EUREKA STREET

Vol. 9 No. 6 July/August 1999 $5.95

Tim Bonyhady on John McDonald and the state of Australian art criticism

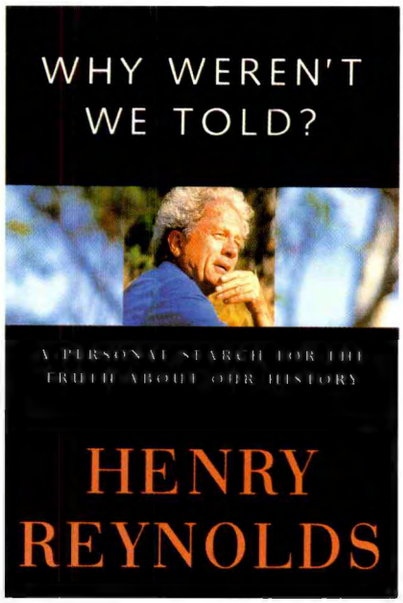
John Sendy on China 50 years after the Revolution

Margaret Goldrick remembers Arthur Boyd

Bill Garner on the great and disappearing art of camping

Peter Mares reports on the Indonesian election

EUREKA STREET



Special Book Offer &

VIKING

WHY WEREN'T WE TOLD?

A personal search for the truth about our history

by Henry Reynolds

Why Weren't We Told? is historian Henry Reynolds' account of his own journey to understanding the truth about our history. Drawing on personal experiences and historical observations, Reynolds looks at Australia's history of relations with indigenous people from colonisation to the present day, identifying the myths that were taught in the past and explaining why and how they came about.

Thanks to Viking Books, *Eureka Street* has 10 copies of *Why Weren't We Told?* to give away, each worth $24.95. Just put your name and address on the back of an envelope and send it to:
Eureka Street July/August Book Offer, PO Box 553, Richmond VIC 3121.

Australian Centre for
Christianity and Culture

Executive Director
Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture
(Located at Canberra)

CHARLES STURT
UNIVERSITY

The Australian Centre is an ecumenical foundation, endorsed by the National Council of Churches and sponsored by the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn and Charles Sturt University. The Centre is committed to the celebration and nourishment of the encounter and dialogue between Christianity and all aspects of modern Australian life.

Dialogue between Christian traditions and between Christianity and other faiths; providing a focus for reconciliation and the recognition of indigenous Australian spirituality; and, promoting and exploring the interaction of the arts and Christianity are major aims of the Centre.

Integral to the work of the Centre is the building of a national meeting place. A site has been secured on Lake Burley Griffin in Canberra on the edge of the parliamentary triangle. A design for the Centre's buildings has been selected following a national architectural competition. Fundraising to support the building is in progress. A major grant has been received from the Commonwealth's Federation Fund.

The Executive Director will be responsible to the Board of Management of the Centre for the strategic leadership of the Centre, the development of policies and programs, advocacy and funding and oversight of the building of the Centre. The Executive Director will lead a small team of professional staff, including a building project manager and a fundraising and business development manager.

The successful applicant will be committed to the vision of the Centre and have a record of outstanding service in church or community organisations. A demonstrated ability to lead a complex organisation and to manage large scale projects is essential. The appointee must have excellent communication skills and a record of effective fundraising from private and corporate donors. Success in entrepreneurial commercial activities and formal theological qualifications would be an advantage.

The appointment will be for three years in the first instance with the possibility of renewal.
A salary package up to $80,000 per annum is available.

