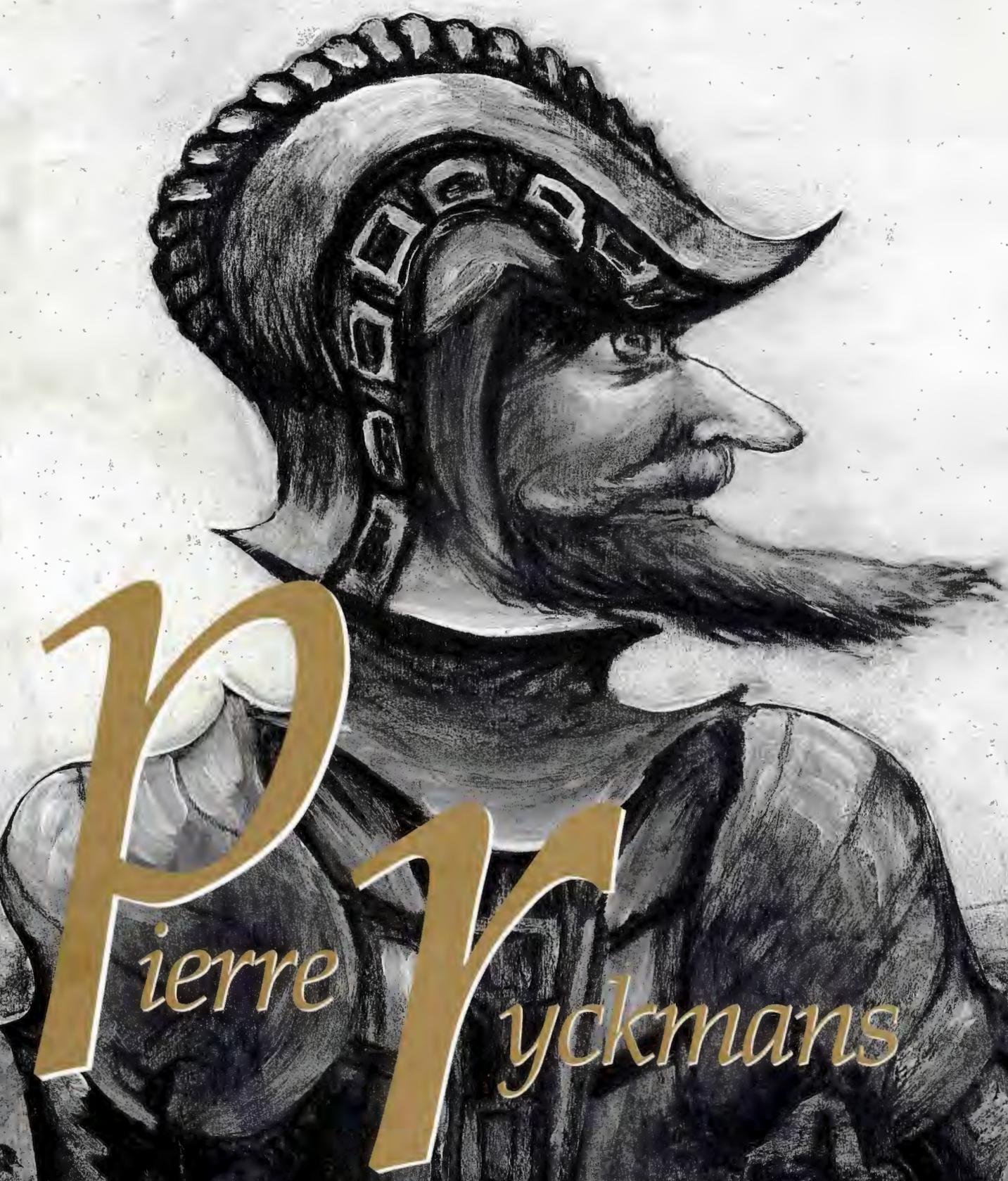


EUREKA STREET

Vol. 8 No. 3 April 1998

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P*ierre* **M***yckmans*

—in pursuit of Cervantes

Summer

1 In Stockholm, Sweden. **2** The Mohorovicic Discontinuity, named after seismologist Andrija Mohorovicic, who discovered it in 1909; also known as the Moho or M-discontinuity. **3** Maximilien Robespierre. **4** Vaslav Nijinsky. **5** Baron de Coubertin; he founded the modern Olympic Games. **6** G.K. Chesterton, 'To a Certain Nation'. **7** Flavio Cotti. **8** The litas. **9** The Ganges and the Brahmaputra in Bangladesh and West Bengal. **10** a) Peter Brain; b) John Uhrig; c) Clive Hamilton. **11** John Cage. **12** The Tower of Babel. **13** Victor Emmanuel III. **14** Apuleius. **15** The 5531-kilometre dingoproof fence—the world's longest. **16** British Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson's private and political secretary. **17** George Gordon, Lord Byron. **18** A red blood cell. **19** i) *It Happened One Night* (1934); ii) *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975); iii) *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991). **20** China (18 million). **21** Ellington's first two given names are Edward Kennedy. **22** Strawweight—upper limit of 48 kg. **23** Ten: Frank Sedgman, Lew Hoad, Ashley Cooper, Neale Fraser,

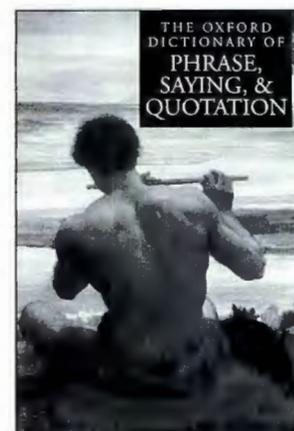
Rod Laver, Margaret Smith, Roy Emerson, Evonne Goolagong, John Newcombe and Pat Cash. **24** Nero. **25** Lachlan; Murray; Murrumbidgee. **26** a) Nancy; b) Deborah; c) Unity; d) Jessica. **27** The forget-me-not. **28** Freedom of speech and expression; freedom of worship; freedom from want; freedom from fear. **29** Ho Chi Minh. **30** Greta Garbo. **31** Gamaliel; Acts 22.3. **32** Peter Sculthorpe. **33** Shakespeare's *Measure For Measure*. **34** Gore Vidal. **35** Henry Purcell; Antonio Vivaldi; Gustav Holst. **36** Ong Teng Cheong. **37** (i) The Timor Sea; (ii) Australia. **38** *The Open Road* motoring bi-monthly magazine, with 1,500,000 per issue. **39** Rupert D'Oyley Carte. **40** *Carnival Destiny*, with a displacement tonnage of 101,353 and an overall length of 272 metres. **41** They are a trinity, and the legend goes that St Patrick used a shamrock to demonstrate to the Irish that God was both three *and* one. **42** (i) Mars (ii) Victoria (iii) Proserpina (iv) Vesta. **43** Mazo de la Roche; Terry Pratchett; Jean Auel; L.M. Montgomery; Winston Graham; C.S. Lewis. **44** Jack Newton. **45** The Todd River boat race.

Answers

Thank you to everyone who sent in entries for the January–February Summer Quiz.

And our apologies for heightening anticipation by delaying the answers ...

Congratulations to winners **Pat Pilgrim** of NSW and **Rhonda Lewis** of Victoria, who will each receive a copy of *The Oxford Dictionary of Phrase, Saying and Quotation*.





A magazine of public affairs, the arts and theology

The tributes to Santamaria have been remarkable, particularly from commentators quite alienated not only from his religious and moral beliefs but from his socio-political opinions. In the newspapers there was almost a consensus that he had been a 'towering' public intellectual of nationwide influence. He was given a state funeral and accorded a status almost above politics—which he believed to be his rightful place.

—see James Griffin, 'The Santamaria Legacy', p26.

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Censoring perceptions

IN DEMONISING RUPERT MURDOCH, rival media outlets have, as usual, neglected deeper themes in his shedding of the book commissioned from the last Governor of Hong Kong, Chris Patten, by Murdoch's HarperCollins publishing house.

This latest episode in the long story of freedom of expression illuminates the following enduring issues, which, in the context of contemporary communications technology and a globalising economy, take on new significance:

- the absurdity of the censor;
- the power of *any* large media organisation, whether or not run by someone with whom you tend to agree;
- the trend for corporations to act like states and the implications of that for corporations that deal in information and for the civic life that depends on that information;
- above all, the evil of self-censorship.

Rupert Murdoch may have got rid of Patten's manuscript, but there is no shortage of commercially risky, politically awkward works.

If the Chinese leadership were to visit the HarperCollins website they would be aghast to find this relatively small part of Mr Murdoch's operation alone responsible for 32 current titles which touch on China but have not been vetted by either the Chinese Foreign Ministry or the News Corporation 'State Department', so far as we know.

What would Jiang Zemin make of *Tibetan Nation*, by Warren W. Smith? Not what the HarperCollins' blurb writer thought: 'Concluding that the essence of the Tibetan issue is self determination, Smith bolsters his argument with a comprehensive analysis of Tibetan and Chinese histories and their close relationship.' Intrigued, the President could turn to *In Exile from the Land of Snows: the Dalai Lama and Tibet since the Chinese Conquest*, by John F. Avedon.

Li Peng may sidestep his bureaucrats to get another report on the body-parts trade and other features of 'the hidden world of the *laogaidui*', part of China's prison system, in a book by human rights campaigner Hongda Harry Wu. Has HarperCollins shown the requisite obeisance in publishing *Chinese Awakenings: Life Stories from the Unofficial China* by James and Ann Tyson, or in describing Lisa Lee's *The Flower Net* as 'a *Gorky Park* for our time'?

As he ponders how large an advance it may be necessary to offer serving politicians for their prospective memoirs, Mr Murdoch may himself want to curl up with *Thread of the Silkworm*. It is safe to recommend to his Chinese friends because, according to HarperCollins, Iris Chang 'tells the story of one of the most monumental blunders the US committed during its shameful era of McCarthyism. It is the biography of a pioneer of the American space age [Dr Tsien Hsue-shen] who was mysteriously accused of being a Communist and deported to China, where he became—to America's continuing chagrin—the father of the Chinese missile

program. Perhaps every editorial decision-maker in News Corporation should read this 'story of a scientist, aloof and shy, who tried to devote himself to science but who found himself on two continents at the vortex of the fickle, ever-shifting winds of world politics and war'.

Chris Patten's book is a temporary, minor casualty. Another publisher will eagerly launch it into the swift but short-lived current of controversy. The incalculable damage of this episode is, narrowly, the way it signals to those who work in News Corporation the current policy towards China, and the distorting consequences of that in so many media outlets as some, but not all, staff anticipate to excess.

More broadly, damage is done because it reinforces in the minds of *all* who work for large media organisations in this information age that commercial conflicts of interest can be a kind of trump against their better instincts grounded in principles like respect for free speech, diversity, dissent and even history's right to a full record. (A full record is the best we can hope for; accuracy has a chance of being distilled from it over time.)

In 1944, George Orwell's manuscript for *Animal Farm* was rejected by at least three publishers. Victor Gollancz was sensitive to the communist orthodoxy of the time and to the commercial risk of alienating members of the Left Book Club. Jonathan Cape, having consulted what he called 'an important official in the Ministry of Information', worried about the effect of so offensively satirising Stalin's Russia, with whom Britain was then allied in war against Germany.

REJECTING ON BEHALF OF FABER AND FABER, T.S. Eliot informed Orwell that 'we have no conviction ... that this is the right point of view from which to criticise the political situation at the present time'. Directors of Freedom Press rejected the book because Orwell had in the past attacked their pacifism, according to Orwell's best biographer, Bernard Crick. The frustrated Orwell briefly planned to self-publish, adding a preface attacking self-censorship. (The preface, lost until 1971, is an appendix to recent Penguin paperback editions.)

In the preface, Orwell lamented, not government censorship, but largely voluntary censorship in the press, books, films and radio that silenced unpopular ideas and kept inconvenient facts dark because they did not conform to current orthodoxy: 'At this moment, what is demanded by the prevailing orthodoxy is an uncritical admiration of Soviet Russia ... And this nation-wide conspiracy to flatter our ally takes place, curiously enough, against a background of genuine intellectual tolerance. For though you are not allowed to criticise the Soviet government, at least you are reasonably free to criticise our own.'

Today's orthodoxy, for News Corporation among many others, might be that the best way to influence a regime is to develop business relationships with it, or that globalisation will eventually create economic development from which freedoms will follow naturally. Orwell's response still serves: 'These people don't see that if you encourage totalitarian methods, the time may come when they will be used against you.' Tolerance and decency, although deeply rooted, had to be kept alive by conscious effort. 'The result of preaching totalitarian doctrines is to weaken the instinct by means of which free peoples know what is or is not dangerous.'

As Mr Murdoch's public relations operatives assiduously put it about that Chris Patten's book is not very good anyway, is there a better reply than that which Orwell made to the same charge against *Animal Farm*?

They will say that it is a dull, silly book and a disgraceful waste of paper. [These were days of rationing]. This may well be true, but it is not the whole of the story. One does not say that a book 'ought not to have been published' merely because it is a bad book. After all, acres of rubbish are printed daily and no one bothers.

Animal Farm was eventually published in 1945 by Frederic Warburg, whose memoir *An Occupation for Gentlemen* (Hutchinson, 1959) might interest the next chief executive of HarperCollins. Ruminating on the character of a publisher, Warburg wonders whether business growth leads to a waning of exuberance and daring. This is important, he writes, because 'general publishing deals with the highest achievements of man's creativity. And the publisher himself is a creator of an unusual and special type.'

Warburg quotes Thomas Mann, leading writer in his stable:

The publisher is not a soloist of spiritual exertion, but the conductor of the orchestra. Whereas the author, in his public loneliness, with only himself to rely on, hemmed in of necessity by his ego, struggles to do his best, the publisher selects from the common effort whatever his instinct and his feeling for the necessary considers as just and beneficial. He takes it over, impresses the stamp of his enterprise upon it, and hurls it in its collective variety into the battle of life, where it must contend with the powers of obstinacy, ignorance and death ... What a glorious occupation, this mixture of business sense and a strategic friendship with the spirit ... I am well aware that in these days the life of a publisher is far from easy. But happy I may certainly call it ... It must be happy, free from the torture and frailty which all individual creation involves—and yet with an opportunity to serve the spirit. ■

—Paul Chadwick



Theology and history: the Collins case

IN ENGLISH SOCCER, when managers and players observe the rules of the game but do something the authorities find offensive, like questioning the paternity or the intelligence of the referee, they are charged with 'bringing the game into disrepute'. Critics invariably query whether players could do this more effectively than the administrators who bring the charges. But the exchange has the merit of suggesting that issues vital to the welfare of the sport are not confined to the soccer field.

The process followed by the Congregation for the Faith against Fr Paul Collins would be familiar to theologically educated soccer fans. The questions raised by the Congregation are not covered by the rules of the historical game which Collins plays in *Papal Power*. But the fact that the charges implied against the book are theological in nature is predictable and significant. It indicates that the questions at issue are deeper and lie outside the scope of the book.

While Collins speaks of papal power, his theme would be better named papal control. He touches only tangentially the theory on which papal authority is based, emphasising the practice of control by the Papacy. His examples include Roman control of the appointment of bishops, of liturgy, of the teaching of faith and of theological reflection. His examples are for the most part of control exercised unwisely or repressively.

As a historian, Collins argues that current practice reflects a popular perception of the role of the Pope both inside and outside the church. It sees the Pope as the sole source of authority and legitimacy within the church, and so accepts that his Roman government is responsible for regulating belief, liturgy and promotion to higher office within the church. It sees the local churches as, effectively, branch offices of Rome.

Collins argues that these perceptions have been strengthened by the nineteenth-century definitions of papal infallibility and primacy. These doctrines and their definitions function as symbols of papal control. While Collins does not, in my reading, attack the content of the doctrines, he regards their definition as regrettable because they have become props of inappropriate papal control over the church. They have led to a personal cult of the Pope, most recently expressed in the image of the travelling Pope who is so identified with the Church that the local churches appear to lose their own leadership and identity.

In a historical synopsis, Collins then asks how the Papacy came to be seen in this way. In his account he emphasises sharply the abuses and deviations significant in the history of the Papacy. He concludes by defending the autonomy and



mutual responsibility of local churches. To reform the role of the Papacy within the church, he calls for more frequent Councils, initially of the Catholic Church, but eventually including representatives of other churches.

The publicised questions put to Collins' work by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith do not deal directly with his argument, but with their perceived assumptions. They ask if his theory of the church and of the place of the Bishop of Rome within the church is consistent with Catholic belief. In particular, they raise three points of concern: whether Collins has minimised the identification of the Catholic Church with Christ's church, whether he has reduced the doctrines of infallibility and primacy to theological opinions, and whether his understanding of infallibility is too lacking in content.

These charges are significant because they are theological and theoretical judgments made upon a work of historical reflection. The fact that they are made indicates that an older, deeper and more difficult question is at issue: the relationship between faith and its habits of mind on the one hand, and history and its habits of mind on the other. For a century or so, faith and history have been uneasy companions, and from this longer perspective, the debate about *Papal Power* is only another skirmish in a continuing quarrel.

THE HISTORICAL EYE views traditions and their institutions from outside, and sees change and contingency as essential parts of any historical process. Within any tradition, there will be many opinions which will wax and wane in importance as the institutions do.

The perspective of faith, however, works from within a particular tradition and sees it as normative. The institutions and beliefs constitutive of the tradition share that normative character, and any development within them is, by definition, continuous.

In some traditions there is no tension between faith and history, because their central beliefs are non-historical. But in the Catholic tradition, the need to hold together the historical and faith perspectives, and its difficulty, are inevitable because the tradition is grounded in historical events and processes, such as Jesus Christ's life and death and the formation of the central structures of the church, such as the priesthood, the episcopacy

Testing procedures



CRITICISMS LEVELLED against Father Paul Collins over his decision not to play by the rules of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in its investigation of his statements on the papacy in *Papal Power* actually provide a strong argument in defence of his approach.

Collins has been accused of grandstanding, of wanting to 'have his cake and eat it too', and of trying to apply the standards of procedural justice one finds in Western civil society on to the Universal Catholic Church. These are the kind of stock-in-trade charges that are always rolled out whenever the belittling of church dissidents is thought to be the smart thing to do. They betray an ignorance of the issues involved in this case.

The Catholic Church is not some sort of exclusive club with immutable rules that have to be blindly obeyed or rejected along with membership. It is a community that evolves and adapts and that, as the Second Vatican Council acknowledged in *Lumen Gentium* 'will receive its perfection only in the glory of heaven'.

Once you allow for imperfection in the church you must also allow for the possibility of mistakes. Collins believes that mistakes have been made in devising the rules, regulations and organisational expression of the church as we know it, particularly in regard to the papacy and its claims to infallibility. This may or may not be so. The point, however, is that, if we refuse to test such claims, we deny the very nature of the church as a living, growing, pilgrim People of God, by assuming that what is must necessarily always have been and always will be.

How then are competing claims best tested?

The CDF insists that everyone accepts its terms without question. Those who bring accusations of error against a theologian or church teacher remain anonymous. Investigations are shrouded in secrecy. A number of assumptions are in operation here. First, while theologians are held accountable, the CDF itself is not. Second, ordinary Catholics have nothing to contribute to the investigation, not even their interest. Third, a fair hearing can be guaranteed despite the first two assumptions.

If anybody needs reminding of just how wide of the mark these assumptions are, it is worth recalling the case of the Sri Lankan theologian Father Tissa Balasuriya.

Balasuriya fell foul of Rome for challenging fundamental Catholic beliefs in a book entitled *Mary and Human Liberation*. Among the charges were that Balasuriya had taken issue with the doctrine of original sin (which he said was an 'abominable'

concept to Asians) and with traditional depictions of and devotions to the Virgin Mary (tantamount, Balasuriya argued, to a cult that 'tranquillises' Catholics).

According to the CDF, Balasuriya had 'deviated from the integrity of the truth of the Catholic faith' and, after refusing to sign a Profession of Faith drawn up by the CDF, he was declared excommunicated, with the Pope's approval, in January 1997.

Last month, the declaration was rescinded. Although Balasuriya signed a statement acknowledging 'perceptions of error' in his book (but not doctrinal error) and agreed to submit future writings to his bishops for their imprimatur, the substantive concessions were all made on the Vatican's side. Why? Its investigation of Balasuriya had been faulty, its reaction exaggerated. More importantly, the excommunication had been an injustice to Balasuriya, an embarrassment to the church and a setback to attempts to ground the Christian message in an Asian cultural context.

Investigating Collins in camera, through a process loaded against an outcome favourable to him, would be a travesty of a similar order. Even if he were cleared of the charge of doctrinal error, the experience would be a warning to other theologians and church intellectuals that they risk a touch on the shoulder by the heavy hand of Rome whenever suspicions of their work arise. Creativity, not just liberty, would be stifled.

There is another issue here: how is theology best done?

However one may hedge an answer with the need to preserve the integrity of the faith and with the obvious point about the qualifications required for the task, the process must involve a genuine exchange of ideas. Otherwise, theology is not being done, only dictated. Within the church there are those who still appear to think that it was a grave miscalculation by Emperor Charles V to summon Martin Luther to the Diet of Worms in 1521, thus giving him a platform from which to defend his views. It led, they seem to assume, to the collapse of the Holy Roman Empire, the Reformation, and by degrees the French Revolution.

A free exchange of ideas earlier might have produced vastly different outcomes. It might now rescue the church from the kind of Roman fundamentalism that threatens its mission to the world in the new millennium. ■

Chris McGillion is the religious affairs editor for the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

and the special place of the Bishop of Rome. As historical events and processes, these are subject to historical reflection. Yet in the tradition they bear a normative character.

In earlier periods, the tension between the theological and historical uses of mind was not significant because scholars took for granted the detailed historical accuracy of the early Christian documents and the identity between early and later church life. So, for example, at the Last Supper, Jesus intended to ordain priests to celebrate the Mass. In the commission to Peter, Jesus had in mind the office of the Bishops of Rome in

the church of the scholar's day.

Historical study, however, showed that the primary goal of Christian narratives was to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and that this goal coloured the historical information they provided. The documents also revealed that the early communities were diverse, and that institutions and beliefs which were to become normative developed slowly. The tradition was not to be conceived as a bouquet of flowers but as a seed. But Catholic theologies have insisted that the change in the tradition was organic and continuous.

The tension between the perspectives of faith and of history provides the key to the questions put to Paul Collins by the Congregation. His resolutely historical perspective raises the question whether he sees the Catholic tradition as only one among many equally privileged religious traditions. His emphasis on the contingent and wilful aspects of the processes that led to the definition of the infallibility and primacy of the Bishop of Rome makes the Congregation ask whether he regards them as integral to the Catholic tradition or as dispensable opinions.

All historical works about the church, even Eamon Duffy's splendid script for the history of the Popes, raise these kinds of questions. But Collins provokes them more insistently because he so emphasises abuses of power and the passion for control. The more strongly we see the development and exercise of papal power as the product or inspiration of control, infantilism and fear, the more inevitably we shall ask whether this particular aspect of tradition really reflects the work of the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ.

This is not to say that Catholics must dismiss Collins' judgment that the present condition of the church is dysfunctional. While the Congregation would no doubt disagree with him, his concerns echo questions raised in high places. Pope Paul VI, for example, saw the Papacy as the greatest obstacle to ecumenical union; the present Pope, too, has asked non-Catholic Christians to reflect on the proper exercise of Roman primacy. More recently, Bishop Stecher's trenchant criticism of Rome won widespread publicity. Whether such critical reports incline you to shoot

the messenger or the king depends on your judgment about whether they are true and representative.

THE TENSION REVEALED between the historical and theological perspectives may prompt a further question: what part do the doctrines of the primacy and the infallibility of the Bishop of Rome have in Catholic tradition? In general terms, they are essential but not primary. For they concern the unity in faith and life of those who follow Jesus in the church. This unity is the work of the Spirit, and is expressed primarily in the face-to-face relationships which make up daily church life.

But ministers also play an indispensable role in helping their communities live faithfully as members of the larger church. Among these, the bishops of Rome have had a special role in strengthening the faith and life of the whole church. The role is that of Peter in the early church. It has been described as one of primacy, and has been defined in legal terms, because unity usually becomes problematic when it is absent. At such times a clearly defined understanding of rights and responsibilities is often important.

Unity in faith presupposes another question—whether the whole church can ever fall away from the truth. The conviction that the Spirit will not allow it to do so implies that the church can speak truly about faith when necessary. The church is therefore infallible in the sense that it will not fall away from the truth, and that the universal, constant and directed teaching

of the apostles and bishops in areas central to faith can be accepted as certain. It follows from the role of the Bishop of Rome in strengthening the unity of faith in the church that, when he claims to speak definitively on behalf of the whole church, he is endowed with the infallibility of the church.

The place of the papal doctrines in the tradition show that there is a wide space for discussion about how the role of the Bishop of Rome is best exercised. Collins, who fears the modern flirtation with totalitarianism, argues that the church lives best when local churches have considerable autonomy. Others, who fear more the cultural fragmentation within modernity, may want to strengthen the central organs that serve unity. Others may judge that, regardless of what happens to the government

of the church, Christ's followers will not find themselves suddenly delivered either to Babylon or to Jerusalem.

When the Congregation asks whether Collins has too minimalist an understanding of infallibility, it raises another question which is widely debated among theologians. They ask whether the development of belief and structures in the church is reversible, and so, whether the church can ever forget. Without some capacity to forget, it is hard to see how rifts between churches can ever be healed, for each tradition believes itself normative for its believers.

If doctrines and structures are described in broad terms, there is usually no problem. The Orthodox, for example, could accept that the Bishop of Rome has

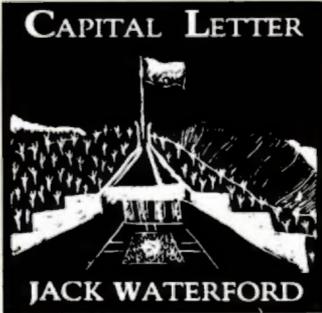
a role to play in safeguarding the unity of the church in faith. The problem arises when doctrines and institutions are described in detail. It is hard to imagine that the Eastern churches would ever accept the nineteenth-century definitions and expressions of the papal role. The reason is that these understandings arose out of a Western self-understanding which, in its developing form, was not accepted by the churches of the East even when the church was united. To achieve reunion between the churches of East and West, it would be necessary to go back to a time before each tradition had developed its characteristic forms.

Once we begin to distinguish between an Eastern and Western doctrinal tradition, however, we must again deal with the tension between the theological and historical perspectives. For to speak of a double tradition appears to relativise Catholic tradition. But to identify the church simplistically with the Western tradition demands a wholly implausible reading of church life from the fifth century to the eleventh centuries.

