EUREKA STREET

Vol. 9 No. 2 March 1999 $5.95

Andrew Dodd in the Antarctic

Michael McGirr on Lenten Banking

Hugh Dillon on Law and Order

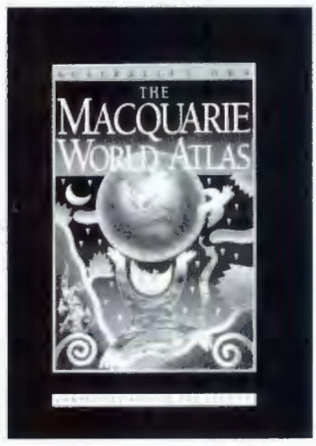
John Uhr on the Republic

Paul Collins on the Earth Charter

Plus Exorcism, Rugby League, Gerry Adams, and the curious case of the Rationalist Society

summer quiz answers

1. Frederick Douglass, (1818–1895), an African-American slave who escaped and became an activist in the civil rights movement, supporting women's rights as well. **2.** Russia. **3.** Over 600. **4.** St Thomas More. **5.** Cosimo de' Medici, Giuliano, and Cosimo's son, Giovanni. **6.** Cologne Cathedral. **7.** Gaspar, Melchior, Balthasar. **8.** Michael Boddy & Bob Ellis; Alex Buzo; John Romeril; Jack Hibberd. **9.** Seventeen years (including one year for starting a bushfire in a bungled attempt to destroy company records). Robin Greenburg. **10.** A theremin. **11.** (a) *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë (b) *The Godfather* by Mario Puzo (c) *The Orchard* by Drusilla Modjeska. **12.** Jean Etienne Lenoir, in 1860. **13.** In your kidney. **14.** Rita Hayworth. **15.** Bashful, Doc, Dopey, Grumpy, Happy, Sleepy and Sneezy. **16.** Marie Curie and her daughter Irène Joliot-Curie both won the Nobel Prize for Chemistry. (Both also died of radiation-caused leukaemia.) **17.** Epona, or Rhiannon who was a manifestation of Epona and Macha; Hathor; Ganesh. **18.** POP: Points Of Presence—the range of telephone numbers that a provider can use; ISDN: Integrated Services Digital Network—a digital link provided by telecommunications companies to subscribers; URL: Uniform Resource Locator—the way that internet resources are addressed. **19.** Cambridge don Andrew Wiles, in 1996. **20.** They are the 21 non-Latin churches that give allegiance to Rome. Any of: Coptic; Ethiopian; Syrian; Maronite; Syro-Malankara; Armenian; Chaldean; Malabar; Belorussian; Bulgarian; Greek; Hungarian; Italo-Albanian; Melkite; Romanian; Ruthenian; Slovak; Ukrainian; Krizevci; Albanian; Russian. **21.** (a) 1902 (b) 1920 (c) 1928 (Although women's suffrage was granted just after WWI in Britain, they had to be over 30 to vote until 1928, when universal adult suffrage was finally granted.) (d) 1944. (Tiens! Un peu tard, n'est-ce pas?) (e) All those clocks didn't tell the Swiss what time it was until 1971. (f) 1893 (So what if they say 'fush 'n' chups' and have no public broadcasting left?). **22.** Milton's 'Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity'. **23.** Dylan Thomas' *A Child's Christmas in Wales*. **24.** D.H. Lawrence's *Kangaroo*. **25.** Enid Blyton's *The Famous Five*. **26.** 'USS Enterprise'. **27.** Shakespeare, *The Passionate Pilgrim*. **28.** Muriel Spark's *The Comforters*. **29.** 1979. **30.** Ursula le Guin. It first appeared in *PNLA Quarterly* 38, later in *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction* 1979. **31.** Morris West; Julian Morris: *Moon in My Pocket*, 1945, age 29; Michael East: *McReary Moves In*, 1958, age 42 (reissued under West's name and his title, *The Concubine*, 1973). **32.** Vulcan. **33.** An interest in men's ears (see *Julius Caesar*, Act III, Scene II). **34.** St John Lateran. **35.** Bony. **36.** All had their 100th anniversaries in 1998. **37.** Hyderabad; the India/Pakistan border. **38.** The monk Volmar. **39.** Maureen (Reebie); Sigmund (Jackie); Toriano (Tito); Jermaine; La Toya; Marlon; Steven Randall (Randy) and Janet. **40.** Captain W.E. Johns (author of the Biggles books) overrode an RAF doctor's decision to reject Lawrence/Ross on medical grounds. He brought in a civilian doctor who passed the would-be recruit, enabling him to enlist.



Thank you to all the enterprising sleuths who sent in entries for the January–February Summer Quiz. **Congratulations** to winner Maree Reid of Birchgrove, NSW, who will receive a copy of *The Macquarie World Atlas*, worth $99.95.

EUREKA STREET

Volume 9 Number 2
March 1999

A magazine of public affairs, the arts and theology

CONTENTS

4
COMMENT
With Morag Fraser, Michael McGirr and Hugh Dillon.

7
CAPITAL LETTER

8
LETTERS

12
THE MONTH'S TRAFFIC
With Frank O'Shea, Paul Collins, Rosey Golds, Richard Johnson and Christine Nicholls.

13
ARCHIMEDES

14
BUSH LAWYER

17
SUMMA THEOLOGIAE

18
FREEDOM FROM INFORMATION
Moira Rayner on FOI, nurses and convicted murderers.

19
POETRY
'Love' and 'The Secret Imbalance', by Zoltan Kovacs; 'The Storks of Leon', by John Kinsella (p33).

20
LETTERS HOME
Andrew Hamilton on the recent communication from the Australian Catholic bishops and the Vatican.

21
DOWN TO EARTH
Paul Collins on some theological implications of the Earth Charter.

23
SOMETHING RICH AND STRANGE
Will tourism transform the Antarctic? asks Andrew Dodd (who went there).

27
WHAT'S IN A NAME?
John Uhr argues for openness and public participation in nominating the president of an Australian republic.

30
RATIONALIST RUCTIONS
Margaret Simons investigates a split in the ranks of one of Australia's grand old institutions, the Rationalist Society.

35
INTEGRITY: THE LONG WALK
Antony Campbell asks whether you can factor fear into the unconditional love of God.

38
SCULPTURE ON SITE
Peter Harris on the sculpture of Inge King and Ron Robertson-Swann.

40
LET'S EAT CHINESE
Ouyang Yu on being Chinese–Australian, or should that be Australian–Chinese?

42
THEATRE
Geoffrey Milne on the best of Australian summer shows.

44
FLASH IN THE PAN
Reviews of the films *Shakespeare in Love*; *Ronin*; *Men With Guns*; *Psycho* and *Little Voice*.

46
WATCHING BRIEF

47
SPECIFIC LEVITY

Cover design by Siobhan Jackson. Cover photograph by Darren Jew—iceberg off Coronation Island, South Orkneys.
Graphics pp5, 16, 18, 21, 27–33 by Siobhan Jackson.
Cartoons pp9–10 by Peter Fraser.
Photographs pp23–26 by Darren Jew.
Photograph p38 courtesy Peter Harris.

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

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

Publisher
Daniel Madigan SJ

Editor
Morag Fraser

Assistant editor
Kate Manton

Consulting editor
Michael McGirr SJ

Graphic designer
Siobhan Jackson

Production and business manager
Sylvana Scannapiego

Editorial and production assistants
Juliette Hughes, Paul Fyfe SJ, Geraldine Battersby, Chris Jenkins SJ, Scott Howard

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

United Kingdom correspondent
Denis Minns OP

South East Asia correspondent
Jon Greenaway

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

Marketing manager: Rosanne Turner
Advertising representative: Ken Head
Subscription manager: Wendy Marlowe

Administration and distribution
Kate Matherson, Lisa Crow, Mrs Irene Hunter

Patrons
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
email: 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.

Preambles

THERE WILL BE NO GETTING AWAY from the republic this year and no getting away from the preamble. And neither should there be. *Eureka Street* will be following the debate and making its own contribution throughout 1999.

We begin, this month, with John Uhr, who makes some very practical suggestions about an open and participatory nominating process for the head of state (see p27). Frank Brennan will follow him next month.

Meanwhile, here is Fr Brennan's suggested wording for a preamble to the Constitution:

> We, the people of Australia, are the custodians of the Australian continent and nearby islands. We are the inheritors of the Commonwealth of Australia which was constituted on 1 January 1901 after the people of the colonies, humbly relying on the blessing of Almighty God, agreed to unite in one indissoluble federal commonwealth under the Crown of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. We affirm our respect for the land and environment of Australia. We acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, being the prior and continuing occupiers and custodians of the land, have continuing rights as indigenous peoples. We acknowledge that Australia is occupied and entrusted to us all, being people who are drawn from diverse cultures and who are equal before the law and united by our affirmation of the rule of law. Asserting our sovereignty, we commit ourselves to the Constitution. —Frank Brennan

Anyone who has stood in the Lincoln Memorial in Washington and read the writing on the wall there has some sense of how words count, how words move nations.

This, then, is our time. ■

—Morag Fraser

Winners

Congratulations to all the hardy masochists who completed *Eureka Street*'s Summer Quiz. The winner, and recipient of the *Macquarie World Atlas*, is Maree Reid of Birchgrove, NSW.

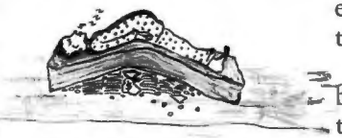
We also congratulate Mr & Mrs J.A. Hoadley of Hawthorn, Victoria, winners of the subscription competition prize, the Encyclopædia Britannica CD 98. We look forward to their using it on next year's even worse Summer Quiz.

And warm congratulations as well to *Eureka Street*'s theatre reviewer, Geoffrey Milne, who was recently awarded La Mama Theatre's Apricot Tree Award for distinguished services to Australian Theatre. Geoff was quick to explain that the 'Apricot' refers to the tree which originally stood in the courtyard of La Mama. Not to be confused with a lemon.

MICHAEL MCGIRR

Money not Lent here

TWO OF AUSTRALIA'S most popular novels, *The Harp in the South* and *Poor Man's Orange*, have recently celebrated their 50th birthdays. In the late '40s, Ruth Park wrote about the inner suburbs of Sydney with more sentimentality, and a more hard-working vocabulary, than could pass for social realism these days. Her books are not mere time capsules, but they do reflect on a wide range of social institutions of the period: medicine, the law, public transport, manufacturing, housing, redevelopment, aged care and so on. Famously, she has a lot to say about the Catholic Church. Remarkably, she does not make a single reference to banking. There are wealthy people in her Surry Hills, but Delie Stock, the brothel madam, and Lick Jimmy, the Chinese grocer, always deal in cash.



It is tempting to contemplate life without banks. The banks seem to be contemplating it themselves. I recently met a retired rural bank manager. He's in his mid '50s and unsure of what to do with himself. He came alive when he spoke about occasions on which he'd been able to arrange all kinds of assistance for the bank's customers. But every branch he managed has now closed. The bank deals with its customers by mail. Or phone.

Stories of this kind often drift into the city from the bush, blown along by the occasional gusts of concern that the suburbs do still feel for regional Australia. But I work in an area of Melbourne which, in its day, was much like Ruth Park's Surry Hills. At the moment, there are two enormous office and residential developments within a stone's throw of the eponymous Eureka Street. Both are on former industrial sites: Jacques and Vickers Ruwolt. In addition, the current surge in medium-density housing in the area means that airless six-packs of townhouses are sprouting all over the place where there used to be single houses. The result will be an increased population in the area. Because of the nature of the housing, this population will have a high disposable income.

We have dealt for years with the bank on the nearest corner. Our accounts were opened in pounds, shillings and pence. As businesses go, we've never had much in them. But our personal relationships with the staff at the bank have been wonderful. They will ask after workers who have long since left Jesuit Publications. One teller, at least, has almost as much race memory of Jesuit Publications as some of us have here.

Last year, I found myself in Sydney International Airport on my way overseas when I was told that my Visa card had expired. I wasn't carrying cash. I rang the bank's hotline and pressed countless buttons for countless options before a weary human voice came on the other end. There was nothing he could do. I pleaded with him to ring our branch. He relented. Eventually, I could hear him talking to a familiar voice. Our local teller laughed when she understood the predicament I had got myself into. The voice between us obviously found this reaction hard to compute. Laughter was not on his list of menu options. But our local teller was able to fix things up. She told the go-between to make sure I brought her back a bottle of duty-free. This message was not forwarded. Not so long ago, the branch put a money machine in the outside wall and decided to charge extra for coming inside too often to talk to our long-standing associates.

In the last 12 months or so, our bank, one of the four big ones, has closed two branches within a couple of kilometres of our office. This is in spite of the burgeoning population of the area. The other banks have also closed branches. Their intentions have been spelt out in the avalanche of mail they have landed on us. They want us to do our banking by using the phone to punch numbers directly into their computer. In a way, the future they have in mind is of a piece with the kind of housing development taking place around us. At most new inner-city addresses, the front door is answered anonymously. By video or phone. Meanwhile, bank fees and charges pile up. Types of accounts are misleadingly called 'banking products'. They aren't products at all. But not even the banks expect us to believe they should be called services. It makes you wonder what you could possibly lose these days by keeping your money in your mattress. Only your chiropractor might object.

In the last year of this century, there is much talk in Christian circles about the idea of a jubilee. The heart of the biblical notion of a jubilee is one of restorative justice: the correction of the balance of power within a community by restoring land to its original occupants, equity to those in debt, trust to the estranged and comfort to the deprived. The idea of retributive justice has worn such deep grooves in our legal system that the more communal sense of restorative justice is seldom taken seriously.

But each year, Christians celebrate a season based on the idea of restorative justice. It's called Lent. The word comes from an Old English word meaning 'lengthen', a reminder that the season coincides with the lengthening days of Spring in the northern hemisphere. The word also implies broadening, creating space, letting tensions run slack. The season begins on Ash Wednesday with the reminder 'unto dust you shall return'. 'Dust' always gets emphasised because

it sounds dramatic. But the important word is 'return'.

For Catholics, Lent has been associated with the Sacrament of Reconciliation or Confession. This sacrament is not secret Catholics' business. It is a sacrament whose development owes a great deal to the idea of putting things right with the broader community. This is where the idea of penance comes from. Penance is not interest paid on a loan from God. It is reinvesting yourself in the Christian community.

Ruth Park wrote of a poor community but not an impoverished one. She may have been gilding the lily, but she wrote as if she believed that forgiveness were possible. And she understood, as we are in danger of forgetting, that every real celebration of reconciliation is communal. ■

Michael McGirr SJ is the consulting editor of *Eureka Street* and the author of *Unhinged Saints*.

COMMENT: 3

HUGH DILLON

Crime ratings

A lateral take on law and order.

AN ELECTION APPROACHES IN NSW. Despite the demonstrated incapacity of governments to reduce crime rates significantly by using more and more draconian methods, the law-and-order drum keeps beating. And it is ignored by political parties at their peril.

The tabloid press, talkback radio and commercial television news have tremendous influence over the electorate's perceptions of crime, and they propagate what criminologists Russell Hogg and David Brown have labelled, ironically, 'law and order common sense' (in their recent book, *Rethinking Law & Order*, Pluto, Sydney, 1998).

Populist 'criminology' is being written by journalists, sub-editors and television producers, and comes in 30-second sound bites or hours of shallow talkback. The slogans of 'law and order common sense', according to Hogg and Brown, are: *crime rates are soaring; things are worse than ever; New York and LA are the shape of things to come; the criminal justice system is soft on crime; more police with greater powers are needed; penalties must be increased;* and *victims should be able to get revenge through the courts*. They are repeated ad nauseam and without analysis.

Politicians know this, and shape their policy announcements accordingly. No-one wants to lose the vote of a tabloid-reading, talkback-listening, Channel 9 viewer. But politicians, despite all appearances to the contrary, also know that crime problems are far more complex and intractable than the kings of talkback would have us believe. If more draconian penalties, increased police numbers or 'zero tolerance' were the simple solutions to the crime problem, we would have solved it many years ago. The electorate knows this.

Certain categories of crime, but not all, have been on the increase since World War II, and particularly since the 1970s and '80s. Reports of street violence, domestic violence, child abuse and drug crime have significantly increased in that time. On the other hand, homicide rates have remained relatively stable, matching the increase in population. Fear of crime, however, has far outstripped the real increase in crime.

And any increase in reported crime cannot simply be interpreted as an increase in the commission of crimes. It is only quite recently, for example, that domestic violence, child abuse, sexual violence and other 'shameful' crimes have been widely recognised as serious and reportable, whereas these crimes were largely unreported a generation ago.

Nonetheless, there have been real increases in crime caused by real social problems. Entrenched high unemployment rates have exacerbated pressures on young, ill-educated boys and men who are overwhelmingly responsible for street crime. While courts have become more punitive (contrary to common public perception) and jail populations have increased dramatically in the past decade, street crime rates are not responding directly to mere threats of increased penalties. Social and economic problems, as well as criminal behaviour, must be targeted as part of a crime-prevention strategy.

Drug and drug-related offences constitute a large proportion of crime, particularly property crime, and provide a signal example of how current strategies are failing to address crime. Despite the vast amount of law enforcement money spent on drug investigations and prosecutions, police commissioners and Directors of Public Prosecutions throughout Australia concede that the 'war on drugs' strategy has been unsuccessful. Given the size and value of the drug trade in this country, alternative strategies need to be considered and trialled. Legalisation would probably lead to increased usage, but associated health and crime problems would decrease significantly. The only successful approach is likely to be an educated, non-partisan approach taken after careful, open consideration of all the issues.

With the express intention of reducing recidivism, a rational, non-partisan approach to crime would emphasise the need for the courts and corrections systems to favour rehabilitation over denunciation, deterrence and retribution, except in relation to the most serious crimes. A rehabilitative approach could involve victims, as is the case with some crimes committed by children, and emphasise cheaper community alternatives to imprisonment.

Whatever the decisions, they must be adequately debated. If war is too important to be left to the generals, crime is too important to be left to tabloid journalists and talkback kings. Politicians, lawyers, bureaucrats and police should join forces to educate the public and the media about the true dimensions, root causes, prevention, investigation and punishment of crime. Such an approach would assuage unnecessary anxiety, engender confidence in our institutions and engage the community in the shared work of preventing crime and integrating young people into a civil society. ■

Hugh Dillon is a lawyer and social commentator.

Capital Letter

Jack Waterford

Of might and men

A PEAL OF BELLS for what seems like a spate of deaths among politicians and public servants inspires some mordant thoughts: what might be said in the eulogies of some of the modern practitioners?

There was Jim McClelland, bon vivant and biting wit, whose movement into the ranks in the last days of the Whitlam Government became the symbol of the fact that it had, too late, discovered the law of supply and demand. Whose work on the Maralinga Royal Commission was portrayed as larrikinism against the British, but which was as much focused on the nationalism of Australian politicians and officials. And whose confessions, hidden until his death, showed that he too had had a deep conviction of Lionel Murphy's guilt, but had also wondered, if uncomfortably, how much it mattered in an overall assessment of the man.

There was Jim Cope, the Speaker deposed by Whitlam in one of those streaks of unfairness, cruelty and misjudgment we have come to forget. A decent man of the old Labor school, bitter, tribal but with a disarming sense of humour that few politicians have had since Fred Daly or Jim Killen. And Maurie Byers, the advocate whose arguments made Australia a single economy, who put the flesh, if in Malcolm Fraser's time, on Whitlam's constitutional visions, and whose conversational style of persuasion gave us the Koowarta case, the Tasmanian dams case, Mabo and Wik. And Andy Menzies, loyal, wise and discreet Crown Solicitor who knew more than most where the bodies were buried.

And Don Dunstan, who (even before Whitlam was making his impact on the federal scene) transformed Labor in South Australia from being a mere instrument of the organised working class to a party of ideas and ideals, with a language of 'reciprocal obligation'—between a prosperous society and those who were left out—that transformed Australian politics.

We are a generation past Dunstan and past Whitlam, but have scarcely found a politician since with any of the power to inspire ideals, make people change their lives or articulate a vision about where the nation ought to be going. Dunstan's impact was not merely on the Labor Party. He and Whitlam established an agenda that operated as powerfully on the other side of politics as on their own. Few conservative politicians today would speak in the language of politics pre-Dunstan. And, even though the modern trend is to attack the size of the public sector and doubt the power of collective action, the base points of who is in and who is out were set on a 1970s agenda.

STANDARDS IN POLITICS—how politicians and public administrators behave—are again in the news, with all of the evidence indicating massive disillusion with the way politicians behave. There may be little evidence of an actual increase in the extent of rorting, and abuse of power, but the root of the disillusion does not depend primarily on evidence that some are tripping. It lies more in the fact that they are tripping even as they appear to be going nowhere in particular. The foibles seem less the human, or the humanising, foibles of people on a great mission. Increasingly, they look more like the excesses of those not even trying to achieve goals capable of inspiring the head or the heart.

It is not necessarily the case that a goods and services tax, or a new industrial relations framework, or a medical benefits system is simply too mundane to inspire anyone. It may well prove in time, for example, that Whitlam or Dunstan's greatest achievements may have been more in extending sewerage to the masses than in providing physical or social capital to Aborigines. Where they went beyond the current crop was in their capacity to articulate their mundane goals within a framework—one capable of providing some inspiration as well as sense. And they did it against greater competition too—in an environment in which politicians vied with the churches, the courts, and the established institutions for the role of providing moral guidance and public goals. As Hugh Mackay has described it, our politicians have to become storytellers, able to tell us stories that link the past with the present, and proceed to tell us what we should be doing in the future.

IN THIS REGARD, Lindsay Tanner is the latest to move into the ALP policy vacuum—following the steps of Mark Latham, if with more than a backward look at Paul Keating. Tanner's story is about how technology has changed all of our old structures, and about how economic rationalism and globalisation are consequences, rather than the drivers, of the society we are developing. By his account, governments can at best negotiate or 'facilitate' change; they can no longer drive it, and certainly not with the instruments of old. They, and we, must adapt to a new society less driven by the production of goods and more by the production of services.

He may well be right in his general descriptions. But the society which he describes imagines for itself a level of base infrastructure which must be provided somehow, if not by government then at least by something more than the operation of the market. And the premium the new society puts on education, health and dealing with social dislocation, requires collective action to ensure an equality of opportunity, if not of outcome. But outcomes also matter. Parties and leaders who cannot describe the outcomes wanted, and who cannot infuse the mission they describe with appeals to ideas and ideals, can never win the popular consent which is also critical to the success of community action, and ultimately, of communities.

No doubt it will be the fate of Tanner to be seen first as an embarrassment rather than a spur to action. And the Coalition can use his candid descriptions of Labor's organisational inadequacies for some immediate advantage. But there might be another lesson from the past. Dunstan and Whitlam created open debate within the party, realising that the images of disunity from bruising public brawls were not nearly as damaging as failing to face the contradictions. That tradition in Labor has now turned into a public relations charade, with the real debates and decisions, such as they are, being resolved behind doors by the factions.

For the Coalition, of course, there is scarcely any debate, public or private, about our story of the future, even if some ministers, particularly Peter Costello, are effective in describing some limited visions. In even the medium term, its incapacity to write a road map is a greater risk to it than the chance of a breakdown on the roads it has so far found. ■

Jack Waterford is editor of the *Canberra Times*.

Virtual Labor

From Paul Rodan

I was intrigued to read (*Eureka Street*, Letters, January–February 1999) James Griffin's reference to 'the real Labor Party'. I had thought this creature to be extinct, following a too-close embrace of economic rationalism. However, if James Griffin has made a recent sighting, perhaps he could advise us of the location.

Paul Rodan
East Malvern, VIC

Fighting words

From Don Anderson, Department of English, The University of Sydney

There I was, enjoying John Wiltshire's version of 'What Did You Do in the War, Daddy?' in his review of Andrew Riemer's *Sandstone Gothic* (*Eureka Street*, December 1998) when I came smack up against the outrageously incorrect claim of his penultimate sentence. 'Little of value or importance to Australian culture was produced by Sydney English over the next 30 years', i.e. 1965–95. You could have knocked me Downing with a feather! I realise that 'Australian' and 'culture' are contestable terms, but surely they need not be restricted to contributions to *The [Melbourne] Critical Review* and *The Cambridge Quarterly*.

Nothing will change Mr Wiltshire's mind but, lest others be misled by his rewriting of academic history, may I offer a highly selective list of contributions by members of the University of Sydney's Department of English over the last three decades to what most of us would understand by 'Australian culture', particularly scholarly and literary culture.