Patron: His Excellency the Honourable Sir William Deane, AC, KBE
Chair, Centre Council: The Rt Honourable Sir Ninian Stephen, KG, AK, KCMG, KBE

Applications close Friday 16 July 1999

Applicants are required to address the selection criteria and complete the University's Application for Employment form, available from the Division of Human Resources, Wagga Wagga telephone (02) 6933 2213 or email hstewart@csu.edu.au.
An information package is available.
Equal opportunity in employment is University policy. www.csu.edu.au

EUREKA STREET

A magazine of public affairs, the arts and theology

Volume 9 Number 6
July/August 1999

Contents

Front cover: *Australian scapegoat*, 1987, by Arthur Boyd. Oil on canvas, 267 x 415cm.
Back cover: *Horse skull under a blanket and a starry sky*, 1981, by Arthur Boyd. Oil on canvas, 183 x 175cm.
Arthur Boyd's work on the cover and pp3, 30–33 is reproduced with kind permission of the Bundanon Trust. All Boyd images have been generously supplied by Australian Galleries, 35 Derby Street, Collingwood, Victoria.
Cover design by Siobhan Jackson
Cartoon p5 by Dean Moore.
Graphics pp4, 10, 11, 13, 16–19, 20–23, 34–40, 48–49 by Siobhan Jackson.
Photograph p50 by Tracey Schramm.

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

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.

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

Talking pictures

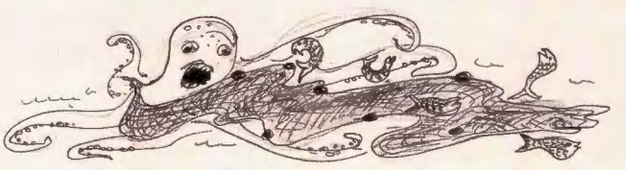
ARTHUR BOYD, whose work and life are the subject of our cover story this month, is a painter whose reputation is now so firmly established as to be unassailable. The eyes of the world have adjusted themselves so that they can 'read' (or partly read—Boyd will always be a challenge) the strong narrative lines and the sometimes violent, always lyrical strength of his work.

But it was not always the case. I remember going to an early exhibition by Boyd. I think it was in a bayside house, perhaps his own—close to where I lived. The paintings were from his *Bride* series. To a child's eye, the curving, floating figures were just a sympathetic extension of the free-floating, visually encoded world that you inhabit at that age. The colours were like pools—you could wade in them. I understood none of the mythology of course, but the images have stayed with me, to be understood at leisure—just as Boyd's bleached Wimmera landscapes, with their black sentinel birds like a rent in the sun, served, much later, to explain the dry country we would drive across each year on those long Christmas pilgrimages that are an accustomed part of living in Australia.

Having Boyd around was rather like growing up with a medieval Passion play permanently running in the shopping centre: bald metaphysics with your groceries.

But the critics at the time were not universally appreciative. Boyd, like many single-minded artists early (even late) in their careers, had more than his share of castigation, misunderstanding and misreading. The art world can be a corrosive place. You need a kind of steely doggedness to thrive in it.

Boyd, a head-down-dogged artist if ever there was one, was variously criticised: for being too sentimental or too harsh. His draughtsmanship was rudimentary or it was staunchly experimental. He was figurative, allusive and



This is our mid-winter combined July/August issue. Because we'll now be off the air until September, we thought this was the right time to remind you that you can catch *Eureka Street* on the net at:

http://www.openplanet.com.au/eureka/

Each month, you can find a selection of current articles, reviews and commentary at this address.

unfashionably prophetic in an age of modernist paring. He sprawled. He was imaginatively incontinent. He was at the vanguard and in the rearguard.

Arthur Boyd is now safely out of reach of conventional criticism, though I don't imagine that is a state to give him much more than ironic satisfaction. It is always good for an artist to be taken up or taken to task by fellow artists or by critics who know the broad end of the funnel from the narrow end, and can conceive their function as something more dynamic than a sieving process that lets only the most refined particles through.

There has, I suspect, always been something unassimilable about Arthur Boyd's art. Just as you are beginning to feel comfortable with his iconography—able to pick the ram and the bird, the barbed wire entanglements much as you track Wagner's *leitmotifs*—or at home in the jangle of black lines that are so characteristic of his drawing, he throws a spanner in the works or he shifts ground. A flower suddenly floats in surreal isolation in the sky. And you have to go back again to the hard business of reorientation. Or you have to decide that maybe this one was a miss among the many hits. Whichever, you are left feeling disoriented.

