EUREKA STREET

Vol. 8 No. 9 November 1998 $5.95

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EUREKA STREET

Volume 8 Number 9
November 1998

A magazine of public affairs, the arts and theology

The young Goethe said to his mother, of some fellow-guests, 'They are agreeable enough but if they'd been books I shouldn't have read them.' Hospitality was not Goethe's most conspicuous quality, but his remark is suggestive ...

—Peter Steele, 'Owl and cormorant', p4.

For the full range of suggestions in this month's special readers' issue, read on.

Cover design by Siobhan Jackson, very much after Jacques Louis David. Rubber duckie in homage to Jeffrey Moss (1942–1998).
Graphics pp5, 10, 20–21, 24–25, 34, 36, 39, 47 by Siobhan Jackson. Cartoon p13 by Peter Fraser. Photographs pp16–17 courtesy John Button and Text Publishing. Photograph p31 by Dan Madigan.

Eureka Street magazine
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Eureka Street gratefully acknowledges the support of C. and A. Carter; the trustees of the estate of Miss M. Condon; W.P. & M.W. Gurry

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

Unsolicited manuscripts, including poetry and fiction, will be returned only if accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Requests for permission to reprint material from the magazine should be addressed in writing to:
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COMMENT

MORAG FRASER

THIS MONTH THE ISSUE is devoted to reading, not as a retreat from the daily round, but as a way of looking at our routine preoccupations with renewed clarity—what Shakespeare called 'washed eyes'. Hence a poem where you usually read prose, one for the November season. And many other things. ■

—Morag Fraser

The Letters

'Dear Mater and Dad' he had written. Or
to his brother, 'Old Salt, how goes it back home?'
He wrote with a blunt pencil by candle-light
or in the Red Shield Hut well away from the Front.
He tried not to get mud on the small pages, or fingerprints,
or blood. He invented memories of Leave in the Old Dart
full of meals eaten and jolly girls or sometimes the Cinema
or that time in the Gods trying to hear a play
(it was a Comedy but he missed so much). Three times
that particular night returned but he never got it right—
the damp and cold through his feet, the smell of steaming wool,
the girl herself twisting her two hands ceaselessly—
not once did his letters reinvent how it was,
or even how he wished it to be. In the front line, though,
what was important was the act of writing,
of getting it down. 'It' was the affirmation
in his head, the thing clung to, the action
of language reduced to sign, as if signs
were a certain recipe for memory and wisdom.
None of the others in his tiny Signallers' group
wrote letters home. 'Writing to yer Maw agen?'
Once he got it down and sealed it off
it went on a long journey that would alter everything.

When he finally got home, after the War,
his Mater was grim-faced with cancer, his Dad old
and that Old Salt his brother married and gone
without even a whiff of the mustard smell of his own War
which he couldn't write about. He couldn't accuse.
Well, that was all right.

Before she died
his Mater handed him the large bundle of letters.
'They kept her alive', his father said, it was the only time
he mentioned her agony years. Alone, in his childhood sleep-out
he opened the first one. It was another person, a child,
and he saw through the lies and was ashamed.
'Those letters proved to us that you still cared'
the Old Man said, 'Though each one was a report from the dead,
but we couldn't admit that. They took so long,
and so much could have happened. We read them
again and again.' And for the first time he saw
how the lies and the cheerful reports hid nothing.
He was filled with agony. And it was for himself.

—Thomas Shapcott

Owl and cormorant

Coleridge, God bless him, said that he was a 'library-cormorant'. It is true. To read his extraordinary notebooks, for instance, is to see him plunge again and again into the shimmering waters of the printed word, coming up with some prize still moving in his wield. Most of us would be fortunate indeed to have his darting ability as a reader, let alone his capacity to transform what he read, but many of us do read, as it were, under the sign of the cormorant. Among books, we spear up some morsel—a fact, a phrase, a word—which seems enough for the present, and leaves us the livelier for having grasped its liveliness. Restlessness, at such moments, can seem its own vindication.

And then there is the owl, at least the owl of emblem. He perches, as though part of the tree that supports him, and scans by eye and ear, welcoming the darkness which will bring him all he needs, and watching from its midst for any movement. Adopted as the token of wisdom, he can also be the clan-sign of many who would not lay claim to that high gift, but who can say truthfully that they do read patiently, with continued focus, and with a kind of unruffled confidence that attention will bring its yield. In a famous, disconsolate sentence, Hegel claimed that 'The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling dusk', but libraries abound in people reading with good cheer, pleased at what comes to them, quite unbidden.

Either way, though, what a strange business the whole performance is. Nobody has ever been born literate, and it is only by courtesy of others that we master the accomplishment, after whatever fashion. Once, for each of us, all writing was invisible writing, in a closed book: the thing was arcane, from beginning to end. And then we were inducted into discovery, finding that to descry those wriggling lines was also to descry, a little, the great book of the world.

A small child called the exclamation mark 'the wonder mark', as the mind see-sawed between wondering-what and wondering-at. Life's business is inclined to tell the small child inside us to be seen and not heard: but the child is right, and we are merely distracted. Those words are bright with strangeness.

Of course it is true that, much of the time, we have to mute alertness. Owls have nestlings, cormorants often have masters, the world must be served. As we are blessed with sleep's daily unconsciousness, so we keep a kind of functional oblivion in order to get through the day. A Champollion may bring to life the Rosetta Stone's hieroglyphics, but even he has to deal in bread as well as stone. Still, to live thoughtfully requires a continual revision of what is to be attended to, and what not. In emergency, for any of us, and under life's continual pressure for some of us, that may seem a luxury; but if it is always so, we will have no way of knowing whether everything we do is mere blundering. Cormorant and owl alike do more than scan: they read for significance.

The young Goethe said to his mother, of some fellow-guests, 'They are agreeable enough but if they'd been books I shouldn't have read them.' Hospitality was not Goethe's most conspicuous quality, but his remark is suggestive, in that we do give readings of others, whether we find them word by word or blocked into paragraphs or chapters. There is a school of thought which holds in effect that all of us come solely in ensembles, and that individual personality is a will-o'-the-wisp: and there is predictably, the very antithesis of such a view. Each of these, itself a reading of experience, is in turn open to construal and that construal is as often as not turned back upon the original utterers. We are, as it were, interleaved with interpretations—are glossed, footnoted, equipped whether we like it or not with introductions and conclusions and indices. Sometimes, on the good days, we adorned with affectionate dedications.

There are of course the other days. Chekhov said, of reviewers, that they were the flies that keep the oxen from ploughing, and when it comes to many human endeavours the world is full of freelance reviewers. How much notice is to be taken of these is, once again, a matter for personal discernment. Each of us is utterly unprecedented, and each, no matter how many the children, will be utterly without sequel; just what is to be made of this, when we are also,

obviously, deeply cognate with one another, is not obvious. We give one another clues as to mutual understanding, but there is no rule as to how the clues are to be provided. Champollion found that in order to read a particular cartouche it was necessary to follow a lion's gaze: but the lion did not know that, and we are part-Champollion, part-lion.

In such circumstances, charity helps. A publisher wrote to an author that his work was 'a remarkable write, but not an irresistible read', which might have application to various other human performances. Where charity itself seems to lack plausibility, stylishness may still be possible—as when Foyle's, in London, covered their bookshop during the Blitz not with sandbags but with copies of *Mein Kampf*. But looking in, or looking out, as cormorant or as owl, staying alert is good policy. Joseph Joubert said, happily, 'His ink has the colours of the rainbow': but he also said, 'Because they know all the words, they think they know all the truths.' This is usefully alarming for a writer, provocatively encouraging for a reader. And it is an incidental reminder that, as none of us is the world's last word, none of us need have it. ■

Peter Steele SJ has a Personal Chair at the University of Melbourne.

COMMENT: 3

FRANK BRENNAN

The take on reconciliation

WIK IS BEHIND US, but the effects of the debate will continue to haunt both sides of politics during the term of the second Howard Government. In 1993, the Coalition parties had played a spoiling role in Opposition, depriving Prime Minister Keating of a workable solution to Mabo in the Senate. In 1998, Labor played tit for tat. The callousness of the Coalition in leaving indigenous people at the door was exceeded only by the hypocrisy of the Labor Party which had no prospect of delivering an enhanced result to Aborigines in the States where Labor was in government.

Entering the new millennium, we need a bipartisan commitment to the principles of non-discrimination, non-extinguishment of common law native title rights, and special recognition of indigenous entitlements to self-determination and protection of sacred sites and cultural traditions.

It is to be hoped that John Howard's manifestation of heart for Aboriginal reconciliation during the last week of the election campaign was not an orchestrated prelude to Tim Fischer's last-minute attack on the Northern Territory land councils. The review of those councils by John Reeves QC (ex-Labor member for the Northern Territory in the House of Representatives) had already highlighted the need for reform and provided the mandate. Tim Fischer went over the top in laying the ground for a post-election attack by describing the land councils as 'blood-sucking bureaucracies' and suggesting that the local Aboriginal communities were 'almost at civil war' with them. The stakes will be high, given the land councils' commitment to retaining the right to veto mineral development and to banning the Northern Territory Parliament from being able to acquire, compulsorily, any Aboriginal land in the Northern Territory.

Even Shane Stone's government, which will fight the land councils on both issues, concedes that the transition to statehood would be the appropriate time for settling a constitutional framework for Aboriginal rights and entitlements. On the national scene, there is now bipartisan room to move with John Howard's observation, 'I think if we do have another preamble to our Constitution we must mention the indigenous people.' A minimal starting point would be Shane Stone's proposed preamble: 'Since time immemorial the land ... was occupied by various groups of Aboriginal people who lived and defined their relationships between each other, with the land and their natural and spiritual environment under mutually recognised systems of governance and laws.'

Any unjustified legislative attack on ATSIC or land councils will not pass the Senate this term. The composition of the Senate will dictate that John Howard treat with Senator Aden Ridgeway. An Aboriginal senator with the ear of all non-government senators will make all the difference. The Liberal Party will need to be more respectful of Ridgeway than they were of Neville Bonner when they dumped him in 1982. National reconciliation on the eve of the Olympics depends on it. Never again will John Howard be able to leave Aborigines outside the door while he treats with the miners and pastoralists. He may even see the political wisdom in treating with the Aborigines. And having learnt from Wik, Aboriginal leaders may realise there is no point in acting as if Labor were in power. Whatever happens, we are all on notice that we are not allowed to use the word 'treaty'. But we had already been told that in 1988. ■

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

Capital Letter

Jack Waterford

Reading the electoral tea leaves

NOTHING COULD BE more disastrous for the Labor Party than the notion that it almost snatched the election, and that it is now, as Whitlam was in 1969 and Hayden in 1980, poised to snatch the next one, with only a little effort and perhaps a policy or two.

Yes, it did win a clear majority of the votes, and only a few hundred in the right places would have put it across the line and only a few thousand into a comfortable majority. The primary vote of both the Liberal Party and the National Party was at record low levels. John Howard himself did almost all that he could to deserve to lose. And Kim Beazley proved himself an able and amiable campaigner. But he did not win.

If this is how well Labor can do without policies, imagine how it could do if it had some next time, someone chortled on election night. Well, perhaps—if the policies were winners, but there's no guarantee of that. Labor's lack of a policy platform to present to the electorate was not part of a strategy of exposing itself to as little criticism as possible, but a reflection of the fact that it has not yet resolved where it wants to go, and how and why it wants to do things. A hastily cobbled-together tax policy at least had the virtue of being more self-funding than the Howard tax plan. But the vacuum within could hardly have been more clear. The purely token tax increases on caviar and executive jets were an example of slogans and dubious anecdotage creating policy proposals of which Pauline Hanson's One Nation might have been proud.

Now that the ALP has contracted out its policy-setting conference to choreographers, there will not be any debate if the leaderships have anything to do with it.

Most of Labor's other policies were hardly more than slogans or vague expressions of good feelings—indeed just the sort of pap produced by the party's national conference at the beginning of the year. And, so far as there was a call beyond the demonisation of the goods and services tax, it was to a broad image of general competence and proven capacity to run the country—just the sort of image that Howard was able to destroy in 1996.

John Howard should get some credit for sticking hard to his tax proposals even as there was a clear shift of opinion against them. But his claim to a mandate, in so far as there is one in the circumstances, comes from the fact that it was Labor's adoption of a campaigning strategy almost entirely focused on opposing the GST that made this, of all elections, almost a one-issue one. Labor almost entirely eschewed campaigning on social issues. It failed to attack the record of Howard in office, whether on integrity or competence issues. If there were categories of the dispossessed who swung back to Labor, it was more from disillusion with Howard's performance than from the allure of skilfully crafted Labor policies. Most of those who felt alienated and dispossessed voted One Nation first, then for Labor. Labor's primary vote rose only marginally.

It was not merely a matter, as implicitly suggested by Mark Latham, of carefully devised policies like his draft education policy, being junked by marketing and public relations men. The policies which had come to appeal to Latham had no more gone through party councils and been adopted by the party than the alternative ones tacked together from some impressions gained at focus groups. Unlike the Latham plan, these at least created an impression of a distinction between the policies of the two alternative governments. Latham's most devastating effect was his reinforcing of the impression that Labor at the moment does actually not want a coherent set of policies—because it is not ready for the brawls about what it stands for that this would involve. Don't hold out for them either. Now that the ALP has contracted out its policy-setting conference to choreographers, there will not be any debate if the leaderships have anything to do with it.

Dare one suggest that it was probably lucky for Labor that it did not win? They would then have had to rely on the actual competence, if not the popularity, of a few of their old stagers, the enthusiasm of their new one, and the goodwill that good old Kim Beazley has acquired. In somewhat the same way, John Howard would be muddling through had not he, or his party, acquired a new lease of life, and even the odd dose of courage. With or without a goods and services tax (Howard might well end up being grateful if the Senate ends up making the GST practically impossible for him) a party that actually holds power also has considerable capacity to reinvent itself, if it so chooses.

The advantage Howard has, apart from incumbency, is tenacity and a broad ideology of government. The moment he appears to lose it, a new leader, with drive and an agenda that will suddenly seem like Clintonism in trousers, or Blair complete with vestments, will take over. He could well retrieve votes that went very grudgingly to Labor last month.

The disadvantage that Labor would have had in government is that some of its internal contradictions would soon have become apparent, magnified, almost certainly by the prompt re-establishment of the networks that created Hansonism—a far from spent force.

The question is whether the impotence of opposition, and the apparent closeness of the prize-next-time, will inspire a debate that can shape a party ready to take power; or whether the tantalising closeness will create a demand for unity, for papering over the cracks, and such a determination to make no enemies that it wins no friends.

ONE MIGHT SAY, OF COURSE, that the reason why there has not been this fundamental argument is that Labor had not expected to be in a position to have a clear tilt at government and was simply unprepared for an election. Or that there was some strategy in the one-line anti-GST tactic: that Labor, like Howard in 1993, was best placed by not presenting itself as a target, that mentioning reduced services, or integrity, or unemployment, or the Government's social policy, or an alternative social policy, or republican issues, or Aboriginal affairs raised the risk of evoking Keating, or diffusing the strength of the case against consumption taxes.

Presumably that was what the polling advice said, just as the Liberals, presumably, were told that a tax plan and the spectre of Keating were the best arrows in their armoury.

In their way, perhaps, both did better than they deserved, but in the process they have further excited voter disillusion with politics and politicians, and yet again returned the compliment by showing their complete contempt for the voters. ■

Jack Waterford is editor of the *Canberra Times*.

No indulgence

From Kenneth Hince

After the purgatorial experience of enduring Barrie Kosky's opera productions, I am inclined to believe what Peter Craven had to say about Kosky's production of *King Lear* (*Eureka Street*, October 1998).

However, let me add with almighty emphasis that if Peter Craven thinks Kosky is a 'great opera director' he knows less about opera than Kosky knows about *King Lear*.

Kenneth Hince
Euroa, VIC

The polling fields

From Joan Healy RSJ

I want to respond to Jon Greenaway's article on the Cambodian election (*Eureka Street*, September 1998), in particular to his questioning of the situation of the outer provinces. I have lived and worked in Battambang Province for many years and, since a recent assignment there included the election and counting day, I agreed to act as an official observer. My motive was to give local people hope that the truth about these elections would be told to the world.

The subsequent tragic events in Phnom Penh cast more light on the 'truth' than did the quick judgment of 'free and fair' by most of the official observer groups. This country is struggling to emerge from a bloody and shackled past and needs understanding and wise support from the international community. The 86.5 per cent of the population living in rural areas ought not to be overlooked.

Outside of the towns the vast effort of polling and counting for democracy sits incongruously in a society that remains 'almost feudal' (complete with influential patrons and armed warlords). Furthermore, the rural school teachers and medical workers, the district, commune and village chiefs are seen as 'the government' and expected to work loyally for the party in their area. I have seen that every kind of gathering in the village, from the family planning group to the chicken bank, can be turned into a political meeting by the village chief. Opposing views cannot be aired safely. Most people have little understanding that village life could be different from this, the village chief controls life in its finest details and is answerable in a direct line to the leader of the CPP. In some villages people were asked to take oaths of support for the party. More sinisterly they were taught to vote in 'the correct way'. In the vast majority of villages in this area, those in authority were openly partisan. Many village chiefs seemed to sincerely believe that to encourage the people to vote 'correctly' was part of their role, and that their loyalty to their superiors could be measured by whether their people voted for 'the government'.

I was still in the villages during the weeks after the polls. In communes which had voted CPP the threats ceased. In those which had voted 'against the government' the threats increased. This was recorded in the local office of the United Nations Commission for Human Rights.

A woman leader whom we know well came to seek help from the Cambodian community development team with whom I was working. The woman has been an organiser of women's health groups in her village and was popularly elected as leader of the Village Development Committee. She belongs to no political party but her work has helped village people to think independently. After the election the powerful commune leader threatened angrily, many times and in front of listeners, to cut her throat and eat her liver. He blames her because the commune did not vote for 'the government'. She feels unprotected since she is middle-aged and her husband is old. Running from the village is no solution; one always needs to return somewhere, sometime.

While protection for the woman was being arranged, the militia under the control of the same chief arrested an 18-year-old opposition party member from a nearby village. Locked up alone and terrified the young campaigner tried to escape in the night. He was shot and killed. Those village people courageous enough to protest were told, 'There is no body. You have no evidence that he is dead. Those who speak will die too.'

It is a sign of great hope that the village people dared to dig up the body in the forest and that a prosecutor working for the 'government' caused those responsible for the shooting to be arrested.

Truly free and fair elections will come to Cambodia eventually. They will be founded on the courage and leadership of strongly committed Cambodian women and men. These are times of extraordinary peril for Cambodia, and of extraordinary opportunity. They require not only economic assistance from the

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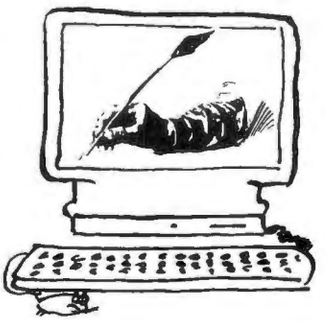


This month,
the writer of each letter we publish will receive a pack of postcards featuring cartoons and graphics, by *Eureka Street* regulars, Dean Moore, Siobhan Jackson and Tim Metherall.

international community but close guidance and support in mediating a non-violent solution to the conflicts of an emerging democracy. The assistance pledged at the signing of the peace accord is needed now as never before.

Joan Healy RSJ
Regent West, VIC

Street angel

From Richard DeAngelis

The Clinton–Monica saga has been remarkable and disconcerting, a mix of the truly silly and irrelevant along with the tragic and the serious, particularly regarding the President's loss of authority, prestige and power to do his duty well.

The most puzzling aspect for me, following the latest revelations, is the ambiguity of Clinton's 'moral authority', which many seem to think he has lost irrevocably. On the one hand, his actions are surely reckless, insensitive, selfish, tawdry and dishonest—an inexcusable betrayal of family, friends, supporters, and the nation, and especially those who need him most. A President, a Democrat, facing a hostile Congress, a flawed human being and a non-charismatic, non-war hero can ill afford being caught with his pants down.

On the other hand, I cannot forget that this President is authentically compassionate, tolerant, open, intelligent, determined, and courageous and has given us some fine public policy most of the time. He is not neurotic, not greedy, not power hungry, not vindictive, not violent or cruel. His scandals have been petty; he has lost money in Arkansas even as Governor; his lies have been venal and shifty. He is not in the same league of evil and immorality as many of his predecessors or contemporaries. Perhaps some of his virtues outweigh his faults. If we are all flawed human beings, why can't we grow up to accept that Presidents are just as human as our parents and us?

Richard DeAngelis
Brighton, SA

From the source

From Chris Curtis, Vice President, Victorian DLP 1976–1978

As a professor, James Griffin (*Eureka Street*, July/August 1998) should prefer primary sources to secondary ones. As evidence that the DLP subordinated social welfare policies, he states that the DLP's social welfare policy occupies one sentence in Paul Reynolds' *The Democratic Labor Party*.

I was the policy review co-ordinator of the Victorian DLP. Social welfare policy—broadly defined to include family payments, health, education, prison reforms, etc.—occupied 37 pages of the 126-page compilation of DLP policies that was produced in 1977.

If Professor Griffin cares to read DLP policy speeches or press statements (including all those that the press never published), he will find ample reference to social welfare matters.

The DLP is gone but ignorance about it lives on. The true test of the DLP's commitment to social welfare is in fact the many former DLP members and voters who now support the Labor Party as the only way to save Australia from the economic rationalist madness which has infected it. After all, it was the Democratic *Labor* Party.

Chris Curtis
Hurstbridge, VIC




The Month's Traffic

Unconventional

PATRICK ('PADDY') O'BRIEN, Associate Professor of Politics at the University of Western Australia, and one of the wild men of the Constitutional Convention, died suddenly of a heart attack in September. He was walking home alone from a party in suburban Perth, that Saturday night, that he seemed to have enjoyed thoroughly. Neighbours heard him whistling, not long before death must have struck him.

This is a personal memoir of Paddy O'Brien from one who, for more than 20 years, was a regular target for his renowned broadsides.

We never actually talked in all that time. This did not prevent his assuming that I held particular views, nor from penning what an embarrassed official described as a 'possibly defamatory and rather personal' letter addressed to me, care of the Department of Employment Education, Training and Youth Affairs, after the committee I chaired failed to support his research application. I gather (the Department, wisely, never forwarded the correspondence) that Paddy thought that I was a fellow-travelling/politically correct/unjust and prejudiced femocrat determined to do him a personal injury.

Hence, I felt justified in describing him, to a fellow delegate whose support he had sought just before the Constitutional Convention began in February, as a 'mad right-winger' and in advising her to be careful in her dealings with him.

But I was wrong. ConCon changed everything.

Paddy had been elected in Western Australia on an 'Elect the President' platform. I, in Victoria, won on the 'Real Republic' ticket, committed to genuine constitutional reform to protect individual and citizens' rights. I learned that my old foe and I were to be seated virtually side-by-side on the 'non-aligned' republican backbenches of the old House where the Convention was sited. The prospect was uncomfortable, so, when I came across Paddy, a solitary figure in a battered panama and seersucker jacket, contemplating his pungent cigarette in the sun outside the welcoming reception, I greeted him. I started to explain my committee's decision, expecting a rebuff. To my surprise, Paddy was not only civil, but disarmingly self-deprecating, even charming. He didn't want to discuss his correspondence—'Oh, I write rather strong letters,' was all he would say, 'it clears the air.' He was also, I'd swear, either a bit embarrassed, or shy. Truce was declared.

By the second day of the Convention we were allies. The crass manipulation of the Convention by the Australian Republican Movement, the ALP and Coalition voting blocs, to prevent our even discussing a republican model that let the people elect their head of state, drove the 'fringe dweller' republicans into something like our own coalition. Between 28 and 35 of us met each morning, caucusing during the day, supporting each other's motions and press conferences and applauding our speakers. Warmth grew. By the end of the first week, Paddy was standing nearby in the courtyard during a twilight drinks function hosted by Dick Smith, and when he couldn't remember what followed:

'Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky ...'

with which he was trying to impress journalist Miranda Devine, I chimed in with:

'Like a patient etherised upon a table;'

and we all laughed, and had another drink. After he died I pulled out and re-read the whole of T.S. Eliot's *Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. I can see that yellow sky yet, licking its tongue into the corners of the evening.