Margaret Clunies Ross is the immediate past-President of the Australian Academy of the Humanities. Dame Leonie Kramer was, while Professor of Australian Literature, the Chairman of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Professor Kramer edited the 1981 edition of the *Oxford History of Australian Literature*, to which Adrian Mitchell, Vivian Smith, and Terry Sturm contributed major sections. Consider G.A. Wilkes' *Dictionary of Australian Colloquialisms*, Elizabeth Webby's biographical *Early Australian Poetry*, and Garry Simes' contributions to Australian lexicography, particularly prison and gay slang. It is not, I believe, drawing too long a bow to point out that David Malouf, this year's ABC Boyer Lecturer, was a member of the department from 1967–1977. Consider Stephen Knight's contribution to the history, reviewing, and publication of Australian crime fiction. What

Eureka Street welcomes letters from its readers. Short letters are more likely to be published, and all letters may be edited. Letters must be signed, and should include a contact phone number and the writer's name and address. If submitting by email, a contact phone number is essential. Address: eureka@jespub.jesuit.org.au

of Michael Wilding, whose publications in the areas of scholarship and fiction were described by Debra Adelaide, in a review of Wilding's most recent fiction, *Wildest Dreams*, as 'prodigious'. Perhaps Mr Wiltshire has not yet forgiven Wilding for *Living Together* (1974). Let us not overlook Debra Adelaide's own contributions to bibliographies of Australian women's writing 1795–1900, and to fiction. Consider Brian Kiernan's biography of David Williamson.

'Sydney English'—not, I believe, an Australian locution—has produced *Southerly* since 1963. Ivor Indyk is the founding (and funding) editor of *Heat*, Australia's international literary quarterly. Phil Roberts edited and printed Island Press's individual volumes and annual anthologies of poetry, 1970–1979. Consider also Vivian Smith's poetry and his scholarly work on the Palmers, David Brooks' poetry, fiction and essays. Sydney's Writers-in-Residence and Research Associates, some paid, some honorary, have included Kate Grenville, Drusilla Modjeska, Frank Moorhouse, Les A. Murray, Roger McDonald and Salman Rushdie. Sydney graduates hold senior positions at Random House, Pan Macmillan and ABC publishing. A Sydney graduate is Literary Editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, another was for some years a transforming editor of *24 Hours*. Luke Davies and Delia Falconer are younger Sydney graduates whose poetry and fiction have received wide acclaim.

I am sorry to have gone on at such length, but it seems the only way to rebut Mr Wiltshire's ludicrous and insulting assertion. That said, I must apologise to those many of my colleagues, past and present, whom I have not found space to mention. I guess it is expecting too much to trust that Mr Wiltshire will see fit to do the same.

Don Anderson
Sydney, NSW

John Wiltshire replies:

My article raised serious academic and cultural issues. My point about Sydney English was a specific one. However, I refuse to trade insults with Mr Anderson.

Competition = destruction

From Philip Flanagan, Melbourne Catholic Social Services

Congratulations are due to John Honner for his excellent article ('Contesting Welfare', *Eureka Street*, December 1998) on the proposed changes to Youth and Family Services in Victoria.

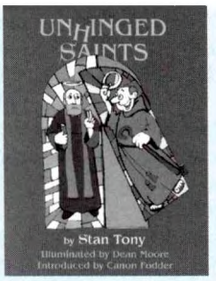
I agree that the changes have the potential to destroy the very good but far from perfect system we have in Victoria. The administering Department of Human Services (DHS) is well aware of this potential, but states that it will be able to avoid most of these aspects.

Much of this danger is as a result of operational imperatives in the proposed changes of which I will give the two major examples:

- First, the increasing of the minimum geographical areas of coverage of program contracts to at least two local government areas and the 'bundling' of previously separate programs together in the proposed tenders as against the current system of smaller service areas and specifically targeted programs with individual contracts.
- Second, the demands that will be made for information technology to allow the exchange of client data between agencies and other groups involved.

Such technology is well beyond the resource capabilities of most small and medium agencies.

These imperatives will inevitably result in the demise or absorption into larger agencies of a number of small reputable agencies, limiting or eliminating consumer choice and probably producing local monopolies. The significant resources



This month, the writer of each letter we publish will receive a copy of *Unhinged Saints*, an unsanctimonious look at sanctity by Stan Tony, a *Eureka Street* regular by any other name.

contributed by those defunct agencies via their capital assets, fundraising and business enterprises will be lost to the sector.

Later tender rounds should be easy for the Department, as there will be few service providers remaining to compete. This is hardly an outcome that would meet national competition policy requirements.

The Department of Human Services indubitably has a number of less-than-prominent agenda items that it hopes to accomplish. These are outside of the near-motherhood statements such as close links between similar programs ('continuum') and linkages to other community programs, which the whole field would agree would benefit their clients. The hidden agenda items include minimising departmental involvement with statutory clients (e.g. wards of the state), reducing the number of contracts it has to administer and reallocating resources geographically to areas of higher need. These problems could be addressed in other ways but would require a more consultative approach.

Unlike John Honner, I feel that most service agencies would probably agree with a change process that ultimately lead to contestability, but would like to see criteria for outcomes produced so that performance comparisons can be made between agencies. The tender processes must be simple and not consume agency resources to the detriment of client services. The tender outcomes would usually result in some redistribution of workload among agencies rather than a winner-takes-all situation, with the ensuing disruption to an extremely vulnerable client group.

Where do we go from here?

John Honner's 'market place' paradigm in Victoria has begun to change and this should be reflected in the YAFS redevelopment.

All concerned should participate vigorously in the debate with DHS, the Minister and local politicians to devise an alternative model, to be developed incrementally. This new model should incorporate all the desirable objectives of the DHS proposals without the operational carnage on agencies and therefore their clients.

Philip Flanagan
Alphington, VIC

Competition = co-operation

From Roger G. Mauldon, former Commissioner, Industry Commission

John Honner's article, 'Contesting Welfare' (*Eureka Street*, December 1998), decries the 'market models' now being applied to community welfare services. Those advocating the application of competition policies are seen as having a 'world view' which can be described as 'atomist, individualistic, analytic, materialist, controlled'. By contrast, the 'world view' of the community welfare sector can be described as 'organic, holistic, spiritual, vulnerable'. Competitive tendering for community welfare services funding

is said to 'create friction among once co-operative organisations'. Competition is seen to be antithetical to collaboration. Honner's paper concludes on the note that 'competition cannot create community'.

My purpose in responding to 'Contesting Welfare' is not to belittle the problems which competitive tendering can cause providers of community welfare services or to short-circuit the issues which need to be resolved. Rather, it is to provide a richer world view of competition and contestability than Honner is prepared to concede. My Bloomsbury *Dictionary of Word Origins* tells me that the word 'compete' comes from a compound Latin verb *com-* (together) *petere* (seek or strive). At first *competere* meant 'come together, agree, be fit or suitable', and hence our word 'competent'. In later Latin it developed the sense of 'strive together', and hence our word 'compete'.

Words change their meaning, yet 'competition' in practice still reflects far more of its etymology than popular conceptions of it as 'market red in tooth and claw' or 'survival of the meanest'. Of course competition can have its seamy side—hence the need for strong trade practices law as part of the National Competition Policy (NCP) package. But competition's multifarious activities are far more about co-operation and developing good relationships than about 'dog-eat-dog'. Networking, strategic alliancing, putting consortia together and sub-contracting to or from a prime contractor all build relationships which are part and parcel of community—albeit at times a complex one.

There is no reason why competitive tendering should not create many more fruitful collaborations between community welfare organisations than 'friction among once co-operative organisations'. The Industry Commission's 1995 report on *Charitable Organisations in Australia* presented some simple models of ways in which large and small community welfare organisations could collaborate to tender for the delivery of efficient and effective services.

The role of NCP in these regards is to ensure that governments don't erect 'Chinese walls' which exclude particular groups from participating in these sorts of relationships. This is the current meaning of 'contestability' within the NCP framework. Competitive tendering is one way of ensuring that any potential supplier can have a go at being involved. What is at issue seems not to be competitive tendering *per se*, but rather the nature of the partnership between the community welfare sector (as suppliers) and governments (as funders) in providing services, and the design of tendering regimes which follow from this.

There is much in 'Contesting Welfare' which needs to be taken with great seriousness in the design of competitive tendering within the community welfare sector—in particular: pressures for 'price-competitive' tenders which can erode quality of service rather than 'fixed-price' tenders which can lead to better quality; the continuity of services where there is a potential change in service provider; and ways of avoiding wasteful costs in tendering (and indeed the funding of overheads from which tendering costs have to be met). As Honner writes, many of these issues have not been fully resolved or tested in the community welfare sector. However, the issues themselves have been well rehearsed in the various reports which Honner cites.

In our complex society no single framework for selecting and funding community welfare organisations as service providers can claim the moral high-ground as to which is atomist or organic, materialist or spiritual, secure or vulnerable. To the extent that 'contestability' is relevant to these issues, it is through widening the field from which collaboration and relationship building can take place. Perhaps even the etymology of 'contestability' might help. My Bloomsbury tells me it comes from *con-* (together) *testori* (bear witness). Not a bad ideal for working relationships between governments and the community welfare sector!

Roger Mauldon
Garran, ACT

Competition = ideology

From Gerry Harant

John Honner's excellent article ('Contesting Welfare', *Eureka Street*, December 1998) on the likely effect of CCT (Compulsory Competitive Tendering) on Victoria's human services is a trenchant analysis of what will happen when CCT is introduced into the welfare sector. I cannot agree, however, with his apparent acceptance of economic rationalist rhetoric leading to his conclusion that 'competition cannot create community', which implies that creating communities is one of the purposes of competition and of its enforcers. He also quotes official Victorian bombast that CCT policy is based on a 'desire for better services'. CCT will result in a paradigm shift which, he says, is so contrary to this supposed desire that the project is bound to fail.

Would he were right! In Victoria, contracting-out was implemented in 1996 after the imposition of unelected and invariably right-wing commissioners on our revamped municipalities in 1995, and extended into human services supplied by councils. The rhetoric was the same as that quoted by Honner. The reality, however, was otherwise. It became clear that the very purpose of the 'reforms' was precisely the paradigm change Honner comments on.

Even before the imposition of CCT, ratepayers were told that municipalities would be concerned only with the dollar cost of services rather than their quality. Numerous new 'managers' were installed, long-serving efficient officers were sacked, staff wages were depressed in new workplace 'agreements' and their numbers slashed. The preparation for CCT involved further costs for consultants, the establishment of 'business units', the drafting of what were generally woefully deficient specifications and the shoe-horning of previously co-operatively run services into managerialist models of steerers and rowers. Promised rate cuts, often vigorously rejected in public meetings in favour of retention of services, failed to materialise and even turned into rate rises.

Not many of the CCT contracted services went to private contract; contracting-in rather than contracting-out is the rule. Not surprising, given that the expertise to run these services is not likely to be available to private companies, with the exception of things like garbage disposal and road maintenance, which many municipalities had contracted out years ago. It was clear that much of the 'service' rhetoric was not and could not be pursued except in the glossy PR put out at the ratepayer's—sorry, 'customer's'—expense.

Unlike Maggie Thatcher, who had invented CCT but specifically exempted human services, Victorian councils observed no such niceties. As a spokesperson for our local Library Friends, I had numerous encounters with commissioners and their appointees, raising many of the points made by John Honner. I may as well have talked to ventriloquists' dummies. However, one useful outcome was an understanding that the whole destructive exercise was ideologically driven and had absolutely nothing to do with service improvement or, indeed, cost reduction.

Among other things, contracts have the following advantages (for economic rationalists):

- Once the contract exists, accountability to users ceases. Regardless of how ridiculous it may seem in the case of in-house contracts, all contract details are hidden behind a 'commercial-in-confidence' pretence.
- Staff have little redress once the agreement is in force. The freedom normally given to professional staff no longer exists.
- Users have no access to the management of a service run by a 'provider' except via the 'client representative'.

As Honner points out, all transactions become commercial ones. Clients, even in welfare situations, are 'customers', but with none of a customer's rights. Every cost-cutting exercise, particularly if made possible by new technology, is described as a 'customer advantage'. The natural distrust between 'shopkeeper' and 'customer' is introduced into transactions where no money changes hands. Social contact between staff and users, an essential component of human services, is discouraged or made impossible. There is no reason why CCT contracting-out of the state or federal welfare sector should not follow this pattern.

CCT has not worked in councils. The cumbersome 'arm's-length' relationship which is supposed to exist between councils and their predominantly in-house service providers has proved so expensive and tedious that in many cases councils appear to have reverted to a de facto relationship not far removed from the marriage of pre-CCT days.

What remains, apart from the excessive cost of maintaining an extra administrative tier, is the paradigm shift. For instance, libraries were set up by communities well aware of the costs of a 'free' library. They are now run by 'business units' which demand that they be evaluated in terms of value for money, which as John Honner points out, is absurd in the human services sector. After all, the cheapest library would be no library.

Nor will this paradigm shift fade away, even if contracting were to be abandoned tomorrow. The bureaucrats who were installed to impose it are still there, and have been insulated by the State Government from scrutiny and dismissal. Worse still, it has got into our blood.

When I first looked into CCT, I got hold of the Whitfield report, a study of ten years of CCT under Thatcher. The report shows that the monetary savings achieved by the CCT regime is not 20 per cent as is usually stated, but averages 5 per cent and is quite frequently negative. It struck me that this was very useful material which should be used widely. But then it occurred to me that such arguments, a few years ago, would not have entered my thinking; after all, would a possible saving of 20 per cent, indeed of any size, be worth having if it meant destroying our community?

Gerry Harant
Blackburn, VIC

Rites to bear arms

From Len Baglow

In response to Andrew Hamilton's article 'Colts or Canons' (*Eureka Street*, November 1998), I would like to make a couple of points.

Earlier in the year, I was out practising with my theological six shooter. Unfortunately, I spooked an ecclesiastical grizzly bear. As a result, the grizzly bear decided to have a go at me with its own theological weapon. Now, grizzly bears have a confused notion of theology. They think the basic theological building block is order or dogma. As a result, they build rather stodgy theological weapons that don't work as planned. Recently, a group of grizzly bears built a weapon called the 'Instruction On Certain Questions Regarding The Collaboration Of The Non-Ordained Faithful In The Sacred Ministry of Priests'. If the grizzly bears ever get the trigger to work, they will shoot themselves in the head, as well as do untold damage to the environment.

As a conservation-minded theological gun slinger, I am rather keen to protect grizzly bears. They may not be all that cuddly, but they do have a role in the system. Indeed, my much-criticised *Compass* article was partly about protecting ecclesiastical grizzly bears. The central contention of the article was that grizzly bears and others in the Church (not just the Roman Catholic denomination) have been ingesting some indigestible prepackaged food from our culture. The issue is complex because some very good and important theological food such as Sacrament and Ministry have been melded with a sociological injustice, namely the cleric/lay distinction. I believe it is possible to think within the broad Catholic tradition about Sacrament and Ministry without necessarily making the cleric/lay distinction. Certainly, the cleric/lay distinction has been there for a long time; but not always. I challenge other theological gunslingers, including the polka-dot-hatted Andrew Hamilton to take up the question. Just watch out for the grizzly bears.

Len Baglow
Bridie Island

Mean Melbourne

From Dr Edward Duyker

I was pleased to see that Humphrey McQueen, in 'A Class Balancing Act', *Eureka Street*, January–February 1999, contrasted the mercenary attitude of the State Library of Victoria (which does not return the $1 coin for use of its lockers) and the State Library of New South Wales (which does).

I am an independent, Sydney-based, historian who often does research in Melbourne—my home town. I refuse to pay the $1 locker charge at the SLV and make a point of carrying my notebook in a plastic bag which can be stuffed in my pocket prior to entry. I've also found army surplus trousers—with the big pockets on the thighs—quite adequate to carry the paperback I'm reading on the tram and my sandwiches etc. until I go outside for lunch. No-one has yet asked me if I was carrying a banana or was just happy to see the staff at the security desk. I do my shopping after leaving the library.

Edward Duyker
Sylvania-Southgate, NSW

Diplomacy

From Tony Kevin, former Australian Ambassador to Cambodia (1994–1997)

By way of postscript to my letter on the Cambodian political crisis (*Eureka Street*, December 1998): I was relieved that a political compromise was reached in late November (soon after *Eureka Street*'s December issue had gone to press). Hun Sen ultimately offered to Funcinpec 50 per cent of ministerial portfolios, and to its leader Prince Ranariddh the independent presidency of the National Assembly. A new Senate chamber will be established as part of the deal, to be chaired by former Assembly President Chea Sim of CPP.

Ranariddh—under great pressure from his father King Sihanouk to compromise—agreed. Now, honour, status and generous remuneration have been preserved throughout the Cambodian political elite; and no political leader will be held accountable for any of the mistakes of the past three years. Sam Rainsy's 15 MPs will be a vigorous parliamentary opposition.

International normalisation has started. Cambodia's seat at the United Nations has been reinstated. Entry into ASEAN may be harder—Singapore, Thailand and Philippines remain suspicious about whether Cambodia's newfound stability can last. But resumption of foreign aid to its pre-1997 level is already being planned. The last Khmer Rouge military forces have surrendered and have been amnestied by the government. The Khmer Rouge refugee families in Thai border camps should soon be coming home.

It is a hopeful new beginning. But it is the same shaky coalition that dissolved into war in 1997. It is not yet clear whether the personalities involved have learnt the lessons of the trauma of the past three years, or whether the outside world (in particular, Washington) has learned to read Cambodian politics correctly. Both conditions will need to be fulfilled if this brave experiment in national reconciliation is to work.

In my urgent advocacy over the past 16 months of such a normalisation of Cambodian political life, and in trying to reduce the high risk of a tragic new civil war and the renewed ostracism of Cambodia from the world, I may have offended some people who quite genuinely have different experiences and perspectives on Cambodia than I formed as a diplomat in Phnom Penh from 1994 to 1997. For example, at the Joint Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee hearing on Cambodia on 26 August, I found myself publicly opposing judgments about Cambodian politics and Hun Sen offered by eminent persons with experience of Cambodia. I was not comfortable doing this, but it needed to be done.

With respect to recent correspondence about Cambodia in *Eureka Street*, I would like to say that I have the highest respect and affection for Sister Joan Healy of the Josephite order, whose expertise and sensitivity in matters of Cambodian social development especially at the village level is unsurpassed. One of my most moving and educational experiences in Cambodia early in my posting (in 1995) was my first encounter with Joan Healy at a Krom Aphivoat Phum (Develop The Village) community development project near Battambang. I learned much from her about Cambodian society during that visit.

My letter to *Eureka Street* setting out my assessment of the gravity of the crisis in Cambodia, and citing Joan Healy's previous letter as a reference point, was in no way intended to convey disrespect for Joan Healy's judgement or expertise. It would be foolish to do so. We share the same goals: to help the Cambodian people escape from their acute historical dilemma. In our love for the Cambodian people, we play on the same team. I hope and expect that we will continue to work together on Cambodian reconciliation and development issues in the future. The last three sentences of Joan Healy's November 1998 letter are very pertinent now that a political settlement has been achieved:

'These are times of extraordinary peril for Cambodia, and of extraordinary opportunity. They require not only economic assistance from the 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.'

Wise words. Let us hope that the Australian Government will support the promising but still fragile peace process through an active and engaged diplomacy in and around Cambodia. Also, that AusAID will continue to assist the important work in Cambodia of Sister Joan Healy and the Josephite Order, and of village self-help organisations like Krom Aphivoat Phum.

Tony Kevin
Canberra, ACT




The Month's Traffic

Gerry Adams and the cold shoulder

When Gerry Adams visited America in the heady days after the proclamation of the 1994 IRA ceasefire, he was lionised by the media there. They had found that rarest of political treasures, someone who was unpopular overseas but was no threat to them, an agitator who actually liked Uncle Sam. 'A white dude, with radical chic and anger directed elsewhere,' was how he was described by no less than Edna O'Brien, who had been sent by *The Irish Times* to cover his visit and whose unlikely presence among the media was an indication of the significance of the occasion.

O'Brien had coined one of those memorable phrases which sticks in the mind, capturing the handsome rakishness of an impeccably dressed 46-year-old with son-of-Buddy-Holly glasses and no grey in his beard. Five years on, the glasses are less conspicuous and there are telltale flecks of silver in the beard, but the charm is still there, while the dapper youthfulness has been upgraded to a statesmanlike gravitas.

Gerry Adams is the most significant figure in Irish nationalism in the last 50 years. This is not to demote people like Sean Lemass, John Hume or Dick Spring to lesser rank. They came from mainstream political backgrounds, whereas he has risen through the ranks of paramilitary activists to arrive at a philosophy which agitates for a united country through constitutional means. No other politician or political party in Ireland any longer seriously aims for a united Ireland.

I do not place too great significance on whether he may once have been an IRA volunteer; half the leadership of emerging countries would be disqualified if their former lives were examined in the way that Adams' has been. As to the inquisition to which he used to be so predictably subjected in the wake of some IRA atrocity, his standard reply hid irrefutable logic within a classic piece of Adams-speak: 'No-one in positions of power or authority can hide behind a smokescreen of selective condemnation or denunciation and expect to have any positive effect on any conflict situation.'

It is interesting to note the reaction of Australian politicians to the Adams visit. At the time of writing, they appear to be falling over themselves to explain why they are not going to meet him.

Here is the one person who, more than anybody else, is central to peace in Northern Ireland, who has taken and continues to take enormous political and personal risks to achieve it. Yet the Australian Prime Minister does not think it worth his while to listen to what Adams has to say; neither does the Premier of any of the States he is scheduled to visit, apart from Jeff Kennett in Victoria. (Admittedly, Peter Beattie will be out of the country.) And even Kennett said he 'thought about it for some time' before deciding to meet him. Alexander Downer was non-committal, saying only that a request from Adams to meet would be looked upon favourably.

So much for hospitality. When I think of some of the shysters and nonentities who have ready access to our political leaders, when I look at the backgrounds of some of the international figures who have been fêted in Canberra, I find it hard to excuse this act of gross discourtesy, a feeling I share with many other Irish people.

Perhaps Australian politicians think they know it all about Northern Ireland. I certainly don't and I would like to hear Gerry Adams give his analysis of the current situation, just as I would welcome the opportunity to hear David Trimble explain his position. But even though I am a resident of the capital city of Australia, I will not have the opportunity.

I could of course go to Sydney to attend the gala dinner in his honour. But that raises another dilemma: even if I could afford to join the 1000 or so people willing to pay $190 for a meal and a bit of music, I would find myself questioning such an expenditure and wondering at the use to which surplus funds might be put by the Republican support group, Australian Aid for Ireland.

The 1996 refusal by Australian authorities to allow Adams to enter Australia was not his first rejection by this country. In his autobiography, he tells how, when he was a boy, his family had completed all the necessary paperwork for assisted passage to Australia, only to be refused because his father had spent some time in prison for IRA activities.

One can only speculate how things might have been different had Australia accepted the Adams clan on that occasion. It might have made a difference to the course of events in Northern Ireland in the '70s and '80s. It would certainly have removed the figure of most significance in the last ten years; it is hard to believe that nationalists could have come up with another person with the drive, charisma and courage of Gerry Adams.

That Mr Howard cannot find time to meet him says a great deal about our current Prime Minister, little of it good.

—Frank O'Shea

Going to the devil

The first I heard about the new Catholic rite of exorcism was at 6.40am on Australia Day. The ABC called for a comment on a newspaper article, which claimed that the Vatican was 'making over' the image of the devil. It was obviously a slow news day. I said 'Give me ten minutes to wake up'; it's difficult to focus on demonology before you've had a shower.

Biblical theology treats demonology and Satan soberly. There are very few references to the devil in the Hebrew Scriptures and, if

demonic possession is excluded, the New Testament is reasonably circumspect compared with both the demonology of intertestamental Judaism and the Greek belief in 'daimones', that is, beings that inhabit the interface between the gods and us.

Certainly, devils appear in the gospels, usually in the context of healing, when Jesus, with the authority inherent in his personality, casts them out. The presumption is that there is a connection between sickness and mental illness and possession. On occasion, Satan assumes a personification, as in the confrontation with Jesus in the desert. The influence of the cultural context of intertestamental Judaism on the New Testament is clear.

The demonology of patristic theologians borrows from Jewish apocryphal literature, and their medieval followers indulge in a welter of speculation about angels and devils. The medievals also created the demonic iconography that we have inherited. In contrast, the official church is far more circumspect: there is no reference to the devil in any important church creed and there are very few references in the documents of general councils.