While, in my judgment, *Papal Power* does not take positions on these questions, it does raise them. The importance of the issues explains why the Congregation has questioned the book. It is also suggests why it is so important that the Congregation's processes of review encourage and not deter hard thinking about them. ■

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

While the Congregation would no doubt disagree with him, Collins' concerns echo questions raised in high places. Pope Paul VI, for example, saw the Papacy as the greatest obstacle to ecumenical union; the present Pope, too, has asked non-Catholic Christians to reflect on the proper exercise of Roman primacy.



JACK WATERFORD

Owning responsibility

A CORONER'S INQUEST is sitting in Canberra to determine what went wrong in a terrible explosion at the site of the old Royal Canberra Hospital in July last year. The hospital had been meant to implode,

but the force of the explosive sent shards from the hospital up to 800 metres from the site, including right across Lake Burley Griffin. The ACT Government had been keen to make a public spectacle of the demolition of the old hospital, not least because of the political outcry about its being closed down. It invited the public to watch from what it thought an ultra-safe distance of more than 200 metres from the site. On a lovely sunny winter Sunday, 100,000 people came to watch. A 12-year-old girl was decapitated.

The inquest will drag on for many months, because it will be a mini-royal commission into the whole affair. There are many parties, from the body which commissioned the demolition, the contractors who carried it out, sub-contractors who played bit parts, engineers who consulted and so on. And, of course, there are the questions not only of the ultimate responsibility which politicians must accept for such disastrous events, but whether any political expediencies actually played a contributing role.

The agency which organised the affair is one of the new-model corporatised government agencies, run on business lines by a board of businessmen. It was once a government department. It once commanded a fair amount of engineering expertise, but had long ago let that go, preferring to buy in such expertise when it needed it. There are not a few people who hope that the inquest will involve some close examination of how well these new models of government service delivery compare with those of old, and whether the workings of the model contributed to what occurred.

I am not so sure that it will be found that the structures themselves contributed to the disaster. Sceptical as I am of some of the new models, and concerned as I am about the running down of public sector expertise, it would be idle to imagine that a city of the size of Canberra would ever have had vast explosives knowledge; most likely the job would have been put to outsiders in any event. Already, however, there have been some alarming signs that the agency lacked even the original plans of the government building, and did not itself have the expertise to evaluate the different tenders which came in. An astronaut once remarked that there was something scary about being blasted into the stratosphere on an assemblage of 200,000 moving parts, in the knowledge that each one had been supplied by the lowest tenderer.

What is clear, however, is that public opinion will not necessarily tolerate the divisions of responsibility which the politicians have spelt out for the new models. In theory, the government has passed the responsibility on to the new boards, and the operation is supposed to run on private sector lines. In theory, the politicians should wear the blame only if it is shown that it has been some formal policy direction which has been at the root of a disaster.

But it will not work that way. No-one may worry much about whether airline safety is regulated by a government department or by a corporation or privatised entity, but they will tend to blame the Government if an aircraft falls out of the sky. The more so if the minister actively involves himself in the decision-making. If Centrelink, providing the 'front-counter' services of the old Department of Social Security, fails to deliver the benefit cheques, the politicians will ultimately bear the blame. Likewise for the

many hundreds of private sector concerns now performing the functions of the old Commonwealth Employment Service. Or a Telstra if the telephone service does not work, or if one cannot get one's telephone repaired for weeks because the operation is now co-ordinated from another city hundreds of miles away. Or if the computers of a major agency, now supplied via an outsourcing contractor, go bung and the operations of the agency grind to a halt.

One doesn't have to search very far for proof that politicians hardly ever learn anything. They find it hard even to learn from recent events in their own backyard. The real irony of Jeff Kennett's deep embarrassment over his boosting of Crown Casino comes not from his hubris but from parallels with Tricontinental and other fiascos of the Cain Government. There have been rorts galore since members of the Bjelke-Petersen Government got a touch up from the Fitzgerald Royal Commission, but only in Queensland could it be said, from the recent evidence, that almost all parts of the system denounced by Fitzgerald are now firmly re-established. Western Australia is having fresh WA Inc. problems. It's all too delicious for words, even when one can write the scripts off by heart.

And in the Howard Government, memories do not even seem to last a month. What is pitiful about the latest round of conflict of interest allegations, however, is not so much that ministers think that they can get away with outright conflicts, but that so many of them do not have a clue of what the letter, let alone the spirit, of the rules requires. There's an extra irony, of course, in all of this happening in a Government which had promised to set new standards of public behaviour, and which published its rules with great fanfare. But, as John Howard defends, at least for a time, the indefensible, as he has, say, with Geoff Prosser or Warwick Parer, his own words suggest that he does not understand the principles involved. Or worse, that he does understand them, but thinks them dispensable when it suits.

IT IS NOT WITHOUT INTEREST that almost all of the problem front-benchers—Short, Gibson, Jull, Moore, Sharp, Woods, McGauran, Prosser and Parer—have been very average performers for the Government. Only Sharp has actually been a loss. John Moore is still there, of course, but whether anyone could explain why, on the basis of distinctions between his shareholding interests and those of others who had to go, is open to doubt. The others who tripped, however, were hardly ornaments, even if they were thought by Howard to be especially decent, or old or loyal mates. Howard's attachments have prolonged the agony between the trip-up and the inevitable resignation, unnecessarily damaging the Government's reputation for integrity. No-one would write home about the standards set by recent Prime Ministers, but one has to go back to Billy McMahon to find one so indigent.

Which underlines, perhaps, the lessons to be drawn from exploding hospitals. There's now a script for the coming election campaign. Presumably it has been tested before the focus groups. Telstra and tax reform in large dollops, a budget as generous as it can afford to be, the media chiefs largely squared away for the time being, and an opposition fairly inept in promoting a different approach. But things go wrong. The mechanisms set up to shield politicians from the flying stones do not necessarily work, indeed are increasingly not even under the politicians' own control. ■

Jack Waterford is editor of the *Canberra Times*.

Terror nullius

From David Rose, *Australian Catholic Social Justice Council*

Michael Polya's letter (*Eureka Street*, January–February 1998) outlining his narrow arguments on land ownership is proof again that *terra nullius* has always been a state of mind (of a particularly Western mind) rather than a geographical place.

His casual juxtaposition of indigenous people with fauna and his assertion that indigenous people 'may be chased away, but cannot be dispossessed of what they didn't own in the first place' is insulting and repugnant. It is precisely this attitude and the governmental policies built upon it which led to the findings documented in the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's Report on the Stolen Generations, *Bringing Them Home*.

Mr Polya conflates land ownership with 'equity in the land' and proceeds to conveniently show how indigenous people could not possibly own the land.

For him land is a resource to be exploited. He refuses to recognise indigenous peoples' culture and law, and their spiritual connection with the land.

Mr Polya completely misses the point of the High Court's decision in *Mabo* and the subsequent *Native Title Act*. The overarching aim of the legislation is to recognise prior indigenous ownership of the land and to reconcile this with a Western tradition of property rights.

This sort of *terra nullius* thinking is still alive and well and will surface again as the *Native Title Amendment Bill* is re-introduced in Parliament.

David Rose
North Sydney, NSW

Null and void

From Patricia Tynan

If one is tempted to compliance regarding Australia's movement towards reconciliation, respect for social justice and basic common sense Michael Polya (Letters, *Eureka Street*, January–February 1998) injects a lightning bolt.

My response to Mr Polya is simple, confident that knowledgeable, erudite argument was

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already made in Frank Brennan's 'A free-speaking church-goer's guide to Wik in '98' in the same issue. However, Father Brennan's arguments were not intended to be focused to Mr Polya's postulations. Inter alia, Mr Polya writes:

1. 'Ownership of land ... can be acquired only by either purchase ... or by investment of labour, or money... in effecting improvements and thus enhancing the value of the property.'
2. 'Aborigines were nomads [and] territorial occupiers like all creatures that live off the naturally occurring produce of the land ... Most of the fauna is territorial in that very sense. Just because no value is added by the occupier, length of occupation makes no difference ... None of them [ie fellow human beings or fauna] have equity in the land and therefore may be chased away, but cannot be

dispossessed of what they didn't own in the first place.'

3. Mr Polya goes on to make a distinction in respect of the *Mabo* decision as between Murray Islanders and the mainland indigenous people. He queries why 17.5 million non-Aboriginal Australians had not the same 'rights to freehold ownership'.

4. There was no *terra nullius* because the British Empire did not consider that the Aboriginal people (whose culture they did not understand and with whom they competed for land) was 'a nation' and therefore could not enter into a treaty.

His letter is framed in an ideology which, as Mr Polya himself laments, amounts to 'semantic confusion'—his own.

These arguments comprise value judgments and opinions, not arguments which will stand historiographic scrutiny. The opinions relate greatly to the power relationship between indigenous people and colonial invaders. I suggest that:

1. The premise as stated is an opinion based perhaps on a spurious legalistic reasoning suited to a simplistic economic rationalism.
2. It is frightening for both humans and fauna that they be equated in such a concept, which is morally repugnant and smacks of ideologies of totalitarian racism.
3. Judges and presenters in the *Mabo* case would be no less aware than Mr Polya of cultural practices which were different between the Murray Islanders and the mainland indigenous people. Mr Polya bases his argument on his value judgment concerning how land can be said to be 'owned' and raises such values to judge between horticulturists and what he calls nomads irrespective of the environmental surrounds.

4. That the British Empire did not understand a people of alien culture and with whom they competed for land is a British problem and no justification for land-grabbing and physical aggression. *Terra nullius* as defined in the *Mabo* judgment is a concept and reality which is historically apparent.

Lest such values as Michael Polya's prevail, Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Patricia Tynan
New Lambton Heights,
NSW

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Antagonishtic

From David Griffiths, *Chairman, Co-operative Federation of Victoria Ltd*

The Race Mathews review of four co-operative books (*Eureka Street*, January–February 1998) is welcome but remiss in not acknowledging the impact of the Antigonish Movement in Australia.

He argues that it was only in the middle 1950s that credit unions finally took off within the Catholic parishes, largely as a means of enabling households to access consumer loans at interest rates below those of the hire purchase industry.

The Australian co-operative historian Gary Lewis inspires this statement. It is an incomplete interpretation. Captured by this incompleteness, Mathews argues that there was a conflict between the Antigonish and stick-to-their-knitting proponents of credit unions.

This was a very real conflict—particularly in New South Wales.

In Victoria, the Antigonish impact was also very real with the Young Christian Workers (YCW) Co-operative Movement for at least 20 years. The YCW Co-operative Movement was concerned with access to affordable consumer loans. But, then, this is the basis of co-operation—individuals joining together to meet their common needs through mutual action.

The YCW Co-operative Movement was also much more and adopted for itself the very principles of the Antigonish Movement praised by Mathews:

- The primacy of the individual;
- Social reform must come through education;

- Education must begin with the economic;
- Education must be through group action;
- Effective social reform involves fundamental changes in social and economic institutions;
- The ultimate objective of the Movement is a full and abundant life for everyone in the community.

The first YCW co-operative was established in 1948. By 1964 the YCW Co-operative Movement comprised:

- 23 housing co-operatives;
- 1 permanent building society;
- 1 trading and insurance co-operative;
- 1 regional trading co-operative;
- 1 association of credit unions;
- 68 affiliated credit societies;
- 1 land purchasing co-operative;
- 1 education co-operative.

The YCW Co-operative Movement practised the holistic approach to co-operatives that Mathews preaches. It is a remarkable, forgotten, history.

While a short letter can not do justice to the YCW Co-operative Movement, it can signal the need to rectify the interpretation created by Gary Lewis and continued by Race Mathews.

David Griffiths
Blampied, VIC

Dependence Day

From Patrick Connor

I was amused to read in the December issue of *Eureka Street* that 'the US and Brazilian churches are the two most independently-minded in the Americas'. I know little about the church in Brazil, but the American bishops are anything but 'independently minded' when it comes to dealing with 'Rome'. Witness the way they caved in to 'Rome' on the issue of the pastoral letter on women, and the way they have done the same thing with regard to an inclusive-language lectionary, which the Canadian bishops have long been using.

In a recent article in *America* magazine Thomas Reese SJ, writing on the Synod of the Americas, quotes a non-North-American bishop as saying that, at lunches with the Pope, 'the US bishops were so obsequious towards the Pope that a fruitful conversation could not take place. He faulted the bishops for doing this and the Pope for not cutting them off'.

Patrick Connor
Bordentown, NJ, USA



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En garde, old guard

From Marie Louise Uhr, *National Convenor, Ordination of Catholic Women*.

The Reverend Dr Dowd OF is hoping, I feel sure, that someone from the 'pockets of dissenting recalcitrance' will rise to the bait he dangles in his letter criticising Hilary Charlesworth's essay in *Eureka Street*, November 1997 (*Eureka Street*, March 1998). I cannot resist. I give him his pleasure.

Dr Dowd must recite a very different creed from the one we say at church each Sunday, if he finds the Catholic Church to be one of 'those religious communities whose creeds require distinctions on the basis of sex to be made concerning the conferral of ordination'. Ours makes no mention of ordination, let alone of the sex of the person to be ordained. Even Cardinal Ratzinger noted, when discussing the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's *Responsum ad dubium*, that 'these matters are not contained in the deposit of faith' (NCR 6 June 1997).

Moreover, it is surely to confuse theology with papal authority to argue that 'doctrinally the matter is settled'; especially as major scriptural scholars around the world—for example the Pontifical Biblical Commission in

1976, the American Catholic Biblical Association in 1979 and the Catholic Biblical Association of Australia in 1995—have been unable to find scriptural bases for the present prohibition; and when the Catholic Theological Society of America in 1997 found it necessary to raise major questions about the CDF's use of patristic sources in *Inter Insigniores*.

We hold, of course, that institutionalised misogyny, not the gospel, is at the root of the Vatican's refusal to consider the ordination of women. And should Dr Dowd, or anyone else, wish to examine our arguments more fully, we'd be happy to send them our published material.

Marie Louise Uhr
Kingston, ACT

Revolution parries

From Martin Sheehan

I am writing in regard to David Glanz' extraordinary letter (*Eureka Street*, January–February 1998). What is extraordinary about the letter is his distortion of both Russian history and the history of the Communist Party of Australia.

Firstly, whatever the 'achievements' of the party in Australia, one salient fact remains unexamined by Glanz. That fact is the recently revealed level of funding received by the CPA from the Soviet Union, in order that it might carry out subversive operations in Australia. The truth about Australian communism was that, while they liked to portray themselves as progressive nationalists concerned about the welfare of working Australians, in reality the communists were in the pay of a foreign power, which at that time was ruled by one of the most ruthless and brutal dictators in all human history, bent on subverting Australia's security and sovereignty.

Secondly, Glanz, in his eagerness to paint the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in the best possible light, seems to forget that the Bolsheviks came to power in Russia through a military-style

coup against a legally constituted government. Glanz also overlooks the fact that the Bolsheviks in 1917 were by no means the most popular revolutionary group in Russia: the Socialist Revolutionaries and the anarchists generally could have easily claimed the support of the majority of peasants and workers.

The Bolshevik coup involved, therefore, the setting up of an authoritarian, one-party dictatorship which began persecuting its opponents right from the beginning. That is the main reason for the Russian Civil War, not Western interference. The White Russian forces fighting against the Bolsheviks were not all reactionaries, but a coalition of conservative Tsarists, socialists and other democrats ousted from any share in power by the Bolsheviks. They did receive help from foreign powers, but these interventions were limited and half-hearted, to say the least.

Is it any wonder then that the Bolshevik regime descended into repression and tyranny right from the beginning? How does Glanz think that democracy could have survived in a one-party state? The claim that the gangster regime of Joseph Stalin was an aberration which destroyed the work of the revolution is simply ludicrous. It was, rather, the inevitable outcome of the revolutionary mentality which believes that only the party knows what is best for everyone, and those who disagree belong on the scrap heap of history.

Martin Sheehan
Heidelberg West, VIC

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THE MONTH'S TRAFFIC



Sieg isle

FIFTY-SIX YEARS AGO I was a flying instructor at Western Junction, near Launceston, and in my eighteen months in Tasmania flew in my little yellow Tiger Moth over large areas of the island, its green paddocks, rivers, mountains and lakes, all so different from my home in dry South Australia. When on leave we enjoyed prodigious hospitality, and I regard those months in Tasmania as some of the happiest in my life. Recently I returned to the island, and was delighted to find how little, in basic essentials, Tasmania has changed, and that it is as beautiful as ever.

It did occur to me, however, how very differently things might have turned out.

For, 56 years ago, Hitler had a problem with the forthcoming Japanese conquest of Australia, which seemed a likely prospect. There were many thousands of people of German background living in Australia. The Japanese were allies of Germany, but the rulers of the Third Reich were perfectly capable of being racist about their Asian allies. On no account, said the Führer, should a situation arise where Germans would be living under the command of an inferior (i.e. Asian) race.

So a certain Dr Heinz Kloss was ordered to make a report to Hitler on what might be done with the German-Australians, or Australian-Germans, as he preferred to call them.

When I was planning to write on the history of the Germans in Australia I went to Germany to carry out research for the book. This took me to many libraries, as the German emigrants to Australia came from all over the country, from Prussia to Bavaria, made up of Lutherans, Catholics and some other rather strange sects.

I was born and grew up in the north of the Barossa Valley in South Australia, in an area where there were as many Schutzes and Scholzes as there were Smiths or Joneses. Those sad roll-calls, the War Memorials to World War I, were studded with German names. The German-Australians were the harbingers of multicultural Australia; they've been coming here since the 1840s. They were escaping from religious persecution or the dreadful poverty of 19th century rural Germany, and in Australia they found

prosperity and freedom. They happily absorbed the atmosphere of Australia while being proud of their own culture. They brought us wine and mettwurst, sauerkraut, Beethoven and brass bands and lovely singing. Until my generation they spoke their own dialect of German, Barossa-Deutsch, and English with a rich accent. They were some of the best citizens we have ever had. The only trouble came with some shameful outbreaks of jingoistic hysteria in both World Wars, while all the time there was, in fact, no doubt of their loyalty to Australia.

There was a great deal of material about German settlements in Australia in the German libraries, but something that promised to be more exciting came up when I was given access to the Secret Archives of the Third Reich in Bonn.

In the copious documents there was a report from a Nazi agent sent out to Australia in the late 1930s to try to whip up enthusiasm for the Third Reich amongst German-Australians, and to recruit people to establish cells for the Nazi Party in Australia. Those responsible for the lies about the loyalty of German-Australians in the two World Wars should have read this spy's report. He did his best, travelling extensively around South Australia in particular, but in the end had to report with

disgust that the German-Australians were more interested in growing vines and drinking wine and beer, and making sausages from their pigs, and in playing Australian games such as cricket and football, than in the brave new world of the Nazi party. He wailed: 'there is a widespread addiction of ethnic Germans to the Australian way of life'.

However, a few years later it was Dr Kloss's duty to find ways and means of implementing Hitler's pronouncement that 'it is quite intolerable that an ethnic German group should fall under the domination of the Yellow Race'.

His report to the Führer was stamped in large red letters *GEHEIM* (SECRET). In it he came up with a brilliant idea.

First, with typical German thoroughness, he outlined the possible different outcomes of a Japanese conquest of Australia. There were three assumptions:

First Assumption. That the Axis Powers will win the war but do not occupy Australia. In that case, the only solution is the relocation of all ethnic Germans to Germany.

Second Assumption. That Australia becomes a colony under Japanese sovereignty. There can be no exposing ethnic Germans to the humiliation of living under the rule of the Yellow Race, and so expatriation is the only answer.



A Tasmania not in Dr Kloss' philosophy: The Last Muster of the Aborigines at Risden, by John Glover, 1836. From New Worlds for Old, NGA March-May, NGV June-August.

Third Assumption. Australia is vanquished and occupied. The north is ceded to Japan, but the central and southern portions are allowed to remain independent.

In this case there are several possibilities:

The first is to leave the ethnic Germans where they are. Dr Kloss considered this to be totally unsuitable; the Germans must have their own territory.

The second is to send them all to Germany, or somewhere in the Europe soon to be part of the Third Reich. Dr Kloss had read the earlier report of the Nazi agent in the 1930s, and he found this possibility even more distasteful than the first. 'These Germans tainted by the Australian way of life would not fit well into the Third Reich. They are alienated from the German nation, and reincorporating them would meet with great obstacles.'

But there was another solution ... 'There is,' wrote Dr Kloss, 'a large island off the southern coast of Australia. It is called Tasmania' ...

With the idea that has come to him, his prose swells with the implications of his grand scheme: 'In Tasmania we would find for the Australian-Germans a living space ... [*Lebensraum*, one of Hitler's favourite slogans] ... which would safeguard them from cultural infiltration by the Anglo-Saxons, finally and for all time.'

Dr Kloss' plan was simplicity itself. 'All previous inhabitants of Tasmania will be evacuated from the island and resettled on the mainland, and the island will be occupied by ethnic Australian-Germans. As the number of resettled ethnic Germans will amount to only one third of the 250,000 displaced Tasmanians, there will be ample room for them to expand for coming generations.'

Thus the Axis Powers, united in war but presenting grave problems of race in the event of victory, would not come into conflict in Australia, thanks to the island called Tasmania.

Anyone who has lived in the Barossa or other German-Australian areas will relish the scenario of some Gauleiter trying to persuade Wolfgang and Bertha Waldhuter, with their children, grandparents and great-grandparents, to leave their beloved farm, founded by an ancestor about a hundred years ago, its vines and house and garden, geese and pigs, cattle and sheep, even if offered 2000 acres in Tasmania in exchange for their 500.

Dr Kloss, of course, never took seriously the implications of his predecessor the spy's report, that these people had put down

sturdy roots, and that he was dealing with German-Australians, not Australian-Germans. And, unlike the German-Australian community, he had no sense of humour.

But the unthinkable happened. Germany and Japan lost the war. Hobart never did have a Hitlerstrasse or Göringplatz.

—Geoffrey Dutton

And another shrimp bites the barbie

LIKE THE FIENDISH criminal schemes of Sherlock Holmes' sinister nemesis, Professor Moriarty, contemporary crime fiction spreads its tentacles everywhere. No longer are readers satisfied with the country-house whodunnits of Agatha Christie or the rod-packing gumshoes of Dashiell Hammett. These days, no region is too remote, no profession too arcane to escape the attention of the mystery writer.

In Peter Hoeg's *Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow*, the best-selling 'literary thriller' of a couple of years back, the female protagonist was a half-Eskimo, half-Danish unemployed glaciologist. The machinations in Manuel Vasquez Montalban's *Murder in the Central Committee* were set in the upper reaches of the Spanish Communist Party and the dirty deed was unmasked by a Catalan gourmet. Not even the heartland of the genre has escaped this tendency. James Lee Burke's cop-hero, Dave Robicheaux, is an alcoholic Cajun whose base of operations is a bait shop on Lake Achafalaya in the bayous of south Louisiana.

Australia, never short of exotic settings or intriguing characters, can reasonably claim to have been an early contributor to this development. In his recent thematic history of antipodean pulp, *Continent of Mystery*, Steven Knight points out that the first locally written novel—Henry Savery's *Quintus Servinton*—centres on the adventures of an anti-hero con-man, and that the first Australian-born novelist, John Lang, was a major producer of crime fiction.

Beginning with the convict saga, Knight tracks the emergence of the squatter thriller and the goldfields mystery before turning his attention to the between-wars detective, the criminal romp, the thriller romance and the acclimatisation of the California private eye. Amid the contemporary world of detecting dykes and indigenous investigators, he even manages to find a sleuthing bureaucrat.

He's mine, that last one. Murray Whelan is his name and Melbourne is his beat. It would be more precise, I think, to describe him as an apparatchik than a public servant, but it's fair cop.

Like my thriller-penning forebears of Van Dieman's Land and Moonlight Flat, I set out to write crime fiction with little more motive than to inject a bit of good-natured criminality into the mainstream of Australian letters. To attempt anything more serious, I suspected, would be to invite having the critical shit kicked out of me by the custodians of the sacred precincts of Australian literature. Furthermore, by locating my story close to home, I could peg my research costs to the price of a street directory and a monthly tram ticket.

But since it also seemed to me that a private eye would be inherently redundant in a place like Melbourne—where nobody is more than two phone calls removed from anyone else—I needed to find a more plausible profession for my hero.

Like the conventional shamus, he would need a job that combined nobility of purpose with duplicity of execution. He should inhabit a moral nether-world where nothing is as it seems, where betrayal lurks everywhere, where criminality and respectability cohabit in uneasy truce and the currency of the realm is insinuation, justification and the half-truth. He should, somehow, embody this ambivalence. I decided, therefore, to make him a functionary of the Australian Labor Party.

'On these mean committees,' as Raymond Chandler might have put it, 'sits a man who is not himself mean'. A man who is neither tarnished nor afraid. A bloke who knows how to count the numbers and when to tap the mat. Not the most eccentric of heroes, I admit, no embittered homicide dick or ice-cool hit-man, but a character I might at least vicariously inhabit for the purpose of spinning a yarn.

Three novels later, Murray Whelan has a life of his own. And I find myself a fully-fledged Australian crime novelist, surveyed by the likes of Professor Knight. But sooner or later, the emus come home to roost. Get yourself a name in the crime-writer game and, eventually, the big boys want a word with you. And in this racket, the big boys talk with American accents.

We'd like to publish your stuff, they said. Right here in New York City. Hard cover, the full mozoola. First, however, we were wondering if it might be possible to make a few slight vocabulary adjustments. What, for instance, is an 'arvo'?

Runs on the board? A piece of piss? An op-shop? Shooting through? A furphy? Laminex? Taking the mickey? A glass of shampoo? Does windscreen mean windshield? Is a lift an elevator? Dettol and sandshoes and the All Ordinaries? Duco?

Fair crack of the whip, I bristled. I'm a fair dinkum Australian crime writer. Do youse Yanks dead set reckon that I'm gunna compromise the integrity of my native language just for the sake of potentially humongous sales in the US of A? Do youse Shermans really reckon I'd trade my birthright for a mess of Granola?

Not at all, they replied. We'd just like to suggest a few minor vocabulary clarifications where the American reader might be momentarily confused by false cognates or unfamiliar diction.

Fair enough, I said. Will the cheque be in US or Australian dollars?

So Murray Whelan of the Coburg West branch of the ALP will soon stride the mean streets of Manhattan. And him an unreconstructed Whitlamite.

Just try translating that.

—Shane Maloney

Dead certainties

MR HOWARD, when commenting on the Wik business and the debates about land title, is reported to have said that he wants to replace uncertainty with certainty. Implicit in such a statement is the assumption that uncertainty is to be avoided and that certainty is to be desired.

This assumption about the virtue of certainty, however, is open to criticism.

'Certainty' belongs to the 18th and 19th centuries and its origins lie in the breakdown of the medieval worldview, the scepticism of the Renaissance, and the rise of experimental science.