Paddy O'Brien has been called arrogant, but when he gave me a copy of his book, *The People's Case: Democratic and Anti-Democratic Ideas in Australia's Constitutional Debate*, it was with modesty and a self-deprecating remark. He detested hierarchies, and felt victimised by any. He was a democrat by instinct, as well as intellect. There are few of them, and now one less.

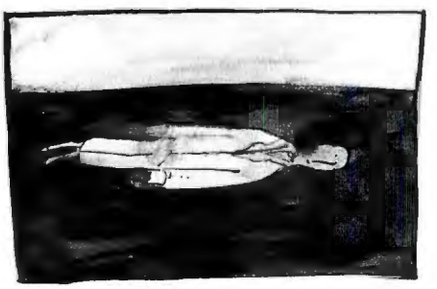
He had been called a 'bully' by some, who hated him: but I saw Paddy shirt-front Eddie McGuire at the Convention dinner, after he perceived McGuire to be browbeating a woman delegate, shouting angrily against the 'damned bully'.

He was an intemperate and perhaps unfair critic, including of me: but was no more ridiculous, as commentators like Steve Vizard would have us believe, than Horowitz playing Chopin. He was driven and directed to a single, perfectionist, end.

He could be vicious in an argument: but he was kind when, towards the end of our Convention, I and other women were exhausted and disheartened by the deceptions, and the Convention's frustration.

Paddy O'Brien was a complex man, and a passionate one: unsure of his own worth and so likely to lash out, but willing to appear ridiculous for his causes, believing deeply and single-heartedly in them. When the Convention ended, we hugged each other. And when the journalist from the *West Australian* rang and told me he had died, I wept.

—Moira Rayner



The swinging forties

ONCE UPON A TIME there was a lacklustre conservative government in Canberra. It had been popular, but not any more. The disappointed electorate was wondering whether the task of governing Australia at a challenging time of international upheaval was beyond it.

Voters were becoming increasingly responsive to critics who described the Government as backward-looking and mean-spirited. The Labor Party had copped a hiding at the previous election, but its supporters were beginning to hope that the Party, under the leadership of a talented, widely read and sport-loving Western Australian MHR (who sometimes had trouble retaining his own seat), could give the next election a real shake.

These hopes had been boosted by a dramatic announcement. A well-known, highly respected individual decided to make an unprecedented resignation from a

significant public position in order to stand for the ALP at the next election. Furthermore, this prominent identity—who had been a member of Parliament before, but never a Labor candidate for the House of Representatives—was prepared to contest a Government-held marginal seat.

This was tremendously uplifting news for the Opposition party faithful. The media trumpeted the announcement with gusto and hailed the newcomer as a front-bench certainty and a leadership prospect in due course. The Government reacted sourly, and made a concerted effort to dent the favourable publicity and discredit the candidate.

Sound familiar?

In fact this narrative describes exactly the lead-up to the 1940 federal election, when Labor's leader was John Curtin and the party's glamorous new candidate was Bert Evatt, who resigned as a justice of the High Court to contest the marginal anti-Labor seat of Barton.

The striking parallels between the 1940 and 1998 elections do not end there.

In 1940, as in 1998, one issue dominated, although not the same one. Tax reform was not uppermost in most electors' considerations in 1940; one candidate standing that year for the Senate in Victoria as a 'Tax Reform' candidate polled only 0.5 per cent of the vote. The dominant question in 1940 was which major party was best equipped to govern during wartime.

In 1940, as in 1998, the election was a cliff-hanger. Days of vote-counting were needed before the outcome was known. The result was a very narrow win to the coalition.

In 1940, as in 1998, Labor achieved a large swing and captured a number of additional seats in the state where its new glamour candidate was standing.

In 1940, as in 1998, some ALP identities doing post-mortem analysis of the election loss wondered whether the party's performance in New South Wales, although a distinct improvement on the previous election, could have been better.

There were, however, differences between the two elections.

In 1940 Evatt gained a big swing in Barton and won the seat easily.

In 1940 Curtin had to wait for days to find out whether he had scraped back in Fremantle, whereas Kim Beazley (whose father succeeded Curtin as MHR for Fremantle in 1945) went to bed on the night of 3 October more secure about his own seat than ever before on an election night.

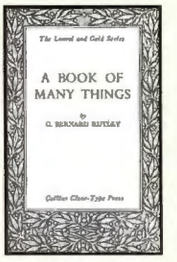
Does the 1940 precedent serve as any guide to what might happen as Australia moves towards the centenary of Federation, the new century and the next election?

In 1940 the Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, was politically weakened by the swing against the Government and its near defeat. A year after the 1940 election, Menzies was removed as Prime Minister by his own party. The wartime government's internal problems led to Labor taking office, and Curtin commenced his term as Prime Minister. Many commentators have claimed since that he was the best Australia has ever had.

Little wonder then that John Howard and Kim Beazley share a passionate personal interest in the movements of Australian history.

—Ross McMullin

The manuscript in my briefcase



FIVE KILOS? Or six? The manuscript in my briefcase is heavy—no idea yet of its literary weight.

I've finished my week at work (as a senior editor of fiction) and the weekend is when I do the other part of my job—reading manuscripts. It is potentially the most crucial part of my work, finding that next great novel, whether of the capital L 'literature' variety or the capital R 'racy' read. I love them both. And this reading I do whenever I can, such as now, for instance, while eating breakfast. Don't get me wrong. It has my full attention, as my cold coffee will attest.

Surely I have one of the best jobs in the world. I read manuscripts, I edit prose, I have my eyes opened every day. This week I talked with Mudrooroo about the influence of *Medea* on his latest *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* story. I offered also, rather gingerly and conscious of the worlds that separate them, a suggestion that there were also echoes of Joseph Conrad in his novel. Both *Underground* and *Heart of Darkness* have master storytellers leading their listeners—and readers—into the dark hearts of their respective civilisations: Marlow into the fetid jungle of imperialism; George into the complex relations of black/white, female/male, real/imagined. Muddy was more comfortable with *Medea*.

And, with Phillip McLaren, a David Unaipon Award-winning author, while discussing his latest novel *Lightning Mine* (a heady blend of international industrial espionage and Aboriginal land rights), we talked about Phillip's mob, the Kamilaroi people. My connection to them was growing up, a white kid in the bush, on their land and playing softball on the Kamilaroi sports oval.

Some weeks earlier, while frantically trying to get Peter FitzSimons' biography of Kim Beazley on the shelves before the election, I spent precious and privileged moments on the phone listening to Kim Beazley Senior's recitation of J.K. Ewers' poem 'The Red Road'.

This, surely, is also why we read. Not only to be captivated, moved, challenged, or taken out of our routine lives by the story, its characters, its language, but to be given a chance to meet other people and see, for just a moment, their world through their eyes.

The manuscript in my briefcase? Well, I can't name names, for the author might be one of those we reject. Is it the author we reject, or the manuscript? Well, both in some senses, for anyone who writes knows that there is much of one's identity in the lines on the page, more than is represented simply by the name on the cover sheet, or more than is allowed by some post-structuralist theorists.

William Butler Yeats wrote the lines, spoken by one to his lover: 'tread softly because you tread on my dreams', and these words resonate as I read manuscripts and write my reports. The words that I choose painstakingly to gently reject a manuscript might well feel like a sledgehammer even to the most seasoned author.

The manuscript in my briefcase cleared the first hurdle. It is a coltish young manuscript (weight, approximately 5.2 kilos) which should have the stamina to finish the race. ■

Belinda Lee is a writer and senior editor at HarperCollinsPublishers.

Hope on Silk Street

AS NIGHT FALLS on Hanoi's Old Quarter, tourists are drawn on to the streets by the bright lights and shopping bargains. This 1000-year-old district has become the Vietnamese capital's main tourist hub, where Westerners haggle with locals over cheap Soviet watches, pirated CDs, fine silk and original art by some of Asia's most innovative painters.

But the bright lights along *Hang Gai*, or Silk Street, also reveal the social cost of Vietnam's move to discard its communist welfare system as it heads towards a Western-style market economy. The Old Quarter not only attracts tourists, but also an increasing number of beggars and young children, who spend long hours trying to eke out a living by shining shoes or selling cheap postcards. Growing numbers of people, lured by the prospect of greater wealth in the larger cities, are leaving the countryside. Once they arrive, many struggle to make ends meet. The government has shut down many inefficient state-run enterprises, ending the communist guarantee of a job for life. The social security net is fast eroding, leaving many with no other option but to live on the streets.

But while the number of beggars in the Old Quarter continues to rise, just a few blocks away a remarkable woman named Madam Pham Thi Vy is offering hope to hundreds of Vietnamese street kids.

In the past decade Vietnam has opened its doors to an increasing number of Western tourists. It remains, however, one of the world's poorest countries. Conditions are rough and tourists often find themselves dining in expensive hotels that cater solely for expatriates and well-heeled foreign business people. In 1995, the recently retired Madam Pham Thi Vy set up an affordable but high-quality restaurant staffed entirely by street kids, orphans, children from single-parent families, and recently repatriated refugees who'd spent years in camps around the region.

We sit in the cool and leafy courtyard of the Hoa Sua Restaurant and Patisserie, while Madam Pham Thi Vy explains that she wanted to do something to help her community and to change the desperate circumstances of many Vietnamese children. Each year she accepts about 200 students. They are trained in cooking, serving, bartending and all other aspects of the hospitality industry. The students at Hoa Sua, who range from 18 to 28 years of age, are provided with accommodation, an allowance, and food and clothing throughout their apprenticeship.

The Hoa Sua restaurant and attached patisserie are located in a grand French colonial-era building. Customers may dine in the serene courtyard, inside the bistro or in the silver-service dining room. The prices remain the same, but the different areas provide the students with the skills to work in any type of restaurant. Customers receive a free appetiser and select from a menu that blends traditional Vietnamese cooking with the cuisine of the former French rulers. The bill, including entrée, main course, a glass of wine and dessert, starts at $10 per person.

The quality of the food and service is outstanding, especially when you remember that it is provided entirely by former street kids and orphans who, until a few months ago, often did not know where their next meal would come from.

Twenty-year-old Nguyen Trinh Lam is one of Hoa Sua's most recent recruits. Lam says that until three months ago he survived by selling cheap postcards to tourists. 'I like working as a waiter here and I'm also learning English because one day I want to open my own restaurant,' he says. 'I also get time to relax with the other students.'

Twenty-three-year-old Phuong has been training at Hoa Sua for more than a year. 'I liked working in the bakery the best,' she says. 'Even though I had to get up early, I had my afternoons free to do other things. Hopefully when my training is over I will be able to get a job with one of the big hotels and maybe travel to other countries.'

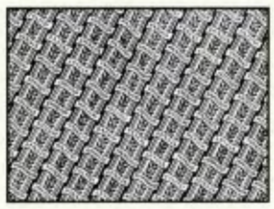
Madam Pham Thi Vy recently opened a catering service, and students are learning new skills there too. She says that at the moment the students are trained by chefs brought in from France, but this year five Hoa Sua graduates will travel to Paris for further training. 'On their return they will take over responsibility for training future generations of students,' she says.

After graduating, the budding waiters, chefs and bartenders are given help to find permanent jobs. About 75 per cent find work within a year. And despite the extensive support provided by Madam Pham Thi Vy, Hoa Sua is entirely self-sufficient, earning enough to cover its running costs and pay for the accommodation and needs of all Hoa Sua students.

—Geoff Keele

Reading death

Darwin, 27 September 1998



For Phil Price, friend and fellow priest, 1953–1998

TODAY, AS YOU WERE LEAVING, I am flying in a warm, salty lake.

I float alone, apart. The anxiety of new people, new places sends me hunting for a moment of solitude. I have carried too much baggage from the south, and wounds open. But distance brings perspective, and this new place brings new ways of seeing. I am licked by salt. The air is full and ripe. The lake holds the body generously at the surface. No movement is needed, no effort required.

Eyes closed, ears submerged. I hear the whole lake breathe with me. In and out. In and out. It's so quiet here.

Eyes open. The sky hugs the lake, breathes with it, into it. I make angel wings in the water. Slowly, deliberately, attentively. Up and down. Up and down. Water floats over skin. Birds fly across the dome of the sky. Wings beating slowly, deliberately, attentively. Air floats over feathers. Higher, a solitary plane. The day is ending.

Tomorrow, I will hear of your phoenix death. Your last take off. The swift return to the earth. Then the flames. Your charred and mangled body. The wail of sirens, and children and wife. The stupid waste. I will hear of your death, thousands of miles away, and I will think of this lake.

Today you are being carried on angels' wings. Slowly, deliberately, attentively. And I will miss you, brother. ■

Jane Foulcher is an Anglican priest.

Not forgetting the gas

MELBOURNE'S *Age* editorial (3 October) was right: infrastructure disruption '... can ... adversely affect the financial outlook of the nation and has disturbing social, economic and even defence implications'. However, the solution is not—as the editorial went on to suggest—to have such a physically secure supply that we then take it for granted because, if we did, it would surely slide into political oblivion. Political oblivion is not the right place for essential services in an open democratic society.

As gas supplies are reconnected in Victoria, the opportunity to consider how we deal with breaks in the provision of essential services is again fast slipping out of our grasp. While it may seem tedious that we only learn about infrastructure when it fails, it is precisely our consequent frustration and vulnerability that makes us interested in robust infrastructure. Our emotional responses provide the *political constituency* for robustness. And nothing teaches like real experience—the more so if you also have a productive intellectual framework in which to think about it.

Gas-fired homes discovered that solar and electric homes down the street were willing to share their temporary good fortune. This discovery did a lot for us all, both as communities and personally. We learned that there is such a thing as social capital waiting to be recognised and used.

The crisis helped in two ways. It forced us to find other ways to do things, such as

A picture's worth

ONE TIME-HONOURED APPROACH to writing is to use pictures to represent words. It is still preserved in East Asia in the form of characters—often highly stylised diagrams of the words they represent. In most of the rest of the world, however, such ideograms have been forsaken for a more flexible and efficient alternative—symbols which code for the way words sound.

Archimedes is convinced the wheel is turning, that pictures and graphics are heading for a big comeback in our reading and communication—and, as usual, it's all the fault of science and technology, and the computer in particular.

One of the things computers can do best is follow complicated processes where many changes are happening simultaneously. This is how the real world works. And computers are wonderful at helping us deal with the real world—measuring, calculating, analysing, combining and storing huge amounts of information from many different sources, all at electronic speed. Because they are computers, they do it all in terms of numbers.

Except for a select mathematical few, we humans are not very good at absorbing and interpreting information in terms of patterns of numbers. On the other hand, with our background of hundreds of millions of years of evolution as hunters and gatherers, we have a highly developed sense of vision, and are very sophisticated at absorbing visual information and detecting subtle changes in it. So when the computer has finished playing with its figures, it is most often instructed to display what it has found as a picture or a graphic.

The trend now is for researchers to devote increasing amounts of time to the niceties of displaying information visually. For instance, at the recent conference on Biological Informatics in Canberra (see *Archimedes*, August), more than half the papers concerned themselves with aspects of representing and displaying information—distributions of animals and plants, identification of species, or physical measurements of the environment.

Other areas of modern science have also been travelling the same way. We now talk constantly of 'imaging', whether to do with the remote measurements of the earth's surface taken from satellites, or pictures of the inside of the human head. Almost all hospitals now have 'imaging' departments, where whole batteries of non-invasive tests—CAT scans and PET scans and X-rays and ultrasounds—produce weird and wonderful pictures of our bodies, each carrying its own information and reality. Most of these patterns are constructed from numbers with computer assistance. It is much easier, however, for doctors to interpret the images than the numbers behind them.

Yet in the field of appreciation of graphical information, these doctors and the scientists in the laboratories are probably only just beginning to catch up with their children. Children who have grown up with television seem to approach it in a completely different way from parents who did not. In the late '70s I found it almost impossible to teach a course using videos because the class sat back and expected to be entertained not informed. Today, students seem able to analyse visually presented information much more rigorously. They can play and dissect videos over and over again, in the way that their parents used to play and dissect records and tapes.

Inevitably, we are becoming more graphically minded. It is reinforced by the growing pace of our daily lives. It's easier and quicker to absorb graphical information than print, and so the ideogram has returned in another form. It's now called an icon, and it's not only a significant part of the operation of computers, it has also made a major incursion into the world of machinery and household appliances.

All of these changes are perhaps best reflected in the way information is located and displayed on what is now the world's most extensive source of information, the World Wide Web. A kaleidoscope of print, photographs, animation, even sound, come together on the screen to produce a single message.

Contrary to many of my pessimistic journalist friends, I do not believe print is dying. Print is still the most efficient, dense and even elegant form of recording and presenting information. But it is not the only form. And it is not even the best form for communicating many types of information. The computer makes it possible to integrate these many different forms into one message. And already this capacity is changing the way we read and the way we write. ■

Tim Thwaites is a freelance science writer.

heat water, but also demonstrated that we could get by without it. Suddenly a little BO was OK.

The type of social infrastructure thus generated is called empathy or trust. It too is easily taken for granted, and it also fails through lack of use—it loses its constituency. Trust is a sorely needed community attribute and one we should be loath to play fast and loose with. The political concerns we associate with the rise of One Nation neatly underscore the need for trust just as our infrastructure crisis was helping to restore it.

No-one could oppose a call for a more cautious initial design for gas supply. But we should not allow ourselves to be frightened into striving vainly for fault-free infrastructures at massive expense. Each marginal improvement to the physical robustness of electricity or gas supply is likely to cost exponentially more than the preceding one and will not help at all with, say, security of petrol or water supply. By contrast, enhancing the *social* experience of temporary independence from any of these infrastructures could give us a generalised level of community confidence that would be socially transformative.

The starting point for such a new way of organising for emergencies—that is, a social or *civil* defence system—would be precisely the 'constituency of the occasional crisis'. When crises are far apart, our social and political memories atrophy to the point where we do not allocate the resources for adequate defence. Consider what would happen to our fire brigades or our ambulance services if they only had to deal with one event per year.

National service went years ago, and while few now want a return to universal military training, many would agree that it is a good thing to cultivate an understanding of what it takes to keep society going if infrastructure fails. So here is the impetus for civil defence training—a national service that would provide training for all emergencies, military included. It would encourage application of its principles to all the present emergency services, such as fire brigades, surf lifesaving clubs, neighbourhood safe house schemes, first aid and the many other voluntary organisations that attempt to pick us up when our resources fail. A civil defence service would not compete with them but would dramatically enhance the social context in which they work. Training would help us understand our communities, their natural resources and the social and technical infrastructures upon which they are built. Because the expertise would be in our heads and in our social frameworks, it could be mobilised anywhere, any time, in any emergency.

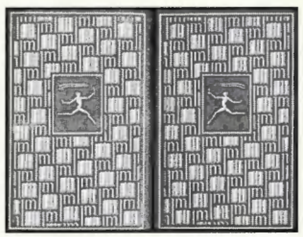
If we were organised to deal with breakdown we'd all know a lot more about what it takes to run a hi-tech society like our own. Social responsibility would improve. Our technical infrastructures could be built more flexibly, cheaply, and with much greater openness, enabling simpler repair and simpler transformation as inevitable obsolescence overtakes them. It is not difficult to imagine the many other spin-offs such a community-based program would generate: from skilling to export sales of the very program itself, its detailed training procedures, and, inevitably, a new level of locally maintained material infrastructures. Just ask the Scandinavians who, to some extent, already do it.

Curiously, such a national service could also enable a level of privatisation of infrastructure hitherto undreamed of—because we would then be able to see to its monitoring and maintenance at a level simply unavailable at present. Enhanced community responsibility could give new meaning to the honest market economist's dream: consumers with much improved and more generally accessible information about their own (infrastructure) market.

A pity such a scheme could not be in place before midnight 31.12.1999 or 'Y2K'.

—Frank Fisher

Turning the page



Judith Watkins spent a week in October with Larrakia and Tiwi women from the Top End, at a place called Nungalinya, named after the big rock—a sacred place— offshore from Casuarina Beach, Darwin.

I LOVE TO READ. I read books, I read music, I read different situations, I read people. Reading is an integral part of my life, and I like to think I'm proficient in it. It comes as an enormous shock to be in a situation where my proficiency comes into question, the paradigm within which I operate needs to be thrown away, and I have to begin again.

This was exactly what happened to me at Nungalinya. I had to be prepared to be a beginner once again, to be open to learning the basic skills of reading. I was reminded, sometimes very bluntly, that readers need to be patient, to use all their skills of observation, and that even then they make mistakes. I had to learn about new ways of reading language, both spoken and unspoken, new ways of reading nature, new ways of reading people and situations, perhaps even new ways of reading myself.

And yet, as the weeks go by, and the distance between the present and past experience increases, I find myself wondering whether I was learning new reading skills, or rediscovering the importance of reading skills I had come to take for granted. During the time at Nungalinya, I was reminded that worthwhile reading is often hard work. It can be risky and challenging. It demands that we take time to listen and reflect on what we read. New reading means being prepared to ask questions of the text, and of ourselves as readers. New reading means allowing the text to speak to us.

'Now we see in a glass darkly'—fragments of text and subtext are running around in my mind. The reading, and the waiting and the listening continues, and I am grateful for the questions and the challenges it poses. ■

Judith Watkins is a Uniting Church Minister.

This month's contributors: **Moira Rayner** is a lawyer and freelance journalist; **Ross McMullin** is the author of the ALP centenary history, *The Light on the Hill*; **Geoff Keele** is a freelance journalist; **Frank Fisher** is Director of the Graduate School of Environmental Science & Centre for Environmental Management at Monash University.

SUMMA theologiae

Colts or canons

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN Catholics are often choreographed like Westerns. Down the street comes Black Hat with his goons. They are met by White Hat coming out of the saloon. A gunfight ensues, with enormous collateral damage, and the triumph of White Hat. It remains only to identify the men in the hats.

If we survey the terrain more carefully, however, and ask what lies in the protagonists' sights, what goods they defend, and whether their weaponry is up to the mark, we may sometimes see that they are actually firing past one another, and that casualties are caused by friendly fire. A case in point is found in the latest number of *Compass* (Winter 1998) which includes a letter from Cardinal Clancy in response to an earlier article by Len Bagelow (*Compass*, Summer 1997). This exchange on the future of ministry in the Catholic church appears to require the reader simply to take sides. But that response might be too hasty. Bagelow reacts against the sharp division drawn in Catholic theology between laity and clerics. He believes it responsible for destructive tensions within the church. On the one hand, the restriction of ordination to men and of decision-making to the ordained leaves lay people unable to fulfil their responsibilities, and makes many ordained ministers anxious about their role. On the other hand, as lay ministry is increasingly identified with roles in the liturgy, the mission of the church to society is neglected.

Bagelow's solution is to do away with the distinction between lay and cleric, which he claims to have been developed late in the early church. He then sketches the consequences by imagining the shape of ministry in St McKillop's in 2010.

The main differences between the present and future church are that in St McKillop's ministers will be called by their New Testament titles and will be commissioned by the community for short periods of service. Ministries, available both to men and women, will be varied, including deacons working with youth, the marginalised and the environment, and prophets to church and society. The sacraments are not reserved to the presbyter, while deacons link the local church to the bishop and to the Bishop of Rome.

Bagelow clearly writes in opposition to a clerical church, whose characteristics he sees as preoccupation with dignity and control, centralisation, churchiness, maldistribution of resources, and inflexibility. He wants a church for which all take responsibility, which is open to the wider society, where all co-operatively build up the whole church, and where ministry can meet changing needs.

Like any imaginative re-creation, Bagelow's blueprint is open to criticism on practical grounds. In architects' drawings, children never cry and cars never belch smoke. The reality, even in free churches, is always more messy. At St McKillop's the number of people commissioned is so large, and the commissionings so frequent, that its attention may turn out to be even more inwardly focused than today. Might not, too, the energy that comes from lifelong ministries in the church, be lost to such a church?

Cardinal Clancy's response appeals to Catholic teaching about ministry. He insists that church ministry is grounded in Christ's commission to the Apostles. Teaching and sacramental and pastoral care in the church derive from the successors to the Apostles. Lay people who help in this work are deputed, and their work is not sacramental. The distinction between ordained and unordained, therefore, is central to the church, and attempts to remedy any malfunction in the church must respect the difference.

The differences between these two positions clearly cannot be papered over. But it would be a mistake simply to take sides between them. For they derive their energy from different places. Cardinal Clancy is concerned for the continuity of church tradition and teaching. In defending clerical difference, he asserts the claims of church order. Len Bagelow is concerned with the psychological and sociological implications of current practice. In attacking clerical distinctiveness, his target is clericalism—the concentration of power in the hands of the priest, the reduction of church to sacristy and altar, and a spirituality which places clergy over laity.