So what are we to make of the Vatican document on exorcism? It is significant that it was issued by the Congregation for Divine Worship. This is because it is part of the revision of the 1614 Roman Ritual which was asked for by Vatican II. The rite of exorcism was the last of the rituals to be revised.

Cardinal Medina Estevez, Prefect of the Congregation, said that there would be 'very few cases' in which the ritual of exorcism would need to be used, and it could only be carried out with the permission of the local bishop and with the consent of the person suffering possession. The new ritual acknowledges that much that in the past was called 'possession' was actually psychological illness.

Naturally, the media picked up on issues like demonology and exorcism. As a whole series of movies in the style of *The Exorcist* show, the issues continue to fascinate apparently sophisticated post-moderns. But I must admit that I squirm when issues like this get a public airing. It is not that I don't recognise the reality of evil in the world and of sinfulness in myself, but I have the feeling that it is really a culturally insensitive way of speaking in the context of contemporary Australia.

Sure, the church has to deal with the issue of demonology in other cultures, like Africa or Papua New Guinea. In PNG, Andre

(continued p14 ...)

A wise investment

IT WAS A GOOD SILLY SEASON STORY—so much so that about three weeks after *The Australian* ran it, the same story bobbed up in *The Age*.

Achievement in science and technology ranked level with sport as the two most potent sources of national pride, according to a rigorous survey of nearly 31,000 people conducted across 24 countries. In fact, sport and science were the only factors picked consistently in all countries, though economic performance and the arts also figured in some.

The report had what all editors look for in the silly season. It was quirky, counter-intuitive, but light enough not to frighten away summer readers. It provided an odd new fact to stick in the trivia album, or to talk about for five minutes over a refreshing ale. But there was more.

Besides Australia, the countries surveyed included Britain, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Holland, Ireland, Russia, Bulgaria, Japan, the Philippines, the US and Canada. And the people who were most proud of their scientists were Americans—no surprise there—and, lo and behold, Australians.

'The study confirmed the national obsession with sport, but the finding about science was completely unexpected,' says Dr Jonathan Kelley of the Research School of Social Sciences at ANU, a co-author of the report which was published in the *Australian Social Monitor*, a journal of Melbourne University's Institute for Applied Economic and Social Research. 'Scientific achievement really makes people feel good about their country.'

The results of the survey should be put on a banner by the Australian Research Council and hung from the Sydney Harbour Bridge, says Kelley, because they show politicians that financial investment in scientific research could have significant political benefits. And it also might surprise businessmen to learn that spending money on science, in addition to being a good economic investment, is 'damn good PR'.

The millions of Australians who attended sports extravaganzas over summer were left in no doubt that government and business have discovered the PR value of sport. Why not science? Particularly since, unlike sport, science is not a game—it's our future.

Also released over summer was an assessment of *Biotechnology in Australia*, by Dr Peter French of the science lobby group, the Federation of Australian Scientific and Technological Societies (FASTS). French argues that biotechnology is about to revolutionise the global economy. While Australia has a good track record in biotechnology research, he says, it has a poor history of capitalising on its discoveries. One of the main reasons is lack of financial commitment, both public and private.

Biotechnology is particularly dependent on basic research, the report argues. Other countries recognise this. In the past year, the US, Britain, Singapore, Germany, Canada, China, Spain and others have all announced significant public investment in biotechnology. In the US, that great bastion of private enterprise, the federal budget allocation to biotechnology is more than $4 billion a year to support an industry projected to have annual sales of about $50 billion by next year. Yet the Australian Government appears to think that if there's any money to be made, the marketplace will create an industry unaided.

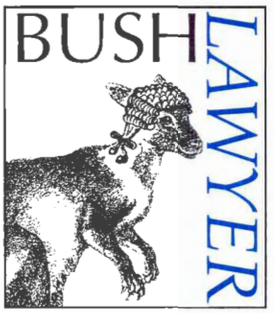
'It is clear that many of Australia's competitors are positioning their biological industries to take advantage of the biotechnology revolution,' the report says. 'There is not the same level of activity in Australia currently. This should be cause for serious concern and subsequent remedial action by government.'

The report calls for government support of up to $500 million a year for basic research. That's serious money—about as much as we spend on CSIRO and university research combined at present. French also suggests changing the tax regime for research. Since the Federal Government reduced the industry R&D tax concession from 150 per cent to 125 per cent, private investment has declined markedly. And Australia's capital gains tax is seen throughout the world as a major impediment to foreign investment.

The report nominates the superannuation funds—now standing at more than $350 billion—as a source of private investment capital.

All of this should give the Howard Government substantial food for thought. And what comfort to know that investment in science, apart from creating jobs and profits, can swell national pride as well. Sounds like a useful ingredient in any recipe for re-election. ■

Tim Thwaites is a freelance science writer.



BUSH LAWYER

SÉAMUS O'SHAUGHNESSY

Home sweet home?

In NSW, nearly 40,000 Apprehended Violence Orders ('AVOs') were issued by magistrates last year. An AVO is also known colloquially as a 'restraining order'. They are mainly used to protect women from domestic violence ('domestic AVOs'), but are also issued to protect others who have a genuine and reasonable fear of intimidation, harassment, assault or stalking ('personal AVOs').

Although AVOs are issued under a part of the Crimes Act, they do not in themselves carry any criminal conviction. A person can consent to an order being made without admitting to having done anything to frighten or hurt the complainant. It is not a guilty plea. Breaches of AVOs are, however, serious offences, carrying jail terms.

One of the triumphs of feminists is to have exposed domestic violence as a pervasive social problem and forced governments to take action. Nonetheless, the tide of applicants for AVOs which flows daily into the courts shows no sign of ebbing, despite the efforts of police and other agents in the community. If anything, exponential growth in the numbers of complaints can be expected on current trends.

This is not necessarily a bad thing. I don't think anyone suggests that, because the numbers of complaints are going up rapidly, the number of domestic assaults is climbing steeply. Rather, we are getting to see more and more of the iceberg.

Most complainants seeking AVOs, as far as I can see, come from battler territory. Crime statistics bear this out. While the wealthy and well-educated do sometimes make an appearance in court, a typical respondent (the person complained about) to an AVO complaint seems to me to be a man between 25 and 40 who is either unemployed or in a low-paid job, who is inarticulate, angry, suffers from low self esteem, and is overly dependent on the woman and sometimes on alcohol. In short, a man who feels powerless except against the woman in his life. He is not a SNAG.

Over the past few years, the NSW Government (and I dare say governments elsewhere) have responded quite well to the alarming emergence of the sorry truth about domestic violence. The police, courts and welfare agencies now devote considerable amounts of time and effort to the protection of victims. This intervention has reportedly had a significant impact on the behaviour of many men. The reason is easy to see: it is very humiliating to have the police apply to the court for an AVO against you because your wife or partner alleges you were violent towards her. And she is no longer alone—she has stood up to you.

So far so good. What are the problems with the system? Two stand out.

First, the system is systematically abused by certain people, often in relation to a Family Law dispute. I once ticked off a solicitor who was patently trying to get an AVO to eject a husband from his own house because he and his wife were arguing over the property and other Family Law issues. In another case, one parent vexatiously sought an urgent AVO to prevent the other exercising custody rights in relation to their daughter. Magistrates must constantly keep a weather eye out for those sorts of things.

Second, while resources (arguably insufficient) are rightly being targeted for victims' protection, there is little or nothing being done on the prevention or remediation side until a person is found guilty of a criminal offence. Under an AVO, the court has power only to restrict the behaviour of the respondent. I cannot, for example, require him (or her) to undertake anger-management counselling or family therapy.

I am not an adherent of the 'Men's Movement', but these inarticulate, angry, dependent, powerless men are not human garbage. Even if they were, it would be pragmatic to 'recycle' them rather than abandon them to create further problems. But where are the resources to be found? And call me old-fashioned, but what is being done to socialise boys at an early age that violence towards women is a no-no?

I don't underestimate the good that courts can do, but education is the key. We must teach boys how to be peaceful men and good citizens. ■

Séamus O'Shaughnessy is a country magistrate.

Dupeyrat has written extensively about it, and James Griffin's fascinating article on Mother Marie-Therese Noblet (1889–1930) in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* records a whole life lived out in the context of ecstasy and apparent possession.

What relevance is this to us? At least it reminds us of the reality of evil in our culture and in ourselves. In classical theology, evil is an absence of good. It lacks intelligibility; it is a surd. That is not to say that evil is not real, but to emphasise that it is a distortion of good, to say it is essentially parasitic.

I identify evil in our society with acquisitive individualism, with the 'greed is good' syndrome. The common good is constantly sacrificed to the demands of the bottom line and profit for the shareholders. We also see evil in the way forests, rivers, land, seas and other species are sacrificed to voracious consumption, much of it artificially created. We have lost our sense of our real place in both the human and natural communities. The acquisitive capitalist demons within us have created a disjunction between the self and the world. We no longer participate in the world but have become parasites upon it.

That's why, when the ABC asked me how I thought of the devil, I replied 'as an economic rationalist in a business suit!'

—Paul Collins

Will good taste wreck the game?

Late last year, the Sydney Football Stadium hosted its last ever Australian Rugby League Grand Final. After the ARL versus Super League fiasco, it was a strangely deflating feeling to be sitting in the stadium witnessing a rather predictable game between the out-of-towners, Brisbane, and the local team, Canterbury. To complicate matters further, Canterbury, who would normally have been considered the local underdogs, and thus aroused the traditional crowd support, had a compromised past. They had joined Super League. So, for those who felt passionately about the issue, the grand final had degenerated into a match between two different categories of traitor.

In many ways this grand final was no different from any of the others I had been to over the last ten years. There was the usual, cheerfully vulgar entertainment—Jimmy Barnes and his son, the ARL combined cheerleaders, the children gyrating in spandex and polyester, the parade of the Legends of League—but the

atmosphere was gloomy. As if somehow corporatism had swooped upon the game like a gigantic eagle, clutching the players' jumpers with its claws and dragging them off to distant, high-summed destinies.

So I sat in the stadium trying to feel a goodbye. And the first thing I thought about was the SFS's unique heritage of crummy entertainment.

I remembered the year when the Optus people had flown in a giant television set by helicopter. The structure of the installation wasn't strong enough to survive the wind and the sides of the television collapsed. It was meant to symbolise the birth of a new communications system in Australia. It ended up seeming like a low-budget, domestic re-enactment of the Fall of Saigon.

Then there was the time when a series of artificial trees constructed like giant plastic asparaguses was erected in the centre of the stadium as a backdrop for one of John Williamson's performances. The sight of these plastic tubes being inflated was enough to widen the eyes of those least inclined to tasteless humour. But the worst aspect of all was the way the giant asparaguses were unceremoniously deflated. They kind of wheezed down, inch by inch, in a fitful descent, as John Williamson scurried away from the portable stage.

There was also the time when performers from the musical *42nd Street* carried their 3-feet-wide model gold coins on to the middle of the stadium together with a complicated, temporary staging system which took about ten minutes to erect. After some dithering and general confusion, they finally discovered that the wrong tape had been brought along. The performers had no music to dance to. The whole production had to be canned, the stage taking a further ten minutes to dismantle. It was like a performance by the conceptual artist Vitto Acconci.

Once the audience themselves were even invited to become part of the entertainment. I remember bringing a rather introverted friend along to the grand final the year they filmed the famous Tina Turner 'Simply the Best' campaign. The audience were told to wave their hands about madly and sing along with wild enthusiasm at the appropriate moments. It was potentially excruciating, but as usual the cheerfully irreverent crowd managed to transform the indignity into a joke on the staged excitement of the commercial itself. The sound system at the stadium was brutal. The acoustics ensured maximum volume with minimum intelligibility. If you looked around the arena while the commercials were being played, you could see thousands of people clutching their ears like the tormented individual in Edvard Munch's 'The Scream'.

In almost every respect the Melbourne football grand finals are more professional than the Sydney ones. The entertainment is more respectable. The execution is more reliable. Sydney grand finals are artistic failures. There's no doubt about that. But somehow a tiny voice inside me says that to fail in the genre of the football grand final is a more sophisticated act than to succeed. It is their very professionalism which makes Melbourne grand finals so gormless. To try at all at this sort of thing is to try too hard.

One of the traditions of Sydney grand finals which has always intrigued me is the way that objects must fall out of the sky or be shot up into the sky or, eventually, be suspended in the sky. There are two reasons for this, I figure. First, football (and perhaps all sport) is about the human longing to fly. Playing sport lets us pretend for a while that we have wings.

But it's also about the implications arising from a perverse defiance of Newton's Fifth Law. Things that go up don't necessarily come down. Things get stuck. There is always the plastic asparagus that won't deflate, the net of balloons that won't release, or the sky diver that lands outside the stadium. This seems to me to be saying something like: 'everyone sets out to soar in life but things get in the way'.

The grammar of rugby league is about making your way up the field while fighting off seemingly insurmountable obstacles. That's why it's so incredibly moving and exciting when a player does finally manage to escape a tackle and break free from his opponents. In the end, the culture of rugby league celebrates the poetry of disappointment. It respects a winner, but sanctifies the runner-up. The weak entertainment, the punishing sound system, the multitude of stuff-ups, I wouldn't have it any other way.

—Rosey Golds

What's the (entry) score?

SOME INTRIGUING comparisons came out of the recent publication by the *Canberra Times* of the entry scores for various courses in universities in the ACT and NSW.

Entry scores are not an indication of the intellectual difficulty of the courses. A score of 70 would get one into most courses at the University of Canberra, but for a degree course in Sports Coaching one needs a score of 76.35, and for one in Sports Media (covering sporting events as a print, radio or TV journalist) one needs 82.65. I have no doubt those sports-related courses are good courses for their purpose, but I doubt that they are more intellectually difficult than those in Human Biology, Earth and Land Science, or most of the other offerings of the University of Canberra which one can enter with a score of 70, or more difficult than a degree in Philosophy at ANU which requires a score of 73. Perhaps a free seat at the Olympics is more fun than Wittgenstein.

Universities set entry scores for courses at a level which, from past experience, they expect will provide them with about the number of students they can take in each course. Scores can go up or down from year to year without the university making any changes to the course. The scores are simply an indicator of demand for the particular course. That is why Medicine at the University of NSW requires a score of 99.6, and scores for entry to Law everywhere are much higher than for most other subjects. That is what makes the comparisons of demand so intriguing, as indicated by the scores.

The degree in Nursing at the University of Canberra is more in demand (entry score 76.25) than any nursing degree in NSW; congratulations—but why? The entry qualifications for a Bachelor of Arts (70) or Science (70.55) course at UC are the same or higher than for those courses at UNSW or for the BA at the University of Sydney (all 70), despite the fact that those two universities are in a much bigger city and have long-established reputations at a level which UC is still working to attain. Indeed, if Daddy and Mummy are prepared to pay full cost fees, you can get into Arts or Science at UNSW or Sydney with scores down to 65, which would not get you into any course at UC, ANU, Charles Sturt or Wollongong.

The Albury/Wodonga campus of Charles Sturt University is the smallest of CSU's three campuses, and—in the competitive mode so favoured by economic rationalists—in that small city faces competition from a campus of Latrobe University in Wodonga. Yet the degree in Physiotherapy at CSU requires a score of 99.85—higher than for Medicine at UNSW!

One might try to discover why, in these allegedly post-Christian times, it requires a score of 81.5 to do a degree in Theology at

Australian Catholic University, whereas the materialistic Commerce degree at ANU requires only 73. And what is it between the Catholics and the Protestants, that the degree in Theology offered by Charles Sturt, in co-operation with St Mark's in Canberra, requires a modest 69.3? My experience of my own friends suggests that Protestants are more inclined to theological discussion than Catholics, but the figures suggest the opposite.

Want to study Acupuncture? 77.2 at University of Technology, Sydney. Chiropractic? 85.15 at Macquarie. Psychology everywhere needs a high score, usually well over 80. You can study Nuclear Medical Technology at Charles Sturt with 69.3, but you need 86.15 to study Ancient History at Macquarie.

There are hours of fun to be had studying the entry scores for university courses. Maybe some university will offer a degree in it?

—Richard Johnson

If we only had the words

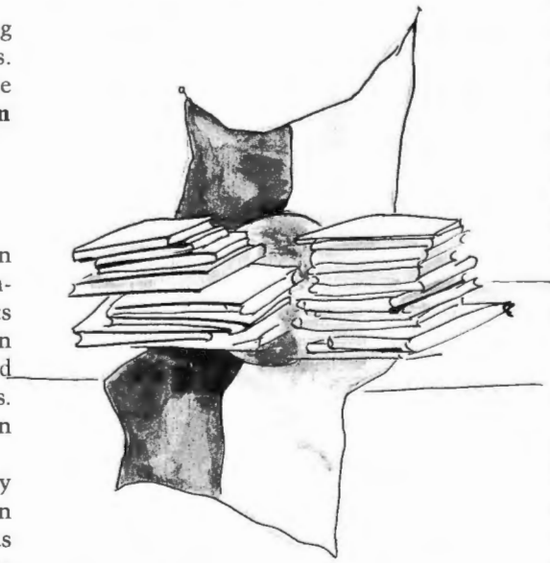
IN EARLY DECEMBER 1998, in a top-down decision, the Northern Territory Government decided that it would disband its unique bilingual education programs, in which local Aboriginal languages and English are used in primary school classrooms. It decided to replace them with instruction exclusively in the English language.

At present, in Northern Territory schools there are 21 bilingual education programs in which 17 different Indigenous languages are being taught alongside instruction in English. While the government initiative to provide improved English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) instruction in remote Aboriginal schools is to be applauded, it is difficult to interpret the decision, which is endorsed by Federal Education Minister David Kemp, as anything but a direct attack on the relatively few remaining 'strong' Aboriginal languages. It will also mean the demobilisation of many dedicated bilingual education workers in remote rural communities, the majority of whom are Aboriginal. In turn this will translate into even higher rates of unemployment among rural Australians.

For Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians who have worked for many years to establish and maintain the bilingual programs, the decision hasn't come as a surprise. Bilingual education has been under almost constant attack since the Whitlam Government introduced it in 1973, as part of the reforms for self-determination (which incidentally, also seems to have been scrapped recently, on the quiet).

Bilingual education programs were originally introduced partly because the English-only programs in Aboriginal schools failed dismally to come up with the educational goods—only a tiny, elite minority ever learned to read and write under the old English-only regime. Many contemporary advocates of 'English-only' education seem to have forgotten this.

For almost a decade (1982–1991), I lived and worked with Warlpiri people at Lajamanu, a settlement roughly equidistant from Alice Springs and Darwin, located in the Tanami Desert of the Northern



Territory. Together we worked in the school to establish a successful bilingual education program using the local vernacular, Warlpiri, and English. The Lajamanu community, under the leadership of two visionary leaders, the late Maurice Luther Jupurrurla and the late Paddy Patrick Jangala, had lobbied the government for ten years before the school was afforded official recognition as a bilingual school. The older people feared that younger Warlpiri were in danger of losing their culture and language. Most older Warlpiri recollect English being imposed upon them by pure force. As late as the mid-1970s, if Warlpiri adults and children spoke Warlpiri within the hearing of the settlement supervisor, or within the confines of the schoolyard, they would be hit or otherwise punished. During those 'Native Welfare' days, a barbed-wire fence was erected around Lajamanu school to keep the kids in and the adults out—a powerful metaphor encapsulating the alienation of the school from the community. A close Warlpiri friend of mine, Peggy Rockman Napurrurla, a woman still in her 30s, recalls, 'In those "Welfare Days", the settlement supervisors would hit us if we spoke Warlpiri. They would say, "Stop talking in that Chinese language."'

So committed was the community to the program that, in 1982, ten Warlpiri adults worked full-time for the entire year, with no remuneration, to create Warlpiri books for Warlpiri children to read in the classrooms. In 1989, the school topped all government Aboriginal schools in the Territory in the Education Department's externally administered moderated testing programs in English. Internal tests conducted in the school also showed a steady improvement in academic achievement over the years. The Department refused to accept the validity of this testing program, and consistently denied access for independent researchers to compare the performance of students in bilingual programs with those in non-bilingual schools. This, in conjunction with the Department's under-staffing and under-resourcing of bilingual education programs since their inception, explains the current paucity and inconclusiveness of research evidence about Aboriginal bilingual education programs in Australia.

Nonetheless, it is true that, even in the bilingual schools, academic results are well below those of their non-Indigenous counterparts. This is the result of a complex mosaic of interacting factors—not least of which are Indigenous poverty and poor health. Bilingual education is not a universal panacea.

From my experience I would say that the major argument for the continuation of the bilingual programs isn't academic, at least not now. Aboriginal-controlled bilingual programs give Aboriginal parents and extended families a real place in their children's education. Indigenous-controlled bilingual education programs put Aboriginal teachers into Aboriginal classrooms as 'real' teachers, assist the Aboriginalisation of schools (acting as circuit-breakers to continuing welfare dependence), improve relations between community members and schools, increase school attendance, and legitimate and strengthen the minority language (raising the self-esteem of both adults and children).

Teaching children initially in their own language allows them to move from the 'known to the unknown, to acquire general

learning skills which they can then employ in learning a second language. ESL and bilingual education are mutually supportive—a quality ESL program is an essential part of any successful bilingual program. As Mandawuy Yunupingu (lead singer of Yothu Yindi and former principal of Yirrkala Bilingual School) puts it, 'If you have control over both languages, you have double power.'

The decision to scrap the bilingual programs represents a return to the White Australia Days. It pre-dates even the Australian Government's 1950s Frankenstein-type dream of assimilation for Indigenous Australians and migrants. As early as 1835, the Governor of South Australia made a speech to the Kaurna Aboriginal people of the Adelaide Plains in which he exhorted 'the natives' to drop their languages in favour of English: 'Blackman, we wish to make you happy. But you cannot be happy unless you imitate white man. Build huts, wear clothes, and be useful ... have God ... love white men ... and learn to speak ENGLISH.'

The last fluent speaker of Kaurna, Ivaritji, died in 1929, and the majority of Australia's 250 Indigenous languages have already been extinguished. We have lost more than three quarters of these languages, which is not only a loss for all Australians but also for the world's linguistic heritage. These languages need to be regarded as living national treasures. Unless there is immediate, strong and meaningful intervention, history will repeat itself. It is clear from the outrage being expressed in parts of remote Aboriginal Australia (some communities are threatening to pull all children out of school when the 1999 school year begins) that the Territory Government's decision isn't 'making them happy' in the least. The bilingual programs must be maintained and given a fair go with adequate funding and decent resources—if the Australian Government can fund bilingual education programs in the Pacific, it can do so at home. (*A shorter version of this article appeared in* The Australian.)

—Christine Nicholls

This month's contributors: **Frank O'Shea** teaches maths at Marist College, Canberra; **Paul Collins** MSC is a priest, author and broadcaster; **Rosey Golds** is a freelance writer; **Richard Johnson** retired as professor of Classics and is now a visiting fellow at the Australian National University; **Christine Nicholls** is a Senior Lecturer in Australian Studies at the Flinders University of South Australia.

From both sides now

THE BYWORD FOR CATHOLIC ORTHODOXY IS DENZIGER, the original editor of a collection of doctrinal texts published in their original Greek or Latin. A generation of Catholic theological students will be familiar with it in its English translation and rearrangement by Jozef Neuner and Jean Dupuis, who taught theology together in India.

Neuner began his teaching in the internment camp, where he and many German Jesuit students were placed by the British colonial authorities during World War II. Dupuis' theological teaching has recently concluded, at least temporarily, after his writing was investigated by the Congregation for the Defence of the Faith. Most recently, both men have been exercised by the challenge to speak properly of the Christian Gospel in Asian, non-Christian cultures. Recent journal articles unite them in discussion of this theme.

Vidyajoti, a theological magazine emanating from Delhi, dedicated a recent edition (August 1998) to Jozef Neuner on his 90th birthday. The most stimulating article is by Michael Amaladoss, who discusses, realistically, the difficulties of inter-faith dialogue, remarking that there has been more theory of dialogue than practice. Committed believers are likely to be half-hearted in their commitment to dialogue, and vulnerable to the charms of fundamentalism, particularly if they believe that their religious world is being eroded by secularism. Moreover, if a society finds its identity in a dominant religious tradition, its adherents commonly resist discussion with groups perceived to be alien both to religious and national traditions. Amaladoss, however, believes that dialogue becomes possible where believers of different traditions see themselves as possessing a common culture.

