $86 million to repair Phnom Penh.

—**Mark Deasey**

Wages from the top down

AT THE AUGUST SPECIAL Cabinet meeting on unemployment, Professor Judith Sloan and Dr Peter Dawkins, recognised 'experts' on the labour market, told ministers that if we want to increase employment we have to reduce wages, particularly at the bottom end of the income scale.

Expert opinions are not to be sneezed at, especially when they can be supported by impressive economic theories about how the price of commodity (in this case, human effort) must be allowed to move downwards in order to 'clear' the market of excess supply, that is, unemployment.

However, two things need to be said about economics experts. First, their apparent professionalism and scientific objectivity is never completely free of value judgements and ideology. Second, they often fail to consult common sense. Taken together, these two limitations suggest that policy makers should be very wary about giving them too much credence.

Take, for example, the theory that says that if wages fall, then the labour market will 'clear'. This prescription is premised on treating human effort (labour) as if it were any other commodity, operating according to the standard laws of supply and demand. These laws dictate that when the price of a good goes up, demand will fall, but supply will rise. When the price is allowed to move freely, eventually the quantities supplied will equal the quantities demanded and, *voilà*, the market is cleared!

What would happen if Messrs Howard, Costello and Reith were to consult the 'battlers' on the validity of this theory? Let us say that a low-wage worker is the only income-earner for a family, with his partner working hard and in an unpaid capacity caring for two young children. They receive various forms of income support from the Government, but his weekly wage after tax is $330, or around $8.20 an hour for forty hours.

Now what happens when it is suggested to this worker that instead of being paid $8.20 an hour (after tax), he will receive only $7 an hour? Assuming that he does not go on strike immediately, what would the rational response to that information be, given that he must earn at least $330 a week to keep his family's head above water? Does he say to himself, 'Oh, the price of my

labour has fallen, therefore I will reduce its supply. Instead of supplying forty hours a week, I will now supply only thirty. In which case, my take home pay will be $210 a week.' According to the standard economic theory used by experts, this is what will happen.

Anyone with any common sense knows that this not a probable reaction in the real world. The real-world worker, instead of offering less labour, will offer more in order to ensure that this take-home pay is at least equivalent to what he was earning before.

Fortunately, some academic economists have a greater grip on reality. Take, for example, John Creedy in the most recent edition of *The Economic Record*, Creedy, from the Economics Department at Melbourne University in has an article with the rather long title, 'Labour Supply and Social Welfare when Utility Depends on the Threshold Consumption Level'. He analyses how workers behave in relation to wage changes when they must earn a certain level of income to survive. His conclusion is that for those on the threshold of poverty, earning low wages, 'it may be worthwhile ... to supply higher amounts of labour in order to avoid poverty. Over a range of wage rates, *labour supply falls as the wage increases*'. (My emphasis)

What this implies is that if we want to reduce unemployment, which is the excess of labour supply over demand, then it is not implausible to suggest that we should increase wages. Of course, this proposal ignores the likely reaction of employers to wage rises, but it ignores it in exactly the same way that the prescription to lower wages ignores the likely reaction of workers. In other words, the effect on employment of changes in wages is not clear-cut at all.

If the Government is really concerned about reducing unemployment, it will focus less on wages and more on increasing the demand for labour by means other than wage reductions. It could, for example, expand public investment in social and economic infrastructure, one of the approaches suggested by Dr Tim Battin of New England University in his paper, *Full employment: towards a just society*.

As Battin argues, 'The failed and discredited economic rationalist policies being pursued by the present government based on the premise that unemployment can be reduced by reducing wages and working conditions are consigning one million Australians to the poverty of unemployment'.

What is clear is that falling wages at the bottom end of the income scale will result in a greater gap between rich and poor, and this will have long-term damaging social and economic consequences. If the Government does wish to pursue lower wages in order to increase demand for labour at the bottom end of the market, it will be morally, politically and economically obliged to reduce taxation on low-income workers to ensure their take-home pay is relatively unchanged.

How should such a tax reduction for low-income workers be funded? Some will say that a GST is the only way to go, but it is not. It makes more sense, economically and socially, to fund income tax reductions for the working poor by broadening the income tax base and thereby capturing a greater amount of revenue from the working rich, or, as the case may be, the non-working rich. Measures designed to crack down on the inappropriate use of negative gearing, family trusts and over-generous superannuation concessions to the wealthy would be a good start.

—David de Carvalho

IN a PHRASE

The black-armbandwagon

ON THE READER'S ASSISTANCE DESK, in the manuscript reading room of the State Library of South Australia in Adelaide, there is a small wooden counter sign which bears the words, 'Historical Treasures' Room'. Embossed in Gothic gold, this quaint, almost comically desperate title, says much about the attitude of white Australians towards their past.

The traditional image of Australia as a land without 'history' has ensured that the fledgling stories of the white Dreamtime are informed by a certain preciousness. Any memorabilia with a faintly musty odour is immediately stamped 'heritage item' and placed in the mandatory 'Ye olde worlde' rosewood cabinet. Wrapped with loving hands, and placed in the display cases of an exiled culture, our 'history' appears fragile and vulnerable—especially in the face of recent historical revisionism.

The work of historians such as Henry Reynolds in exposing the lie of *terra nullius* has revealed the frail notion of settlement that sustains the moral legitimacy of the Australian nation state. History matters now in a way it never has before. After the High Court's *Mabo* and *Wik* decisions, politicians who have so often relied on positive history as the building block of national community and electoral success, have been forced to face the fact that Australia's indigenous inhabitants were violently stripped of their land and culture. Since the election of the Howard government in March 1996, Australians have heard much about the need to reject the 'black armband' view of history.

The 'black armband view' is a phrase first coined by Professor Geoffrey Blainey in his 1993 Latham lecture. For Blainey, this view of history was one which represented 'the swing of the pendulum from a position that had been ... too self-congratulatory, to an opposite extreme that is ... decidedly jaundiced.' Blainey placed much of the blame for the spread of the gloomy view of Australia's past on the histories of Manning Clark, and the so-called 'guilt industry' encouraged by influential bodies outside of the historical profession, bodies like the ABC, the High Court, the ALP and some education institutions.

In the wake of the coalition victory last year, Prime Minister John Howard consciously adopted Geoffrey Blainey's critique of black armband history as a central plank of his government's drive to champion the cause of the 'mainstream.' The Prime Minister's Menzies and Playford lectures, delivered late last year provide two examples. Interestingly, Blainey's metaphor of the pendulum has also become a common feature of government rhetoric. The pendulum serves as the symbol of balance, constancy, and utilitarianism—values which were apparently forgotten during Labor's thirteen-year cave-in to noisy minority groups and political correctness. Like Manning Clark before him, Geoffrey Blainey has become the Federal Government's poet laureate.

But the terms 'guilt industry' and 'black armband', have been, at least in spirit if not word, a common feature of political debate in Australia for much longer than the last few years. We err if we date the debate from Blainey's Latham lecture in 1993. The relationship

between Blainey and Howard goes back more than a decade.

Blainey's views on multiculturalism, immigration, and history, enunciated in the early 1980s, bore a striking resemblance to Howard's 1988 initiative, 'Future Directions'. In 1985, Blainey delivered a public lecture at the Mt. Eliza Uniting Church in Victoria.

In this lecture, he spoke of the 'vocal, richly subsidised multicultural lobby' and of the need for Australia to be 'one nation' rather than 'a nation of many nations'. Together with the 'socialist' elements in the Hawke Government, the ABC, and schools and universities, élite groups were spreading the view that Australia's history was 'largely the story of violence and exploitation.'

In 'Future Directions', Howard stated the importance of history to Coalition policy. Looking back on the first years of the Hawke Government, the document warned that the professional purveyors of guilt were attacking Australia's heritage—telling people 'they should apologise for pride in their culture, traditions, institutions and history'.

Naturally, Blainey and Howard were not alone in their views. In 1988, prominent intellectuals warned of the new tendency of historians to focus solely on the dark side of history. John Hirst wrote in the IPA review, concerned about what he called the 'black school' of Australian history, while in *Quadrant*, Robert Manne remarked on the 'sombre Bicentenary mood of intellectuals'. (More recently, however, Manne has been outspoken in his support of the 'Stolen Generations' Report.)

Another means of gaining a different perspective on the black armband controversy is to examine the etymology of the term—at least in the context of Australian political history. Although Geoffrey Blainey may have coined the phrase 'black armband history' in 1993, he was not the first to apply the words 'black armband' in the context of Australian history. This was done by Aboriginal Australians.

At the sesquicentenary celebrations in 1938, members of the Aboriginal Progressive Association wore formal black dress when they met at Sydney Town Hall on January 26 to declare Australia Day a day of mourning. Forty-two years later, on April 29 1970, the bicentenary of Captain James Cook's landing at Kurnell, the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, led by the then Kath Walker, marked the occasion as a day of mourning. 'We intend a silent, dignified vigil of protest', said Walker. 'Those who cannot afford to wear black clothes will be asked to wear black armbands or bows.'

In Hobart, on the day of the centenary celebrations, students wearing black armbands demonstrated against the Tasmanian government's refusal to grant Truganini's last wish to be buried at sea. In Melbourne, more than 150 people marched from Captain Cook's Cottage in the Treasury gardens, denouncing Cook as an invader and calling for Aboriginal land rights. In Sydney and Canberra, the wearing of black dress and black armbands was a common feature of vigils and protests. In the words of Kath Walker, the wearing of black dress symbolised both the genocide committed against Aborigines since the white man arrived and the present plight of Aborigines.

In 1986, a poster designed by the Treaty 88 committee in Alice Springs, a committee which Geoffrey Blainey had himself been asked to join, called on Australians to 'wear a Black Armband' for the 'Aboriginal year of mourning'. In Canberra, on the following Australia Day in 1987, 200 people gathered in front of the Australian War Memorial to mourn 'invasion day'. The *Canberra Times* reported that 'many in the crowd wore black armbands.' At noon, wreaths were laid on a stone inscribed with the words 'Their names shall live forevermore' and 'two minutes' silence commemorated the Aborigines who died since white settlement.'

On Australia Day 1988, this same language of protest was incorporated into the Aboriginal demonstration against the bicentennial celebration. Again, protesters wore black armbands and marched under invasion day banners. In a somewhat bizarre juxtaposition of signs, even those crew members who sailed under the Coca-Cola flag of the first fleet re-enactment wore black armbands to demonstrate their sympathy with Aboriginal people.

More than two decades before Geoffrey Blainey 'invented' the phrase 'black armband history', the wearing of black armbands was a legitimate and conventional vehicle of protest for Aboriginal Australians. It was a symbol of historical dispossession, inequality and betrayal.

Blainey has done much more than 'coin a phrase', he has provided conservative politicians with a means of de-legitimising voices of Aboriginal protest. In a manner bearing the bitter irony of much appropriation of Aboriginal culture in Australia, Blainey and Howard have employed two words also found in the Aboriginal protest movement, added the word 'history', and managed to transform a spirit of mourning and defiance into a brand mark of gloom and disloyalty.

The Howard-Blainey offensive, is, of course, a direct response to the Manning Clark-Don Watson-Paul Keating view of history. In 1988, Manning Clark published an article in *Time Australia* on January 25 entitled 'The Beginning of Wisdom'. It was a piece over which the Liberal Party are still smarting. David Kemp, now Minister for Education, referred to the *Time* article in the Senate in 1993, and quoted the following passage:

> Now we are ready to face the truth about our past, to acknowledge that the coming of the British was the occasion of three great evils: the violence against the original inhabitants of the country, the Aborigines; the violence against the first European Labor force in Australia, the convicts; and the violence done to the land itself.

One of the most prominent features of the Keating government's determination, inspired by Clark, to recast Australian identity, was the call for Australia to break free from its British-centred past—a convenient position, given that the Labor Party had itself been among the most vigorous champions of the White Australia Policy and loyalty to Empire throughout the 20th century.

Don Watson recently gave an example of Manning Clark's 1988 rhetoric when he addressed a seminar on black-armband history in Melbourne.

> I do not know a serious historian who believes that a credible history of this place could be written without acknowledging that the country was part of the British Empire; exploited human and natural resources; and practised racism and other forms of discrimination. (See Don Watson, 'Teach it all, good and bad, *The Australian*, March 13, 1997.)

There are two problems with this representation. First, it is one-dimensional — the British Empire might be construed to have acted only in a mean-spirited manner. Second, it contains an unfortunate bracketing of words. The words British Empire are immediately followed by the words 'exploit', 'racism' and 'discrimination'. It is difficult to discern exactly where British responsibility ends and Australian responsibility begins.

It is this slipshod arrangement of words in the Watson-Clark rhetoric which understandably attracts the ire of conservatives protective of British heritage.

The truth which seems to have escaped the protagonists in the history debate, is that both sides of politics have attempted to conscript history to serve a partisan cause. This is hardly surprising—in politics, the use of history demands the abuse of history. Politics requires of history a clarity and simplicity it could not possibly possess. History becomes one- dimensional—a flag to be waved, the badge of honour and pride or the emblem of victimisation and betrayal. In this sense, we might best understand the Blainey-Howard assault on black armband history if we saw it as a strategic device of political language rather than an attack on the historical profession.

Assailing black armband history could then be seen as a means of identifying the unpatriotic, the rallying call to the loyal and the proud, the button to press when the emotional response of the mainstream is to be exploited. It is history as label, slogan, and grab, an appeal to perceive the past in the simplistic juxtapositions of television news—pride or guilt, shame or heroism, celebration or invasion day. Of course, it is also cheap history—as the Federal Government's response to the Stolen Children report has shown.

But finally, and perhaps most important of all, the government's use of the black armband label is instrumental in denying the legitimacy of Aboriginal political initiatives. Because Aboriginal Australians rely on the recognition of historical dispossession as the foundation of their present political demands, the government's representation of black armband history as overly negative and unpatriotic only serves to further marginalise the Aboriginal right to negotiate. Australian history has become a most effective political weapon.

—Mark McKenna

This month's contributors:

Peter Pierce is professor of Australian Literature at James Cook University;
Mark Deasey is Community Aid Abroad's program coördinator for Mekong, Cambodia; **David de Carvalho** is deputy director of the Australian Social Welfare Commission; **Mark McKenna** is the author of *The Captive Republic: A History of Australian Republicanism (CUP)*;
Genevieve Wallace is an arts/law student and a production assistant at *Eureka Street*.

Textile industry wearing thin

FORTY YEARS AGO, 103 Union Road, Surrey Hills, Victoria, functioned as the suburban cinema, screening the latest flick every Saturday night. Today it's a clothing factory, and the picture the place now delivers is of one local textile company struggling for survival in the face of tariff cuts.

Manufacturing school and work wear, Surrey Clothing Company has existed as a family business for more than thirty years. However, Michael Classon, co-partner in the company, maintains that in the last two or three years it has become increasingly difficult to survive.

With shrinking protection against imports, there has been little encouragement for textile companies to remain in Australia. The larger manufacturers are moving offshore to South-East Asia in search of the cheap labour used by their international competitors. This leaves smaller companies like Surrey Clothing floundering, with little option but to sell out.

The troubles faced by such factories are made more pressing by the fact that back-up provided by secondary industries, responsible for providing materials and machinery, has also disappeared offshore. Classon says day-by-day production involves constant frustration because parts and mechanical skills are now so difficult to obtain.

The changed prospects in textile manufacturing creates constant pressure on Surrey Clothing to reduce staff. At present the workers are mainly of migrant women of Vietnamese background. In Michael Classon's view, these workers, many of whom have worked for the company for 10 to 15 are unlikely to find employment following retrenchment.

Alternatively, they may be pushed into agent-controlled outside labour, an option increasingly favoured by opposition companies struggling to stay in operation. With standard working conditions and wages difficult to police, this outworking situation creates the potential for exploitation of workers and their children.

Large companies appear to view the trend to shift production offshore as necessary for survival. Such a move follows the direction American and New Zealand companies have taken—to situate the bulk of their textile manufacturing in Asia. The question rarely confronted is an ethical one—whether Australia should be employing cheap labour in developing nations to deliver profits to huge companies at home.

If and when the doors at 103 Union Road close on its era as a family-owned clothing factory, the matter will not make big news. However, as Surrey Clothing's struggling position reflects the plight of small textile companies nationally, it is clear the human, as well as economic, costs of textile industry change demand consideration.

—Genevieve Wallace.

Photographs by Bill Thomas, courtesy of the staff at Surrey Hills.

GARY BRYSON

The Last Post

'Has anyone seen Nigel?'

The Voice across the room was unmistakable. It wasn't just an English voice, it was one of those particular English voices; a crisp, no-nonsense chop-chop kind of voice—in command, and utterly correct. If Nigel were smart, he wouldn't waste time making his appearance.

THE ROOM IN QUESTION BELONGED to the BBC, and the place was Hong Kong, on the eve of its return to China. The Voice too belonged to the BBC, but in that room, in that place, at that moment, it was much more. It was the British Empire itself, pressing on with grim authority in the face of its own end.