It is appropriate both to sympathise with and to put questions to each position. Cardinal Clancy states clearly the Catholic teaching on the grounding of ministry in Christ and the apostles. While this understanding, with its associated emphasis on the importance of ordination, has developed over time, it is so central within the Catholic tradition that the revolutionary change proposed by Bagelow seems inconsistent with Catholic identity.

But Cardinal Clancy's argument does not deal with the strong theological case for evolutionary change. Indeed Catholic theology has yet to respond to the implications of the clear evidence that in the New Testament there are diverse patterns of ministry, and that the present forms and spiritualities of ministry developed over time. If Cardinal Clancy's response were regarded not only as a true but as a complete response to Bagelow, Catholic theology would risk being associated with a clerical caricature in which the ideal candidate for ministry is a young man who practices stretching his neck like a Kenyan tribeswoman to fit an ever more commanding clerical collar, who isolates himself from his people, busies himself with a self-absorbed liturgy, and ignores, dominates or speaks rudely to such women as he must meet.

BAGELOW DESCRIBES attractively an active church in which many forms of service are recognised and in which people and initiative are valued and empowered without respect to gender or status. It would be a pity if these proper qualities of ministry were seen necessarily to lie outside the Catholic tradition.

In fact, in many local communities that function relatively well and justly, the theological bottom line enunciated by Cardinal Clancy would be accepted unreflectively. But people and priests involve themselves in shaping the pastoral strategies and outreach of the parish in ways that echo, but are less self-conscious than those commended at St McKillop's.■

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

Acute as a Button

***Peter Craven** looks at the life and times of one of those rare politicians who didn't have to wait for 20-20 hindsight to make him a free and frank—very frank—reader of the political scene.*

JOHN BUTTON was a Labor senator from 1974–1993. He rose to become the Labor (and government) leader in the Upper House and he was the influential and highly respected Minister for Industry in the Hawke and Keating governments. I remember having lunch with one of the warlords of the Liberal Party some time in the '80s, at a time when there were bright hopes on every side of politics for what the Hawke/Keating team might achieve, and I asked him what he thought of his opponents now that they were in power. 'Well, I have a lot of respect for what John Button is trying to do as Minister for Industry. And I have a lot of time for Barry Jones as the minister for Scientology.'

What John Button was trying to do was to bring Australian manufacturing kicking and screaming into a late 20th-century beset with globalisation and the free market, factors he was more sceptical about than some of his fellows but which he accepted as the conditions under which industry must operate. The consensus is that he did a good job and that he represented the governments in which he served at their most flexible and rational. He cut tariffs, wrangled with BHP without sending them broke, rationalised the automotive industry within an inch of its life but nevertheless succeeded in persuading Toyota to build a new plant, the single greatest investment in the field for the entire period.

But he was always an agnostic. John Button belonged to the dead middle of the Labor Party which it would be simplistic to describe as simply technocratic. For Button any suggestion of communism only brought to mind the recalcitrant Victorian Left of his early days in the Party, but he clearly had his own doubts about the mafia men of the New South Wales Right. Once,

As it Happened, John Button,
Text Publishing, 1998.
ISBN 1 875847 49 9, RRP $34.95

back in the '80s, a breakfast show host asked him about some comment Paul Keating had made. 'Oh, the Treasurer is a man of infinite intellectual flexibility. I'm sure he'll think his way through the matter.' It was as close as John Button could come to a sneer but you knew there were depths beneath the asperity. Keating himself had no doubts. When asked to gloss he said, without rancour, 'He's having a go at me.'

As It Happened makes clear the extent of John Button's scepticism about Keating in government and as Treasurer, though Button is too much of a natural for political chronicling not to appreciate much of the glitter of that particular prince of darkness.

He puts his money, and his bet with history, however, on the first five years of the Hawke government, though this book is a number of other things besides being a cold-eyed appraisal of the Rise and Fall of the Australian Labor Party as a gleaming conservative force in our history. It is also a portrait of the chronicler, both his early years as an emerging sensibility and his later achievements mixing it with captains of industry and titans of Labor who not infrequently found themselves united in their opposition to him.

In some ways *As It Happened* would have strong claims to being seen as the most vivid account of the Labor Government we have. Although Button is intent on his own corner of government (and in giving an account of his own track record) he is a splendidly droll observer of politicians. If he is not a great caricaturist like Mungo McCallum, he is a better realist than any of the journalists of the current generation and quite a stylist as well. He has the great advantage of the insider but he can also do the voices, and what they say is often both disarming and unspeakable.

HE BEGINS by quoting V.S. Naipaul on the way a politician becomes his profile and proceeds to sidestep any such temptation. The aloof Malcolm Fraser followed no such formula: he was one politician who had the compassion to send Button a warm note when his son Dave died tragically of a drug overdose. This personal tragedy shadows this book every so often as a reminder of a more real and heartbreaking world.

Childhood is Ballarat, where he is remorselessly belted by his upright Presbyterian minister father, and Geelong College where he enjoys the sport, evades the character-building

and wears a black tie the day Ben Chifley dies. His father, a good man who rushes to defend the local Italians when an idiot local policeman tries to have them interned during the war, also dies while John is a boarder in Geelong. At the Ballarat funeral the Catholic priests line up outside the church as a mark of respect because they cannot enter the church of the heretic.

At university, in Melbourne, the young Button's liberalism leads him to launch a campaign against the initiation ceremonies at Ormond and he succeeds in having the more scarifying features abolished. He is intent on a world elsewhere, of course, and in 1957 he sets off by ship for the glories of Italy. On the boat he gets to know Patrick White's partner Manoly Lascaris who has a dread of Australian suburbia.

Later, on firm ground, he has an affair with the daughter of an earl who talks about getting 'sozzled' and conducts her life in A.A. Milne baby talk. Once, in London, while he is staying with an Australian friend, he discovers that a French girl, somebody's girlfriend, has taken an overdose. He carries the comatose body (clad only in knickers) out into the London street and calls out for an ambulance, knowing he doesn't have the strength to carry her up the stairs again if it fails to arrive. She survives and has forgotten the incident entirely when he visits her some time later in Paris.

THE MELBOURNE John Button returns to in 1959 seems provincial and dusty by comparison. He says that the Labor Party leadership of the period was characterised by anti-Catholicism, incompetence and authoritarianism. Young Button schemes against these vices of the Left-wing Old Guard. He is the kind of young Labor intellectual who takes his bearings from the British weeklies and attacks Menzies' cult of the 'standard of living' with his own (Robin Boyd-influenced) idea of 'the quality of life'. He is the natural ally of people like Dick McGarvie and John Cain and in 1970 he supports Whitlam's purge of the Victorian Party.

Although he is by this stage a partner at Maurice Blackburn and has been offered a seat on the bench of the Arbitration Commission, politics has become the 'dominant virus' of his life.

He gets into the Senate in time to see the last, dreadful year of the Whitlam government close up. Jim McClelland warns him, 'Don't pursue other people's illusions', and he seems to have enjoyed the Balzacian spectacle of the National Capital. His description of Lionel Murphy having 'the colourful swagger of a successful buccaneer' is characteristic: he is merciless in what he memorialises about the giants around him. When he expresses concern about the fate of the Timorese, Whitlam says to him, 'What are you worried about them for, comrade? They're all mulattos.'

There is a vignette of a shadow cabinet debate about whether the Labor front bench should fly first class or economy. 'Listen, I'm a great man and I fly economy,' Whitlam thunders. Round this table, he says, there is a collection of pissants who would stay pissants no matter how much first class they flew.

Not surprisingly, the ever-rational Button votes for Hayden in his bid for the leadership against 'Big Fluff', as Whitlam was known. He also disgraces himself by consuming nearly an entire bottle of

Cointreau and giving a speech in the Senate which compares a Liberal senator first to an army chaplain and then to a pimp in a Cairo brothel, as if these two were more or less cognate. The President of retired service chaplains telegraphs Whitlam and says that if he ever wishes to be Prime Minister again he must disassociate himself from the likes of John Button. 'Comrade, with your background,' is all Whitlam can say as he shakes his head in wonder.

He also falls foul of Reg Withers, the government leader in the Senate, a man who has renounced his father's Labor politics but who declares, 'My father would turn in his grave at the sight of you parlour pinks!' Button takes some pleasure in Withers' fall from grace when Malcolm Fraser banishes him to the back bench because of his government's famously high standards of rectitude. Button is both sympathetic and sadistic. It's all a bit like that line from T.S. Eliot, he instructs the roughneck Reg, 'The last temptation is the greatest treason/To do the right deed for the wrong reason.' 'Who the hell is T.S. Eliot?' Withers growls.

Literary analogies also come into play when Bill Hayden is staring, in deep denial, at the prospect of surrendering the leadership to Bob Hawke. He's not like Coriolanus, he tells Button. He's like Macbeth, he will never ask for mercy. But he's damned if he's going to give it up for a bastard like Hawke. The dialectical Button gives the standard answer and gives it very well. 'The fact that someone is a bastard ... has never been a disqualification for leadership of the party.'

In the meantime he has gone, with Michael Duffy, to see whether Hawke will avenge himself on the Haydenites. They find him poolside, in bathers, basting his body, over and over, with a suntan lotion, like a turkey almost too beautiful to put in the oven. 'There is not a vindictive bone in my body,' the old Silver Bodgie preens. They drive off into the sunny Saturday afternoon laughing in hysteria at the vanity of their new Leader.

But Button has considerable time for Hawke the Prime Minister and says that history will treat him more fairly than anyone is inclined to at the moment. He says that he was a master of the politics of government and that he knew how to get the best out of his cabinet.

After their victory in the 1983 election, the heirs apparent are staying at the Lakeside Hotel in Canberra. All Button can think of is that his son Dave, who had helped him hand out voting cards through all their years in the wilderness, is not there with him. He collapses in an uncontrollable fit of sobbing. Hawke and Hazel are kind. Only Gareth Evans—lovable as ever—sticks his head round the bedroom door and says, 'Still boo-hooing, are we?'

Hawke's sense of the *via media*, his attempt to rationalise while adhering (where possible) to the traditional Labor causes was close to Button's instinct. Paul Keating, on the other hand, would jab his finger in front of Button's chest and say, 'You've got to remember, mate, that we're here because we're the best.' When Button would ask him where the foreign investment guidelines were he would say, 'They're in my head, mate, in my head.'

BUTTON SAYS THAT Hawke thought Keating was an interloper whereas Keating thought Hawke was 'vacuous'. There's something fitting about the fact that it was the innocent intellectual Button who almost brought them to loggerheads over the 1988 Kirribilli agreement which they had kept from their colleagues even though they had been willing to trade the leadership (the succession from Hawke to Keating) in the

presence of two outsiders, Sir Peter Abeles and Bill Kelty.

It reads like a scene from *Richard III* or the annals of some totalitarian government lost to human memory. Button has been talking, nearly meaninglessly, to some journalist about how the two lords of Labor are getting on. 'I think they've got an agreement,' he says, not knowing what he does. Hawke is ropeable: 'You bloody idiot! You've really put your foot in it this time.' He turns to Keating. 'There's no agreement, is there Paul?' Keating looks into the middle distance, 'If you say so, Bob. If you say so.'

Button becomes convinced—from 1989, in fact, though the conviction is still deep in 1991—that Labor cannot win another election. Days before Keating's accession he tells Hawke, 'You will be seen as a Prime Minister who didn't know when to go.'

HIS ATTITUDE to Keating is complex. He counts him as some kind of political foe, as the arch-acolyte of Treasury, the man who pushed up interest rates to the consternation of manufacturing (and nearly everyone else) and the prime minister who then turned around in 1992 and did his best to stimulate the economy. On the other hand as a memoirist with a feeling for history he adores Keating for his style and his black-hearted splendour. He describes him as 'the most enigmatic and spectacular politician of the '80s and '90s', but also as someone who, having longed all his life for the prime ministership, didn't know what to do with it when he got it. He admits that Keating had 'the confidence and arrogance of a matador' though one aspect of his account suggests what it must have been like to be a bull.

One day he is sitting with Keating on a plane and Button starts reading his copy of *The Bonfire of the Vanities*.

'I've read that book,' Keating says. 'I identify with that bloke.'

'Which bloke?' Button asks in fear.

'The money-market bloke,' Keating says. 'The yuppie. The bloke who gets into trouble.'

It's not Button's last word on the subject but it's as close as he gets to summarising his feelings on Keating, of whom he says it was 'the dichotomy between the political mobster and the cultivated man which created the enigma'.

This is a more sophisticated register and a more elegant—not to say subtle—set of discriminations than we usually get with Australian politics. And it continues to enliven the fairly solid accounts Button gives of his dealings with the different sectors of industry. On the one hand he was trying to raise money for things like the Japanese multifunction polis and on the other hand he was having to put up with people like Theophanous screaming in Caucus about migrant jobs.

Button did put into effect a plan which saved BHP in a way that did not accord with their desires but which seems to have worked. He did address himself to a car industry which had too many manufacturers producing too many cars for too small a market. At one point he says to the managing director of GMH that when they get through their current mess they should think of getting some Australian equity. 'Senator,' comes the reply, 'if you can find anyone mad enough to buy shares in my company let me know any time of the day or night.' At regular intervals, in the midst of the somewhat dry enunciation of how Button slashed tariffs and incurred the wrath of business and unions at once, the figure of Mr Tamura, the chief executive of Toyota recurs, like a figure in farce, saying, 'Only three words, Mr Button, "Don't change plan." '

He says, with some pride, how he told Gary Ablett about Margaret Thatcher and—in a reciprocal act of name-dropping—Margaret Thatcher about 'God'. He seems to take pleasure in reporting that neither party had heard of the other.

He certainly seems to have stuck to such guns as he had. At one point Laurie Carmichael comes up to him. 'You bastard. You bastard,' he says. 'I'll say this for you, someone had to bite the bullet.' His eyes blaze, he turns on his heel, and his overcoat trails behind him, Button says, like the cloak of a Medici.

Such grace notes cover a quantity of special pleading. When a representative of the car industry says, 'If imports continue like this we'll soon all be driving Daimler Benz,' Keating's eyes glisten. 'If that happens we'll all be much better off.' On another occasion his eyes smile at a union official who is appalled at how narrowly his industry and his workers have escaped the scrapheap and how tough it's going to be to survive. 'You've got to remember,' the Domingo of Treasurers says, 'the shoe is designed to pinch.'

In his chapter on 'True Believers', John Button sounds that famous phrase to its depths. If the 'true believers' are the backbone of Labor, what did they get from Keating who served, in his first phase, as the mouthpiece of a Treasury who believed in the mysticism of a J Curve which made no sense to the wisest heads in industry or to the minister they served? Button knows true believers have a weakness for government ownership and jobs rather than an ideology-driven belief that the private sector is intrinsically superior.

But where, in a world of ferocious international markets, is Chifley's light on the hill? And what for that matter is Hartley Grattan's Macaulay-like peroration on the integrity of the Australian Labor Party, written in the 1940s? A party 'which has struggled with every handicap to which political parties are heir but ... [nevertheless] stands for a social democratic Australia'. Yet Button himself no longer knows how that phrase can be glossed.

He tells the story of how he went with his advisor to Don Russell (Keating's principal minder) the day in 1989 that Russell recalls as the day he heard the Australian economy give an audible snap. Button says the Treasury officials would come, in twos, like nuns of old, to him and his people to spread their doctrine. At one point, in despair, he says to his staff, 'We have fallen among fuckwits.'

TO READ *As It Happened* is sometimes to wonder, in John Button's account, how Labor held on for another six years. But the man who was in his own words 'seriously pissed off' with both Hawke and Keating is too intent in the latter part of his book on explaining what he did in his attempt to restructure manufacturing for better or worse. What the head of Benetton said to him about 'antique' clothes manufacture, the German gentleman who developed wool and denim jeans, the drug companies who found a world role, the manufacturing industries who found none and whose plight is as sad as that of the Navaho Indians.

This book is the record of one highly intelligent government minister, partly backed and partly opposed by one of the more intelligent cabinets of recent times, and if it is in some ways a success story and

always a monument to the formidable exercise of intelligence in the pursuit of sane government, it is also very much a story of government from the top down.

When a young managing director from Nestlé comes to Button, early on, and asks him what he is to do, 300 of his workers are on strike and the factory is likely to collapse, Button does not hesitate. Sack them all, he says, and close the plant for a month. This happens and 240 of the workers are reinstated; productivity increases fourfold. It's a success story, I suppose.

In the most famous funeral oration in Greek history the great Athenian statesman Pericles, after waging deadly wars, declared that no Athenian ever wore black for him. He must have known the rhetoric was hollow, even as he took solace in the qualified sense that might have made it true in his own mind. John Button does not pretend that the government he served was unambiguously good or sensible or humane. He clearly thinks that his part of it was 'better', that it was in the long-term interests of the country and therefore necessary. But his emphasis is on the business of government, the responsible exercise of power, not on its human cost.

It is to his credit that at every point he insinuates the heresy of what it means to look at things from a different angle. Why Bob Hogg might have stood up and defended the old corrupt Victorian Left so formidably after Whitlam purged them. Why an old Labor man might have wanted to leave his money to the communists because Laurie Carmichael believed in something.

JOHN BUTTON's last, nearly whimsical, pages are about the road he takes to Geelong to watch the Geelong Football Club. He says, with some pride, how he told Gary Ablett about Margaret Thatcher and—in a reciprocal act of name-dropping—Margaret Thatcher about 'God'. He seems to take pleasure in reporting that neither party had heard of the other. He likes Geelong because it is a place where the story of the city and the story of the bush rub shoulders. He thinks that this country never had a defining moment of independence, that it has dribbled out of its colonial heritage into an era of colonisation where decisions are made elsewhere, as if by clockwork, by something called the market. The changes he tried to make in industry should have been made long ago in the '60s.

At the same time he knows there are the values that come from the Bush (as he puts it), the sense that any family suffering the pain of poverty diminishes us all, the sense in which money is so much less than everything as to be inconceivable as a value in itself.

What lies behind the elaborate conceit about the Geelong Football Club is the idea of the dignity of being a loser, the ancient Australian tolerance of the no-hoper.

process of Australian politics abide our question in a host of ways. It is generous to fellow politicians from Flo Bjelke-Petersen to John Hewson and it is both less besotted with politics and more alive to its lunatic micro-drama than any other book by an Australian politician I know. It is urbane, unfazed, narky and self-obsessed. Almost everyone will enjoy reading it. John Button knows things as a writer which he could not allow himself to know as a minister. *Sack them all, the market will know its own* was one option for the politician. It's the writer who has the courage to ask for our judgment on it and on everything. ■

As It Happened makes clear the extent of John Button's scepticism about Keating in government and as Treasurer, though Button is too much of a natural for political chronicling not to appreciate much of the glitter of that particular prince of darkness.

The John Button who addressed the Senate on a bottle of Cointreau knows about that. So does the man who grieves for his son. If this book appears to repress this knowledge in its overarching plan, its comedy goes some way towards alleviating it by the richness with which it indicates the fallibility and grandeur of government.

This is a highly intelligent memoir, vivid and engaging at every point. It makes the

Peter Craven is currently editing *Best Australian Essays, 1998.*

What lawyers don't read

Is law an industry, a profession, an academic discipline, or a political philosophy? Whose 'satisfaction' with lawyers' performance matters—peers', public's, clients', courts', or government's?

It's important to know. The Standing Committee of Attorneys-General is working towards agreement on a national scheme for admitting lawyers to practise. This could be revolutionary—and the people always suffer in revolutions.

The plan is to progress towards a 'national legal services market', an ideal to which all Australia's legal professional bodies have agreed, in principle. The particular proposal, put up by both the lawyers' national representative body, the Law Council of Australia, and the 'Priestley Committee' (a committee of all Australian Chief Justices), departs significantly from tradition, though the tradition has long been divorced from the reality.

First, it has been proposed that control of lawyers' admission, and thus of the standards of skill and competence, and so their education and training, should pass to a national body. The proposed National Appraisal Council for the Legal Profession (NAC), would be funded by another levy on lawyers and on Law Schools. NAC could force the states to comply with its requirements and meet its standards for lawyers' training and competencies. The proposal would explicitly give the executive arm of Commonwealth Government—with the connivance of the states—effective control over the whole of the Australian legal profession.

Does this matter? Well, you might think so, if you knew legal history, and if you had a philosophical view of what law is, what lawyers ought to be and what they should know and understand. But lawyers don't learn legal history any more. Most don't bother to undertake the (optional) study of the science of jurisprudence. So let me spell it out.

Historically, lawyers are specialist advocates and legal advisers who are exclusively licensed by the courts, not by the executive part of government, to be the courts' 'officers', their autonomous experts, in advocacy, in advising on the law, and assisting the administration of justice.

In the tradition we inherited from England, legal professionals have had a monopoly on the right to appear in the courts and give legal advice since 1292. Since the 15th century, judges have set the standards for lawyers' education and training, independently of universities and the church—the most powerful institutions of the times.

Until quite recently, lawyers' education and training has been delivered through a system of apprenticeships—'articles of clerkship' or 'reading' with a qualified legal practitioner. This system was never perfect. Once the monopoly had been created, the quality of education offered through the Inns of Court started to deteriorate. Achievement became symbolic, the training pragmatic and oriented to the preservation of the status quo and its crafty contortion to address new, recurring problems—the source of the extraordinarily complex array of 'legal fictions' from which our basic property, tort and contract law developed. Poor training resulted in a diminution of skills, and inconvenience for the courts. So, since the 19th and early 20th centuries, universities have increasingly come to provide at least the academic part of legal education and training. Nonetheless, university qualifications have not been universally required. Forty years ago, half of the admitted lawyers in NSW did not have law degrees, though virtually all of the Tasmanian and Western Australian ones did. A handful of Law Schools and legal academics (they have spawned since) all taught much the same, generalist, legal course until the late 1970s.

The practical component of legal training was still delivered through the articles system, but by the end of the 1970s the states had begun to set up training institutes to provide more rigorous training. By then, all the states had long regulated the legal profession by statute. In some, admission to practise was administered by statutory bodies associated, more by tradition than strict legal necessity, with their Supreme Courts.

But by that time a substantial tradition of legal professional autonomy had developed, as it had not in Europe, where judges and lawyers' status were largely determined by government regulation. This had led, notoriously, to the corruption of the judicial process and integrity of both courts and lawyers in Nazi Germany. The law became identified with the implementation of government policy—discriminatory, secret, retrospective laws and arbitrary or oppressive procedures—that could never be described as 'just' or even 'law', in jurisprudential terms.

In Australia we followed the British tradition. In our own parochial version of Australian federalism, each state regulated its own legal profession—each Supreme Court determined its own standards for lawyers' admission—and each professional body defended its own against the lawyers from 'out of town'. In Western Australia, for example, any would-be applicant for admission had to prove local residence for at least six months. The justification was that it would take about that time for news of the applicant's bad reputation or malfeasance to filter back, by camel train, from 'the Eastern States'. The rule persisted into the 1980s, when camel trains were relatively rare.

In principle, admission to practise is still controlled by judges. Over the centuries they have delegated the detail to recognised professional bodies—the Law Societies and Victoria's Law Institute, and other educational institutions, and merely receive the applicants, duly recognised. In practice, legal education in Australia has largely fallen into the hands of the universities' law courses, with practical training delivered

through professional-based bodies. Increasingly, these bodies have become subject to government control, through government regulation and government control over the funds for education and training.

It would obviously be silly to let state legal professional bodies set up parochial monopolies whose purpose or effect is simply to protect local lawyers from extra-state competition. It seems logical to establish reciprocal recognition of legal qualifications. It became necessary to do so in the late 1980s after the High Court struck down as unconstitutional the Queensland profession's favoured 'restrictive trade practice' that protected Queensland lawyers from the intrusions of 'southerners'.

Now we need to give attention to what setting 'national standards' for legal practice might mean.

I return to my initial point: that legal education, for more than 700 years, has been essentially practical, to achieve certain desirable results, in what was a quite rigid framework of 'forms of action'—writs commencing highly specific remedial processes—in a government framework of courts. Of course they developed to meet new challenges, as social and economic systems changed—especially as the feudal system of hierarchical relationships and duties deteriorated and was replaced. Now, the pace of change is frenetic. Lawyers do much more than litigate and advise. Modern social and commercial and governmental business is complex, multi-layered, and in a state of flux. So what training is necessary for lawyers?