Dupuis himself writes on religious dialogue in *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* (December 1998). His article is helpful because it relates the Catholic interest in dialogue to changing understandings of religious pluralism. While the encouragement of dialogue between religions had its roots in the Vatican Council, even there it was seen as a preliminary step in the process of winning the dialogue partners to Christian faith. Since the Council, however, both church documents and theologians have given more value to non-Christian religions in their own right. Dupuis summarises this new appraisal, claiming that the presence and action of the Holy Spirit within non-Christian religions is now generally recognised. Furthermore, while Christ, the Kingdom of God and the Church are held to be intimately related, the building of the Kingdom is not confined to those who acknowledge Christ within the Church. We may expect to *find*, and not merely to *bring* God in the dialogue.

Dupuis insists that the adventure of dialogue does not consist in leaving one's faith behind, but in exploring personally and openly the religious experience and beliefs of the partner in dialogue. Dupuis so underpins his article with quotations from the present Pope that it is easy to see why, in a letter to *The Tablet*, his colleague, Gerald O'Collins, remarked that to criticise Dupuis is to criticise the Pope.

Another kind of dialogue is the subject of an intriguing article in *Semeia* (no. 78). Nanjini Rebera discusses the distinctive way in which the story of Martha and Mary is heard by groups of Indian women. Indian readers notice first that the story takes place in Martha's house. She is a property owner, and so an independent woman, to whom Mary, as younger sister, has obligations within the house. When the Indian audience hears that Mary sits at Jesus' feet, they instantly recognise the position of the disciple distinctive in most Asian cultures. Mary, therefore, is not passive or contemplative, but is being trained to represent Jesus. When Jesus responds to Martha's complaint by praising Mary's choice, he denies that the only role for a woman is that sanctioned by her culture. He asserts that there is a better way, embodied in Mary's thoroughly active commitment as a disciple.

This interpretation shows the value of dialogue between cultures for throwing fresh light on the Gospel. Western interpretation of this passage has for too long been paralysed by Augustine's initially liberating contrast between Martha the active person and Mary the passive contemplative. Most readers feel ill at ease with the dismissal of Martha in this interpretation, but cannot free themselves from it. If we think in stereotypes, it may seem strange that Indian Christians have reassured Western Christians about the value of being active. But, then, dialogue is all about correcting stereotypes. ■

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

Freedom from information

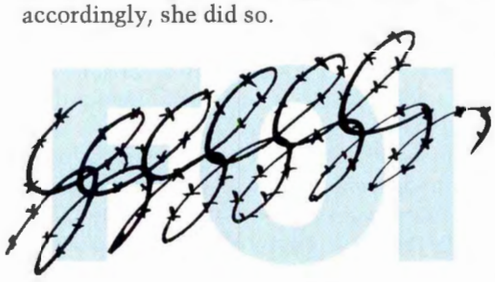
THREE YEARS AGO, a Gippsland man was charged with a particularly horrible murder. Three young people he did not know were found dead after an execution-style shooting. It was a terrifying, inexplicable crime.

The three had decided to share a house in Melbourne, where they had recently moved from rural Victoria. They had advertised for a housemate, an advertisement the murderer apparently answered. No motive was established.

The Gippsland man's arrest had been precipitated by an event in the Botanical Gardens in which he bailed up a young couple in their car and instructed them to lie down in a pose mirroring the style of the triple murder. He maintained his absolute innocence, and proffered an alibi: at the time, he and his de facto wife testified, he had been visiting her in a Frankston hospital.

The jury didn't believe him, or her, and he was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment. He maintained his innocence and instructed his lawyers to seek further evidence to support an appeal. That evidence, he believed, would be found if his lawyers could talk to the nurses on duty in the ward on the day in question.

The firm asked the Frankston Hospital for their names. They refused to give the information out, citing privacy considerations. He made an FOI request. It was denied. He appealed, as was his right, to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal. The hospital sought legal advice from leading law firm, Dunhill Madden Butler, who advised them to resist the application. This they did, after a fashion. Late in 1998, the hospital sent along a senior medical practitioner, not a lawyer, who formally relied on the exemption for 'personal information' and opposed its release. The applicant's lawyer made a case for the names, in the interests of justice to a man who may have been—and on his instructions was—unjustly convicted. The doctor had nothing to add—though the Act also exempts the release of information where personal safety is an issue. Tribunal Member Noreen Megay, a former prosecutor herself, said she saw no reason why she should not grant the application, and accordingly, she did so.



Curiously, the hospital did not appeal. It released the information, as ordered. It did not tell the nurses first. They found out in mid-January, then all hell broke loose. The nurses were outraged, and afraid. This is understandable, if illogical (the man was, after all, safely incarcerated).

FOI is an irritant to governments. Victorian Premier Jeffrey Kennett has long been irked by the release of information under FOI. Typically, such requests, whether they be for information about the management of the Crown Casino, the costs of the Grand Prix and the new CityLink project, or the use of ministerial credit cards, are denied by government. The way they have responded to FOI has had the effect of putting the onus on the requesters, to demonstrate that the documents denied do not fall into a particular exemption, or that a public interest test for release is applicable. In opposition, Kennett used FOI to great effect and trumpeted its virtues. Since his election in 1992, access to FOI has been increasingly impeded.

The exemptions have been broadened, particularly by extending the definition of 'working documents' and Cabinet papers; new enterprises have been exempted from its operation, and increasingly, since government business is regularly dealt with through corporate structures or partnerships with industry, reliance is placed on 'commercial-in-confidence' exclusions. The costs have, in some cases, trebled. The usefulness of FOI to opposition parliamentarians and community groups has been much reduced by the delays occasioned by refusals or simple failure to comply with statutory timetables within government agencies—the political 'moment' quickly passes. Kennett has himself publicly expressed frustration with the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT), which deals with applications for review. Most recently, it incurred his wrath by releasing, on 'public interest' grounds, some controversial government business documents. It has compounded its perceived sins through 'delays' in dealing with community-initiated appeals against contentious planning approvals. Developers don't like having their grand plans frustrated. VCAT has not been helpful to government.

So it was not surprising that Kennett should respond, after a call from a frightened nurse to 3AW where he was doing his regular talkback spot, that he would see to it that the Act was amended.

ON 14 JANUARY, his Attorney-General, Jan Wade, announced that she would be 'seeking legal advice and looking at the FOI Act in relation to the issues raised, because the VCAT decision has serious implications for numerous people, right across government, involved in decision-making where those decisions are subject to FOI applications.'

This is not such a case. As the Attorney-General noted in her press release, the issue was clouded by the inexplicable decision by the hospital not to seek legal representation

at the hearing, and not to appeal. The exemptions available—but not claimed—went beyond 'privacy' considerations, and the public interest in preserving the security and safety of the nurses could have been argued—but wasn't. The Supreme Court could have reviewed that decision, but wasn't asked to. The hospital, in other words, mucked up.

But the case, and the Victorian Government response to it, show just how contested is the ground of administrative law.

As the Australian Law Reform Commission and Administrative Review Council noted in their 1996 review of the Federal Freedom of Information Act, access to information is an accepted part of our democratic system. It is a bulwark against government oppression, and possible maladministration or even corruption. Fears by public servants, as individuals, that they will be targeted for retribution can be addressed in other ways than by dropping an iron curtain of confidentiality.

The man's case is, in principle, a just one. His being convicted of murder is not the relevant issue here. If an individual has been wrongly convicted and the truth—or otherwise—lies within the knowledge of a public servant, it should be made available for a court to review. There are many ways to protect individuals from maddened citizens: removing access to information, lest an individual civil servant feel at risk, is not the best, or even appropriate option.

We can assume that the Victorian Government will seek to use this event, and the public sympathy it generated, to make further inroads upon FOI, thus achieving what Justice Michael Kirby described as a 'deadly sin': undermining the essential access to independent decision-makers who can stand up to government and require that sensitive information be provided.

The convicted man has promised that the nurses will not be threatened or harmed by him. He has said—and isn't it reasonable, on cooler reflection?—that he only wants his lawyer to be able to find out whether any of them remember if he was there, that day, visiting his wife—the alibi that the jury did not believe.

Faith in justice, and open accountable government, is the foundation of community, and the best remedy for citizen outlawry. ■

Moira Rayner is a lawyer and freelance journalist.

Love

'Do I look old?' she softly quizzed,
And in earnest examination allowed
Only her reflection in the mirror
To search for an answer, to goad,

To force a reply, an elementary error,
To say simply 'yes', simply 'no',
(Both requiring careful exegesis
Which, though practised, is slow).

To convince I have naturally learnt
To look at reflections and to see,
'You're beautiful' I whisper to her,
Knowing eventually she dies, like me.

Zoltan Kovacs

The Secret Imbalance

(Poem against intolerance.)

I fear my right hand's obedience and wit,
Its ability to write, to take up my instruction,
Revealing what my left hand can not do.
The left entirely a Spartan balance,
A curl, a fist, a palm, thumb-and-finger paper-weight,
Not a manipulator of the considered
But a stationary presence, the bored,
The well educated but idle,
The familiar, the unacknowledged,
Uncoordinated, the accepter of slow fate,

The hand that holds the fork.

Zoltan Kovacs

Letters home

Andrew Hamilton *discusses the recent Statement of Conclusions that came out of the meeting between Australian bishops and the Roman Curia. This is the first of a short series of articles on the Statement.*

IN DECEMBER, a group of Australian Bishops and Curial officials published a joint letter on the state of the Australian church. It occasioned immediate comment, much of it negative.

I read the letter just before visiting the Immigration Detention Centre, where I found a group of asylum seekers intent around the TV set. They were Iraqis who had fled from Saddam Hussein's government, and who had just heard that Iraq was being bombed. I listened with them to President Clinton explaining eloquently and reasonably on geopolitical and moral grounds why it was in everyone's best interests, including those of ordinary Iraqis, to bomb Iraq.

Clinton's analysis was interesting. But I was struck by the contrast between his large rhetoric and the simple response of the asylum seekers who had suffered under Saddam. They feared for their wives, their children and the future of their country. The analysis missed the human reality.

The asylum seekers believed, too, that Clinton's analysis was also unconnected to the reality of Iraq. Because he did not understand Iraq, the only result of bombing would be to strengthen Saddam's position, weaken the forces which opposed him, and make it more difficult to influence the shape of Iraq after he went. The only sure fruits of the bombing would be further malnourishment of children and suffering of the weakest.

The conflict between the large rhetoric of Clinton's analysis and the human rhetoric employed by the asylum seekers invites us to ask which analysis and consequent course of action were authoritative. Clinton had consulted the 'experts'—those with geostrategic perspective, technical military knowledge and political articulacy. But the Iraqi asylum seekers had another kind of expertise—that of those who had Iraq as their country, had lived under terror and waited in the shadow of the bombs.

If in this case the refugees' reflection seemed the more cogent, it was because they represented the experience of the people. While an appeal to the 'experience of the people' is nebulous because no people is homogeneous, the consequences of ignoring it are often disastrous. If Clinton's analysis were based on inadequate consultation, the solution which he proposed would also be flawed.

This leads us to the letter on the Australian church. It represents the reflections of some Commissions of the Australian church, assisted by officials of their Roman counterparts. It offers a partial viewpoint. Its diagnosis of the Australian church is in balance negative—it mentions good points in the initial survey, but, especially in the body of the text, focuses on the deficiencies which the Australian church shares with other churches infected by modernity. Its rhetoric is large—the weaknesses of the Australian churches are described in the theological categories of faith, anthropology, pneumatology, Christology and ecclesiology. They are also attributed to large cultural movements: feminism, individualism, secularism, anti-authoritarianism and liberalism.

In the view of the letter, the effect of these tendencies of modernity is to blur proper boundaries—the boundaries between good and evil, between ordained and non-ordained, Rome and local churches, men and women, religious and lay associates, prescribed and maverick forms of celebration, processes appropriate to the church and to civil society. This blurring of boundaries is said to weaken a proper discipline and respect for teaching authority, especially that of the Roman church.

The remedy, flowing naturally from the analysis, is to insist on proper hierarchies in doctrine, in moral behaviour, in relations between priest and people and men and women, in the practice of the sacraments. The keynote of the document is fidelity to the magisterium. The bishop is to ensure that due order is observed and to remedy all abuses. This, however, is to be done 'not by blunt use of authority, but through dialogue and persuasion'.

It would be a mistake to dismiss the letter unreflectively. For the analysis and remedy proposed in the letter are interesting and deserve reflection. But, like President Clinton's address, it invites the question whether the large rhetoric of analysis and solution corresponds to the experience of Australian Catholics.

Certainly, evidence can be found to show that the social and intellectual influences named in the letter are significant. But to my mind the letter misses a more seminal crisis in contemporary Australian Catholic life. This is the temptation to discouragement, provoked by strains in Australian society. Discouragement arises when we perceive that all is not well within our society, but feel powerless in the face of the forces which demoralise us. In Australian society, the evil consequences of unemployment, substance abuse, family breakdown, and gross inequalities of wealth are evident. But governments are unable to address these problems, and even exacerbate them. Government itself becomes increasingly impersonal, treats critics as its enemies, and identifies communication with public relations. There is a breakdown of trust, and boundaries are hardened between citizens and non-citizens, the virtuous and the jailworthy.

In the face of the difficulties of society and the dysfunctional hierarchies of government, discouragement leads us to withdraw from the public world and from communities into a private world. Intellectually, this withdrawal can be expressed in post-modernist strategies, and spiritually by preoccupation with personal growth. These, however, are symptoms of malaise and not its causes.

It would be surprising if the church were protected from discouragement. Many Catholics often express the same alienation from hierarchies and boundaries in the church as in other organisations. Their alienation is increased by large rhetoric and by actions and processes that appear authoritarian. They readily suspect that

these display mistrust. While judgments may be unfair, failure to recognise the face and the love of Christ in the church of their experience leads people easily to withdraw from it.

If this reading of Australian Catholic experience is correct, the analysis and remedies presented in the document fail to address the process of discouragement. They may confirm fears that the church resembles the broader society in being helpless before the discontents of modernity, and that its leaders resort to the same gestures of mistrust. It is hard to see how insistence on boundaries and hierarchies will, in the fine phrase of the letter, 'make the face of God visible to the people of today'.

For discouragement, the best remedy is encouragement. Gestures of encouragement, like that of Jesus in the story of the sinful woman at Simon's house, do not destroy difference, but cross boundaries and relativise hierarchies in asserting a common humanity. At a personal level, the pastoral practice of the Australian church, at its best, has been rich in such gestures. When they have been embodied in the public life of the church, as in the enquiry into the status of women in the church, they have been warmly welcomed. In the face of discouragement, gestures of inclusion and trust are precious.

The reflections out of which I have put questions to the Bishops' letter are those of only one person. They need to be complemented by other viewpoints. But the example of Iraq indicates how it is important that the analysis take into account the experience of the people. ■

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

THEOLOGY: THE ENVIRONMENT

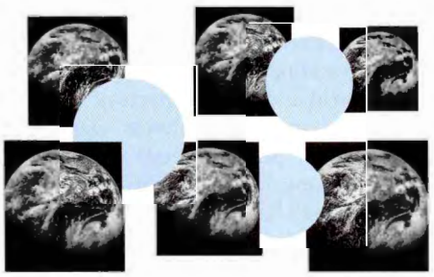
Down to earth

How does theology intersect with environmental concerns?
***Paul Collins** found some answers at February's Earth Charter meeting in Canberra.*

OCCASIONALLY, you become involved in something you think might really have some impact on the world. Over the last months I have been working with a local committee to develop an 'Earth Charter' along similar lines to the UN Charter on Human Rights. Similar processes are under way in other countries. The charter is meant to be 'a statement of fundamental ethical principles and practical guidelines that are widely shared by all people'. Not an easy task!

One of the great disappointments of the environmental movement was the Earth Summit at Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The problem was that governments, including the US Bush administration and the Keating Government simply did not take either the Summit or the environment seriously. The Earth Charter process is an attempt to recover from Rio.

The idea of a Charter goes back to the Stockholm environment conference of 1972, but it gained new currency in 1987. At that time the World Commission on Environment and Development (called the Brundtland Commission after Gro Harlem Brundtland, former Prime Minister of Norway) argued that sustainable development was possible without compromising the integrity of the natural world as developing countries struggled to support their ever-increasing populations.



Brundtland held that 'only growth can eliminate poverty and create the capacity to solve environmental problems. But growth cannot be based on the over-exploitation of developing countries.' The Charter was seen as a way of consolidating and extending 'relevant legal principles to guide state behaviour in the transition to sustainable development'.

After Rio, the idea for an Earth Charter was picked up in 1995 by NGOs and the Dutch Government. By March 1997, an initial draft had been circulated, with the eventual aim to gain endorsement of the Charter by the United Nations. The February meeting in Canberra was the first move by the Australian committee to initiate a year-long consultation process here.

Personally I am interested in the role theology might play in this process. For charters are about ethics and ethics are about beliefs. Judeo-Christianity often gets blamed for destructive Western attitudes toward the environment. Certainly, our faith-tradition is partly responsible for a constellation of unspoken assumptions about myopic anthropocentrism, and exploitative attitudes toward the natural world are often based on dualistic and partially understood Judeo-Christian values.

Critical of the traditional Western approach, a number of philosophers have argued that we need to develop a new ethical attitude. Roderick Nash's *The Rights of Nature* (Sydney, 1990) outlines the development of this movement in North America, and Australian thinkers like John Passmore have spoken of Western attitudes which 'are infected with [an] arrogance ... which has continued into the post-Christian world' (*Man's Responsibility for Nature*, London, 1974, p5). Interestingly, he also makes the observation that elements of this new ethic are 'already inherent, if only as a minor theme, in Western thought'. However, I think that the pragmatic utilitarianism which still underpins much of this discussion is insufficient as a foundation.

Western culture is probably the oddest culture ever. Most other peoples have seen the world as somehow sacred. For indigenous people, the landscape and the beings within it are endowed with meaning and personhood, and specific places have a sacred or numinous quality. However, while

acknowledging this, I am not suggesting that this is the way that we should go. Our culture is different and we need to recover and develop, as Passmore suggests, the best elements of our own tradition.

So I am proposing that we move the discussion onto a different plane. I prefer to talk about the symbolic, iconographic, sacramental significance of the natural world and of all the living parts of it.

The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins says that we have the capacity to intuit the unique, sacramental individuality of every single being; everything in nature radiates meaning to the sympathetic observer. He calls this intuition 'inscape'.

Hopkins also invented another word: 'instress'. This is the intuition of the connective, creative energy which binds groups of beings together. This can be applied to the life-significance and symbolic value of the communities of living things that go to make up a rainforest, lake, reef, or bioregion. This is the way ecologists speak about nature, and theology has much to learn from them.

WHAT DO I MEAN when I talk about the symbolic value or the sacramental significance of nature? I am saying that the natural world and specific parts of it have a life value that far transcends economic, social or even human needs. For within nature, and especially in beautiful and wild parts of it which have not been manipulated and modified by us, there is a deeper, numinous quality to be found, a vector toward the transcendent. The sum total of the natural parts do not explain the mystery and sense of timelessness inherent in the whole which surrounds us.

For the perceptive person, there is a note of simultaneous presence and transcendence that draws us both inward and outward at the same time; inward to the profound existential emptiness that exists in our core, but which we rarely confront. Outward, to a transcending presence that both cradles and confronts us.

After his encounter with God in a dream at Bethel, Jacob says (in the Latin Vulgate translation): 'Terribilis est locus iste' ('How awesome is this place', Genesis 28:17). The word 'terribilis' here conveys the sense of being in a place that we do not control, in a state of acute vulnerability and radical openness. It is the experience of a transcendent presence that is non-personal and undifferentiated, but is also real and transforming.

It is parallel to the experience of the mystics. It is described by Joseph Marechal in his *Studies in the Psychology of the Mystics* (London, 1927) as a form of contemplation that 'is neither a sense-perception nor an imaginate projection nor discursive knowledge, but ... an intellectual intuition, one of those intuitions whose exact type we do not in our ordinary experience possess' (p121).

This experience is further explained by Aidan Kavanagh, who describes the Catholic notion of sacraments as 'unsettling encounters between living presences, divine and human, in the here and now' (*On Liturgical Theology*, New York, 1984, p82). Those in direct contact with nature and wilderness, many of them post-Christian, often report experiences like this.

In modern technological society it is difficult to integrate these experiences, because the dominant mental horizon of our so-called 'rational' culture ignores any notion of the iconographic significance of nature. We see the world as a neutral, secular reality that is valued solely in terms of its economic potential or commercial realisation. Literally, we cannot see the trees for the woodchips.

So what are the consequences of this for the Earth Charter?

First, it lays a foundation for a Charter that is acceptable to a broad cross-section of people from most cultures and regions: most mainstream Christians, indigenous people, those from the great religious traditions and those broadly interested in spirituality.

Second, it moves the discussion beyond the old shibboleths to a more contemporary cultural context. Talk about the 'sacred' makes sense to many today.

Third, if nature is a symbol of transcendence, it is clear what our first principle must be: the preservation of the integrity of the natural world is our prime task, no matter what the cost.

Fourth, this approach helps us recover a perspective and context for ourselves. Our lives belong within the biological matrix of the natural world. We have no meaning or purpose separate from it. It is our only home and ought to be treated as such.

Finally, the Judeo-Christian tradition has always held that nature in all its complexity and beauty is God's creation and it mirrors God's splendour. To destroy it, for whatever purpose, is to destroy our most precious image of God.

In fact, I think it could be argued that it is our primary sacrament. ■

Paul Collins MSC is the author of *God's Earth*.

EXPEDITION

ANDREW DODD

Something rich and strange

Glacier near Shingle Cove, Coronation Island, South Orkneys.
All photographs by Darren Jew.

'I FEEL LIKE A TRESPASSER,' said Moya as we entered the ice for the first time. We were crossing 60 degrees south, the legal boundary of the Antarctic, and right on cue *Professor Molchanov* was piercing the pack.

We were standing on the bridge, high above the water, admiring the contrasting forms of ice. Incandescent blue lumps of glacier were bobbing about with remnants of tabular bergs. It was all glued together with loose, sticky brash. It looked like a junkyard for unwanted ice. Somehow it had merged to form an imposing barrier, stretched across the ocean for miles on end.

'I remember thinking with horror about how tourists could go to Antarctica,' said Moya. 'Never in my dreams did I imagine I'd be here myself.'

All around us was action. The Russian captain was standing behind the wheel, charting our passage through the floe. The radios and control panels hummed and whirred. Passengers oohed and aahed as we passed crab-eater seals lolling about on the ice. Cameras snapped as we sent penguins shuffling into the sea.

In all the excitement of finally *making it to the Antarctic*, I didn't feel like an intruder, but I think I knew what Moya meant. We were parting the ice—quietly, gently, but nevertheless breaking up the natural order of things. Anyone with the slightest interest can't help absorb the stories about the impact of humans in Antarctica.

In the Antarctic, nothing decomposes, people have to carry out their own bodily wastes, there's still husky shit in the snow from Mawson's trip, there's the ozone hole, the rising sea level, the long lines, the driftnets, the Patagonian Toothfish, all that junk around the bases, the oil spills and those Japanese whalers. And now there's tourism too.

'I just hope they don't let it get out of hand,' said Moya.

The *Molchanov* is a converted research ship from Murmansk. Each season she goes south with her crew of iron-stomached Russians. From Ushuaia, in Argentinean Tierra del Fuego, she travels back and forth to the Antarctic Peninsula. Each time with 50 or so passengers, each on the trip of their lives.

Moya was travelling with her husband, a retired Gurkha colonel. They run a horse stud near Perth and had come south to celebrate John's recovery after a serious car crash. Her moment of doubt was fleeting, but it set me thinking: why do we resent others' doing what we so enjoy ourselves? Why do we come to Antarctica as tourists

but worry about others doing the same?

I left the bridge and went astern. I wanted to see the effect of our entry into this otherworldly place. There was a ripple across the ice like the last gasps of a Mexican wave. In the ship's wake, the pack was closing in as quickly as we'd prised it open. Two hundred metres behind us it was welded shut. Perhaps this place is a little more resilient and forgiving than many of us give it credit for.

Sitting on the deck was expedition leader, Greg Mortimer—a veteran mountaineer who seems to get a real buzz from taking people south. As the co-founder of Aurora Expeditions, he's heard all the arguments and self-doubts before. I asked whether he felt like a trespasser. 'No,' he said, 'there are much greater forces at work than our puny efforts.'