The handover of Hong Kong (or the takeover or the make-over or the move-over, depending on your point of view) was an event of great poignancy and a curious dance of pride and protocol. We members of the foreign media congregated in our thousands, gratefully accepting the outgoing government's handouts—a t-shirt, baseball cap, Hong Kong '97 watch and reams of glossy brochures. What we hoped to witness was some vague idea of history in the making. This was our collective delusion because what actually happened was the reverse—history was unmade.

Did we miss the point? What we witnessed was certainly the start of a new era in Hong Kong, an event that shouldn't be underestimated in terms of its global import. But the logic of the handover, the tenor of its conviction and the true source of its poignancy, led in another direction. For what we witnessed was nothing more or less than the final moments of the British Empire. Not the beginning of the Chinese Century—that, if it occurs, has its roots in earlier history. And not the subjugation of Hong Kong, a process that may happen over years if not decades. The Hong Kong handover was instead a choreography of finality; a choreography which, for all its dignity, its maturity of spirit, its sheer bloody *rectitude*—was nevertheless a reluctant, whispered goodbye to the world. And in those last few hours of British rule in Hong Kong, as the trappings of colonialism were cleared off government buildings and once Royal clubs and pubs, the spirit of colonialism made a brief, but noisy re-appearance. Pomp and ceremony mingled with rain and tears; skirling pipes and marching soldiers gave way to drunken flag-waving in the streets of Wanchai; and everywhere was the Voice, insistent and irritating. Hong Kong at that moment was more imperially British than for some time.

'I'VE NEVER BEEN TO CHINA', said Liz. She'd lived in Hong Kong for seven years.

I had joined a small party of British ex-pats celebrating handover in, of all places, a French restaurant. It was early in the morning of July 1, *Britannia* had steamed off into the night, the lights were being turned off at the Prince of Wales Barracks, the fireworks were over. Everyone was more than a little tipsy. 'You're in China now,' I told her. She looked genuinely shocked, as if the idea had only just occurred to her. Meanwhile, the French Canadian owner of the restaurant was busily decorating the walls with Chinese flags.

Liz's statement underscores, in a way, the nature of the British presence in Hong Kong. People went there to work: to advance their careers, to make more money, to increase their business prospects—sometime soon you'd work your way back to London. Many arrived by accident, taking well-paid jobs

that might have been beyond them in the Old Country. Some stayed: the stereotypical 'China hand' is still to be seen here and there, his face as creased as his tropical suit, testament to a life of oriental decadence. But few would have regarded Hong Kong as a place for permanent migration in the way that other British colonies became. And you didn't have to be interested in China to get on; the barest smattering of Cantonese would see you through. This was Britain after all, and the colonial ideal was always to adapt your surroundings rather than adapt yourself.

Yet the British presence is less evident in the shape of Hong Kong than it is in Rangoon, say, or in the older parts of Sydney. British Hong Kong and its Victorian/Edwardian splendour has long since been submerged by a peculiarly Asian architecture; tall buildings with twinkling fairy lights, glaring neon which makes the city look awake even when the shops are shut. Little things remind you still of Britain: the disposition of pedestrian crossings, the rain, the long wait for a tram until three arrive at once.

The real British presence in Hong Kong is hidden in the city's heart. Today's freewheeling capitalist frenzy is sustained by sound plumbing. And by good traffic management, talented teachers, the rule of law and a highly efficient bureaucracy. And of course by cricket, horse racing, the exclusive clubs—and fox hunting.

As it happened, the son of the fox was at the ex-pat's party. James is a stockbroker and a practical man. He didn't want to talk about any of that 'British bullshit'. He'd stay in Hong Kong, he said, until he stopped making money, and then—well, he didn't know. He'd been there longer than many. His mother, he told me, was the fox for the local hunt. Fox-hunting has been a difficult past-time to pursue in a country where there are no foxes, so a human 'fox' fills the bill, usually someone with standing in the Anglo community. James' mother would leave a scent trail for the hounds to follow before getting smartly out of the way.

IT WAS NO ACCIDENT THAT WE HAD BEEN at the BBC to hear the Voice. The BBC was running the media in the same way that the British ran the colony.

They didn't mess around. They hired a large chunk of the Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts and set about renting out makeshift studios to the rest of us. They arranged the best for themselves; the best studios, the best camera positions, probably the best insider contacts. Add to this the best hotels and such wonders as Luncheon Vouchers, and stretch limousines from which weary youngsters would emerge, toting tripods.

It was their story after all, and it went roughly like this: after nearly a hundred and fifty years of our civilising influence on this once barbarous and inhospitable territory, the ungrateful Chinese government is kicking us out, lock, stock and barrel. Marvel at the tenacity with which Chris Patten has defended democracy and freedom! (And his dogs, Whisky and Soda, whom someone unfairly tried to poison.) Cheer Prince Charles as he pluckily commits Britain to be watchdog over China in Hong Kong! Jeer Jiang Zemin and his unfamiliar Mandarin slur! Weep as the Union Jack comes down! Toodlepip, and sorry we can't help the trams run on time any more (fade to test card and *God Save the Queen*).

THE BRITISH HAVE A KNACK FOR SIMPLIFICATION. To Geoffrey Howe, Margaret Thatcher's Foreign Minister, the issue was a kind of 'relay race' in which the 'priceless Ming vase' of Hong Kong was passed safely from one exhausted runner to a fresh contestant. Howe was the chief British negotiator of the Joint Declaration of 1984. Organising the race was his job; Chris Patten was his chosen runner.

And yet there is today, a lingering doubt as to whether the race had to be run. The Beijing government had never recognised Britain's sovereignty over Hong Kong, or the treaty of Nanking, or the lease over the New Territories. 1997 was an important date only for the British, signifying the end of a lease which was not acknowledged by the landlord. There are obvious diplomatic difficulties with such an arrangement, but though the logic leans towards eviction, this is not inevitable. Hong Kong island and Kowloon were supposedly held by the British in perpetuity. Why hand it all back? Far from being kicked out by the Chinese, it seems possible that Britain botched the negotiations in a series of disastrous misreadings of China's intentions.

In 1979 the then governor, Murray MacLehose, approached the Chinese government with a proposal to extend the lease over the New Territories. Business interests were nervous about the security of contracts after 1997. It's been suggested that this was Britain's first big mistake, that sleeping dogs might better have been left to lie. The argument runs like this: once the issue was raised the Chinese had no option but to save face by demanding the return of their territory. Did they want it? In recent years the issue of sovereignty over Hong Kong has become an emotional one in China, but it wasn't always so, and hardly at all before the Joint Declaration. The Chinese have benefited from the presence of an *entrepôt* with the West, a site of mutual access and communication even in the darkest days of the bamboo curtain, and more recently a conduit for trade and a source of finance. Hong Kong has also been a kind of steam valve for Beijing's repressive policies.

But saving face is the Chinese Way, and the sovereignty of the whole of Hong Kong and the New Territories became the central issue of the negotiations. The British didn't want this; Margaret Thatcher proposed to China that they continue to administer a sovereign Chinese Hong Kong, an idea that was rightly rejected by the Chinese.

That's the argument. But whether any of this was the case, or whether China forced the issue to begin with, from the moment the Joint Declaration was signed the only possible course of action for Britain was yet another honourable retreat, the last of a long line from the Empire that perfected the handover.

ON THE STREETS OF HONG KONG, handover kitsch was on ample display as the locals cashed in on the event. The discerning shopper could purchase a 'once only' handover Barbie doll, or a

Hong Kong '97 snow shaker, tin plates, badges, hats, the ubiquitous t-shirt. Elsewhere there were 'special handover rates' on everything. Our hotel rooms were cutely priced at 1997 HK Dollars per night—only about three times the normal rate.

Profiteering is what Hong Kong is all about—opium in the past, handover today. The city has long been a magnet for those with a genius for making money. Forget for a moment the Jardines and the Swires: the real source of Hong Kong's enormous energy and resourcefulness is its Chinese people.

For generations, Hong Kong has provided an escape for the persecuted, the poor, the straggling refugees of China's turbulent 20th century. They brought with them a passion for enterprise and an eye for the main chance that makes New York look slow. You got the feeling that maybe all of China could be like this, if only Beijing could loosen up a little.

Or maybe not. China is not Hong Kong and the difference between them will determine the future of both. Take, for example, David Chu. Chu is a flamboyant Hong Kong businessman, a motorcycle fanatic and a para-glider. A man who shoots rapids without a raft.

Chu recently para-glided from Hong Kong to Beijing, landing on the Great Wall. Fortunately, his credentials with Beijing are impeccable, and he has taken it upon himself to become Hong Kong's unofficial ambassador. 'We are going to do a reverse takeover,' he says. 'We are taking over China.' He's smiling, but he means it. So convinced is he that Hong Kong will be good for China, he has given up his US passport: 'I'm the man who has bet everything on Hong Kong. My passport, my investments and my family.'

Forthright and up-front to Westerners, Chu also knows how to be critical the Chinese way, and how to change negative attitudes to Hong Kong. 'I'm beginning to make some difference in China', he says, and you almost believe him.

Understandably, the Beijing leadership treats David Chu as 'a very strange Chinese', and indeed he is. Westernised, cosmopolitan, able to straddle the cultural divide, he appears the very essence of Hong Kong's temperament, and perhaps of its future success.

Because if China is not Hong Kong, neither is Hong Kong Chinese. The British are only part of the equation. There are foreign devils there of many hues. The owner of the restaurant where the British ex-pats drowned their sorrows is a French Canadian with a Chinese wife and two daughters—he's a man who's there to stay. There are Americans, Germans, Swedes, Swiss, Filipinos. Hong Kong bears the legacy of the Gweilo, the white ghost who can never be laid to rest. It's a legacy that makes Hong Kong a place of singularity and moment, a hybrid of breathtaking promise.

Will China change this? Undoubtedly, although the spirits of Tiananmen are not yet pounding at the city gates. Change is more likely to be subtle. It's already happening; self-censorship in the media, legislative fiddling over rights of assembly and freedom of speech. Within two years, magistrates will be required to both speak and read Mandarin, a language of terrifying complexity and an almost impossible task for native Cantonese speakers, let alone those whose first language is English. In the meantime, the boardrooms and the bureaucracy are being stacked with pro-China ring-ins, as will be the police and the Independent Commission Against Corruption (Hong Kong's new head, Tung Chee Hwa, has already signalled his intention to have the word 'independent' dropped from the title.)

Hong Kong is the second least corrupt city in Asia; Beijing is so corrupt it's practically off the scale. Who will change whom? The issue of corruption topped the list in a recent poll of Hong Kong's fears about handover; China has the potential to suck Hong Kong dry. Tung Chee Hwa will be judged by his willingness to keep the city clean as well as democratic, a task he'll find difficult if not impossible.

A comparison: The British Army in Hong Kong played a useful role in fighting corruption, particularly against the well-armed and well-organised Triads. But the commander of the People's Liberation Army will earn about as much as the average Hong Kong secretary, and his officers even less—a situation that practically guarantees corruption in the ranks.

And in China itself, the president, Jiang Zemin, warned not long ago that official corruption was in danger of destroying the Communist Party. Officials use public money to pay for everything from mobile phones to houses—even office towers—while foreign businesses are forced to make substantial payments to ensure they make—and keep—the right 'connections'. It is easy to imagine the glee with which corrupt Chinese officials are now descending on 'their' Hong Kong.

AROUND DAWN ON JULY 1, I left the ex-pats and the drunks of Wanchai behind to stand under torrents of rain and jostling umbrellas watching the PLA make its triumphant entry into Hong Kong. People cheered and clapped, but the mood of the city darkened. Perhaps it was the rain, or the early hour. Or perhaps it was the feeling that the party really was over.

Dressed in spotless new uniforms, standing immobile in the backs of open trucks, the solders seemed unreadable, impervious to the crowds and the rain, their white gloves sinister, as if they hid the bloodstains of Tiananmen. What were they thinking, those impassive wet faces whose weekly pay will barely buy them a beer in Hong Kong?

Urged on by his parents, a small boy beside me waved at the soldiers. There was no response. The open trucks gave way to a convoy of armoured cars and the cheering died down, less sure of itself. Earlier, in the restaurant—a mere 6 hours before—the British ex-pats had cheered Prince Charles as we watched the flag ceremony on the bar TV. 'Come on Charlie,' whispered one. 'Don't stuff it up.' The Union Jack was carefully lowered, folded and carried off. It was a tense moment; some were tearful, some shook their heads, open-mouthed in disbelief. And then the words were said, Prince Charles swallowed the lump in his throat, and it was all over. 'Let's get pissed', someone said.

Was it a wake or a celebration? No-one was really sure. But funeral or party, it was one that few in Britain bothered to stop watching Wimbledon for.

Back in the Old Country it seems, people couldn't give a damn about Hong Kong, or about the end of the Empire. Europe is the issue to watch, and especially those crafty Germans. They

call it looking to the future, but the great British net curtain is well and truly up, its denizens peering out in mistrust at the foreigners now beating on their doors.

That the empire means nothing to most people in Britain is both a reflection of *realpolitik* and a failure of history. The journalist Simon Winchester has said that the British public are 'in denial' about their crumbling status. What's being denied is not the glorious Empire of Kipling and Victoria, the Empire which brought the Magna Carta to the world. Nor is it the Empire that massacred Indians at Amritsar, invented the concentration camp, thrived by trading opium for tea. What's being denied is that this Empire, the biggest the world has seen, practically no longer exists. 'It's a grim arithmetic,' writes Winchester. 'In a little more than half a century the world's most fabulous empire [has] shrunk to one fiftieth of one per cent of its former size—not even Charlemagne's realms declined so quickly.'

Denial was evident in Hong Kong too. With its pomp and ceremony and it's vague threats of 'we'll be back if you're not careful', the handover ceremony masked an extraordinary achievement. The British Empire should be remembered less for the breadth of its boundaries—or its influence on legal systems, governance, the prevalence of cricket—than for its remarkable process of colonial disengagement, its genius for dismantling itself. This is the real significance of the Hong Kong handover. For despite their despotism and their determination to make things in their own image, the British managed to return most of their colonial possessions in some semblance of good order and, with some notable exceptions, peacefully. Not unchanged, and sometimes changed for the worse, though most have continued to prosper.

This is hardly a source of pride for them; not glorious enough to sustain a national myth, nor a celebration in Hong Kong. For Britain may finally be remembered as the country for whom empire-building was an amateur sport, where the fish is thrown back, and the fox is nothing more than the ghost of a scent. We came, we saw, we conquered. And then we took our ball back and went home. ■

Gary Bryson is the executive producer of ABC Radio National's *Late Night Live*.

SUMMA theologiae

Culling the theological month

'TOTO, WE'RE NOT IN KANSAS ANY MORE.' Judy Garland's innocent words to her faithful dog in *The Wizard of Oz* are now the title of a review article by Kathleen Nash in *Semeia* 74 (1996). *Semeia* is 'devoted to the exploration of new and emergent areas in methods of biblical interpretation'. This latest number is certainly true to type, rejoicing in the theme 'Biblical Glamour and Hollywood Glitz'. There are lots of articles on Bathsheba and Salome, a few on Moses, even one on Clint Eastwood. In *The Unforgiven*, Eastwood looks down the barrel of his gun at Gene Hackman, who says 'I don't deserve this ... to die like this; I was building a house.' The allusion, we are told, is to Deuteronomy 20:5. Further valuable information can be found in the journal's detailed bibliography on matters biblical and cinematic.

Luke Timothy Johnson's article 'Glossolalia: The Embarrassment of Experience', in *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* (July 1997), offers a different kind of scholarship. Johnson is interested in the fact that speaking in tongues can be so divisive in Christian communities. Exploring the (admittedly biased) written record from St Paul through to the end of the third Christian century, Johnson concludes that glossolalia is an increasingly marginal activity in the Church, perhaps reflecting the fact that religious authority, as it becomes more established, becomes more hostile to haphazard inspiration.

Theologians today discuss a different issue about the significance of words. Some take the post-modern view that words only connect with other words, rather than with underlying realities, and hence argue that religious discourse can only be conducted within the religious community. This is a rather glib summary of a position espoused by the Yale School and made famous in George Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine*. I do not agree with this position, and I was impressed by Brad Kallenberg's piece, 'Unstuck from Yale: Theological Method After Lindbeck', in *The Scottish Journal of Theology* (1997/2). Kallenberg gives a very fair summary of Lindbeck's work but then argues, in the light of both science and philosophy, that language is not all there is and that God is in dynamic relationship to the world. It is such a pleasure to read theologians who can write with a sensitivity to science!

Disappointment of the month also has to do with the reach of words. *Liturgy Digest* is a relatively new, beautifully produced journal from the University of Notre Dame, Indiana—a university famous for football teams but also a significant centre of Roman Catholic theology. The first number for 1997 is given to several essays on the place of metaphor in liturgy, but seems to become more embroiled in issues of diaphor and epiphor than it is in a spirituality that might draw us to worship.