What is a lawyers' role? Ask the short man with a megaphone and an Irish accent wearing a cotton-wool 'judge's' wig who stands outside Melbourne's central Post Office most days. He tells all who will listen, and some who would rather not, how all lawyers are blood-sucking, influential, incompetent leeches. There is another, rather like him but without the wig, who patrols the Family Court precinct demanding the exclusion of all lawyers from family disputes because they 'foster litigation' instead of conciliation. Ask journalist Evan Whitton, who writes an occasional column in *The Australian* and relentlessly publicises his book about the dishonesty of the law and lawyers. He even wrote a diatribe against democracy, based on lawyers' 'take-over' of lawmaking—and perversion of parliament—in the week before the election.

It would seem that lawyers play an important and sometimes unpopular role in the family, society, and politics. Practising lawyers write laws, give advice on how to use, enforce and avoid them, and form the exclusive pool from which judges are appointed. Yale Professors Lasswell and McDougal wrote, in 1943, that lawyers are 'the one indispensable adviser of every responsible policy-maker of our society.' Control over what they learn, and how they exert such influence, is a very significant power.

What should we train lawyers for?

If it is to prepare them for practice, what kind of practice? Traditional law courses are directed at commercial law practices. Many lawyers wouldn't know a corporation if it presented its bottom to be kicked. Thousands of lawyers deal with the needs and problems of ordinary people—buying a house, defending a minor criminal charge, collecting debts, sorting out family, work or immigration problems. So far as business is concerned, lawyers provide a service, and it would be happy if their training were simply directed to technical expertise and commercial efficiency.

Lawyers don't learn legal history any more. Most don't bother to undertake the (optional) study of the science of jurisprudence.

No education and training can ever teach a lawyer all the law there is to know. Twenty-eight years ago the UK Ormrod Committee on Legal Education said that, 'The range of the subject-matter of the law is so great that no system of education and training before qualification could possibly cover the whole of it, except in an utterly superficial and useless manner. The process of acquiring professional knowledge and skill is continuous throughout the lawyer's working life.'

Law has become infinitely more complex since. So we should train lawyers to learn continually. But learn what? And on what philosophical basis? If corporations desire to pay no tax, is it a lawyer's business to bend the law without thought for its purpose? If the rule of law underlies community cohesion, shouldn't a lawyer's training include a comprehensive understanding of the lawyer's double role in serving the public interest as well as fulfilling the client's desires?

Without a clear understanding of the ethical and social basis of 'law', it would be easy to accept instructions uncritically. This has risks for the lawyer and the client. When I was 'trained' in income tax law, during my first year of articles, I was taught how to evade tax using the precursors to the 'bottom of the harbour' schemes that, not long after, led many taxpayers, and their lawyers, into law-breaking, fines, disbarment, and even jail.

The professional responsibilities of the lawyer must, surely, include a clear understanding of the need to work with law; to uphold and improve it, and the courts, and the profession. This is not inconsistent with putting their client's instructions and interests first. Law has never been just a business: lawyers are a part of the justice and political systems. Lawyers know how law is made and government works. They manipulate and influence law. They affect how democratic government works.

This makes legal training very important: the mix of academic study (usually but not always leading to a law degree), and recognised practical training and expertise, must include this knowledge. Practical, clinical training is still provided by firms (where bad habits may also be passed on) or, increasingly, by specialised institutions. The academic side is largely provided by universities—but it is a very mixed bag. They all now package their courses to meet very different needs and expectations of students—they now market to their 'clients'.

There is far more choice in the courses of study, as there was not when I first studied law. This means that lawyers do not, necessarily, share a common core of knowledge before they go into practice. Indeed, there are some notable omissions.

The Priestley Committee has recommended that a practising lawyer's academic study should cover 11 areas of knowledge: criminal law and procedure; tort; contracts; property; equity; company law; administrative law; Federal and State constitutional law; civil procedure, evidence and, finally, professional conduct. But when I completed my undergraduate degree in 1969 I had to pass 'core' subjects that have, inexplicably, now become optional: legal history, constitutional history as well as constitutional law and jurisprudence.

This choice—and these omissions—have come about because many law students do not intend to practise. About 35 per cent

of law graduates either don't practise, or use their qualifications in an array of occupations: in-house employment in corporations; as barristers; in community-based or government-funded legal aid services; in government, management, or in highly specialised areas of boutique practice. They wish to choose a targeted course. But in so doing, I think they, and their teachers, are at risk of missing the point.

How can anyone 'study' law without appreciating both its history, and its intellectual and philosophical basis? How can one decide to practise law without a fundamental appreciation of the ethical responsibilities of a lawyer? These are now taught in 'short courses', just prior to admission.

A LAWYER must know the law, as a discipline—what it is, and how to find out what it is.

A lawyer must know the law, as a profession. This includes the historical and philosophical reasons for their duties to a client: to accept work and continue to act until dismissed; to communicate and obey the client's instructions; to maintain a confidence, and meet the duty of care. A lawyer must appreciate the fiduciary relationship with the client, and the ethical duty not to misuse it; must avoid conflicts of interest whether they be with other clients, other people, or the lawyer's own financial and other interests. A lawyer must embrace the duty to be fair and candid, and not to pervert or abuse the legal system: High Court Justice Callinan has been severely criticised by the Federal Court for advising a course of litigation for strategic purposes, when he was a QC, knowing that there was no hope of success. Is there not a similar duty not to misuse relatively privileged access to the courts, by the wealthy? A lawyer must, above all, respect the law, the courts, the judicial process, and the office of judges.

These ethical principles are just one small part of the pre-admission competencies proposed both by the 'Priestley' areas of practical legal education and the Australian Professional Legal Education Council.

The model proposed by Victorian Attorney-General Jan Wade's discussion paper presently in circulation proposes that the responsibility for legal education and training for admission should be vested in a statutory body—which is no surprise. It posits a university degree, or equivalent, teaching the 'Priestley 11 Areas of Knowledge'—no jurisprudence, no legal history, no ethics other than a 'short course' prior to admission in 'professional responsibility and ethics (preliminary)'.

The proposed post-admission practical legal training would include important practical skills: trust accounts, advanced professional conduct and ethics in practice, personal work management, legal writing and drafting, interviewing/communication techniques, negotiation and dispute resolution, legal analysis and research and advocacy. Those who wish to take out a full practising certificate must also acquire measurable competencies in practice management and business practice, legal and business accounting, and one year's work experience in four areas of transaction-based work (e.g. property, wills and probate) and litigation and personal rights-based work (e.g. criminal law, commercial litigation).

Such training should produce technical competence, but where is the gravitas?

In 1976 the then Governor-General, John Kerr, wrote that: 'I doubt whether Law Schools can provide, except in relation to general professional ethics, an overall ideology for lawyers. In their various ultimate interests and specialties they will espouse and develop ideologies which rationalise their respective relationships with the economic system and their selected role in it.'

Yet no constitutional lawyer is a good lawyer, who does not know constitutional history, and John Kerr's role in weakening constitutional conventions, and bringing forward a republican form of government in Australia.

Nor is any lawyer a 'real' lawyer, in my view, who lacks an understanding of our legal history; the reasons why lawyers have—and must not lose—their tradition of principled independence; knowing how Common Law and Equity developed, and lawyers' special role in protecting individual rights and the public interest.

In 1909, F.W. Maitland delivered a course of lectures on the 'forms of action' from which our litigation remedies are derived. All lawyers should read them. He makes it utterly clear why there can be no 'right' unless it has a remedy, and why it has always been a lawyers' role to develop the law to create one.

It is instructive to remind ourselves of this, at a time when cost is taking justice beyond the reach of the majority of our citizens: 'The forms of action we have buried, but they still rule us from their graves.' ■

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GERARD WINDSOR

"He has Great Expectations." Page 196.

Something for the journey

AT 7.20 IN THE MORNING I let my son out to walk down to the station. I unlock the wrought iron security door and hold it open for him. As he passes through, bag on his back, tennis racquet in one hand, I put the book into the other. 'Don't put it down on the seat,' I plead.

There are two sectors to his journey. From Petersham he takes the train on its curving run east towards the sun of Circular Quay. This is the sector for the life of the imagination. For on this line the older rolling stock is used. The rattle that revs up into an unbroken whirr is more pronounced. The badly designed windows are set too low and have the transverse metal bar at eye level, so that vision from the carriage is cramped and awkward. I'm always puzzled, sometimes outraged, that such gross ineptitude spoiled travel for a generation of commuters. Buses of the era have the same flaw. These were constructions of the 1970s, my adulthood. I shake my head at it. Any child could have told them. The malign incompetent (I know he can't be both) should be in the history books. His story is just the material for one of those boxed cameos that Norman Davies' *Europe* has made popular. The eyes of the villainous engineer could be ruled out by the transverse bar to preserve his anonymity.

So it's a journey where it's better not to try to look. It runs between eight stations and of these three are underground. You're completely unsighted then in any case. It's better to withdraw into yourself. The senses are assaulted rather than indulged. In Europe, proud care has been taken and expense accepted to make the passage underground as quiet as possible. The loop of the Sydney City Circle line has been left raw and primitive. Perhaps as often as not the turbulence of wheels and chassis diminishes only to the shriek of unoiled brakes. Nobody seems to be worried about lubricating this passage through the dark.

'Okay,' I say to the traveller, 'just read on the train. Twenty minutes each way, five days a week. You'll get through books at a great rate.' I have to admit I've actually checked the bookmark of an afternoon. Once, twice maybe. Yes, he's been advancing consistently, twenty to thirty pages a day. Of course he actually enjoys the stories (they're always stories) and has perfect recall for the details of the narrative. I don't. I was reading Don De Lillo's *Underworld* and I told him the story of the first chapter, the retrieval and loss of the baseball that Bobby Thomson hit for a homer.

'Tell me another story from a book,' he asked at once.

But I couldn't. What was the previous novel I'd read? Colum McCann's *Songdogs*. A nice work but a haze of oscillations, father and son moving in and out of mundanities and memories and going nowhere fast. Nothing with the complete spherical beauty of De Lillo's baseball. I shuffled my Dickens, but characters and shards were all that I could seize on. Not the firm lines and locks of interconnection that you need to retell stories from the classics with the requisite confidence and maximum effect.

He had a day in bed with a temperature and I said, 'I'll read you a story. This is one my Dad liked. He thought O. Henry was a great writer.' I started on 'The Gift of the Magi'. The rhetorical circumlocutions of the opening were a shock, and made me baulk, but I hopped on with a mix of adroit skipping and contemporary glossing. The listener was attentive. There was still a page to go when he said, with just the right gasp of surprise, 'He's sold the watch for her present!' I wasn't sure then whether to finish O. Henry's version. It's mostly moralising. But I did. Why not see how the guy who thought up the idea rounded it off? See how another time did something? It seemed to me archaism and gilding of the lily, but heavens knew how the eleven-year-old mind might react to it. I mustn't truncate the possibilities. Let things work

through to their organic end. Stories, above all. You don't know where the stories might suddenly lurch. If you know an ending, lock it away. If you have one in mind, screen it. Once the ending is known you've stymied an unknown world of possibilities.

WHEN THE BOY was nine I started reading him *Great Expectations*. A host of motives were at work here. To force-feed something of the best that had been thought and written—if not quite in our time, well, at least not too long before my grandfather's time and he'd passed it on, father to son. Secondly, boy and man I'd loved it. Dickens was *de rigueur*, and it was short Dickens. I wanted to do my own rereading in the way most economical of time. Finally, it's hard to beat reading to someone who is cuddling up to you.

Great Expectations started well. Plenty of excitement, mystery and funny stuff. Enough to ride out the Dickensian ruminations when the boy would say, with impatient exasperation, 'What was all that about? I didn't understand anything of what you just read.' But it didn't turn him off the main game, not a bit. With a clarity I'd never got from childhood readings or set text analyses at school and university, I saw that *G.E.* is a sublime opening, a racy ending, and a great stagnant slough in between. Dickens has to kick his heels between sending Pip to London and Magwitch's reappearance. Nothing goes on between those events that you'd need to include in the Classics Comics version. But we hung on. I hummed very portentously over that faint flicker of something that tickles Pip's memory when he sees Estella. I got all dark and pregnant when Jaggers seized his housekeeper Molly by the wrists. It kept the thread tangible as we pushed on.

Then Magwitch comes up the stairs that dark and stormy night, and the nail-biting is on. When Pip had seen no shadow of another parting (and we had exhausted the pros and cons of the sad and happy endings), the call was on for a follow-up. *Oliver Twist* was nominated. The boy called for the reading, the boy nominated. Away we went. Oliver's miseries began. We'd had eleven chapters of them when together we went to see Lionel Bart's *Oliver*. Ah, fractious day. Barry Humphries was doing Fagin. This was the trade-off for *Waiting for Godot* the following night. 'This is history,' I told him. 'You can tell your grandchildren the story of how you saw Peter Hall's revival, the man who first staged it forty years before. You can say you saw Ben Kingsley and Denis Quilley on stage.' At interval he said, 'This is so boring. This is the most boring thing I've ever seen.' That was good. Besides I'd caught him laughing three times. *Oliver* on the other hand didn't bore. We were still at the stage door, just us and a woman from Nebraska, when Humphries and his entourage finally emerged. Humphries, insisting we open at his photo, autographed the program with a seigneurial graciousness. We followed him up the alleyway into Marlborough Street.

We didn't go back to Dickens' version. No formal discussion or decision. No hints dropped. Nothing said at all. The onward pressure had gone out of the story. It didn't rate as a yarn dripping with mysteries and early-on hints and melodramatic signals, not as *G.E.* did. He knew how it all panned out. He'd seen Fagin in a suit and a trilby, he'd seen the Artful Dodger being hugged by his auntie. What more was there to know? There's no way I was going to insist on an activity that had no internal compulsion to it. Well, not in this case. As long as he kept reading. That wasn't negotiable.

Reading, I found myself presuming, is an absolute good. I seem to have evolved this moral value autonomously. Some people reach it through reaction. They have had parents who complain about children who never do anything. Instead, the parents moan, 'they spend all day with their faces in a book'. Other values are presumed to be superior—being outside in the fresh air, helping around the house, doing something constructive like, say, hitting a few nails in, hitting a few balls around. So, in later life, the child regards the flicking over of pages as an activity beyond criticism.

But I didn't have that perpetual motion sort of parent. My credo, I suspect, derives more nakedly from self-interest. Home alone all day I'm nagged by the catalogue of chores, phone calls, fix-its that must be attended to. And more are always arriving to take the places of any unlucky enough to be rubbed out. Yet I read a book. It's my profession, I say. Well, part of it, at any rate. I need to have a defensible position on this, a secure base for a pedagogical principle. Reading might be an absolute good but what about newspapers or magazines or comics? For if the first step is to get them to read, the second is to have them read the right things. Sounds a bit vulnerable to a touch of postmodernist probing, but you know what I mean. This is not a merry, essayistic dance of words that might or might not have some aesthetic charm. Getting a reader up and running is a practical challenge that hangs over parents' heads.

My own mother still points to me and says I don't read enough, at least not widely enough. I can't say she's wrong. She points to brothers of mine and their more elastic habits, habits followed under severer handicaps than I have. One is a psychiatrist who soaks himself in European history and Aboriginal sociology and contemporary fiction,

" He seized me

and another is a barrister whose preferred recreational reading is medical textbooks.

A parent can't just shrug and say reading is an aptitude or a disposition that you either just have or just don't. That some people have ball skills, some have green fingers, others are readers. I can't say that. Yet of course there are loads of non-readers. I buy *Woman's Day* and *TV Week* for the ninety-year-old widow across the road and she says, 'Thanks for getting me the books.'

There is certainly nothing more akin to a book in her house. In any case she's given up *Woman's Day* now, because, she says, 'The Princess has gone'. It was a book, and it had a story. Now the story has finished. It's all over. The old lady's books in any case are really only visuals for the permanent, set text of her TV. She's xenophobic, racist, gentle, noble, generous, honest, full of affection, definitely nicer than most people,

and she's not a reader and there's no evidence she ever was. But she's not my tribe and I need readers about me.

He's a reader all right, he's a sucker for a story, he's wholly attentive to a narrative. Unattached facts, without a story, pass him by. 'What's this bridge?' I ask as we drive over it for the fortieth time in two months. 'I dunno,' he says almost cheerfully as though ignorance is the natural blessed state. Yet he'd get a good pass mark for listing the labours of Hercules. If I told him how Fig Tree Bridge got its name, it would become indelible. But I don't know that story.

Stories have the rhythms that his mind works to. Stories in their primitive, perhaps grosser form. The transference of the term might be a legitimate and pedagogically useful move, but 'Adventures in Science' or 'The Story of Our Forests' don't start him ticking over. But try the Argonauts or the history of a family squabble, and his whole concentrated system fires.

I've no idea what this narrative attunement does to human beings. I can't actually imagine them without it—though I'd claim I've seen it in weaker forms. That means that while I was telling a story I've seen people who were passive or even inattentive. And, mind you, it was a controlled experiment. Same story, same occasion had other listeners enthralled. Those who don't swing into a narrative flow, are they deficient? Are they likely to be impaired over time? In what way? Not forward looking? Their lives not moving to a pattern of problem and resolution, of search and discovery, of quiet meditation and headlong advance, of different perspectives taking their turn? Maybe I'm setting up the tropes of storytelling as the paradigm for the well-lived life? Does the consummate storyteller, the ideal listener turn out to be the effective or even the virtuous personality? It sounds unlikely. Popular lore would have it that the story freak will be the hopeless dreamer, the victim of fantasy and airy nothings. If that's the dreary commonsense view, it's also not easily falsifiable.

Stories might be fun, but as a line to the young, 'reading is so pleasurable' does sound hedonistic and negligently unpragmatic. It probably needs to be combined with a dictum like 'reading's the best way to think'. How many ideas and arguments that course around in the mind come from conversation? Does anyone argue in person with the same lucidity that they do on the page? How often does their talk include all their qualifications and second thoughts and possible lines of future development? How many of the great self-education and research legends centre on men and women going out and getting into conversation?

It wasn't what Socrates said in the agora. It was how Plato wrote him up that got the philosophers going. Philosophy is typified as a series of footnotes, not as a memory of a few ideas tossed around in the Academy, the salon, the pub. Reading's the best way, the only way to prevent an arthritic mind on a twenty-year-old. Or a sixty-year-old. I look forward to arguments. I'm not such a calm seeker after truth that I'm not a bit scared of an argument, but that's minor compared to the pleasure of a homegrown arguing machine, and to the wonder that such marvels come continually into existence.

'What's it like?' I ask. *It* is *The Three Musketeers*.

'It's good, really good.'

The schoolbag is being unpacked. 'Wait, just wait.' He yanks the bookmark, scans the page. 'What's ... pensive?'

'Thoughtful.'

'Wait, just wait. What's ... c.o.q.u.e.t.r.y?'

'Oh Lord. Kind of flirting. Done by women. I'll show you some time.'

He drops *The Musketeers* back in the mêlée of texts and notes and exercise books.

'Get stuck into it. You've got forty minutes each day, to the Quay and back. You'll get a lot read.'

THE TRAIN CORNERS in the tunnel and breaks out into the Quay. Streeton has a popular image, 'Rainy Night Circular Quay'. His figures lean against the rain, skirts are held away from the puddles, whatever moon there is and the hard-driven gas lamps bounce light and shadow across the surface of the water; it is hard, perhaps impossible, to distinguish where land ends and harbour begins. Yet the scene isn't dismal. The generous open spaces, the tossing of lights, elements and human beings tussling together but in a pedestrian, homely way, Circular Quay even at its worst is still benign enough.

At eight in the morning, on a summer's day, it is the birth of the world. Everyone, everything is in motion, and the movement is new, it is that of starting. The crowds on the incoming ferries contract evenly towards the gangways, and file out and spin away. Commuters and schoolchildren zig-zag and tack across one another over the promenade, landing and embarking. The ferries race towards the wharves and the water boils with the cauliflower soup of their reversed engines. The air thrums slowly with their easing out as they turn stern first again and cleave out into the harbour. The water, busy but not crowded, glitters on every upwash of every wave.

The boy descends from the train and swings away to the western seawall. His book is back in its bag. The second half of his journey is with Matilda Cruises. The blunt catamaran rides confidently at the

steps. Perhaps ten boys on it, twice that number of girls. 'What school are the girls?' I ask him.

He doesn't know.

'Well where do they go?'

He doesn't know that either, nor where the boat calls, nor what time it leaves the Quay, nor when it reaches the school wharf. He could be reading his book. But he's not. Of course he's not. 'What do you do on the boat?'

'Play, sometimes.'

'What do you play?'

'Cricket.'

'Cricket! On the boat!'

'Ye-es. It's not that small. You haven't seen it. It's got seats like on planes.'

'Yeah, but you don't play cricket on planes either.'

'Well we do.'

'Fair enough.'

ADULTS DROOL AT THE IDEA of two half-hour trips a day, under the Bridge, criss-crossing the western reaches of the Harbour and up the Lane Cove River. I did it myself for a year as a boy of eleven. I don't recall reading either. The boat was privately hired, and Stannard Brothers gave us what was left of their fleet after the more productive hirings of the day had been arranged. The drivers may have been the dregs of the workforce too. One we suspected of insobriety. Another threw knives around the woodwork. But we were little boys from employer, professional families, and we had our snobberies.

Ian O'Brien, whose father owned quarries, took his place at the stern, on the raised decking above the rudder. As we turned from Rose Bay across Point Piper he waved to his home, high and white on the Vaucluse hill, and he took out a folded linen napkin and unpeeled it, left, right, front, back, and began on his ziggurat of warm buttered toast. I could see it was delicious; it had melted to the perfect consistency. Ian O'Brien was fussy about his toast. He gave away some of his crusts, others he tossed into the wake and the seagulls swooped. I never asked for any. I was never given any. Ian O'Brien looked down from his poop deck and flapped his napkin free of crumbs. He had his father's quarries, and a brother, a boarder, in his final year at the school, and he had moral authority. One driver, humpingly, took us straight over a buoy. He had a red face and moist bloodshot eyes. 'Very low in the water,' he said, looking back, one hand on the wheel. 'Yes, very low in the water,' called Ian O'Brien. 'Only five feet of it showing above the surface. Very low in the water.'

'What did you do on the boat?' asks Harry. 'Well we did a lot of the steering, and we had rubber band and pellet fights and on the days when we were given a tug we didn't keep warm and dry and we lost hats overboard all the time.'

'Is that all?'

'We had a sort of feud, a friendly one, with the Hunters Hill lot. When they got off at Alexandra Street of an afternoon they used to pelt us.'

'What with?'

'Seaweed mostly. They'd store it on the wharf in the morning. A boy called Sturtevant was the ringleader. He went mad one day. He must have found an old tennis court roller and he had this thing teetering on the edge of the wharf one morning.'

'Why?'

'Why do you think? That afternoon, the moment he was off the boat, he made a dash for his roller. Now if he hadn't waited for the other Hunters Hill kids to get off he'd have succeeded ...'

'At what, at what?'

'Shut up, I'm telling you. He got the handle of the bloody thing and heaved. We'd just started to edge out, and the thing missed, just.'

'What would have happened?'

'What would have happened! We'd have been sunk. You know how heavy tennis court rollers are. Imagine it landing on the wood of one of those little launches. Terrible damage.'

'Would it really have sunk it?'

'I dunno. I reckon.'

'What happened to the roller?'

'It's still at the bottom of the Lane Cove River, I presume.'

'What else did Sturtevant do?'

'He was a jumper. He should go down in the history books for that.'

'What sort of a jumper.'

'A long jumper. You must read Flann O'Brien. He's got a lovely story about a sergeant of police who was a long jumper.'

'Yes, yes, but what about Sturtevant?'

'Well when the boat came into the Riverview wharf, it was a point of honour with him never to wait till it had stopped and tied up.'

'Was he allowed?'

'No, of course not, but I suppose in those days things just weren't regulated.'

'So he got off before it tied up?'

'Got off! He jumped. He leaped. He'd watch for the angle the boat was approaching the wharf. Then he'd make a beeline to the most advantageous spot. He'd be up on the walkway round the edge or even on the roof

A Moment In Leon

Katherine's eating pizza. She's so hungry she doesn't ask what's on it. The woman who runs the pension is out in the corridor listening for the slightest movement. You know that if you snap open the door she'll be caught stooping at the keyhole. Across the road storks are nesting atop a turret. Down the road the Damned are being consumed on the facade of the cathedral. A young man is daubing the walls of narrow twisting streets with anti-fascist graffiti while hams drip from the ceiling of shops about the Plaza San Marcelo. The bells chime with the quarter hour and I read that further south it's popular to cook rice in vats of blood. As if the life of an un-named Saint was recorded between the lines I hear someone call out from deep within the building, 'No hay atajo sin trabajo'. No pain no gain. The traffic snarling against peak hour on Calle Generalisimo Franco ...