ACCORDING TO THE New York-based International Association of Antarctic Tour Operators (IAATO), 10,373 tourists were scheduled to visit the Antarctic this season. There were a total of 16 ships, making between one and 16 trips each—a total of 105 separate voyages. The overwhelming majority travelled to the Antarctic Peninsula.

IAATO is in charge of self-regulation in the industry, but there are also plenty of rules imposed on tourist operators. They are subjected both to the regulations of the Antarctic Treaty System and to their respective national laws. Aurora Expeditions has to submit an Environmental Assessment to the Australian Antarctic Division, even though the Peninsula is well outside the territory claimed by Australia.

Before the first landing, the passengers are given a briefing. The expedition naturalist, Dr Nick Gales, gets everyone together in the dining room and goes through the rules. Clean your boots when leaving and boarding the ship. No smoking, eating or littering ashore. Don't venture within 5 metres of wildlife, don't remove samples, don't disturb rocks or moss beds. Avoid encircling animals, always leave animals access to the sea. Stay upwind if possible. Move slowly.

In other words, the effect of our single visit may not appear to be great, but, cumulatively, tourism could have a major impact. One person disturbing a penguin is merely annoying, but if this happens repeatedly over the course of a season, then it becomes serious.

With the spectre of the entire Antarctic Treaty System looming large, you could decide to stay locked in your cabin rather than risk dislodging a snowflake ashore. But you don't. You go out. It's irresistible. You wander among elephant seals and albatrosses and rookeries. There were times when we were rolling in the snow, tossing snow balls at each other, tobogganing down the slopes. The Antarctic might be a sanctuary for peace and science, but there are no rules which say you can't have fun.

Greg has enormous faith in the power of the place. He believes that if people carry the responsibility themselves they will gain more from the experience. And for the most part this approach works, but occasionally rules are broken and individuals do things they shouldn't.

One night, we were heading down the South Georgian coast in a swirling blizzard. A flock of about 100 diving petrels descended on the *Molchanov* and started laying eggs in various nooks and crannies. When the word went around, several bird-watchers were seen scurrying through the bar, pulling on beanies and gloves as they ventured out to commune with the birds.

The next day there was a rumour that a Swiss bird-watcher called Raymond had taken a liking to one of the petrels and had found it a berth in a box in his cabin. Raymond was a retired librarian who had a habit of reading everything from the index pages backwards. He was on a lifelong mission to see a representative of every bird family on earth.

The Danish birders were up in arms, lobbying Nick Gales to retrieve the stowaway petrel. Nick explained that the heat in the cabin was enough to kill the bird. Raymond claimed the petrel would be snatched by skuas if released immediately. They compromised and released it at dusk. Then Nick had to track down the other birders who'd souvenired petrel eggs. The eggs would have perished anyway, but he demanded they be thrown overboard.

I WAS TRAVELLING in the wake of Helen Garner, who'd ventured this way a year earlier. Her article in the *Good Weekend* (30 May 1998) was an account of a similar trip with Aurora Expeditions. Initially I found it hard to read, probably because I'd been beaten to the story by a piece so forceful in its scope and impact. But I was also riled that anyone could go to the Antarctic and be so seemingly ratty about the place. Fancy going to the Antarctic and whingeing about the smell of penguins. Surely the opportunity to see it up close would temper anyone?

Ice sculptures, near Cuverville Island.

And what was all that stuff about not taking a camera? Helen had got huffy at the briefing before she left Australia because everyone was talking about all the photos they'd be taking. So she decided to leave her camera at home. This reaction became the leitmotif of the piece. She believed that people 'raised a camera between themselves and everything they encounter—as if direct

experience were unbearable and they had to shield themselves from it'.

I guessed her 'heroic lenslessness' had more to do with a writer's desire to concentrate on the words and not to mix the medium. The photos were, as she acknowledged, a tool to stop the slip of memory. She chose to record the experience in writing, but looked unfavourably on those who opted for pictures. Interestingly, her article was accompanied by professional photos anyway.

Still, Garner's essay came as close as anything I've read on the Antarctic to describing the indescribable. She was trying to represent the feeling of seeing icebergs. She conceded the frustration of 'plumbing the word-well' and coming up empty. She turned to a string of adjectives which somehow, together, went close to the truth. Words drawn from crafts such as masonry and dressmaking. *Bevelled. Pocked. Frilled. Dimpled.* And so on. It was clever and refreshing, particularly after reading a series of histories in which Edwardian explorers cavalier their way through the landscape, rarely stopping to describe it, let alone with any hint of emotional attachment.

Wandering Albatross cleared for landing, Albatross Island.

And now we were travelling through the same terrain. We might even have seen the same icebergs, a year older, a little more *chiselled*, a bit more *chamfered*. In the Gerlache Strait we were cruising around, just five of us in a Zodiac dinghy, taking it in. Forms so bulky and intricate, so delicate and beautiful. The way they just sat there, barely balanced. The slightest encouragement and 50 tons of ice could death-roll.

Describing the scenery was every bit as hard as everyone warned. Our diaries were filling fast with purple prose as we grappled with killer whales and fur seals and twilight and cornices and fjords and volcanic calderas and windswept rookeries. I'd noticed how often I was using the word *extraordinary*. Others were wedded to *amazing* or *awesome* or *magic*. In desperation, some of us resorted to expletives to bring oomph back to hackneyed phrases. In the face of another work of nature, 'absolutely bloody amazing' was a slight improvement. Before long we were doing without the superlatives altogether. Another nunatak of stupendous proportions with preposterous turrets peering through a luminous range of silhouettes just became, 'Oh fuck will you look at that.'

Others were still valiantly trying to think of *the* metaphor which could put a handle on what we were experiencing. When we first saw the icebergs, one woman described them as friendly battleships waiting to meet us. I thought they were arranged like abandoned cars in a farmer's paddock. Different makes and models, different eras, each had a story.

Julie, a park ranger from Philip Island in Victoria, had a catch-all phrase. In the face of the indescribable, she just muttered 'that's sick'. There were times when we reached the silly point of passing off scenery with mock disdain. Offered another wondrous view, I heard myself joking, 'Oh yeah, I guess it's OK. It'll do I suppose.'

We couldn't absorb it all. Cameras were crucial. They provided the evidence that something as beautiful as this could exist after all. The pictures proved our memories weren't embellishing. Nobody's notebook is that good.

Photo or no photo, there was one iceberg I will never forget. We were in Charlotte Bay on the Antarctic Peninsula. The water was perfectly still. The Assistant Expedition Leader, Rosy Whelan, was steering the Zodiac towards a solitary berg in the middle of the bay. 'Don't bother taking photos yet,' she said, 'there's something really special round the corner.'

We motored on to a shelf, cut like a cove, in the iceberg. We were actually on top and inside it at the same time, on a lip of aquamarine, or is it turquoise, or is it gun metal, blue. It was almost the colour of a public swimming pool, but much brighter, more radiant, more inviting. The water was sparkling and, despite its being little more than freezing, I had to fight an urge to dive in.

What is that colour of glacial ice? On board, the question was becoming a consuming pastime. None of us could nail it, but Rhonda from Adelaide called it 'menopausal'. She explained how a friend lived near a park where weddings were often held. She said the bride's and groom's mothers almost always wore this same blue.

ONE MORNING I was on the bridge when the radio burst into life. It was Stefan, the Expedition Leader of another ship, the *Clipper Adventurer*. Pleasant greetings were exchanged between the leaders.

Stefan sounded Dutch. He explained that foul weather had delayed him in the Falklands and he'd had to change his itinerary. He started listing all the sites he wanted to see in the next couple of days: Paradise Bay, Cuverville Island, Errera Channel, Deception Island, Lemaire Channel, Peterman Island. Greg was taking notes, checking the dates when the *Clipper* would appear. When Stefan signed off, Greg's quiet curse gave it all away. This friendly chat had been a ritual carve-up of territory. So was this the IAATO rules in action? They state that landing priority is given to the first vessel that makes its intentions known. If so, the *Clipper Adventurer* had effectively told the *Molchanov* to butt out.

The next day, the pleasantries were thrown away when we were exploring the inlets around magnificent Cuverville Island. I was sitting on a rock, taking in the scenery, listening to the waves lapping against the ice. A gentoo penguin surfaced two metres away, and, totally unaffected by the presence of humans, gracefully preened itself before the long walk up to the rookery. The sun was warm on my face and I was drifting asleep. I started hearing a rhythmic booming sound, and, thinking it was the penguins cooing in the distance, took no notice, until the noise became too loud to ignore.

I opened my eyes and smack bang in front, between two icebergs, was a giant cruise ship. The *Clipper Adventurer* was chugging across the bay. At precisely that moment the penguin squirted shit on the rock and waddled off as a gust of cold wind blew across the beach. The *Clipper* anchored behind the headland and passengers began assembling on deck ready to board the dinghies.

Clearly someone had not stuck to the schedule. Greg was seething. For a guy who would rather climb Mount Everest than raise his voice in anger, this was pushing all the wrong buttons. He jumped in a Zodiac and sped back to the *Molchanov*, where he used the radio to give Stefan on the *Clipper* a piece of his mind.

Later, he was quietly sitting in the snow, washed out by what he described as a 'potent experience'. It was the first time he'd seen 'such a confluence of ships' and he had little doubt where the blame lay. 'Unfortunately, this time we've got a breakdown of the system. I know that it is a very good system and I have argued very strongly to support it for a decade, but the *Clipper*—that was just the act of a moron.'

The previous day, we'd been prevented from reaching Penguin Island because the *Clipper* had 'got in our face'. It wasn't the inconvenience of having to change schedules that rankled. It was the way it compromised the whole feeling of wilderness and isolation. As Greg said, 'At the moment there are three ships in the Antarctic Peninsula, which account for about 200 people, in an area 2500 kilometres long. So we are very isolated, but when two ships come together it doesn't seem like that.'

But feelings about other ships go beyond personal inconvenience. Greg fears that the industry could be invaded by entrepreneurs with big money. 'There aren't any at the moment,' he said, 'it's just my reading of the market.' This is the fear that bubbles up again and again—it is not our impact but others'. It is not one visit to a sensitive place but several. It is not this operation, but the ones without our regard for the environment.

Then, almost as quickly, he dismissed the threat. 'There are plenty of natural barriers to tourism in the Antarctic—a wild sea, the need for expertise to run trips and the huge costs.'

INTERCURRENCE ISLAND on the Peninsula is a rarely visited place. As the name suggests, it's subject to some wild seas. The island is cleft in two with a chasm reaching from one beach to the other. Between the massive walls of rocks we could see the waves breaking on the other side of the island. I think Greg wanted something more than a run-of-the-mill landing to cap off the trip, so over the speaker he announced we'd be motoring around the heads in Zodiacs, landing on the opposite beach and then walking back through the gap where we'd be picked up again.

Andrew Dodd and King Penguin, South Georgia.

When we went on deck, one young woman was on the brink of tears. This would be the last time ashore. At the start of the trip I remembered her saying that she'd wanted to come to the Antarctic for so long that she'd forgotten the initial reason why. At least four years of dreaming and saving and willing herself to make it, and the reality was fast slipping into the realm of memory. Feeling squeamish at her emotion, I suggested that the best cure was to make the last experience so horrible that we'd never want to come back.

What followed wasn't horrible, but it was certainly memorable. As we rounded the heads we were suddenly heaving in three-metre waves. The island's sheer rock walls offered no sanctuary; the prospect of being swamped or capsized was real enough.

In one inflatable was Hans, a middle-aged Danish birder. He had championed the cause of the captive petrel a few days earlier and made a name for himself by counting penguins at each of the rookeries we'd visited. At Salisbury Plain on South Georgia, for example, he'd counted 86,050 king penguins (plus 3600 chicks!).

As the Zodiacs heaved about in the swell and it became obvious we couldn't land, Hans decided to voice what most of us still had in check. 'You can't take us here ... You have a duty to protect us ... You must take us back now.' Hans claimed he was speaking for the two plump Swiss women sitting huddled over on the gunnels. They were looking disconsolate as the boat lurched and rolled.

We turned and retreated—this wasn't to be another of the wonderful landings we'd come to expect. As we limped back to the *Molchanov*, it dawned on many of us that we'd probably never set foot on the Antarctic again.

On one level it had been a stuff-up—a surge of panic, a near mutiny on one boat, a few of us chucking up. Greg came into our cabin and apologised for making us uncomfortable. He described the outbreak of fear as 'unfortunate'. A nice gesture I thought and equally nice wording. It wasn't quite condemnation of those who couldn't hack it, but nor was it acceptance of blame. I tried to say that I didn't care, but I did mutter something about being worried that people were scared.

The truth is it was good for us to be shaken up. More than that, I loved the failure. It was proof that it's still possible to do this tourism thing in the raw. ■

Andrew Dodd is a freelance journalist. He travelled to Antarctica courtesy of Aurora Expeditions and Aerolineas Argentineas. For information about Aurora Expeditions call 1800 637 688.

What's in a name?

If we can't have direct election of an Australian president, then the next best thing might be full public participation in the nominating process, argues ***John Uhr****.*

IN POLITICS, process is as important as substance. So, as we prepare for the 1999 referendum on the republic, it is time to try to win the federal parliament over to greater public input to the change process.

The people will vote only after parliament has examined and passed the Government's as yet unseen referendum proposal. Once the Government declares its hand, parliament will establish a special committee to work through the detail of the referendum proposal. Parliamentary debate will inevitably cover many of the topics aired at the 1998 People's Convention in Canberra: the appointment, powers and dismissal provision for the new office of president.

Clearly then, the emerging debate over the appropriate form of public participation in the proposed nomination process (should the referendum win the day in November) is as important as the debate over the powers or the appointment arrangements. But anxious republicans have begun to define a preferred path of public nomination even before the parliamentary debate has begun on the merits of the Government's unseen interpretation of the Convention's minimalist model. Of course, in looking to the details of presidential nomination ahead of the actual powers of the president, there is a risk of putting the cart before the horse.

The source of this republican anxiety seems to be the fear of the growing popularity of various direct election options. By the end of the Constitutional Convention, republican opponents of popular election had convinced themselves that the secret of referendum success rested with a nomination process that had credible community participation. Steve Vizard's richly entertaining *Two Weeks in Lilliput* traces this curious development from an insider's perspective on the republican wrangle, as his team tries to save the indirect republic from direct democracy. Even Vizard was sceptical, but Kim Beazley has put the best face on it with his Australia Day defence of a nominating process that 'harnesses some of the strengths of the popular election argument, while avoiding the pitfalls of dual mandates'.

My fear is that none of the nominating models that are beginning to circulate are very open or participative. Intended to disguise the distance between the virtues of public nomination and the vices of popular election, most of the minimalist models of public involvement simply highlight the distance between public and president. Further, I suspect that minimalist models of participation will maximise public opposition to the changes on offer. The best of the nominating proposals is that identified by Beazley: the model proposed by former Chief Justice Sir Anthony Mason and colleagues, published in *The Australian* of 16 December 1998, which has since attracted widespread media attention. If this sophisticated model, with its carefully balanced committee of the great and the good, cannot win over republican sceptics, then I predict that parliament will have to go back to the drawing board and try to save the democratic credentials of the proposed office of president.

THE GOVERNMENT will probably introduce into parliament a referendum package which includes two bills. The first will contain the set of questions about constitutional alteration to be put to the people in November. The second bill will establish a nominating procedure that can be put into action later, should the proposal for the so-called 'bipartisan parliamentary appointment model' be approved. Something like the Mason model of the nomination process is likely to be included in that second bill, organised around a committee comprising parliamentary representatives of all political parties, together with invited community representatives across a broad spectrum of national and state interests.

Under this model, the nominating committee would meet (not necessarily in Canberra but with no commitment to meeting the people by travelling around the nation) and invite written nominations according to prescribed procedures. To my mind, this approach is far from voter-friendly. It confuses public participation with public input, and reduces community participation to minimalist proportions by requiring would-be participants to fax up rather than front up. Genuine public participation means that those who make decisions face the public and listen to their case. By contrast, public input means that the decision-makers receive public submissions, and for my money 'submissive' fails to capture the

Anti-republican commentators will never be satisfied with any form of republican change. More relevant is the discovery ... that parliamentary appointment not only lacks public support but also public legitimacy. One lesson that I see is that republicans have to loosen the preoccupation with safeguards against popular election and sharpen the focus on public legitimacy.

republican ethic. Residents of Canberra, or whatever city gets to host the non-travelling nominators, might be able to front up to hand over their prescribed nomination form, but the rest of us will have to live with this submissive model of what I call fax republica.

IT IS WORTH PONDERING the lessons emerging from the fact that this carefully crafted model has been so roundly chided as just another beastly bureaucracy. Certainly, anti-republican commentators will never be satisfied with any form of republican change. More relevant is the discovery, by commentators like Hugh Mackay, that parliamentary appointment not only lacks public support but also public legitimacy. One lesson that I see is that republicans have to loosen the preoccupation with safeguards against popular election and sharpen the focus on public legitimacy.

It is important that the national parliament recognise the right of the Australian people to participate effectively in any presidential selection process.

Putting to one side the merits of direct election, it is likely that the feasibility of the minimalist model will come down to public support for the nomination process, and that support is not there yet. The Mason model nicely illustrates one cause of the current state of republican anxiety: fixated as it is on various rules and regulations about the formalities of nomination, the model never pretends to say much about the substance of community consultation. This focus on form spells trouble for the republican cause. Advocates of popular election within the republican camp will have little trouble in pinpointing this 'participative deficit', as it might be called. And in the anti-republican camp, where many participants at the very least pretend to be in favour of democratic participation, we can expect opposition to any nominating procedure that minimises community input.

The Communique from the 1998 Constitutional Convention did not advocate popular election in any form, either for the nominating committee or for the final determination of the nominated candidates. I share the wish of many Australians that some form of popular election or ratification had been secured, either through direct election of the president or of nominating committees. But, presuming that popular election in either form is off the immediate agenda, I think it is all the more important that parliament do everything it can to bolster popular participation in any nominating process.

My suggestion is that the weight of sole responsibility be taken off the shoulders of the one Canberra-based committee proposed in the Mason model. Australia surrounds Canberra; it is the centre of national government in a federal political system. In the best spirit of Australian federalism, we should work to transform the Canberra-based committee into a link between the people organised by state and territory and their national parliament, which alone will have the power to confirm, and thereby authorise, a nominated candidate for the office of president.

It is important that the national parliament recognise the right of the Australian people to participate effectively in any presidential selection process. Nothing would be more fitting than for the national parliament to establish a process giving the people the right of popular initiative through a 'bottom up' process of popular nomination organised through state and territory parliaments, rather than solely a 'top down' invitation to participate in a centralised nomination procedure.

But first—back to the 1998 Convention. The final Communique identified 'the objective of the nomination process' as 'to ensure that the Australian people are consulted as thoroughly as possible'.

I do not think that any one national committee can hope to do justice to that requirement. Note that the Communique identified this process of popular consultation as involving 'the whole community' and that it particularly targeted levels of representation below that of the Commonwealth: state and territory parliaments as well as local governments. This important recognition of the federal character of the Australian political system suggests that the task of community consultation should be shared among the state and territory political communities in order to enhance the possibilities of participation by the two other classes highlighted in the Communique. These are 'community organisations' and 'individual members of the public', both of which can expect to have greater ease of access to the nominating process through participation at state and territory level.

THE COMMUNIQUE floated a consultative mechanism based on parliamentary establishment of a committee to consider possible nominations. My advice to parliament (not that they have yet asked for any) is that this Canberra-based committee be retained as the link between the openly participative state and territory Consultative Committees (as one might call them) established by the eight state and territory parliaments, and the prime minister, who is responsible for selecting a nominee from the shortlist provided by the national Nominating Committee (as one might call it).

The 1998 Communique envisaged the Canberra-based committee as performing two tasks: detailed consideration of public nominations and reporting to the prime minister 'a shortlist of candidates'. This sensibly leaves open the possibility that a committee established by the national parliament might serve as a link between the formal parliamentary presentation of the nominee by prime minister and leader of the opposition (whose consent is required for the nomination made by the prime minister to parliament) and a federation of state and territory advisory bodies with

responsibility for state and territory rounds of community consultation.

The model I prefer would have the federal parliament establish a committee with representation across all recognised parliamentary parties and also including the sort of 'community membership' required by the Communique: a micro version of the balance of gender, ethnicity, region, age largely established in the 1998 Convention. The precise numbers can be subject to further discussion, but a workable size of 15–20 might be feasible.

I see the Nominating Committee as having three tasks. First, to work through the nominations that are provided to them from the state and territory consultative committees. Second, to use its own initiative and take note of any additional candidates deemed by the Nominating Committee as worthy of close consideration. And third, to provide the prime minister with a shortlist of five or so nominees, balanced according to the criteria of 'community diversity' identified in the Communique. All this is consistent with the Communique. All I am explicitly adding is greater public participation.

Of course, it is entirely likely that the Nominating Committee would, of its own initiative, come up with a shortlist that included many if not all of the state and territory shortlisted candidates. But the Nominating Committee could never generate the same degree of popular participation and public legitimacy as that generated by the combined strength of the eight state and territory Consultative Committees. The distinctive competence of the national committee compared with the state and territory committees is its deliberative capacity to advise the national government of a nationally credible shortlist of (preferably unranked) candidates. To protect its peak advisory responsibilities, the operations of the Nominating Committee would not be put on hold in the event of non-compliance by one or more recalcitrant states or territories: after the due date for forwarding of state or territory nominations, the Nominating Committee would proceed with its business, even in the absence of one or more sets of nominations.

Much of the primary work of community consultation should rest with the Consultative Committees established by the state and territory parliaments. In each case, the state or territory governments should establish and fund a committee representing all parliamentary parties, with the additional membership of invited individuals from the relevant state or territory, representing a similar balance of social interests to that identified in the Communique. These state and territory Consultative Committees would hold extensive community consultations to take note of as wide as possible a range of community views on the general qualities required by holders of the office of president, and on specific persons who the Consultative Committee might approach to sound out their availability for nomination.

Then each of the state and territory Consultative Committees would meet in private session to consider a shortlist of eligible candidates from their respective state or territory, together with any report on any relevant community interest in the general question of desirable or preferred qualities for nominees (for example, 'anyone other than a serving politician'; or 'no sporting champions'). That shortlist and related report would then be forwarded to the chair of the Nominating Committee for consideration by the Nominating Committee in its deliberations.

The Nominating Committee should endeavour to come to an agreed position on the composition of the shortlist. A model of sorts is a jury, where the task is to come to a unanimous position. The shortlist of candidates should be made public shortly after it has been delivered to the prime minister and leader of the opposition. We can leave for later investigation the details of how parliament might best organise its debate and vote on the first nominee for our inaugural president. Other parliamentary systems with presidents, like India and Germany, incorporate a federal dimension to promote greater public participation. Australia can devise its own version of a similar process.

The Communique explicitly recognised that the 'process for community consultation and evaluation of nominations is likely to evolve with experience and is best dealt with by ordinary legislation or parliamentary resolution'. I hope that the Commonwealth parliament will act on this useful advice and proceed by way of a provisional parliamentary Resolution and not attempt to regulate and restrict the flexibility of the national nominating process.

Nothing would be more fitting than for the national parliament to establish a process giving the people the right of popular initiative through a 'bottom up' process of popular nomination organised through state and territory parliaments, rather than solely a 'top down' invitation to participate in a centralised nomination procedure.

At the end of the day, the fate of the referendum might not turn on any of the various nominating procedures. My sketch of one possibility is designed to bring greater openness to the whole process. But public attitudes will and should also focus on the substance of presidential power, and I suspect that no amount of tinkering with participative processes will hide from voters the downside of what *The Australian* on 8 January described as the real strength of the Convention model: 'that it goes tolerably close to mimicking the existing system'.

Steve Vizard knew at the time of the Convention what Hugh Mackay is revealing now: the least important reform in the eyes of the Australian people is one that simply mimics 'the existing system'. ■

John Uhr is Reader in Public Policy at the ANU and author of *Deliberative Democracy in Australia*.

Rationalist ructions

One of Australia's venerable institutions has recently gone through the kind of internal upheaval more usually associated with party political factions. ***Margaret Simons*** *reports on the goings-on in the Rationalist Society.*

THE IDEALS of Rationalism dictate that human beings should govern themselves with the use of reason: that one should argue one's point, and not rely on force to carry the day.