More practical is the May 1997 issue of *New Theology Review: An American Catholic Journal for Ministry*, which is devoted to the topic of reconciliation at political, social and personal levels. Michael Lapsley SSM, a New Zealand Anglican priest who, in his preaching against apartheid became the victim of a mail bomb, writes movingly of his personal experiences. Reflection on the sacrament of reconciliation also suggests that its celebration must find more plural forms if the sacrament is to match the plurality of the Church proclaimed at Vatican II.

Best of all, read Michael Himes' essay, 'Why do we need a church—asking the pressing questions', in *The Furrow* (May 1997). This journal comes from St Patrick's College, Maynooth, in Ireland. Himes was once professor of theology at Notre Dame, but has transferred his allegiance to the other Catholic football university, Boston College. In his wise, witty, and brief essay, Himes points out that before we discuss all the other vexed questions about the Church, we need to consider a prior question: why we need the Church. Himes' own answer goes like this: 'we cannot believe apart from community... Trying to enter into relationship with God in some private, individualistic fashion is a guarantee that one will be talking to oneself ... The deepest ground for this claim is the central doctrine of the Christian tradition: God is communal ... and I am not.' How you answer this question, of course, shapes how you answer all the other questions. ■

John Honner SJ teaches at the United Faculty of Theology in Melbourne and edits *Pacifica: Journal of the Melbourne College of Divinity*.

JACK WATERFORD

The Barwick Judgment

Garfield Barwick, 22.6.1903–13.7.1993

GARFIELD BARWICK WAS A good man with a brief, as a barrister, as a politician, and, if somewhat less properly, as a judge. The broad briefs were rarely his, though; once he understood the target in view, he pursued it with zeal and imagination. He was combative, vain and usually very cocky, but he was also determined, organised, and able to be very persuasive—at least on a one-to-one basis.

But in the most public parts of his life, he will be seen by most as a failure, and not only on party political grounds, or because some can never forgive him his role in the Whitlam sacking of 1975. He went into politics groomed as a potential Prime Minister and moved straight into Cabinet. By the time he stepped down, six years later in 1964, to become Chief Justice, it was clear that, while he might be a tradesman minister, he was no politician. This was partly because he lacked a capacity to persuade large groups of people in settings less formal than a court, partly because he lacked sure-footedness in contests with no rules, but also because he lacked ideas and a vision that he could sell. And when he stepped down as Chief Justice 16 years after, it was also clear that he had left little lasting mark on the law.

In his previous roles he had been openly doing a job for others; even as a minister, and a reasonably competent one, he was generally acting under orders, and, when he was not, as with his proposed restrictive trade practices legislation, he failed.

As Chief Justice, he settled some old scores, did a journeyman's job on the humdrum business, and, as he grew more bored, became cantankerous, more partisan in his approach, and much more interested in projects, such as the environment (a genuine passion) and the building of the High Court in Canberra.

His stock of prejudices did not much change with the times, his economic libertarianism clashing with a moral conservatism more Methodist than Menzian. On the brief, such as with his divorce laws, he could cope pragmatically with moral dilemmas. He constantly added to his hate list, but mostly confined it to those who directly attacked him; as a partisan, he was more anti-Whitlam and the stock of ideas he represented, than pro-Liberal. In fact he despised most politicians, particularly those with agendas.

As an advocate, Barwick had attempted to engage judges in argument—to provoke them into debating his points with him, sometimes to anticipate their criticisms, at other times cunningly to lay the bait which would draw them where they did not want to go. He feared the silent judge who sat and listened but would not show what he was thinking, not telling whether he had adopted the argument and was ready to be taken to point two, or needed another whack of the premise.

With those he could engage, he could debate all day long. He was always superbly prepared—understanding every last intricacy of the law or regulation under analysis, but also, ever, with a very seductive overview which would seem to point inexorably in the direction which he wanted to take the court. On the detail and the policy, he was always confident, ever patient. Sometime he was one for the big bang—'I have 100 points, Your Honour, but my best one is this and if I miss on it I probably fail'—and sometimes he was one for the intricate exposition.

He was no cross-examiner, no great man for histrionics before juries, and, in any case which depended primarily on facts, was a careful layer of bricks, building a structure from which he could put propositions of law. With law, his logic seemed often intimidating, even when he seemed plainly wrong.

BUT HIS LAW HAD FEW LODESTONES. He had learnt it first as a gun for hire, and acquired much of his reputation for cunning as a regulations-buster, particularly during World War II. He would like such work to have been portrayed as standing up for the citizen to find limits to the power of

bureaucrats but much of it consisted of finding loopholes for the well-heeled seeking profits or exemptions from scarcity and emergency.

But it developed within him an instinct which later made him very difficult to characterise on the bench: at heart was the affection for the intricate argument that got one out of doing something otherwise compulsory, or the master's respect for a fine piece of sophistry—sometimes by focusing on the purpose and sometimes on the literal meaning of words—and a strong view that the interpretation and application of much of the commercial and administrative law was entirely amoral. Just as fundamental was an instinctive distrust of government and bureaucrats.

Those who stick labels on High Court judges reach first for attitudes on Commonwealth and states' rights, then assumptions about party political affiliation. These have some use, but it is limited. Though Barwick virtually invented the concept of implied rights within the Constitution in a states-rights argument to defeat Commonwealth banking legislation, and, in his later years, bent old views to suit his political prejudices on issues such as representation of the territories in Parliament, he was at heart a Commonwealth man. His lasting judicial legacy will be in his extension of Commonwealth power, particularly in the corporations field, which laid the framework for much of today's trade practices and corporations law.

But there is more to the law than the struggle for power between tiers of government. Most lawyers with experience of politics and government are by instinct practical, and work with a strong sense of parliamentary sovereignty: if a law was what parliament wanted, then, provided it was within power, their tendency was not to second-guess the way parliamentarians had chosen to solve the problem. Lionel Murphy is a very good example. He may have been a champion of the liberty of the subject, but he had a very strong tendency to assume essential legality, to look for the sense and the purpose of legislation and to try to make it work.

But Barwick was by nature anti-authoritarian, with a tendency to think any law or regulation an infringement of liberty and an example of bureaucrats wanting to rule the world. By instinct he did not want to let them go a millimetre further than they could. Attitudes such as this cut across centrism or states-rights, political or moral liberalism or conservatism: most of the judges on the present High Court, for example, are closer to the Barwick mould than Murphy's, and tend to see as at the centre of their duty the protection of the citizen against an ever-overreaching bureaucratic state.

But it would be fairer to say that the citizen in Barwick's mind's-eye was a businessman trying to dodge tax; for his successors it is rather more likely to be an Aboriginal or a battler. The businessman, of course, would be a yeoman; Barwick despised big business, even when he took its money, and never forgot or forgave the oil company which, nearly 70 years ago, bankrupted him when he stood guarantor for his brother's failed business.

As a judge, as when he was a lawyer, Barwick was very results-oriented, willing to adapt his judicial technique to get the result he wanted. He was legalistic only in the sense that he shaped his arguments in legalese: he could sweep aside or ignore a precedent as grandly as anyone. Only rarely did he demonstrate a wide vision or a sweeping argument. More often his agenda seemed to be defending the reasoning of cases he had won as a barrister, or establishing as principle arguments he had lost. He rarely swayed other judges even when they were focused on the same results; though most of his colleagues were in awe of his advocacy skills, few thought much of him as a lawyer or as a judge, or of his ability to reach detached and lonely judgment rather than to put a case.

He is now not much quoted, and the reasoning of many of his more significant cases has been rejected, by black-letter lawyers as much as the more adventurous ones. Just after he died, the High Court dismantled another of his edifices—the use of loopholing by the states to get around clear constitutional prohibitions on state excise taxes. His whole approach to tax-dodging, which pushed literalism to the fore, is discredited; his expansive and imaginative reading of Section 92 of the Constitution, which won him the bank nationalisation cases, is an oddity of history: even judges usually seen as conservative, such as Sir Harry Gibbs and Sir Keith Aickin, have left more landmarks of personal freedom in the law than he has.

Sir Garfield's most public moment was as the Chief Justice who confirmed the mind of Governor-General Sir John Kerr to sack Gough Whitlam. Ever after, it shaped most people's view of him, seemed to underline a continuing party-partisanship, and made even his retirement a misery, as he sought, often unconvincingly, to defend both his conduct and his advice.

He was unwise, but not necessarily wrong, to accept Sir John's invitation to advise him. There was precedent for it, but there was not only the risk, which was realised, of drawing himself and his court into controversy, but the fact that he was personally of a political background: were a Harry Gibbs or an Owen Dixon to have given similar advice, it would not have excited such anger. And the point becomes reinforced when it is recognised that Sir John asked for confirmation of his opinion, not advice about what he should do.

Only the most romantic maintainers of the rage would pretend any longer that there was anything exceptionable about the general proposition that a Governor-General had the power to dismiss a government which could not secure Supply, and most might agree with Sir Garfield that, ultimately, he had a duty to do so. But Sir Garfield's proposition—put baldly as self-evident, in the style Sir Garfield always adopted when taking others over the cliff—that a government had to have the confidence of both houses of Parliament, was preposterous.

And then there was the most nagging question left by 11 November 1975—at what stage did a political crisis become a constitutional crisis and at what stage did a power become a duty? Did Sir John act too quickly? Sir Garfield would say that the timing had been a matter for the viceroy, but there can be little doubt that his encouragement pushed Kerr on.

It was, of course, never for Sir Garfield to express a jot of regret, and by then he was so bitter that the attacks of critics he despised—particularly journalists, modern law lecturers and social theorists—only compounded his certainty of his correctness. Besides, it gave him a cause, as an advocate again. He took on all comers on the subject on several occasions—once, after a National Press Club lunch, he stayed to carry on the argument on the footpath for an hour or more; later, he was virtually to regard the case as a brief. As well, the affair produced not only a wide public notice he had never previously had, even as a minister, but a remarkable, if caustic, biography by David Marr. That will be read long after any of Sir Garfield's judgments. ■

Jack Waterford is editor of the *Canberra Times*.

JAMES GRIFFIN

PNG: the election debrief

UNPRECEDENTEDLY, media advertisements and billboards proclaimed KAIKAI BILONG TINGTING ('food for thought') for the 1997 national elections. Diagonally set for all perspectives, the huge hoarding at the turn-off to Parliament House read:

WHEN THE RIGHTEOUS ARE IN AUTHORITY THE PEOPLE REJOICE BUT WHEN THE WICKED RULE THE PEOPLE SUFFER (Proverbs 29:2).

This was not casual, nor even just opportunistic, bible-bashing. Something extraordinary was happening in the Papua New Guinea polity, thanks to the shock of the first coming of Sandline mercenaries in February and the general revulsion at what was thought to be widespread political corruption.

'Do not sell your country to the dogs', urged the Catholic Commission for Justice, Peace and Development. 'Use the power God has given me to elect good leaders who can provide good and caring government.'

And so they seemed to do—for at least enough electorates to be able to effect a change in the quality and direction of government.

Then in those collusory days between the declaration of the polls and the election of the prime minister by Parliament, something went wrong.

After the election on 22 July, the *National* daily editorialised that 'A network of broken promises' had been left in the wake of 'a new coalition government, hastily pieced together from many different parties, groups and individuals in less than 18 hours'.

Papua New Guinea had gone to the polls preoccupied with Sandline 'and a host of other issues', almost all of which were blamed on the previous governing coalition of PPP (Sir Julius Chan's People's Progress Party) and Pangu Pati (originally Sir Michael Somare's party from which he had, with a few followers, broken away).

On 13 July the man destined to become the new prime minister, Bill Skate (a former Speaker in 1992-4 and then an energetic Governor of Port Moresby who had founded his own People's National Congress), had said: 'We do not want to be involved with their (PPP-Pangu) dirty politics ... We would be going against the people's wishes ...'

Yet, together with its partner, the People's Democratic Movement (PDM, ex-prime minister Paias Wingti's party), Skate's PNC had done just that: formed a PNC-PDM-PPP-Pangu coalition.

Papua New Guinea is not Africa, as the English colonel of Sandline with his clipped guardsman aplomb and suave cupidity discovered.

But even more barefaced was the apparent apostasy of a group of some 13 cleanskin independents and minuscule 'parties' of one or two such as the People's Resources Awareness Party (PRAP).

They were led by Father Robert Lak, erstwhile University Catholic chaplain, and Peti Lafanama of the professedly incorruptible, radical nationalist Melanesian Solidarity Movement (Melsol).

Lafanama, in particular, led public protests in Port Moresby against Sandline and corruption. Fr Lak was 'also very vocal', said the ecumenical Christian weekly, the *Independent*, but now they 'have compromised everything they stood for'.

Lafanama actually seconded Skate's nomination for Prime Minister and was photographed escorting Skate by the arm to the Speaker's podium. Fellow Melsols outside were appalled. Many—and not just cynics—were asking if money and offices were being transacted. Chan and Wingti may have lost their seats but these two exceedingly wealthy, most numerate vote-crunchers were to hand in all the manœuvres.

But before we go any further, remember this: after commentators have their fun deploring the disorganisation, venality, intimidation and sporadic violence of elections in Papua New Guinea, it is well to remember that they have delivered accepted, legitimate governments. Since 1977 in each of the last four parliaments, only one no-confidence motion has toppled the government, and the successions have occurred without violence. There has been no need for interim elections.

Compare, for example, the 50 or so governments cobbled in cradle-of-civilisation Italy since the war. In Papua New Guinea there have been only five different prime ministers since Somare assembled his coalition in 1972; Australia has had six.

Papua New Guinea is not Africa, as the English colonel of Sandline with his clipped guardsman aplomb and suave cupidity discovered.

PNG ELECTIONS HAVE BEEN notoriously about primary ethnic/clan interests (roads, bridges, schools, and access to the cash economy) although not exclusively so, as strong personalities and church and other affiliations can subsume them. However the 'national interest' has been generally ignored, with political parties or factions too weak to consolidate and articulate demands into competitive programs.

Thirteen parties contested in 1997: four returned a single member, two won two seats each. Even the larger parties lack the necessary finances and a disciplined national structure through which to sift appropriate candidates. The resources of the leadership become the key to preferment as, after the polls, they are used to contain successful adherents and recruit independents—in this election, 38 of them out of 109 seats. The absurd number of candidates may indicate democratic zest but, in a first-past-the post contest, it

diminishes the legitimacy of the outcome.

In one electorate there were 63 contestants; theoretically there could have been a victor with less than two per cent of the vote. Little wonder that so many people feel unrepresented.

Sandline precipitated corruption as a national issue, overwhelming parochial concerns for the first time in many places. While fewer sitting MPs (52) lost their seats than in 1992, incumbents in 1992-97 had greater access to discretionary funds than ever before. As well as Chan and Wingti, John Giheno, Acting Prime Minister when Chan stood down, was a casualty with 11 other ministers.

Peter Barter, the exemplary Minister for Provincial Affairs, who had recently issued a constructive plan for peace on Bougainville, was possibly a victim of miscalculation and skulduggery rather than being found guilty by association.

More obviously punished for his long-term association was the only other European incumbent, Tim Neville, who organised Wingti's one-vote victory in 1992. Then he won Milne Bay Regional with 41 per cent of the vote against the vivid former Papuan secessionist, Dame Josephine Abaijah, (16 per cent). This time she turned the tables quite easily, one of only two out of 54 female contestants to succeed, but the first elected since 1982. While she was now prepared to bury secessionism, she stridently kept alive the need to share: a Papuan had to be Prime Minister this time and Skate was the man.

But are we looking just at a case of *plus ça change ...*?

One must scrutinise the process which brought Skate to power to see if such pessimism is justified or if any promise can be plucked from it.

Certainly the NGOs which called for change will not disappear. Transparency International (TI) whose president, Sir Anthony Siaguru, is a former Deputy Secretary of the Commonwealth and MP, will continue to propagate PASIM PASIN NOGUT ('End bad ways'). A three-day 'national integrity' workshop in Port Moresby brought in Australia's Frank ('Bottom-of-the-harbour') Costigan for its keynote address. The day following the election TI reproduced, in a full-page notice, the National Integrity Pledge signed by 'William Jack Skate MP' on 12 June, maintaining the pressure.

Among the other signatories was the nation's first commander of the Defence Force and former deputy prime minister,

Getting netted

THE LOOK OF WONDER ON THE FACES of the Archimedean offspring was enough to counter all the Internet sceptics. They had just received the latest weather report from Mars, and were now surveying the Red Planet from the comfort of their home, more than 50 million kilometres away. It was only hours after the small remote-controlled rover, known as Sojourner, had rolled down the ramp from the US Pathfinder Mission Lander onto the surface of the planet. And they were able to follow its exploits in detail, hours ahead of the sketchy reports available in the media.