Nicholas of Cusa, for example, argued in the fifteenth century that absolute truth is beyond our grasp, since 'men determine the uncertain by reference to some objects as certain'. Erasmus, a few decades later, celebrated the futility of the intellectual quest for certainty: 'Human affairs are so obscure and various that nothing can be clearly known.' The classic sceptical text, however, is Montaigne's *Apology for Raimond Sebond*, published in 1580. In his *Natural Theology* of 1436, Sebond had argued that the Book of Nature was absolutely knowable with complete certitude. Despite the title of his work, Montaigne in fact offers not a scrap of

apology for Sebond, instead arguing strenuously that our senses delude us and that we can know nothing at all.

But the sceptics lost ground to the rising tide of modern science. Focus shifted from the 'subject'—the one who knows—to a new conception of 'object', the independent reality described by the combination of mathematics and experiment. In Galileo's *Dialogue concerning the two chief world systems of 1632*, it is declared that, in the mathematical sciences, human knowledge 'equals the Divine in objective certainty'. Descartes similarly writes that 'in our search for the direct road towards truth we should busy ourselves with no object about which we cannot attain a certitude equal to that of the demonstrations of Arithmetic and Geometry'. Again, Isaac Newton regarded his work as having 'much certainty' and 'not an hypothesis but most rigid consequences ... and without any suspicion of doubt'. And so uncertainty was replaced by certainty.

The most notorious claim of the Newtonians was uttered by Pierre Simon de Laplace in his *Essay on Probabilities*: 'Given for one instant an intelligence which could comprehend all the forces by which nature is animated and the respective situations of the beings who compose it—an intelligence sufficiently vast to submit these data to analysis—it would embrace in the same foundation the movements of the greatest bodies of the universe and those of the lightest atom; for it, *nothing would be uncertain* and the future, as the past, would be present to its eyes.'

Thus Laplace did away with the need for a God, and the Enlightenment blossomed and progress had its way with us, and aspects of life about which we could not be certain were relegated to the decorative margins of art or theology. Love and faith, for example, or soul and spirit, were separated from the enterprise of science. They could not be calibrated, after all, and thus they fell out of the realm of the important.

But then, in 1927, the quantum physicist Werner Heisenberg discovered his so-called 'uncertainty principle', which constituted a total rebuff to Laplace's ambition to give a complete and certain account of nature. Not only that, but the subsequent tests of Heisenberg's indeterminacy relations have vindicated those who would take a much more subtle view of reality. Quantum mechanics implies that space-time and causal descriptions can no longer be applied unconditionally to the fine structure of nature, and so exposed the limitations of Newton's materialism.

Mr Howard shows himself in his rhetoric to be a Newtonian, a man of the Enlightenment. The assumption that one title must exclude another reveals a peculiarly materialistic approach to reality, for it is only material objects that exclude each other from the simultaneous occupation of space and time. Instead of certainty, however, we need clarity. We need the vision to see that land is not merely a scrap of matter. If the people involved in the dispute over title can talk about their histories together, then perhaps fears will be replaced by affections, spirits will meet spirits, and boundaries can be transformed.

To do that, of course, we will need greater support for the process of reconciliation. But that is another story.

—John Honner

Articulate images

IN CANBERRA you can stand at the entrance of the National Gallery and stare straight across Lake Burley Griffin to the uncompromising scrub of Mt Ainslie. Australia relentless.

But this month you'll get a flicker of interference from a gigantic banner proclaiming another view entirely: Thomas Cole's autumnal landscape, *The Mountain Pass called the Notch*, painted 1839. America heroic.

The Cole banner is paired with a blown-up detail of *Mount William from Mt Dryden, Victoria*, as Eugene von Guérard, Viennese son of a court painter, pictured it in 1857.

Von Guérard came to Victoria for gold. Thomas Cole was forced to leave his native Lancashire for America in 1818 when his father's textile business failed to feed the family. Both painters discovered more than they bargained for in their new worlds, and their paintings helped shape the different ways in which later immigrants would see the two great continents. But I didn't believe I'd ever see Cole and von Guérard side by side, flapping like giant flags over the Molonglo. I should have known better.

In 1990 I had caught an Amtrak express up the east coast of the United States, to interview Patrick McCaughey in Hartford, Connecticut. McCaughey, after a term as Director of the National Gallery of Victoria, had gone to the oldest Art Museum in the United States, the Wadsworth Atheneum. The Wadsworth is an astonishing place—a triumphal march of an American munificence. One wing commemorates the late J. Pierpont



Nobel rot

Morgan in crimson and gilt to make Scarlett O'Hara blush. New Englanders take their money and the Cause of American Art seriously, and McCaughey, ever the savvy enthusiast, did too.

He beguiled away my day with the best guided tour of a grand collection anyone could have. Like Robert Hughes, he is an Australian with a voracious eye and a tongue to keep pace with his observations—a master at drawing connections, deploying scholarship like a strobe.

But what really set him running was what he called 'the great theme'—the nineteenth century 'discovery of the land'. He found it in the Wadsworth's extensive holding of heroic landscapes: 'the best telling of the Hudson River school' in America. But he found it even more pointedly in Australian landscape painting. This wasn't antipodean nostalgia. He listed the evidence. And then he told me about his ambitions for a tandem travelling exhibition. In 1993. 'Why not, say, Fifty American Pictures, Fifty Australian Pictures, From Glover to Streeton, From Cole to Edward Hopper.' Why not indeed. But he was getting only what he called 'dusty answers' back. Nice idea, but a 'sort of teaching show'. Not blockbuster material.

Well, finally, it has happened. From March you have been able to walk through the weird white light of the forecourt of the new wing of the National Gallery of Australia and straight into the enquiring or projecting mind of the nineteenth century. *New Worlds from Old, 19th Century Australian and American Landscapes* is five years later than planned, but there are 123 pictures there to tell 'this great story', as McCaughey put it that day.

Yes, it is a teaching exhibition (what exhibition is not?) but how better to learn about difference or about related experiences of possession and dispossession at a time when we seem so lost for sufficient words.

—Morag Fraser

New Worlds from Old, 19th Century Australia and American Landscapes will be fully reviewed by Tim Bonyhady in the May issue.

This month's contributors: When not in his Tiger Moth, **Geoffrey Dutton** is a writer; we note that **Shane Maloney's** aptly named new novel, *Nice Try*, is published this month by Text and *The Brush-Off* will be published in the US by Arcade in May; **John Honner** is, among other things, the originator of the name *Eureka Street*; **Morag Fraser** is editor of *Eureka Street*.

LAST MONTH Archimedes looked in on his first academic conference in England—without leaving home. It was an Internet conference on the Public Understanding of Science, a subject which has become such a commonplace topic of discussion in the UK that it is now generally referred to by its unfortunate acronym, PUS.

The conference ran for two weeks, covering topics ranging from why people do not love mathematicians to how Muslims view science. Participants were urged to reply and comment, and the conference then devolved into a multiplicity of discussions and points of view.

One of the common threads running through the conference was the complaint that public misunderstanding of science stemmed at least in part from scientists' lack of understanding of the public. Scientists rarely take the time and trouble to communicate with the public or the media, it was said. One Spanish contributor even argued that the subject for the conference should have been SUP rather than PUS.

One manifestation of the failure of scientists to take the public seriously is their common assumption that knowledge should all flow one way, from scientist to non-scientist. But until there is some form of dialogue, non-scientists will feel disenfranchised, with little stake in the enterprise of science.

Many scientists seem threatened when challenged by non-scientists (and are particularly galled that it is the non-scientists who ultimately hold the purse strings). To Archimedes, this shows a fundamental misunderstanding of the scientific process, which is unfinished, unsettled, argumentative and essentially human. Science is a means of accumulating knowledge by applying the scientific method—observing, forming an explanation for the patterns you detect, making predictions on the basis of your explanation, and then checking to see if you are right. In the end, you are left with an explanation that works, not necessarily one that is true or correct. When your explanation fails to work, you throw it out or refine it.

The public does not understand this very well either. It means that in a strict sense, there is no absolute certainty in science, but that does not mean you cannot depend on what science says. Sharon Beder from the University of Wollongong, argues in her statement to the PUS conference, that this very lack of public understanding of the scientific process allows clever corporate PR people to manipulate public opinion. It allows them, for instance, to portray global warming as little more than 'a theory' upon which scientists cannot agree. As if that were not the way science works. In fact, 'the theory' of global warming is backed by as overwhelming and eminent a grouping of scientists as you could hope to gather on any topic in any field.

One place where you can glimpse science-minded people at work in a very human way is on the ABC's *Science Matters* list on the Internet. There, the subscribers are putting forward opinions and evidence, challenging each other (sometimes abusively), and in the process learning from each other. In the mêlée of fact and opinion, red herrings and clarification, interesting discussions and sources of knowledge emerge.

One thing you learn is just how human a process science is. Scientists are as ignorant about things outside their field as anyone else. Recently on the list, two classic urban myths emerged, and both were discussed at length before being laid to rest by people who were authoritative enough to do so. One was the idea that daddy-long-legs spiders are really very poisonous, but lack the capacity to inject their venom. Not true, but it took a spider expert to silence a chorus of those who believed.

The other myth was a good example of the scientific method at work, where one counter-fact can put paid to a vast edifice of hypothesis. Under discussion was the vexed question of why there is no Nobel Prize for mathematics. This topic unearthed a rich vein of salacious gossip about Alfred Nobel's wife. Apparently, according to good (urban myth) authority, she had had an affair, run off, whatever, with a mathematician. Not surprisingly, so the story went, this made Nobel unwilling to put any money towards maths. But all the speculation apparently overlooked the fact that Nobel never married. ■

Tim Thwaites is a freelance scientific writer.

Free market flotsam

Jon Greenaway looks at the predicament of Thai, Malaysian and Burmese migrant workers caught in the wake of the Asian economic crisis.

SHAHID SITS ACROSS the desk from me, composed and self-contained as he explains his predicament in soft tones. With his youthful face and neatly pressed shirt and slacks, his appearance doesn't seem to meet with his experiences as a migrant worker in Malaysia. Once or twice his eyes register something like pain, but the look is gone before you can understand it or even feel it, and before it can undermine the impression that Malaysia has made him a very tough man.

He tells that he left his last job out of fear of his employer who beat him and his fellow workers repeatedly. He went quickly

when his boss flew into an uncontrollable rage after a mistake by one of the workers and threatened that the next person to make a mistake would be beaten to death.

'What can I do,' Shahid says, palms raised in resignation, 'I'm not Malaysian—I can't say or do anything.'

The details of Shahid's story are repeated many times over amongst the one million Bangladeshis who are living and working in Malaysia. When he came to Kuala Lumpur two years ago with the help of a labour recruiting agent he was first employed illegally in an engineering workshop. However when the government launched a

drive to register illegal workers in 1996, he was sacked by his employer. The cost of paying for his official status and the demands of being responsible for Shahid made him a less attractive prospect.

'When I started my next job my new employer promised that after one year of working I could go anywhere if they offered to pay me more. But that didn't happen.'

After he left, Shahid told his employer he would return to pick up his pay and his passport. Employers across Asia keep the travel documents of their foreign workers, whether it is illegal or not to do so, as a means of control. Often they pay the expenses of the employee that have been incurred with government registration and/or labour agents. The result is that migrants receive a paltry allowance initially as most of their income goes towards clearing their debts. Shahid's employer, however, refused to give over his passport and his pay.

'The day after, I got help from some people who tried to get them for me, but he wouldn't give them. Ten days later my permit expired and I became illegal.'

HE WENT TO THE Bangladesh High Commission for assistance but even if they were willing to help him before all the others who have descended on their doorstep since the economic crisis began, there is little they could do—in Malaysia it is a condition of migrant labourers' work permits that they work only for the employer with whom they are registered. Shahid was in breach of his visa for leaving his job.

This was last August and for seven months now he has been living with the help of friends and waiting for some solution to present itself before he is picked up by police and put in a detention centre because



Lining up, Setenyih Camp. Water for 2000 people is piped in for one hour only, morning and night.

Blowing the whistle on abuse

IN THE MAGISTRATES BUILDING in Kuala Lumpur a nondescript court room—save for the roar of traffic doing its best to drown out proceedings—has witnessed a piece of Malaysian legal history. It has hosted the trial of human rights worker Irene Fernandez which, at over 100 hearing days, is the longest ever.

'They're really prolonging [the trial] to stop my activities,' Fernandez says, 'that's quite clear. They're doing it so that I spend half of my life in court and therefore I won't be able to do as much as I want to.'

Some compare the case of Irene Fernandez to that of J.B. Jeyaretnam and Tang Liang Hong, the Singapore Workers' Party representatives sued for defamation by Lee Kuan Yew and Goh Chok Tong. Using litigation to silence critics is not a new tactic and Australia has the odd exponent of this none-too-subtle art. However, the circumstances of the Fernandez case prompt the very questions about Malaysia's justice system and democratic principles that Dr Mahathir cannot abide.

She was charged in early 1996 under the *Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984* for publishing misinformation. This was for a report she authored for her organisation, Tenaganita, in August 1995. Based only on the testimony of former detainees, the report detailed inadequate and cramped conditions, insufficient rations, poor sanitation, and mistreatment and lashings by guards. The US State Department's 1996 report on Malaysia noted the trial of Irene Fernandez and confirmed that some 50 illegal aliens died in such detention centres in the year she published her report. She also alleged widespread corruption and graft amongst the camp guards.

The government's case has made much of the fact that the report is based on testimony alone and that Irene Fernandez herself never visited the camps. The difficulty for her was that until she published her report, observers were not allowed to visit. Yet she claims that when these prearranged visits were made, the conditions would dramatically improve—walls would be whitewashed, better food cooked and water supplied through the day instead of just the few cups distributed at lunch.

Her claims are independently supported by former detainees of the centre referred to widely in her report, Semenyih camp. They attest to insufficient rations, brutality on behalf of the guards, irregular water supply and the dramatic yet very temporary improvement to the camp on the days

international observers visited. They also confirmed that labour agents would turn up at the camp and pay the guards anywhere up to 1,200 ringitt for the fit and the strong, another key detail of the report.

International attention is what Malaysia does not wish to have in this matter. According to Fernandez, it was the references made to the report by foreign journalists and human rights organisations that precipitated her being charged. 'I never thought the government would react in the way it did,' she says. 'I thought they would just deny it or have their own internal investigation.'

Fernandez and her counsel have been critical also of the hearing of the trial in a magistrate's court. Their petition to have the case moved to a higher court was denied. The magistrate herself is only in her late twenties and when she began hearing the case two years ago was fresh out of law school. In Malaysia, government prosecutors and magistrates move back and forth in the same department without a clear division between the two. In effect, the quite senior counsel prosecuting this case is her superior.

ON THE DAY I VISITED THE TRIAL, the government's key witness was being cross-examined by the defence. A Bangladeshi who worked as a labour broker, he provided Irene Fernandez with information on the camps. He was taken into custody around the time Fernandez was charged and was released 54 days afterwards, withdrawing his support for the claims made in the report.

With a fixed half-grimace/half-grin he answered questions from defence counsel, often stating 'I can't remember'. His answers were closely heeded by observers in the court. However just prior to the court's adjournment for the day he was asked if he was subjected to any torture while in custody. 'Some uneducated policemen misbehaved', was his long-considered reply.

The next day he informed the court that he would not be able to take the witness stand, as the night before his apartment was broken into by four men who identified themselves as policeman. He claimed they harassed him, locked him in his bathroom and ransacked the apartment.

The trial continues.

—Jon Greenaway

he is unable to pay what is in effect a bribe. The economic downturn has made it difficult to find the protection of employment, particularly as there is a reduced demand for people with skills.

Shahid stops talking for a moment and points to another Bangladeshi worker who is in the same office looking for help. 'This man's employer hit him with a machete.' The man holds up his bandaged hand and averts his eyes, looking down at his worn out sandals. His transgression was to ask his boss for some money for celebrations following the end of Ramadan. He hadn't

been paid for some four or five months.

We also talk about detention and what it might be like to be in one of the centres for illegals who cannot pay for their transgression. 'I don't want to find out, it's bad enough on this side,' Shahid observed with a wry grin. His answer seemed like the stuff of Australian myth—the ironic shrug, the understatement that recognises the seriousness of it all.

Migrant labour in Asia is very serious business. The conservative guess based on government figures put the number of foreign workers in East and South East Asia

at 3.5 million but unofficial estimates suggest that illegal migrants put it closer to 7 million. The trafficking of workers, traditionally associated with prostitution but in fact intrinsic to all form of work overseas in Asia, has permitted the growth in the number of illegal workers. Through clever avoidance of authorities, or through buying their complicity, brokers are able to get workers across borders and through checkpoints they wouldn't be able to negotiate by themselves. Worldwide, the International Organisation for Migration estimates that four million people are

trafficked each year, paying US\$7 billion for the privilege.

In the past the Middle East attracted Asian workers but in the boom years, more and more started to work in their own region. The case of Thailand, which exports *and* imports migrant labour, illustrates this trend. In 1988, according to Thai labour statistics, 66,000 Thais were working abroad in Asia compared with 201,500 in the Middle East. In 1994, 379,500 were registered as working abroad in Asia whereas the figure for the Middle East had declined to 49,700.

Of the countries in South East Asia that are recipients of migrant labour, Malaysia and Thailand prompt the greatest concerns about the well-being of migrant workers. Malaysia is possibly the largest importer of foreign labour in East Asia: illegal and registered migrant workers together augment the local working population of 8 million by some 2 million. Thailand has around one million foreign workers, 75 per cent of whom are Burmese. And unlike South Korea (also affected by the downturn, and a large importer of foreign labour) Thailand and Malaysia have been hit at a sensitive stage in their development, before their

economies became as complex as South Korea's.

The economic problems have come at a difficult time for the migrants themselves. Foreign workers have established themselves as a significant phenomenon in the region but before national and international procedures have recognised their presence. According to those who work with migrants, with the economic squeeze it will not only be low income earners who feel the pinch but these itinerants as well.

ANTHONY ROGERS, a de la Salle Brother, works out of the National Office for Human Development in Kuala Lumpur, one of the few organisations that help migrant workers in Malaysia. In the last fifteen years, he has seen huge numbers arrive to feed a heated economy.

As activity turned towards manufacturing and industry, locals were attracted to Kuala Lumpur and other industrial centres and foreign workers were needed to build homes and work tables on the cheap. But with the slow-down there is the question of what will happen to the maids, waiters, construction and plantation workers.

'There has been an open-door policy to support this industrialisation,' Br Rogers says, 'and this has been allowed via the forces of the market.'

Rogers' concern is that the disintegration of the boom sectors that have fed the employment of Bangladeshis, Indonesians and Filipinos will also be according to market principles—in their more brutal shape.

One initiative to offer some form of protection for foreign workers is the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, adopted by the UN general assembly. Yet despite support from donor countries for migrant workers such as Mexico and the Philippines, only nine countries have ratified the convention, well short of the 40 needed to bring it into force. This lack of interest internationally is perhaps a reflection of a disregard within most countries' borders. Cheap, expendable labour with no strings attached—that is how the migrant workforce is viewed.

Most employers look after their foreign workers, pay and conditions notwithstanding, as they are a hard-working and dependable source of labour. But when

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mistreated, foreign workers have virtually no recourse to action. The Office for Human Development works to inform migrant workers of what rights they do have and represent their interests in disagreements with employers and agents. This pursuit has seen them begin proceedings in one of the first cases in Malaysia of a migrant worker suing an employer for breach of contract.

Raising awareness of rights and employers' responsibilities amongst foreign workers is made difficult for Rogers by an overwhelming sense of helplessness—like that articulated by Shahid—that has to be overcome. The conduct of employers who withhold their employees' pay, along with their passports and permits, and that of complicit authorities who shake down foreigners for money when they are caught without their documents, reinforces the weakness of their position.

Anthony Rogers believes that it is possible for workers to have some control over their circumstances. He illustrates his point by reference to an incident at the building site for the new international airport in Kuala Lumpur. Ninety per cent of the workers are migrants; in February immigration officials came through and arrested those without proper documentation. The next day workers downed tools. Following this, assurances were made that the incident would not be repeated—the airport is needed for staging the Commonwealth Games later this year. 'Mahathir got scared,' he says with a grin.

BEING INVOLVED in this sort of work in a country where opposition politicians are not allowed on television is not easy—one tends to get in the way. Some years ago Br Rogers spent two years in prison for his work. He was not charged or convicted, merely held under suspicion of being a threat to national security.

Irene Fernandez, another human rights worker in Malaysia, has also raised the ire of the government. Her organisation, Tenaganita, stumbled on information about inadequate conditions in immigration detention camps while researching women's health issues. She is now on trial for publishing false information (see p19).

Fernandez confirms reports of a crackdown on migrant workers in response to the economic slow-down, particularly the undocumented workers who for so long have been popular with less scrupulous employers because they do not have to pay the government any of the

levies required for a registered worker.

'The construction sector has been badly hit,' Fernandez says, 'there have been quite a few lay-offs but very little reporting of them.'

'But at the same time the construction sector employers are uncertain as to how long this will last ... so quite a number of them are not willing to let go of their workers. So they are putting them on three-day-week, two-day-week kind of jobs just to keep them there.'

According to Fernandez, the situation will become worse for workers—particularly in the harder-hit sectors of the economy like construction—when permits for foreign workers come up for renewal in August. Employers will not be willing to pay the A\$800, nor would the workers be earning enough to afford it. The likely result is that more will become illegal and therefore out of reach of any legal recourse.

Across Asia, migrants are becoming convenient scapegoats for governments as they try to find ready-made solutions for their out-of-work people. (Thailand already has two million unemployed and that number is projected to double by the end of the year.)

Malaysia has made it illegal for foreign workers to man petrol pumps. As a result, many Bangladeshis are losing their jobs. It is also now illegal to hire a domestic maid from the Philippines if you are earning less than A\$4000 a month. This move is not so much for the benefit of locals but for Indonesians whom the government seems to favour amongst the groups of migrant workers, because of their religious and cultural similarities with Malays. It is also pragmatic as there are unknown numbers of Indonesians willing to come across the border to escape an economy even more depressed than Malaysia's. At the same time the Government is touting a crackdown on traffickers.

Thailand, like Malaysia, has vowed to rescind legal work permits for many foreign workers in July when they are due to be renewed *en masse*. But the Thai response to the question of migrant workers differs in that they are less interested in structural and procedural change and more concerned with wholesale deportations.

In the middle of January the Labour minister announced that 300,000 illegal foreign workers would be expelled by the middle of April to create jobs for Thais. To achieve this the groups to be targeted had to be the Laotians, Cambodians and especially the Burmese—workers from countries that share a border with Thailand and therefore

easily deported. And there was evidence that immigration officials were moving to put this into action. Soon after this announcement the number of bus trips from the central processing detention centre in Bangkok to borders tripled in frequency. Yet it has become clear that the Government has little chance of achieving this ambitious target.

Figures for the number of illegals deported in December and January show that only some 20,000 were sent back. Admittedly the campaign was announced in the middle of January, but this does suggest that, far from being a well-considered program of action, the push to return migrant workers was a decision made in haste.

THIS SEEMED to be confirmed in the middle of February when I visited the immigration detention centre at Kachanaburi, the town famous for the death railway bridge where John Howard will be spending Anzac Day. Two weeks before I visited, it was announced that one of three new clearing houses would be built in Kachanaburi province, to facilitate the return of illegal aliens. The immigration police at the centre knew nothing of this plan.

When you add that Burmese are being repatriated from Kachanaburi, still being driven to the border and dropped off to walk the last two miles through the hills to Burma—two miles heavily populated with labour agents willing and able to take them back from whence they came—it is not surprising that many still return.

An international human rights worker looking for a Burmese person in Chiang Mai province, located in the North of Thailand, was told quite plainly that if he was recently deported he'd be back soon if he wasn't taken by the Burmese military to work as a porter. Many Burmese workers are not willing to return to villages that were burnt down or relocated, or to areas that are under the heavy hand of the Burmese military.

As Fr Dan Boyd, the chairman of Thailand's National Catholic Commission on Migration, points out, Burmese who have been forced to leave their country are not all in the camps on the border, for complex and historical reasons, but in factories or brothels.

'The issue that I think the Government also has to address is this: of these 300,000 people, how many would be classified as persons of concern by UNHCR; how many of them are de facto refugees for political reasons and not economic migrants?'

The repressive conditions inside Burma, combined with the fact that some industries would collapse without migrant labour, make it difficult to avoid the conclusion that even if the Government were conducting an effective and co-ordinated campaign to remove foreign workers from Thailand, new arrivals would take their place. Moreover, even though the downturn has caused some to lose their jobs, if they wish to leave, the cost of getting past the authorities and finding transport to the border is A\$160.

The importance of migrant labour to Thailand was confirmed in February when the fishing industry, staffed almost entirely by Burmese and using around a third of all Burmese workers in Thailand, was granted an exception.

THE CONCEPT that if those people went back to Burma there would be Thais rushing aboard those ships to fill these jobs really stretches belief,' Boyd says. The conditions for workers are cramped for the month they are out at sea, and they are often controlled and manipulated by ships' captains supplying cheap heroin. Dan Boyd describes this occupation as possibly the worst job migrants could perform. AIDS is rampant amongst the 250,000 or so Burmese in the industry, contracted mainly through the use of shared needles.

The futility of trying to shuffle migrants across Thailand's border was recognised by the National Security Council, the authority predominantly concerned with the matter. In a meeting with an international NGO interested in providing help, they said there was little need. It was unlikely, they said, that Thais would be interested in making fish sauce, and the campaign was an appeal to the fears of Thais thrown out of work.

While Thailand and Malaysia provide the main cause of concern about the well-being of migrant workers, current economic difficulties will affect people doing semi-skilled and unskilled jobs in foreign countries Asia-wide. The exact nature of the fallout is not easy to predict.

Graziano Bellatista, editor of *Asian Migrant News*, published out of the Philippines, speculates that if policies of expulsion—articulated in South Korea and Singapore as well—are carried through, the

number of displaced workers in Asia could go as high as 2.5 million. And he suggests that the weak economies in Asia will work to push people overseas. 'In sending countries, increasing unemployment will swell the reserve of workers available for a job abroad,' he estimates.

'The very attractive exchange rate will constitute an additional incentive to migrate, and less affected economies, such as Japan, Taiwan and Singapore, will become the target for additional migration pressure.'

He concedes also that repatriation will not be an easy task, 'and the possibility of many migrants remaining in an irregular condition is not far-fetched.'

It has been suggested by media reports that migrants will be booted out of their host countries by the thousands, but because many come from countries also hit by the economic crisis and because sectors

unwilling to be seen winking at the presence of a migrant work force when their own working class is struggling to exist.