But recent events in the Rationalist Society of Australia, an organisation that has been an important part of Australia's history, suggest that the internal politics of the organisation don't quite square with the ideals. The society's journal, *Australian Rationalist*, which in recent years has become a respected member of the small group of Australia's intellectual journals, has been caught up in the ructions, which for ferocity and bad feeling at least equal and probably surpass those which resulted in the editorship of *Quadrant* passing from Robert Manne to P.P. McGuinness. The difference is that this time the disputes are mostly over money, not politics.

A recent boardroom coup has resulted in the editor, Kenneth Davidson, being dropped as a director, and subsequently resigning as editor, saying in his letter of resignation 'I no longer have confidence in the integrity or competence' of those who control the assets of the organisation.

With him went the President of the Rationalist Society of Australia for the last 12 years, and his de facto partner, Lesley Vick. Vick has been involved with Rationalism for over 30 years, and has been a mainstay of the modern movement, as well as an activist with a number of organisations involved with reproductive health issues.

She was not a victim of the coup, but resigned immediately afterwards saying the 'unjustified removal' of Davidson and two of his supporters 'not only showed contempt towards them, it also showed contempt towards the Rationalist Society'.

Feelings on the other side of the dispute run just as hot. While *Eureka Street* was researching this article, several attempts were made to dissuade us from telling the story—the implication being that it had all been satisfactorily dealt with internally.

At the heart of the dispute is about a million dollars of assets—the legacy of generations of Rationalists—and the way in which it is to be invested and managed.

The Rationalist Society of Australia began in the 1920s and was influential—largely because of the many prominent intellectual figures who passed through the society during the '40s, '50s and '60s. Melbourne-based, it was both a counter and a companion to the largely religious-based feuds on the political left.

More recently, it has been closely associated with civil liberties movements, and has made small contributions to various causes, one being the 'Maintain Your Age' campaign of the '80s, which sought to enshrine editorial independence for Melbourne's broadsheet newspaper in the face of take-over threats. It has also been active in the gun control campaign, and has made submissions to government inquiries on voluntary euthanasia, abortion law reform and vilification legislation.

But the last 30 years have been largely a story of decline, with many of the battles that once put fire in the belly of Rationalists—for religion to get out of politics, for example—either won or no longer so keenly relevant.

Membership, which at its peak had been over 1000, dipped below 300 by 1993. So many of these were elderly that it was recently jokingly suggested that the large print of the journal *Australian Rationalist* was necessary if the members were to read it with ease.

A side benefit of an ageing membership though, is the society's comparative wealth, with money left over the years in donations and bequests. The victors in the coup now control that money, and they have already announced that they will return to generating income by speculative trading on the stock exchange.

According to Davidson and the other coup victims, this sort of trading has in the past eroded the value of the Rationalists' assets. As well, they say, unnecessarily large amounts of money have been spent on the administration of this small organisation, including paying honoraria to board members, and, most controversially, expenses of the office manager, Lois Sweet, in whose house the society's office is located. Sweet is also now, post-coup, a board member of the Rationalist Association of Australia.

Kenneth Davidson was formerly economics editor of *The Age*, and a leading member of the intellectual community that gathered around the Canberra Press Gallery in the '70s and early '80s. More recently his unfashionable critique of economic rationalism has seen him fall from

favour. He is still a senior columnist for *The Age*, but it is probably fair to say that his influence in the world of journalism has declined since the heyday of the paper.

But as editor of *Australian Rationalist*, his success was spectacular. He and Vick persuaded the Rationalists to increase the resources devoted to the journal, and it was turned into a periodical dealing with public affairs, and distributed through newsagents under a deal signed with Gordon and Gotch. Membership of the association, which included a subscription to the journal, lifted to just under 1000, and journal sales peaked at somewhere between two and three thousand, once more giving the Rationalists a small but influential voice in national affairs.

As editor, Davidson leaned heavily on colleagues and friends. John Spooner, the award-winning artist for *The Age*, provided cover art work. Old mate Bruce Petty provided cartoons. Former *Age* journalists like Geoffrey Barker, who wrote on 'Howard's Moral Ambiguity', contributed articles. But Davidson cast his net wide. In recent issues, diplomat Richard Broinowski wrote about the links between trade and human rights, and McKenzie Wark wrote on justice for Aboriginal people. The magazine also provided a forum for less well-known names drawn from the bureaucracy, the ranks of the Rationalist Society itself, and academia.

RESPONSES FROM the older Rationalists to this revival were not universally positive. Some suspected that many of the new subscriber members had no real interest in the ideals of Rationalism to which they had devoted their youth. Some told *Eureka Street* that Davidson himself was not a 'real Rationalist'.

There were grumbles that the *Australian Rationalist* had become a general journal of public affairs, rather than one propagating Rationalism, and that Vick and Davidson together were effectively taking over the society.

None of these grumbles was publicly aired, or at least not until after the coup. The victors claim that the journal had come to dominate Rationalist activities, that other activities, such as meetings and lectures, had been wound down, and that Vick and Davidson acted as a 'two-person caucus' making all the decisions.

Lesley Vick responds that this is merely a cloak for a dispute that is really about the control of money. She and Davidson would have welcomed more help in running Rationalist events, she says. 'In any case, particularly since we are talking about Rationalists here, why didn't they come forward with their concerns and argue their case if there was a problem?'

The new editor of the journal, Ian Robinson, replies: 'I suppose it is chicken and egg. You get two strong people making all the decisions, and perhaps other people don't feel able to combat that, or that their contribution is wanted.'

In any case, given the condition of the membership pre-journal, it is legitimate to wonder what would have become of the Rationalists without the Davidson journal. At a deeper level there are disagreements about what Rationalism stands for in the modern world. Some of the older members tend to see Rationalism as being primarily an anti-religious movement. Mr Tom Tatchell, in his '80s, and one of those who supported the coup, told *Eureka Street*, 'We all have got our own views on what it means, but I think it's a euphemism for being atheistic, for being against religion and superstition.'

Other members take a broader view. Brian Ellis, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at La Trobe University, and one of those removed in the coup after more than 40 years in the movement, has published articles calling Rationalists 'people of the enlightenment', and arguing that Rationalism is more than ever needed because of the anti-science attitude of younger generations, the 'irrationalism' of postmodernism and deconstructionism and the appearance on the world stage of powerful nations such as Iraq, Iran and China, which had never been through an enlightenment.

Ellis has written, 'Rationalism ... is the view that human beings are ... able to discover the truth, and decide what is right. We can free ourselves from prejudice, and we have no need of divine revelation, or royal decree ... This is the sense of rationalism in which the Rationalist Society of Australia is a rationalist society.'

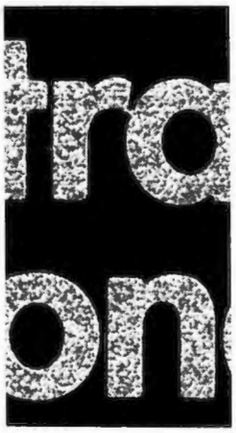
Lesley Vick has also written on the direction of Rationalism, arguing for the society to promote independent thought, 'a way of thinking which enhances our understanding and enhances human progress'.

That is the intellectual framework. Now back to money and power.

Because of its small membership and comparative wealth, the Rationalists long ago adopted a structure to protect the funds from being used by any hostile take-over group. The money is held by a separate limited company, the Rationalist Association of Australia, whose members include directors and past directors of the Rationalist Society of Australia. The Society, meanwhile, is the operational arm of the movement, and publishes the journal, as well as holding social gatherings, lectures and talks.

THE BEGINNINGS of the falling out that has left the Society without its most prominent members was a disagreement over the way in which the million dollars or so of assets were being invested. The Board of the RAA had delegated this task to David McKenzie, a former Labor MP from the Whitlam era, and a man described as a stock market 'enthusiast'.

Vick, who knew him through her work on family planning issues, brought McKenzie into the organisation. In 1989–90 he took over as financial manager, and after three or four years proposed a shift from a conservative to a speculative trading policy, selling investment stock for trading stock. On the surface, this seemed to be successful. Large trading profits were posted.



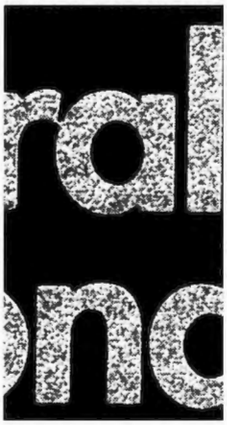
But the character and stability of the society's portfolio had fundamentally changed.

In 1994, the value of the share portfolio held by the RAA peaked at $1.2 million. Nearly half of it was in bank shares. Most of it was conservatively invested. By 1997, the RAA had far smaller holdings, with the largest in an obscure company called GEO2 which has never paid a dividend.

Davidson and Vick were both on the board when this change of policy was agreed to, but Davidson became increasingly concerned that the apparently large trading profits being shown by McKenzie were illusory, and achieved by selling down the value of the portfolio. 'You might say we should have got on to it sooner,' he says. 'The fact is I am not a financial whizz, and

it took me two years to work out what was going on, and another two years to persuade the rest of the Board it was a problem.'

At a meeting in November 1997, Davidson pushed for a change of policy back to conservative 'blue chip' investment. He narrowly won the vote—the first time in a long while that a decision hadn't been unanimous. McKenzie apparently went along with the new policy.



In the meantime, without the 'profits' from the share trading, it was evident the society was living beyond its means, with the main cost being the journal. Davidson, Vick and one of their supporters, long-term member of the society and veteran of many causes, Kate Oldaker, began a close examination of how money could be saved.

Oldaker spent days going through cheque butts in the office of the Society. She found that administration was costing nearly $30,000 a year mainly because, apart from $17,000 in honoraria to McKenzie and Sweet, there were costs associated with maintaining the office in Sweet's house.

THE NEW PRESIDENT of the Society, Peter Dumble, and the new editor of the journal, Ian Robinson, responded to questions put by *Eureka Street* by saying that 'any payments to Lois Sweet were entirely legitimate, as either honoraria or payment of expenses in lieu of rent, and were agreed to by the RAA Board, decisions by the way to which both Lesley Vick and Kenneth Davidson were party.'

Eureka Street quotes this answer in its entirety and understands that the Society had rented central city premises before the move to Sweet's house. Mr Robinson also claimed that some of Oldaker's work was in error, although he did not provide details. They said that further scrutiny had shown that the savings promised by Vick were 'largely illusory'.

They also pointed out that Davidson also received an honorarium as journal editor (Davidson claims he offered to relinquish this as part of the cost-cutting). 'To our knowledge nothing illegal, unconstitutional, fraudulent or self interested was done either by the Board collectively or by any individual member,' they said. Lois Sweet told *Eureka Street* that she didn't wish to add anything to the comments made in the letter.

Following Oldaker's work, Vick got quotes on outsourcing the management of the association. In a report submitted in September 1998, she said that since McKenzie need no longer be involved in active trading, and Sweet's administrative work could be outsourced, the cost of administration could be cut to $13,000 a year. A motion was passed accepting outsourcing in principle. Oldaker and Vick set about seeking more quotes.

But the outsourcing, and the resulting loss of honoraria, never went to a vote. At the AGM of the RAA held in October, McKenzie organised a block of votes, including proxies from two absent, older board members, and Davidson, Ellis and Oldaker were dropped from the board. They were taken by surprise. Davidson and Vick weren't at the meeting, having been detained in Canberra by a family health crisis. They had arranged to take part in the meeting by telephone hook-up, but McKenzie challenged their right to do so soon after the meeting began, and they were disconnected. Ellis also wasn't present. He claims he was not sent a notice of the meeting, although McKenzie insists that he was.

Lending force to McKenzie's argument that they had to go were the audited accounts, which showed the results of the change in trading policy. The association had made a loss of $130,000 on the share portfolio. McKenzie and his supporters presented this as evidence that the Davidson policy was a 'disaster', and that a change was essential for the future of the society.

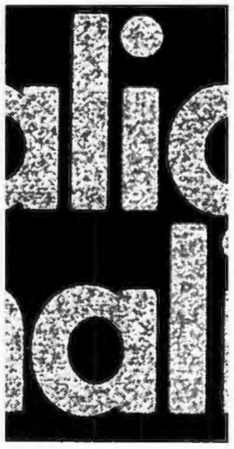
Davidson claims this one-off loss was simply the result of the erosion in the value of the portfolio becoming evident on the books for the first time.

There was no move against Vick at the meeting, and the coup organisers say it was hoped she would stay on, and Davidson would remain as journal editor, but both resigned from all positions with the RAA and RSA, as did Ellis. Meanwhile, the new board voted for a return to David McKenzie's speculative investment policies.

Contacted by *Eureka Street*, McKenzie, Robinson and President of the Society, Peter Dumble, argued that the speculative trading policy had been successful, and there was no need for a change. They claimed that profits averaged $80,000 a year and that, although the value of the portfolio had fluctuated, it had kept pace with inflation. 'If it ain't broke, why fix it?' they asked.

But Davidson responds that, although the portfolio might have kept up with inflation, it did not keep up with the stock market. Between June 1991 and 1997, the value of the RAA portfolio increased by 33 per cent, but over the same period the all ordinaries index of stock market movement increased by 81 per cent. Davidson says that with a passive investment policy aimed at maintaining the value of the portfolio in line with the all ordinaries index, the value of the portfolio in June 1997 would have been $1.7 million, instead of its actual value of $1.2 million. Effectively, he says, McKenzie's trading has cost the RAA money.

But McKenzie strongly defends his active trading policy and his performance. He says Davidson is using figures selectively and 'with intellectual dishonesty' to back up his argument. 'Ken Davidson is a great economic journalist and I agree with most of what he writes, but he knows nothing about the stock market. He has never put his own money on the line.' McKenzie said he sees nothing wrong with an organisation like the RAA engaging in speculative trading. 'It's been a success, and Davidson's policy was a disaster, you can't really argue with the figures,' he said. 'What's a blue chip company anyhow? You look at some of the ones people regard as blue chip, and they haven't done so well.'



McKenzie confirmed that he had invested his own money in the same companies in which he invested RAA money. 'I would have thought that was a point in my favour, that after researching a company I was prepared to put my own money on the line.' He said all his personal trading was conducted through a separate broker from that used by RAA, and that he received no benefit from the RAA buying power.

So far as the coup is concerned, McKenzie said: 'I did what I felt I had to do for the good of the Society, and it didn't give me any particular pleasure, believe me. Lesley and Ken are old friends.'

SO WHAT OF THE JOURNAL? Will Australia lose yet another small magazine? The new editor, Ian Robinson, insists that it

will continue, but agrees that some changes in distribution might be needed for cost reasons. The Society also plans to set up a website, and in the past Robinson has suggested that this could in time complement or even replace the journal.

Robinson is presently a freelance writer and teacher of writing. His background is in education. He worked for 20 years with the Victorian Ministry of Education in curriculum development, policy and administration, with a particular focus on mathematics, and has published extensively in the field. He also has a long involvement in the performing arts, including directing and performing at La Mama and The Pram Factory theatres, and conducting workshops for writers at the National Playwrights' Conference. In a paper on the future of the journal written late last year, Robinson suggested it be printed on cheaper paper, with a smaller typeface, not so many illustrations and changes to layout to save paper and therefore money. Robinson also indicated a return to covering 'traditional' Rationalist issues 'such as creationism, religious fundamentalism, new age beliefs etc.' as well as the socio-economic issues favoured by Davidson. 'It is not a matter of either one or the other but a matter of restoring a balance and giving due weight to all aspects of Rationalist thought,' he said.

Meanwhile, the battle isn't over. Most recently, Davidson's and Vick's supporters are considering challenging the appointment of Dumble as President. This was done by the RSA committee, rather than by election among the members, which Vick believes to have been unconstitutional.

So far, many ordinary members of the Society still don't know what has occurred and why. It is likely that many of them are journal subscribers first, and Rationalists second—if at all. It is hard to predict what their attitude and their loyalties might be.

Meanwhile, the management of money left by generations of Victorian activists and the future of a leading journal of opinion, remain in dispute. ■

Margaret Simons is a freelance journalist.

The Storks of Leon

Extraneous sculptures
perched or lurking
high on the roof
of the Cathedral
of Santa Maria
dropping starkly white
against the deepening blues
of stained glass windows
that hold the weight of God
as indifferently
as the long thin
legs of storks
hold their
houyhnhnmic bodies.

Or like a motto
of deliverance
or permanence
occupying the turrets
of the ancient city walls,
the traffic thick
about the plazas,
choking the *calles*.

Down an alley
of mud and excrement—
the paraphernalia
of a half-lit tableau
sticking to the tread of our boots
like a bad memory—
a stork lifts towards
its towering nest,
drawing us with it.

Near the Church
of Santa Maria del Mercado
storks gather
in the halflight.
They move their beaks
like heavy needles
through the rough fabric
of conversation.
Here we'll find
none of the calm
of those on the road from Avila—
perched like stylites
on row after row
of decapitated trees.

John Kinsella

Integrity: the long walk

Antony Campbell *continues his series on an unconditionally loving God. This month: Fear of God—God of love*

III

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear;
for fear has to do with punishment,
and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love.
(I John 4:18)

I DON'T LOVE THOSE I FEAR. So where does that leave me with God? It is natural to be afraid of overwhelming force—an earthquake, a landslide, a tornado, a raging sea, someone who is a lot bigger and stronger than I am. God's power is overwhelming. If I feel it is out of the question to refuse a demand, it is natural to fear what may be asked. Most people feel that way about God. According to many psychologists, intimacy is what almost everybody wants and what almost everybody fears just about as badly. Understandably: intimacy needs vulnerability. Accepting a loving God inevitably leads to our intimacy with God. Three strikes against the love of God—all of them spelled f-e-a-r. A powerful God, a demanding God, and a loving God; all giving us cause to fear God.

Some people do love and also fear. Such love and fear would, I believe, involve complex factors—past and present processes, rational and non-rational elements, adult and child aspects, the impact of doubt, etc. I do not know. It may be more realistic to say that fear holds us back from loving unreservedly. Fear puts restraints on love. Trust matters. How do we come to trust God?

✦

A powerful God

God's power is overwhelming. Not that we are tossed around by it as we might be by an earthquake, a tornado, or the raging sea. But we're confronted by it whenever we open our eyes or whenever we stop to think.

No matter what we know about our universe, if we accept belief in a creator God, we are claiming God as a being of immense outreach and power. Our solar system, with its one star, is big enough—the sun, our moon, and the planets. A galaxy is vastly bigger, even our own galaxy, the Milky Way. Astronomers say there may be as many as a thousand million stars in the bigger galaxies. I can be wide-eyed with wonder at the experience of thousands upon thousands of individuals all crowded into a single sports ground—but nothing like a million. The reality of some ten million people below as I fly over Los Angeles is staggering; I have not flown over China. Astronomers go further and claim there are more than a hundred thousand million galaxies out there, receding into the distance at incredible speeds. Believers in God hold that all this vast universe rests—metaphorically—in the palm of God's hand. Belief in God is stretched, but belief in nothing may be stretching it even more.

Have too many of us today lost the knack of wonder? The ancients knew wonder well enough:

> When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
> the moon and the stars that you have established;
> what are human beings that you are mindful of them
> mortals that you care for them? (Psalm 8:3–4)

I can get around the wonder intellectually by letting God be God and settling for the limits of my own human mind. I can't get away from the fear quite so easily—a very human fear, but mine. What do I do with it? I can ignore my fear. If I do, it doesn't go away and it does impact on my relationship with God. Very simply: I don't love those I fear. If fear is there, it is going to affect any love in my relationship with God. John said: 'There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear' (1 John 4:18)—but my love of God

Our liturgical language often emphasises the 'God of power and might'. Immense power evokes fear. It can be a healthy fear that is properly awe and respect; or it can be a destructive fear that is afraid of being overwhelmed by superior power. I wonder what 'power and might' evokes for us in our prayer.

Fear of God gets in the way of accepting God's love. Perhaps not at a surface level, but certainly at that deep visceral level where it matters. Until I face my fear of God, the reality of our human fear of God, I can't accept God's unconditional love.

is far from perfect and my acceptance of God's love needs some help.

I don't see any way of banishing this elemental fear. It is my natural reaction as creature in the presence of my Creator. I have to look at it, face it, own it. I think I have to put it in its place. That's where priorities are important. I don't want fear to have a high priority in my faith.

✦

A demanding God

Are we free to say no to God? If we aren't, are we forced back into fear—a fear of the demand that cannot be refused? A relationship is humanly suspect if the freedom to say no isn't there. What happens in our relationship to God? Is that so different?

It is not fashionable among Christian believers to think of saying no to God; but it has to be thought about. The 'rich young man' said no to Jesus. Everybody I have talked with believes that Jesus still loved him as he walked away (cf. Mark 10:21–22). Finding plausible examples of our being free to say no to God goes against the grain; I think they are there. The question is not the theological issue of whether God has a particular will for us. The question arises for those who believe God has a preference in certain cases.

Someone has a choice between two jobs, one secure and solid with the certainty of a financial future and the other risky and uncertain with the challenging possibility of changing a bit of the world. One of these jobs may be felt to carry with it a strong call from God. The possibility has to be there of saying no—and of knowing ourselves loved by God as we walk away. Objectivity and moral wisdom are not the issue. Conscience is. The conscientious belief is that God wants one of the options. Such options may be found in the choices of career, of partner, of schooling for children, of medical procedures, and so on.

✦

A loving God

Accepting the love of God is not impossible; it just isn't easy. Where God's overwhelming power is concerned, if I am certain of God's unconditional love for me, I am not afraid. Those who love me unconditionally will not harm me—so no cause for fear. First, though, I have to accept that unconditional love. When I am unconditionally loved, I ought to be able to say no. Most of us don't feel that way about God. Maybe I should, but first I have to accept God's unconditional love. Deep down it is scary to accept love, to accept my being utterly loved—scary, and quite different from fear of another.

It sounds odd to call love scary. At first blush, it can seem to be ridiculous; on reflection, it can be seen to be right. I'm not sure why love is scary. Is it the fear of having my shallowness revealed? Of being found uninteresting or boring? Of being vulnerable to rejection? Of being hurt? Of dependence? Of loss? Has it something to do with losing myself to the other? What if my beloved might want what I'm unwilling to give?

The love of God is scary. To accept my love for God is scary: to accept God's love, even more so.

✦

Fear of God

Fear of God gets in the way of accepting God's love. Perhaps not at a surface level, but certainly at that deep visceral level where it matters. Until I face my fear of God, the reality of our human fear of God, I can't accept God's unconditional love. It is all very well for me to adopt a pious tone of voice and speak of 'reverential awe before the majesty of infinite power'; what matters is its effect on my relationship with God. My fear may be eased by belief in God's justice or God's love. But the fear is there.

Respect and reverential awe are there too. They are close to fear; they are not the same as fear. They too can get in the way of our accepting God's deep, passionate, and unconditional love for us. Humanly speaking, we are not used to associating deep and passionate love with profound respect and reverential awe. We revere and respect those we love, but that is different. Where God is concerned, our respect and reverence can get in the way of our accepting God's love. Fear gets in the way even more.

God's love for us is a central element of Christian faith and always has been. I believe that is true of Jewish faith too, but I don't know enough to make statements about others' faith. Our faith can be like a pudding. Central elements get mixed into a pudding with a lot of other ingredients. It would be nice if faith were clear and straightforward; but it's not. God's love for us is a central ingredient in the mixture that is our faith; respect and reverence and fear are among the ingredients too—along with many others. The taste of a pudding depends on all the ingredients and the proportions they've been mixed in and the way they've been cooked. Where faith is concerned, we each make our own pudding. It is enough to recognise that fear of God is one of the ingredients of faith and is a force that can push belief in God's love for us into the background. In my experience, fearing God remains a very human activity—and not always a healthy one. It can be healthy, but not always. For me, fear has to move into the far background.

Scripture and liturgy don't necessarily help much to banish fear. 'The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge' (Proverbs 1:7).[1] 'Fear of the LORD' gets an extensive press in the Older Testament. Even when contexts suggest a meaning closer to 'the love of God', the overtones of fear remain. Passages in the gospels can intensify our fear. Remember Peter's 'Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man' (Luke 5:8) or the centurion's 'Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof' (Luke 7:6). Peter again: 'You will never wash my feet' (John 13:8). We might talk about humility, but passages like these can confirm an unhealthy fear by injecting a false sense of unworthiness.

It is all very well for the gospel to say 'Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul'; that's the stuff of martyrs. When it goes on: 'rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell' (Matthew 10:28) then it sounds as if it is positively encouraging fear

of God. It is even stronger in Luke's gospel: 'But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!' (Luke 12:5). Other quotations, of course, point in other directions; but such passages reinforce a fear of God that is instinctive in human nature. Fear plays a larger role in faith than many of us might like to admit.