It is disorientation that is most threatening when one is confronted with new art of any kind. Criticism can help. But it can also build walls of resounding or implacable language around the experience of art.

Some of the articles in this month's issue of *Eureka Street* take up this issue: they look at the current state of criticism, particularly art criticism, in Australia—how enabling it is, how disabling. Others, like Margaret Goldrick's memoir, 'Ramsholt Revisited', do the welcome labour of establishing a detailed context for particular art. Goldrick knows the literal country in which Arthur Boyd and Peter Porter made poems and paintings together. Contexts can be great windows: they will never explain, but they will broaden the view. And they can also provide the start of great stories.

One such, mentioned briefly in Tim Bonyhady's article, 'Bludgeon, Dirk and Grease', concerns Caravaggio's painting, *The Taking of Christ*, which now hangs in the National Gallery of Ireland, on permanent loan from the Jesuit community in Lower Leeson Street, Dublin. It is too good a story to keep in Ireland. I take these bare details from the fuller story told by Noel Barber SJ in his preface to *Saints and Sinners, Caravaggio & The Baroque Image* (edited by Franco Mormando, McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College).

In the early 1930s, Maria Lea Wilson, the daughter of a Catholic solicitor in Charleville and the widow of a Captain Percival Lea Wilson, gave a painting to the Jesuit Community on Leeson Street, Dublin. She did so out of gratitude for their friendship and counsel after her husband, a District Inspector in the Royal Irish Constabulary, had been shot dead by the IRA in his home town of Gorey, County Wexford, in 1920.

Lea Wilson had bought the painting for £8 during a student holiday in Edinburgh. The plaque on the frame read 'Gherardo Della Notte'—the popular name given to the famous 17th-century Dutch artist, Gerard van Honthorst (who specialised in night scenes). The 'Notte' should have been spelled 'Notti', but no-one noticed that detail at the time of Lea Wilson's generous gift to the Leeson Street house.

The painting had the umbrous patina of its age. Some Jesuits say that it had acquired an even thicker coat because the person mopping the floor at Leeson Street also gave the painting a regular rub with the

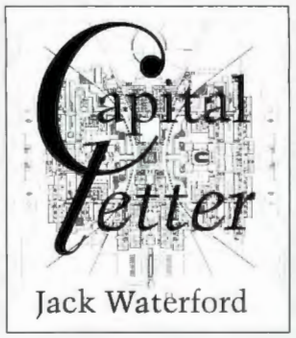
same cleaning implement (this detail is not confirmed). Whatever the cause, the dark face of the painting prompted the Superior, Noel Barber SJ, to contact the Irish National Gallery about cleaning and restoration. The then assistant director, Brian Kennedy, took on the task and brought a restorer and 17th-century expert, Sergio Benedetti, to examine the painting.

Cut to the dénouement.

A painting entitled *Imprigionamento del N.S. di Gherardo della Notte* (note the spelling, 'Notte', again) had been confirmed in 1972 as referring to a work not by Honthorst but by his more famous contemporary. This dark work, gift of the Irish widow of a murdered Englishman, and 60 years hung in the dining room at Leeson Street, was confirmed as the lost Caravaggio.

The story, intriguing enough in its narrative details, is also a study in the mutability of reputation and the volatility of criticism. Honthorst/delle Notti was for a time more famous than the controversial Caravaggio. And Caravaggio himself is now the controversial subject of a controversial book, *M*, by the Australian writer, Peter Robb. All three make very rich winter reading.

See you again in September. **—Morag Fraser**



Jack Waterford

Baring standards

'Obligation, expectation, rules, courtesies, established practices. He was the only person Lester knew who, in the decade of the '80s, used those sorts of terms unselfconsciously, and as if those abstract principles were concrete, and widely understood and practised.'