If this is so, the numbers of migrant workers open to exploitation will increase. It is a phenomenon that is beginning to present itself in Bangkok. Aung Win Shwe is a Karen Burmese living in Bangkok. He runs an organisation that helps Karen men and women in need.

He remarks upon a climate of fear that has descended since the beginning of the year. 'It was not like this in the past.

'When we were harassed for authorities before, it was just for money, now it seems there is something more behind it.' Win Shwe has had to move his 'office' from one bedsit to another more frequently to escape the attention of authorities, making it difficult to keep in contact with other Karen.

In late January, Karen in Bangkok gathered for a New Year's celebration that came a month too late. It was thought to be imprudent to meet at an obvious time. That would have made the 'illegals', and even those with proper documentation, easy targets for police who know the movements of Burmese groups in Bangkok through the use of informants.

Young men and women arrived looking dressed up like modern Thai youth, sporting baggy trousers and imitation gold jewellery, many with baseball caps obscuring their Burman features. Changing into traditional Karen tunics seemed a very significant act.

I spoke with one young Karen possessed of a broad smile and halting English.

He told me that, two days before, he had been picked up by police; money was demanded when they found that his passport was out of date. Normally the cost of avoiding imprisonment is between A\$25-40. On this occasion he had to pay A\$100.

I asked him if that was his month's wage. 'A little bit more', was his reply. He continued to smile as he asked if I would like some tea. ■

Jon Greenaway is *Eureka Street's* South East Asia correspondent.

Migrant labour in Asia is very serious business. The conservative guess based on government figures put the number of foreign workers in East and South East Asia at 3.5 million but unofficial estimates suggest that illegal migrants put it closer to 7 million.

employing them in large numbers depend on their presence, there is a strong possibility that migrant workers will stay where they are. Perhaps they will shift from the hardest-hit sectors, such as construction, but there will be demand for migrant workers to work in sub-standard conditions, with low and irregular pay as a means of cutting costs and getting the most out of the work force. Instead of their being the first to go, as was suspected when the currency problems first hit, they could well be the last. Their illegal status will be perpetuated by governments

Old dogs, new tricks

*A change of leadership in Vietnam has prompted frank calls for political change from respected senior revolutionaries. They warn the Communist Party that it must democratise or risk collapse. The extraordinary thing, writes **Peter Mares**, is that, so far, this dissent has been tolerated. But for how long?*

IN DECEMBER, retired Lt Gen. Tran Do sent a 13-page letter to Vietnam's top leaders warning them that if the Communist Party does not reform, then it may well fall apart.

'Our economic reforms cry out for an accompanying and vigorous political reform programme,' he wrote. 'By concentrating all power in the hands of leading party organs, we are making the party regress and degenerate ... possibly leading to social explosions.'

'If we do not find our way out of this social morass, we will irrevocably collapse ... instability will grow and the party will be obliged to repress [the unrest], which will bring about its disintegration.'

'Under such circumstances there is a need for frank and constructive exchanges, in the press, among social organisations and at the very core of the party.'

'The solution vital to solve these problems is democratisation.'

Now 74, Tran Do joined the communist party in 1940 and rose to become an influential member of its powerful Central Committee, serving as the head of the Commission for Culture, Literature and the Arts. He is regarded as one of Hanoi's leading intellectuals and enjoys the respect afforded to veteran revolutionaries. This is not the first time he has spoken out.

During the late 1980s, Tran Do urged the party to heed calls for political reform. But as Vietnam reeled in shock at the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe, the tide turned and in August 1989 Tran Do was removed from his party post.

Tran Do is not alone in his renewed appeal for change. Another former Central Committee member, Hoang Huu Nhan, has written a similar letter arguing that 'if the party continues to build its monopoly on leadership through dictatorial power, it is hard for the country to move forward.'

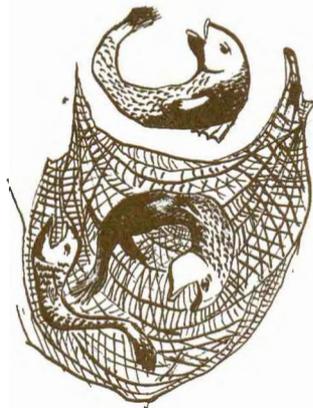
Respected mathematician, Dr Phan Dinh Dieu, has added his voice, giving a daring speech to the

National Fatherland Front, an umbrella linking mass organisations loyal to the Communist Party.

Dr Dieu pointed to the contradiction between 'the demands to develop a market economy and democratise society and the maintenance of monopolistic leadership by the Communist Party'. He warned that crucial decisions were being made by a coterie of people without 'the talent or dynamism to serve the interests of the country' and called for freedom of expression, opinion, press and association.

Phan Dinh Dieu has never joined the party, but he did serve as one of the few non-communist delegates to Vietnam's National Assembly in the 1980s. He was dropped for being too outspoken, after just one term.

This burst of fresh appeals for change coincides with the Communist Party's long drawn-out transfer of power to a younger generation of leaders. At a Central Committee meeting in December, 80-year-old revolutionary veteran, Do Muoi, retired from his position as party chief to make way for 66-year-old General Le Kha Phieu, a military commissar whose party career has been built on ensuring political rectitude within the armed forces. General Phieu's career highlights include several years in Cambodia, where he rose to be deputy commander of Vietnam's 'volunteer army' in the mid 1980s. He has had very limited exposure to the non-communist world and is little known either within or outside Vietnam. If he is true to his background, then General Phieu will support the maintenance of a repressive and pervasive security apparatus which does not tolerate dissent or public protest. He will respond cautiously to pressures to further liberalise the economy.



Critics like Do and Dieu risk being caught up in a process that the Vietnamese call 'shaking the net to catch the fish'. In this scenario, the party leadership and its security apparatus will show a degree of tolerance in the hope that other supporters of the reformist call will be emboldened to reveal themselves. The resulting crackdown, when it comes, will be all the more efficient.

General Phieu's doctrinaire views are balanced by those of new Prime Minister Phan Van Khai, 63, an enthusiastic champion of market-style economic reforms. Khai took over from his mentor, outgoing Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet, 74, in September. At the December Central Committee meeting the younger man also inherited Kiet's number three position in the party Politburo. The third member of the leadership triumvirate is the new President Tran Duc Luong, 60, who replaced 76-year-old General Le Duc Anh as head of state (and as number two in the Politburo). Luong is also seen as a supporter of economic reforms, though without the same zeal as Khai.

The latest appeals for political change are designed to take advantage of a grace period for the input of critical ideas and suggestions as the new leaders settle into their jobs and set the course for the future.

Foreign observers of Vietnam like Australia's Ambassador to Hanoi, Susan Boyd, are encouraged that there has been no attempt to silence the critics: 'The government has said publicly that such criticism within the party is normal, and is healthy and is to be encouraged and we are led to believe that no reprisals will be taken against those people,' she says.

Ambassador Boyd points to the contrast with the past, when dissenters found themselves subjected to various forms of intimidation, including house arrest and jail.

'We believe that there is a greater openness here, that there is a recognition that discussion is useful and that the party itself must grapple with the challenges to its authority and the challenges facing Vietnam if it is going to retain power and to persist.'

It is to be hoped that Ms Boyd's optimistic view of developments will prove correct. But critics like Do and Dieu risk being caught up in a process that the Vietnamese call 'shaking the net to catch the fish'. In this scenario, the party leadership and its security apparatus will show a degree of tolerance in the hope that other supporters of the reformist call will be emboldened to reveal themselves.

The resulting crackdown, when it comes, will be all the more efficient.

THE RENEWED APPEALS for political liberalisation also coincide with a period of introspection and analysis for the Communist Party, following widespread rural unrest in a northern province near Hanoi.

For several months during 1997, a series of violent protests by farmers shook the party to its core. The protests erupted in an area considered to be part of the party's traditional heartland, the province of Thai Binh in the Red River Delta, the most densely populated region in the country. The protests were directed at particular instances of abuse of power and corruption at district and provincial levels and were not, as such, a call for political change in Vietnam. Nevertheless, the waves of unrest posed a fundamental challenge to the legitimacy of the Communist Party because they were sparked by the very kinds of injustice that gave birth to Vietnamese communism and which the revolutionary movement had promised to sweep away.

Representative Lai's villa is located in the very centre of the village of An Dao. But his villa and the village of An Dao are two completely separate worlds. The villa covers a spacious area [and is] completely surrounded by four walls about three metres high. ... Representative Lai is frightfully rich. Other people's money, rice, paddies, and dwellings can slip into his possession with a wave of his hand.

This is an extract from the novel *Impasse* (*Buoc Duong Cung*) published in 1938 by Nguyen Cong Hoan, and banned soon after by the French authorities. Hoan was a leading exponent of the 'literary realist' school—a generation of politically engaged writers who documented the injustices inflicted on the Vietnamese peasantry by the colonial administration. In *Impasse* Hoan describes how farmers struggle to pay exorbitant French taxes only to see their money squandered by local Vietnamese officials who are lazy, brutal and corrupt. The story is set in Thai Binh where grievances over unfair taxes were at the heart of peasant rebellions against the French and their local collaborators.

AUSTRALIAN BOOK REVIEW

in April:

Dorothy Hewett reviews
Mandy Sayer's *Dreamtime Alice*

Bernard Smith on the Pacific

Robert Manne on the Boyer Lectures

Nigel Krauth reviews Bernard Cohen's *Snowdome*

Liam Davison reviews
Thomas Shapcott's *Theatre of Darkness*

Mackenzie Wark on John Frow's
Time and Commodity Culture

Cassandra Pybus reviews the Antipodean essay collection
Seams of Light, edited by Morag Fraser

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In 1997, the farmers of Thai Binh echoed the complaints of their forebears. Farmers were forced to pay up to thirty different taxes but received nothing in return. They were infuriated to see district officials constructing elaborate private homes while promised local roads—for which they had contributed a considerable portion of their precious rice harvest—remained unbuilt. When peaceful demonstrations and petitions failed to elicit any response from local officials, the farmers' anger finally boiled over into violent protests. In one village some twenty policemen sent in to quell the demonstrations ended up being taken hostage by farmers wielding sticks.

Thai Binh is Tran Do's home province, and he made extensive reference to the unrest there in his 13-page letter to the party leadership.

'These same peasants who formed the backbone of the party,' he wrote, 'are today turning their back on it to defend themselves, something I never could have imagined.'

Recent months also saw outbreaks of unrest coloured by religious sentiment in southern Vietnam as authorities sought to move Catholic residents to make way for a new road project. The issue of land ownership and land clearance has explosive potential throughout the country and such protests are a sharp reminder that Vietnam's veneer of political stability is brittle.

The year ahead promises to be even more difficult. The new leadership must grapple with a drought which threatens to reduce spring harvests in the nation's two key rice-growing regions, the northern Red River and southern Mekong Deltas. It will also be confronted with the fallout from Asia's financial crisis.

V
IETNAM ENJOYED SOME SHELTER from the immediate impact of its neighbours' economic problems, because it has no stock exchange and a non-convertible currency. But it is not immune and the most severe consequences will be long-term. Battered investors from elsewhere in Asia—especially South Korea—may scale down their operations or pull out of projects in Vietnam altogether, while the competitiveness of Vietnam's exports has been undercut by the massive devaluation of currencies like the Indonesian rupiah and the Thai baht.

Perhaps most importantly, some 70 per cent of Vietnam's exports go to other Asian countries, so a slow-down in key export markets like Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong, China and Taiwan will act as a brake on growth. In the longer term, the Asian crisis poses fundamental questions for Vietnam's development path. Economic planners had assumed that increasingly affluent countries elsewhere in South East Asia would steadily abandon labour-intensive export industries, vacating the field for eager new entrants like Vietnam. Now Vietnam will be competing head to head with richer neighbours who

are hungry for investment in low-wage manufacturing in order to get millions back to work.

The growth rate in Vietnam may fall as low as 5 per cent in the year ahead. While this looks impressive in the context of regional collapse, in a nation of 78 million people, where 60 per cent are under thirty years old and close to 80 per cent depend on agriculture for an income, it is not enough to stand still.

Income distribution and perceptions of who benefits from growth are even more important. The rhetoric of ten years of economic reform, known as *doi moi* or 'renovation', and the experience of rapid growth have led to an explosion in expectations and a growing gulf between rich and poor.

All of which adds up to huge challenges for the Communist Party, which has been all but immobilised for the past two years by its own leadership debate. The issue focused attention inward and away from affairs of state and even though it has now been resolved, the party is still hobbled by the need for compromise between its different factions. The party's dogged determination to project an outward image of harmony precludes it from engaging in the kind of 'frank and constructive exchanges' that Tran Do has called for. Without such debate, there is little hope that the party can resolve its key ideological differences or adopt a revitalised reform agenda.

Since being appointed as the General Secretary of the Communist Party, General Le Kha Phieu appears to have dropped some of the ideological rhetoric that helped win him the backing of hard-liners in the party. Ultimately Vietnam's most powerful political figure will be judged by what he does in the job, rather than by how he got there. In public statements reminiscent of China's Deng Xiaoping, General Phieu is now adopting a pragmatic tone:

Socialism is a new force that arose from the evolutionary process for survival and development of humankind. Continual renovation is an essential rule of socialism. All peoples in the world want to be rich and powerful, and try to learn ways to get rich. We are no different.

General Phieu should be aware that the people of Vietnam will measure him by this yardstick. The generation who fought the French and basked in the reflected glory of Ho Chi Minh's nationalism have now retired. Vietnam's new leaders can no longer rely on their revolutionary records as a source of legitimacy and they will be judged by their performance in making people rich. If it is only a privileged few who prosper, then the stage is set for confrontation. ■

Peter Mares is a broadcaster with Radio Australia and the ABC's former Hanoi correspondent.

Recent months also saw outbreaks of unrest coloured by religious sentiment in southern Vietnam as authorities sought to move Catholic residents to make way for a new road project. The issue of land ownership and land clearance has explosive potential throughout the country and such protests are a sharp reminder that Vietnam's veneer of political stability is brittle.

The Santamaria legacy

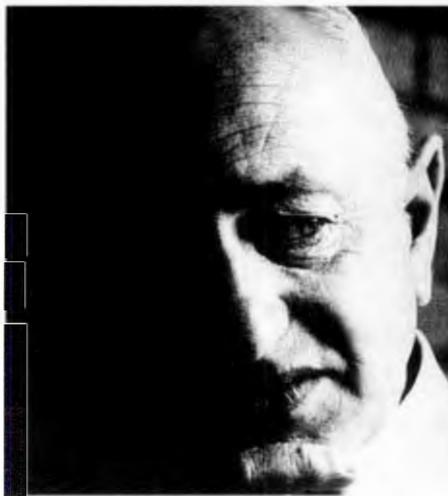
MELBOURNE'S ARCHBISHOP George Pell, in his panegyric on Bob Santamaria, spoke of his 'beautiful Christian death'. No-one who has followed B.A. Santamaria's career and adherence to the tridentine values and practices of the Catholic Church would have expected less.

In his younger days, 'doubt' was not a word in his vocabulary; later, he did tell interviewers he had experienced 'doubts', but he did not mean it in any agnostic sense. Rather it was now only 'probabilities' that favoured the prospect of resurrection and eternal life. There is, however, no evidence that these 'probabilities' were eruditely weighed. In fact, it would be difficult to think of a leading Catholic apologist less curious about intellectual developments or less enthusiastic about social and technological change. Rhetorical flamboyance, cogency and certitude were the marks of his self-presentation. He was a defender of the faith before he was a seeker after truth.

The tributes to Santamaria have been remarkable, particularly from commentators quite alienated not only from his religious and moral beliefs but from his socio-political opinions. In the newspapers there was almost a consensus that he had been a 'towering' public intellectual of nationwide influence. He was given a state funeral and accorded a status almost above politics— which he believed to be his rightful place.

While he could use the pronoun 'we' in describing feats of the Catholic Social Studies Movement within the Labor Party in the early '50s, and was later the ideologue of the Democratic Labor Party, it was a point of pride almost that he officially belonged to neither. He was contemptuous of politics.

In an article, 'The Christianisation of Australia' (quoted in G. Henderson, *50 Years of the Movement*, p50), he argued that '... the secularised society in which we live is one in which every major institution of modern life accepted as a normal accompaniment of "gracious living" is founded upon one or other of the seven deadly sins'. Aptly, his second name was Augustine. Had he 'gone into politics' himself, he said, 'I probably would have lost my soul' (Robert Moore, *Profiles of Power*, p118).



B.A. Santamaria (1915–1998)

In the end it was no mean feat to be accepted at his own valuation, not only by the Coalition but even by old Labor stalwarts like Clyde Cameron and Tom Uren. The ultimate irony was to be extolled, as his former schoolmate (ex-Senator/Judge) Jim McClelland noted, by a Prime Minister whose policies and performance he 'despised' (*The Australian*, 4 March 1998).

A family group photograph in the early pages of Santamaria's autobiography, *Against The Tide* (1981), yields insight into his upbringing and the ingrained self-confident conservatism it must have engendered. It was taken, I would think, in the mid-'30s, by which time his Sicilian father had become more than the fruiterer Bob always said he was, but rather a prospering licensed grocer. The eight individuals are conventionally, symmetrically posed, discrete, autonomous but bonded. The parents are Maria and Giuseppe—Mary and Joseph. The paterfamilias is bald, portly, proud, moustachioed, in wing collar and latched tie, authoritative but not repressive; the mother and daughter are comely and seraphic. The five boys are well-rigged in suits for Sunday Mass and scholarships, the youngest at centre between his parents looking cherished but not coddled. Behind his seated father, not usurping rank, is Bob, the first-born, deferential but anticipating succession. All in all, the epitome of that superb social artefact, the Italian family, of well-nourished decency, sensuous moral

constraint and future achievement for all. In drab *entre deux guerres* Brunswick, however, the Santamarias were 'dagoes'.

In *Against The Tide*, Santamaria admirably shrugged off his family's 'tormentors'. He knew that his mother's 'carefully hand-made spaghetti was probably more nutritious and certainly much more palatable than fish and chips, and mince'. His father's defence was hard work and probity. But Joseph did not neglect acculturation. A generation and a half before any Silvagni became an Aussie Rules hero (and two before Campese strode with the Wallabies), Joseph was taking his son, as early as 1922, to Prince's Park to see Carlton wallop or being walloped. They were not yearning for their *patria*. They were pious Catholics, but Joseph, in true Sicilian style, was not regularly at Sunday Mass until 1931. Bob in his last year of school, armed with Sheehan's *Apologetics*, his 'rational justification for my act of faith in Catholic Christianity', may well have made the difference.

The (Irish) Christian Brothers would have fortified a natural bent towards conformism and, probably, incuriosity. He was properly grateful to them for their zeal. There is nothing that I have seen which would indicate that he ever saw education in terms other than moral discipline, rote learning, combative apologetics and drills for successful public examinations, the apogee of scholarship. Heurism was not in his line nor in that of his great patron, Archbishop Mannix, whose tutelary preoccupation was the Penny Catechism.

IN 1931, Bob became dux and school captain at St Kevin's, which had been set up at Mannix's instigation as a central school to prepare gifted Catholic boys for university. This surely palliated ethnic insults and pointed towards leadership in the manifest destiny that young crusaders for Christ were asked to feel at that time. While 1931 was the slough of the Great Depression, it was also the year of a renewed call by the papacy in *Quadragesimo Anno* for reform of the socio-economic order. Young Catholics inspired by their religion's intellectual revival in England began to find a public voice in Australia through the

Campion Society, founded that year. Melbourne had an ecclesiastical leader of international stature, one who had, during Ireland's troubles, mocked the British navy itself at Penzance only a decade before. In fact, in the popular mind Archbishop Mannix was one of the four cleverest men in the world. Australia could be converted, become even a springboard for the Christianising of Asia. No wonder McClelland remembered how at St Kevin's young Santamaria walked 'on the tips of his toes, as though he were about to levitate'.

Not unnaturally for the time, Santamaria praised Mussolini to McClelland, not just for restoring order to Italy and running the railways on time, but no doubt because of the Lateran Treaty of 1929 which created the Vatican state. Mannix was to call Mussolini, as late as 1943, 'the greatest man living today'. Santamaria wrote his BA Honours thesis on Mussolini. The left wing historian, Russell (*The Australian Legend*) Ward spent a few days in 1937 at the University of Melbourne with the Adelaide debating team:

Santa struck me then, and still does, as the cleverest and most fanatical person I ever knew ... He preached eloquently and incessantly the virtues of Franco's falange, of the Spanish rebels and of Franco himself but he was very far from being obsessed with Spanish affairs. To back up these views he passionately expounded a whole theory of authoritarianism. Fascism in Germany, Italy and everywhere else was the best form of government, because the most viable in the modern world ... and all human history went to prove it. Art, science and learning, he argued, had always flourished most under royal, imperial or dictatorial rule; the more authoritarian the better. In this respect the France of Louis XIV, the Sun King, was the nonpareil of all time, though the absolute and continuing authority the Pope ought rightly to wield over all living creatures was even more important. The three guests from Adelaide agreed that Santa must have been the greatest debater living. (*A Radical Life*, p88)

Denys Jackson, one of the older Campions and an admirer of Charles Maurras and his *Action Française*, was particularly influential in this contempt for democracy. Jackson was to become an editor and chief writer of the archdiocesan *Tribune*, a leader writer and columnist ('Sulla') for its counterpart, the *Advocate*, foreign affairs commentator ('The Onlooker') for the *Catholic Hour*, pamphleteer for the

Australian Catholic Truth Society, a most prominent spokesman on church platforms and, in the 1940s, a columnist ('John C. Calhoun') for *News Weekly*. As the archbishop could be accounted a democrat, it was an anomalous position for one such man to occupy. Santamaria in time was to theorise that a democratic party system was bound to stagnate and needed to be galvanised by what Maritain called 'prophetic shock minorities'. In a two-party system this eventually had to apply to both parties and that had to mean ultimate convergence. As the Labor Party, supported by most Catholics at the time, became the focus of his attention, extending influence beyond it was not an issue. In the '60s, however, Santamaria did make approaches to Catholics in the Liberal Party to create 'cells'. But that was for the future.

ASIDE FROM his not always commendable polemics—his brashness was occasionally criticised—he participated as the third member of the University debating team (with Stan Ingwersen and Kevin Kelly) in the still famous Spanish Civil War debate in March 1937. A stacked auditorium responded to his exultant cry of 'Long Live Christ the King'.

Santamaria's most productive action, however, was to become the founding editor of the *Catholic Worker*. Here, as with other deeds, his own account requires modification. A monthly paper modelled on the New York *Catholic Worker* started by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin had been talked about by Campions but did not get beyond that stage until Santamaria, with characteristic energy and boldness, went with a friend in late 1935 to see Mannix to seek permission to start it. Mannix—who was well-informed through priests such as Frs Hackett and Murphy about the Campions and well pleased with this 'first flower and fruit', as he said, of Catholic secondary education—told Santamaria somewhat indulgently that he did not need archiepiscopal permission, although it is clear what would have happened if anything heterodox had appeared under a masthead with 'Catholic' on it. He declined to appoint a chaplain, but at another stage he did grant a censor to vet the paper for conformity to faith and morals.

Santamaria went ahead without consultation and presented the Campions in January 1936 with a near *fait accompli*. He had written almost a whole issue; it was completed; it was published on 1 February with élan. The final packaging took place

with libations courtesy of Joseph; the first copy was despatched to Pope Pius XI and another to Joseph Stalin. There was a feeling that the local apostolate might at least save Australia, perhaps more.

The first issue was headlined WE FIGHT; Capitalism and Communism were 'the illegitimate children of the same diseased materialism'; Capitalism at this stage was the worse evil (although Santamaria does not recall this); the Spanish Civil War had not begun.

Friction soon developed as Santamaria overrode the editorial board as to the paper's content. He was to have this problem with other organisations to which he belonged. In 1937, the board established a sub-committee to supervise content and check publication. Santamaria's participation diminished and in 1941 his association was severed altogether. The circulation had risen to 55,000 (not 70,000 as he claimed).

In *Against The Tide*, Santamaria remarks regretfully that he and his former colleagues 'became strangers' owing to his heavy work with ANSCA and the organisation of the Movement. What he glosses over are the reservations, about himself and his attitudes, held by former colleagues. They were highlighted by his inability—and that of Mannix and other bishops—to hold to the distinction between Catholic Action and action of Catholics which was bruited in ANSCA publications and, almost tediously, elsewhere. But more of that later.

During the war Santamaria was exempted from military service because, he maintained, of his role in the National Catholic Rural Movement, but just as plausibly because of Mannix's influence with Arthur Calwell and Labor's recognition, by 1942, that ANSCA and the Movement could help the fight against Communism in the unions. What is remarkable for such a vocal man is how little he was to say about World War II except when wanting to stress Australia's vulnerability at the foot of Asia. It is difficult to avoid suspicion that a combination of pro-Fascist and anti-USSR sentiments and an aversion to Roosevelt, which he shared with Jackson, determined this.

More indulgently, it can be said he was preoccupied with his ANSCA tasks of organising the National Catholic Rural Movement (NCRM) and drafting the Social Justice Statements issued by the bishops each year from 1941 until 1946.

Inspired by papal encyclicals and their philosophy of distributism, the NCRM

advocated farming in small communities as most efficacious for the moral life of man. Emphasis was placed on co-operatives, 'diversified' (ie, not just wheat) and semi-subsistence farming. Farmers would be more independent of markets and their fluctuations and free from commercial exploitation. Santamaria's high point of fantasy was reached in 1945 with his book *The Earth: Our Mother*. In it he juxtaposed his 'family farm' against the 'economic unit' proposed by the Rural Reconstruction Committee.

In fact, he had little idea of what an economic unit might be.

HIS JOURNAL, *Rural Life*, spoke of settling 'half a million a year, including migrants'. *News Weekly*, post-war, wanted 'a million migrants a year'. What, he asked, was the basis of hostility to his ideas? *Rural Life* had an easy answer in April 1952: 'More often than not it has a subconscious religious motive'.

Leaving aside the empirical criticism based on the post-World War I failures in soldier and closer settlement schemes involving British migrants as well as Australians, it would hardly have been surprising if sectarians had looked askance at NCRM. In his address to the NCRM's annual conference in 1951 Santamaria explicitly stated that 'the fundamental reason' behind it was 'religious'. With disarming audacity he insisted that 'our doctrine ... is today the doctrine of agricultural experts' (*Rural Life*, May 1951).

A premonition of the Labor split that was to come occurred in 1953 when the Victorian Minister for Lands, R.W. Holt, son of a Presbyterian minister, tore up in Parliament an amendment to a Bill which would have allowed Italian settlement on poor land in Gippsland. He maintained it was foisted on him by Santamaria. Later he was to say that Santamaria had implied he would lose his seat if he did not comply. Whatever the truth, Holt's action foreshadowed a wider apprehension of what the Catholic Church and that old perturbator, Mannix, might be up to (R. Murray, *The Split*, Chapter 8). After all, Santamaria was Director of ANSCA at the time, taking over in 1946 when the apolitical Maher was eased out.