Genuine awe is a rare commodity in the world of the prematurely-aged modern teenager. If it can be supplied through the Internet, then Archimedes is prepared to overlook many of the Net's shortcomings. This is a side of the Internet that seems to been ignored in the uproar as those in power begin to realise that they can no longer fully control the access to and movement of information around the world. But in the area of learning about science at least, it has much to offer.

Take, for instance, the ABC's latest on-line offering, The Lab. Connect to the Internet, dial in the address (http://www.abc.net.au/science) and on your screen appears a menu to lead you to all sorts of activities—24 hours a day, seven days a week.

At a mundane level, the site acts as a gateway to what is happening in the ABC science programs. There are links to transcripts of material from the *Science Show* and the *Health Report*, software to search for a program or report you only vaguely remember, and listings of what is coming up on ABC Radio and Television.

But The Lab is more creative than that. You can listen, for instance, to sound clips from Karl Kruszelnicki's *Great Moments in Science* on the Triple J network. The software can be downloaded free. As science happens, news flashes appear on the screen, together with links to take you to Websites that can provide the latest information. It might be a new finding or picture from the Mars probe, or the progress of an expedition in the Brazilian rainforest. Last month, for instance, the Lab organised an on-line chat with expeditioners at Australia's Antarctic bases.

In addition, there are features and columns on scientific matters and issues written by scientists and science communicators. They make use of all the capability of the Net to display images and link information. Some even allow you to interact and add your comments. Since The Lab opened in July articles have appeared which describe the Big Bang, debunk many of the claims of the beauty industry, and survey the ecological limits of Australia. And what Website would be complete without a games area. This one comes with free software to make it happen.

There's even a link to a CSIRO site which is running a soap opera based on a scientific research. CO_2LAB tells the story of the interactions between the researchers and technical staff at a laboratory studying climate change. 'The soapie is really a Trojan horse to attract people not usually interested in science to find out about current scientific issues,' says Simon Torok, a science communicator at CSIRO Land and Water in Canberra, whose idea it was. His efforts can be seen at (http://soap.csiro.au

For those who like their information straight—neither stirred nor shaken—there is Nova, the science education site of the Australian Academy of Sciences, at (http://www.science.org.au/nova/). It is checked and updated regularly.

Then there are various discussion groups to join, eclectic groups of people—working scientists, high school students, science communicators, ministers of religion, computer buffs, teachers, and anyone else who is interested.

It's trite to observe that, as with any new, pervasive technology, the Internet carries both benefits and dangers. But you could be forgiven for thinking that our legislators have only recently discovered this. Because of the nature of the Internet, trying to regulate it skilfully with laws and technology is virtually impossible. A pornographer can be doing business from Finland today and the Bahamas next week.

That puts the ball squarely in the court of the individual and the community. We have to educate ourselves and our children to use the Net wisely. The potential benefits for increasing knowledge and strengthening democracy are too great to allow clumsy regulators to block the superhighway. ■

Tim Thwaites is a freelance science writer.

Ted Diro, now leader of People's Action Party, six of whom were elected. Diro was forced out of Parliament in 1991 as a result of a nine million kina forestry scam. He claims to be 'born-again'. His popularity in Papua brought him victory in Central Regional but in spite of some journalistic fantasies that he might become a compromise prime minister, he never became relevant.

Among other notable critics of the outgoing régime were Sir Mekere Morauta, for a decade the distinguished Secretary for Finance, a *bête noire* to Chan, who had been scathing about the 'small band of rapacious politicians', and Lady Carol Kidu, widow of the incorruptible Chief Justice, Sir Buri Kidu.

Other advocates of clean government who will not evaporate are Operation BRUKIM SKRU ('Bend the knee'), a pan-religious movement, a number of whose nominees were successful, ICRAF (Individual and Community Rights Advocacy Group), the PNG Integral Human Development Trust, Greenpeace, Melanesian Environment Foundation and YWCA. Perhaps even the female village AGLOW movement which sponsored Kuk Kuli, the first preliterate elected since 1977, will stay alight.

FOLLOWING THE DECLARATION of the polls, three main camps were set up.

In Kavieng, in Chan's home province, the outgoing coalition, PPP, with 16 MPs (now led by Andrew Baing, not regarded as PM timber) and Pangu (14 MPs, led by pro-Sandline Chris Haiveta) took counsel.

In Tufi, on the north coast of Papua, not New Guinea, Skate's PNC (5) colluded with PDM (9), formerly Wingti's party, now led by Roy Yaki, who was hardly PM material

In Wewak (East Sepik), virtually Somare's home base, his NA together with MA (11 altogether), attempted to attract more of the 38 independents. Outside these coalitions was Ted Diro's PAP.

To illustrate the flexibility MPs have in conceptualising what a political party is, we need not go beyond Dr John Waiko, the nation's first PhD in Social Science and a former professor of History.

After several ill-timed change-overs during 1992-97, he had become Chan's Minister for Education. As such, he maintained he had an obligation to remain with PPP, although he was formally the parliamentary leader of PAP. Confronted with the chance that he and Waiko could be on opposite sides of the House, Diro, who claimed 10 supporters, denied any conflict, refusing 'to be dragged to the gutters and play dirty politics'.

Which side would he support? He had friends on both sides; there would be a decision the day before the election; PAP was 'not interested in any short-term government'. And, ultimately, no-one was interested in him. Diro went into Opposition, Dr Waiko into Government as Vice-Minister, this time for Education, and still a member of PAP! Ludger Mondo (also PAP), a former secretary to the Catholic Commission for Peace, Justice and Development, behaved similarly.

At the beginning of the week before the election, those touted seriously for Prime Minister were Somare (NA), Haiveta (Pangu), Skate (PNC) and Morauta (Independent). Only Somare was not a Papuan but as 'father' of the nation with the composite name, he clearly did not see that as a disadvantage. Nor did he accept that he was a 'retread', and seemed jaded.

Somare had never fully accepted his rejection for Chan in 1980. Then, after his triumphant return in 1982, there was a further deposition in 1985 when his Pangu Pati was split three ways by his protegés, Wingti and Siaguru. After looking an easy winner in 1987 he was bested by Wingti, and reacted badly to Namaliu's election as leader of Pangu and Prime Minister, 1988-92.

Somare was also somewhat compromised over dealings with Taiwanese financiers for the erection of his monument, Somare Haus. It now stands desolate and half-finished. But Somare's mediating skills still made him a favourite for top post.

Meanwhile, the reputable Namaliu who, in spite of a small majority in 1992, had now 55 per cent of the vote, was being urged by his electors, influenced by BRUKIM SKRU, either to replace Haiveta as leader of Pangu or leave. Morauta was being induced to lead PDM and try for PM.

The question was who would become PM—Somare or Skate? Somare was headlined doing a jig as Namaliu defected to his side. There was some irony in the statement from his former University colleague, Moi Avei (under Chan's Minister for National Planning) that it would be 'intellectually dishonest' for him also 'to jump ship'. But he did so a few days later and landed in Opposition with the shadow portfolio of Education, Science and Technology.

Wingti then persuaded Morauta to become the new leader of PDM. As such he was now a serious contender, but eventually Somare's intransigence pushed PDM-PNG back onto PPP-Pangu. This put Morauta into an impossible position even if he were offered the ultimate prize. He was a Papuan, uncompromised, with rare experience in financial administration. But he could not stomach even leading PPP-Pangu. Finally, Somare was prepared to give over to him. But it was too late. Somare was nominated against Skate but only as a matter of form. He seemed to shrug off the result: '*Après Moi. ...*'?

What can be said for Fr Lak and Lafanama? They may sincerely believe that Bill Skate has cast off his suspicious former associates and is committed to transparency in government.

A NEWLY ELECTED Papua New Guinea prime minister has unusual power; he cannot be deposed for 18 months and can change the ministry. Skate has already set out broader terms of reference for a new Sandline enquiry which have infuriated Chan and should unsettle Haiveta. PPP-Pangu need not dominate. Moreover, under the reformed provincial government arrangements, regional MPs or their proxies become 'governors' of their provinces and thus conduits for decentralised expenditures. As such, Lak, Louis Lamane (a fellow priest) and Lafanama qualify for what can be regarded as an influential, even a pastoral role. However, Somare's group had opposed this reform and intended to modify it.

In the complex politics of Papua New Guinea, more than virtue and talent are needed to win office. The current Opposition (NA-MA-PAP-Independents) lacked the resolve to depose an obsolete leader, and the energy to mobilise like Wingti and Chan.

But utter pessimism is not yet in order. Public and parliamentary scrutiny are still alive and well. Skate knows Melsol and the unions can fill the streets again. He may be 'born again', like a few of the 'raskols' with whom he once associated.

But his problems are enormous.

Aside from brooming the public service for slackness and corruption, maintaining momentum in the economy and tackling the law and order crisis, he must completely overhaul an army that has been allowed to starve in its city barracks in Port Moresby and Lae. Then there is Bougainville, about which Skate appears to be conciliatory.

We must wait and see. But it was a fascinating election. ■

James Griffin is Emeritus Professor of History at the University of PNG. He visited PNG for the election of the PM.

OUT OF THEIR

PLACE

__Jon Greenaway__ reports on the paradoxical case of the Bhutanese refugees—the most sedentary itinerant population on Earth—and the most forgotten. Photographs by __Mathias Heng.__

Mathias Heng's photographs record a refugee people who make do—with extraordinary gusto. They cobble classrooms out of bamboo, eke out a living from wood gathering, build fragile houses from whatever comes to hand, cutting out windows to let in light and air.

FLICKING THROUGH A BOOK OF PAINTINGS by Bhutanese children, I was struck by the vibrant colours. These people, after all, have allegedly been forced from their homes by the arbitrary rule of Bhutan's monarchy.

I was expecting a little more darkness: something like the charcoal depictions of life in a concentration camp rendered by young Jewish inmates, and now kept in the *Ecole Militaire* in Paris. The subjects seemed innocent enough as well—a family house in one, a small temple in another—until I turned the page on a picture, painted by a 13-year-old boy, that showed the torture of his father. Manacled and with feet tethered, he was being beaten by Bhutanese military men while he was suspended upside down from a tree.

The bright colours came from paints supplied by Irish volunteers with Caritas in Nepal, who have the responsibility for educating some 40,000 children spread over 7 camps near the border. They are some of over 92,000 refugees, the bulk of whom left the tiny Himalayan kingdom because of the unrest brought about by a series of rallies in late 1990.

The protests were a culmination of the tension between Hindus in southern Bhutan (whose ethnology is predominately Nepalese) and their Buddhist northern rulers. While other refugee crises have accelerated and then eased, the Bhutanese in Nepal could perhaps qualify as the most sedentary itinerant population on earth, and, as many of them enter their seventh year of encampment, perhaps the most forgotten.

'Over the last 20 or 30 years they have come to expect and want education and human rights improvements which were perceived by the Bhutanese King as a threat,' says Sr Mary Moorhead. Sr Mary is an educational administrator working in Jhapa, where most of the camps are located. She oversees the teacher-training of volunteers drawn from the camp populations. She gave me the book of paintings to look through before we spoke, the only preparation she felt necessary before she explained the eviction of southern Bhutanese.

The eviction took place under the auspices of a citizenship act which differentiates between genuine and illegitimate residents. (The government requires that a land tax receipt from 1958 be produced as proof of legitimacy). Most of the refugees come from farming communities.

'And some 80 per cent of Bhutan's economy is aid, so I guess the necessity of food production from the south became less somehow'.

According to Mary Moorhead, there are two main reasons why the Bhutanese refugee problem has persisted: the intransigence of the King of Bhutan and the tactical superiority of his régime in its dealings with Nepal, which has had three changes of government since 1990, all of them disrupting negotiations. There is also a lack of sufficient pressure from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The UNHCR, she says, is geared to respond to crises, not situations that persist.

Since the refugees first came to Nepal there have been 7 rounds of bilateral talks, none of which has produced anything resembling a resolution. Last October the governments of Nepal and Bhutan both put their case before the Executive Committee of the UNHCR in Geneva.

The then foreign minister of Nepal, Dr Lohani, talked of the economic and social impact of the refugee population on his already impoverished country (though there is some evidence that it is in fact bringing in money), and questioned the assertion of the Bhutan government that a large proportion of the 'refugees' went to Nepal willingly. Bhutan's representative in Geneva expressed his concern for the situation of the Bhutanese in the camps but reiterated that any verification process prior to the refugees' repatriation or relocation will prove that most were in Bhutan illegally in the first place or emigrated to Nepal of their own free will.

This has been the sticking point: how and why did they come to be in Nepal? Dr Lohani told the committee, 'we find it extremely hard to understand that almost one-sixth of a population of a country should, within a short period of time, choose voluntarily to renounce the safety and security of home and society in exchange for an uncertain future in a refugee camp in a foreign country.'

In the meantime, the UNHCR has coördinated a refugee operation that has been well supported by non-government organisations. As well as Caritas, which has responsibility for education, the Lutheran World Service takes care of maintenance and construction, the Nepal Red Cross distributes food rations, heating oil and blankets, and the Nepalese government provides medicines.

Out of their Place

Since the camps have a relatively stable population, these organisations have been able to witness some positive results from their work. In Nepal's nation-wide Year 8 exams, students in the camps averaged over 85 per cent, whereas children from the areas surrounding the camp produced an average result below 50 per cent. Mary Moorhead views the success of the education program as a reflection of the children's keenness. The 40,000 students are funnelled towards 65 tertiary education scholarships provided by the German government which, as well as providing an opportunity to learn, are a ticket out of the camps. The program is in part governed by camp committees which, according to Moorhead, provide the refugees with some control over their situation.

Despite these achievements there is, understandably, a morale problem in the camps, with the frustration of confinement compounded by the lack of productive work. A sense of community has alleviated this, but it is starting to show cracks. 'And it will get worse', says Mary Moorhead. 'There was an extraordinary amount of commitment and good will to set this thing up ... there was an absolute belief in the people as a whole, rather than each individual seeking his or her own solution.

'Whether they [the Bhutanese] will keep up this commitment to the whole group I don't know.' ■

Jon Greenaway is *Eureka Street*'s South East Asian correspondent.
Mathias Heng is a freelance documentary photographer.

PAUL TURNBULL

The body and soul snatchers

WINTER HAS AGAIN COME TO NORTH QUEENSLAND and southerly winds are fast drying the bush. Before the fires come in September, Uncle Monty Pryor will walk amongst the Burdekin Plum trees that his ancestors planted many generations ago at Cape Upstart, to the north of the coastal town of Bowen.

This senior Elder of the Birri Gubba people will visit his ancestral country to seek guidance, as to where and how a skull returned from a British provincial museum should be reunited with the land. Until he is certain in his heart where the relic should be buried, and what ceremonies will need to be fulfilled, the skull will remain locked in a temporary keeping place at the James Cook University in Townsville, just to the north of Birri Gubba country.

Being spiritual custodian of the skull has caused Monty Pryor anguish, but it is an obligation he is determined to fulfil, even though age and ill-health forced his retirement as Deacon in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Townsville several years ago. As he explained to me in mid-1991, some eighteen months after his return from Britain with the skull:

> They stole my people from there. Now you [must] put that in the rightful order. Abducting, an abduction of your people, to experiment on, or to experiment on the remains or whatever may be. It's the same, see, to taking the whole being.
>
> **Paul Turnbull**: *The fact the body's dead makes no difference?*
> **Monty Prior**: It still makes no difference. No, because that is one of us. You're taking part of us away to somewhere else.
>
> *So it means virtually the same thing as taking the children away?*
> That's part of you. Well, that's the same as our children, our other members of family.
>
> *So there's a really different sense of time about the whole thing?*
> That there is.

Through our conversation that morning the claims of Aboriginal spirituality were woven easily with Western understandings of time, the past and providence. Effortlessly, though not always happily, we spoke of Birri Gubba obligations to ancestral country, Monty Pryor's years of selfless work on behalf of Aboriginal inmates in Stuart Creek prison, the plight of the stolen children, and the continuing fight for the many years' wages that he and other Aboriginal people are still owed for their work in clearing and fencing the network of pastoral runs that still largely define the landscape of North Queensland.

What also became obvious as we talked was Monty Prior's sorrow at knowing there are still those who do not understand the significance of the Birri Gubba continuum of birth, life in the land and return to the realm of spirit. Despite the mounting evidence as to how important the repatriation of ancestral remains is to Aboriginal peoples, there remain those who look on their continued preservation within scientific collections as outweighing the imperatives of Aboriginal religion.