John Kinsella

of the cabin. And he had his bag in his hand. A small suitcase, a Globite. He'd watch, he'd concentrate, then he'd sling his bag out on to the main deck of the wharf. It'd go sliding, screeching along the beams. It was amazing the lock held at all, and sometimes it didn't. Books, pens, sandwiches skiing all over the place. But we weren't watching the bag. We didn't take our eyes off Sturtevant. 'Cause he'd follow the suitcase. Even if the boat was just making a pass at the wharf. A most prodigious leap. All the effort as he just hurled himself across. And it wasn't just the distance—and that must have been three or four metres—but the moment he leaped he had to concentrate on the landing because only at king tide could he hope to get on to the open deck of the wharf. The rest of the time, all the time really, it was the steps. He had to see exactly which step he was aiming at, he had to be ready to brace and grab on to the hand rail above him. And when the tide was low, of course, he had to land on the platform at the bottom of the steps, and that was covered in moss and the moment he touched he shot forward, skidding and accelerating if anything, and if he wasn't to go out the other side and into the water under the wharf he had to clamp his hands on the timber above him and lift his feet and break the momentum. He was mad, quite mad. But he never missed, he never went in. There should be a plaque to him on the wharf. Gary Sturtevant.'

'Did anyone ever go in?'

'I went in once. Just stepping on to the boat at Rose Bay. I slipped. I hung on, only went in up to my waist.'

'Did you?'

'I did. Yes.'

'Do you think I will?'

'No I don't. You've got gangplanks and the rest of it.'

'I still could.'

'Try not to. Walk straight. Hold on.'

THE TRAVEL'S PART of the schooling, I tell myself. Rubbing along with people on a journey together. Life in miniature. Diverting, maybe guiding, one another, passing the time. Evolving your own stories as you go. The Canterbury pilgrims. Read on the train, talk and play on the boat, that seems a fair balance. As he comes home and crosses the water and turns west the companions fall away. He's thrown back on his own devices. That's when the book comes into its own. Distract him back over the last leg.

It's been such an El Niño summer, and the afternoon is still torrid at daylight saving five o'clock, and his long socks are still supposed to be up and his tie on, so I wander down to the station to meet him and shoulder the book-weighted bag and stroll with him back up the hill to home. This day he's crossing the bridge and jouncing down the stairs, and blow me down, he's not alone. Bugger, I think.

'Hello,' I say, 'what's this? Two Riverview boys?' The other boy is very fair.

'This is Rob,' says Harry.

'Hello,' I say, 'nice to meet you. Do you live here or are you just visiting?'

'I live here. Over Crystal Street.'

Bugger, I think again. But I know that's not being fair to the boy. We cross to The White Cockatoo and turn right to accompany Rob a few metres further. At the corner we all say goodbye cheerfully. 'See you, Rob,' says Harry. We two turn towards Palace Street.

'Were you talking to Rob in the train?' I ask. I'm still hoping, although I know it's unreasonable.

'Oh yes,' says Harry. 'Rob's usually on the train.'

Damn, I think. I just can't help myself. The reading's now down to twenty minutes a day. 'What sorts of things do you talk about?'

'Oh nothing special.'

'Rob seems a nice guy.'

'He is.'

'Is this his first year at the school too?'

'Yes.'

We turn in at the corner shop and buy a Billabong from Akrive. Harry peels off the paper and crumples it and aims it at the bin.

'Shot!' We go on up the hill. 'Rob was talking about his family and I thought the names were funny. He said that's because they're Aboriginal. He said he's half Aboriginal. His Dad's Aboriginal, but his Mum's not.'

'Really.' That was nothing remarkable in the bright cosmopolitan playground fling of Taverners Hill Infants and Petersham Public Schools. But on this journey, to this destination, with this intimacy, this is all new. 'What's the story?'

'I dunno.' ■

Gerard Windsor's most recent book is *Heaven Where the Bachelors Sit*.

The Benediction

for Tracy and Katherine

Bendición para la niña

Though darker than Leon's
heavily interiored blue
the cold stone of Oviedo's cathedral
could be luminous
with the warmth of his blessing;
the sullen child aching to light candles
with pesetas as if they were
laughing clowns at a fairground.

At the altar of Saint Teresa
we pray together, the child brooding
heavily. I thank Teresa of Jesus
for bringing us together,
for the single face
with which we smile
upon her retablo,
for our joy and despair,
our faith and anger,
her overwhelming patience
as the sky outside struggles
with the last vestiges of winter.

John Kinsella

Photograph: AP/AAP

READING THE REGION

JON GREENAWAY

When the centre does not hold

THERE IS A JOKE about Indonesia that has sprung to mind on many occasions during past weeks. Three archaeologists, an American, a Brit and an Indonesian, stumble upon an undiscovered tomb in Egypt. They enter and the mummy inside comes to life.

'Where are you from?' the ancient Egyptian asks the first two. They tell him of their respective countries' position in the world. He knows nothing of America's current dominance and the glories of Britain's former empire. When the last archaeologist explains that he comes from Indonesia, the mummy replies, 'Oh yeah. Is Suharto still in power?'

Now that Asia's modern-day Pharaoh is gone, what is left is a power vacuum and a country on the brink of more disasters than any self-respecting analyst would dare imagine. The violence of the May riots still echoes through a traumatised community; a kilo of rice has increased in price four-fold since last December; inflation is spiralling. The economy is contracting, and the World Bank predicts that 20 million Indonesians will have been put out of work by the end of this year.

As yet, no group or person has emerged to take firm control of Indonesia. President Habibie, unsure of his position as would-be successor, looks towards elections scheduled for May. General Wirranto, the head of ABRI (the military), has been concerned with reforming the armed forces and removing his rival, Suharto's son-in-law General Prabowo, from positions of authority. His oft-stated reluctance to become a political figure and his desire to withdraw ABRI from the prominence it had in Indonesian affairs under Suharto may be more than just lip service. Meanwhile, continued racial, national, and social upheaval bedevil the confederation of Java and its satellite states. The ties that bind the state are loose in Indonesia, and the possibility of devolution becomes more real by the day.

East Timor, as the outer limit of Indonesia's expansionist policies, is the natural starting point for Indonesia's reinvention of itself. Is Indonesia ready to cede greater autonomy to East Timor and on what terms? What would an independent East Timor mean for the rest of Indonesia, and could East Timor possibly run itself?

Ten days before the four student activists were shot outside Jakarta's Triskati University on 12 May, triggering the unrest that ended Suharto's rule, there were few visible signs of tension in East Timor. Ironically, the situation was overwhelmingly peaceful in Indonesia's most troublesome province while frustration and resentment were coming to the boil in the Republic. Perhaps East Timor was watching and waiting. During discussions we had in Jakarta before I arrived on the island, a Timorese academic observed, 'Now the rest of Indonesia knows what it is like to live in East Timor.'

At first impression it is hard to imagine East Timor as anything other than a sub-tropical idyll. Clean, blue water washes up on beaches shaded by coconut palms by the coast. The interior is dotted with rustic Portuguese buildings among vegetation that marks the Wallace line—the boundary between the tropical flora of South East Asia and the temperate vegetation of the Pacific. Dili has some bustle to it but a herd of goats is still likely to appear from nowhere and disrupt passing traffic.

Talks are under way between Indonesia and East Timor, but there is disagreement about motives and progress. ***Jon Greenaway*** *interviewed* ***José Ramos-Horta****, Nobel Peace Prize winner, on 9 October.*

What progress has been made in the talks?
Nothing really substantial. They continue on 19 to 21 November. There were two items on the agenda. One was the autonomy proposal which the Indonesians had offered, but the UN itself had drafted its own proposal for autonomy. The conflict remains the same in a sense: the Indonesians are willing to talk about autonomy within Indonesia. The Portuguese, Timorese Opposition and UN position remains opposite: that is autonomy, yes, but without preconditions, and as long as there is a transition until a referendum is held. The UN position is that the Indonesians should not insist on preconditions to the granting of autonomy, and leave a few years and then we will see what happens. The Timorese resistance are talking three to five years.

What's the Indonesian attitude to the question of a referendum?
They refuse a referendum because they know they will lose it by 99.9 per cent.

Do you think there will be any movement towards your position on that?
All I can say is that, whether they like it or not, they have not been able to defeat us in 23 years. They are now totally bankrupt and there is no improvement in sight for many years. I simply do not see how they can hold on to East Timor.

So basically there has been no change in the Indonesian position over the last two days?
No, there has been no change at all. The only difference now is there are more troops inside East Timor.

How does this sit with the public withdrawal of troops from East Timor some weeks ago?
The Indonesians have lived with lies as part of their daily practice and they cannot get over this bad habit. The troop pull-out is an absolute farce.

Presidential elections are intended for next May. How might political developments in Jakarta affect the question of East Timor's independence?
I only hope that whoever comes after Habibie, following the next elections, has a sense of fairness and justice as well as a real sense of the national interest of Indonesia. The longer they stay on, the more costly it is for Indonesia, and the people of East Timor will continue to suffer and to struggle. If there is no change on the ground we are going to escalate the resistance in East Timor. We are going to escalate the international campaign and they need all the international goodwill they can get to help the economy.

It seems to me that there is more at stake here for the Indonesians than just East Timor; that in fact the viability of Indonesia as a federation is at stake.
The argument put by many people now is that by disengaging from East Timor they would in fact have more time and energy to solve problems in other islands. The East Timorese cannot be held responsible, cannot be made to pay, for Indonesia's problems in other islands. It is not our problem. We were never part of Indonesia: they invaded us. Aceh, West Papua is their problem, so they have to engage the Acehnese and West Papuans in dialogue in order to solve those problems. They will not solve them by attempting to crush resistance in East Timor.

The military has a lot at stake in East Timor, not to mention pride. Could they resist a negotiated withdrawal from East Timor?
We are prepared to be accommodating, to be flexible so ABRI can get out of East Timor with honour and dignity. They don't have to appear to have been defeated. ABRI and the East Timorese will all be winners because in the struggle for peace there are no losers. We are not trying to humiliate ABRI but they have to acknowledge that East Timor is a political problem, not a military one. It requires courage and humility to acknowledge that it was a mistake to have invaded, but it was Suharto who ordered the invasion so ABRI can easily get out of it by blaming Suharto.

How important in this process is the role played by Bishop Belo and the church?
Bishop Belo and the Catholic church as a whole are courageous people with an enormous sense of honour and dignity. All these years East Timor has been occupied, when the rest of the world abandoned us—including the Vatican—it was the poor, the humble East Timorese church that stood with its people. They have a special place in the heart of the East Timorese and they will always play a central role in bringing peace, in helping reconciliation among Timorese, in building bridges between the East Timorese and Indonesia later on.

The safety of the Indonesian transmigrants in an independent East Timor must be a concern for the Indonesians?
It is natural that they would fear an independent East Timor in this regard, but the East Timorese will have the generosity to extend the hand of friendship to the Indonesian migrants and invite them, encourage them to stay on. It would be very unchristian for us to persecute the Indonesian migrants. I personally would feel totally defeated if ever the people of East Timor turned on the migrants, and our own collaborators, and exact revenge. A society that is built on anger and revenge is not a healthy one.

How could an independent East Timor support itself economically?
We are very touched by the concern of those who think the East Timorese might not be able to survive economically. I can understand their concern. However, look at Indonesia. Has Indonesia survived? They are so bankrupt. East Timor has its own natural resources—oil, natural gas. We can develop agriculture, small industries, tourism, fisheries. We might not be another Singapore, but I am sure that within ten years we can reach the level of Fiji and within 20 to 25 years be a prosperous small country, and we will be an example to other small nations.

—Jon Greenaway

Three kilometres to the East of Dili, a statue of Jesus stands on a cape, facing back towards town. Built for the 20th anniversary of East Timor's annexation, it is much like the more famous image in Brazil, another of Portugal's former colonies. Made out of bronze, it stands on a globe, the feet just above East Timor's small outline, hands extended in ready embrace. But up close the Dili monument gives nothing away, staring back towards town with an almost obdurate gaze.

When President Suharto celebrated this gift to the people in 1996, a helicopter flew him past the stations of the Cross to the beginning of the final 27 steps that symbolise East Timor's place as the 27th state of Indonesia. Two years later, the forecourt where he landed is beginning to fall into the sea, and the portion that has disappeared is unrepaired.

Occupation of East Timor has a longer history than the 23 years of Indonesian rule. The declaration of independence in 1975, by the Fretilin administration, gave East Timor its first taste since the 16th century of life without a foreign power. This exercise in self-determination, a culmination of events after a coup four months before by another armed group called the Democratic Union of Timorese, was to last only 10 days before the Indonesian military invaded in December. There is an overwhelming sense that the real Timor is obscured from view by a series of layers, the most recent being the Indonesian faces in the markets and the colonial buildings on Dili's foreshore.

While the attachment to Portugal had a profound impact on the island, demonstrated in the devotion to Catholicism and Timor's cultivated elite's carrying a Portuguese inheritance in their ancestry, language, and names, the two subsequent occupations—by the Japanese during World War II and now by the Indonesians—has resulted in comparatively little cultural exchange.

But it is not just in Dili that one can witness the presence of others in East Timor. As you travel through villages near the northern town of Bacau, an area where there is a more heavy-handed presence of the Indonesian military because of rebel activity, the signs fill the window of the car like snapshots: a dilapidated building, shaped in an arc and lined with Roman columns, that speaks loudly of Latin colonialism; a cave for storing weapons cut into the side of the hill 50 years ago by the Japanese; and in between, the patrol of four Timorese soldiers wearing the distinct red beret of the elite Indonesian commando force, Kopassus. All of this on the few kilometres of road between the hamlet of Fatamaca and Bacau.

In the six months since the fall of Suharto, Habibie has offered a plan of limited autonomy of East Timor within the federation. Resistance leaders have been released from prison, and supporters can now film interviews with resistance leader Xanana Gusmao inside Cippinang Prison. The University of East Timor has witnessed the largest protests since the massacre at the Santa Cruz cemetery in 1991.

On 6 August, Portugal's foreign minister, Jaime Gama, and his Indonesian counterpart, Ali Alatas, agreed to try and work out a solution. By the middle of October these negotiations were in a fragile state, but they suggest that a self-governing East Timor is no longer a fanciful notion.

From 6 to 8 October, the UN hosted talks on East Timor between representatives of Portugal and Indonesia. The talks were part of the commitment, made at the meeting in August, that an agreement on autonomy plans would be reached by the end of the year. They unveiled their own proposal for the first time, including the Portuguese and Timorese demand that there be no preconditions.

José Ramos-Horta, co-recipient of the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize with Bishop Belo, and representative of the National Council of Timorese Resistance, observed the talks and criticised the inflexibility of the Indonesians (see interview). He also accused Indonesia of bad faith, of conducting a large military manoeuvre on the weekend prior to the talks to clean up the remaining 500 or so Falintil guerrillas under the command of the bearded and charismatic Taur Matan Ruak. Reports out of East Timor have it that, in spite of claims that the numbers of soldiers are being reduced, there are now 7–8,000 more troops on the island than in May. Such claims suggest that the maintenance of Indonesian rule over East Timor still has its supporters. Not only is control of East Timor a problem for Jakarta, but in Aceh in West Sumatra, Irian Jaya, and even Sulawesi, there is growing support for separation. Dr Gerry Van Klinken, editor of *Inside Indonesia*, suggests that those who would block any withdrawal of bureaucracy or army from East Timor may be doing so not to keep East Timor, but to keep the rest of Indonesia.

'The possibility that change in East Timor will precipitate change elsewhere has for years been put forward by conservatives in Jakarta as an important reason not to concede anything. Jakarta's declaration of East Timor as its 27th province, and not as 'occupied territory' (as with Israel and the West Bank), will make it harder for them to argue that East Timor is a special case.'

Van Klinken argues, however, that most regional elites remain committed to a unitary state. However, if the economy is still in the doldrums in two or three years time, resentment over sending tax to Jakarta may shift the public mood too far for them not to follow. Jakarta has always dreaded the disintegration of the Republic, and so will do what it can to placate the disgruntled in order to maintain the union.

Perhaps East Timor's future depends on whether advocates of unity can be convinced that concessions may be made to East Timor without the entire union falling to pieces. Indeed, Van Klinken suggests that not to do so at this time might precipitate the very anarchy they fear from separatists who may well conclude that there is nothing to be gained by peaceful negotiation. 'The pressure for change in East Timor is now so great that I think Jakarta would be wise to start preparing the ground by pointing out to Indonesians that East Timor is indeed a special case and a Suharto mistake.'

Being part of Indonesia has not been without its material benefits for East Timor. Ninety per cent of the population was illiterate prior to 1975 and only 30 km of road on the island was paved. Roads and schools have been supplied and health care has been expanded—95 per cent of the funds that paid for this were drawn from outside East Timor. There are criticisms of the quality of the infrastructure, but there is no doubting its benefits when the alternative is nothing. But, as with the rest of the Republic, East Timor's economy is in a critical condition. There is little work to be found on the island and what is there is in some way supported by the military presence. Even in the coffee-towns like Ermera, which should show signs of profit, people sit in the dust on the side of the street selling meagre produce to make ends meet. They have never generated their own industry and economy: it has been imposed for centuries. So from where would enterprise emerge now?

Added to the economic malaise, compounded this year by the failure of the island's staple corn crop, are the social problems. Locals point to the psychology of being under siege that has been part of daily

life for so long. One woman—a prominent dissident who has been imprisoned, interrogated and is now, she says, under constant watch—believes that having either to comply, resist, avoid or lie creates a certain attitude.

'You become used to the situation and it becomes almost normal,' she observed. 'Even Timorese living in other countries cannot really know what it is we are going through because you lose that understanding when you go.'

Some have dealt with it by falling into the bureaucratic-military envelope, both officially and unofficially. Members of the Timorese church and others in wide contact with the community point to the network of informants that supply the military command with details on suspects and their families. There are so many involved that the people are losing the capacity to trust one another, they say. One recently released opponent of Indonesian rule described being constantly watched and attended by guards, having his attempts at finding work blocked, and being asked by those assigned to watch his house to inform on his associates for a fee. The extent of resentment over the way people have behaved since 1975 might only be revealed when it is allowed free expression.

With only one university for 800,000 people, and a backward economy, there is very little to occupy people's time. Cheap speed and ecstasy flows into East Timor and is consumed hungrily, particularly by young men. One Timorese I spoke with pointed down a street in Bacau and told me that all the young people milling on the side of a road were either high or would soon be so. The road ran past an area where a market—run by settlers from the rest of Indonesia, known as the 'Macassarese'—used to be. Two years before, a riot saw two people killed, the stalls burnt to the ground and the Indonesians return from the 'old' to the 'new' town.

There is also the political violence—the long-alleged claims of atrocities. Two years ago, Bishop Belo established a Justice and Peace Commission, in an office inside his own compound on Dili's foreshore, to investigate reports of such abuses. So far it has documented over 400 cases of rape, torture and physical violence. The Bishop lends his weight to a select number of cases (a small parish of only 1–2,000 people to the south of Bacau had seven cases of unexplained deaths and disappearances between October last year and May). The Bacau area has seen fighting between the military and Falintil in the last six months, including a firefight at Easter and the crash of a helicopter carrying the entire regional command four months ago, rumoured to be the work of the resistance fighters. The recent, ill-timed ABRI offensive mentioned above is said to have been in retaliation.

The possibility of a crackdown against the civil population is not discounted by people in Dili. Bishop Belo has maintained that the situation remains a tense one and there is concern over the protests that had begun in mid-October over the pronouncement by Governor Soares that any civil servants who did not support the Indonesian autonomy initiative would be removed from their jobs.

The reconciliation of a damaged and split community is a task that now shadows the effort of ending Indonesian rule. José Ramos-Horta, for one, believes that if East Timor is granted independence from the economically crippled super-state it will develop its own industries and a civil society. If economic independence is to be achieved, the Timorese will need longer than the ten days they had in 1975 in which to do it, and a large measure of good will and cash from the international community.

After visiting the Justice and Peace Commission, I wandered across the road to the beachfront. To the East the statue of Christ looms in the distance. Back towards town, the rusted hulks of landing craft used by the Japanese in World War II jut out from the shore. One of them has an Indonesian naval patrol boat moored next to it. In its shadow young boys are collecting mussels, quietly and with purpose. The rains that came too late to save the corn crop had finally arrived by the beginning of May and low cloud was advancing from the hills in the hinterland. The boys look skywards momentarily as the rain begins to fall, and then return to their work. ■

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On the tiles

CALL ME CRAZY, or perhaps just eccentric, but I find hours of entertainment in trying to decipher the complex and elegant calligraphy of a mosque. As the tour groups file by, their guides eager to get them out of there and into their cousin's carpet shop, I'm getting a crick in my neck reading every curlicue on the walls and around the domes. In those tiles that look deceptively like your bathroom floor the artist has squirrelled away a host of patriarchs, prophets and caliphs. People usually give me a wide berth when I'm in reading mode—they just don't know what they might expect from someone who stares so intently at bathroom tiles for that long.

I do it partly for the same reason people do the crossword—the thrill of the hunt for that elusive word, the desire to hone language skills grown dull, the sense of achievement when the maze has yielded its secret. Every so often there's something that warms the heart, that softens the stern outlines of religion. Like the Persian couplet over the door leading to the tomb of a great sufi saint. Thousands pass under it each day, tourist and devotee alike, without being able to read it: 'Let this place be a Mecca for lovers. May whoever comes here lacking anything, be here made whole.'

Most of it is more familiar or pedestrian than that, but it's still a pleasure to decipher the text and understand it. But could this be the reason all those artisans toiled there? This writing is surely not meant simply to be read—it's too deliberately obscure for that. Perhaps it's intended to surround us with words from God as a reminder that God is never silent but continues to reveal and to communicate. What the fundamentalist forgets (and all my decoding and unravelling runs this risk too) is that words of any scripture have meaning beyond their content. They are words to put us in touch with The Word. It may well be that the appropriate response to the word of God in stone, silver and ceramic is the wide-eyed 'wow!' of the traveller, or the pilgrim's sense of awe at the incomprehensible and the sacred. Those exquisite arabesques are there not to convey information but to alert us to the living word continually addressed to us. ■

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R.J. DALZIELL

Demanding to see Sophocles

MY FATHER'S book-lined study remains virtually intact, as the few volumes we children have removed to our own bookcases in the six years since his death scarcely make a dent in his collection.

The rambling Perth house where I grew up is itself little changed: it is still my mother's home. The small red and green volumes of the Loeb editions of Greek and Roman authors are as familiar as the honey jar in the shape of a beehive or the backyard jacaranda with a view of the sea from its branches.

My father, Mervyn Austin, a classical scholar, was a passionate advocate for his academic discipline, building up a successful department over almost 30 years as professor of Classics at the University of Western Australia. His contribution is formally commemorated by a lecture theatre, a portrait, a memorial lecture, and a Classics Department that has continued to flourish.

In the years since his death I have often thought about the significance of his dedication to Classics. Although his education at Melbourne Grammar School and his Rhodes Scholarship suggest privilege, he did not come from the class that his schoolmate Manning Clark disparagingly calls 'Yarra-side'. He grew up in Moonee Ponds. When he was 13 his own father died suddenly and only the generosity of the surviving partner in their modest real estate agency kept his mother and her four sons afloat.

My grandparents were not educated people. Their four boys profited in an extraordinary way from their teachers at school, their own efforts, and from each other's company at home.

Enthusiasm for the Humanities was passed on to the next generation: two of my cousins are classical scholars. Following in the family footsteps (but believing that my decisions were *sui generis*), my own studies began with languages, including Classics, moved on to French Studies, and more recently to Australian Literature. It is a rich inheritance, but part of a dimension of Australian cultural history that is, I suspect, largely invisible to most policy-makers in Australian higher education. Times have changed, and when my own children express enthusiasm for high school Ancient History, I think with some bitterness of the uncertain future that an enduring interest in this subject would offer them.

The recent closure of the Classics Departments at the University of Tasmania and at Melbourne University was disturbing evidence of a waning institutional commitment both to the 'presence of the past' and to the impressive track record of Australian classical scholarship. And when the news broke about threats to the Classics Department at the Australian National University, I was deeply shocked. The ANU is the university that received me in mid-life, and from which I graduated with a PhD, after a richly satisfying experience of research in the Humanities.