As Gerard Henderson has pointed out, Santamaria has given five different dates for the initiation of the Catholic Social Studies Movement (henceforth, the Movement). The most plausible is 14 August 1941 or 1942, coinciding with his 26th or 27th birthday. He was approached by

Herbert Cremean (staunch Catholic, deputy leader of the State Parliamentary Labor Party), Vic Stout (Secretary of Melbourne Trades Hall Council) and Reg Broadby (Secretary, Australian Council of Trades Union), to mobilise Catholic unionists against Communists. Mannix approved and contributed £3,000.

Neither he nor Santamaria seem to have been concerned that such activity would compromise the precept in all handbooks that Catholic Action could not be involved in practical politics. (Maher was concerned but was by-passed.)

Communist infiltration of the unions had been advanced by the manifest failure of capitalism during the Depression, the heroising of the USSR as an ally during the war and the vigour of Communist union officials in representing their workers' interests. By the war's end Communists controlled key posts in mining, maritime, transport and metal workers' unions, among others.

Santamaria's response was to adopt, as he said, Communist tactics. (This, among other of his strategies, casts doubt on Archbishop Pell's peroration that Santamaria 'knew the attractive force of the principle that the end justifies the means. But he resisted this'.) Anyone wanting to know about Movement organisation should read the contribution of John Cotter, a former Movement/National Civic Council organiser, in *50 Years of the Santamaria Movement (Eureka Street Papers No. 1, 1992)*. In 1945, at the annual Bishops of Australia meeting, it was decided that while the Movement was not *mandated* Catholic Action, it was nevertheless to be controlled in policies and finance by an episcopal committee (consisting of Mannix, Gilroy and O'Collins). Santamaria was to be Liaison Officer, virtually in control; as Henderson says, 'a lay bishop'. When in 1946 he became Director of ANSCA, the situation was even more anomalous.

Particularly reprehensible was action of Movement officials who put it about that the Movement *was* in effect mandated, that it reflected 'the mind of the Archbishop' and that it was sinful to dissent from it. Santamaria has to bear his share of the blame for the McCarthyite hysteria that prevailed. It was 'a quarter to ... ten minutes to ... five minutes to midnight', said the preachers. Catholic girls should have a spare case packed to escape what happened in Spain. This lurid nonsense was preached in a country where only one Communist was ever elected in the seven parliaments (and

he was personally a special case and it was in North Queensland), no army or police officer was known to be red, and the bureaucrats, with few exceptions, were clean. Even a Labor government was prepared to put union officials in jail in 1949. And in the background were those same rednecks who, after World War I and while Jack Lang was ranting, were prepared to protect their property with 'secret armies'.

This is not to deride the formation of the Industrial Groups by the Labor Party in 1946 or the mobilisation of Catholic workers to support them. In the unions, the Communists had to be confronted and defeated. (They were as naïve about their capacities as the Movement turned out to be.) This was achieved by the early '50s. But Santamaria's ambitions did not end there. As the original constitution of the Movement stated, he aimed 'to permeate the whole of society' with 'the positive ideals of Christian social teaching'. This sounds reasonable, but Australia was a plural society with sectarian traditions and, in practical terms, permeation involved partisan and bitter faction fighting even against fellow Catholics. How a movement with a sanctioned status was to avoid bringing the church into a confessional conflict was baffling. Santamaria in 1985 tried, with chagrin, to rationalise his past naïveté by comparing the Movement to just another faction within the ALP (*Annals Australia*, April 1985). Was he really so instinctively devious that he could not see that the Movement was an outside body with a constitution not subject to approval by the ALP, with a leader and members who did not belong to the organisation they sought to manipulate?

THIS WAS WHERE the erratic Dr Evatt had a case against Santamaria in 1954, albeit that he was being hypocritical in having had no scruples in using Santamaria's services in the past. Santamaria liked to think that Evatt's supporters were simply those who were 'soft on Communism' when they were more often just Masons and Methodists and a miscellany of ALP members (including Catholics) who, in various ways, felt their positions and opinions threatened by an intrusive sectarian sodality. Unfortunately no distinction was made between the Movement and the Industrial Groups.

Anyone not blinded by ideology or vanity should have foreseen that then was the time for compromise. Already, in early 1954, three of the most scholarly archbishops

(Simonds, O'Brien and Beovich) were concerned at how the Movement could embarrass the Church, while the advent of James Carroll as auxiliary bishop to Cardinal Gilroy brought Sydney archdiocese into closer contact with the ruling New South Wales Labor Party. Santamaria thought the Victorian Groupers had the numbers to withstand Evatt's assault. Midnight, however, galloped ahead to High Noon as, without scruple, anti-Grouper forces ambushed their Victorian opponents and expelled them from the party. In New South Wales the Groups were disbanded but most of their members lived to spare the ALP a complete disaster.

Mannix and Santamaria were obviously desolated when the Vatican, in 1957, finally ruled that Catholic Action bodies could not be involved in party politics. As the official documents were not published, they affected to believe that they had not been rebuffed, and publicised their version of the ruling accordingly. But Santamaria finally severed all connection with official Catholic Action and converted his Movement into the National Civic Council (NCC). 'Permeation' was officially over but, with the creation of the Democratic Labor Party (DLP) earlier in 1957, the NCC had a political front behind which to operate.

ALMOST IMMEDIATELY, conflict occurred over the direction the DLP should take. Was it to be a party aiming for office in its own right or one aiming to force the ALP to a reconciliation on anti-Communist terms? The NCC dominated by Santamaria opted for a 'nark' policy, a role successfully played in the elections of 1958 and 1961 when the DLP preferences assured Menzies of office. Former Labor MPs like S.M. Keon and W.M. Bourke, however, were vehemently critical of Santamaria's control. Senators McManus and Gair (DLP) were also to have difficulties with him. In 1982, serious divisions in the NCC led to a split and threats of litigation.

When in 1965 the ALP 'numbers man', Senator Kennelly, proposed exploratory talks towards a reconciliation with the DLP, it was Santamaria and the NCC secretary who parleyed, not the DLP politicians. Labor leader Calwell was a primary stumbling block, but it is difficult to see how a rapprochement could have been successful with the Vietnam war looming.

Anti-Communism remained the DLP's preoccupation even as the Australian Communist Party split into three parties

Point counterpoint

ON 9 FEBRUARY 1970 in *The Australian*, Santamaria caned Peter Hastings for a critique based on a newspaper report rather than on a reading of a full text. 'Intellectual integrity demands that ... the critic should have read the statement before attacking it ... the failure is inexcusable ... There is ... a moral duty to correct this error.'

Here is a (non-political) example of how he observed his own strictures.

In March 1978, Santamaria wrote to the *Melbourne Age* protesting against a 'disgraceful caricature' of his former teachers as depicted in Ron Blair's play, *The Christian Brothers*. Morally, he said, it constituted 'defamation' and was on a par with Frank Hardy's *Power Without Glory*. A theatre critic, Neil Jillett, had praised the actor, Peter Carroll as 'a marvel'. He, Santamaria, did not want 'to make any assessment of the dramatic value either of the play or the acting' (suggesting he had seen the play). He wanted 'simply to protest at the current fashion of turning a doubtfully honest penny by writing a book or a play about living persons, or existing organisations grossly distorting historical truth ...'

He praised the Brothers for their dedicated, selfless service to society 'before education had evolved from an honourable profession into a well-paid industry'. Blair had exhibited '... elementary imbecility', in writing that a Christian Brother taught 'adoration' of the Virgin Mary but 'since all publicity is said to be good publicity, I suppose that this letter will leave Mr Blair laughing all the way to the bank'.

Blair (5 March 1978) replied mildly that he was 'amazed' that Santamaria should jump to 'so many conclusions'. Carroll had been invited to perform the play 'in several Christian Brothers' Colleges'. In fact, even before the play opened in Sydney its director, John Bell, had invited a group of Brothers 'to check that every thing was accurate and also to gauge their reactions', said Carroll (8 March 1978). 'That performance', he continued, 'lasted about ten minutes longer than any performance since. They just fell about.' Blair alleged that it was clear Santamaria had not seen the play.

And so it turned out. On 10 March, Santamaria replied. He had 'in fact, read the text ... supplied to me by courtesy of Playbox Theatre' but he was careful not to admit that this was *after* his first letter. Without apologising to Blair or Carroll he became conciliatory almost to a fault: he agreed with Jillett that the play is 'a devastating portrait ... terrifying in its universal validity and hilarious in its details'. But, he said, 'the single point I raised remains' (emphasis JG). It was 'unfair', (not 'disgraceful' this time) to call the play *The Christian Brothers*; this put it in a category with *Power Without Glory* and the 'blasphemous' *Jesus Christ Superstar* which were subversive of Christianity. Nothing now about dishonesty, venality, 'imbecility', 'adolescence', calumny, etcetera. And no apology.

—James Griffin

and their membership wilted. Eventually the advent of Whitlam deprived the DLP of its *raison d'être* and it was wiped from Parliament in 1974. During its existence as a splinter party it virtually shelved social welfare policies and must share blame for the general stagnancy of Coalition rule in the '60s.

One alleged DLP achievement was the winning of State Aid for private schools. Certainly, with a supportive splinter party having the balance of power, the opportunity was there with an election coming up in 1963, but this could hardly be said to have been the outcome of some grand strategy. One may as well say that Menzies' concession was the result of Calwell's near victory in 1961, losing government by one seat.

Menzies had always favoured state

support for independent schools but knew, as an astute politician, that to overcome sectarian prejudice the time had to be propitious. Many non-Catholic private schools were beginning to find fees insufficient to fund the upgrading of equipment, notably in science and libraries. Catholic parents were beginning to show muscle in areas remote from DLP influence. Quite simply, State Aid was inevitable, as was evident when Whitlam changed ALP policy.

In spite of the Vatican ruling, the NCC continued to be indulged with the use of church facilities in some dioceses, especially in Victoria. Although in January 1957 the Australian bishops assured the Pope that 'the Church would never be allied to—or associated with—any political party, nor

would any approval or assistance be given to bodies that operate in the political field', in August 1969 the Institute of Social Order, for example, staged a conference for priests on a range of matters including 'the federal executive and conference of the ALP, the national congress of the ACTU and the coming federal election against the background of Australia's urgent questions of foreign policy and defence'. The speakers were Santamaria and his allies, James McAuley and J.P. Maynes (*Catholic Worker*, September 1969).

Bishop Lyons of Sale levied his clergy for contributions to the NCC and told them to keep it secret. Most extraordinary of all, in 1967 Santamaria wrote to certain bishops requesting them to donate to the NCC capital fund 10 per cent of their federal per capita grant to Catholic schools. The NCC, with about 50 full-time staff and no longer in receipt of \$12,000 per year from Mannix (who died in 1963), had some difficulties. On the recommendation of Sir Michael Chamberlain of the Knights of the Southern Cross, the Victorian dioceses would hire an NCC subsidiary, the Catholic Adult Education Association, as consultants—on a commission of ten per cent. (This is documented for the first time in a forthcoming publication, *Catholics and the Anti-Communism Movement*, by Fr Bruce Duncan CSSR.) Aside from the unethical proposal that public moneys be used in this way, the irresponsibility towards the Church is astonishing. One can imagine the glee with which say, the DOGS (Defence of Government Schools) personnel would have pursued the issue had they got wind of it.

FEW AREAS of Australia's foreign or domestic policy escaped Santamaria's public attention. His 'expertise' on our nearest neighbour, Papua New Guinea, for example, has been revealing.

When Gough Whitlam jolted everyone in New Year 1970 with his promise that, if he were elected in 1972, PNG would become independent by 1975, he caught the DLP without any policy in this area. Santamaria tried to fill the vacuum with a 'Point of View' (*News Weekly*, 28 January 1970) accusing Whitlam of being prepared to say anything to get political power even if it caused another Biafra. Actually, Whitlam had deliberately waited until after the October 1969 elections to keep the issue off the hustings.

By mid-1970 the Liberals were virtually accepting his lead. Taken to task by Peter

Hastings (*The Australian*, 4 February 1970), Santamaria then said he was not proposing that 'self-government' be delayed. He believed 'the opposite. We should be in advance of events ... The more important issue is not the date of the transfer of power but the nature of the political community to which we hand over'. Now who was going to decide such a thing? This was just verbiage.

In late 1996 he wrote in *The Australian* that Michael Somare had 'pleaded with Gough Whitlam' not to grant early independence to PNG. Exactly the opposite occurred, as a subsequent letter to the paper proved by quoting PNG's Hansard and Somare's autobiography. There was no retraction.

In his defence of the family, Santamaria conceded nothing to feminism. Ann Daniel, writing from personal experience, says that 'to speak about women and the Movement is to have a very small topic indeed'. They had a 'spectator/servile role' (*50 Years of the Movement*). When *Humanae Vitae* pronounced on contraception, Santamaria dashed into the fray with a pamphlet worthy of Sheehan's *Apologetics*, dismissing as unworthy of consideration the opinions of the majority on the Vatican Commission. As for there being any difference between an infallible and an 'authentic' papal prescription which might allow the exercise of conscience, no, in reality there was no difference for the individual Catholic.

He had no patience with those who thought the world was overpopulated; food production (*pace* Malthus) was keeping up; distribution was the problem. He seemed unaware of industrial pollution and wear and tear on resources or of issues about vulnerable species. He was opposed to racism, he said, but when attempts were made to do something about it (sanctions against South Africa, for example, there were usually arguments against that (it was hurting the blacks who were doing so much better than their own rulers further north, etcetera).

His egotism could be taxing, although in retrospect amusing. Henderson recounts how in 1954 the entire first two days of a conference at Belloc House were 'devoted to the delivery of four papers by B.A. Santamaria ... The papers covered the whole gamut of the Movement's work—political, industrial, economic and international'. When Fr Paddy Ryan of Sydney moved that in future no one person should give all key addresses, he was defeated 30 to four. In 1974 at an NCC conference Santamaria gave seven out of eight papers, the other being a homily on 'Hope'.

In his autobiography there are no photographs of his assistants or underlings, only Santamaria with Mannix or McAuley or Muggeridge or the Pope and, of course, his family.

But even when his acolytes revolted, they usually went quietly. Many were grateful to him for their experience in the Movement/NCC; not just the exhilarating activism but the informal education.

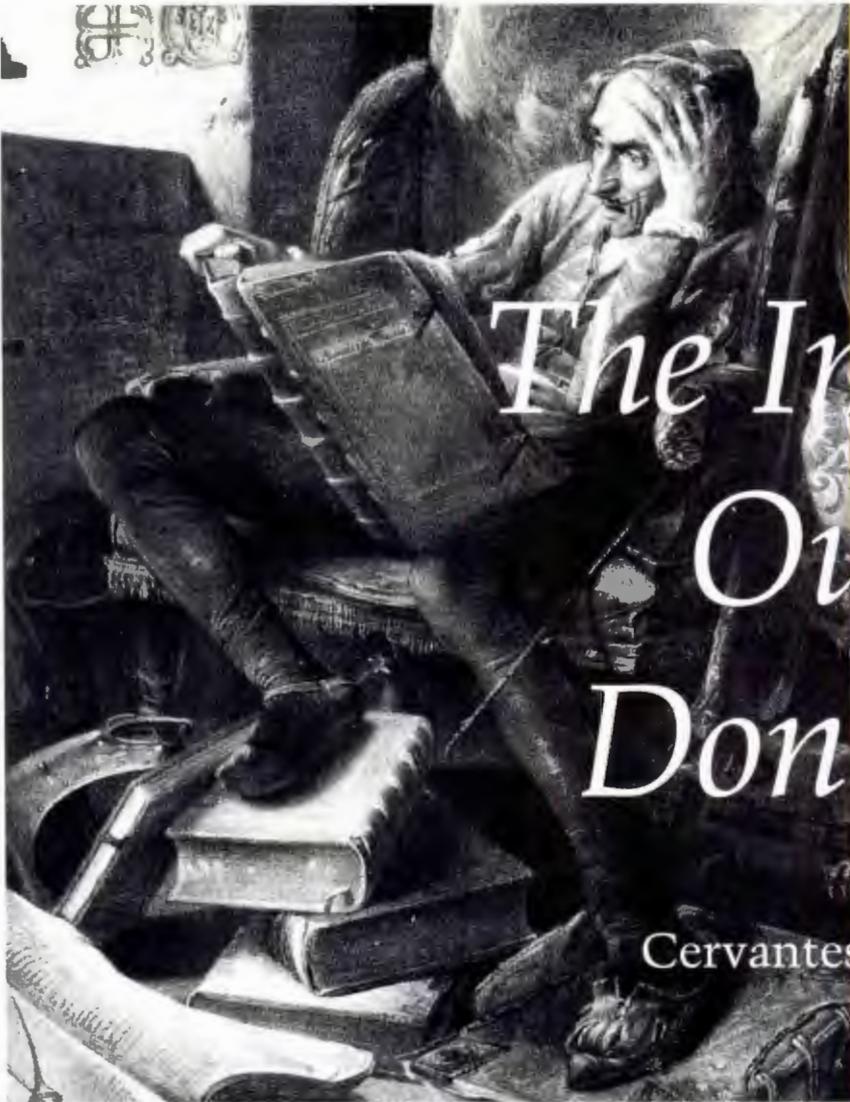
T. R. Luscombe, an erstwhile Movement leader, who ultimately concluded that Santamaria was 'guilty of a strange inability to fully read the Australian mind', has paid tribute to 'one of the most intensive, energetically conducted adult education courses yet devised in any Catholic country throughout the world'. From this emerged 'Catholics who were both articulate and realistically conscious of the potentialities of power pressure' (*Builders and Crusaders* pp187, 191).

THIS, together with his work within the Industrial Groups to oust Communists from union leadership, may count as his most positive contribution to Australian society. There is, however, a downside which an oral historian might take up before it is too late: what was the cost to families, marriages and mental health in fostering fanatical activism and crisis attitudes? Certainly there were costs in dividing the Catholic community and a sense of wasted effort.

Recently, H.C. 'Nugget' Coombs also was offered a state funeral. His autobiography, *Trial Balance* (1981), was published at much the same time as Santamaria's. Someone should have contrasted their achievements then. Although a Keynesian socialist, Coombs was twice reappointed to the Reserve Bank by Menzies; he served all prime ministers from Curtin to Whitlam. He left his mark on post-war reconstruction, banking, public administration, the Arts Council, the ANU, the environment, and selflessly devoted himself to Aboriginal welfare in the last decades of his life. He died at 91. Above all he was modest.

In the end Santamaria pronounced himself 'a failure' However, he was not the rueful type and he would not have meant 'failure' in the sense implied here. Rather it was Australia that had let *him* down. But, as he now said, Australia was only a 'backwater' anyhow—quite different from the country he dreamt he might 'permeate' in his salad days. ■

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ESSAY

PIERRE RYCKMANS

The Imitation of Our Lord Don Quixote

Cervantes and some of his modern
critics

IN DEBATES, the word 'quixotic' is nearly always meant as an insult—which puzzles me, as I can hardly think of a greater compliment. The way most people refer to *Don Quixote* makes you wonder if they have actually read the book.

In fact, it would be interesting to find out whether *Don Quixote* is still as widely read as the universal popularity of the character would normally suggest. But it could be awkward to conduct such an enquiry; specially among educated people, one often encounters a strange misconception that there are a certain number of books one *should* have read, and it would be shameful to acknowledge that one has failed in this sort of cultural obligation. Personally, I disagree with such an attitude; I confess I read only for sheer pleasure.

Of course, I am talking here about creative literature (fiction and poetry), not about the theoretical literature (information, documents) which scholars and professional people must master in order to perform competently within their respective disciplines. For instance, you would naturally expect that—let us say—a medical practitioner should have read some treatises of anatomy and pathology; but you cannot demand that he be also thoroughly conversant with the complete short stories of Chekhov. (Though, when you come to think of it, between two doctors whose medical qualifications are otherwise equal, I believe I would rather trust the one who reads Chekhov.)

Literary critics do fulfil a very important role (as I shall try to show in a moment), but there seems to be a problem with much contemporary criticism, and specially with a certain type of *academic* literary criticism. One has the feeling that these critics do not really like literature—they do not enjoy reading. Worse even, if they were actually to enjoy a book, they would suspect it to be frivolous. In their eyes, something that is amusing cannot be important or serious.

This attitude is unconsciously pervading our general view of literature. As a result, we tend to forget that a vast majority of literary masterpieces of the past were originally designed as popular entertainment. From Rabelais, Shakespeare, Molière in the classical age, down to the literary giants of the 19th century—Balzac, Dumas, Hugo, Dickens, Thackeray—the main concern of the great literary creators was not so much to win the approval of the sophisticated connoisseurs (which, after all, is still a relatively easy trick), as to touch the man in the street, to make him laugh, to make him cry—which is a much more difficult task.

The notion of 'literary classic' has a solemn ring about it. But *Don Quixote*, which is the classic *par excellence*, was written for a flatly practical purpose: to amuse the largest possible number of readers, in order to make a lot of money for the author (who needed it badly). Besides, Cervantes himself hardly fits the lofty image most people have in mind when they think of inspired writers who create immortal masterpieces: originally a soldier of fortune, he was wounded in action, and remained a cripple; captured by pirates, he was sold as a slave in North Africa; when, after long years of captivity, he was finally able to return to Spain, it was only to fall into dire poverty; he was sent to jail several times; his life was a harrowing struggle for survival. He repeatedly attempted—always without success—to earn money with his pen: theatrical plays, pastoral novels—most of these works have disappeared; the little that remains is not particularly impressive.

It was only at the very end of his career—he was already 58—with *Don Quixote* in 1605, that he finally hit the jackpot: the book was at once a runaway best-seller. And Cervantes died just one year after the publication of the second and final part of his book (1615).

Since *Don Quixote* was rightly hailed as one of the greatest works of fiction of any age, in any language, it is interesting to note that it was also a potboiler concocted by a hopeless old hack, at the very end of his tether.

Furthermore, when we consider what originally triggered Cervantes' imagination, our puzzlement increases: he had intended his entire book as a *machine de guerre* directed against a very peculiar target—the literature of chivalry and knight-errantry—a genre which had been in fashion for a while. This literary crusade now appears utterly irrelevant, but for Cervantes, it was an important cause that mobilised the best of his intellectual energy; in fact, the relentless pursuit of this rather idle quarrel provided the very backbone of his entire narrative. As we all know, the overall structure of *Don Quixote* is very simple: the basic premise of the story is set in the first few pages of chapter 1, and the

thousand pages that follow simply represent its successive applications to diverse situations—hundreds of variations on one same theme.

Is it necessary to recall here this premise? Don Quixote, who is a kind, wise and learned country gentleman with little money and much leisure (always a dangerous combination for an imaginative person) develops an extraordinary addiction to the literature of chivalry. In Cervantes' own immortal words:

This gentleman in the times when he had nothing to do—as was the case for most of the year—gave himself to the reading of books of knight-errantry, which he loved and enjoyed so much that he almost entirely forgot the care of his estate. So odd and foolish did he grow on this subject that he sold many acres of cornland to buy more of these books of chivalry... (In the end), he so buried himself in his books that he spent the nights reading from twilight till day break, and the days from dawn till dark; and so, from little sleep and much reading, his brain dried up and he lost his wits.

AS A CONSEQUENCE, he then decided to turn himself into a knight errant—and out he went into the vast world, in the hope of illustrating his name for all times with noble and valiant deeds. But the problem, of course, was that knights errant belonged to another age, long vanished. In the ruthless modern world, his obstinate quest for honour and glory was a grotesque anachronism. The conflict between his lofty vision and a trivial reality could only generate an endless series of preposterous mishaps: most of the time, he ended up as the victim of cruel and elaborate practical jokes. In the very end, however, he finally wakes up from his dream, and realises that, all along, what he had chased with such absurd heroism, was a ludicrous illusion. This discovery is his ultimate defeat. And he literally dies from a broken heart.

The death of Don Quixote in the last chapter is the climax of the entire book. I would challenge any reader, however tough and insensitive, to read these pages without shedding tears. And yet, even at that crucial juncture, Cervantes is still pursuing his old obsession, and once again, he finds the need to score a few more cheap points at the expense of some obscure books of chivalry. The intrusion of this futile polemic at that very moment is utterly anti-climactic—but then Cervantes



has a perverse habit of ruining his own best effects—a practice that has infuriated many readers and critics (I shall return to this a little later). What I wish to underline here is simply this: it is bizarre to observe how a literary masterpiece which was to exert such universal appeal—transcending all barriers of language, culture and time—could, from the start, have been entirely predicated upon such a narrow, tedious and pointless literary quarrel. In order fully to appreciate the oddity of this situation, one should try to transpose it into modern terms: it is as if, for instance, Patrick White (let us say) were to have devoted his greatest creative effort to the single-minded debunking of some trash fiction published in *Women's Weekly* or in *New Idea*.

But this, in turn, raises an interesting question. A few weeks ago, out of the blue, I innocently caught some critical flak: in a series of lectures broadcast last year on Radio National, I had developed (among a few other heresies) the notion (quite banal in fact) that creative literature, inasmuch as it is artistically valid, can carry no message. This view is not new, by the way, and should be self-evident. Hemingway, whom I quoted at the time, had expressed it best; to a journalist who was questioning him on 'the messages' of his novels, he very sensibly replied: 'There are no messages in my novels. When I want to send a message, I go to the Post Office.'

Some critics reacted with belated indignation to my statement: 'What?? No messages in the masterpieces of world literature? And what about Dante's *Divine Comedy*? What about Milton's *Paradise Lost*?' Even more to the point, they could have added, 'And what about Cervantes' *Don Quixote*?'

OF COURSE, many poets and novelists *think* that they have messages to communicate, and most of the time they passionately believe in the momentous significance of their messages. But quite frequently these messages were far less important than their authors had originally assumed. Sometimes they proved to be actually mistaken, or downright silly or even obnoxious. And often, after a while, they became simply irrelevant, whereas the works themselves, if they have genuine literary merit, acquire a life of their own, revealing their true, long-lasting meaning to later generations; but of this deeper meaning, the author himself was hardly aware. A majority of Dante's most fervent readers today care very little for medieval theology; and virtually none of *Don Quixote*'s modern admirers ever read—let alone heard the names of—most of the books of chivalry which Cervantes had attacked with such fierce passion.

Actually it is in this gap between the author's conscious intention (which may be merely incidental) and the deeper meaning of his work that the critic can find the only legitimate ground on which to exert his craft. Chesterton put it well (in one of the introductions he wrote to Dickens' novels):

The function of criticism (if it has a legitimate function at all—can only be one function, that of dealing with the subconscious part of the author's mind, which only the critic can express—and not with the conscious part of the author's mind which the author himself can express. Either criticism is no good at all (a very defensible position) or else criticism means saying about an author the very things that would have made him jump out of his boots.