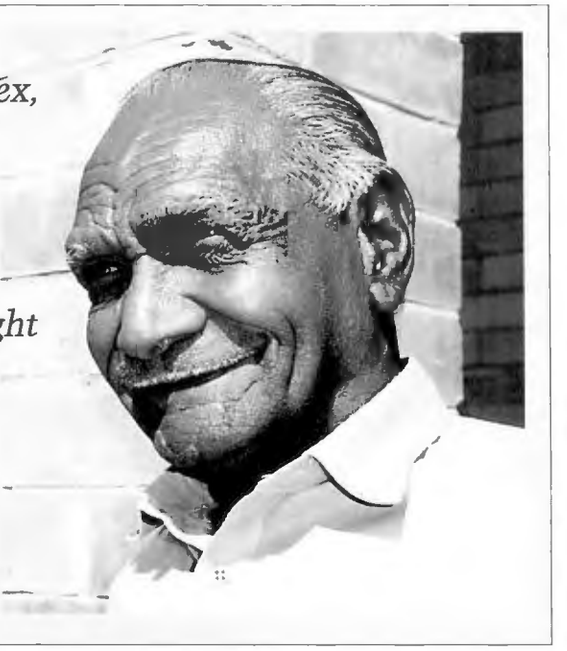
Monty Pryor knows too well this unwillingness to listen. During the course of his visit to Britain in 1990, he journeyed to Edinburgh. There he met Matthew Kaufman, Professor of Anatomy at Edinburgh University, and pleaded with him to allow the repatriation of what was probably the largest surviving collection of Aboriginal remains in Europe.

Kaufman was determined not to see the collection lost to science, and proceeded through the course of the meeting to stress in exhaustive detail the importance of keeping the remains, emphasising how much Aboriginal people had learnt about themselves, and had yet to learn. A gifted scientist, Kaufman had good intentions, but the impact on Monty Pryor was devastating. This senior law man was left feeling as much a nameless specimen as the rows of crania shelved in the anatomy school's museum. As he later recalled:

> Well my friend, he [Professor Kaufman] gave us all the facts. He had all the facts. He was an encyclopedia. He said he knew all about us Aboriginal people. He knew everything about us ... I just had to get up and leave.

Since the late 18th century, Western science has accumulated a wealth of fact about the Australian indigenous body. This vast archive is truly encyclopedic, in the sense that it is comprised of a myriad discrete and often sequential studies of Aboriginal anatomy and morphology. Listening to Monty Pryor speak of his life, and why the bones of his people must be returned to their rightful place in the Birri Gubba's ancestral country, it is hard not to be disturbed by the unwillingness of opponents of repatriation to acknowledge how many of the older entries in this encyclopedia incorporate literal or implied traces of the violence of the frontier. Articles in 19th century scientific journals often not only contain a wealth of what is now near indecipherable anthropometric data, but indicate how remains were procured through knowingly desecrating burial places. In some instances, they reveal how bones were removed from the bodies of Aboriginal people who had died violently at the hands of colonists.

Reconstructing that past can prove complex, as is well illustrated by the circumstances which eventually led to the skeletons of eight Birri Gubba men and women being traded between two German museums in the early 1880s.



Photograph of Monty Pryor by Barbara Erskine.

One is drawn to fill the intervening spaces between these learned texts with a history that explains how and why the bodies of Aboriginal peoples were so readily procured for scientific use. However, reconstructing that past can prove complex, as is well illustrated by the circumstances which eventually led to the skeletons of eight Birri Gubba men and women being traded between two German museums in the early 1880s.

In 1880, Rudolph Krause, a young German medical student with anthropological interests, was hired by the Godeffroy Museum of Hamburg to measure the Birri Gubba skeletons, in preparation for their sale. The museum had been founded by Hamburg shipping magnate Johann Cæsar Godeffroy, who had employed various collectors throughout the Pacific. Forced into bankruptcy in 1879, Godeffroy reluctantly agreed to the sale of the museum's extensive ethnographic collections. (Krause 1881)

The sale of the skeletons was especially embarrassing to Godeffroy. Soon after they had arrived at the museum in 1869, they had come to the attention of Rudolph Virchow, Germany's most eminent anatomist and a founder of the prestigious Anthropological Society of Berlin. Virchow moved quickly to clinch a deal with Godeffroy to furnish a report on the skeletons, to be published in the museum's own journal, together with a series of meticulously detailed plates, engraved strictly to Virchow's instructions.

Virchow sought an anthropological coup, there being at this time no comparable series of complete Australian skeletons anywhere in continental Europe. Even so, despite the finished plates being printed by Godeffroy at great expense, Virchow failed to furnish the accompanying text. After the forced sale of the museum's ethnographic collection, to the Leipzig Museum for Ethnography, in 1881, Virchow used his influence again to assert exclusive scientific rights over the skeletons.

That Aboriginal remains should fuel ambition and rivalry in scientific circles was not uncommon, given the significance they had come to assume in contemporary thinking about the course of human evolution. However, what was unusual about the Birri Gubba skeletons was that they had been sent from the Bowen district to the Godeffroy Museum by a woman, then in her mid-forties, named Amalie Dietrich.

Given that in the 19th century, science was overwhelmingly the preserve of men, what led Amalie Dietrich to comb Birri Gubba country, taking the bones of their ancestral dead from hollow trees and burial platforms? In 1990 the editors of the *Bulletin* were inclined to answer that question by drawing a blunt parallel between Dietrich and those women who later willingly participated in Nazi genocide. In November that year they published a feature article on 19th century trafficking in Aboriginal remains, which among other things claimed that in the course of her travels, Dietrich had sought to have an Aboriginal man murdered for his skin. One of the few, and not the most flattering photographs of Dietrich to survive was placed on front cover, under the headline 'Angel of Black Death'.

What led Amalie Dietrich to comb Birri Gubba country, taking the bones of their ancestral dead from hollow trees and burial platforms? In 1990 the editors of the Bulletin *were inclined to answer that question by drawing a blunt parallel between Dietrich and those women who later willingly participated in Nazi genocide.*

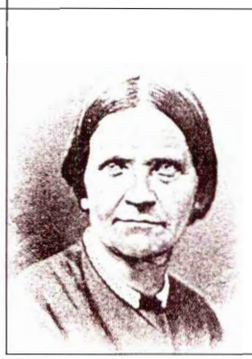


Image of Amalie Dietrich from Amalie, Ein Leben *(A Life), by Charitas Bischoff.*

HOWEVER, THE LETTERS THAT CHARITAS, Amalie Dietrich's daughter and only child, wove into a posthumous biography of her mother, afford glimpses of a more complex story. Dietrich was a highly intelligent, sensitive and profoundly unhappy woman. By the early 1860s she was desperate to escape the humiliation of a failed marriage to a man who shared her deep love of science, but whose snobbery and depressive self-obsession had left her desperate to prove her own worth in the eyes of others. Understandably, she eagerly accepted the help of a family friend in persuading Godeffroy to employ her on a generous salary collecting in Queensland on behalf of his museum. The same friend agreed to act as guardian of her young daughter in her absence. (Sumner 1993, pp3-11)

The years Dietrich spent in Queensland between 1863 and 1872 were marked by hardship and little inner peace. 'On the one hand I felt so elated and carefree in this new part of the world', she confided to her daughter in a letter shortly after her arrival in Brisbane, 'and on the other hand so lonely and bewildered.' (Bischoff 1931, p233) Even so, the hardships and dangers of life as a natural history collector on the Queensland frontier were preferable to the unhappiness she had left behind. As she wrote from a bush camp on the outskirts of Rockhampton in April 1864:

> To be sure, I am exposed to more dangers here than when I travelled about my home, but here as there I know God can be my shield. I fear no evil. Times in the past have been so hard that I really consider myself very well-off now in comparison with former days. What freedom I enjoy here as a collector. No one circumscribes my zeal. (Bischoff, pp243-4)

While Dietrich's skills as a collector quickly earned her a degree of recognition women rarely achieved in 19th century scientific circles, the letters she received announcing her election to various learned societies appear to have enhanced her consciousness that the freedom and self-worth she had found were dependent on the rarity of the specimens she forwarded to the Museum. 'I am always trying to imagine what they will say in Hamburg when the consignments arrive', she confided to Charitas. 'They are sure to be a little anxious as to whether I am equal to the task. I am naturally anxious as well.' (Bischoff, p236)

So desperate was Dietrich to please Godeffroy that events were set in train that twice nearly cost her life. In September 1864, attempting to procure a striking specimen of water-lily, she became trapped in a swamp. All that saved her was the chance passing at dusk of a group of Aboriginal men and women on their way to a ceremony. Fright and exhaustion gave way to a serious fever, which so weakened Dietrich that she was again nearly killed, after inadvertently causing a fire in the house she had rented in Rockhampton. The bulk of her equipment and many specimens awaiting shipment destroyed, she was left distraught at having to inform the museum of the disaster. 'I am so worried what Godeffroy's will say,' she wrote to Charitas. 'Will they lose confidence in me now? Will they recall me?'

Distressed by uncertainty for over six months, Dietrich was elated when the following spring she finally received a kind and encouraging letter from the museum, expressing confidence and promising new equipment. And yet the letter was unmistakably clear how she was to make good the loss to Herr Godeffroy:

> We are glad to hear you intend going north, and would ask you again to send not only skeletons of the larger mammals, but also as many skeletons and skulls of the aborigines as possible, as well as their weapons and implements. (Bischoff, p259)

'Such things are very important for ethnology', the letter continued. 'We have every confidence that you will carry out all these instructions.'

Dietrich had left Hamburg knowing that the museum was keen to acquire Aboriginal remains, but it seems to have been the burden of this new responsibility that set her to grave robbing, even though she now owed her life to Aboriginal people, and knew how seriously they took their obligations to the dead. (Sumner, p45)

Her anxiety to please Godeffroy may also explain the circulation of a particularly grim tale in print and Queensland pioneer lore for over a century, to the effect that she sought to have an Aboriginal man killed for the sake of obtaining his ritually scarified skin. As the story goes, Dietrich, when visiting William Archer, a Rockhampton pastoralist and keen amateur naturalist, asked him to help her procure the skin of an Aborigine. What Dietrich had in all likelihood learnt as she travelled northwards was that the mortuary rituals of several peoples on the Queensland coast involved the post-mortem removal and drying of the skin of initiated men. At this time, only one such skin was known to science, having been presented to England's Royal College of Surgeons by explorer Allen Cunningham in 1829.

As the story has it, William Archer understood Dietrich as wanting him to help murder a man for his skin, and ordered her off the property. Given that Archer enjoyed good relations with local Aboriginal people, it could well have been simply the suggestion he help her desecrate a burial place that so offended him. However, the story appears to have circulated widely, and came to be retold, gruesomely embellished, by H.L. Roth, in his 1908 history of Mackay:

> The celebrated Godeffroy Museum of Hamburg had a collector on the coast from 1863 to 1873, who made several ineffectual efforts to induce squatters to shoot an aboriginal, so that she could send the skeleton to the Museum! On one occasion, she asked an officer of the Native Police what he would take to shoot so and so, pointing to one of the Native Black Trooper. She got no human skins nor skeletons from the Mackay district. (Roth 1908, p81)

In all probability Roth was accurate in only one respect: it was not until Dietrich arrived at the North Queensland coastal settlement of Bowen that she successfully managed to procure the skeletons of Aboriginal people.

As the story has it, William Archer understood Dietrich as wanting him to help murder a man for his skin, and ordered her off the property. Given that Archer enjoyed good relations with local Aboriginal people, it could well have been simply the suggestion he help her desecrate a burial place that so offended him.

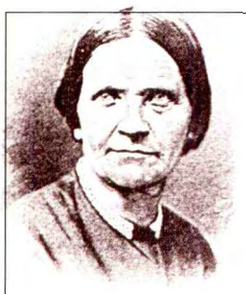
AT THIS TIME THE BOWEN REGION was still the scene of murderous frontier conflict. Many ethnographic 'curios' passing from the region to southern and overseas collectors had been gathered in the wake of punitive actions by local settlers and the infamous Native Police. Three years before Dietrich arrived at Bowen, a local cotton and orange farmer, Korah Halcomb Wills, had openly displayed the partial skeleton of an Aboriginal man in the town.

Not only had Wills joined in the punitive raid in which the man had been killed, he had packed a saw and boning knives, intending 'to get a few specimens of certain *limbs* and *head* of a Black fellow'. As he recalled in a memoir he penned some thirty years later, in the aftermath of the slaughter, he had put the tools used in his previous occupation as a butcher on the Victorian gold-fields, to a new and terrible use:

> I shall never forget the time when I first found the subject that I intended to anatomize, when my friends were looking on, and I commenced operations *dissecting*. I went to work business-like to take off the head first, and then the Arms, and then the legs, and gathered them together and put them into my Pack saddle and one of my friends who I am sure had dispersed more than any other in the Colony made the remark that if he was offered a fortune he could not do what I had done. (Brisbane, Oxley Library, OM 75-75/3, p. 59)

Hardened as they were by the violence of frontier conflict, many Bowen residents were horrified when Wills afterwards exhibited the bones during the course of festivities aimed at raising funds for local charities. His only concession to decency was to 'cover them up with a flag, the Union Jack' in case 'the ladies ought get a *shock*, if they were left uncovered.' (p 67)

Many cruelties were perpetrated during the expropriation of Aboriginal land in North Queensland, though Wills was rare, if not unique, in making an inhuman mockery of contemporary scientific aspirations. Even so, the intensity of frontier conflict in the Bowen region during the 1860s was such that the desire to take revenge upon Aboriginal people through desecrating their burial places, may also have figured in the minds of some of the men whom Dietrich found willing to help her in the cause of science.



It is a past that allows us to appreciate the many complex and subtle ways in which European ways of ordering reality have ignored, or served to discredit, the aspirations of Aboriginal people. Knowing this dimension to our past hardly seems likely to generate guilt, but, optimistically, offers the best hope that in future we

The late 1860s were lean years for bush workers. Men may have joined Dietrich simply for the money, given that she paid cash sums on behalf of Godeffroy which were comfortably above the prices that Sydney and Melbourne museums—also trafficking in Aboriginal bones—were known to be willing to pay. However, one cannot rule out curiosity as a motive. While possessing little if any formal education, those who helped her comb the bush for the dead may have shared in some measure her concern to increase the sum of scientific knowledge about this 'savage' race of beings in whom they had become locked in struggle, before—as seemed inevitable—they became extinct.

The science of race that Amalie Dietrich and other procurers of ancestral remains were instrumental in creating was eventually to lose its hold over the settler imagination. Today in North Queensland it is increasingly rare to hear terms such as 'full-blood' or 'half-caste', and rarer still to hear someone assert that identity and culture are the products of biological inheritance. There is also a growing willingness to listen to the voices of the Aboriginal peoples of the region, and to reflect critically on how the quest for knowledge by earlier generations of Europeans served very different ambitions.

However, the legacy of 19th century sciences of man arguably remains strong in one important respect. It continues to have its aftermath in the way we commonly think of the journey of humanity through space and time. We readily construe the past, present and future as successive and discrete realms of existence, giving little credence to the very different temporal unities of Aboriginal being.

Granted, we no longer scrutinise Aboriginal religion and customary law in comparison with our sense of time so as to relegate their truths to the category of 'superstition' or 'myth'. But there is still an unfortunate tendency to judge the demands of Monty Pryor and others for the return of the ancestral dead against criteria which overlook, or down-splay, the very different meanings past and present have in the lives of Aboriginal people.

We also hear conservative politicians and intellectuals condemn what they call the morbid obsession amongst Australian historians with the violence of the frontier era. They point out that they as much as anyone want true reconciliation, but not a past that seems calculated to generate uncertainty and guilt. However, it is hard to imagine how reconciliation in any lasting sense can be achieved at the expense of neglecting such issues as the relations that once existed between science, colonialism and trafficking in the bones of Aboriginal people. What we find is distressing, and a cause for sorrow. At the same time it is a past that allows us to appreciate the many complex and subtle ways in which European ways of ordering reality have ignored, or served to discredit, the aspirations of Aboriginal people. Knowing this dimension to our past hardly seems likely to generate guilt, but, optimistically, offers the best hope that in future we might prove better listeners. ■

Paul Turnbull teaches history at James Cook University of North Queensland.

Notes:

Bischoff, Charitas. 1931. *The Hard Road. The Life Story of Amalie Dietrich, Naturalist, 1821-1891.* London: Martin Hopkinson.

Krause, J.D.E. Schmeltz and R. 1881. *Die Ethnographisch-Anthropologische Abtheilung des Museum Godeffroy in Hamburg.* Hamburg: L. Friederichsen & Co.

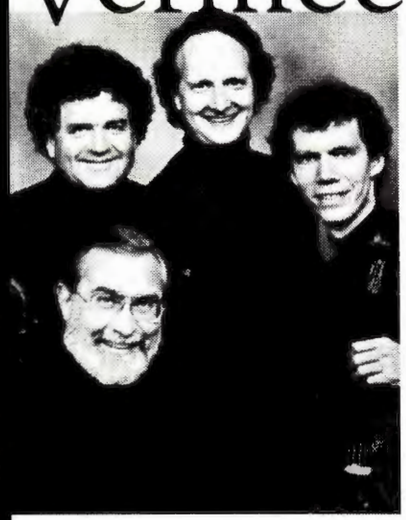
Roth, H. Ling. 1908. *The Discovery and Settlement of Port Mackay, Queensland.* Halifax: F. King and Sons.