I had imagined that the ANU valued the Humanities, judging by the calibre of academic staff in the English Department where I was based and in other Departments where I attended seminars or sought advice. Classics at the ANU is now reduced from a department to a program, and staff tenure is no certainty.

My distress and indignation is not simply nostalgia for the quaint but obsolete profession of a much-loved parent. My father was not a lamp-lighter, a bell-ringer or an illuminator of manuscripts (although in a metaphorical sense he was all of these). His academic discipline has current importance, value and purchase.

IN CONTEMPORARY Australia, which used to be described as increasingly multicultural but is now more often termed 'pluralist', immigrant groups are generally clear about their cultural identity as shaped by their country of origin, even though their new culture introduces tensions, particularly for the first generation of the Australian-born. When I taught English in the Adult Migrant Education Program, we teachers thought that we were building a multicultural society among the students, with shared customs, demonstrations of music, dancing, craft and (of course) cooking, but the students were often puzzled by the invisibility of what they called 'Australian' culture, by which they meant the Anglo-Celtic culture of those of us who were neither Aboriginal nor immigrants. Migrant Education teachers often seemed to be Anglo-Celtic Australians who were attracted to this kind of work because they did not have a clear sense of their own cultural identity.

Because my own family background had been culturally rich, I did not share this uncertainty, although I might not have liked every aspect of my cultural origins, choosing to accept some and discard others.

At the risk of some indulgent nostalgia, let me explain the way in which a classical heritage pervaded my childhood.

In a familiar childhood memory I am rapidly winding down the car window to lessen the reverberation of my father's sonorous baritone as he passionately declaims a passage from Homer or Virgil. When these recitations took place in the enclosed space of our small station wagon we would beg him to 'turn the volume down', our hands over our ears, concealing our pride in a professorial parent so learned and so eccentric. Classical literature for us was a living oral tradition. The poetic rhythms of Greek and Latin literature were part of the comforting background of home: we heard them murmured behind the door of the study as our father practised his lectures, intoned on the beach when we were walking the dog, and quoted on any occasion that seemed to him remotely appropriate. Family dogs had classical names: the black Labrador Argus, named after the faithful hound of Odysseus who recognised his disguised master, wagged his tail and died, an ancient story that still brings tears to my eyes. Then there was Juno, an affectionate golden Labrador inclined to indolence, whose brown eyes recalled those of Homer's 'ox-eyed goddess'.

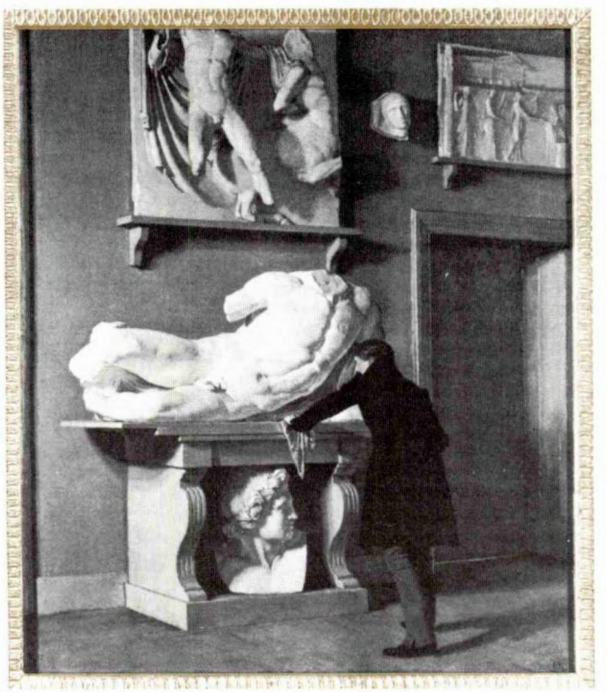
I understood the paradox on the shield of Achilles, and knew that my peaceful existence contrasted with the war experience of my parents. I knew that

Poseidon was the god of the ocean, and although I grew up at home and content in the sun-drenched West Australian landscape of my childhood, I believed in a continuity between the Indian Ocean at Cottesloe and the wine-dark sea of the Aegean. One of our favourite walks beside the Swan River we called Nymphland, because it seemed to us mysterious and wonderful, with a magical, invisible, presence. In those days we were ignorant of the original Aboriginal habitation of the Perth area, but we did have a language from our own European tradition to express a numinous sense of place.

As a child in Perth in the 1950s and '60s, I thought the beautiful grounds of the University of Western Australia were like the park of a stately home that belonged to our family, even though our cramped university bungalow was more like a tenant's cottage. We would roll down the grassy banks in front of Winthrop Hall, stare at the clock face on the tower until we spotted the giant hand move, chase each other round the cypress pines, bounce across the miniature bridges in the Sunken Garden or collect gumnuts by the oval. Beside the university reflection pool, in twin niches on either side of the pillared 'undercroft' to Winthrop Hall, stood two statues in golden stone, Socrates and Diotima. Although it was often the red and gold carp or the waterlilies that claimed my attention, these two figures intrigued me. Inscribed on the statues are quotations from Plato's *Symposium*. Diotima addresses the other familiarly as 'My dear Socrates' and they are conversing about the importance of beauty, both the beauty of forms and the beauty of minds.

The figure of Diotima represented the presence of women in the academy for me from an early age, and not until I was much older did I realise the extent to which my gender would exclude me. Nearby, above the archway linking Winthrop Hall with the original arts building, was a mosaic of other female figures who represented, I was told, 'the five lamps of learning'—Counsel, Courage, Wisdom, Understanding and Knowledge. I was also impressed by the university motto 'Seek wisdom'. The wisdom of indigenous people was symbolically represented by a Maori prayer inscribed into a stone seat in the Sunken Garden, minimal perhaps, but at least there. Of course I grew up with an outrageously idealistic view of humanist educational values, but there was something in it that has been lost.

A childhood experience I cannot remember but often had told to me was a three-year-old tantrum in the university library. I had accompanied my father to inspect the new books on display as I often did after morning kindergarten on the campus. The previous week there had been a display of classical works. A bust of Sophocles had impressed me. To my dismay, the bust had been removed and I stamped my foot, breaking the reverent silence of the library by demanding loudly 'I want to see Sophocles!' I grew up thinking of Homer and Sophocles, Plato and Aristotle, Virgil and Cicero as familiar figures, rather like our relatives in Melbourne and in England, whom I had never met but who had legendary status in family storytelling. My father's stock phrases included 'as old Sophocles used to say' and 'Homer knew it long ago', or rather indignantly, 'don't you remember that passage in Virgil ...?' It was as if the classical authors commented on our everyday life, like affectionate but sententious great-uncles whom we ignored most of the time but occasionally took to heart.



C. Købke, Young Artist Studying Casts of the Elgin Marbles, 1830, Hirschsprungske Samling, Copenhagen

When I was older I learnt that my father had derived great comfort from the classics, especially Homer, during his years of service in World War II. It was not that he aggrandised himself as a Homeric hero, but rather that he learnt from Homer that bullying superior officers, tedium, atrocities, loneliness, homesickness, heroism, companionship and loss, were not unique to 20th-century warfare.

I'd known the names of the Greek gods and their Roman counterparts from an early age, and although I did not 'believe' in them—my religion was shaped by Anglican Christianity—I had a rich repertoire of myths and legends to help make sense of my unfolding life. I also had an insight into human emotions and the dimensions of the Western psyche to which the various gods corresponded: power, desire, aggression, reason and cunning. Later, Classics presented alternative approaches to life—the Stoic and the Epicurean, the Sceptical and the Platonic.

At school I learnt something of Aboriginal culture and legends, although little of their history. Aboriginal stories seemed strange and different from my classical and biblical stories (and were probably poorly translated), but I could see similarities in the role these stories played in their culture. As a child I had my own stories, and felt no desire to appropriate theirs, but simply to be aware of them in their 'otherness' and to respect a different cosmology. As an adult I read Aboriginal literature and autobiography attentively but I do not wish to appropriate a belief system that can never be truly my own. It is odd that the reading public is devouring books of popular mythology such as Pinkola Estes' collection in *Women Who Run with the Wolves*, and Knutson and Suzuki's *Wisdom of the Elders*, desperate for stories by which to live, at a time when the sources of story that are closest to Western culture are being obscured. It is ironic that linguists should be working against time to retard or prevent language loss in dwindling language communities, while academic institutions are choosing to accelerate the loss of an academic community competent in Greek and Latin.

I grew up to associate scholarship with warmth, enthusiasm and excitement rather than with clinical detachment. My father's study was a haven from which his children were never excluded, however preoccupied he was with writing and lecture preparation.

We had generous access to all his books, as long as we never wrote on the pages. In some senses my father's classical passion was an eccentricity that we his family pretended to control or permit. At special dinners my father was permitted to say a short Latin grace, with the long one reserved for Christmas and Easter. None of his surviving family, sad to say, have committed either of these graces to memory. My mother, who was not academic, often poured scorn on this Latin and Greek nonsense, and more perceptively, detested Greek tragedy for the cruelty it confronted.

My father also taught Adult Education courses in classics for years in order to promote his subject and to cater for a less academic group of people, some of whom went on to enrol in Classics as mature age students. Topics such as 'Love and Friendship in Homer' or 'Women in Greek Tragedy' attracted full classes, and he would trek out to the University Extension classrooms on campus after a long day's teaching and a hasty meal. His skill as a public speaker was well known, giving rise to invitations to speak on his subject in many different forums, from women's organisations to the local Theosophists.

He related his speech-making to the tradition of classical rhetoric, holding the position of Public Orator at the University of Western Australia for many years. Throughout my childhood, organisations would often contact my father with a request for a Latin motto. He never charged a consultancy fee, and there is no record of his many creative efforts. Motto writing, I presume, is an obsolete custom now, and not central to my claims to relevance, but I regret its passing.

When my father died, letters of condolence from friends, colleagues and former students expressed not just their sense of loss but their enthusiasm for the classics he professed, illustrating a community interest that extended far beyond the academy. Fortunately his academic position has been ably filled.

But for how long? Already in Australia a generation of promising young classical scholars have had to abandon their calling and turn to other professions for an income. Established and experienced scholars face redundancy.

Exceptional students, like the young Western Australian Harold Bailey, who acquired an international reputation as a philologist, may teach themselves initially, but many capable students will be denied the opportunity to learn. At least Bailey had the opportunity for a university education in Classics, opening the way to postgraduate study in other ancient languages and subsequently a professorship at Cambridge. Australia, the so-called 'clever country', is pursuing a path of intellectual superficiality by choosing to lose touch with an entire academic tradition.

My colleagues at Narrabundah College in Canberra (and at a handful of private schools) are now unusual in offering courses on Homer and on Greek and Roman writers (in translation) to senior secondary students. These courses are well-subscribed and have inspired students to continue with Classics at university level. But this opening will be denied future students.

Australia then will have little more to offer them than the Disney version of Hercules. And that is not likely to provoke a stamping of the feet and a demand to see Sophocles. ■

R.J. Dalziell teaches literature at the Australian Catholic University. Her book, *Shame and the Modern Self*, co-edited with David Parker, was published in 1997.

The loose canon

Dearest Verity and Zoe,

For a long time now your mothers have done their best to alleviate the deadly dullness of your English curricula by giving you the books they read as children. You both love Eleanor Farjeon, C.S. Lewis, L.M. Montgomery, Jane Austen, Betty MacDonald and Georgette Heyer now, because they are not boring; later you will come to see that not being boring is a sine qua non of good writing, and many 'serious' writers sin against this simple law. Sometimes I find myself inexplicably looking for a P.G. Wodehouse or a Dickens or an Austen, or even for some housework to do: quite frequently the reason is that I have been trying to read the latest Carey, Updike or Brookner. Books must be wise, beautiful, funny, engrossing or informative, singly or in any combination. Remove all of those qualities and you are left with the usual bestseller, often with unwelcome additions of emptiness, pomposity and narrowness of mind. Sometimes a foolish or dated book can be thoroughly enjoyable, but that is always because it will contain one or more of the good qualities I have mentioned.

Now that you are in your teens, it is very important that you don't stop reading. That might seem a strange thing to suggest, but often young people can get out of the habit of reading for sheer pleasure and curiosity, bombarded as they are by the dreary tasks of school and their hectic television-watching schedule. The corporate society is imposing heavy homework on you, my darlings, and you do it too diligently. Be subversive: read widely, and not just the latest piece of vacuity like *The Horse Whisperer*. (The film might have been OK, but the book was rubbish.) And remember that poetry is for reading, mostly aloud—not just for writing in English class.

It would ease my mind greatly to know that you have become well-read women by the time you both reach thirty. I have compiled this list to encourage you in independent thought and wide-ranging interests, because one way or another all these writers have affected me deeply as I travel from ignorance to consciousness of ignorance. If you give up a tithe of your television watching, you will have time to read these and many more besides in the next 14 and 16 years. Not all of them are novels. Most of these authors have written many other books which would be good for you to read; I'm giving you the best ones to start with. I love all of these books, except for the 'harmless' ones, which I merely quite like, but still recommend to you so that you don't end up thinking that there's something gone awfully wrong with the novel at the end of this century. That would be a terrible thing.

Absolute musts:

Sons and Lovers; The Rainbow by D.H. Lawrence
Wuthering Heights by Emily Brontë
Jane Eyre by Charlotte Brontë
The Canterbury Tales by Geoffrey Chaucer (in translation, but try it as well in the original Middle English, which is surprisingly easy to understand.)
A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man by James Joyce
Ulysses by James Joyce (Persevere at first, and you will read it many times over.)
The Lord of the Rings by J.R.R. Tolkien
David Copperfield; Great Expectations; A Tale Of Two Cities; Bleak House; Nicholas Nickleby by Charles Dickens
Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain
Moby Dick by Herman Melville
All the rest of Jane Austen
The Owl Service by Alan Garner (not a children's book at all.)
War and Peace; Anna Karenina by Leo Tolstoy
Crime and Punishment by Fyodor Dostoevsky
Macbeth; King Lear; Antony and Cleopatra; Henry IV; Othello by Shakespeare
Madame Bovary by Gustave Flaubert
The Getting of Wisdom by Henry Handel Richardson
My Brilliant Career by Miles Franklin
The Man Who Loved Children by Christina Stead
Catch 22 by Joseph Heller
Portnoy's Complaint by Philip Roth
My Brother Jack by George Johnson
The Bible (the King James is for reading aloud, the New Revised Standard Version is for thinking about.)
The Code of the Woosters; Uncle Fred in the Springtime by P.G. Wodehouse
My Life and Hard Times by James Thurber
The Odyssey; The Iliad by Homer
Tess of the D'Urbervilles by Thomas Hardy
A Kind Of Loving by Stan Barstow
Schindler's List by Thomas Keneally
I, Robot and others by Isaac Asimov
1984, Animal Farm by George Orwell
The Divine Comedy by Dante
The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald

And not all non-fiction is a pack of lies:

Akenfield by Ronald Blythe
The Reason Why by Cecil Woodham Smith
Distant Voices by John Pilger
A History of the English-Speaking Peoples by Winston Churchill
Fermat's Last Theorem by Simon Singh
Bury My Heart At Wounded Knee : An Indian History of the American West by Dee Brown
Hons and Rebels by Jessica Mitford
True Stories by Helen Garner
The Female Eunuch by Germaine Greer
Old Rowley by Denis Wheatley
The Guinness Book of Records
Longitude by Dava Sobel
My Place by Sally Morgan

And the poets John Donne, Thomas Wyatt, William Shakespeare, George Herbert, John Milton, Alexander Pope, William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Keats, Robert Browning, Alfred Lord Tennyson, Emily Dickinson, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Dylan Thomas, T.S. Eliot, Sylvia Plath, Robert Lowell, Allen Ginsberg, Michael Dransfield, Les Murray, Judith Wright, A.D. Hope.

And for good light fun, much better than watching a soap:

Angélique by Sergeanne Golon
Gone With the Wind by Margaret Mitchell
Rebecca by Daphne du Maurier
Queen Lucia; Miss Mapp by E.F. Benson
The Nine Tailors; Murder Must Advertise; Strong Poison; Clouds of Witness by Dorothy L. Sayers (The best detective stories ever.)
The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes by Arthur Conan Doyle
Berry and Co; And Berry Came Too; Adèle and Co by Dornford Yates (appalling politics, but very funny.)
Almost anything by Faye Weldon
Guards! Guards!; Wyrd Sisters; The Colour of Magic by Terry Pratchett
They're A Weird Mob; The Things They Do To You by Nino Culotta/John O'Grady. (Very funny and historically interesting, not least because in the latter book, one of the things they did do to you was keep you in the hossie till they'd made you better.)
The *Titus Groan* series by Mervyn Peake
Puckoon by Spike Milligan
The Clan Of the Cave Bear series by Jean Auel
Cold Comfort Farm by Stella Gibbons
The Whiteoak series by Mazo de la Roche
The Shining by Steven King
Flashman by George MacDonald

These will do you no harm:

Beloved by Toni Morrison
Possession by A.S. Byatt
Shame by Salman Rushdie
The Accidental Tourist by Anne Tyler
The Joy Luck Club by Amy Tan
The Shipping News by E. Annie Proulx
Lonesome Dove by Larry McMurtry
The Chosen; My Name is Asher Lev by Chaim Potok

And life is too short to read *The Bridges of Madison County*, Norman Mailer, Anaïs Nin, the Marquis de Sade, Scott Turow, Barbara Taylor Bradford or Ayn Rand or Georges Bataille or biographies of Princess Diana.

Your loving Aunt Juliette

Juliette Hughes is a vegetarian.

HUGH DILLON & ROBIN KONING

Rights, rites and signs

Legislating Liberty: A Bill of Rights for Australia? Frank Brennan SJ, University of Queensland Press, Australia 1998. ISBN 0 7022 3011 1 RRP $29.95

THIS BOOK IS NOT the predictably soft-left academic treatise its somewhat misleading subtitle suggests it is. I say that the subtitle is misleading because this is quite a personal book, a wide-ranging essay or meditation on public discourse about rights and freedoms in Australia. It looks at law, morality and public policy in relation to some of the most controversial and complex issues confronting the nation: gay rights, abortion, euthanasia, free speech and indigenous rights. And in doing so it goes beyond consideration of the rather narrow topic of a bill of rights.

Nonetheless, protection of rights in Australia is Brennan's central theme. The bulk of the Australian literature on a bill of rights consists in a measured consideration of the pros and cons of a bill of rights, a shopping list of preliminary issues, a wide-ranging review of the adoption of the charters or bills of rights among common law jurisdictions (other than the United States) and proposals for a model bill. Virtually none of them—because they have been written by judges and academics—has anything original to offer a political activist intent on implementing the proposals, nor do they deliver a blueprint for action. *Legislating Liberty* is different. The politics of civil rights is the stuff of the book and gives it its piquancy.

The Bill of Rights project—if it can be called that—has had, at best, a halting progress in Australia. In 1983, the Hawke Government was elected on a platform which included the introduction of a constitutional Bill of Rights. Attorney-General Gareth Evans made a gallant attempt to launch it, but, like national land rights legislation, the project was stillborn. In 1988, four reform proposals designed to be so anodyne as to cause no anxiety in even the most conservative breasts were defeated after a disingenuous assault led by the tory parties. Australia is now the only major common law jurisdiction without a statute specifically enshrining fundamental rights.

If Australia is to adopt and benefit from the approaches taken by its common law peers, something more than wishes or academic excellence on the part of advocates of a bill of rights is needed. So is a dose of *realpolitik*. While Brennan has attained a high public profile for his stance on Aboriginal matters, he is no Balmain basket-weaver. He is a highly skilled and pragmatic political operator.

Legislating Liberty could be read as a primer on rights advocacy. Brennan emphasises that church people should not expect special treatment as advocates. On the contrary, he suggests, unless their arguments and campaigns are cogent and persuasive, they will be unproductive or even counter-productive. He also stresses

that Christians need to realise that they live in a pluralistic society and that people of goodwill and good conscience may take a different moral stance. He accentuates the distinction between law and morals, arguing that just because something is considered wrong does not mean that there should necessarily be a law against it. Finally, he utterly rejects Catholic or Christian triumphalism in political and moral discourse. One can see why he has had such a powerful impact politically.

Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1787, 'A bill of rights is what the people are entitled to against every government on earth, general or particular, and what no just government should refuse, or rest on inference.' It was, however, not until the mighty Chief Justice John Marshall, in the first decade of the 19th century, developed the concept of the separation of powers and, virtually unilaterally, took for the Supreme Court the role of overseeing the Constitution, that the Court had a significant impact on American politics. Even so, it was not until the Fourteenth Amendment guaranteeing citizenship, 'due process' and 'equal protection' for all Americans was passed in the wake of the Civil War that the modern approach to rights litigation was germinated.

It therefore does not inevitably follow that the introduction of a bill of rights in Australia must conform in all respects with the modern American paradigm. Brennan argues that we have a different political and legal history and culture, and that we should not adopt the American approach of handing over enormous constitutional power to unelected, value-laden courts, nor should we look forward to litigating every moral issue that confuses or excites us as a society.

Despite having gone to America as a Fulbright scholar in 1996 with a view that the American model was worth adopting here, he came home persuaded that it was so fundamentally flawed that it should be rejected for home-consumption by Australians. What flaws does he see?

The American model siphons enormous political power into the hands of a small number of unelected judges. (There are nine justices on the US Supreme Court, seven on the Australian High Court.) On the other hand, the Australian High Court is our court of final appeal on all matters of law and has a limited constitutional jurisdiction. The bulk of the High Court's work is non-constitutional. Controversial political issues do not end up in the High Court as a matter of course.

Second, the US Supreme Court has, for much of its history, been polarised because justices are appointed as often for their political and moral opinions as for their judicial qualities and legal ability. The current court is split three ways. In Australia, even if a 'capital C conservative' is appointed to the High Court in a blatantly political exercise, he or she has only limited opportunity to affect fundamental legal rights even in 15 or 20 years of service.

Third, a polarised court will adopt different and clashing judicial techniques to attempt to resolve the issue put before it. Inevitably, a strong, ideologically based dissent, particularly by a significant fraction of the bench, tends to undermine the legitimacy of the outcome reached by the majority. In America, this has meant that the same questions, such as abortion, are never permanently resolved and are revisited when a party thinks that the balance on the court has swung in its favour.

Brennan finds that Australia, by contrast with America, has managed reasonably well to tackle the hard questions—and find compromises with which most people can live even if they do not agree with the ultimate results—through the political rather than through the legal system alone.

He argues that the vast majority of us have reached a civil accommodation on a number of issues and that the time is ripe to entrench rights of freedom against discrimination on the basis of gender, sexual orientation and race in the Constitution. Other important rights, based on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, should be enshrined in a statute capable of being amended by parliamentary majority, ensuring that the legislators have the primary and last word on the subject.

Nonetheless, it seems to me that his analysis of the US Supreme Court's attempts to solve the nation's dilemmas may be unduly pessimistic. It is obvious that the Court has had a markedly benign effect in protecting certain civil rights, particularly those concerned with discrimination on the basis of race. To declare the American method a failure because it cannot solve insoluble problems is a harsh judgment. Moreover, Australian courts cannot escape political dilemmas.

Minorities will always seek to protect their rights against the majority in court because they cannot win in the political process. *Mabo* and *Wik* are demonstrations of that, and the High Court had better get used to the litigation of claims of rights. Thus far they have done a good job and have generally won the confidence of the people. No-one would wish to see politicians attacking the High Court for short-term political advantage, but perhaps Brennan is a little protective of the Court. Judges are held in much higher regard than politicians in the community.

There is no simple panacea for the solution of moral quandaries in politics or at law. The losers in court or in the political process will rarely accept defeat if driven by a strict moral code which they consider supersedes society's laws.

What I enjoyed most were Brennan's descriptions of his personal struggles with each of the moral issues he presents as case studies. There were some moving and even unconsciously funny moments. I could not help laughing at the image he presents of himself, a very tall, patrician-looking Jesuit, pink with embarrassment as he buys a stack of books on gay rights, considering whether to buy some others just to camouflage his purpose. It was almost a steal from Woody Allen.

I was touched by his obvious compassion for those suffering on the horns of moral dilemmas, such as abortion, although I wondered whether he really needed to feel compassion for gays. In my experience, gay people who have come out feel patronised by straight people who offer their 'compassion'. If they don't feel sorry for themselves why should anyone else feel pain for them?