The closer a book comes to being a genuine work of art, a true creation, fully alive with a life of its own, the less likely it is that the author had full control and a clear understanding of what he wrote. D.H. Lawrence, who was an exceptionally perceptive critic, summed this up in a statement which I have already quoted many times—but one should never tire of invoking it: 'Never trust the artist. Trust the tale. The proper function of a critic is to save the tale from the artist who created it.'

This urge 'to save the tale from the artist who created it' has proved particularly strong with the critics of *Don Quixote*. In fact, some of these critics have developed a most peculiar attitude: it is as if, the more they come to love *Don Quixote*, the more they come to resent Cervantes. At first, this paradox may seem far-fetched, but there is a logic in it.

Last century, when theatrical troupes went on tour in the country, performing romantic melodramas for unsophisticated village audiences, it often happened that the actor who had impersonated the villain of the play, had to be protected after the show, as the local toughs would be waiting for him in order to beat him up, in punishment for all the evil deeds he had just perpetrated so convincingly on stage. Similarly, it is because *Don Quixote* has become so intensely alive and



real for them, that some readers cannot forgive Cervantes for subjecting their hero to such a foul and savage treatment.

Or again, you can find another instance of this same phenomenon illustrated in a popular contemporary thriller: in Stephen King's *Misery* (I have not read the book; I only saw the film, which is quite terrifying, and horribly funny), a best-selling author is being held captive by a female fan; distressed and angered by the fictional death of her favourite heroine, this psychopathic reader tortures the hapless author and forces him to rewrite the ending of his novel.

Now, the four modern critics of Cervantes, whose views I wish briefly to survey here, rank among the best literary minds of our time, and therefore—needless to say—they should have very little in common with the psychotic freak in King's story, or with the country bumpkins who used to beat up stage villains at the backdoor of the theatre. And yet, as we shall see, both the sophistication of the former and the crude naïveté of the latter bear witness to the operative virtue of one same magic: *the reality of fiction*.

The first of the critics I shall consider is Nabokov.



NABOKOV GAVE SIX LECTURES ON *DON QUIXOTE* when he was a visiting lecturer at Harvard during the early fifties (the lectures were published posthumously: V. Nabokov, *Lectures on Don Quixote*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York 1983). When preparing his course, at first he relied upon the memory he had retained of the novel which he had enjoyed in his youth. Soon, however, he experienced the need to go back to the text—but this time, he was appalled by the crudeness and the savagery of Cervantes' narrative. In the words of Brian Boyd, his biographer, 'He detested the belly-laughs Cervantes wanted his readers to derive from his hero's discomfiture, and he repeatedly compared the vicious fun of the book with Christ's humiliation and crucifixion, with the Spanish Inquisition, with modern bullfighting.'

He enjoyed so much thundering against *Don Quixote* in front of a large student audience, that he eventually upset a number of colleagues within the Faculty, and he was solemnly warned: 'Harvard thinks otherwise.' When, some years later, he applied for a chair at Harvard, his candidacy was rejected, which was a bitter blow for him. Naturally, other factors probably more significant also intervened, but the *Don Quixote* lectures may well have played some part in this fiasco.

Nabokov always found particular enjoyment in challenging received opinions. On the subject of *Don Quixote*, his taste for the unconventional helped him to formulate at least one original and important observation: contrary to what most readers believe, the narrative of *Don Quixote* is not made of one monotonous series of disasters; after a careful check, episode by episode, Nabokov was able to demonstrate that the issue of each adventure was actually quite unpredictable, and he even compiled the score of Don Quixote's victories and defeats as games in a tennis match, which remained full of suspense till the very end: '6-3, 3-6, 6-4, 5-7. But the fifth set will never be played. Death cancels the match.'

His distaste for Cervantes' sadistic treatment of Don Quixote reached such a point that he eventually excluded the book from his regular program of lectures on Foreign Literature at Cornell: he could not bear to dwell on the subject any further. But the corollary of his virulent hostility towards the writer was a loving admiration for his creature, which he expressed in a moving tribute:

Don Quixote has ridden for three hundred and fifty years through the jungles and tundras of human thought—and he has gained in vitality and stature. We do not laugh at him any longer. His blazon is pity, his banner is beauty. He stands for everything that is gentle, forlorn, pure, unselfish and gallant.

The second critic I wish to evoke here is Henry de Montherlant. Montherlant, one of the most remarkable French novelists of our century (also an important playwright and essayist), was profoundly imbued with Spanish culture. He spent much time in Spain (actually he even learned and practised bullfighting); his fluent knowledge of Spanish enabled him to read *Don Quixote* in the original text.

He re-read the book four times during his life, and he too experienced an increasing irritation at Cervantes' coarse treatment of a sublime character. Besides, he felt that the book was much too long and that it contained too many tasteless and cruel jokes. But this objection could be turned against itself: is this not precisely a perfect definition of life itself? Come to think of it: *a story that drags on much too long, and which is full of tasteless and cruel jokes ...* Note that the worst

accusations that can be directed against Cervantes always point in the end to the unique and disquieting power of his book to conjure reality.

Finally, what irked Montherlant most—what he could not forgive Cervantes for—was that, through the entire book, not *once* does the author express *one* word of compassion for his hero, or *one* word of blame for the vulgar bullies who relentlessly mock and persecute him. This reaction—very similar to that of Nabokov—once again reflects a paradox, now familiar for us: what infuriates the critics of Cervantes is precisely what constitutes the main strength of his art: the secret of its compelling life-likeness. Flaubert (who, by the way, worshipped *Don Quixote*) said that a great writer should stand in his novel like God in his creation. He created everything, and yet is nowhere to be seen, nowhere to be heard. He is everywhere, and yet invisible, silent, seemingly absent and indifferent. We curse him for his silence and his indifference, which we take as evidence of his cruelty. But if the author were to intervene in his narrative—if, instead of letting facts and actions speak for themselves, he were to speak in his own voice, the spell would be broken at once, we would be suddenly reminded that this is not life, this is not reality—it is merely a tale. When we reproach Cervantes with his lack of compassion, his indifference, his cruelty, with the brutality of his jokes, we forget that, the more we hate the author, the more we believe in the reality of his world and his creatures.

This absolute reality of Don Quixote became an article of faith for the most powerful and the most original of all his modern commentators—my third critic, Miguel de Unamuno. Unamuno (1864–1936) was a multiform genius: scholar, philosopher, novelist, essayist, poet—Basque, Spaniard, European, universal humanist. He wrote a book, *The Life of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza*, in which he commented on the entire novel of Cervantes, chapter by chapter. His paraphrase of Cervantes is imaginative, paradoxical, profound—and also extremely funny. His main argument, which he sustained, tongue in cheek, over more than four hundred pages, is that Don Quixote should be urgently rescued from the clumsy hands of Cervantes. Don Quixote is our guide, he is inspired, he is sublime, he is true. As for Cervantes, he is a mere shadow: deprived of Don Quixote's support, he hardly exists; when reduced to his own meagre moral and intellectual resources, he proved unable to produce any significant work. How could he ever have appreciated the genius of his own hero? He looked at Don Quixote from the point of view of the world—he took the side of the enemy. Thus, the task which Unamuno assigned to himself was to set the record straight—to vindicate at last the validity of Don Quixote's vision, against the false wisdom of the clever wits, the vulgarity of the bullies, the narrow minds of the jesters—and against the dim understanding of Cervantes himself.

IN ORDER FULLY TO APPRECIATE UNAMUNO'S ESSAY, one must replace it within the context of his own spiritual life, which was passionate and tragic. Unamuno was a Catholic, for whom the problem of faith remained all his life *the* central issue: Not to believe was inconceivable—and to believe was impossible. This dramatic contradiction was well expressed in one of his poems:

... I suffer at your expense,
Non-existing God, for if You were to exist,
Me too, I would truly exist.

In other words: God does not exist, and the clearest evidence of this is that—as all of you can see—I do not exist either. Thus, with Unamuno, every statement of disbelief turns into a paradoxical profession of faith. In Unamuno's philosophy, faith ultimately creates the thing it contemplates—not as a subjective and fleeting auto-suggestion, but as an objective and everlasting reality that can be transmitted to others.

And finally it is Sancho Panza—all the Sancho Panzas of this world—who will vouch for this reality. The earthy Sancho, who followed Don Quixote for so long, with scepticism, with perplexity, with fear, also followed him with fidelity. *Sancho did not believe in what his Master believed, but he believed in his Master.* At first he was moved by greed, finally he was moved by love. And even through the worst tribulations he kept following him, because he had come *to like the idea*. When Don Quixote lay dying, sadly cured of his splendid illusion, ultimately divested of his dream, Sancho found that he had inherited his Master's faith; he had acquired it simply as one would catch a disease—through the contagion of fidelity and love.

Because he converted Sancho, Don Quixote will never die.



Thus, in the madness of Don Quixote, Unamuno reads a perfect illustration of the power and wisdom of faith. Don Quixote pursued immortal fame and a glory that would never fade. To this purpose, he chose to follow what would appear as the most absurd and impractical path: he followed the way of a knight errant in a world where chivalry had disappeared ages ago. Therefore clever wits all laughed at his folly. But in this long fight which pitted the lonely knight and his faithful squire against the world, finally which side was befogged in illusion? The world that mocked them was turned to dust, whereas Don Quixote and Sancho lived forever.

That Don Quixote proved ultimately to have been wise is a point which was persuasively developed by the last of my critics, Mark van Doren, in his essay *Don Quixote's Profession*. Van Doren (1894–1972) was a remarkable scholar, poet and critic, who taught literature at Columbia University for nearly forty years, and exerted a deep influence on a number of intellectuals, writers and poets—specially those who had enjoyed the privilege of being his students. (Most of his writings are now sadly out of print, but they deserve urgently to be rediscovered by all lovers of literature.

Van Doren aptly characterises *Don Quixote* as a book of 'mysterious simplicity':

The sign of its simplicity is that it can be summarised in a few sentences. The sign of its mysteriousness is that it can be talked about forever. It has indeed been talked about as no other story ever was. For a strange thing happens to its readers. They do not read the same book ... There were never so many theories about anything, one is tempted to say, as there are about Don Quixote. Yet it survives them all, as a masterpiece must do, if it would live.

THE ENTIRE ESSAY BEGINS with a paragraph which deserves to be quoted in full, for, in its luminous elegance, it affords a characteristic example of van Doren's style:

A gentleman of fifty, with nothing to do, once invented for himself an occupation. Those about him, in his household and his village, were of the opinion that no such desperate step was necessary. He had an estate, and he was fond of hunting; these, they said, were occupation enough, and he should be content with the uneventful routines it imposed. But the gentleman was not content. And when he set out in earnest to live an altogether different life, he was thought by everybody, first at home, and then abroad, to be either strange or mad. He went away three times, returning once of his own accord, but in the second and third cases, being brought back by persons of the village who had pursued him for this purpose. He returned each time in an exhausted state, for the occupation he embraced was strenuous; and soon after his third homecoming he took to bed, made his will, confessed his sins, admitted that the whole enterprise had been an error, and died.



The central argument in van Doren's essay is that (whatever Cervantes himself may have thought on the subject) *Don Quixote was not mad*. He became deluded only when he tried to assess the progress of his enterprise. And here, the hoaxes of which he fell the victim played a fatal role: they gave him a false assurance that his undertaking was really feasible, they confirmed his mistaken hope that he might eventually succeed. Thus these hoaxes artificially prolonged his career. Yet, at any time he could have abandoned his quest and returned home, had success not appeared to be within reach. Only the illusion which fed on the hoaxes gave him the courage to forge ahead. But he always remained free to decide whether to pursue or to desist. A real madman does not have such a choice: he is the prisoner of his madness; when it becomes unbearable he cannot drop out of it and simply go home to resume his previous way of life.

The occupation which Don Quixote chooses for himself is that of knight errant. He is not under the delusion that he *is* a knight errant—no, he sets his mind on *becoming* one. He does not play at being someone else, as children do in their games, he is not pretending like an impostor, or impersonating like an actor on stage. And he adopts the profession of knight after due reflection: it is the result of a deliberate choice. After having considered other options, he finally decided that the career of a knight errant would be the most rewarding, intellectually and morally.

But how does one become a knight? van Doren asks. By acting like a knight—which is the very opposite of pretence or make-believe. And to act the way Don Quixote does is more than to ape. To imitate as he does is a profound apprenticeship—the true way of learning and the key of understanding. 'What is the difference between acting like a great man, and being one? To act like a poet is to write poems; to act like a statesman is to ponder the nature of goodness and justice; to act like a student is to study; to act like a knight is to think and feel like one.'

Had Don Quixote been simply and plainly mad, or had he indulged in a protracted game of self-deception and play-acting, we should not be talking of him now—van Doren observes—‘We are talking of him because we suspect that, in the end, he *did become* a knight.’

‘Man is a creature who makes pictures of himself, and then comes to resemble the picture.’ Iris Murdoch made this observation in a different context, but it accurately identifies a defining feature of human nature. It was most memorably exemplified by Don Quixote—which gave Cervantes’ novel its universal relevance.

Unlike Don Quixote, however, most of us do not have the chance to select and decide for ourselves which characters we should apply ourselves to become. Circumstances of life do the casting; our roles are being imposed upon us, other people dictate us our lines and prompt our acting. A haunting illustration of this was provided in one of Rossellini’s last films, *General della Rovere* (1959): a petty crook in Italy, at the end of World War II is arrested by the Gestapo, and forced by them to impersonate a prestigious figure of the Resistance, General della Rovere, in order to extract information from political prisoners. But the con man performs his role so convincingly that the other prisoners come to worship him as their moral leader; thus he is progressively compelled to live above himself and to match the image created by their expectations. In the end, he refuses to betray their trust: he is put in front of a firing squad and dies the death of a hero. He has truly become General della Rovere.



As for us, life seldom offers such dramatic scripts. Usually the roles we have to play are more humble and banal—which does not mean that they are less heroic. We too have companions of captivity with extravagant expectations that can force us to enact parts well beyond our natural abilities. Our parents expect us to be sons or daughters, or children expect us to be fathers and mothers, our spouses expect us to be husbands and wives, and none of these roles are light or easy. They are fraught with risks and challenges, with trials, anguishes, humiliations, with victories and defeats.

To the basic interrogation of man—why is it that God never speaks to us openly, nor answers us directly with a clear voice? Why are we never allowed to see his face?—C.S. Lewis gave a striking answer: How can God meet us face to face, *till we have faces*?

WHEN WE FIRST ENTER UPON THE STAGE OF LIFE, it is as if we were only given masks that correspond to our respective roles. If we act our part well enough, the mask eventually turns into our true face. Thus Don Quixote becomes a knight, Rossellini’s petty crook becomes General della Rovere—and each of us, we can become at last who we were originally meant to be.

The famous American multi-billionaire Ted Turner made a remarkable statement some years ago. He said he disliked Christianity, as he felt that it was ‘a religion of losers’. How very true! What an accurate definition indeed!

The word *quixotic*—as I indicated at the very beginning—has entered the common language, in the meaning ‘hopelessly naïve and idealistic’, ‘ridiculously impractical’, ‘doomed to fail’. That this epithet can be used now in an exclusively pejorative sense shows not only that we have ceased to read Cervantes and to understand his character, but more fundamentally it reveals that our culture has drifted away from its spiritual roots.

Make no mistake: for all its earthiness, its cynical jests, its bawdy and scatological realism, Cervantes’ masterpiece is anchored in Christianity—more specifically, in Spanish Catholicism, with its strong mystical drive. In this very connection, Unamuno remarked that John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila and Ignatius of Loyola did not reject rationality, nor did they distrust scientific knowledge—what spurred their mysticism was simply the perception of ‘an intolerable disparity between the hugeness of their desire and the smallness of reality’.

In his quest for immortal fame, Don Quixote suffered repeated defeats. Because he obstinately refused to adjust ‘the hugeness of his desire’ to ‘the smallness of reality’, he was doomed to perpetual failure. Only a culture based upon ‘a religion of losers’ could produce such a hero.

What we should remember, however, is this (if I may thus paraphrase Bernard Shaw): The successful man adapts himself to the world. The loser persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore all progress depends on the loser. ■

Pierre Ryckmans is a sinologist and novelist. His most recent work is *The Analects of Confucius*. *Images of Don Quixote* by: Adolf Schröder, p31; Gustave Doré, pp32, 33, 35 & 37; Roland Wheelwright, p34; anon. p36.

An ideal father

Romulus, *My Father*, Raimond Gaita, Melbourne: Text, 1998. ISBN 0 875847 61 8, RRP \$19.95

IN THE BEGINNING was the word. Nowadays I don't believe that as strongly as I did at twenty. I still read the Bible but I think now that upstream from the word is something—a feeling, an impression, some *human presence*—that the word, like cupped hands, can only try to contain. And with my 'lines of logic' I've come to want rather more 'curves of emotion', in Wilde's picturesque phrase from *An Ideal Husband*.

Freud remarked how closely discursive thought resembles madness, wryly confessing that 'the delusions of paranoiacs have an unpalatable external similarity and internal kinship to the systems of our philosophers'. Paranoiacs know too much too well and in thought the urge to close every loophole, to make every connection and cover every contingency, is all too often under the defensive influence of the super-ego (to use a dated word) whose function is not to enlighten but first to madden and then to punish.

Gaita's book is a moving account of his father's commitment to words and of his struggle with a world of feelings that his words cannot get hold of. It's also an account of a loving and admiring son, already a moralist in his teens, who at university gives up psychology to become a moral philosopher.

Who's for Tennos?

Old themes return, we swear we'll give them up—
Death, 'trigger of the literary man's biggest gun';
Breath, its rhyme (it only has one other),
Cold comfort, when your days are down to nought,
Theft, half a rhyme and poems are half true—
Told of the fire stolen, liver eaten out,
Gold in a shower tumbling in a lap,
Weft of the sex-share, snaring everyone.
'Bring him back when he can ride a horse,
Write a sonnet', said the Prince. What to
Sing has never worried birds. Word on
Word the dossier's amassed and each
Bright future marks the slughorn's call,
Heard in the amniotic, echoed after.

Peter Porter

Even in his later, rather more contented, years Romulus is a demanding man. A grown-up son reneging on a visit had better work on a moral defence:

My father's profound regard for the spoken word was of a kind that sometimes made him literal-minded and tone-deaf to context. If you defended yourself against the accusation that you had broken your word, he became impatient, treating the defence as an expression of bad faith, a failure of character, a refusal to be true to the words you had spoken. If you said that you hoped to come, or you might come, that was fine. If you said that you would come, he would hold you to it under pain of lack of integrity, of a failure to have your character integrated by a commitment to your words. He seemed to believe that only a self in that way integrated had risen to the humanising potential of speech. I think that is why he ran together, so literally, the words one spoke and the giving of one's word.

The strain (we used to say 'strain', then 'stress' came in) implied in 'under the pain of' and in the repetition of 'integrity', 'integrated' and that awkward but redolent phrase, 'a self in that way integrated', is almost palpable.

Romulus Gaita was born in Romanian Yugoslavia in 1922 and thought of himself as Romanian. He married Christine Dorr in Germany in 1944, an educated, tiny and elegant woman, and Raimond was born in 1946. They came to Baringhup, Victoria via Bonegilla at Christina's insistence and because of her asthma, in 1950. Romulus was an expert in working metal but typically was given menial work.

When the book opens, Romulus is thirteen and 'holding a pitchfork tightly in his hands' to save himself from a violent uncle. Years later, he defends his right to keep goats on his land by attending the Maryborough Council meeting carrying a chainsaw and threatening to cut off all their heads (except one, tantalisingly). Jilted by a woman he'd courted by letter, he falls ill, entering a mental institution. Ironically, and without knowing it, the same woman may have been the occasion of his getting better:

I do not know what set my father on the very long road to recovery. He singles out an event that occurred while I was with him during the May holidays of 1961. 'Come Raimond,' he said to me late one afternoon. 'We are going to Sydney.' 'Why?' I asked, surprised at the suddenness of this announcement. He hesitated for a moment and then said, 'I'm going to shoot him'. I knew he meant Lydia's husband. He and Lydia had come to Sydney only months before.

Happily, the visit turns out very differently. But the episode—described in the same cool voice that speaks for all throughout the book: Romulus, young Raimond, author Raimond—is valuable for the glimpse it affords of the young moral philosopher: 'I was not morally appalled by what my father was setting out to do' because, he'd worked out, love made people do strange things. 'Its capacity to wreck lives, to humiliate otherwise strong and proud people and to drive them to suicide was already familiar to me. That it should also drive them to murder was a part of the same story.'

Raimond is fourteen. Passionate love is a structure of obligations, an intrinsic contract,

where in return for experiencing its transports you go quietly when the game is up.

For me there was never a question of justification. I simply refused to condemn my father for intending to shoot Lydia's husband. The refusal was not conditional on him being my father. I would have refused to condemn anyone in a similar position to his, and I would have thought any victim of such a killing to be unworthy of their passion if they complained.

So they got in the car and drove. 'It never occurred to me to say I would not go,' he writes; Romulus was his father, he was 'obliged' to accompany him. Of course, 'I also accepted that he might quite rightly pay the legal penalty, go to jail, and perhaps even be hanged for murder.'

Gaita's memoir is of men, his father and his friends, and of men living not quite without women but sometimes only beside them and frequently troubled by them. Both Romulus and his son respond warmly to good women, and beautiful women—and the father's loving second wife, like the son's daughters, play supporting roles in the book—but for the most part the tenderness that counts is between men, in the way the men look after each other. They share that melancholy of men that makes heroes of men who can hang in. Gaita quotes from *The Book of Common Prayer*: 'Man that is born of woman hath but a short time and is full of misery. He cometh up and is cut down like a flower. He fleeth as if he were a shadow and never continueth in one stay' and the tone is recognisable in Canterbury and countless cathedrals and bars around the world and in the classic crime novels of Florida and Southern California.

THE THEME OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ILLNESS, where it fits in the world of words, in Romulus' world and Raimond's world, first appears with the soul sickness of a mother unwilling or unable to cleave to her husband or care for her children. Christina forfeits her role and the saddest parts of the book are about her lethargy, her deceptions and lack of control, and the hurts she visits on two long-suffering husbands. Her own suffering must have been immense and yet I found it hard to reach, to empathise with, I don't know why.

Certainly Gaita doesn't dwell on his loss of a mother. Instead, we see him apparently very well 'mothered' by the men, and 'fathered' as well. Gaita hints at suppressed feelings, at being done out of his anger, as

The Shellfish Gene

In theory Evolution's just as open
To altruism as to selfishness
But as the waters lave me I betoken
No abstraction beyond shellfishness.

The problem is our tide-warped mensuration.
We live not long; our scale is planetary;
Just single soldiers of a warrior nation,
Time-truncated, ex-explanatory.

I can't be pictured but in diagram,
Yet this one shell's to me a satrapy—
A trillion more of me and still I am
Like Atreus's House an atrophy.

'The Rocks! The Rocks!' ten thousand voices quicken:
Some self-inspired things from sea have waddled
And others seen their adaptation sicken,
Myself in sheer adjacency safely swaddled.

Peter Porter

well as his own small deceptions, and there's a sense that he was always older than his years, prepared, having to be prepared, to do for his father as his father did for him (though he never seems unable to leave).

But, as I said, tenderness is the heart of the book, framed by, or perhaps filtered through, the word-structures of moral philosophy. Much of the warmth in Romulus' life he gets from his friends and their talk. But there's a point in the book where we glimpse him outside the words, where the warmth is simple and direct. Romulus kept bees.

On winter mornings he gathered the bees which had not entered the hive the previous night, to all appearances quite dead as they lay on the grass. He took them into the kitchen, laid them on their backs on the table and held an electric light bulb about fifteen centimetres above them, moving it continuously so that they would not be harmed by a concentration of heat. It was an entrancing and moving experience to see their legs twitch, so slightly at first that one wondered whether it had really happened, and then more surely. After a few minutes they turned right way up, still unsteady on their feet. When they looked ready to fly we took them outside.

And then there are the dogs. The moral philosopher fusses a little whether we'll

think the old man sentimental. He wasn't, he says; on the contrary, 'his practice always expressed a wisely judged sense of the radical difference in kind between human beings and animals, even though he sometimes blurred the distinction in conversation.' Romulus fed his dogs the same food as himself and his visitors, sat the two of them in the back seat of the car and took them to drive-in movies, 'convinced that they enjoyed them'. He used to say 'if dogs go to heaven, and he met them there, he hoped that they would say that he treated them well.' His son responds, in a book written in the year after his father died, at 74: 'I always thought that to be a beautiful sentiment, beautifully expressed.' ■

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Talking Russian

Conversations with Joseph Brodsky: A Poet's Journey through the Twentieth Century, Solomon Volkov, translated by Marian Schwartz, The Free Press, New York, 1998. ISBN 0 684 83572 X, RRP \$39.95

JOSEPH BRODSKY liked to tell a story in which General Jaruzelsky, having been to Moscow to be given instructions by his masters, was seen off at the airport by Brezhnev. After the ritual bussings, Jaruzelsky boarded his plane and flew back to Poland. Brezhnev remained on the freezing tarmac, gazing after the plane. Eventually his entourage contrived to get his attention. Very slowly, he said, 'As a socialist, he is trivial: as a leader, he is a nonentity: as a human being, he is beneath contempt. But ah—what a kisser!'

The story comes from that rich granary, the Eastern European Joke of Contempt. In Brodsky's mouth it had an additional overtone, in that it was Brezhnev who ignored his request to stay in Russia when

story as such. A joke is a joke, but sometimes no joke too.

Solomon Volkov has published several other books dealing with the reminiscences of expatriate or visiting Russians in America, and has himself written excellently on St. Petersburg. Here, he has assembled and edited a number of interviews which are peculiarly fascinating for anyone gripped by Brodsky's writing. They could also intrigue the student of autobiography, or of modern poetry in English or in Russian, or of high individuality in the shadow of a tyrannical regime.

The interviews began almost twenty years ago, and ran on until 1992. The splicing has been dextrous—as Volkov says, 'For the sake of continuity and clarity, it was sometimes necessary to group together episodes recorded at different sessions'—and from my own reading of Brodsky and his commentators I would agree that the book 'represents both the letter and the spirit of the poet's thinking throughout the years.'

It is appropriate to put it that way because Brodsky was indeed a thinker. Poetry was various things for him, but it was above all his way of being as intelligent as possible. A main use of his

prose—as in the collections *Less Than One* and *On Grief and Reason*—is to alert the reader to just how intelligent the poetry is.