Sumner, Ray. 1993. *A Woman in the Wilderness: the Story of Amalie Dietrich in Australia.* Sydney: New South Wales University Press.

Korah Halcomb Wills, Diary, Brisbane, Oxley Library, OM 75/75/3.

1997 International Series

Vermeer Quartet



From Chicago, one of the great string quartets of our time plays Haydn's powerful spiritual masterpiece ***'The Seven Last Words of Christ'****, with readings by some of Australia's most eminent spiritual leaders.*

PROGRAM 1

Haydn
String Quartet op 51, Hob III: Nos 50-56 The Seven Last Words of Christ

PROGRAM 2

Beethoven
String Quartet in F major, op 18 no.1
Bridge
String Quartet in E minor
Dvořák
String Quartet in A flat major op 105

PERTH
Monday 15 September
Program 1 - 8pm
Perth Concert Hall

ADELAIDE
Friday 19 September
Program 1 - 8pm
Adelaide Town Hall

SYDNEY
Saturday 20 September
Program 1 - 8.15pm
Sydney Opera House

MELBOURNE
Monday 22 September
Program 1 - 8.15pm
Melbourne Concert Hall

SYDNEY
Tuesday 23 September
Program 2 - 8.15pm
Seymour Centre

CANBERRA
Wednesday 24 September
Program 1 - 8.15pm
Canberra School of Music

BOOKINGS

Adelaide BASS 131 246
Brisbane QPAC (07) 3846 4646
Canberra Ticketing (02) 6257 1077
Melbourne Ticketmaster 11 566
Perth BOCS (08) 9484 1133

BOOKINGS

Sydney
SOH Box Office (02) 9250 7777
FirstCall (02) 9320 9000
Ticketek (02) 9266 4800
Seymour Centre (02) 9364 9400
(23 September concert only)

ENT/6126

Musica Viva Australia
www.mva.org.au

ANTHONY REID

The regional thing

Is Australia an Asian Country? Can Australia survive in an East Asian future?
Stephen Fitzgerald, Allen & Unwin, 1997.
ISBN 1 86448 401 2 RRP $19.95

DESPITE ITS UNFORTUNATE main title, this is a ringing manifesto for change in Australia. It is the creed of one of our most important political visionaries, who has consistently argued for Australia to adjust in a principled, purposeful and self-reliant way to the opportunities and challenges presented by its place in the world.

As a Foreign Affairs cadet in the early sixties, Stephen Fitzgerald fought to be assigned to study Chinese, but resigned in 1966 to pursue an academic career when there looked to be no future in Australia's China policy. He encouraged Gough Whitlam, the clearest hero of his book, to shift this policy, and became Australia's first Ambassador to Beijing (1973-76). He has since oscillated between the academic and business worlds. As chairman of the Asian Studies Association of Australia (1982-84) and the Asian Studies Council (1986-91) he was the most effective campaigner for 'Asia-literacy' for all students in our schools and universities.

His case is now fully set out at a fateful moment when, as he puts it, John Howard's Australia has taken the first steps down the wrong fork in the road, which could lead through blindness and inertia to 'the extinction of some distinguishing features of this liberal, democratic and humanist society'. Although experience has not been kind to his strategy, he remains the strongest advocate for a coherent educational and international policy, and his book provides an essential basis for the debate we must now have.

His argument is that the élites of 'Asia' are moving towards a sense of regional identity, the essence of which is the hope and confidence that their new-found modernisation and prosperity is of a different and superior sort to that of the West, so that 'Asians' can avoid the dysfunctional elements of violence, inequality, family breakdown and political cynicism they perceive in the US. A regional block is taking shape in what he more frequently calls 'East Asia', and it is needed for the 'peace, prosperity, security, and social and cultural harmony of its region'. Australia, if it takes the hard, visionary road of working at 'Asia', can be part of this association, helping to ensure an open outcome by bringing to it our strengths of democracy, pluralism, and laid-back tolerance. If we fail to take up the challenge we will be excluded and marginalised by 'Asia', as already suggested by Australia's exclusion from the first Asia-Europe meeting (ASEM) in Bangkok in March 1996. In that event Australia will find itself bullied, ignored, or treated as a third-world quarry in a twenty-first century inevitably dominated by Asian economies and probably 'Asian values'. The Asia-Pacific (APEC), Gareth Evans' ingenious solution to the problem of where we belong, is rejected by Fitzgerald as 'fatally distracting and misleading' because it deludes Australians into think that they can have Asia as well as the 'white man's club' led by the US.

Fitzgerald has the visionary's penchant for seeing moral choices starkly. The Australia of Whitlam took a giant step in the direction of becoming 'Australian', dealing with China as an independent country should. With the sacking of Whitlam and still more the gold-rush into Asia of the 1980s the country lost its way, seemingly having nothing to offer our neighbours but greed. But the Keating period again witnessed the right steps being taken towards a recognition of realities, before the disaster of 1996 when a Prime Minister 'played with the future of Australia' by pandering to the intolerance he perceived in the electorate. In recounting this 25-year saga Fitzgerald's own scars and frustrations are seldom far from the surface. In particular the story of Australia's unrequited love affair with China in chapter 2, the naïve enthusiasms followed by disillusion when Australian initiatives were subverted and democracy activists crushed, seems very close to his own story as a China advocate. Scars are also evident from his battles with ethnic lobbies as chairman of the Fitzgerald Committee on immigration in 1988. This is an engaged manifesto, by a public intellectual who has also fought for his big picture in a tough real world.

The book has some important things to say about the need for ethical consistency and clarity when business, government and individuals engage in Asia. The sense of moral superiority most Australians carry into Asia, based on little more than a different political system, older wealth, and profound moral and intellectual confusion, is a poor preparation for dealing with élites increasingly sceptical that a Western value-system is the right goal. What he pleads for here is a better-defined sense of what being Australian means, and leadership in ethical terms that will help business to take a consistent stance. He vehemently opposes the ideology of multiculturalism as divisive ethnic lobbying, but supports a self-consciously cosmopolitan and 'honey-coloured' Australia comfortable with its Asian present rather than pining for a lost European past.

NECESSARILY, HOWEVER, most of his practical program is about education. The Australia he seeks can only be achieved through educating a new generation better able to understand Asian societies and operate in them. The solutions set out in the central part of the book are the same ones which he was able to promote in Dawkins' time as Education Minister, tempered only a little by the disappointing results which have been achieved in practice. Languages should be universally

Chinese New Year, Victoria Street, Richmond, Victoria. Photograph: Bill Thomas

taught, with the key Asian languages most prominent. The syllabus at all levels should be revised to give Asia the central place it deserves in world history, geography, literature and so forth, without creating a distinct and ghetto-like Asian Studies special subject.

The key ways to achieve this are to change the Year 12 syllabus, which governs what is taught lower in the school, to reward teachers who acquire the right kind of skills, and drastically to reform faculties of education. 'If our universities in general are universities of British studies, the quintessence of this is to be found in Australian faculties of education'

The problem is that to achieve any such changes one must overcome not only the rivalries of nine educational bureaucracies but the autonomy of schools and the voluntaristic anarchy in much of the syllabus, where what is trendy or popular takes precedence over what is essential for the country's future.

This dilemma drives Fitzgerald into supporting Allan Bloom's call in *The Closing of the American Mind*, for the core of what the nation defines as important and inspirational again to become obligatory in the school syllabus. Above all we need a sense of purpose in our educational agenda.

The argument is strongly put, as it must be to attract attention, but it contains some fundamental contradictions. The first is the problematic definition of 'Asia'. Much of the book uses the word in its popular Australian sense as the vague 'other' to which Australians must react and adjust. This sits uncomfortably with its use as the purely geographic region in which Australia belongs or might belong, with its extraordinary mix of western, eastern and global cultures.

THE ASIAN POLEMICISTS most outspoken about the identity of 'Asia'—Lee Kuan Yew, Dr Mahathir, Ryutoro Hashimoto—also use the term in the sense that opposes it to western values, making many other Asians uncomfortable. The attraction of a neologism like 'Asia-Pacific' is that it has a better chance of being accepted as neutrally geographic than the 'Asia' already laden with emotional baggage.

Much of the strength of Fitzgerald's vision of an Asian identity relies on the analogy of the European Community—and indeed there are many parallels between Britain's ambivalence about Europe and Australia's about Asia. But in arguing in Chapter 3 ('The Asianisation of Asia') that there is a growing sense of community of élites in 'Asia' which will inevitably lead to a tighter block, he is forced to ignore some profound differences. The reality of regional coöperation he uses is ASEAN, the grouping of Southeast Asian states which has been successful precisely because it has no dominant hegemon and shares a wariness about the pretensions of China (especially), the US, Japan and India. But the 'Asia' he wants Australia to be part of is 'East Asia' including also China, Korea and Japan. In chapter 9 he argues without much subtlety that China will dominate this region by 2020—a spectre which guarantees that the consensuality of ASEAN cannot be extended to include China. He may be wrong about the long-term viability of a centralised Chinese polity, and he is almost certainly wrong about China's 'secret weapon' of the Southeast Asian Chinese (this old chestnut sits oddly with Fitzgerald's contempt for Australians who see themselves as surrogate Brits). But if he is right that China will be hegemonic, it is certain that Australia will share with Southeast Asian countries a need to balance China through more local regional ties.

By hindsight it is easy to see that Europe was able to achieve the world's most effective regional bloc because the cold war defined its otherwise murky eastern border sharply, and because there was (as in ASEAN) a nice balance between Germany, France and Britain within it. Fitzgerald's East Asia has no such clear border. India, Sri Langka, Bangladesh, Mongolia, Kazakhstan et cetera have a better case for being included in it than Australia does, and India in particular is likely to be sought as a large, democratic and pluralistic balance to China in any Asian bloc which eventually emerges. All of this suggests that groupings will be fluid, and if Australia's interests lie most closely not with 'East Asia' but with Japan, India and ASEAN, the latter being a group of similarly middling, diverse and

vulnerable states as Australia.

Fitzgerald rejects what he calls the 'convergence thesis' that eastern and western countries are becoming more like each other as a result of global communications and the better sharing of the world's wealth. In this he supports (but does not mention) Samuel Huntingdon's influential argument in *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, 1996, (applauded in Beijing) that global culture and universal human values are dangerous myths, and that the world will divide into blocs based on the great religious and cultural traditions. Fitzgerald would presumably reject his placing of Australia firmly in the western camp, but Huntingdon makes the better argument against 'convergence'—partly because he distinguishes the 'Asian' interests more clearly.

To my mind both Fitzgerald and Huntingdon underestimate the potency of global communities in the twenty-first century, and the temporary nature of regional blocs as means to global ordering. Both underrate the creative value of ambivalence and multiple identities at all periods but particularly our own. Belonging in several places is one of the great Australian strengths.

As a result of the initiatives of Stephen Fitzgerald and others moves were made in the late 1980s to fund and prioritise the study of Asia. Most of these have now lapsed. Although the stated aim was sensibly to 'infuse' Asia into the mainstream disciplines of history, geography and political science, the reality is that less about Asia is being taught now than 10 years ago in such courses, both in universities and schools. In a time of shrinking resources anything seen as peripheral or not wildly popular is the first to go. The sad experience is that courses on Asia are not very popular, perhaps just because of the tendency to use the word as a trope for otherness. Expertise on Asia has survived because of the large investment of the seventies, growing language classes, and the discovery of Asia by applied schools of business, law, accounting, architecture and so forth—usually without the benefit of training.

Fitzgerald's dramatic call for a rethink of national priorities is timely. We need the kind of long-term vision that drives all our Asian neighbours to put a higher and more coherent priority on education than we do. Unfortunately our three-year election horizons make that kind of vision extremely hard to come by. For us in the profession, it may be that the best way to achieve a realistic sense of where Australians belong is to talk less about 'Asia' and more about the specific challenges which face us, for all of which the solutions will necessarily involve our regional relations. ■

Anthony Reid is Professor of Southeast Asian History in the Research School of Pacific & Asian Studies of the Australian National University and President of the Asian Studies Association of Australia.

BOOKS: 2

JOHN S. LEVI

The metaphysical ballet of belief

Dimensions of the Sacred—An Anatomy of the World's Beliefs, Ninian Smart, HarperCollins, London, 1996. ISBN 000 686 3728 RRP $19.95

'THE GODS ARE PARADOXICAL' warns Professor Ninian Smart in *Dimensions of the Sacred*. 'They are invisible yet they express themselves in the world'. The gods were plainly visible at midnight in Hong Kong on 30 June 1997 and we all saw them.

The national emblems dutifully fluttered in an artificial breeze. A large congregation quietly assembled as the precise hour approached. Processions of presiding dignitaries entered from each side of a purpose built hall. As the flags were reverently lowered, anthems resounded and eyes became moist with emotion. Brief, carefully chosen speeches were delivered by men whose status and physical safety had been attentively cosseted by crowds of uniformed acolytes. We witnessed a profoundly significant ceremony involving the ultimate destiny of millions of people.

It was the meeting of two cultures and two profoundly disparate ideologies, acknowledging the supremacy of money, property and mutual prosperity. The success of the ceremony was confirmed in the following week when neither the Hong Kong Stock Exchange nor the real estate market faltered. The gods had been appeased.

British-born Professor Ninian Smart inaugurated England's first Religious Studies Department and now teaches at the University of California. As he observes, there are 'too few general studies of religion and world views, and a great richness of monographs'.

In this most recent, tightly constructed book of 330 pages, Ninian Smart imaginatively brings order into chaos as he tackles the 'major themes' of religious life and finds that there are seven dimensions into which the faith systems of the world can be placed. He deftly draws together the patterns and symbols, the ideas and the dogmas by which human beings acknowledge the sacred and give inner meaning to their most significant and most mundane moments.

It has been a daunting task of a scholarly lifetime. The raw material is untidy and idiosyncratic. The seven dimensions encompass, with some ideological pushing and shoving, the non-theistic varieties of Buddhism and the political doctrines and dogmas of Marxism. Myths and creeds perform 'metaphysical ballets'. Some religions are visionary and meditative. Others are centred upon the emotional and historical realities of victory accompanied by triumphalism whilst other religious traditions must contend with physical defeat, exile and martyrdom. Geography, literacy, class structure, urbanisation and subtleties of language all shape our religious practices and ideologies.

This book marks the third time in the past three decades that Ninian Smart has attempted to describe the way human beings deal with the transcendent and ultimate focus of life.

He modestly describes his chosen order as 'random' but the work is far from being haphazard and every chapter is rich in detail.

Religious ritual represents the first dimension. It is through ritual that we are able to express our ideas in a tangible fashion while we create a personal sense of historical continuity. Ritual, almost by definition, is a practical, didactic method in which we are able to transcend time and place. Ritual represents the outward sign of every faith community.

Philosophy, theology and doctrine constitute the second dimension of religion, which operates whether that faith system is theistic or nontheistic. Often philosophy intersects with ritual behaviour. In Buddhism in particular, observes Professor Smart, meditation assists the individual to become immersed in a particular conceptual system. The same could be said for the three western monotheistic religions whose adherents express their religious convictions or beliefs through patterns of custom or behaviour.

Thirdly, religion has a story to tell. The myths, legends and heroic narratives of past events are the integral constituents of every religious group. In Judaism the story of the Exodus and the journey towards the Promised Land is the defining story for three thousand years of history. For Christians the story of the Passion has shaped their lives and is reënacted over and over again.

There is an emotional dimension that is beyond ritual. Certain individual experiences can change the manner in which faith communities grow. The visions of Amos, the enlightenment of the Buddha, the conversion of Paul and the teaching of the Prophet Mohammed have provided the framework that pervades the centuries. Echoes of individual inspiration are reflected by structures, by methods of reaching collective decisions and by prayer.

The fifth foundation of religious life is the ethical or legal dimension of religion. Faith traditions are not simply collections of myths, philosophies and ritual. Religious communities develop legal and ethical systems that shape communal and individual boundaries. Both the community and the individuals of each community can define their own identity by modes of behaviour that happen within boundaries and recognisable limits.

All religious groups develop a structure of leadership. Clergies create hierarchies. Specific learning skills and attainments result in the ability to teach and to impart knowledge. The sixth dimension of religious existence is therefore the social context in which a faith functions.

Finally, each religion will express itself through poetry, music, art and architecture. Sometime this concrete and outward manifestation can be a simple as a sacred book. More frequently, religious faith will express itself through a vast, distinctive range of imagery.

No matter how religiously committed we are, there is another negative dimension to religious behaviour that must be acknowledged. Religion and spirituality can be profoundly destructive, manipulative, anti-human, repressive and even bizarre. We don't need to look back to the Middle Ages to know that Ninian Smart's seven dimensions fails to include the catastrophic consequences of being persuaded to abdicate the stewardship of mind and soul to another.

Just recall those neatly folded bundles of clothing and shoes at the foot of each suicidal cult member intent on a heavenly gate beyond the stars. Think of those sprawled corpses in Jonesville in the jungle of Central America. Remember the Iranian children sent across the Iraqi minefields clutching holy texts. Week after week militants kill and torture fellow Algerians. Nuclear warfare, complete with ominous apocalyptic religious overtones, threatens the Indian sub-continent and the entire Middle East.