That's an observation that Ian Callinan made of his hero, the High Court judge, in his potboiler, *The Lawyer and the Libertine*. If it is not something anyone might any longer say about Callinan himself, one might think it could have been said about John Howard, the man who put Ian Callinan on the High Court bench, in a conscious attempt to put a 'Capital C' conservative on to the court.

John Howard himself is rather proud of being a 'Capital C' conservative. Indeed, he has boasted of being the most conservative leader the Liberal Party has ever had. He did not mean it in the sense of being cautious or reactionary, but in the sense of believing in the necessity of maintaining political and social institutions, and in promoting the role of the market, rather than the state, as the engine of the economy and society. On paper, too, his claims are good, and not only in terms of promoting the market and undoing a culture of dependency on the state. In 25 years of public life, his speeches have expressed the decencies, the respect for the civic institutions and a moral basis and sense of public duty in public life.

One can, of course, be too pure, particularly in politics. The novelist Callinan recognised this in his hero by saying that he lacked the flexibility for politics, though he deplored that this was so. ('That's the trouble today. Everybody's flexible. No standards. No moral values.')

But one of the arts of the politician is being able to express the ideal and genuflect to the light on the hill while recognising that sinners can never entirely live up to the standards.

It is only in desperation that one denies the standard. On this, John Howard, Prime Minister, started well, proclaiming that his government would set new standards in public life and would rebuild some of the collapsed trust between people and politicians. His own standards are high, and it is unimaginable that he himself could have got into some of the appalling appearances of conflict of duty that some of his frontbench have.

It is only now, when it is apparent that a high proportion of his team has simply no conception of the rules, that Howard is denying that the principles exist.

Warren Entsch might epitomise how many of the entrepreneurial class in the new Liberal Party simply don't get it. It's not a question of whether he is a Rhodes scholar, but a measure of the collapse of old consensuses about what standards are. That's not an excuse that John Howard or Ian Callinan could use.

Ian Callinan is a classically conservative judge—quite a good one actually—but he has been badly caught out by a bit of bad luck. While a barrister, he acted for a person who wanted to use litigation as a tactic to buy delay and bargaining space, but who was well aware that the litigation was hopeless and the legal claims specious. That such conduct is unethical by the professional standards of a bar of which Ian Callinan was once president, and amounts to a civil wrong, no-one has denied.

There is an abundance of evidence that has led four Federal Court judges, and anyone who has read Mr Callinan's own advice, to conclude that he was an active party, if not the key strategist, in this abuse of court processes. This kind of activity is far more common than one might think, but is usually well hidden by the capacity of clients, and their lawyers, to hide behind legal professional privilege. In Mr Callinan's case, however, his misfortune was that the client ultimately went bankrupt, and the receiver of his property sold the litigation records to the victim of the abuse of the court's processes.

Some of the more creative modern legal minds might be able to fashion some rationale for why conduct of this sort is a reasonable thing. But a 'Capital C' conservative—whether a Howard or a Callinan—should not be able to, least of all as some have been complaining vociferously about the way in which (according to some interest groups) refugees have been using the courts as a strategy for delay.

Callinan, of course, has not been heard directly in his own defence, but he was well aware of the allegations against him when he gave evidence in the court case by which the victim recovered damages. Howard has claimed that a full bench of the Federal Court has ruled the initial findings on him unnecessary to the judgment made. This claim is true only in the sense that the court found that the impropriety of which he appeared to be the author had become, by adoption, the punishable impropriety of another.

If it were merely yet another case of some custodians of the civic order failing to live up to high standards, the cynic might shrug and ask, what's new? Alas, it fits into a wider framework. Howard believes, for example, that most of the institutions of society and the state have over the years been captured by the ideologies of his political opponents, and that he has a right to use his power to refashion them according to his own views. The problem is that, all too often, the emphasis has been on the abuse of and the undermining of the institutions themselves, rather than on attacking and replacing their former guardians. The overt politicisation of the process itself undermines the new trustees, but even more does the demeaning of the bodies and the values they represent.