I have two minor criticisms of the book. First, nowhere does Brennan engage in any concerted analysis of the ideas of other significant commentators, such as the Federal Court judge, Murray Wilcox, and former High Court justices, Sir Anthony Mason and his own father, Sir Gerard Brennan, concerning an Australian Bill of Rights. No doubt a book should be read on its own terms, but it seems to me that it would have been stronger had he done so. Second, a book as readable as this naturally inspires a desire to read further on the subject, but it lacks a bibliography. I hope there will be a further edition. ■

Hugh Dillon is a NSW magistrate. He declares his long friendship with the author.

Religious Business: Essays on Australian Aboriginal Spirituality. Edited by Max Charlesworth, Cambridge University Press, 1998. ISBN 0 5216 335 24, RRP $29.95

W.E.H. Stanner has made a signal contribution to our appreciation of the depth and sophistication of Aboriginal religions. It is not surprising, then, that his thought should be so pervasive throughout this collection of Charles Strong Memorial Trust lectures on Aboriginal spirituality, as Max Charlesworth notes in his introduction.

The collection opens with an excellent overview by Stanner himself. He offers insights into what can seem an inaccessible area, while also offering the delight of opening up many new questions. In the course of his analysis, he also sets the record straight on popular misconceptions, such as those about the 'barbarity' of initiation ordeals, while also challenging what he sees as sloppy thinking in well-intentioned newer understandings, like the popular dictum that Aborigines do not own the land but are owned by it.

The other contributors home in on a wide range of particular questions—concepts of good and bad in the Aboriginal 'moral universe' (Ronald Berndt); an analysis of women's distinct contribution to indigenous religious life, including a feminist critique of androcentric anthropology (Diane Bell); and the 'religious factor' in indigenous land rights and native title issues (Frank Brennan and Nonie Sharp). Tony Swain takes up some of the methodological issues noted by Stanner and Berndt. His epistemological critique exposes the failure of positivist, objectivist, subjectivist and phenomenological anthropologies to allow a proper understanding of Aboriginal religion, and then suggests an approach which transcends these limitations. The fact that he can still talk freely, in 1985, about 'meaning' leads one to hope for a follow-up on the impact of post-modernism on anthropology.

'Ned Kelly Died for our Sins' is the tantalising title of Deborah Bird Rose's contribution. She notes how some Aboriginal groups have incorporated historical European figures into their Dreamtime mythology. While earlier works have focused on stories of Captain Cook which portray him as the archetypal 'immoral European' (p107), Rose analyses stories which seek to identify and define the moral European. The archetype here is Ned Kelly. He is assigned a creative role in the Dreaming, he is a force for justice and right, he opposes what Captain Cook and his type are doing, and he is eventually killed because of this. Rose's insightful interpretation of these moral and immoral figures complements Berndt's analysis of good and bad.

In her talk, Rosemary Crumlin used seven art works to entice her listeners into the realm of Aboriginal spirituality. Unfortunately, precisely because Crumlin's presentation relied more on the direct impact of the art on the audience than on her words, this is the talk which translates least well into essay format. Still, the art works themselves are the closest the collection comes to an Aboriginal 'voice' not mediated through non-Aboriginal commentators, and the fine colour reproductions of them lie, appropriately, at the heart of the book.

Four of the paintings selected by Crumlin were from a remote community at the edge of the desert, where I have worked for the last five years. It was disappointing,

then, to find the same inattention to detail which has plagued a number of recent books about that community, such as James Cowan's *Two Man Dreaming* and Monica Furlong's *The Flight of the Kingfisher*. In the present book, the community is still named 'Balgo', a name of uncertain origin which travelled with the community from the old mission site. When the people became a self-governing community in the early '80s, they chose to name the community Wirrumanu (sometimes Wirrimanu), the correct Aboriginal name for the present site. While the name Balgo remains in common parlance, and in the publicity for 'Balgo art', for example, it would be good to see the people's choice of official name respected in a collection of this stature. Also, while Susie Bootja Bootja is correctly named in the colour plates as Napaltjarri, she is then referred to as Napangarti in the essay. Names are always worth getting right, but particularly kinship 'names' which situate an Aboriginal person in their relational world, the importance of which is a refrain throughout the book. It would also have been helpful to see some acknowledgment that two of the artists have died since the talk was first given, and one had died even before it.

Having borne the label 'missionary', and accepting at least some of the possible definitions of the word, I am interested in the engagement between Aboriginal religions and Christianity. The lean index to this collection gives no indication that this theme recurs throughout the book. Even such a clear heading as 'Meriam people and Christianity', a major part of Nonie Sharp's essay, is not cross-referenced under 'Christianity'.

What we do find under that heading is the one essay, by ex-Pallottine missionary, Peter Willis, which offers the most sustained treatment of the topic. It is a case study of his own work among the Mirriwung people around Kununurra in the late 1960s, and he analyses the dynamics of Aboriginal conversion to Christianity in terms of an exchange theory of human interactions. The 'patrons', in this case the missionaries, offer goods and services and gain adherents; the 'clients', the Aboriginal people, by offering their affiliation, gain important allies and a measure of kudos in white society.

Willis' argument is sometimes hard to follow. On the one hand, he makes much of the fact that Aboriginal people, on becoming Christians, continued 'the ceremonies and observances of Aboriginal religion', claiming this as a sign of their not fully buying into the missionaries' agenda. Yet he has earlier told us of his own observation, as their priest, that the traditional ceremonies to which he and the nuns were invited 'must be compatible with Christianity', a view based on the good rule of thumb that well-instructed Aboriginal people saw no incompatibility. Willis also oversimplifies to the point of reductionism by downplaying any spiritual motivation on the part of either the missionaries or those Mirriwung people who converted. 'Jesus', for example, is mentioned only once, and that, significantly, in a quote from an Aboriginal Christian. But the strength of Willis' analysis is its critical challenge to those missionaries who err in the opposite direction by over-spiritualising very complex cross-cultural interactions.

In 1970, Stanner found it necessary to argue for the inclusion of 'Aboriginal beliefs ... within the scholarly scope of comparative religion'. This book verifies his claim that 'the intellectual requirements can be, and long have been, amply satisfied' (p1). ■

Robin Koning SJ has worked for some years with the community at Wirrumanu, WA.

Re-jigging Australia

This month we conclude our series of reviews of books that come out of the Australian National University's Research School of Social Sciences project on reshaping Australian institutions. The books are all published by Cambridge University Press.

Gender and Institutions (Welfare, Work and Citizenship), Moira Gatens and Alison Mackinnon (eds), 1998.
Living Feminism: The Impact of the Women's Movement on Three Generations of Australian Women, Chilla Bulbeck, 1997.

GATENS/MACKINNON'S is an edited anthology of feminist research on women's issues in welfare, housing and housework; harassment, discrimination and affirmative action at work, and citizenship.

Bulbeck's is a thoughtful analysis of the future of feminism, following upon a review of the effect of the women's movement on three generations, derived from interviews with 60 lively women.

The two books benefit from being read together, the delight of Bulbeck's lightening the labour of reading the Gatens anthology. There is curate's egg quality in the latter, which heightened my disappointment. Feminist scholarship would affect public policy more—surely, feminism's point—if it were accessible. This collection of academic essays will not be essential reading for policy-makers, as public policy drifts into laissez-faire and freedom of contract.

Thus, Gatens' preface reflects on the sexual difference that permeates all institutional settings and the assumption that 'gendered regulatory norms intersect with, shape, and provide [their] underpinning'. But Bulbeck begins *Living Feminism* with a tale: a convent frames, and hangs on its walls, the blood-stained, sheets from aristocratic wedding-nights. One, however, is not stained: before that 'blank page', most women pause: 'women's stories are written from their bodies'. Her point is made.

And so it continues. Gatens' introductory chapter on the masculinist assumptions of the 'rational actor', and the male-breadwinner model in economic thought, is thought-provoking. So is Cass' analysis of that model's discriminatory effect on women's access to housing and its benefits. Baxter's analysis of why men don't, and probably won't ever, share domestic responsibilities is an informative counterpoint to Bulbeck's commentary. Bulbeck cites Eva Cox's, 'We want to change the world, not get the men to do half the bloody housework,' and remarks drily that 'many women would settle for half the housework as a good start.'

The papers on workplace design don't satisfy, partly because, as Gatens admits, there is no legal analysis of equal opportunity legislation (was a contribution promised, and not delivered?). This would have assisted the Bacchi critique of sexual harassment in the 'chilly atmosphere' of the University, and Eveline's 'Heavy, Dirty and Limp' chapter on the preservation of male advantage at work. Eveline's acerbic analysis of Dame (no 'sister') Leonie Kramer was pleasing. Braithwaite's perception that the Affirmative Action Agency has succeeded because its Act is 'loose, gentle and weak legislation' seems gently misguided. The corporate world has not embraced diversity. Its AAA reports are superficial. The sanctions, such as they are, are watered down, and the Act's future is uncertain: the report of its recent review has been suppressed for months.

The last part of *Gender and Institutions* is the least successful, dealing with citizenship, population, and an essay by Chilla Bulbeck on women, the republic and constitutional reform. Overall, the anthology reads as what it is: a collection of academic papers.

I turn, with pleasure, to Bulbeck's own book, *Living Feminism*, a delightful analysis of women's lives and their changing structures.

Since 1992 Jocelynne Scutt has published five or more collections of brief, autobiographical 'stories' by Australian women. These are insights, in their own words, into women's lives; historically useful and, in feminist terms, a Good Thing. Women's achievements go largely unrecorded by masculinist historians. Mrs MacArthur developed Australia's merino industry while her feckless husband dined at his London Club. The official glory is his. So it goes.

But is writing the record enough? Scutt doesn't think so. *The Age* recently published her tart opinion piece, pointing out that the most publicly recognisable women in the world today are not our many high-achievers in business, politics or academia but women defined by their sexual connections with powerful men: Diana, discarded consort of the Prince and serial victim of caddish and careless playboys: Hillary, betrayed wife of the US President, and Monica, his exploited groupie.

Scutt's books compile written answers to her structured questions, by women who identify as feminists. Bulbeck's is a thoughtful analysis of structures—girls' upbringing, experiences of work, marriage and difference—and women's responses to feminism, mediated through structured personal interviews with non-white, non-middle-class, non-cosmopolitan women selected because, it is claimed, they are neglected by feminism.

Where Scutt stands back and allows the woman's voice, Bulbeck interacts and interprets, lets the subjects doctor their interview transcripts, ponders those changes; invites them to respond to her '(mis)interpretations of their story' in context, and analyses the totality.

The stories are unsettling, inspirational, familiar—Audrey's story of survival as an Aboriginal woman; Rachel's sacrifice of

career for family, a choice she refuses to rue—and Bulbeck's analysis insightful, especially into that uniquely Australian creature, the 'femocrat,' and the 'walking with the men' feminism of indigenous, Muslim and migrant women.

I was struck by her analysis of intergenerational feminism. It is not only in the US that older women tend to link their feminism, born from personal experience of discrimination, with 'injustices inflicted on other oppressed groups;' or that younger feminists source their individualistic feminism to Women's Studies. No wonder each finds it hard to talk to the other.

But Bulbeck speaks to the heart. The contributors to *Gender and Institutions* have written for feminist scholars. I hope someone translates for the readers of *New Idea*.

—Moira Rayner

Melancholia

It is like being in the wrong country
at the wrong time, without language,
without family, friends, maps,
with sameday grey weather,
nowhere to snooze,
a diet of pebbles and chaff.
It is where corpses walk,
when the very self smells stale.

Early morning is worst,
light bleeding into the night,
the twenty-four hours before dawn,
the room's titanic volume,
blankets sheets of lead,
another effervescent day,
decapitated on a pillow,
the opening of lids a Lazarus-like feat.

Give us Pertofran, Tryptanol, Prothiaden.
Thank God for Ciba-Geigy, Frosst and Boots.
Give us our daily psychotropic pap.
Let us confabulate, sizzle, chirrup.
Let countries be Avalons, Edenic shires,
let early mornings shimmer undefiled.
Melt that grim simulacrum of wax:
forget that life is a suicide pact.

Jack Hibberd

Nightmares

To me they serve a biological function —
their surrealism of disaster and threat,
staged on a stage where horror knows no compunction,
rehearses us for that ultimate performance: death.

Jack Hibberd

Citizenship and Indigenous Australians: Changing Conceptions and Possibilities, Nicholas Peterson and Will Sanders (eds), 1998.

This collection of twelve Australian National University conference papers of recent but no explicit date, includes contributions from such notable authors on indigenous issues as Rowse, Read, Nettheim and Reynolds. The preface says that 'very few indigenous people' participated in the conference. All the writers are academic and it is not clear that any is an Aborigine.

Among the questions broached are: How, in view of profoundly different cultural and historical backgrounds, can Aborigines and non-Aborigines be members of the same society on equal terms? What would 'a fair and equitable relationship' be in view of Aborigines' prior occupancy and brutal dispossession? Can there be tolerable differences in citizens' rights between such different peoples? If Aborigines were to have 'distinctive rights', what would hold the Australian nation and society together? Necessarily, answers are speculative and, in view of the recent virulence of Hansonism in Australia, some will seem to some readers impractical, even utopian.

A lengthy introduction precedes three sections. The first, 'Historical Conceptions', deals with 'Bureaucratic Constructions of Indigenous Identities in New South Wales' and roves from first-fleeter Watkin Tench and 'Baneelong' (usually 'Bennelong' who, unlike British Tench, does not make the Index) to the work of Professor A.P. Elkin (1891–1979). The others are titled 'Contemporary Conceptions' (of citizenship and self-determination) and 'Emerging Possibilities'.

Also, I dare say, necessarily in post-modern days, not all the papers make for facile reading. In an otherwise informative one on the 1967 referendum, we are told in a 70-word final sentence that erroneous histories confuse 'textual and contextual signifiers and documentary with performative functions of language ... but their meta-narrative, by analogising the referendum with ... significant outcomes, does have a historical truth once it has been recontextualised.'

After that, Peter Read's lucid litany of past controls of Aborigines in 'Whose Citizens? Whose Country?' is almost droll in its account of contradictions. In 1935 a mixed-race Australian was ejected from a hotel for being Aboriginal but, returning

home to his mission, he was refused entry because he wasn't. When he tried to remove his children, he was told they were Aboriginal and so he couldn't. He went to the next town and was arrested as an Aboriginal vagrant and placed on a reserve. During World War II he was at first not allowed to enlist until he went interstate as a non-Aboriginal. After the war he needed permission to get a passport although he had received exemption from the Aborigines Protection Act. Then as a non-Aboriginal he could not visit his relatives on the reserve but he could not enter the Returned Servicemen's Club.

In a cogent paper, 'Post-Colonial Citizenship and Legitimacy', Richard Mulgan endeavours to come to terms with the guilt that conscientious non-Aboriginal people feel about such humiliations and—worse—the killings, dispossession and impoverishment. He has little time for 'moralising liberals' for whom 'collective guilt, far from being a problem, is more a badge of honour and a source of self-esteem'. They 'tend to be tertiary educated, to be attracted to humanistic ideals such as autonomy and justice and to find employment in the public sector and social services rather than in economic production'.

Mulgan wants a constitutional theory that legitimises both Aboriginal rights and general citizenship rights of all Australians. While law does not arise from wrong (*ex injuria jus non oritur*) it does arise out of facts (*ex factis jus oritur*) so that well-established regimes can be legitimate in spite of unjust origins. The legitimisation will emerge, he argues, from just and egalitarian contemporary practice. Dissemination of Mulgan's argument would reduce some redneck fears that Aboriginal rights will lead to the loss of even the suburban backyard.

The final paper, 'Sovereignty', fittingly belongs to Henry Reynolds, who has championed the Aboriginal cause since the 1967 referendum. He believes that problem 'can best be tackled by prising apart the two concepts of state and nation'. Paradoxically, only the state 'can underwrite and protect indigenous nationalism and self-government from inimical forces both within Australia and without'.

On the whole this collection makes a challenging symposium.

—James Griffin

Contributors: **Moira Rayner** is a lawyer and freelance journalist; **James Griffin** is Professor Emeritus of History, University of Papua New Guinea.

On the cards

A LOT CAN BE READ from old postcards. The mass-produced ones from Edwardian times project a strong sense of display. A town will be presented for an admiring gaze, whether it be its streetscapes or individual public buildings. But there are also photographs blown up to postcard size, sometimes produced by professionals, sometimes by amateurs. These are maverick, vary hugely in subject matter and quality, and often come without any identifying mark whatsoever.

Such a card is reproduced here. All we know—from the typography on the back—is that it is Australian. The photograph, not completely in focus (the figures beyond those clustered around the statue are sharper) suggests that it has been taken by an amateur, perhaps somebody involved in the function being celebrated. But what was it? And where? When? (The question which gave some intensity to the initial reading was, simply: is the card worth the dollar being asked for it?)

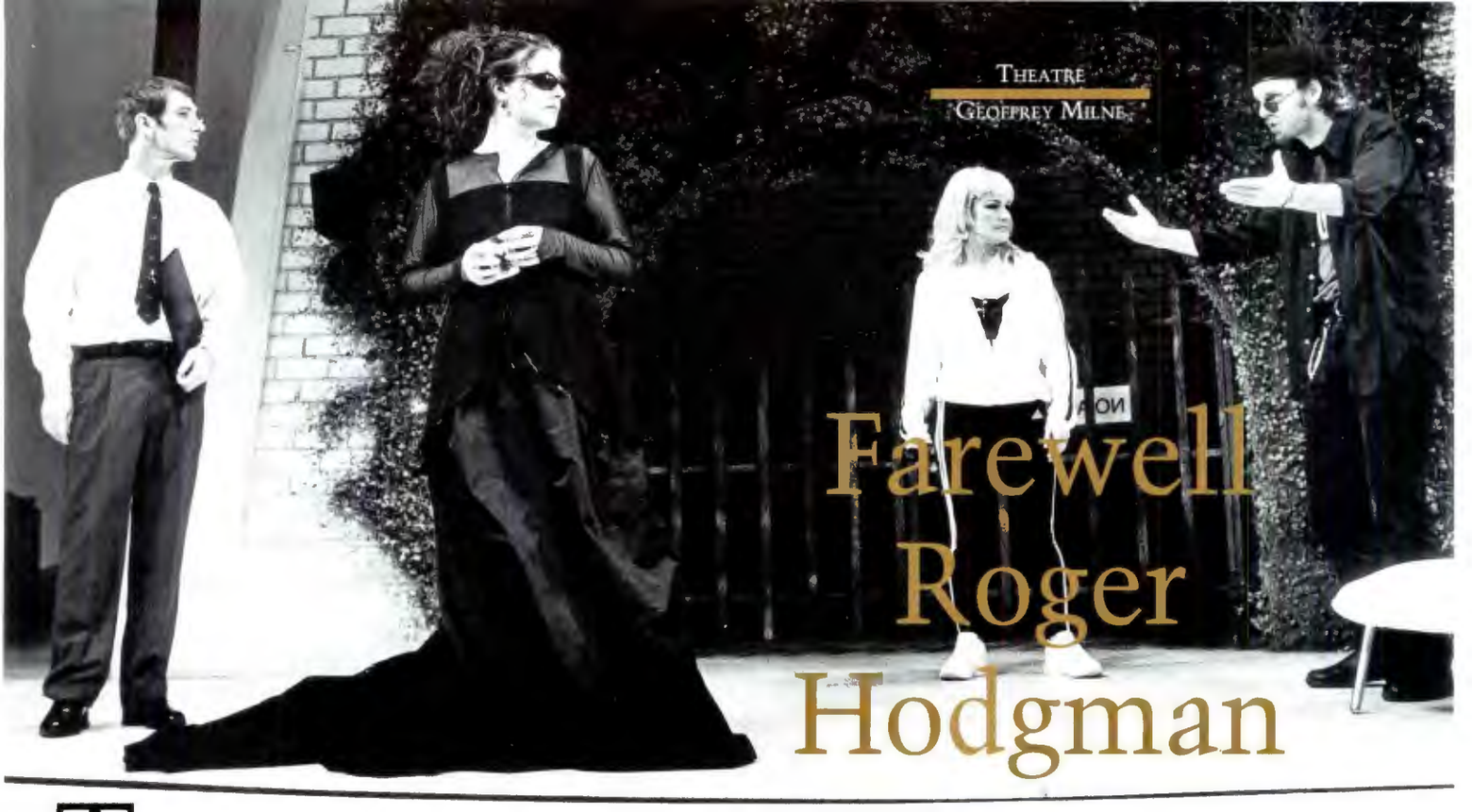
The time of the image is the easiest to bring into focus. The card is in black-and-white, not sepia, which suggests that it is after 1910, while the three men holding canes further suggest the 1920s, even later. For just as beards became fashionable after soldiers wore them back from the Crimea, so the profusion of walking wounded after World War I helped to popularise the cane.

The 'where' and the 'what' of the card are more difficult to determine. The statue is in a park, and if I read the photograph correctly, the commemoration has just taken place. This would explain why the speaker has removed his hat; and why the two boys to the left, while still, show with hands on hips a growing impatience. But who are the people still coming down the path? The pair of girls in the middle distance seem to have halted, to be taking in the scene rather than about to become part of it. So perhaps the people, having been to church, are promenading in their Sunday best, as some Australians used to do.

The cloth caps on two of the men provide perhaps another clue: this could be a working-class district. Certainly the body language of the five male principals is strikingly different, as though they have unusually come together for the cause being celebrated.

My rapid reading then—on buying the card—is that this might be an early celebration at the statue commemorating the poet John Shaw Nielson in Footscray Park, Melbourne. Given that the statue would have gone up after he died in 1942, the costumes seem a little old-fashioned; but working-class dress was often conservative. The lie of the land seems right for Footscray Park, as it slopes down towards the Maribyrnong. But one day soon I must go and check. ■

Jim Davidson is an historian and a collector of postcards.



Farewell Roger Hodgman

THE FIRST Roger Hodgman productions for the Melbourne Theatre Company (MTC) that I can recall were in 1984, the year after he took over as second Dean of Drama at the Victorian College of the Arts and accepted an ancillary post as John Sumner's associate director at the MTC. They were poles apart in period and style. One was contemporary British (Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls*) and the other a classic (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*). Fourteen years later—and 11 years since taking over the helm of the venerable old flagship from Sumner—Hodgman has opted to finish his term of office with similarly disparate works.

Leaving aside his mainly managerial contribution as Artistic Director, Hodgman's principal concentrations of artistic energy since he began have been in six areas: Shakespeare and other English renaissance drama; contemporary American drama and music theatre; European drama of the past; old MTC staples like Coward, Shaw and Wilde (someone has to do them); occasional forays into contemporary English drama and new and recent Australian drama.

The best of his English classics have been his first and last Shakespeares, with some interesting and successful ones in between, most notably the two very popular star vehicles for Pamela Rabe and Hugo Weaving in the Playhouse (*The Taming of the Shrew* of 1991 and *Much Ado About Nothing* of 1993). His production of John Marston's rarely seen *The Dutch Courtesan*, also in 1993, is also memorable, not least owing to Geoffrey Rush's exuberant Cockledemoy and to Dan Potra's extraordinary design for this sprawling play on the cramped old Russell St Theatre stage.

Outside the English renaissance, Hodgman has seemed most at home with the modern Americans, especially Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller. His *Streetcar Named Desire* in 1987 (with Helen Morse as Blanche Dubois in a towering, evocative set by long-term design colleague Tony Tripp) was almost a great one. His *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* three years later was not. *The Crucible* in 1991 was easily the best of Hodgman's Arthur Miller productions and one of his most powerful productions ever for the MTC, thanks to fine acting from a huge cast and the timeliness of its revival; it was one of those occasions when all the social and production elements seemed to gel. His *View From the Bridge* (Miller's next play, produced the following year) also worked well. His most recent American production, A.R. Gurney's *Sylvia*, was thin on content but has been one of the company's bigger successes of recent years—again, mainly due to the contribution of a star actor: Rachel Griffiths as the eponymous dog.

EVEN MORE PROMINENT in Hodgman's recent career—*and* in the diminution of the MTC's massive debt—have been music-theatre pieces by Stephen Sondheim. There have been four of them, beginning with an excellent *Sweeney Todd* in 1987, with Peter Carroll as the demon barber. Then *Assassins* in 1995, the outstanding *A Little Night Music* last year and the distinctly disappointing *Into the Woods* early this year. As always, Hodgman's choice of collaborators has had a lot to do with the success of the work; Tony Tripp has designed the whole sequence and Jean McQuarrie has also been musical director throughout the extended Sondheim project, while certain performers have appeared in two or more, with the result that a definite sense of ensemble house-style has evolved.