Dimensions of the Sacred—An Anatomy of the World's Beliefs avoids these tragic, negative dimensions of human spirituality and religious commitment. This book correctly suggests that through an understanding of shared structure people of religious belief will develop a theology that can accommodate differing and even contradictory faith traditions. Professor Ninian Smart has given us a thoughtful taxonomy of the sacred and laid the foundations for religion's next vital task. ■

John S. Levi is Senior Rabbi of the Victorian Union for Progressive Judaism and a President of the Council of Christians and Jews.

BOOKS: 3

MICHAEL MCGIRR

What the Dickens...

Jack Maggs, Peter Carey, University of Queensland Press, 1997.
ISBN 0 7022 2952 0 RRP $35.00

THERE ARE TWO JACK MAGGS. Or three. Or four. Or maybe more.

The first *Jack Maggs* is the name of a new book by Peter Carey, his first extended adult fiction since *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith*. At first glance, this *Jack Maggs* is not as beguiling, nor as witty, nor even as unusual, as *Tristan Smith*. *Tristan Smith* creates fictional countries, economies, languages and cultures in

labyrinthine detail and asks a deformed trapeze artist, another Tristan Smith, to negotiate them. It's a shaggy dog story, leaning decidedly in the direction of *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, and if it weren't so funny it would be as exhausting as Sterne. But Carey's *Tristan Smith* has a clear log of concerns: it is anxious about what happens when one culture dominates another, whether you call that colonisation or globalisation. Jack Maggs seems, on the one hand, to be a more conventional narrative and on the other to have a less clear thematic focus.

But wait. There's another Jack Maggs. This is the name of the main character in the new book by Peter Carey. Maggs is a 'bolter', a convict who has unlawfully returned to England from exile for the term of his natural life in New South Wales. In doing so, he runs the risk of forfeiting his life. He does so because he is obsessed by Henry Phipps, a young gentleman, whom he refers to as his son.

On arrival, Maggs gets a job as a footman

(known in slang as a 'fart catcher') in the house of the man who lives next door to Phipps, one Percy Buckle. Buckle has spent most of his life as a grocer; he inherited a windfall and is still dizzied by the heights to which he has unexpectedly risen and from which he can equally suddenly fall. Maggs has to replace a footman who has recently taken his own life; the old footman's lover, Mr Constable, is his new boss. As always, Carey begins to weave emotional complexity in and through the economic pressures that act upon his characters.

This Jack Maggs, the second one, bears a name remarkably similar to that of the convict, Magwitch, who returns from the other side of the world to announce himself as the long lost benefactor of Pip in Dickens' *Great Expectations*. *Jack Maggs* is scarcely a remake of Dickens' book; it is more like the storeroom of Silas and Ma Britten (professional thieves whom Carey describes), filled with takings which have caught his eye. Among these is the characterisation of Maggs. Magwitch says of himself:

> '... when I was over yonder, t'other side of the world, I was always a looking to this side; and it come flat to be there, for all I was a growing rich. Everybody knowed Magwitch and Magwitch could come and Magwitch could go and nobody's head would be troubled about him. They ain't so easy concerning me here, dear boy...'

The description fits Maggs like a glove. There is at least one sequence where *Great Expectations* closely coincides with *Jack Maggs*. This is the convict's flight by river. In both books, this flight is the occasion of a momentary softening in the convict's character. In *Great Expectations*, it is Pip himself who witnesses the change. It is reciprocated by one of Dickens' most celebrated changes of heart:

> For now all my repugnance to him had melted away and in the hunted and wounded and shackled creature who held my hand in his, I saw only a man who had meant to be my benefactor and who had felt affectionately, gratefully, and generously towards me with great constancy through a series of years.

The difference between Carey and Dickens is not simply Carey's distaste for melodrama. Dickens creates unifying narrative standpoints. In *Great Expectations* the principal standpoint is that of Pip, whose blindness and thoughtlessness allow the irony of a second standpoint—that of the reader. Carey works from a series of endlessly multiplying viewpoints.

The figure who accompanies Jack Maggs on his last attempted flight is Tobias Oates. Tobias Oates is the creator of a third Jack Maggs. Oates is a celebrated writer in London in the 1830s, the man responsible for such literary inventions as Captain Crumley and Mrs Morefallen. He has also been a Fleet Street hack and an early version of the investigative journalist as social conscience. In some respects, his career mirrors Dickens' own. Oates 'had an obsession with the criminal mind.'

The fact that Percy Buckle entertains Oates to dine is one of the deepest satisfactions of Buckle's Great Good Fortune. On one such occasion, he meets Jack Maggs and enters an arrangement whereby he promises to introduce Maggs to a Thief-taker who can track down Phipps.

In return, Maggs has to undergo some of Oates experiments in magnetism. During these experiments, Oates manages to draw from Maggs the story of his transportation. He witnesses the scars which 'the cat' has left on Maggs' back. Oates keeps a detailed record of all he hears and begins work on his next bestseller, *The Death of Maggs*. This very book is another Maggs; it too struggles for life. Oates begins work on it in 1837; it sees the light of day in 1860. It starts with a sentence whose cadence mirrors the opening of Carey's own novel.

Within Oates' *Maggs* is a fourth Maggs, the character created from Jack Maggs' story. During their attempted flight, Oates falls asleep and Maggs, the character in Carey's book, pilfers his notebook and confronts the character in Oates' book. Maggs' response is both unexpected and, ironically, a trigger for the rest of the story:

> Jack Maggs was weeping. He bent his body into a hard, tight ball. He grasped his stomach and rocked to and fro.

Like *The Name of the Rose*, *Jack Maggs* is a book which invites participation on a number of levels. It is far from simple. *Illywhacker*, *Oscar and Lucinda* and *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith* all elaborate colourful conceits: a shopping-arcade-turned-menagerie, a glass church, a family circus. Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs*, like its central characters, is a book in flight. The conceit it elaborates is storytelling. The novel is an ageing and moody form of entertainment. In Carey's hands it is made over to look young again, and seductive.■

Michael McGirr is consulting editor of *Eureka Street*.

"KOSTKA – XAVIER BY THE SEA"

A History of Kostka Hall

To commemorate the 60th Anniversary of the Foundation of Kostka Hall, the Eldon Hogan Trust is publishing a history of the school.

The history is being written by Helen Penrose and Catherine Waterhouse of HistorySmiths and chronicles the establishment and development of Xavier's second preparatory school which first opened for classes in Brighton on Wednesday, February 10, 1937.

A special pre-publication price of **$24.95** is being given to all orders placed with payment prior to the official launch on October 21.

All orders (with payment) should be forwarded to:

Miss Helen Barry
Xavier College – Kostka Hall
PO Box 89
Brighton VIC 3186
(Telephone: 9592 2127)

THEATRE

GEOFFREY MILNE

The roar of the cash registers

THERE HAVE BEEN SOME DARK mutterings in recent years about our 'flagship' State theatre companies. Questions like 'what are they there for?' and 'how are they fulfilling their charter?' have been tossed about lately in theatre foyers and bars and even occasionally in the press.

Following a spate of flagship productions of American musicals (notably those of Stephen Sondheim), lightweight American and British plays from the commercial off-Broadway and West End stages, and a clutching at the box-office straws of the stuff of amateur suburban rep., questions like these seem worth asking. There is also a perception that the flagships are all about the classics and foreign drama: 'Where's their commitment to Australian drama and especially to new work?' is another question we've heard from critics of the State theatre system.

Fuel was added to the fire back in May when The *Australian* splashed the news all over its front page that 11 of the 16 client companies of the Major Organisations Fund carried deficits at the end of 1996. All of the State theatre companies (the MTC, the STCSA, the Sydney Theatre Company and the Queensland Theatre Company) were in the red, along with other theatre companies like Playbox.

Several points need to be made about this apparent crisis in the Australian State theatre network, some of them financial and some of them artistic.

First, an operating deficit in one year (in most cases, the first) of a new triennial funding cycle is not necessarily to be taken as incontrovertible evidence that a company is about to collapse. In most cases, audience support actually grew during the 1996 financial year, although in some places (such as Adelaide and Brisbane) over a declining subscriber base. Likewise, many companies have invested in what is nowadays known as 'product' (in the form of play commissions, new productions and so on) which will not reap all of its financial or even artistic rewards until later in the triennium, when commissions are realised as actual productions and when successful productions are picked up and toured elsewhere.

I should also refute one commentator's gloomy conclusion that the only reason some companies stayed in the black (or plunged less deeply into the red) is ancillary activity, like touring. Co-production (and more frequently 'buying-in' from and 'selling-on' to other companies) and semi-national touring have been artistic and accounting facts of life among the major theatre organisations for at least the last decade. As I have argued elsewhere, this can lead to a shrinking mainstream repertoire and a lessening in the amount of work available to directors, designers and other creative artists, but it helps companies to amortise costs associated with mounting new productions and it increases the length of contracts for the dwindling number of actors lucky enough to get the touring gigs.

A touring theatre is the only kind of 'national theatre' Australia has. This was so in the past with organisations like J. C. Williamson's and it is now with those like Playing Australia and Performing Lines dedicated to the touring of Australian-produced (if not exclusively Australian-written) material across state and territory boundaries and into regional areas. While the tendency for many of the various regional centres in Australia to become mere branches of the flagship head offices in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide is a worrying one, we can't blame the State theatres for taking advantage of the Playing Australia touring guidelines. In short, if you're on a good thing (like a revival of *The Doll* or an all-star production of the foreign *Sisters Rosensweig*) you've got to exploit it for all it's worth.

NONETHELESS, THE STATE THEATRES do not face an altogether rosy road into the new millennium. For one thing, I'd hate to be a corporate fund-raiser for a Sydney performing arts company right now: surely every available sponsorship dollar is going to go to the Olympic Games until 2000. I also don't much like Wayne Harrison's chances of getting the 850-1000 seat theatre he needs for the Sydney Theatre Company over the same period. It's a good claim: the success of this company in building up audiences and demand for its 'product' is such that the STC has outgrown the capacity of both the Opera House Drama Theatre and the Wharf (the only venue presently owned by a State theatre company) but it is hardly surprising that Harrison's recent

expansionary policies have led to a deficit in 1996. STC is the only State company to have increased its activity in the present climate of contraction. Ancillary activity in the form of commercial co-production (as in its association with the hugely successful *Tap Dogs* and with the forthcoming *Rent* with Cameron MacIntosh) might be a good way forward.

Nor do I fancy the job of Rodney Fisher, the new AD of the State Theatre in Adelaide. Following the growing success of the Adelaide Festival Centre's eclectic World Theatre Seasons during the 1990s, its tenant and competitor (which had produced the typical 'world' repertoire of the State theatre network since the 1960s) opted for a so-called 'Australian Playhouse' program until 2000, focusing exclusively on revivals of Australian classics. I believe Chris Westwood got rolled from her job as Executive Producer of the State earlier this year as much for her non-mainstream programming as for her widely published criticism of the SA Arts Minister. It remains to be seen whether Fisher will stick to Westwood's five-year Australian plan, but I can't see him or his board doing so. If the State reverts to orthodox mainstream programming, how will its battle for subscribers with its landlord pan out? And what deals might have to be done with the funding bodies and with the AFCT about repertoire, set construction and other infrastructure?

There were grave problems in Brisbane with the QTC mid-decade, as I reported here in September 1995, but I am cheered to report that the new Artistic Director, Robyn Nevin, seems to have turned things around very strongly. Subscriptions and general-public box-office takings are well up, several of the productions have earned extended seasons (and extensive intra- and interstate tours) and all have been either well-received or vigorously debated (like the co-production with local indigenous performing company Kooemba Jdarra of Louis Nowra's *Radiance*).

Which brings us to the Melbourne Theatre Company, with problems graver than those of any of its three colleagues. With an accumulated 'debt' (rather than mere year-end shortfalls) reportedly as high as $4.5m, but gradually declining over the past year or so to around $3.2m, the MTC has curtailed its production activity markedly in the last three years and adopted an increasingly 'safe' repertoire. It now rents the Victorian Arts Centre for all of its productions, since relinquishing its own Russell St Theatre at the end of 1994, and—as is widely known—it spends substantially more to hire its State-owned theatres than it receives in State subsidy. It also commissioned (through its patron, the University of Melbourne, of which it is a 'Department' and to whom it is presumably indebted) an enquiry into the ways it should structure its affairs into an uncertain future.

A PRINCIPAL TENET of the resultant Anderson Report is that its salvation depends on its owning its own theatre, and many prospective sites have been looked at, with some sympathy from the State government. But, in a city with a plethora of theatres (unlike Sydney), many of which are presently dark at any one time, it has to be asked whether Melbourne needs yet another. It is one thing to save on rent by owning one's own venue; it is another to fill it with productions, many of which would have to be those of hiring companies who already have stacks of other choices, despite the recent closure of Napier St Theatre.

Again, I don't much envy the job of the successor to Roger Hodgman, who has announced his resignation as Artistic Director from the end of next year.

The questions about the State theatre companies' repertoire are more easily answered: little has really changed in the past decade. In 1986, the four State theatre companies that still survive today gave 51 productions between them, including two buy-ins from other companies and a number of productions on tour. In 1996, the big four achieved 43 productions between them (including two co-productions and seven buy-ins) plus a further four restaged and/or touring elsewhere. So there has been less actual 'product' over the past decade and an increase in co-production and buying-in or selling-on of productions.

But an examination by content of the State theatres' repertoire from 1994-96 reveals some interesting trends. Back in the 1970s and early '80s, the generally accepted formula (expressed especially by John Sumner in his MTC program notes) was 'roughly one-third Classics, one-third new Australian writing and one-third contemporary writing from abroad.' Perhaps surprisingly, 46 per cent of the 128 productions given by the State theatre companies over the past three years were Australian-written and a pretty remarkable one out of every five plays staged (on average) was a world première. An unsurprising 42 per cent of the repertoire was made up of contemporary works from abroad (mostly from the UK and the USA, including five musicals). The big decline, obviously, has been in the production of Classics: barely one play in eight in recent years has come from the likes of Shakespeare, Ibsen, Aphra Behn, Molière or August Strindberg. Ironically, it is these which have often elicited the most eloquent reviews in defence of the State theatres—stressing that only companies as well-resourced as these are able to do plays like *The Shaughraun*, to name but one example.

The State theatres are still a problem for women writers: barely 15 per cent of all works produced in the last three years have been written by women. While this represents a slight increase over the past decade, this figure is still poor in the national repertoire as a whole, of which women creators account for closer to 40 per cent across the board.

Looking into the future, I think we can expect more of the same: fewer productions shared by more companies, more from the big names of the Australian theatre and still more from the USA and the UK—and probably more Sondheim. ■

Geoffrey Milne is head of theatre and drama at La Trobe University.

FLASH IN THE PAN

A man's van

The Van, dir Stephen Frears (Independent cinemas). Don't worry if you haven't seen the film version of the two earlier parts of Roddy Doyle's Barrytown trilogy, *The Commitments* and *The Snapper*. The novel *The Van* is a further instalment in the wondrous life story of Jimmy Rabbitte and his down-at-heel family. For some reason, Doyle's own screenplay changes Jimmy's name to Larry and creates a free-standing story. You do catch glimpses of Sharon's young child in the background and those familiar with *The Snapper* will be glad of a quick progress report on the child.

Larry's friend Bimbo (Donal O'Kelly) has been retrenched. Many of his friends, including Larry (Colm Meany), are used to being unemployed and good-naturedly show him the ropes of his new situation. They give him useful tips about daytime TV. But Bimbo is itching for something to do and gets Weslie (Brendan O'Carroll), who is both Barrytown's Mr-Fix-It and Mr-Break-It, to find him a fast food van. The one he discovers is rundown and filthy. But Bimbo and Larry shake hands over it and before long even Larry is enjoying the uncommon experience of being gainfully employed.

The rise of the van is woven in with Ireland's fortunes in the 1990 World Cup; Larry and Bimbo owe their initial success to towing the van to pubs where fans are watching the games on TV. Before long, the van is such a success that they can afford to refit the engine and drive to the seaside to cater for beach-goers. The story is told with undying wit. At one stage, one of the Snapper's disposable nappies falls into the batter and gets deep fried along with the rest of the fish. Yet Roddy Doyle does not live on wit alone: *The Van* is both a knowing and compassionate film. It has no illusions about how two middle-aged men in a tiny galley are likely to irritate one another. The friction that emerges between Larry and Bimbo carries the film into another register just when you are beginning to tire of ugly food jokes. On the other hand, the film shows with compassion how desperate both men are to resolve their tensions and how lovable they are, for all the chips on their shoulders.