A bipartisan conservative wave of politics, the so-called 'third way', would seek to put fresh emphasis on an individual principle of duty, one putting as much focus on personal responsibilities as on rights, and as much on personal citizenship as on the benevolent state. At the same time, politicians deplore a lack of notions of civics and want them taught again in the schools. But even inside individual political parties, let alone in politics in general, it is increasingly difficult, from the rhetoric as much as the example, to find agreement about what duty and citizenship mean, or what principles we hold in common.

We might all agree that old principles have to be re-examined in a society now considerably different from that of a generation ago. However, until we find (or re-find) some principles, our major problem is our steep waning of knowledge about and respect for the structures that make us a community. ■

Jack Waterford is editor of the *Canberra Times*.

Associative disorders

From Dr Bruce Wearne, General Secretary, Association for Christian Higher Education in Australia

Discerning what is at stake in the Voluntary Student Unionism legislation is not easy. The Senate majority report favours the legislation, but in terms consistent with the Liberals' policy that freedom in the marketplace must stand above all else. The Committee's May 1999 document (ISSN 1441-9890) 'supports the passage of this legislation because it views it as a measure likely to revitalise and modernise the non-academic sphere of university life' (p19). This is the same old appeal to the principle of 'user pays', now proffered to us as the basis for cultural renewal. Such a narrowing view of culture calls for the spiritual resistance of all Christians because commercial values (rather than the grace and mercy of God) have been accepted in an idolatrous manner as the engine of our society.

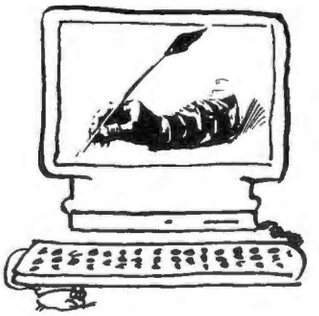
Last month I wrote a submission to the Senate inquiry into VSU on behalf of the Association for Christian Higher Education in Australia. The submission did not endorse the Coalition's view of its legislation, and a Liberal Senator claimed it endorsed compulsion, denying freedom of association. The submission actually opposes compulsion and supports freedom of association, but does so on Christian, rather than liberal, grounds.

There is a need for reform, but the submission strongly advised against more legislation that continues the malformation of university life. Since the abolition of the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission, universities have been subjected to ongoing pressure to violate their integrity as institutions devoted to science and scholarship. Yet it is precisely this violation which is celebrated by the Committee majority in their endorsement of the legislation.

Promoting the latter-day reformation of higher education is not easy. But Christians must seek such a reformation, not just for themselves, and their institutions, but also for the State-controlled secular universities. Such reform must hope that one day these institutions can launch out in a significantly different (non-statist, non-materialistic) direction.

The Senate report would fireproof the legislation from any accusation of increasing government control over universities. It is the 'non-academic sphere of the university' which the proponents of the Bill say they are concerned about. It is in this sphere that they see the problem. The powers that rule in this sphere have become too big; students are conscripted into membership whether they want to or not. They become quasi-'shareholders' when compulsory fees are taken from them at enrolment. The legislation takes away a university's right to do this. The legislation aims to protect the right of all students to graduate and ensure that it does not depend upon whether fees have been paid to an association they have not chosen freely to join.

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



There is no question that reform is necessary. This 'non-academic sphere' has indeed grown into organisations of corporate, commercial and ideological monopoly.