A 'semi-permanent loose ensemble of artists' was a long-cherished ideal of the MTC under John Sumner, and—although it had petered out, really, by the early 1970s—Hodgman has certainly done his best to retain such vestiges of the ideal as opportunity has permitted. In practice, this has resulted mainly in ongoing relationships with designers (principally Tripp), playwrights (mainly Janis Balodis), musical director McQuarrie, veteran lighting designer Jamieson Lewis and certain actors. Among these have been Peter Carroll, Paul English, MTC stalwart Frank Gallacher, Rachel Griffiths, Tammy McCarthy, Lisa McCune, Helen Morse, Bruce Myles, John O'May, partner Pamela Rabe (and her Shakespearean sparring partner Hugo Weaving), Bruce Spence, Alison Whyte, veteran showbiz personality Bob Hornery and sundry others. Many of these, in various combinations, have appeared in Hodgman's Shakespeares, his American drama and music-theatre *and* in his European classic productions.

A Little Night Music was arguably the apogee of Hodgman's career in this respect. Morse and O'May (pictured right) led an outstanding cast, which also featured Rabe, McCune, Ruth Cracknell, Greg Stone and Christen O'Leary. Tripp's design of revolves, gauzes and pantomime-style cut-outs complemented the transience of the piece's themes and maintained a superb tempo. McQuarrie's subtle music direction kept the whole thing in focus to a degree we rarely see on the commercial musical stage.

Hodgman also brought Nordic conceptions of love and honour to the stage in three of Ibsen's plays. The best of these was his first, a 1988 production of *Hedda Gabler* (with Carroll and Morse in the leads) for which he arranged a splendidly actable new translation himself; those were the days when artistic directors still had time to do proper research and preparation. Later Ibsens (even the well-reviewed *Doll's House* with Rachel Griffiths this year) failed for various reasons to match the *Hedda*. Elsewhere in the modern European classic canon, he essayed a couple of less-assured shots at Chekhov. A 1989 *Cherry Orchard* got close to the mark (with Robyn Nevin, Rabe, Morse, English, Neil Fitzpatrick in a good-looking, Tripp-designed production that just missed the play's psychological centre) whereas last year's *Three Sisters* was a mostly unsatisfactory attempt to incorporate a large ensemble of mostly too-young actors into a rather out-dated MTC house-style production.

Like any good artistic director, Hodgman has endeavoured to oblige older subscription and regional audiences with some of the enduring favourites of the British theatre like Noël Coward's *Private Lives* and Shaw's *Heartbreak House* way back in 1986. Of the more recent British drama, probably only his co-production with the STC in 1996 of David Hare's *Skylight* rekindled the enthusiasm sparked by his early production of Churchill's *Top Girls*.

The most under-represented aspect of Hodgman's contribution to the MTC's traditional repertoire has been new Australian work—with the conspicuous exception of the *Ghosts Trilogy* and other plays by his associate Janis Balodis, a series beginning in 1985. He also deserves full marks for guts (and perhaps even folly) for selecting Balodis' maligned *Heart for the Future* as the company's 500th production in 1989. Apart from those, Hodgman has generally farmed out the original imaginative and dramaturgical effort of getting up new Australian drama to associate directors or has bought it in from (or co-produced it with) other companies. Clearly, the MTC under Hodgman has paid no less attention to Australian work than the 'flagship' average; it's just that he has never seemed as comfortable doing it himself.

ON THEN TO HIS SWANSONG: a super-modern, set-in-St Kilda *Twelfth Night*. Hodgman was clearly determined to go out on a high note, no doubt partly to expunge memories of dark times in his other role as administrator: the deficit, the search for a new building, problems of company identity and so on. What defines this production above all is Tripp's set (pictured above left): looming over a four-sided revolve, featuring Luna Park as a vision of Illyria in the grip of Bakhtinian carnival madness, is an illuminated sign reading 'JUST FOR FUN'. As the action grows darker in Acts 4 and 5,

letters drop out of the sign, which diminishes to J_ST F_R _UN. Thus when Olivia finally hears of all the mayhem that has happened to poor old Malvolio, we have already spotted the emotional signposts. Then, in the end, the sign lights up again in full and we're left with an overall sense that this has been a resolutely jolly and festive *Twelfth Night*: 'fun Shakespeare' in the style of Nimrod's heyday in the 1970s or of Glenn Elston's open-air picnic productions.

The 'look' is often paramount in contemporary 'fun Shakespeare' and so it is here in some measure. Portraying Malvolio nowadays, for example, is a tricky task and his famous yellow stockings take the form here of a gaudy in-line skating suit; the cross-garters secure his knee pads and his chamber of 'hideous darkness' is a wheelie bin. Elsewhere, the swords for the duel between Aguecheek and Cesario are billiard cues pinched from a local pool hall; Olivia's veil becomes a pair of Ray Bans while Orsino's palace is a rococo bathhouse from an older St Kilda. Orsino's retainers are nightclub bouncers in black (complete with ID numbers) while Olivia's Fabian is a female aerobics trainer.

But the visual gimmicks are smartly integrated into the production and performance style. Shane Bourne's Sir Toby—a rakish denizen of Fitzroy St all-night bars—is a foil for Bruce Spence's Sir Andrew, a hayseed totally at sea away from his up-country National Party seat. In a daring casting coup, Hodgman has given Feste to the stand-up comic Greg Fleet, who studies his laconic and gloomy observations on life while nursing a seemingly endless hangover at an open-air café further up Acland St. Fleet also makes a very good fist of Gerry Hale's Elizabethan pastiche songs, although I'd be surprised if his untrained voice survived the rigours of a Playhouse season intact.

It is from this trio, and from Kim Gyngell as the smarmiest smiling Malvolio we've seen in years, that Hodgman extracts the bulk of his knockabout humour. But the women in the play are also stylishly represented, especially Alison Whyte as a superbly ambivalent Viola/Cesario, Josephine Byrnes as a detached, new-age Olivia and Mandy McElhinney (a real up-and-coming star) as the conniving Maria who sets the comic plot's wheels in motion with genuinely vengeful relish. Some of the extras also impress more than they sometimes do in MTC productions. A slightly underworked Wayne Hope (who only gets to play twin-brother Sebastian) is one and Kevin Hopkins (in multiple roles) is another. This is as strong and as imaginative an ensemble of actors as Hodgman has assembled for some years.

In the end, Olivia's remark that 'He [Malvolio] hath been most notoriously abused' is something of an overstatement in this mostly playful and good-natured production. Similarly, the decorative revolving stage (one of whose sides is an Acland Street cake shop) evokes the idea of 'cakes and ale' more than the vicious 'whirligig of time'. But these are small quibbles about a production which surely achieves what it set out to do: to celebrate a long-serving and hard-working artistic director's exit in a major key. ■

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

FLASH IN THE PAN

Virgin history

Elizabeth, dir. Shekhar Kapur. 'A director from Bombay takes on Elizabethan England' says the ominous program credit. Well, why not, one feels constrained to say. Post-colonial justice etc. Peter Brook had his way with the *Mahabharata*. Scorsese is into his Buddhist period, and Hollywood's golden age churned out its quota of parcel gilt Elizabethan sagas to prove that Gloriana was just a good midwestern girl at heart and would have settled down in the kitchen with a brood of kids and Robert Taylor if the danged business of running England and beating the Spanish hadn't gotten in her way.

Elizabeth looks beautiful. The acting is often memorable. The film has some moments that detach themselves from all one's conditioned expectations, to float in that space cinema can sometimes clear in imagination: moments of dread, of mute indecision or tacit malice. Cate Blanchett (above, on the left), as the young Elizabeth, has a gallant stride and an occasional intonation to demonstrate exactly why this woman could never have settled anywhere except on a throne. Geoffrey Rush plays her Svengali court adviser, Walsingham, with an urbane ruthlessness—slitting a beautiful boy's throat here, dispatching Mary of Guise in her bed there—that is both inexplicable and convincing. Kathy Burke is a lumpy, irascible Queen Mary, her teeth as rotten as her tragic sectarian politics. In one scene, a cameo of alienation, Kapur has her crouched in a dank bed-chamber while an attendant dwarf brushes her hair. There are also burnings, carnage in Scotland and torture scenes in the tower to focus the mind.

So the images are potent, but as a whole the film skates on a thin script and an impoverished sense of history, running its murder mystery-cum-love story course as if by default—for lack of anything richer, or stranger. Odd to conceive of Elizabethan England as a *tabula rasa*. It suggests that the producers' expectation of an audience is that it has never read a book, seen a play, a film, a portrait, surfed an internet encyclopædia or watched Glenda Jackson on television.

—Morag Fraser

Mane attraction

Year Of The Horse: Neil Young and Crazy Horse Live, dir. Jim Jarmusch. 1996 was the year of the Horse, and the pivot for Jarmusch's splendid documentary, one of the best rock docs since *The Kids Are Alright* showed The Who's significance to the art. Art is really what *YOTH* is concerned with, since Neil Young is one of the few who never sold out to the coke-chic Armani-suited dead souls who run the record companies. In fact, Geffen sued him in the '80s for refusing to make his new music more 'commercial'. Crazy Horse has few parallels for longevity and honesty—Van Morrison, The Grateful Dead when Jerry Garcia was alive, Midnight Oil, AC/DC maybe. Not the Stones. Billy Talbot (Crazy Horse's bass player) may have approximated Keithy in substance-abuse heroism but slick Jagger just never had Young's heart. Jagger got on by being meaner and more bourgeois than the suits, turning his latter concerts into Mayfair wife-swaps; the Horse has candles and incense like the '70s shagpile loungerooms where the music won us. And they aren't being retro.

Jarmusch uses 1976, 1986 and 1996, giving a fine sense of form as well as showing Young's evolution from Byronic godlet into baggy-shorted dad. (With black socks and leather shoes. Of course!) In 1996 Jarmusch shoots in Super 8, which suits the music and gives a seamless quality crucial to the documentary's primary revelation: that Young and Crazy Horse may have aged, but they haven't lost anything important. Near the end, Jarmusch does a cut from a 1986 performance of 'Hurricane' to its 1996 manifestation. Like a blow to the heart, you see how age has greyed and weighed him down, but that the silver-elastic tenor is strong as ever, even youthful. And in the '90s outro, he thunders his guitar in the simple white strobing and ends with a sacramental offering of one of those '70s big candles. The Horse is still with him.

—Juliette Hughes

Give us pause

What Dreams May Come, dir Vincent Ward. This is an awful pretty film. Somebody in Hollywood must have just worked out some nice things to do with animation. One of them will enable you to step into a work of art and mess around in the oils. You can

even make mud pies from bright coloured paint if you want. This is what happens to Chris Neilsen (Robin Williams) after he dies. Neilsen met his wife, Annie (Annabella Sciorra), on a lake in Europe. They marry. They have two children. The children die in a car crash. Then Chris, a doctor, also dies in a car crash. He finds himself in a kind of heaven which looks like Monet's Disneyland. In fact, Annie is a painter and Chris has entered one of her landscapes.

Meanwhile, back in a dreary place called reality, Annie is taking all the car crashes pretty hard. Chris tries to communicate with her from the painting, but fails. Despite appearances, we are assured many times that he is still in reality. Annie is so dumb that she doesn't realise this. So she commits suicide. And goes to hell. From which reality Chris rescues her.

The most inane thing about this film is the chance to see sophisticated theological concepts such as heaven and hell turned into toys for people with new software. The most disturbing thing is its underlying assumption that the mind and will can achieve everything.

I openly confess that I have never liked films in which the main character dies in the first 20 minutes but refuses to leave the screen. Wait for *What Dreams* to come out on video and then hope, when you get to your video shop, that somebody has taken it out. And lost it. This is a pretty awful film.

—Michael McGirr SJ

A life of Brian

Velvet Goldmine, dir. Todd Haynes. *Velvet Goldmine* explores the life of a mythical rock god, Brian Slade (Jonathan Rhys Meyers). Hack journalist Arthur Stuart (Christian Bale) is given a 'Where is he now?' assignment ten years after Slade's 1974 faked on-stage assassination and subsequent disappearance.

The film is set in a surprisingly Orwellian 1984, as bleak as the black-and-white scenes of Slade's pre-Glam childhood. Stuart tracks down Slade's ex-wife (Toni Collette trying to do an Angie Bowie), his first ex-manager (Michael Feast inexplicably doing a Brian Epstein) and his ex-lover (Ewan McGregor supposedly doing an Iggy Pop but really auditioning for Kurt Cobain). As they reminisce, we start to hear music, the scene changes and we are all back in the thick of the early '70s having a great time. Stuart has a few flashbacks of his own—perhaps they're catching—and his flashbacks get a bit mixed up with the others. And perhaps Haynes caught a few of Ken Russell's flashbacks.

Oh, and the music? Fantastic. Brian Ferry and Brian Eno collaborated on the soundtrack, which covers old songs as well as new compositions 'after the manner of'. Glam rock was characterised by an elephantine bottom end and fireworks in the top range but was strangely empty of middle frequencies. Music has to tell the truth about itself: the heart was lost. The stage had been suddenly vacated by The Beatles, Jim Morrison, Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix: the '60s youth movement had faltered.

Hendrix had humped his guitar onstage, or set it on fire when the muse possessed him. The '70s potlatch turned all this duende into agenda; stardom was endless entitlement, a conscious brief to ream possibility for the watchers' appetites in ways that no one fragile body could survive (except perhaps Iggy Pop's).

—Lucille Hughes

Without a hitch

A Perfect Murder, dir. Andrew Davis. Perfectly produced and perfectly clever have never been quite my cup of celluloid tea. I prefer a few ripples on the surface of cinema, the odd ugly person. But I remind myself that Hitchcock managed his clever productions full of beautiful people in such a way that I'd be happy to drink his brand of tea all day. So it is possible (as long as you're a genius) to make the 'perfect', well, perfect. But Andrew Davis is no genius, and his films fall well short of the Hitchcock mark.

Davis' first mistake with *A Perfect Murder* was basing it on the play *Dial M for Murder*. While Hitchcock's version of this play was not his master work, it displayed a virtuosity and violent confidence that *A Perfect Murder* lacks. Hitchcock could turn a latch-key into an object of fear and loathing; Davis has to rely on a gun.

But Hitchcock is dead and not all thrillers, or films exploring the darker sides of our hearts and heads, should be a tribute to his style of film-making. To be fair, one would have to say, Davis is no slouch. The film's plot is tight, if a little highly strung, the actors appear keenly directed and New York is given enough camera time to turn in a character performance of some note.

Michael Douglas, Gwyneth Paltrow and Viggo Mortensen mark the points of this film's love triangle (pictured below). Douglas pulls out his Gordon Gekko performance to which he adds the odd loving smile and murderous intention. Paltrow is intelligent but flimsy (literally) as the bilingual, fur-collared younger wife. And Mortensen, to his credit, stylishly overcomes the initial hurdle of having to portray a sensitive, struggling, loft-living artist, then settles comfortably into the more interesting role of con artist.

This is by no means a bad film. It almost had moments of inspired intrigue, and came close to ending without the appearance of the dreaded hand gun. But alas, it fell well short of perfect.

—Siobhan Jackson

More than meets the eye

EEEEEEEYA! Make the connections: the US Secretary of State, New Zealand, Sydney's Mardi Gras, *Rolling Stone* magazine, Greek, Celtic and Eastern myths and girls from 5 (my niece) to 77 (my mum).

The link is Xena, played by New Zealand actor Lucy Lawless, who arrived recently on the cover of *Rolling Stone*. The series, *Xena, Warrior Princess*, is produced in New Zealand for the American market, and we see it on Channel Ten on Saturday evenings. When Madeleine Albright was here this year she was asked by a reporter who she'd like to be if she could choose, and she replied 'Xena'. Albright is the world's most powerful woman, and I'm sure she wants to be Xena not just for the figure and the clothes, but for the way acrobatics and self-assertion solve everything. I bet she just wishes she could take on Milosevic or Netanyahu with the 'Xena touch', a two-fingered pinch on the pressure points of the neck. Fixes up warlords a treat. Get Madeleine working out, Bill, and then keep your hands off her or she'll solve your future impeachment problems in ways you wouldn't believe.

The Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras had a float devoted to Xena: the lesbians adore her because she's a beautiful, powerful woman with a great leather costume and the drag queens adore her because she's a very tall, beautiful woman with a great leather costume. Lawless should be pleased with her *Rolling Stone* cover, because it keeps the tall, dark image without the leather but gives her wings, sealing her appeal all over the place: wings are a very '90s thing, ever since publishers discovered you could sell a lot of kitsch related to angels. Claire Danes wore them in Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo and Juliet*, little girls wear them routinely to birthday parties, and teenage girls need to be careful that theirs aren't set on fire by a passing joint.

Xena is a spin-off from the successful series, *Hercules, The Legendary Journeys*. Both programs owe something to the Japanese series *Monkey*, that was popular about ten years ago. It was a strange concept, religious comedy/adventure, as extraordinary as if someone had done something like *The Amazing Adventures of St Francis*. (*Hercules* and *Xena* go to the great pagans for their spiritual comedy. Only the Monty Python crew were clever enough to make Christianity funny.) *Monkey* was to many a revelation about Buddhism, and it was not afraid to moralise. But it had almost as many fart jokes as *South Park*. My family loved it.

If you have read any Greek, Celtic or Eastern mythology, *Xena* is full of in-jokes. It's a supermarket cart of references, seamed strongly with female self-determination, and very slyly comical. The scriptwriters have all read real books. The titles to the episodes give the game away: The Quill is Mightier; Comedy of Eros; Adventures in the Sin Trade; Ulysses; The Path Not Taken; For Him The Bell Tolls; A Day In The Life; Ten Little Warlords; Girls Just Wanna Have Fun; and my own favourite: Fistful of Dinars.

I had an argument recently with a bloke who was very concerned that *Xena* would teach girls that violence solved problems. I tried to point out to him that no-one had yet refuted adequately Susan Brownmillar's theory that women worldwide are kept in subjection ultimately through the threat of rape, and that perhaps equilibrium could be restored a little through men perceiving a threat of getting more than their arguments de-bunked. He thought I was joking, and told me quite seriously that I read the wrong books.

Television—at its best—can teach people to read society accurately, can strip pretension away as easily as it offers prestige. It is such a powerful medium, and can now be almost totally self-referential—for two generations now there has been no pre-television culture to look back on. The world is so affected by the way that television reads the world that no public policy or private life is untouched. The ground being broken now is the ability of the young to take in *and evaluate* audio-visual material. So programs such as the brilliant *South Park*, and *Xena* and even the schlocky soaps, are creating areas for a critique of society in the minds that watch them, because increasingly watching is becoming observation.

There are dangers: mindless trendy imitativeness and worrying desensitisation, but overall I think that one benefit of the televisual global village has been a rolling back, at least in Western culture, of some of our more corrosive prejudices. In Britain in mid-October, Valerie Riches, director of the Family and Youth Concern organisation, said: 'Public tolerance is increasingly being exploited on television.'

She went on to anathematise *Neighbours* for promoting acceptance of single mothers before taking off on her broom.

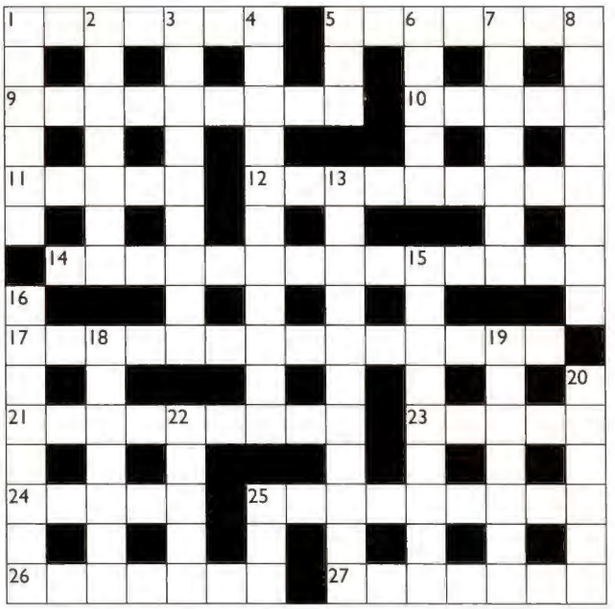
BUT SHE HAS A POINT—not just on her hat—and it is that, love them or hate them, soaps have presented viewers with daily invitations to empathise with the unfortunate. Val would obviously love to see a return of the less racy episodes of *Leave it to Beaver* and *Father Knows Best* (the latter a real hit in the Vatican), and a total ban on kissing between unbetrothed couples under 30. Over the 40 or so years of television, however, viewers presented with Primula's problem pregnancy or Adeline's anguished adultery have abandoned their previous impulses to stone the miscreants to death and have even started to sympathise with pantless presidents. It's created problems for Kenneth Starr. In a desperate attempt to make the people of America aware of *exactly* how naughty a Democrat president can be, the guardian of public morality has let forth such a cascade of sexual information on to the screens of the nation that self-help groups (we are dealing with America after all) for parents have been set up to coach them in answering lisping requests for enlightenment on the meaning of 'oral sex' and the creative uses of tobacco products. What the hell, you hear the parents saying, it's only sex—whaddabout the goddam economy? And so Clinton's approval ratings have stayed intact.

But, in the same week in October, the *Electronic Telegraph* reported that researchers from the University of Stirling's Media Research Institute showed that men's attitudes to television violence are disturbingly different from women's. It seems that in a scene involving a rape from the television program *Trip Trap*, the women were unanimous in rejecting rape under any circumstances, whereas many of the men were inclined to justify the rape because the victim was perceived as bad. So very strange that they didn't read the *rapist* as bad. Lady Elspeth Howe, chair of the Broadcasting Standards Commission, said that there still weren't enough women in television, either onscreen or making decisions. I agree with her as long as the decision-makers aren't like Dear Valerie, scourge of the unmarried mother. Just get Xena to fix *her* up. EeeeeeeeeeeYA!■

Juliette Hughes would like to be Xena too.

Specific Levity

Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 68, November 1998



Devised by Joan Nowotny IBVM

ACROSS

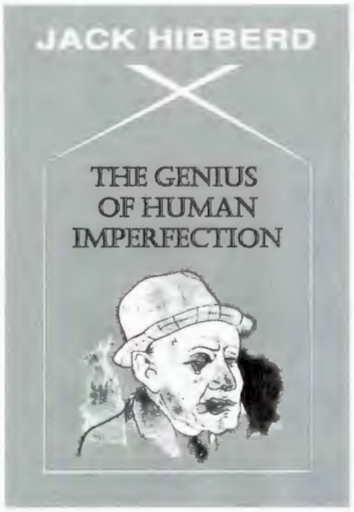
1. Former partner with a right to declare? Oh! (7)
5. Sack girls twice?... (7)
9. ... Not what a model boss would do! Under her they flourished. (9)
10. To repent without first trespassing could make one congratulate oneself. (5)
11. Ship, possibly, on the river Nile. (5)
12. Being relaxed, love nap on 11-across. A combination that is matchless! (9)
14. It is possible to faint through having such a sequence of ideas! (5,2,7)
17. Fruitless search for the game? (4-5, 5)
21. At the very small level, one in the lab could be descriptive of bacteria. (9)
23. Reg Innes initially was in front. Losing in the end made him annoyed. (5)
24. Seeking perfection, I lay out the tarot. (5)
25. A sort of tiny case Des originally bought through his business enterprise. (9)
26. Some information Eric applied to the whole class. (7)
27. Female primarily keeps every last shilling for her collection of coins. (7)

DOWN

1. Preserve the memory of Melba? Leading member agrees to the arrangement. (6)
2. Love in the nook transforms public official into singer. (7)
3. Sucking up? That's fascinating! (9)
4. Souvenir Miro repainted—a reminder (in dead language) for All Souls' Day? (11)
5. Formerly accomplished. (3)
6. You can make pies a brownish crusty colour. (5)
7. Here the greatest problems are below the surface. A chilly prospect! (7)
8. Facial lines go up on it. Why, you ask, is this an age-old problem? (8)
13. Final amount her properties brought to the country. (11)
15. Extra clever, or else ...? (9)
16. Having a swooning feeling while doing a crawl, perhaps. (8)
18. Some might elect Ernest—it would facilitate public reading. (7)
19. The recovered material is silver with cream round the outside. (7)
20. The perils in the grass during the long summers. (6)
22. He looks amorously at form or leg. (5)
25. Really was written that way! (3)

Solution to Crossword no. 67, October 1998

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



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