Our Roman Catholic liturgical language often emphasises the 'God of power and might'. Immense power evokes fear. It can be a healthy fear that is properly awe and respect; or it can be a destructive fear that is afraid of being overwhelmed by superior power. I wonder what 'power and might' evokes for us in our prayer.

Since I've become aware of the havoc that fear plays with faith, I cringe often over emphasis on unrelieved divine power in liturgical language. What if the liturgy gave us more balance; for example, 'almighty and everloving God' in place of 'almighty and everlasting God', or at the sanctus (Holy, holy, holy Lord), 'God of life and love' instead of 'God of power and might'. Wouldn't it be challenging and just as true? Fear of God is all very well in its place. But fear of God can be powerful and out of place and block our accepting God's love for us.

If I need to face my fear before I can accept God's love, the incarnation of Jesus Christ becomes very important for me, emotionally more than doctrinally. Jesus is the human face of God. Jesus sweated, and smiled, and wept. Jesus can take my hand in his, can take me in his embrace (cf. Mark 9:36; 10:16—he took them in his arms). Jesus, the Word made flesh, can bridge that fearful gap between creature and Creator. The incarnation helps me imagine the intimacy with God that was ours when we walked with God in the evening (Genesis 3:8) and that is open to us because we are precious in God's sight, and honoured, and loved (Isaiah 43:4). This is the intimacy that God's unconditional love offers us. To accept it, I have to face my fears and entrust myself to God's love. It is not easy. ■

Antony Campbell SJ is professor of Old Testament at the Jesuit Theological College within the United Faculty of Theology, Melbourne. *Next month: Unconditional love: the vision.*

1. LORD in small capitals here and elsewhere is used, following the RSV and NRSV tradition, to represent YHWH, the Hebrew personal name of Israel's God. As a rule, it is not pronounced by Jews; it is not used in the Newer Testament, written in Greek. It is important for Christians to avoid driving an unnecessary wedge between the Older and Newer Testaments.

EXHIBITION

PETER HARRIS

Sculpture on site

Inge King & Ron Robertson-Swann.
Sydney Festival 1999.

Mercury, *1998, by Ron Robertson-Swann, steel, painted.*

THE CHOICE OF Inge King and Ron Robertson-Swann as the featured artists in the visual arts component of this year's Sydney Festival was as unexpected as it was deserved.

Both are accomplished sculptors who have produced distinguished work over three decades. Both have contributed significantly to the development of sculpture in Australia, not just as creative artists but as teachers and general advocates as well. They have earned their day in the Sydney sun. Or so their supporters would say. Among the avant garde, or what passes for it, they are perhaps seen as having nothing new or vital to add, their work as dated as the aesthetic informing it—definitely passé. So, in a milieu usually controlled by voguish orthodoxy, it was remarkable that King and Robertson-Swann gained a look-in, and miraculous it was *such* a look-in.

Whose taste and judgment prevailed? Who had the clout to sway the Sydney Festival organisers? Was it Francesca Valmorbida, the co-ordinator of the festival's visual arts displays, or Robert Sinclair, who curated the *Sculpture on Site* exhibits? Whoever it was, that person pulled off a real coup. Sydney's lovers of sculpture have had little to admire recently. For too long, in fact, they have been subjected to public sculpture or pseudo-sculpture that is vulgar, trite, gimmicky or superficial.

In the work of King and Robertson-Swann, spectators at last encountered serious, but not necessarily solemn, sculpture. In the works displayed at the Quay, the Opera House, in the grounds of Government House and in the Royal Botanic Gardens, people were able—indeed compelled, if they looked carefully—to see sculpture as sculpture. Even in most of King's sculptures, which are predominantly figurative and often clearly referential, the viewer's attention is drawn to the relationships within them or how they occupy space, rather than what the sculptures might refer to or mean. In Robertson-Swann's sculptures especially, the subject is the object, the work itself.

The sculptures were beautifully sited by curator, Robert Sinclair, who had to overcome various difficulties in selecting a position for each of the 44 works. He had to cope not only with the heterogeneity of the works themselves and the fact that they were not made with these locations in mind, but also with several restrictions imposed by the Royal Botanic Gardens management to safeguard some of the flora. Add to these problems the difficulties of transporting and manoeuvring metal sculptures of such weight and bulk, and Sinclair's achievement are quite marvellous.

In the Gardens, his strategy for the most part was to arrange the sculptures in kindred groups within grassed enclaves. However, occasionally, where the work or the location called for it, he placed a work on its own. King's *Icarus*, *Jabaroo* and *Awakening*, and Robertson-Swann's *Lemnian Bench* and *Reef Break*, stood on their own to telling effect. At the Quay, where he placed King's *Black Sun* in the Customs House Square, and at the Opera House, where Robertson-Swann's *Paradisio* stood in the foyer of the Concert Hall, and his *Mercury* (see above) just outside on the western balcony, Sinclair's task was relatively easy. Much more demanding was placement in the grounds of Government House of sculptures from the Gayle and Geoffrey Cousins collection.

In the Gardens the larger works seemed most at home. Even the open field near Government House could not diminish the impact of the trio of largish works (*Cyclops*, *Pythagoras* and *Elvira Madigan*—all by Robertson-Swann) assembled there. Two

of the largest works by King in this exhibition, *Jabaroo* and *Awakening*, were the most striking of all the sculptures in the Gardens.

The scale of sculpture when it is located in a natural setting is crucial. Most of the sculptures in this year's festival would have been better suited to more defined or intimate spaces: a room, a foyer or a courtyard. That they did not look out of place in the Gardens was a tribute to Robert Sinclair's curatorial acumen. He delivered the best outdoors display of sculpture seen in Sydney for a long time.

Both sculptors are proponents of the 'new sculpture' that developed essentially from Cubist collage and painting. Clearly, the works on display identified King and Robertson-Swann as both modern, if not both Modernist, sculptors, for they create abstractly, though to different degrees, and extend their work into space in a primarily linear way. No close observer of their sculptures, however, would be likely to confuse a King with a Robertson-Swann among the works of this exhibition, unless it was *Cantilever*, probably the most abstract of the King pieces on display.

King belongs to that strand of the new sculpture which has not entirely forsaken the subject. This is why her work is not always wholeheartedly abstract. The figure, certain natural organic forms, the mythic and the totemic, even the talismanic, persist in her sculpture. She belongs in the line of sculptural development running through Arp, Pan, Moore, Hepworth and Noguchi.

Robertson-Swann's allegiance in art is to an abstraction, a formalism, that shuns or strives to shun the subject. In works that are primarily vertical, such as *Oracle*, *Standing Dancer* and *Mercury*, he counteracts the suggestion of figurativeness by asymmetrical arrangement or the introduction of components that disrupt the conformation of the upright figure. If abstraction is to be preserved, the tyrannical force of the figure in vertical sculpture must be resisted. King, however, welcomes the figurative. In *Rumba and Dervish*, *Icarus* and *Guardian Angel*, her abstraction meets her subject halfway. These works candidly retain the lines and conformation of the human figure. They are, if this is possible, abstract representations.

Robertson-Swann belongs in a 'purer', more rigorous or Modernist strand of the new sculpture. Its proponents did not hold back from abstraction. They saw it as the logical outcome of the Cubist initiatives. If sculpture was to advance, if it was to overcome the dead weight of monolithic mass and volume, it had to splinter space, open out into, and at the same time create, internal space.

One consequence of such Modernist logic was that sculpture came to be regarded as a process rather than a product. The sculptor gave himself up to the creative process of making sculpture. The process dictated to the sculptor what would be made; the sculptor was not to dictate, through any preconceived aim or idea, what the process would turn out. This playful, experimental, 'happenstance' approach is for Modernists the truly creative way to make sculpture.

That King is not a Modernist in this sense can be seen from the strong element of design in her sculptures and the fact that they often have a subject. By and large, her works in *Sculpture on Site* are structurally simpler and more demonstrative than Robertson-Swann's. So many of them look like cut-outs and, seen from a distance, like silhouettes. They can appear two-dimensional and insubstantial. Her sculpture is more the work of a carver and modeller than, as with Robertson-Swann, of a constructor. Her sculptures impress more as product than process. Their components are much more likely to be fabricated to suit the work's subject or the artist's purpose.

Robertson-Swann, by contrast, makes as much, if not greater, use of found objects as he does of parts he himself fabricates. This practice can actually work to diminish the abstraction in his sculptures, since the found objects are more or less inescapably referential.

The sculptures of both Robertson-Swann and King are a reminder of the complexity and imprecision of the term 'abstract' as used in art criticism. Even in those of their works in which a subject can be discerned, the work is not a literal representation of it—not that the notion of representation is simple and clear either. When we look at the sculptures on display, however, we can see that there are degrees of abstraction and degrees of representation. All abstract art tends to be, if not representational, then at least referential to some degree, for the curves and straight lines and the shapes they make in combination are part of the nature of things. That is one reason why we can find an emotional force and sensory pleasure in abstract sculpture.

King's *Black Sun*, for instance, creates a feeling of resonant power, something akin to what the sun gives off. In her *Rumba and Dervish* we delight in the way this work expresses the rhythm of the dances indicated by its title. Whether it is *Turn*, *Blue Nude*, *Elvira Madigan* or *Pythagoras*, we can find in Robertson-Swann's work the kind of sensual elegance we see in the curves of an unfolding rose, the coil of a tendril, the arc of a wave or the straightness of furrows.

In Robertson-Swann's sculptures too we can find representation of human emotion. *Chez Charles Swann* in part presents a pained introspection, a pondered anguish, primarily conveyed within the head-like topmost component—not just by the angle and thrust of the spanner and the bolt, but also by the spanner's grip on the bolt. This sculpture might present the body as a house in which we must live and suffer.

Abstract art has the power to move, delight and trouble us, sometimes more intensely than representational art. It is a matter of seeing sculptures as objects in themselves, not merely as simulacra. It is a matter of paying abstract art the right sort of attention.

Certainly, Robertson-Swann and King's contribution to this year's Sydney Festival, so astutely curated by Robert Sinclair, was as good and as sophisticated a public display of sculpture as Sydney has seen. For Robertson-Swann in particular—hometown boy and very much a Sydneysider—the occasion must have been a buzz. There was *Paradisio*, commissioned by the Sydney Festival, standing like a triumphal arch atop the long ascension of stairs leading to the Concert Hall foyer; there were some of his best old sculptures, returning home to bask with him in the Sydney summer. For Melburnian Inge King, it might have been no less pleasing to have so much of her sculpture on display in the Emerald City.

It is a shame, but no surprise, that their exhibition received little attention and little critical appraisal from the media. They deserved a better response. Both are major sculptors—more accomplished than some of the playwrights, singers and performers who were accorded greater attention for their more diverting or accessible fare.

Still, King and Robertson-Swann, against the odds, got their place in the sun, and the public was given a chance to engage with some of the best work of these fine Australian sculptors. That was a shot in the arm for them, for sculpture, and for those who love it. ■

Peter Harris is a freelance critic.

OUYANG YU

Let's eat Chinese

CHRISTMAS—the time just past—is supposed to be a season of (or reason for) happy celebration and reunion—like the Chinese version of Spring Festival. Curiously, it is the season that unnerves me most, with its days of doing-nothingism and total non-reunion; our family members and relatives so far away in China. Our friends (if any), when they call to say 'Merry Christmas', seem only people like us—willing exiles in Australia. A non-Christian myself, I have spent many Christmases without a tree and I have spent Spring Festival likewise: no reunion dinner, no decoration, no visits to friends' houses. I was surprised to find that a friend of mine from Taiwan has a similar experience: no tree, no celebration, either of Christmas or Spring Festival, only this desire to go away somewhere and hide himself from it all.

To find some post-Christmas comfort, I bumped into a book about the Chinese in Australia by Diana Giese, called *Astronauts, Lost Souls and Dragons*. At the end of the book, as at the beginning, no comfort seemed forthcoming.

Whatever the reason may be, a booming industry has arisen out of this new Australian attempt to 'reclaim' its Chinese past. In addition to Diana Giese's book, there are Eric Rolls' *Sojourners* and *Citizens*, Lachlan Strahan's *Australia's China*, Jan Ryan's *Ancestors: Chinese in Colonial Australia* and SBS's presentation of a documentary called *The Embraced*. The list goes on. And rightly so, of course: Chinese have been 'kept silent', as one of the informants in *Astronauts, Lost Souls and Dragons* claimed. It is now time they were given a 'voice', 'embraced', 'acknowledged', and written into history as interesting, 'neglected' historical material.

Surprising similarities there are in history, someone once said. As I found in my doctoral thesis dealing with the representatives of the Chinese in Australian fiction, there is a 'white Chinaman' phenomenon in Australian fiction in which Chinese who are highly educated—which normally means educated in England—and speak good English, tend to be well represented and favoured in fiction over those of the 'lower order' such as the market gardeners, street hawkers, laundry men, and other types of menial workers, of which only those who whole-heartedly serve and support their white masters are well represented. I don't know if this is true in reality, but the impression I get from reading the book is something similar: 'English-educated [Chinese] people like myself who are mainstream Australian', as Moni Lai Storz proudly says—people such as Bill O'Chee, Clara Law and Moni Lai Storz—are well represented.

The importance of English can never be emphasised enough, as I come to realise in this country. Whatever you do, whatever you say, has to be recorded in English. Otherwise, it is not 'worthy' of attention.

A few years ago when I wanted to organise a meeting with a Chinese writer in Melbourne and made a query to a writers' centre, I got a question from them, saying, 'Is his work available in English?' My instinctive reaction to that is: 'Is that important?' I would never have asked the same question in China to anyone who made such a proposal. Interpreters and translators could easily be arranged. Why should we exclude other cultures by stipulating that the knowledge of English should be the prerequisite?

Whether we like it or not, the pressure on migrants for better English has met with equally strong resistance. A while ago, I watched a little item on the TV news to the effect that the Australian Government was going to introduce a new regulation by which no migrants who could not speak English would be allowed into the country. That reminded me of a Chinese acquaintance I had a few years ago who consistently rejected the chance offered him to take English examinations in order to have his application in the 816 category accepted. His reasoning was simple: I am in my mid-40s. I can never learn this foreign language however hard I may try. I have managed to live in this country for eight years without a good command of English. Why do I have to master the language to become a PR (short for permanent residency)? Australians did not have to master an Aboriginal language before they came to this country, did they?

The book is big, and comprehensive—I mean *Astronauts, Lost Souls and Dragons*. It is basically about successful Chinese in Australia, 'the survivors, the winners, the ones whose families have made good in Australia over several generations, or who have reached the head of some immigration queue.' I had wanted to finish it within a couple of hours as I always do with such books. I found it hard to. Not because it is not interesting: it is. Not because it is not full of useful information: it is. (Actually, it is more helpful to me, in a way, than agencies like Employment Solutions in my current freelance situation.) I found it hard to finish because every once in a while questions would crop up that prevented me from proceeding. Admittedly, the book does justice to the successful Chinese-Australians who claim they are 'true-blue Aussies' and 'mainstream Australians'. But what about the other side of the story? The losers, the ones who have not made good? The ones who have lagged behind or even returned home? Should they all blame themselves for being failures because they are no good and speak no good English? And then, how successful were these successes anyway? I was keenly reminded of my visit to Parliament House in Canberra and of my vain attempt to find a black or yellow face in its heroes' gallery of prime ministers and parliamentarians.

TO BE FRANK, I am a bit sick of being a Chinese at the moment. If I want to be a Chinese, why do I have to stay and overstay here? But there's no-one stopping me from becoming an Australian either, although I have my doubts about the likelihood that, if I swear allegiance to Australia today, I might forget my Chinese identity tomorrow. If I acquire my Australian citizenship, will I, 40 years from now, still refer to myself as 'always Chinese' because I was once Chinese? Or can I possibly turn myself into a 'true-blue Aussie' by then? If not, what shall I call myself, Chinese-Australian or Australian-Chinese? Or neither? Or both? But what does it mean to be neither or both?

Enter Pauline Hanson. Someone few Chinese like. And few migrants like, judging by the anti-racist rallies over the past two years in some capital cities in Australia. But a talk with a Chinese friend of mine who went to one Melbourne rally was

immediately revealing. He said, 'I just don't understand why there were more *guilaos* (devils, meaning Australians) participating in the rally than Chinese. If they (Chinese) are really anti-racist, why didn't they come to the rally? Neither do I like the way in which some Chinese commentators have attacked Pauline Hanson in the Chinese media, saying that she was such an ignorant person because she had not much schooling and worked in a fish-and-chips restaurant.

'People should at least be allowed to speak their own mind. Otherwise, where is our cherished freedom of speech? Can you imagine anyone speaking against the Chinese Communist Party in China like Pauline Hanson does here against Asian migrants?'

The Hanson form of Australian nationalism is based on the exclusion of the coloured people, particularly Asians. This is not much different from the new form that attempts to reclaim the Chinese past and make it part of 'us'. In this attempt, Chinese have become useful historical material. They have served a purpose by providing an interviewed voice. They exist for reclamation and digestion, and, ultimately, as 'informants'.

Here, I am reminded of my problems with Australia that remain unresolved. Being a short man, I can hardly find anything that can match my size in any Australian stores. My happiest moment came when I bought a woollen jumper in Shanghai which, I felt, was designed just for me. My Australian-designed phone book does not provide enough space under X, Y, Z, for my Chinese friends, most of whom have surnames starting with X, Y, Z.

As Australians used to define themselves against the invading and corrupting Chinese in the past, there is this new problem of the Chinese turned 'true-blue Aussies' and 'mainstream Australians' who define themselves against the unliveable, 'corruption'-ridden Asia. Detailed accounts of recent experience of the Chinese who return to China abound in local Chinese–Australian newspapers. They are full of horrors. Of sordidness. Of corruption. Of all sorts of uncomfortableness, sharpened by the new-found 'happiness' in Australia—a phenomenon that coincides with the accounts in Giese's book. My reaction is mixed to my homeland where I went back last Christmas. I remember my son's tearful reluctance to leave his cousins in China, and the bleak prospect of his return to a Melbourne suburb as dead as a desert and with few children to play with, either Chinese or Australian.

I went to Hong Kong and China to conduct research on their representations of Australia and Australians. Without going into too much detail, I shall quote a typical passage (of my own translation) from a Hong Kong magazine, in which scathing comments are made on Australian politics. It goes like this: 'Australian political arena is especially full of scandals and intriguing stories, staging one play after another. The audience laugh with understanding and applaud with appreciation.' And another similar comment goes: 'In the political arena of all the states in Australia, not a small number of officials are extremely dirty, and these officials defend each other like in a den of snakes and rats, as black as a bottomless abyss.'

As Australians used to define themselves against the invading and corrupting Chinese in the past, there is this new problem of the Chinese turned 'true-blue Aussies' and 'mainstream Australians' who define themselves against the unliveable, 'corruption'-ridden Asia.

Sometimes, it is easy to talk about politics in terms of nationalism and to ignore real human complexity. Nearly on every account I found myself putting a big question mark against Giese's representations. I would say no to the 'food is life' perception of Chinese food because I, personally, do not take it that seriously. And after my return to China I found myself becoming increasingly critical of that carnivorous, voracious and wasteful aspect of Chinese culture. I would say no to the 'families occupy a central place in Chinese culture' perception. It may be true of some Australian–Chinese, but is certainly not true of a lot of the mainland Chinese, myself included; families are breaking down everywhere in China—refer to the soaring statistics on the number of divorces each year and the increasing number of young couples who do not wish to have any children, for various reasons. I would say no to the perception of *guanxi* (ties or connections) as a glamorous and all important *Chinese* relationship. In fact, in contemporary Chinese terminology, *guanxi* has quite negative connotations.

Increasingly, I find myself growing impatient, wishing for something else. For a Chinese who can't speak a word of English but nevertheless recounts his experience in Chinese. For writers who do not bow under these representational yokes and are persistent in telling their true stories in ways not confined to or defined by any forms of nationalism.

Meanwhile, my doctoral thesis sits at the bottom of the bookshelf gathering dust and going begging from one publisher to another. That seems to be the only fate of such work. It is praise and success that we want to hear of and Diana Giese's book is such a wonderful book of praise and success.

But I need a rest from all that. I have read news in the Australian–Chinese media of multiple suicides by recent Chinese arrivals who could not obtain their PR in Australia. I have heard stories of broken-down marriages from recent reunions. I have heard stories of Chinese migrants hospitalised for mental illness. I know people who claim they will never be able to learn English well, just as some Australians to whom I teach Chinese claim likewise. What do we do about these people? Go on ignoring them and pretend that they do not exist because Chinese people are so successful in turning themselves into 'true-blue Aussies' and 'mainstream Australians'?

On the eve of my decision to make a decision whether to become a 'true-blue Aussie' or not, the voice of a friend from Hong Kong came from afar, sardonically: 'Do you want to wait until another Tiananmen Massacre happens?' I believe in his sincerity and the likelihood of such a possibility. But equally do I believe in the certainty that, as long as I live in this country, there will be plenty of Pauline Hansons or her like. My question to myself is this: will my Australian passport be able to work wonders in changing my facial identity so that I don't have to be recognised and rightly labelled? ■

Ouyang Yu is an author, poet and translator. Diana Giese's *Astronauts, Lost Souls and Dragons* is published by Penguin.

GEOFFREY MILNE

Much ado about summer

THE 1998 THEATRE SEASON saw a change from the serious political drama of 1997. Summer, however, still provided most of its usual favourites—indoors and out. In fact, there have been a number of virtually institutionalised summer theatre offerings in recent years in various cities. Essgee Entertainment (Simon Gallaher's production company) has opened summer productions of Gilbert & Sullivan in the Victorian Arts Centre since 1994, continuing a tradition of summer musicals there since *Pirates of Penzance* in 1984. This year, Essgee has ditched G & S in favour of Stephen Sondheim's 1962 musical *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (photo right) and further diversified its activity by offering the Queensland Theatre Company/Sydney Theatre Company production of Terence McNally's drama *Master Class*.

In many ways, *Forum* is well suited to Essgee's talents and to its always broad, irreverent comic style. While Burt Shevelove's and Larry Gelbart's book is probably faithfully rendered in this performance, it does feel as though Jon English (Pseudolus), Drew Forsythe (Senex) and some of the others are making half of it up as they go along, as they did with their merciless manglings of G & S. There are certainly enough star parts to go round for this excellent ensemble (Philia for soprano Helen Donaldson, Hysterium for Essgee newcomer Jonathan Biggins—the funniest man on the Australian stage at the moment—and the pompous Miles Gloriosus for Mark Dickinson) and they all have a fabulous time doing it. The material has dated since the un-PC '60s (songs like 'Everybody Ought to Have a Maid' and 'Lovely' for the vacuous heroine), but plot, characters and situation are as timeless as the Roman farces of Plautus upon which this is based, or even the later *Commedia dell'Arte*. I enjoyed the show, although it doesn't quite have the outrageous panache of the G & S trilogy. The production played Her Majesty's in Adelaide in February and goes to His Majesty's in Perth in March.

Master Class is from the other end of the theatre spectrum. American playwright McNally has utilised the series of master classes given by Maria Callas at New York's Juilliard School at the end of her career in 1971–72, juiced up with her lacerations of the three young hopefuls who present themselves for her appraisal and advice, her scathing commentaries on just about everybody in the opera world and two flashbacks to happier days at the height of her fame at La Scala. The flashbacks are ostensibly triggered by the young singers' renditions of arias she had made famous, but McNally also uses them to unravel autobiographical details of less happy times, especially her relationships with husband Giovanni Meneghini and lover Ari Onassis. I found this device a bit clunky and repetitive, but it certainly increases the challenge for the actor playing Callas. And in Amanda Muggleton (who has played this role since Robyn Nevin premièred it in Brisbane in 1997) we got a truly wonderful Callas. Her performance is emotionally intense but also full of warmth, intelligence and wit. To Gallaher's delight, the show was extended—and in a city awash with summer frivolity.

ANOTHER MELBOURNE institution is Performing Arts Projects, who have been doing promenade productions in the gardens of stately mansion Rippon Lea every summer since 1991. For the first few years, PAP concentrated on Lady Ottoline Morrell's Oxford estate and the Bloomsbury set who spent their summers cavorting there, in a play by Julia Britton called *Loving Friends*. More recently, adaptations of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, *Seven Little Australians* and *The Great Gatsby* have been the preferred option, with as many as 16 scenes in six or seven different locations, moving the audience as many as ten times through the evening.