Some admirable poets work epigrammatically, so that if you take a brick out of their whole fabric, it might indeed be a gold brick. Brodsky, as a poet, and in prose, is to be had in motion or not at all. It is not that he cannot phrase things with sometimes

lethal precision: for instance, referring to some of the political behaviour of Yevtushenko and others, he calls it 'the ionosphere of immorality.' But as Volkov says in his preface to the book,

The word dialogue is key. Brodsky's mind was essentially dialogic, to an extent I've never observed in anyone else. In this sense, he was a true follower of the ideas of the Russian thinker Mikhail Bakhtin, who proclaimed the dialogue the ultimate form of human self-expression, with everything existing in flux, subject to open-ended questioning by a free mind. Brodsky thrived on paradox, ambiguity, and contrariness. Here was a man in constant Socratic dialogue with himself, endlessly questioning, expanding, and shifting his mental position—and glad to have a sparring partner. So, we Russians sparred ...

'Two Jews, three opinions,' a Yiddish saying goes, and Brodsky, whose Jewishness had not helped him with Russian officialdom, may instinctively have been keeping faith with that tradition.

THERE IS IN FACT SOMETHING BIBLICAL about his whole verbal and written performance, biblical in the sense that it can encompass the tragic melancholy of Ecclesiastes, and a Job-like eloquence which is now tart, now majestic, and the brio-against-the-grain of many Psalms. Brodsky, who had no time for any social cult of exile, knew perfectly well that his, and every poet's, and perhaps every person's, condition is in large degree exilic: and he brought to his contemplation of the condition some of the roiling variety to be found in that encyclopedia of exile, the Bible.

Whatever the cut of the original exchanges, Volkov has arranged them into a dozen chapters, and added some useful biographical notes on the many figures whose names crop up in the text. The



Solomon Volkov with Brodsky in Brodsky's home, Greenwich Village, New York, 1982. Photograph right: Brodsky at home on Moreton Street, Greenwich Village, 1978.

the KGB expelled him in 1972. But it also draws together a number of the elements which show themselves in Brodsky's writings, whether in poetry or in prose. These include a relishing of life's theatre, particularly when it runs towards the farcical and the absurd: a fascination with power and its modalities: an alertness to mutability in all its forms: and a love of

chapter-headings point sometimes to phases of a biography—'A Leningrad Youth', 'Arrests, Asylums, and a Trial' and so forth—and sometimes to the poets who were momentous, whether in the flesh or on the page or both, for Brodsky, the key players here being Marina Tsvetaeva, Anna Akhmatova, Robert Frost and W.H. Auden. Brodsky wrote elsewhere with zest and penetration about each of these figures, sometimes (as with Akhmatova) with the air of a permanently indebted son, and sometimes (as with Frost) as a kind of intellectual buccaneer. Nobody who knows those writings will find many surprises here, though the formulations are, as usual, fresh.

OF FROST, for instance, he says that when he 'sees a house standing on a hill, for him this is not just a house but a usurpation of space. When he looks at the boards the house is nailed together from, he understands that the tree originally had definitely not been expecting this,' which is worth more than much critical rumbling about Frost, not to speak of what is quaintly known as theory. At the end of the chapter called 'Remembering Anna Akhmatova', he says that 'No matter what, she taught us how to forgive', and adds,

... she became a part of us, a part of our souls, if you like. I would also add that, without believing overmuch in the existence of the other world and eternal life, nonetheless, I often find myself gripped by the feeling that she is observing us from somewhere outside, watching over us from somewhere, just as she did in life. Not so much watching as safeguarding.

It can be helpful to think of Brodsky as a haunted writer, though certainly not a hag-ridden one. He was haunted by the shades of known and loved individuals, with some of whom he had had the good fortune to share a few years, but with all of whom he shared large tracts of the imagination, and an extensive schooling in morale.

'Ninety Years Later', prose on Rilke, concludes with the words, 'What makes the place where we are left by this poem indeed attractive is that while we are here, we have the chance to identify with its author, Rainer Maria Rilke, wherever he is.' A detailed study of one of Auden's poems is written 'To Please a Shadow'. 'Homage to Marcus Aurelius' is an authentic salute to the philosopher-emperor, even while Brodsky is saying that 'The most

definitive feature of antiquity is our absence. The more available its debris and the longer you stare at it, the more you are denied entry.'

Near the end of 'In Memory of Stephen Spender,' he writes, 'On account of my Russianness, Natasha [Spender] arranges for me to see Stephen in an open coffin. He looks severe and settled for whatever is ahead. I kiss him on his brow, saying, 'Thank you for everything. Say hello to Wystan and my parents. Farewell.'

Someone who thinks and acts in these terms is unlikely to be intimidated by vogue



or vogue's dog, panic. Steeped in the presence of the undying dead, Brodsky bore out the truth of Charles Simic's claim that 'Poets worth reading usually believe things the age they live in no longer does. Poets are always anachronistic, obsolete, unfashionable, and permanently contemporary.'

The 'and' is critical when reading Brodsky's poetry, or the conversations in Volkov's book. At one point he remarks that:

I took up *belles lettres* for one simple reason: it gives you extraordinary speed. When you compose a line, things occur to you that in principle shouldn't. This is why you should be involved in literature. Why, ideally, *everyone* should be involved in literature. It is a species-specific, biological necessity. The individual's duty to himself, to his own DNA.

These days, it is safe to assume that not everyone will rally to that standard, but whatever it stands for, it is not imaginative

conservatism. Later in the conversations, when he and Volkov are discussing the prodigies of technology, he says,

I am wholeheartedly in favour of finding out about everything instantaneously. On the other hand, though, being a retrograde, I do have certain nostalgic emotions. I know from my own experience that the less information your brain receives, the harder your imagination works.

This is a sanguine view, and once again questions of morale are at issue. He says at another point that 'The ability to see meaning where for all intents and purposes there is none is a professional feature of the poet's calling,' and the last thing he has in mind is some embrace of fantasy—he is in fact speaking in the context of a discussion about collaboration with the Soviet secret police. 'The ability to see meaning' is something which Brodsky finds at once elating, transitory and exacting—most of all, for himself, in the writing of poetry, but by extension in many other areas of life too. In one of the conversations he offers the mot also to be found in his play, *Marbles*—that prison is 'a shortage of space compensated for by an excess of time'. His own imagination operates on exactly the opposite terms: urgently, it covers as much ground as possible.

PHILIP SIDNEY wanted from poetry a 'heart-ravishing knowledge', and if any single phrase fits Brodsky as maker of poetry, that may be it: though God knows the two of them would have made an odd enough pair. Brodsky knew and accepted the fact that poetry is, in effect, an incarnation of time, and he often rehearsed the ways in which this is so, some of them good news and some not.

In one poem, 'Elegy,' of 1985, he wrote that 'A ruin's a rather stubborn/ architectural style. And the heart's distinction from a pitch-black cavern/ isn't that great ...' He denied that he was 'a man of letters' because 'my sole ambition concerns the process ... I absolutely don't care what happens to my poems after they're written'. The final words in the conversations are, 'For me personally—you know what suits me most of all? Suits me very well indeed! The fate of an ancient author, Archiloches or someone. All that's left of him is rat's tails. There's a fate I could envy.' Out of those rat's tails, though, other poems of some majesty are still being made. ■

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Revolutions in retrospect

The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation, Ladislav Holy, Cambridge University Press, 1996, ISBN 0 521 555841, RRP \$36.95
Prague Farewell, Heda Margolius Kovaly, Indigo, 1997, ISBN 0 575 40086 2, RRP \$17.95

MY LOVE AFFAIR WITH PRAGUE began in 1954 during my second visit, in a stay of two months. The hotel, from which I ventured forth to the Old Town Square, Mala Strana and along the Vltava, was one which was famous before the communist takeover in 1948 but had been nationalised to become the hotel with no name. No signs adorned its portals nor did the telephone directory list it and most Czech citizens and foreigners were forbidden patronage there.

My love for Prague was boosted by another sojourn in the hotel with no name in 1966 and again in 1968, during Alexander Dubček's Prague Spring. My abiding interest in Czech literature and music became a natural concomitant to the wild but short-lived hopes for the refurbishment and revitalisation of the communist movement along democratic lines.

Those who admire Prague and seek deeper understanding of Czech culture and politics will find ample rewards in Ladislav Holy's *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation* and Heda Margolius Kovaly's *Prague Farewell*. Ladislav Holy left Czechoslovakia in 1968, as did many intellectuals, and now works at the University of St Andrews in Scotland. His book is one of a long list of Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology. It analyses the make-up and character of the Czech people and Czech nationalism and the ways these affect Czech politics.

Heda Margolius Kovaly tells her own story which includes many hardships and horrors: war, Nazi concentration camps, escape, the Prague uprising against German occupation, and her post-war marriage to Rudolf Margolius who became Deputy Minister of Foreign Trade in the communist government only to be framed, tried and hanged for treason in 1952 and posthumously 'exonerated' some ten years later. Margolius was part of the infamous Slansky trials, orchestrated by Soviet Stalinists, in which eleven of the thirteen chief defendants were Jews. A true believer who apparently never

rocked the communist boat, Margolius gave himself unflinchingly to the cause. Not only was he hanged but publicly vilified. This inevitably meant that his wife and son suffered ostracism and victimisation as well as heartbreaking grief.

Czech history is dotted with tragedies, dominated by the steadfast but patient longings and struggles of the Czechs for freedom from foreign overlordship. Nearly 400 years of Austrian Hapsburg rule ended only in 1918. German occupation lasted from 1939 until 1945. Fifty years ago, in February 1948, the communists took power supported by huge working-class demonstrations. They established a regime which slavishly adhered to Soviet policies and theories. Twenty years later, Soviet troops invaded to blot out the brief Prague Spring of Dubček and to re-install a hardline pro-Soviet regime for a further dreary and oppressive 20 years.

Holy and Kovaly both emphasise a fact which may not be widely appreciated: the Czech communists once enjoyed widespread support and popularity. 'In Czechoslovakia,' Holy claims, 'socialism was not imposed by the bayonets of the Soviet army at the end of World War Two, but grew out of the wishes of the majority of the population, to whom the justice and equality it promised seemed morally superior to the injustices and inequalities of capitalism.'

The Communist Party polled over 40 per cent of votes in the Czech lands in the election of 1946 and won 114 seats in the 300-strong Czechoslovak National Assembly. With the support of the Social Democrats and others, they held a majority and their leader, Klement Gottwald, 'became Prime Minister.

Heda Margolius Kovaly believes the conditioning for supporting the communists had begun, for many, in the German concentration camps where the communist inmates impressed with their idealism, discipline and strength. Many people after the war naturally gravitated to what seemed to be 'the most ideologically alluring political party'.

In *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, Milan Kundera underlines this point: 'the people were enthusiastic about the Russia that had driven out the Germans, and seeing in the Czech Communist Party its faithful arm, they became sympathetic to it. So the Communists took power in February 1948 with neither bloodshed nor violence, but greeted by the cheers of about half the nation. And now, please note: the half that did the cheering was the more dynamic, the more intelligent, the better.'

Inimitably, Kundera emphasises that people respond to the idea of an idyll, to the image of society as a garden where nightingales sing. In Australia, when today's old communists were young, we told a story against ourselves and never tired of laughing our heads off about it. During the Depression a speaker harangues his audience, 'Come the revolution you'll all eat strawberries and cream.' Says one of his listeners, 'But I don't like strawberries and cream.' 'Come the revolution, comrade,'

rejoins the speaker forcefully 'you'll like strawberries and cream.'

AND SO THE COMMUNIST IDYLL did not last long in Czechoslovakia: the nightingales lost voice and the cream on the strawberries soured, as repression, the demand for conformity, hard-line incompetence and despotism took their place.

The Czechoslovakian Communist Party maintained one of the most pro-Soviet, hard-line and repressive stances inflexibly enforcing the Soviet-type command system. The Soviet flag usually fluttered beside the Czechoslovakian. A huge statue of Stalin, claimed to be the biggest in the world, dominated the Prague skyline along with Hradcany Castle, before it was hauled down reluctantly after Khrushchev's 1956 revelations. Slogans like 'With the Soviet Union forever' were displayed everywhere. Ladislav Holy refers to a widely-known Czech joke: 'With the Soviet Union forever but not a day longer'.

Economic and political liberalisation became an issue as the 1960s progressed.

British historian Eric Hobsbawm observed in his *Age of Extremes*:

In Czechoslovakia this demand was all the stronger, not only because Stalinism had been particularly harsh and long-lasting, but also because so many of its communists (especially intellectuals, spring from a party with genuine mass support both before and after the Nazi occupation) were profoundly shocked by the contrast between the communist hopes they still retained and the reality of the regime.

During my visit to Prague in October 1966, small but distinct signs of disquiet with the regime and the Soviet Union were evident. One evening I was entertained in a wine cellar by a junior communist official. His journalist wife later joined us. In itself this was quite unusual and the first time a spouse had been presented to me in a communist country. This young woman proved to be most articulate and intelligent. She launched into a humorous and biting criticism of Czech Party officialdom and included her husband in that company. She made slighting references to Soviet doctrine. All this openly before a visiting foreign communist! When I joined in and heat turned to President Novotny the husband laughingly decided to call it a night.

I was attending a conference of communist delegates from advanced industrial countries called by the journal *Problems of Peace and Socialism* based in Prague. The journal, dry and formalistic, was financed and largely run by the Russians. My speech to the conference had mentioned Stalinism critically several times. Afterwards, during the car journey, a Soviet official, otherwise charming and affable, harangued me with a recital of Stalin's alleged attributes—thirteen years after his death. The same Soviet official likewise lectured two workers who by chance sat at our table in a beer hall in Plzen. They had jokingly slighted Czech and Soviet policies. So our Soviet friend spent nearly an hour putting them straight through an interpreter. In addition, he paid for each round of beer every few minutes, for the Czechs and I became very thirsty. The two 'little Czech men' quietly and quickly sank the excellent Plzen beer and listened meekly, distinctly Schweik-like, but gave no sign of acquiescence. An embarrassing performance. But at least the Czechs got plenty of free beer.

Not long afterwards, early in 1968, the hard-line Antonin Novotny was removed from the leadership of the Communist Party



Václav Havel, elected President 29 December 1989. The poster reads 'Havel to the Castle'.

to be replaced by Alexander Dubček. This new leadership startled the world by ending censorship, fostering open discussion of economic and social problems and involving the population more fully in the decision-making processes in enterprises and institutions. Dubček won great popularity at home and with the growing numbers of communists everywhere who were opting for reform and democratisation of their movement.

THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF AUSTRALIA strongly and publicly supported the Prague Spring, despatched journalists to Prague and took heart at the prospects. However, the Soviet leaders feared and opposed the consequences as did pro-Soviet communists everywhere. In August the Prague Spring was strangled by invading Soviet and other forces. Soviet troops arrested Dubček and his closest colleagues at gunpoint, took them to Moscow and forced them to accept the occupation. Shortly, a government of die-hard, lacklustre Soviet lackeys was formed in Prague headed by Gustav Husák.

The credibility of the communist movement took yet another savage battering, support declined further, moral and political bankruptcy generated impotence and paralysis. Eric Hobsbawm rightly claimed that in 'the last twenty years of the Soviet bloc, even the leadership of the ruling communist parties appear to have lost any real belief in what they were doing'.

And so the conditions for the Velvet Revolution slowly matured. Much of *The*

Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation is devoted to these developments. Holy believes economic hardship was not a significant factor—rather it was the mass resentment about foreign occupation, the trampling of national traditions by a repressive state, the perception that those in authority were fools worthy only of mass ridicule. The Velvet Revolution, according to Holy, was not carried out in the name of democracy and the free market. These issues gained prominence only after the collapse of the communist regime. Rather, the trigger was freedom of individuals and the nation.

But to go back to the hotel without a name. In October 1954 our small group of Australian communists arrived in Prague on the way home after spending over three years studying in China. Back home the Petrov Royal Commission was in full swing. We were instructed to keep our Chinese sojourn a secret and if questioned we had spent the three years in Prague. Therefore, we needed to learn something of that city.

We had stayed three weeks there en route to Peking in 1951, at the large, old-world Paris Hotel not far from Wenceslas Square. This time we were taken to the hotel without a name, run by the Communist Party, near the fabulous Old Town Square. In China we had been quite privileged but this included communal showers, squat toilets, shared rooms and food which occasionally presented problems to Australian stomachs. Here, apparently on the basis of some protocol, being in charge of our small group, I found myself

occupying a whole suite of rooms—spacious, quiet, old-fashioned, with new adjuncts being discovered for days. The bathroom delighted me. To turn on the huge bath tap (there was no shower) required two hands and a close watch on the great gush of hot water. I bought two American novels: Frank Norris' *The Octopus* and Howard Fast's *The Proud and the Free*. With these lush lodgings, nice food and a beautiful city to explore, I was in seventh heaven, an Australian pauper on the pig's back.

The hotel had opened in 1925 as the Grand Hotel Steiner with 60 rooms. Taking tea in its ornate underground Boccaccio Room was a high society ritual in the 1920s and 1930s. This large underground area was little used during my stay but in it one afternoon we saw Yves Montand in *The Wages of Fear*, in French with Czech captions. Today, the hotel is the Grand Hotel Bohemia owned by the Austria Hotels chain.

At the hotel a distinguished-looking middle-aged man accompanied by several young associates often stayed overnight or for several days. This was Karol Bacilek, the Party leader from Slovakia. Bacilek had

been minister for National Security at the time of the Slansky trials. In *Hope Dies Last* Alexander Dubček wrote of a general belief that Bacilek maintained close ties with Soviet security organisations.

Heda Margolius Kovaly reveals that Bacilek had an interview with her husband, Rudolf Margolius, the day before he was hanged. Bacilek apparently promised the unfortunate man that he'd take care of Heda and their child, find her a job and give her assistance. He failed to keep the undertaking. 'To lie like that to a man who was going to die in a few hours,' she

wrote, 'How could anyone be

such a monster?' **N**OT KNOWING ANYTHING of these matters late in 1954, I used to watch Bacilek play chess with his young colleagues. He looked confident, smart, and always seemed to win.

Most days we were accompanied on our wanderings about the city by a communist interpreter called Tula, who spoke nine languages learned while an inmate of Buchenwald. That incarceration left him another legacy: a large silver streak slashed his thick crop of black hair. Phlegmatic, easy-going, slightly paunchy, Tula spoke very good English.

Under his tutelage we became familiar with the sights: the 15th century Powder Tower, the cobbled and expansive Old Town Square, the Jan Hus monument, the 14th century Charles Bridge, the magnificent Vltava River, Mala Strana—the Little Quarter, Hradcany Castle, St Vitus Cathedral (begun in 1344 and not completed until the 1920s), the National Theatre, Wenceslas Square. We saw the home of Karel Čapek. We walked in the street named after the poet and short story writer, Jan Neruda, who immortalised Mala Strana with his unforgettable bitter-sweet *Prague Tales* (1878). We enjoyed Smetana operas. We wandered around the remains of ancient Vysehrad Castle—the first seat of Czech kings—and about the park which hosts the enormous statue, visible for miles, of Jan Zizka the brilliant 15th century Hussite general. We went to White Mountain where in 1620 the Hapsburgs crushed the Protestant rebel Czech army, prolonging their rule for another 300 years. Marvellous old churches abound in Prague providing an architectural paradise. Unfortunately, Tula didn't seem keen on churches and rarely acknowledged them, except for St Vitus Cathedral which, of course, was a bit hard to miss.

I never tired of Charles Bridge, crossing it almost daily long before it became

swamped by tourists as it is now. Patrick Leigh Fermor gazed along the curve of this bridge in 1934: 'Sixteen tunnelling spans carry it over the flood. Each arc springs from a massive pier and the supporting cutwaters advance into the rush of the current like a line of forts. High overhead and every few yards along either balustrade stand saints or groups of saints...'

So Prague can be liberal with memories for any traveller. Yet for Czechs themselves it is a qualitatively different matter, as the novelist Ivan Klima has explained. He believes Prague's 'streets and buildings have more to say to us than the eye of any foreigner can perceive'. Heda Margolius Kovaly so eloquently tells us why:

There is no other city like Prague. It is not only the beauty of the buildings, of the towers and bridges, though it is that too. They rise up from the slopes and riverbanks in such harmony that it seems nature created them alongside its trees and flowers. But what is unique about Prague is the relation between the city and its people. Prague is not an uncaring backdrop which stands impassive, ignoring happiness and suffering alike. Prague lives in the lives of her people and they repay her with the love we usually reserve for other human beings. Prague is not an aggregate of buildings where people are born, work and die. She is alive, sad and brave, and when she smiles with spring, her smile glistens like a tear.

Fifty years after the communist takeover and 30 years after the Prague Spring and the Soviet invasion, the Czech Republic again has troubles. Václav Klaus, the Prime Minister of five years, an economic rationalist zealot, resigned late last year following allegations of corruption. In addition, his market-driven reforms and wholesale privatisation have struck snags, with many Czechs finding his economic medicine unpalatable.

Ivan Klima's 1994 novel *Waiting for the Dark*. *Waiting for the Light* illustrates the ironies and contradictions. It refers to a poet who under the Husák regime gained recognition and prominence by writing verses about his love for women, the motherland and the Communist Party; now, in the 1990s, he earns his money by writing copy expressing his love for ever-sharp kitchen knives, ketchup and chewing gum. ■

John Sedy worked full-time for the Communist Party of Australia for 26 years until 1974 when he disappeared into north-central Victoria.

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CONCERT

Sequentia: Canticles of Ecstasy
(Adelaide Festival and Melbourne)

THE MARCH 6 Melbourne concert was in St Patrick's Cathedral, filled with 1800 Hildegard fans, all willing to pay \$52 a ticket for unreserved and deeply uncomfortable seats.

Vox Feminae is the women's vocal ensemble of the German-based medieval music group Sequentia, which, under the direction of Americans Barbara Thornton and Benjamin Bagby, has been researching and performing medieval music since 1977.

The music of the 12th century abbess Hildegard of Bingen presents certain challenges in performance. It is very demanding technically, and the texts are always crucial. Performances can be sources of endless argument: every medieval musicologist has a theory about what constitutes a historically informed performance of Hildegard, but she tends to elude the pedants and link her lot with singers who can really sing well.

Some very honest musicologists admit that it is impossible to know how the music actually was done: whether instruments

accompanied the singing, how exactly the written manuscripts were meant to be interpreted, and whether the single vocal line was ever filled out with organum.

Sequentia's brand of singing emphasises accuracy, is frequently beautiful and sometimes exciting. The approach is careful and scholarly; nothing is done that would offend any but the most obstinate and impractical of academics.

The six singers (Rebecca Bain, Pamela Dellal, Ellen Hargis, Lydia Heather Knutson, Nancy Mayer and Carol Schlaikjer) processed in, singing the Aquitainian *Orienti oriens*, in early polyphony that was spine-tingling. The individual singers were all very good: Mayer, Dellal and Hargis in particular showed that the English infatuation with sexless white voices denies the sensuousness of this music.

All in all there were seven short Hildegard pieces, and nine Aquitainian. The latter were fascinating, especially since they were contemporary with Hildegard, but this admixture of other composers was not referred to in the advertising—not altogether surprising because Hildegard is the big crowd-puller; and the Aquitainian pieces were good enough to disarm complaint. But it would have been good to hear more Hildegard: some of her more unusual and demanding sequences perhaps. The only

low point of the night was the chorus *O vivens fons* (O living fountain) from her opera *Ordo Virtutum*. This one seemed a little tired and lacking in enthusiasm. It was one rare instance where Sequentia's conservatism did not pay off; quiet legato monody just does not suit the flamboyant text, and the music seems tailor-made for intense layering such as we hear in the Aquitainian songs. Above all, a more energetic rendition would have conveyed something of the text's passion.

This was an issue all the more important in St Patrick's because of the vast building's difficult acoustic. With only six voices, no matter how well-produced, some of the finer edges were lost on those sitting in the middle and at the back. This meant that lyrics were hard to pick up, and again matters would have been helped by the inclusion of the Latin texts in the program (which cost \$5 and was mostly advertising). The translations offered were mostly shortened paraphrases.

None of this was the fault of the singers, who were impeccably rehearsed, sang with perfect intonation and, at their best, in a seamless clear unison that went on and on, using staggered breathing to give a length of phrasing impossible to a single voice. The unforgiving melismas of Hildegard's hymns became luxurious under this treatment.

—Juliette Hughes

A CLASSIC CASE OF LOVE

CDs

A Classic Case of Love
Helen Noonan, soprano;
Peter Constant, guitar
(Move Records)



Bon Voyage
Igor and Olga
Piano Duo
(Move Records)

Sorry
Goanna
(Big Heart
Productions)

HELEN NOONAN is one of Australia's most accomplished and popular sopranos, one who has the vocal equipment to tackle a broad range of music. It is sometimes a worry to see songs such as 'Yesterday' and 'As Time Goes By' on a recording made by a singer whose main métier is classical. Too often what you hear is a travesty of the popular idiom: Kiri te Kanawa's forays into jazz proved that she should stick to what she knows. Noonan is far above this. Her sense of rhythm (something profoundly lacking in many classically trained musicians) is equal to the subtle demands of the rock and jazz she interprets, and her

vocal technique includes *pianissimo*, a feat rarer than you would think. Victoria de los Angeles, that sublime artist, also knew how to sing without forcing a false fruitiness and Noonan follows her intrepidly into Villa-Lobos' *Bachianas Brasilieras No 5*, a piece which is deservedly popular for its gorgeous legato lyricism, but so tiresome to listen to if the singer wobbles and swoops around the vocal line. Noonan knows how to sing unaffectedly, 'straight'; her rendition is lovely, especially the final hummed top A, bang on the bull's-eye. Peter Constant's playing is unfailingly lyrical and resonant.

Olga Kharitonova and Igor Machlak were born and trained in the USSR, and both have that vigorous Russian pianism: they put the two concert grands through their paces in a steely strong reading of Rachmaninov, Ravel, Moscovski, Gavrilin, Brahms, Grainger and Bernstein. The Grainger piece is one of his folkish homages, and none the worse for it. Something of the old weirdo's own pianistic style really comes through in the duo's performance of *Let's Dance Gay in Green Meadows*—a sense of rushing bravura and sheer enjoyment. The

Ravel is interestingly played: you hear more bass, or perhaps this is because you are hearing twenty fingers instead of ten. The Brahms pieces are solidly, even academically performed; Igor and Olga have a weightiness that comes from the rigour of Soviet musical training and this suits the Brahms waltzes. They are never ponderous, however: we are hearing genuine strength and bone-deep technique. This means a great deal of volume and energy: this is not 'wallpaper' music to tootle behind the chitchat at dinner (horrible habit anyway!)—but it's not difficult listening either. Put it on in the morning to wake up the house and annoy your adolescents abed.