—Michael McGirr

Too many cooks

Au Petit Marguery, dir. Laurent Benegui (Kino cinemas and the Elsternwick Classic). *Au Petit Marguery* contains all the elements you'd expect in a French film about food, love and loss. Inside the small, but classy French restaurant, tragedy and passion combine with hot-tempered perfectionism, affection and gluttony.

Michel Aumont plays Hippolyte, the chef who owns and runs the restaurant with his wife, Josephine (played with grace and fortitude by Stephanie Audran, who was Babette, in *Babette's Feast*).

The story takes place on the last night in the restaurant, its closure forced by a small cancer growing at the back of Hippolyte's nasal canal. The tumour is eroding the chef's sense of smell, and without smell there is little taste. His career is ended.

To mark the event, friends and family have gathered for a final meal. As the courses progress, old arguments rise and fall, affairs are revealed and resolved—life goes on.

This is a small, warm film, about the emotional pull of the table and shared sensual experience. Aumont and Audran head the cast of largely unknown actors, and are the film's most interesting characters. The food, which sits at the creative centre of the film, is handled with a physicality that demystifies it and adds to its allure. There are some lovely touches. For example, Hippolyte's growing frustration, and culinary pride, are wonderfully displayed when a customer who complains that his *Châteaubriand* is rotten, has the whole side of beef from which it was cut laid out on his table.

But not all the characters evince such wit or depth. *Au Petit Marguery*, like a meal muddied by the inclusion of too many ingredients, is hampered by too many players, with too many stories to tell. This, along with awkwardly handled flash-back sequences, make it less than completely satisfying.

—Catriona Jackson

Ex-tra ordinary

Addicted to Love, dir. Griffin Dunne (Village) is American schmaltz. No surprises: it's the story of two jilted lovers and their obsession with lovers past—one's convinced there'll be a wondrous reconciliation, the other's bent on revenge.

Matthew Broderick plays the small-town astronomer whose kindy-teaching partner and childhood sweetheart (Kelly Preston), leaves for the 'big smoke' for a short stint of guest teaching, and never comes back. He refuses to accept the 'Dear John' letter and goes on a search-and-reclaim mission, dropping everything to get his girl.

Meg Ryan plays the vengeful, perky bottle-blonde biker-grunge-queen, whose mission is to wreak havoc and revenge on her French-born ex (Tcheky Karyo), who used her to get a green card. It's a slight shift of character for Ryan—a bit more rough-n-ready—but she's still *nice* underneath.

The Frenchman and the school teacher fall in lurve, so, of course, Ryan and Broderick's characters, reluctantly, join force. They set up an observation pad opposite their love-targets and monitor every move—it's high-tech observation, with pictures and audio ... looks like a movie within a movie.

If you can ignore the fact that the film puts clear gloss over its characters' crimes (they peep, record people's private conversations without consent, break and enter, stalk, harass) presenting them as fun-filled sport; and if you enjoy the frivolity of bitter-and-twisted lovers hell-bent on vengeance, then it's all laughs.Predictably, the jilted comrades-in-arms bond and fall. Everyone gets his/her/their man/woman and the curtain closes on a tear-soaked audience.

–Lynda McCaffery

Love on the goal

Fever Pitch, dir David Evans (Independent cinemas). If you have any idea what happened to the Arsenal football club in 1989, this film will lack suspense. But not charm. It's about the kind of football supporter you presume can only exist in the minds of cartoonists and club marketing departments, yet is based on the best-selling autobiography of Nick Hornby. Based, as they say, on a true story.

Paul Ashworth (Colin Firth) grew up as a boy whose first experience of relating to his father was through going to the football. He becomes a case of arrested development: his passion for football makes him the most popular teacher, both among students and parents, in the school where he works. Here he runs up against Sarah Hughes (Ruth Gemmill), an uptight new teacher who insists on actually trying to teach Elizabethan literature to her charges. In one scene, some parents listen patiently to her and then explain that their daughter only wants to be a hairdresser. Meanwhile, Paul is telling a mother how to get to the football ground with her son now that her marriage is broken up.

Paul and Sarah fall in love. She becomes pregnant. He has to grow up. For a while, it doesn't look as though he's going to be able to do so. The wit and wisdom of this film are both based on an appreciation of the characters, though it suffers on several occasions when the characterisation becomes transparent and banal. It doesn't take long to understand, for example, that Paul likes football, but the point is made again and again and again. There are complexities as well, such as a scene when Sarah, as a gesture of acceptance, is invited to a party given by some of the kids but then is unable to accept being accepted.

It's intriguing to ponder why Sarah likes Paul; their relationship is far less obvious than his relationship with the football club which has hitherto been his major place of belonging. When he finds somewhere else to call home you feel like cheering.

—Michael McGirr

Not the pits

Brassed Off, dir. Mark Herman; cinemas everywhere. One of the four sins crying out to heaven for vengeance, we were told in catechism class, was 'defrauding labourers of their wages'. I've forgotten the others, but there was a comfortable hint of hellfire and pitchforks for the sinners. The villains in *Brassed Off*—colliery managers and loan sharks—are easy to consign mentally to the nether regions: Thatcher's successful psychopaths. Mr Howard please note.

Pete Postlethwaite (now *there's* a good northern name), is Danny Oldenroyd, an inspired band master of the Grimley Colliery Band. The band is on the skids because the lads' morale is low—the pit is probably going to close and there won't be any money to pay subs any more. Then Gloria (Tara Fitzgerald) arrives, carrying her late grandfather's flugel, and can play it like a dream. Suddenly Danny has hope as well as obsession, something to take his mind off the incurable lung disease he acquired in the pit.

His son Phil is what Aussies would call a battler—angry wife, four kids and never enough money because 18 months on strike pay ruined him financially. And he needs a new trombone if the band is going to have a chance in the National Brass Band Contest in London.

Herman wrote as well as directed *Brassed Off*, and to some extent it shows. Another director would have cut some of the speeches, and the film would have been just as effective. But there is heart in it and humour and righteous wrath, which make for an emotional evening if you're also moved by superb brass playing.

—Juliette Hughes

All wrongsky

Anna Karenina, dir. Bernard Rose (independent). 'We spent six months in St Petersburg and the surrounding countryside making *Anna Karenina*' and it was a truly remarkable experience,' warbles Bernard Rose. You have to credit his enthusiasm. Certainly his version of Tolstoy's touchstone novel isn't bad travelogue, though you might reason the need.

'We, as Westerners, know little of what this country actually looks like', he declares, blithely discounting a century of the most powerful visual and imaginative evocation 'we westerners' have ever embraced. So he gives it to us in literal spades: the icy wastes—with wolves; the grand imperial cities, with their skating rinks and gilded palaces; the czar's ransom jewellery (Anna wears lapis and jet); the officers' snazzy uniforms and the scythe-toting peasants' sweaty blouses.

But the story itself is almost incoherent, evacuated of psychological subtlety, whizzing past like a minute waltz (108 minutes in fact —not much longer than an Ealing comedy). It is as though Rose unwittingly took up Tolstoy's late, jaded denunciation of his own work and made a film about a silly woman who falls in love with an officer—a trifle, not something you could care about really. And when Sophie Marceau's Anna finally does kneel down in front of the train you *don't* much care, frankly.

Much of the trouble lies with the casting. Marceau, with her fringe and pout, has neither range nor the kind of rounded allure that would make her a credible Anna, in anyone's film. (Imagine *Casablanca* with Sharon Stone subbing for Ingrid Bergman.)

The men fare better: Sean Bean is a stoic Vronsky, Alfred Molina a saturnine Levin, and James Fox makes of Karenin a more sympathetic character than he deserves to be. For the rest—the women gibber while Bernard Rose dithers, never putting his own mark on the film. Then there is the dead-on-cue music—Tchaikovsky wept!

—Morag Fraser

Eureka Street
Film Competition

Everyone remembers Anna, but in some film versions of Tolstoy's classic novel, *Anna Karenina*, the other characters simply drop out of sight. If you can name the actors who play Levin and Kitty (see above left) in Bernard Rose's new version then you will earn yourself the wherewithal for a night out for two at the movies. (But for your own sake try another film.)

The winner of the June competition was Jesse Gainsford of Norwood, SA who had Basil Rathbone's Sir Guy say to Errol Flynn: *'Just get to the point, Robin.'*

Child's head revisited

OUR STEAM-DRIVEN TELLY blew up a couple of weeks ago, right in the middle of *The Secret Life of Machines* (SBS). Fetid burnt-plastic smoke poured out of the back and the screen went black. So we threw it away and had almost a week of bliss without any telly at all. But then we got a rather decent little set in a garage sale for $40. It seemed a sin to pay any more, particularly since I'd cracked and signed up for pay-tv.

When they did the cable rollout for Optus/Foxtel/Telstra in my street, I seethed. The cable dangles far below the normal lines; the trees it passes through are mutilated. 'No way', I told the various salespeople over the next year or so. We disapproved.

Then friends signed up. Then relatives. 'They have *all* the *Carry On* movies', they said, insinuatingly. That was a low blow. I am a helpless fan of Sid James and Eric Sykes. 'They have *Lost in Space* and *Callan* and *Dad's Army* and *Soap*', I was told. 'And no ads, or hardly any for the moment anyway.'

So I signed up, and now have 32 channels, if you count the five free-to-air ones. An embarrassment of television, in fact. Make no mistake about it: there is extraordinarily good stuff available from the past. You can get *The Pallisers*, *The Big Gig*, *Lonely Planet* and a great deal of sport and popular music. You can also get the Discovery channel (documentaries—mostly travel, World War history and wild life) and a heap of horrible talk shows. (Rush Limbaugh's is one. Need I say more?)

The past, however, is providing unexpected riches. The attics of television are being ransacked and if you are of an antiquarian persuasion you'll have fun for quite a while.

Much of the attraction of watching, say, *Popeye* or *The Honeymooners* or *Dr Kildare* is the sense of recapturing part of one's childhood in much the same way as when you catch a whiff of your long-dead aunt's *Je reviens*. Your brain is nudged by the trivialities, the minutiae of past living, and you're there again for a moment, pulled in by *Dr Who* as strongly as you would be by something real, something you can smell. The eye and the ear have become as potent as the nose.

For me, *The Adventures of Robin Hood* is the most poignant deliverer of such revisitings. Each of the very individual faces in that early 1950s' series, I now realise, has long represented for me some sort of archetype: Friar Tuck, Little John, the Sheriff of Nottingham, both Maid Marians (Patricia Driscoll and Bernadette O'Farrell), all have gone into some sort of facial-character bank that must have been forming when I was around six or seven. I watched *Robin Hood* the other night and realised at last how, very occasionally, some people I have met over the last forty years have reminded me of someone.

There has to be a reason, after all, why the Foxtel people programed what is in fact a rather good children's series at 11.30 pm—the programs on Channel 1 after 7.30pm are all of this nostalgic ilk. The cast of *Robin Hood* is a treasure trove of ordinary facial types—real faces without surgical intervention: thin mouths, double chins, natural noses. And for others this experience may come through watching *I Love Lucy*, *The Honeymooners*, *The Saint* or *Dragnet*.

It is, I suspect, an experience that doesn't last: it relies on the surprise of sudden recognition—the impacted knowledge that has been making its presence felt in obscure ways is now extracted and subjected to reflection. The memory, now conscious, takes on a very different character. Television programs used to be beamed into the ether and lost in the static chatter that surrounds our noisy planet. But now they're hoarded and used as filler, a kind of temporal Spackle for the myriad cable channels that have to fill 24 hours apiece. (They repeat a great many of their programs during the day.)

It's as though you're poking through an op shop, finding those green glass butter dishes, kidney-shaped coffee tables and prints of Tretchikoff's *Green Burmese Girl*. Some things you'll want because they have lasting value or because they've become fashionable again (whoever would have thought lava lamps and flares could return?). Others will give you the *frisson*, but you'll pass them by, because if you took them home what would you do with them? The Tretchikoff, the coffee table, all need to be kept in attics somewhere so we can remember the flavour of things as they were once, in a time that thought they were smart. The butter dish, on the other hand, is useful.

There is also news in buckets, constantly, on BBC World, Sky News, CNN and ABN—an Asian-focused business channel. You can be on the spot all over the world as long you don't want something too parochial, although Sky News imports *Today Tonight* from Channel Seven. You also get, among your 27 paid channels, a couple that are just weather reports, and one which is devoted to selling you cheap jewellery and other fripperies. There are seven channels that show movies, five exclusively. And although some of the movies are good, I'm wondering if the local video store might need my custom more. Not every movie shown on cable is brilliant by any means, although they beat the commercial free-to-air channels hollow, simply by showing them largely free of ads. It's a bit of a culture shock to go back to Seven, Nine and Ten and experience the fact that we in Australia have the doubtful honour of being the most ad-bombarded audience in the world.

But what pay-tv conspicuously lacks is investigative journalism of the type still provided by the beleaguered ABC. On Monday, 18 August, *Four Corners* once again showed it had the goods. Liz Jackson's rigorous exposition of ABARE's hopelessly compromised assessment of Australia's greenhouse responsibilities was Walkley material. The fact that such work is still being done, despite cuts and rumours of cuts, is a tribute to *Four Corners*' skill and tenacity.

Really, to be a devotee of pay-tv, you'd have to organise your whole life around that flickering box in the corner that takes up so much of our lives. But *Four Corners* keeps reminding us that there's a real world, that we live in it, and maybe we should be doing something in it. ■

Juliette Hughes is a freelance reviewer.

Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 56, September 1997

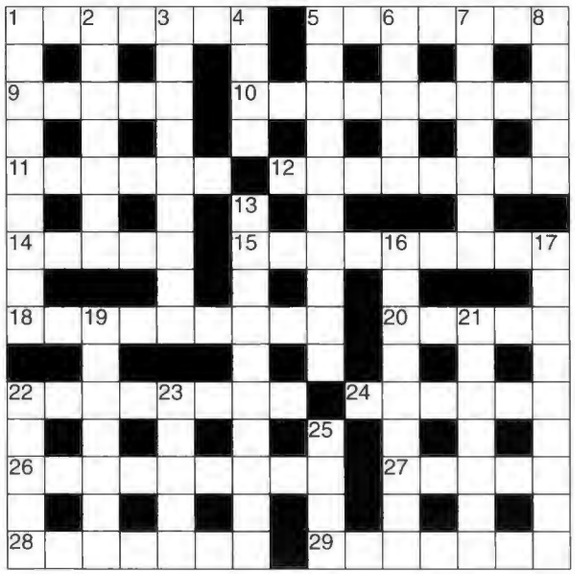
Devised by Joan Nowotny IBVM

ACROSS

1. Artificial-sounding suede from mountain-climbing 24-ac. (7)
5. Pussy-foot around stooge. (4-3)
9. Small picture made in film location? (5)
10. Popery reportedly is in good odour these days. (9)
11. Possible support down lower could, if reversed, lead to improved spirits. (6)
12. Father vehement about state of footpath when he leaves it. (8)
14. Laughing, he is involved with any 24-ac. (5)
15. Musical work left timeless tune in the composition because it was appropriate. (9)
18. Fruit-family which sheds unusual pips ankle-deep! Can be peeled! (5, 4)
20. Press this button when bad pain causes initial alarm. (5)
22. Yes, a dust storm can occur on a weekly basis. (8)
24. Female soul left body of beast. (6)
26. Artist's activity required after prang, perhaps. (9)
27. Some who plead liberal causes can speak well off the cuff! (5)
28. Man's friend departed, dammit! (7)
29. Child speaks of rare tum complaint! More adult-related, perhaps. (7)

DOWN

1. Letter from Greece? Ha, ha! The two of you, apparently, are involved with this little creature from Mexico! (9)
2. Sailor's love confused with desire to forgive. (7)
3. As a dessert, palm-fruit pith is somewhat passé. (3-2-4)
4. Tribe branches out at beginning of month. (4)
5. 5-ac. begins dozing intermittently. (10)
6. Start throwing odd shoe at them in particular. (5)
7. Aver pun to be outrageous. Typical of an upstart! (7)
8. Hush! Be quiet! Game in progress! (5)
13. Choice of reputedly stupid 24-ac. can affect the election. (6-4)
16. Write again that Aunt now takes last four leaders to be sorry. (9)
17. In a whirl, Bruce and I fly to Los Angeles to view Arthur's sword. (9)
19. Small dog reportedly taking a gander at old city of China, say. (7)
21. Doctor swimming in Egyptian river more agile than most, in the circumstances! (7)
22. Classified in pretty pedantic style! (5)
23. Act about it beginning the same as before. (5)
25. Glide smoothly over the surface on 1st March. (4)



Solution to Crossword no. 55, July/August 1997

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

Anthony Reid reviews Stephen Fitzgerald's
Is Australia an Asian Country?

Jack Waterford on Garfield Barwick

Borderline Cases

Jon Greenaway and Mathias Heng on the curious plight of the Bhutanese refugees

A lively trade in bones:
Paul Turnbull on the lessons of Australia's history

ISSN 1036-1758 07
9 771036 175017

Saying goodbye to all that
Gary Bryson on the lessons of Hong Kong