This year's offering was an adaptation by Barry Lowe of Henry James' novella, *The Turn of the Screw*. It would be difficult to imagine a work less suited to open-air picnic-style performance than this wordy psychological thriller, practically all of which happens inside the head of the central character of the governess. There is more action in the narrator's interminable introductions than in practically any of the 12 scenes that ramble over just three locations. For all its perambulations (we move six times this year with our rugs and Eskies), the show is static and thin. We should have been left with our memories of the film intact.

The principal summer institution in Australia is Shakespeare, and the major player in this boom is Glenn Elston, whose populist open-air picnic productions have been seen in practically every mainland capital's Botanic Gardens during the 1990s. Even before Elston, summer Shakespeare was a popular event, particularly in Sydney where a profit-share company called Shakespeare by the Sea has been presenting two plays in repertory (typically a comedy and a tragedy) at the Band Rotunda at Balmoral Beach every year since 1987; this year's offerings were *Merry Wives of Windsor* and *The Merchant of Venice*. Director David McSwan's approach to outdoor Shakespeare is simple and uncluttered, relying on the power of the stories in a stationary floodlit setting.

Shakespeare has also been given annual summer (or dry season) open-air productions by the Darwin Theatre Company for years in a variety of settings, from the Old Town Hall ruins to the Botanic Gardens and a luxurious garden outside the Museum and Art Gallery. DTC's Shakespeares (ranging across all genres) are relatively orthodox, stationary indoor-style productions staged out of doors, but they gain extra resonance from their magical settings.

The site of the National Carillon on Aspen Island in Canberra has also been home to a wide variety of different Shakespeare plays each summer since the early 1990s. Different parts of regional Victoria have also been used as sites for remarkable environmental productions; the Geelong-based Postcard Productions, for example, did a *Macbeth in the You Yangs* from 1992 to 1994, Bruce Widdop's Ballarat-based Ozact have done a *King Lear* in the Grampians and a fine, perambulatory production of

Pericles on Battery Point at Port Fairy.

Easily the most popular open-air plays have been *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *As You Like It*, both well-suited to open-air presentation by virtue of their forest locations. But *Macbeth* has also often been done with success and so has *The Tempest*; *Much Ado About Nothing* is another which is gaining popularity.

Which brings us back to the Elston Hocking & Janes productions of 1998–99. A clone of the 1997–98 Melbourne production of *The Taming of the Shrew* has just had a long run in Perth's Botanic Gardens in King's Park and yet another *Shrew* clone is in residence at Sydney's

all of the rock musical gimmickry works (some of it is pretty heavy-handed and it slows things down somewhat) but there are some unexpected delights, such as Hero's wedding march accompanied by the sonnet 'Shall I compare thee to a summer's day' set as a 6/8 Irish ballad!

But that's not all there is about *Much Ado*. Venturing to Brisbane, I saw another version thanks to Harvest Rain Theatre, a company who operate in a remarkably well-appointed thrust-stage (indoor) theatre at the Christian Life Centre in newly trendy New Farm. Harvest Rain are a Christian group who tackle a wide range of drama, but this very competent pro-am production is

frocks are a scream. But this production insists, rightly, much more on the centrality of the Hero/Claudio plot and thus finds a lot of the darker corners of the play. Seeing two such different productions in the space of a couple of weeks, one wonders if you could contrive the perfect *Much Ado* by combining the best elements and ideas of both.

FINALLY, one for the kids. Back in Melbourne, I caught up with the current version of Elston's evergreen *Wind in the Willows*, directed this year by Marianne Bragge. It was a delight to return to. It has been pared back a bit in recent years and

(with a fine cast including Nicholas Eadie, Helen Thomson, Arky Michael, Peter Carroll and Genevieve Lemon). The new production for Melbourne is *Much Ado* and it follows its predecessors in its knock-about style. In this version, Claudio and Benedick and Hero, Beatrice and friends are members of rival rock bands, the former just returned not from war but a triumphant world tour. Thus Leonato is the girls' band manager, Dogberry and Verges are roadies/security guards, Don Pedro is the boys' manager and Don John, the bastard brother, is a growling Tom Waits sound-alike. Not

their first foray into Shakespeare. Directed by Andrew Buchanan (one of Brisbane's brightest young actors, who also plays Benedick), this *Much Ado* is a bit more orthodox, although the war from which the boys are returning (by helicopter!) is in Vietnam and the setting cleverly evokes a jungle location. The stage business features a lot of hilariously awful 1960s dancing and some nifty jungle evasion techniques (the scene when the boys describe how much Beatrice is in love with Benedick while he is supposedly hiding is a highlight of the whole summer), while the girls' A-line

only uses three locations, which mars the impact of Toad's first car crash a bit, but otherwise maintains the focus better. Damien Jamieson's Toad is as good as any of his predecessors' and so are Peter Docker's phlegmatic Badger and Patrick Moffatt's many lightning-change parts. Anthea Davis is also a lovely Mole. But the best thing about the show is its unity of music, action and the awful gags for the grown-ups. It's a little jewel in the rich summer crown. ■

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

FLASH IN THE PAN

Non-Stoppard

Shakespeare in Love, dir. John Madden. 'O, the difference of man and man!' exclaims King Lear's vile daughter Goneril when her husband's honourable conscience riles her. Albany be damned—she's for her lover Edmund, and tragic mayhem.

Well ditto for film and film. We've seen two big productions about Elizabethan England in as many months, and O, the difference. John Madden directs *Shakespeare in Love* with the finesse that was evident in his earlier *Her Majesty Mrs Brown*. Shekar Kapur's *Elizabeth* gives Cate Blanchett her Oscar opportunity, but otherwise wastes talent on an incoherent script. *Shakespeare in Love* draws out more talent than any audience has a right to expect from one cast in a film even shorter than *Macbeth*. For the screenplay Madden paired Marc Norman with Tom Stoppard. And what a grand old time they all have of it.

Young Will Shakespeare (Joseph Fiennes, much improved since his obscure Robert Dudley in *Elizabeth*) is the harried young bard-with-a-block, contracted to Philip Henslowe (Geoffrey Rush in bad teeth and venal form, see above) to write *Romeo and Ethel, the Pirate's Daughter* for Henslowe's Rose theatre. Henslowe has the moneymen at his heels (literally, with hot coals) and needs a hit, a full house to match the success of Richard Burbage at his Curtain Theatre. (Martin Clunes, as Burbage, behaves badly all right, but with formidable depth and range—wait for his Richard II.) Enter the stage-struck Viola De Lesseps (Gwyneth Paltrow), a rich merchant's daughter, pursued by the impoverished Earl of Essex (Colin Firth, so much better as a melancholy comic villain than he was as the inadvertently comic, melancholy Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*). Viola disguises herself as a boy, gets to play Romeo, meets Will and learns that the play is the thing. Which all goes to show what a great playwright/screenwriter can do when his homage to a greater playwright is not merely referential. Or deferential.

This is grand, profligate cinema, at home with villainy, puns, ambition, love, majesty (Judi Dench, in even worse teeth than Geoffrey Rush, is a trenchant Gloriana), renunciation, tragedy and the poignant ripple of comic resolution. The cast—I've mentioned only half of the best—is directed by a man who manifestly understands that the sum is greater than the parts. And the result is, I suspect, a finer piece of work than either director or screenwriters dreamed of. Have a long look at the final scene and you'll understand what I mean.

—Morag Fraser

Groanin'

Ronin, dir. John Frankenheimer. Robert de Niro still has the power to create wonder with a yeasty-eyed glance, full of executioner's mirth, that changes in a moment to a fagged-out loss of *amour propre*. The problem is that often, as in the very stylish *Ronin*, the vehicle isn't big enough to contain his performance.

An international team of strangers, each expert in some aspect of covert operations, meet in a deserted Paris warehouse at a time set in the recent past before the Irish peace agreement. They are employed by Dierdre of the extremely Irish accent (till her oiyes boog outh) to steal a certain shiny metal case for ice skates which is being offered to the highest bidder. In the process of obtaining this case, whose contents (presumably *not* the latest design of figure-skating Nikes) are sought by the IRA and the Russians, most of the 'ronins' get killed and France's urban population is severely reduced, establishing a tally of street-stall scatterings and car smashes to rival *Bullitt*. I cannot promise that you will find out what is in the case, but I can promise that by the end of *Ronin*, you will not care.

In the first half, *Ronin* builds enormous credibility which it then progressively dissipates. Frankenheimer's stated intention 'to build tension through character and silence rather than action' sizzles the screen, then is inexplicably abandoned in favour of silly repetitive action sequences. He credits French auteur Jean-Pierre Melville's *Le Samourai* as *Ronin*'s main influence, but sets up copycat scenes to bring out the cinema studies major in us all: *Au Bout De Souffle*; *The Third Man*; even a bit of Rambo's self-surgery thrown in.

A ronin, we are informed portentously in an opening credit, is a masterless warrior. This is reinforced by another short lecture in the movie. To an audience so telegraphed, seeing ronins under every stone of post-Cold-War Europe, the final revelation of Sam's fully operative CIA status is staggeringly banal.

So it was Yankee know-how that brought about the peace process in Northern Ireland. (Sorry, Mo Mowlam—Sean Bean, the braggadocio who hasn't the courage or training to complete the assignment is, of course, British.) Good old Sam the fake ronin/CIA agent. *That's* why he was so much smarter, braver, and more moral than the others. And so much explaining at the end you wish they'd just shut up. Next they'll be telling us what's in the briefcase. (It's Tonya Harding's baseball b...aaargh!).

—Juliette Hughes

Length with breadth

Men with Guns, dir. John Sayles. It is rare that a film runs less than two hours these days and rarer still that it has two hours worth of things to say. Be it a war epic or a light comic turn, chances are you're in for the long haul. All the swanky new cinemas that provide you with extra leg room and a tray table are not catering for the luxury market; rather, it's a new cinema necessity, given the length of your average stay.

Consequently, you really appreciate the skills of John Sayles, a master of pace and understatement. His films are long, low-key

and very good. His latest offering, *Men with Guns*, is a strikingly beautiful combination of political documentary and magical-realist ghost story, set in an unnamed corner of South America.

As with many of Sayles' films, we are guided through the tale by an innocent, a character discovering things as we discover them. Dr Fuentes (Frederico Luppi), an affluent city doctor, decides to visit some students in the mountains. Unaware of any danger, Fuentes drives blindly into the very dark heart of his country's political, ethnic and religious conflicts. He discovers a country at its own throat, and is horrified by the things he should have known. While it is tempting to consider Fuentes' naivety as unforgivable and cowardly, *Men with Guns* makes you realise his sins of omission are so common it would be unwise to cast the first stone.

—Siobhan Jackson

Retro repro

Psycho, dir. Gus Van Sant (or is that Alfred Hitchcock?). 'Hitchcock—what's the phrase? Hitchcock isn't feeling himself today ...' That's the best synopsis I can think of for Gus Van Sant's reproduction (you can't really call it a remake) of Alfred Hitchcock's 1960 proto-slasher classic, *Psycho*. Same script, score, shots, dialogue—the only major difference between the two is that Van Sant's is in colour, and has moved from the '60s to the '90s. Van Sant justifies his project by the desire to make Hitchcock's work accessible to a '90s sensibility. Unfortunately, it's precisely because of its shift into our present that Van Sant's *Psycho* jars, not only for those who have seen the original, but also, I suspect, for the new audience it's supposedly for.

Part of Hitchcock's perverse genius lies in his ability to create suspense out of his characters' sense of internal guilt, both moral and sexual. Unfortunately, between the '60s and the '90s many of the mores those guilts arise from have changed, so that, in setting it in the '90s, many of the sordid undercurrents that give the '60s *Psycho* its bite have simply disappeared. Marion Crane's (Anne Heche, in the best performance of the film) thwarted desire for a 'respectable' relationship, expressed during the illicit lunchtime assignation that opens the film, simply doesn't make sense anymore—illicit lunchtime assignations *are* respectable relationships in the '90s. What's worse, Norman Bates' psycho-sexual pathology (as played by Vince Vaughn, in the worst performance of the film) now seems more commonplace than shocking.

For me, the most useful way to look at this picture is as a piece of conceptual art, organised around the play of repetition and difference between original and copy that has intrigued much of contemporary art throughout the '90s. At this level, Van Sant's *Psycho* is actually a pretty interesting film. Unfortunately, as with much conceptual art, it's probably more interesting to think about it than actually to see it.

—Allan James Thomas

The full score

Little Voice, dir. Mark Herman. If you've ever met a Yorkshireman, or read the Brontës, you'd be excused for wondering why some of the best humour of recent times has come from the north of England. It used to be called the dour north. But films such as *The Full Monty* and *Brassed Off* have shown that dour and funny can get along just fine.

Little Voice is from the same director as *Brassed Off*. It is the story of LV (Jane Horrocks), a timid young woman who seldom speaks. In fact, there isn't much need for her to speak, as her mother, Mari (Brenda Blethyn), with whom LV shares a dingy tenement, seldom shuts up. LV spends her life trying to avoid attention. Mari spends her life trying to attract it, especially the attention of men, especially that of one Ray Say (Michael Caine), a theatrical entrepreneur. Both Blethyn's and Caine's performances are gloriously overblown. Their characters are selfish, self-indulgent, callous, even cruel. Yet you are able to feel just a sneaking sympathy for them. The moral complexity of the film hangs on that glimmer of sympathy.

LV spends much of her life in her room. Her whole existence is a kind of sullen tribute to the memory of her father whose picture hangs over her bed and whose record collection she treasures. She has developed, in private, an uncanny ability to replicate the performances of the likes of Marilyn Monroe, Judy Garland and Shirley Bassey. The minute she starts to sing, her personality is transformed. She acquires all the brazen confidence of the performers she mimics. She becomes as dominant and as fake as her mother.

Ray happens to hear LV sing. She could be the discovery of his career. But he needs to be able to coax her onstage. Thus begins a classic seduction or temptation story. It parallels a reasonably weak romantic or liberation story in which LV comes gradually to trust the young man who fixes her phone, Billy (Ewan McGregor).

Little Voice does have its weaknesses. But it has the irresistible strength of making comedy in dire social circumstances. Which may be why a good number of English comics head north.

—Michael McGirr SJ

FILM GIVEAWAY

Eureka Street has 10 double passes to *Men With Guns* to give away, courtesy of Palace Films. Passes are valid for Melbourne only (excluding Friday and Saturday evenings). Just put your name and address on the back of an envelope and send to:
Eureka Street March Film Giveaway,
PO Box 553, Richmond VIC 3121

All the fun of the fair

THERE ARE SCENES OF ALL SORTS; some dreadful combats, some grand and lofty horse-riding, some scenes of high life, and some of very middling indeed; some love making for the sentimental, and some light comic business: the whole accompanied by appropriate scenery, and brilliantly illuminated with the Author's own candles.

—'Before The Curtain', William Makepeace Thackeray's own foreword to *Vanity Fair*, London, 1848.

The first serial I ever watched on television was a BBC dramatisation of Thackeray's *The Rose and The Ring*, in the early 1950s. The screen was not black and white as we know it. It was certainly monochrome, but somehow done with lavender wash, television's equivalent of the sepia photograph. Later television screens were so much blacker and whiter and sharper. We are now denied a second look at most of these programs, since that series was probably one of many long since destroyed in the catchpenny vandalism that lost us the earliest *Dr Who* episodes, most of *Pete & Dud* and God knows what else. But I remember the flavour of it with a child's memory of pantomime fun. Later, of course, when I read *The Rose and the Ring*, I chuckled at the sly humour and the jolliness of Thackeray's cynicism. Thackeray was obviously somewhere not a thousand miles from the Dickens of *A Christmas Carol*, but less cosy, in continual bantering dialogue with the reader.

Vanity Fair has been attempted many times on film, notably with Myrna Loy in the '30s, and this current series adapted by Andrew Davies is the BBC's third effort, showing on the ABC on Sunday nights. There is a pretty fair attempt to convey something of Thackeray's unique take on what I suppose today we call broader culture, the Vanity Fair of general human messiness and striving: a sort of genial and non-pompous second cousin of Johnson's 'The Vanity of Human Wishes'.

Becky Sharp is not the heroine of *Vanity Fair*, but she is the main character. Like Mary Crawford in *Mansfield Park*, she is teamed with a lachrymose goody-two-shoes, and we find ourselves caring what happens to her. I am sure Daphne du Maurier had Becky in the back of her mind when she wrote *Rebecca*, another battle between the heroine and the villainess (although the villainess is long dead). It is difficult in these libertarian days of the late 20th century to disapprove of Becky, Mary or Rebecca de Winter as thoroughly as we were meant to do. I think Austen had to try hard to make us dislike Mary Crawford before the end of *Mansfield Park*, because Fanny is so irredeemably colourless and meek. Thackeray made no bones about Amelia Sedley's perpetual blubbering—she may be the conventional Patmore angel but she is narrow and stubborn and not very bright. But his bluff paternalistic gallantry (something that can gall if one hasn't flirted harmlessly—Becky-like—with nice unreconstructed old chauvinists) comes to her rescue. She is, after all, only a lady, God bless her. Since he gives the task of matchmaking to Becky at the end, which she performs with some wit and even magnanimity, he must distance her from us through her unconscionably bad mothering. Men's hearts are fair game, in Thackeray's tolerant eye, and other women, no matter how deserving, are natural opponents. Only Becky's treatment of Rawdy, and perhaps her final betrayal of his father (played outstandingly well by Nathaniel Parker), are seen as really bad.

Natasha Little makes an excellent Becky—the steely determination behind all her clever schmoozing is there but is never allowed to turn her into a monster. Davies does not go as far as Thackeray in bringing out Becky's bad side. In particular, when she catches her neglected eight-year-old son, Rawdy, peeping at her singing to the odious Lord Steyne, the TV Becky merely scolds him and sends him away, and makes plans for boarding school. In the book she is much more vicious, boxing the child's ears and humiliating him. I think that probably it would be impossible to keep sympathy these days for a character that so abused a child. In Victorian times boxing a young child's ears was far from outrageous. To keep up the pressure on his Victorian audience Thackeray sends him down to the kitchen weeping not so much from the pain in his ears, but in his heart because his mother will not sing to him.

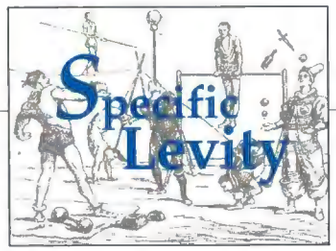
Some of Davies' scenes are inspired: I particularly applauded the way George Osborne's death in battle was conveyed. In the book it is brutal—the build-up of Amelia's hopes through the chapter is undercut briefly and savagely:

> The darkness came down on the field and city, and Amelia was praying for George, who was lying on his face, dead, with a bullet through his heart.

The series shows George (Tom Ward) leading a small charge in a chaotic skirmish. The coup de grâce is sudden: a large, lethal hole appears in the back of the red coat, and we follow him down to the ground, seeing the last bubble of spit pushed out by the ground's impact on a body that cannot ever draw air in again. In visual terms it was as good a homage to the mood of the text as I have seen.

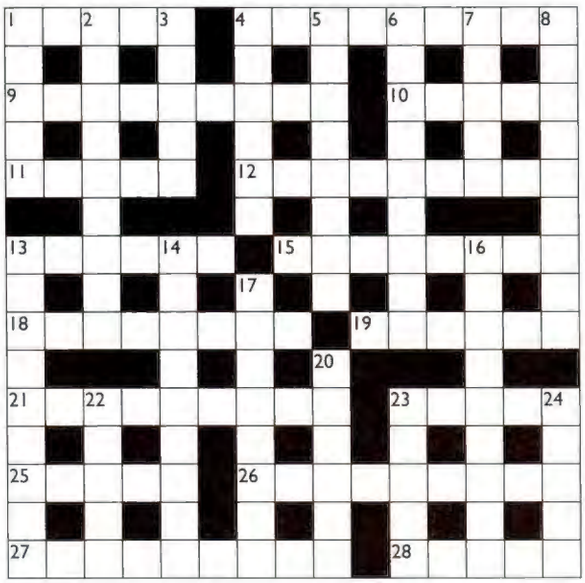
PEOPLE WHO HAVEN'T READ THE BOOK will have a treat in store, and will enjoy the series, because it does a mostly well-judged and thoughtful job. It is quite fun to test the boundaries of each culture by comparing the book with the Davies adaptation. In the end it seems that we are still fascinated by wicked women; it is very common to pit the Jezebels against some paragon—Odette/Odile; Scarlett O'Hara/Melanie Wilkes; Alexis/Krystal in *Dynasty*. And Shakespeare got into the female duality thing long before these with his put-upon shrew, Katharine, and her boring sister, Bianca. In fact there have been female entities in various traditions covering the same territory since before Lilith/Eve. Novel and film have always been fascinated by the flawed and feisty female, and the tradition has morphed through the various mores of the changing times. Issues of sexual 'honour', such as those that haunted Becky Sharp, have little relevance to the heroines of *Friends*, *Xena*, *Melrose Place* or a squillion other contemporary dramas. But I don't think Davies needed to have Becky teaching her students at Pinkerton Academy to say '*Baisez mon cul*'. She may have been no lady, but she knew how to behave like one. ■

Juliette Hughes is a freelance reviewer.



Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 71, March 1999

Devised by Joan Nowotny IBVM



ACROSS

1. Unknown among bookish types returning to the council meeting. (5)
4. For everyone, for instance, to circle young Richard would be full of symbolic meaning. (9)
9. The car displayed on the chart is like my personal signature. (9)
10. 'Adore it!' I hear you say, 'that blue-green mixture in the woollens.' (5)
11. Rushes to take the familiar old violin back. (5)
12. In the first place, I can return with a friend. (9)
13. The expert soundly beats the one who never stops talking? (6)
15. Managed poor Gloria when she was no longer an apprentice. Rewarded her with a shrub from New Zealand. (8)
18. Incidental empty theory for such an emergency situation. (8)
19. Meat about right with a dash of salt, perhaps. (6)
21. Shout for an egg, desire it in a way that is somewhat jaundiced! (9)
23. Strong pitcher needs not so many balls, possibly... (5)
25. ... or no ball, what's more! (5)
26. Special pig liver 'e ate as a favour. (9)
27. Rough up the chap with the fancy title. (9)
28. Very strange game of cards! (5)

DOWN

1. Remained, apparently, prim and proper. (5)
2. Negative alternative to debt reminders? What a reputation! (9)
3. Artist was wise to go back to the origin of dadaism. (5)
4. All its perfumes could not sweeten Lady Macbeth's little hand (Act v, Sc i). (6)
5. Italian learner initially had had difficulty with the English language but was soon speaking in a highfalutin way. (3-2-3)
6. Special lodging to house the precious metal. (4, 5)
7. Competitor has viral disease. (5)
8. Old sailing vessel unfortunately struck yacht from which a church like Oscar's and Lucinda's had been removed? (5, 4)
13. Dr Jekyll's alter ego in the midst of cramp spasm has hallucination of pink elephant, perhaps. (9)
14. Some stay back at a Roman isthmus in search of a lover. (9)
16. Woman at the steering wheel after spell with the ball is likely to submerge. (9)
17. Peter first entered barred area but was exposed. (8)
20. To hear confessions can make one shiver. (6)
22. In part you can tell a Tintoretto by reading the language therein. (5)
23. Pilot changed filer for the logging operation. What a relief out east! (5)
24. Do the wind instruments sound so shrill? (5)

Solution to Crossword no. 70, January–February 1999

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

What your money can do

$ In a developing country

$10 Buy a month's supply of rice for a family of four in East Timor.

or In Australia

Buy a bottle of wine.

$ In a developing country

$38 Pay for one child leader to participate in a Child to Child workshop in Bolivia.

or In Australia

Buy a pair of jeans.

$ In a developing country

$166 Give a loan to a woman in Pakistan so she can set up her own business.

or In Australia

Buy a pair of rollerblades.

Opening doors to a regular income, self-reliance and a better future

Project Compassion

The Catholic agency for overseas aid and development.

Caritas Australia

Your donation will make a difference

Yes! I would like to be part of the work of Caritas Australia and its global partners.

☐ a cheque for $ _____ is enclosed, or ☐ Please debit my credit card: ☐ Bankcard ☐ VISA ☐ Master card ☐ Diners Club ☐ American Express

Card number: ☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐

Exp date ___/___ Amount $ _____ Signature _____

Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss _____

Address _____

State _____ Postcode _____ Parish _____ *Donations $2 and over are tax deductible*

ESpc99

Cut this coupon out and send it to: Caritas Australia, GPO Box 9830 in your capital city

ISSN 1036-1758 02

9 771036 175017