'Sorry' is a CD single released recently by the Goanna Band. It is warmly sung by Marcia Howard, and the theme is a desperate apology to the stolen children for the terrible things that were done to them. The music is a complex production, with sequenced sounds chilling underneath an insistent D minor theme of lament. Produced here and in Ireland, it is worth getting for its marriage of music and lyrics alone.

—Juliette Hughes

Cutback theatre

THERE HAVE BEEN SOME DARK RUMBLINGS in the Australian theatre since the announcement last October of the Australia Council's Theatre Fund grant decisions for 1998 and beyond.

At its meeting of 25–29 August, the Fund (formerly part of the Performing Arts Board and before that the Theatre Board) ...

... faced the enormous task of delivering ... a new Triennial Grants strategy, a strategy which encourages *the best balance* of outstanding organisations with outstanding individual artists and projects. The Fund knew it would have to make hard decisions, telling artists we know from years of working alongside them that there was not enough money to support all of the good ideas. (*Assessment Report*, p1, my emphasis)

In fact, there was not enough money to maintain support for all 41 Triennial Grant applicants so, rather than making cuts across the board, which would have left too many companies unable to construct an effective program, the Fund agreed that 'some organisations with a history of support from the Australia Council could [no longer] be funded.'

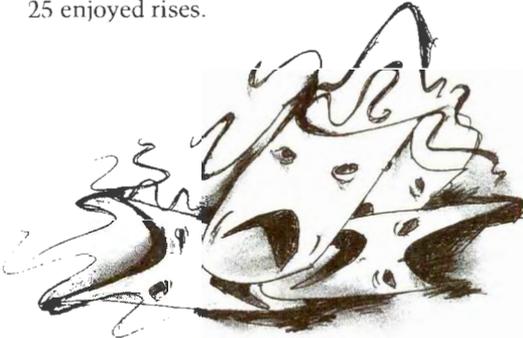
In the event, fifteen organisations which had previously been supported by annual program grants in the theatre category (12 of them for at least a decade) received no funding at all.

A classic case was the Adelaide working-class-oriented touring company, Junction Theatre Company. Two years ago, Junction received an annual grant of \$114,500 from the Performing Arts Board; last year, it (like most organisations) suffered a cut, but still received \$91,600 from the Theatre Fund. Deciding to apply for Project funding this year rather than a Triennial grant, after consulting with the Fund as to its likely future status, it ended up with nil.

The Wollongong-based regional company, Theatre South, suffered similarly, dropping to zero this year.

In addition to those whose grants were cut altogether, a further twelve organisations had their status changed from

annual program support to project support only. While four of these actually gained on the changing swing (receiving more for their projects than they previously got in program grants) the rest lost on the roundabout. Typical here is the fate of the 20-year-old but still innovative Melbourne children's puppet company, Polyglot, whose annual grants of \$101,000 in 1996 dropped to just \$65,000 for 'New Work' in 1998. On the other hand, the newish youth theatre, Theatre Outback in south-west NSW, rightly enjoyed growing support. Likewise, the newish Backbone Youth Arts in Queensland which got \$8,000 more for 'New Work'. But the general trend is downward: 30 organisations in all were cut or got nothing; 18 held their own and 25 enjoyed rises.



Of course, the Theatre Fund's August meeting was not the sole source of Australia Council theatre funding. At that meeting, grants worth a total of \$5.769m were allocated, including all those for triennial and single-year annual program funding, plus a majority of development and project funding. But a further \$1.6m worth of project funding (available to those who missed out on annual grants *and* to those already receiving support) will be announced in mid-April and additional bits and pieces of money for emerging artists and so on will take the overall sum to about \$7.7m from the Theatre Fund. Furthermore, some of the companies deprived of funding from the Theatre Fund (including Junction, for example) have received ongoing support from the Community Cultural Development Fund.

Several things emerge already from this analysis. One is that it doesn't seem to matter much what kind of theatre company you are (or were). Youth theatres have had their funding reduced or been cast adrift altogether; young people's theatre companies have got the chop and so have puppetry companies. Contemporary performance and new circus have also, perplexingly, felt the razor (so soon after having been built up) although it is probable that some projects in these areas will be supported in future.

REGIONAL THEATRE has been severely cut back in recent years and the slide has continued this year. The slippage seems especially odd, given the Federal Government's 'new initiatives in Regional Arts' announced in the 1996 Budget and underlined in Margaret Seares' first Australia Council Annual Report last September (p5). It is one thing to tour city-bred art to the country from head office in Sydney or Melbourne, and another to provide money for a stop-start cycle of occasional projects, but neither policy does anything to develop or maintain regional infrastructure or to attract top-quality artists to work in regional communities.

If *what* you are doesn't make much difference to your level of funding, *where* you are seems to have a big impact. Theatre funding to organisations and individuals in South Australia jumped from 10.5 per cent of the total allocated in 1995/96 to 15.37 per cent in 1996/97 and then slumped back to 11.26 per cent of the money allocated so far for this year. Funding as a percentage of the total also fell slightly in Victoria and the two territories, but rose by less than 1 per cent in WA, Tasmania and the still underfunded Qld. Five South Australian companies have dropped from the lists; three will almost certainly die as a result.

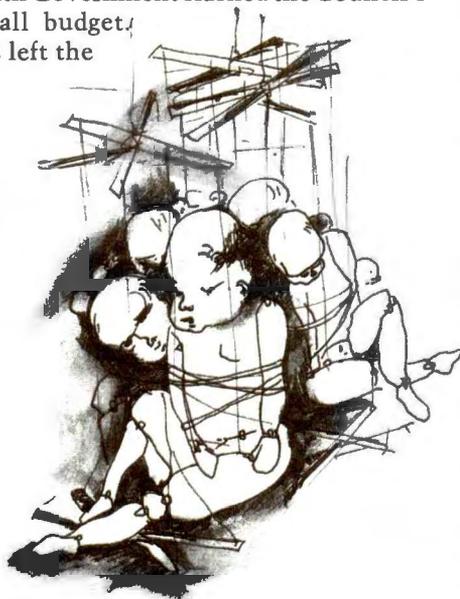
The clear winner in recent rounds has been NSW. Theatre grants to companies and projects there have steadily risen from 32.3 per cent of the whole in 1996, to 37.7 per cent last year and a whopping

44.2 per cent of the \$5.769m allocated in August.

Several South Australians tell me that one reason given by the Theatre Fund for the big cuts there was that it had previously supported too many theatre companies on the basis of population, although nothing has been said publicly to spell this out. Even if SA (with about 8.3 per cent of the population) was previously 'overfunded' with as much as 15 per cent of the money, should not the imbalance have been corrected in Victoria's direction (with about 25 per cent of the population but only 17 per cent of grant moneys) or Queensland's, with some 18 per cent of the population and a derisory 8.4 per cent of money allocated so far this year? How is NSW, by this argument, worth a rise to 44.2 per cent of the cash on the basis of just 34 per cent of the population?

More ominously, an apparent shift to a dollars-per-head emphasis seems to reflect an undisclosed policy shift. For many years, the Australia Council has tended—so consistently as to imply a specific policy—to 'cross-subsidise' regional Australia and the less densely populated states and territories, at the apparent 'expense' of the more densely populated ones and the cities (always with the exception of NSW and SA, which tended to score even or better than par, and Queensland, which has languished. Recent decisions seem to indicate that this is no longer so. But nothing has been said publicly to spell it out.

I have to say I have some sympathy with the Fund's members; they found themselves in an invidious position. Part of the problem, of course, was the money available to them after the Commonwealth Government slashed the Council's overall budget. This left the



Immigrant Boy

(School excursion, Sydney to Bathurst, 1965)

Forehead on the cool glass took every vibration
As the train edged haltingly from Central Station.

The boy felt much calmer, the European rhythm
Of tangled rails, soot tunnels, cab lit within

From its opaque cup light. The reminiscent smell
Of worn smooth vinyl he warms through again.

The view is backyards, fencing, a tree, sheds certain,
A woman and bassinet, all maintain, despite excursion,

The meter they are used to. The boy smells culture,
He smells a past, rail grime and suburbs suture

More calm to reminiscence. He feels abasement,
And on his forehead the cool bruise of displacement.

Zoltan Kovacs

Fund with some \$530,000 less to spend.

But another side of the problem comes about because of some of Council's own policy decisions. One was the transfer of seven theatre companies (and some \$3m) from the Performing Arts Board in 1994/95 to the new Major Organisations Board (MOB). There are now eight 'major' theatre companies guaranteed healthy triennial funding totalling about \$3.268m; only two of them typically create the 'new work' the Theatre Fund is anxious to nurture. Creating the 'MOB' has thus left the Theatre Fund with less room to manoeuvre.

More significant, however, is the dual decision to bring in triennial funding to a select group of extant companies and to clear the decks to enable more new work to be created. The aim is for triennial funding to absorb no more than 45 per cent of the Fund's budget and for the rest to be available for other purposes, and it's not a bad aim—in theory. But the desired balance has not yet been achieved.

Only ten companies so far have gone onto triennial funding, most of them—rightly enough—with increased grants, and a further 26 got annual grants in the multi-year funding category. The category has absorbed 58 per cent of the total budget. It follows that, if the desired 45 per cent target is to be met over the next couple of years, still more companies will have to be cut, or dropped off.

Looking more closely at the fifteen organisations that have lost their funding, a further irony emerges. At least eight of them (Canberra Youth Theatre, Carouselle, Junction, Metro Arts, HotHouse, the Red Shed, Splinters and Theatreworks) are regular creators of (or nurturers of) often very exciting new work. And at least another four long-serving companies whose status and/or funding has been reduced (such as IRAA, Jigsaw, Polyglot and Spare Parts) are also regular commissioners and creators of new work. These four have all received 'New Work' grants, and some of the others might still get project grants in the current round. But the problem is that the very infrastructure needed for the creation of new work tends to be threatened when companies don't have the confidence of annual funding.

What we are seeing here, I'm afraid, is simply a process of robbing Peter to pay Paul from a diminishing pot of gold. As Geoff Crowhurst (Artistic Director of Junction) says: 'The situation is certainly grim, but not impossible. But if there's nothing from the Council next year, this will be the end.'

Balancing the many competing needs of Australian theatre in the next few years will require all the finesse of the Moscow Circus and more, I suspect. ■

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

FLASH IN THE PAN



Layered tort

Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil, dir. Clint Eastwood (independent cinemas). This is ensemble cinema with one of America's dynastic luminaries, Clint Eastwood, as benign manipulator. Forget Dirty Harry. Or maybe just remember that Eastwood has some of the chameleon qualities of Michael Redgrave, and the films he directs increasingly exploit the depth of American stage talent that the great age of British film (and television) took for granted.

In *Midnight* Eastwood stays behind the camera, leaving his daughter Alison to front in a supporting role as Mandy, the sane reference point (a wise Jean Harlow blonde) in a world of miasma and deception.

Eastwood says he read John Lee Hancock's screenplay before he tackled John Berendt's now famous non-fiction tale about a *crime passionelle* committed by a Southern gentleman antique dealer who was, until he shot his lover, the seasonal toast of Savannah, Georgia. It shows: Eastwood trims the tangle of circumstance that Berendt is content (or constrained) to leave in a mess. He is stronger on character and resolution than ambiguity, but he is nonetheless a great actors' director. All the performances in *Midnight* stretch and shimmer way beyond the plot—in some

cases literally. The Lady Chablis, a Savannah drag queen, plays herself so lavishly she is excruciating to watch. Such excess, you want to believe, must belong to a player's world. Which of course it does. The judge who hears the case is the defence attorney, Sonny Seiler, of the original trial. What then, do we make of his deadpan pragmatism? And what do we make of Jack Thompson's faultless reincarnation of Seiler? How do you focus when Thompson (Seiler) is hamming it tactically as Raymond Burr playing Perry Mason to the jury while the 'real' attorney sits up on the bench passing judgment on the whole show?

Then there is the Civil War. Kevin Spacey (as Jim

Williams, Savannah murderer) and John Cusack (John Kelso, Yankee journalist) do it all over again: suave intrigue versus puritan incomprehension. Decadence versus stringency. Tolerance versus naïveté. Each side fascinated to death by the other.

No wonder America keeps staging wars abroad—so much to resolve at home.

—Morag Fraser

Pugilist as pacifist

The Boxer, dir. Jim Sheridan (general release). The opening moments throb with the impact of bitter contemporary politics and private obsession. The scene is in a Belfast prison, the voices over are those of Bill Clinton and Tony Blair, sonorously urgent about peace, but counterpoised with the gritty menace of abiding bigotry— Ian Paisley reminding one and all that he is not about to go away. In a prison exercise yard, a solitary figure shadow-boxes: weaving, ducking, throwing jabs and hooks. It is the boxer, Danny Flynn, brilliantly portrayed by Daniel Day Lewis, on the last day of 14 years' incarceration. Reluctantly involved in IRA violence as a 17-year-old boxing neophyte, Danny has done his time hard and lonely, refusing to name names, but also refusing to fraternise with the IRA prisoners.

Danny wants to resume his life as a boxer ('Archie Moore fought for the world

title at 42') and to rebuild the non-sectarian boxing gym that launched his career. He also wants to resume his love affair with Maggie (Emily Watson) now 'prisoner's wife' to a former friend of Danny's and mother of a young teenager. But these personal aims clash with political reality. Maggie's loveless marriage retains profound political significance because the fidelity of 'the prisoner's wives' symbolises the integrity of the political struggle. She is also daughter of an IRA boss (Brian Cox) who is in the midst of peace negotiations that the 'hard men' view as a sell-out.

Jim Sheridan has successfully combined three classical movie themes: political thriller, couldabeen fight movie and love against the odds. The violence of the ring is juxtaposed with the political brutalities of the street; when Danny loses because he refuses to continue battering an opponent, his IRA enemies pronounce him a quitter, and the comment ironically highlights their unrelenting plight.

This is a better movie than the Sheridan-Day Lewis combination's last political effort, *In the Name of the Father*. Apart from the ending which may be unrealistically hopeful, the film is quite outstanding.

—Tony Coady

City of angles

The Big Lebowski, dir. Joel Coen (general release) The Coen Brothers are playing games again, this time in the City of Angels. So who better to play with than Raymond Chandler? While this movie ain't no monograph on the guy's work, it is a fun piece of skewed homage, mixing reverence with naked good humour.

LA is home to two Jeff Lebowskis—one's very rich and the other—well, he's a bum, who calls himself 'The Dude' (Jeff Bridges). Easy to see how two bone-headed thugs might have mixed them up. Like Danny De Vito and Arnold Schwarzenegger in *Twins*, 'only their mother could tell them apart'. In true Coen/Chandler style, this intsy case of mistaken identity marks the beginning of a plot bulging with extortion, double-dealing, shady foreigners, sex and women who breathe dry ice. Together with his best friend Walter (John Goodman), a strung-up 'Nam vet, The Dude finds himself dealing with all classes and all types in an attempt to get back his old louche life.

The Coen brothers have made and will make better films than *The Big Lebowski*.

But while it's patchy and chaotic by their standards, it still has more intelligent characterisations than most of the films nominated for Oscars. Who else would let John Turturro dance about in a tight, embroidered bowling costume, wearing a hair net? James Cameron? I think not.

—Siobhan Jackson

Free will wanting

Good Will Hunting dir. Gus Van Sant (general release). *Good Will Hunting* is up against *Titanic* for the big gongs this year, but the two films are fundamentally so similar that it's only the ship that enables you to tell them apart. Will Hunting (Matt Damon) is a beautiful young man, gifted beyond measure. He can solve complex mathematical problems with the bat of an eyelid. He has a photographic memory which enables him to acquire an education that costs others a quarter of a million dollars at Harvard or MIT for 'a dollar fifty in overdue fines' from his local library in the seamy area of South Boston.

But he is imprisoned. He is a captive of his upbringing and the social milieu which has both nurtured and bruised him. Half by chance, his mathematical abilities come to the attention of Professor Lambeau (Stellan Skarsgard) and Will finds himself on a voyage of liberation. The voyage includes both the beautiful woman, Skylar (Minnie Driver), tempted across social divisions, and the wisdom figure, psychologist Sean Maguire (Robin Williams). Will finds the world at his feet but is led gingerly towards making the right choices. The scenario is so familiar that you end up wondering why it works so well, why the story of Sinbad should be so revered within a culture as ravenous and opportunistic as Hollywood's. In this case, the answer is partly because at several points the script of *Good Will Hunting* deftly articulates moral certitude. In general, it is because you sit there wondering when it's going to be your turn. It's called manipulation and is one thing you can bank on.

Michael McGirr sj

Suds in the woods

The Woodlanders, dir. Phil Agland (independent cinemas). This is yet another cinematic attempt on a Hardy novel, with screenwriter David Rudkin doing the surgery. The scenery in *The Woodlanders* movie is very pretty indeed. It is, after all,

filmed in the New Forest, that British tree museum: the woods have the look of Captain Cook's Cottage about them—they are looked after, managed and compliant, with as much life of their own as a suburban hydrangea. In this tamed and shabby wilderness, human activity dictates the shape of everything—wattle & daub cottages dot the corrupted landscape like calluses on a high-heeled foot. There is nothing of the ferocity and autonomy of the New Zealand forests in *The Piano*. Simple sons of soil & toil go about their business being part of the scenery rather than the earth itself—very European.

The two villains have a curious bond from the start: Mrs Charmond (Polly Walker) wants peasant-girl Marty South's beautiful hair for a wig; Dr Fitzpiers (Cal MacAninch) wants old Granny Oliver's skull for 'science'. Emily Woof, as Grace Melbury, daughter of a timber merchant, educated above her station, is not allowed enough warmth to attract our sympathy for her; Marty (Jodhi May) is far more significant and vibrant than the heroine. And though Rufus Sewell as the ill-used Giles can smoulder with the best of them, he is up against a truncated comic-book version of the book that turns it into a thin soapie.

The press notes tell us that Agland and Rudkin 'agreed to strip the Hardy novel of many of its Victorian melodramatic coincidences, and to concentrate on the classic tale of the intertwining relationships which are the heart of the story'.

This is the economic-rationalist version of narrative art, one which takes you to the bare-boned bottom line. And they've tilted the playing field: Rudkin and Agland have changed the ending to turn Grace into a feisty and unmartyred modern heroine, and this unbalances the story completely. Agland is a documentary maker of considerable

CONGRATULATIONS

... to Sue Rickard, who wins a copy of *The Oxford History of World Cinema* with this entry to the January–February Titanic competition:

The Titanic—A Slippery Escape Story She lathered her skin with luxurious Vinolia Otto toilet soap. Finding her way barred by watertight doors locked automatically on the abandon-ship alarm, she returned to her bathroom and lubricated her body with the soap, enabling her escape through a porthole. Delia was saved by singing, 'I'm forever blowing Vinolia bubbles', very loudly.

skill: *Beyond the Clouds*, shown recently on the National Geographic Channel, gives perceptions of the Chinese people and their country that are rare and illuminating. But eight hours of documentary give you something that a 98-minute squeeze of 400 pages can't.

—Juliette Hughes

Done too brown

Jackie Brown, dir. Quentin Tarantino (general release). It's interesting that Quentin Tarantino's new film, *Jackie Brown*, is being sold as something of a departure from the style we've come to expect of him, something subtle, reflective, 'mature'. It is, according to Tarantino 'as much about what motivates these characters as about what happens next'.

The story is familiar Tarantino territory—the film's eponymous heroine (played by famous '70s blaxploitation film star Pam Grier) is playing off the cops, her gun-running partner/boss Ordell (played by Samuel L. Jackson, reprising his role in *Pulp Fiction*), and pretty much everyone else in the film. All this so she can get her hands on the \$500,000 Ordell has stashed across the border, to comfort herself in her old age. This is the film's 'big theme': growing old and the gradual closing down of options. We know this because the characters (especially Jackie) keep on having conversations about 'how did I end up here', and 'where do I go from here'. This appears to be what Tarantino means by 'an emphasis on character and motivation', and it's really pretty limp. It wouldn't be a major flaw if Tarantino's usual pleasures were visible: the dynamism of his narratives; the arbitrary and absurdist extremes he's willing to take a scene to; his capacity to make scenes driven by dialogue and performance as attention-grabbing as any car chase. Unfortunately, in his drive for subtlety and maturity he has straightened his narratives out, toned his performances down and given up on the absurd. There are flashes of his old style, most notably in the climactic 'sting' toward the end, but it's not enough to sustain a loooong two-and-a-half hours of uncomfortable cinema seating.

In the end, *Jackie Brown* isn't all that different from anything Tarantino has done before, just less entertaining. Perhaps this is what he means by 'mature': keep on doing the same old thing, just with less energy and conviction.

—Allan Thomas



Father knows best

THE ABC repeated *Faith of Our Fathers* in March. The removal of really great music from liturgies and its relegation to the entertainment sphere has much to do with time that people haven't got any more. It wouldn't

be so bad if what was replacing it was as good; mostly there isn't time to opt for anything that's hard to learn, or that requires a tenor. As leisure decreases, so do voluntary activities, and that includes church choirs. I'd be happy if the ABC would now make a documentary about some of the good music being written for liturgy today, since so little of it filters into parishes.

It was rather spooky watching this Irish production, which claimed the old music for the entertainment industry. Perhaps the experience was no stranger than going to a concert hall to hear the Mozart Requiem or the B Minor Mass, yet it seemed as though the line had finally been drawn on the hymns of the recent past. Cleaned up and turned into quasi-operatic solos and choruses (complete with a scary little girl and a tenor who showed the truth in Spike Milligan's words '... Irish tenor, known and hated throughout the world'), displayed in a giant auditorium similar to—if not indeed the same as—the venue for Ireland's recent triumphs in the Eurovision Song Contest, the hymns desiccated and died.

Some of the hymns were still beautiful, and 'Faith of Our Fathers' is always stirring. But who would sing 'Bring Flowers of the Rarest' now, and in its proper context, unless they were a tridentine fossil? But I may be alone in this; many people adored it, confirming my theories about the deep sentimental attachment of all my lapsed Catholic friends and relations to the paraphernalia of sanctity which they found so anachronistic in the sixties. Since seeing *FOOF*, I have bought into a masochistic four-square argument with my offspring (adolescent, say no more), siblings (floridly lapsed) and mother (have you made your Easter duty?) as they all bag the kind of hymns that get sung at church these days.

'They're so embarrassing!' say the three sides, united in taste. You know you're on a loser, but you mumble something feeble about the music moving with the times, and are rightfully sherricked for it.

'What do you mean, *move with the times*—that whingeing folky crap went out with Peter, Paul & Mary.'

'God is my good buddy, hey man, wo wo yeah yeah,' sneers my kid.

'Nerny ner. You just did a Motown parody *actually*, not folk,' I protest, safe in the knowledge that the Supremes haven't yet broken into current hymnody but with an uncomfortable feeling that it would be a vast improvement if they did, even thirty years on.

'Cling to technicalities if it helps,' says my sister. 'Why don't you sing all the grand old things like "Faith of Our Fathers" and "Hail Queen of Heaven"?'

'It's not politically correct, is it? I mean, are you *really* itching to die for the Faith? Considering that you haven't darkened a church door since Labor was for the workers?'

'It's not the church I left,' she says loftily. My mother offers something about the incongruity of the rise of feminism in the Church and the dumping of Our Lady. I foolishly use the 'M' word (mariolatry) and then the gloves are off for some mutual character analysis.

I do hope the ABC don't put *FOOF* on again.

Father Paul Collins, in his documentary *God's Earth*, (ABC, 15 March) had plenty to say about the alienation of human beings from the things that matter—the connection with what really sustains us, this mother earth that we burn, gouge, poison and sell. Collins is a sharp and honest thinker, a born commentator who has in this production gone some of the way to solving a huge problem faced by the conservation movement as a whole—how to give the message in a way that can fit into a television culture. How to do a sound bite, how to encapsulate a concept in a popular way without falsification. David Suzuki instantly springs to mind; his themes are very similar, but Collins is primarily a communicator who understands his subject, whereas Suzuki is a scientist who is trying to make the world understand its peril. The sadness in Suzuki's voice is a feature of his work; it makes for hard listening sometimes, despite the fascination of the material and the incisiveness of the commentary.

Collins' voice is gentle, steady, as he repeatedly gives us visions of beauty: the flash of tiger colour moving with the breathing underneath, an aerial shot of a lake like a looking glass surrounded by rucked green velvet trees. Then he tells us that to destroy such life, such beauty, is true insanity. That we are existing in a vacuum of meaninglessness because we have forgotten that we are made of the very stuff of the earth itself. He refers to the liturgy of Ash Wednesday: 'Remember, man, that thou art dust and unto dust thou shalt return.' Not such a bleak idea when it reminds you of your very substance.

WITH SUCH INSIGHTS REPEATED and effectively reinforced, the program was brilliant for its whole 54-minute length. I'm not sure I agree that people only became damaged and alienated from the earth at the time of the Industrial Revolution, but it's a great start to discussion, particularly when *God's Earth* is used in schools. I remember David Attenborough showing a reconstruction of a wooden ship of the High Renaissance, part of the navy built up by the Medicis. The destruction of Italy's great beech forests was the price. And there was an old saying that before Henry VIII, a squirrel could travel Britain from John O' Groats to Land's End without touching the ground, travelling from tree to tree. Henry was a great one for shipbuilding. Trees, monasteries, wives, he lopped 'em all when it suited his dynastic madness. Collins is certainly right about public insanity deriving from private anomie.

Nowadays, in what we loosely term democracies, we can't really get away from collective responsibility. We can't blame the state of the earth on the politicians we elect if we switch off their message when it speaks of long-term stuff, looking at hard questions, being courageous, as Sir Humphrey would say.

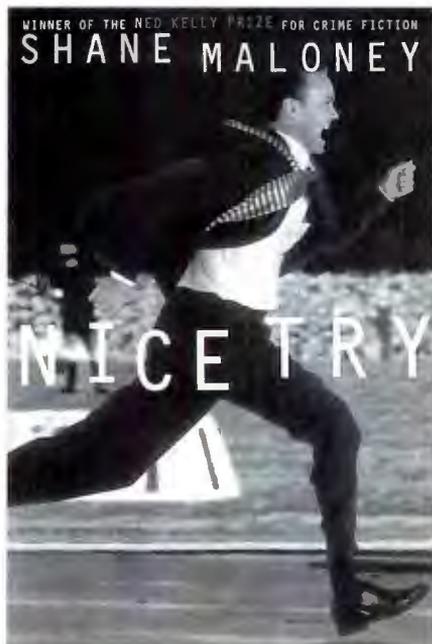
That lovely little thinker, Bob Hawke, gave the last address in the ABC's series of Prime Ministerial lectures in March. He made an eloquent, but not tearful, plea for more respect to be given to politicians. Maybe they would do their job better if we didn't give them such a hard time, he seemed to be saying. I wonder if he's expecting an apology. ■

Juliette Hughes is a freelance writer and critic.

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