The activities have developed historically on all or most campuses, and previous governments and university authorities have viewed them as legitimate, organised expressions of the university student body. But hitherto, all students also had the *right* of membership in the student association because they had gained a place at the university. It is the meaning ascribed to this right of membership which this legislation now changes. With the growth of the 'non-academic sphere' in the various universities, and the National Union of Students viewing itself as the 'peak body' for all students, the local student association was formed as if it were an industrial union. It is at this 'unionism' that the Coalition directed reform.

Student association membership, which should be viewed as an integral part of the *academic* sphere of the university, had been transformed and undermined. The entire corporatisation of student associations in the 1980s was therefore a serious structural displacement. (It must be said that the empire-building in the so-called 'non-academic sphere' was significantly advanced on some Monash campuses at least by Liberal student officiandos who saw themselves 'trickling up' into Liberal party ranks.) The proposed legislation wants to prevent a university from making it mandatory for all students to contribute to the 'non-academic sphere'. But in its application of the 'freedom of choice' principle, it effectively removes the right of all students to membership of the student association by virtue of their student membership in the university. This is the anomaly in the Coalition's university reform agenda.

Ironically, the legislation's defenders set aside the principle of 'mutual obligation' which they are so keen to defend in 'work for the dole'. Their over-emphasis on individual rights within the academy dissolves any systematic concern for the academic structure of social obligation. The balancing of rights with obligations is the classic conundrum of liberal political theory. But those defending the VSU legislation ignore this, apparently assuming that basic theoretical problems can either be solved by legislative fiat or by ignoring them.

The proposed changes go further than simply requiring university administrations to allow freedom of choice about the 'non-academic sphere'. The sledgehammer hits the peanut at the point where individual choice overrules mutual obligation. Then the university can no longer support the forming by students of the student-academic side of its academic community. The university no longer is run with an expectation that students have a mutual obligation to other students in the student dimension of academic affairs. 'Mutual obligation' as a *sine qua non* of the administration of academic affairs is thereby undermined. It is this, rather than the spurious 'freedom of choice', which should be central to any proposed reforms of

university student associations. Students are now viewed as mere clients.

In its defence of legislating for 'freedom of choice' in the university, the report concludes that 'freedom of choice is the only basis upon which a truly representative student organisation can be built and a new culture of student government evolve' (p19). This is nothing other than a religious devotion to client choice in which the advocates of VSU failed to respect student membership of the university. Legislation against the conscription of students in the 'non-academic sphere' will prevent universities from insisting that students have any academic mutual obligation to each other.

This Liberal reconstruction of the basis of the university reveals a dogged unwillingness to question the commercialisation that has brought the freedom of association issue into view. Though this process took off under the previous regime, the Coalition is happy to take the next step in the process of transformation which has already reached deep into university classrooms. This is a further constraint justified by radically individualistic philosophy, a normative orientation for all of Australia's state-controlled universities. Students, as individual clients, make their own individual contracts with increasingly overworked academic 'providers', who are employed on a similarly individualistic basis. Clients have no need for any academic community. Academic peers are replaced by spurious 'team work'.

The Senate report fudges this academic reconstruction. It might say it is limited to the 'non-academic sphere'. But it assumes that student interaction only has individual consequences in the sanctity of the student's mind, to be taken out of the university when collecting the graduation ticket on departure. It has not occurred to these ideologues that 'student associations' have anything to do with the search for truth. Any corporate student impact upon the university's search for truth is rendered peripheral, if not totally irrelevant, to the university itself.

But student interaction, formal and informal, should be encouraged as integral to the university. The truth is that commercialisation and 'user pays' have become the defining characteristics of the university, and the work of lecturers and students in the discovery of truth is ignored. The qualification is the product. Increased financial reward to the client after graduation is the result. Knowledge and insight have been replaced. In such a context the associating of students together to advance the student vocation as a search for truth hardly makes any sense at all.

A question emerges. Can the legislation under which each university operates be amended to allow it to reform its own constitution, and give itself a legal basis upon which to form the internal life of its academy according to a 'mutual obligation' principle? If universities are required by law and their own constitutions to respect 'mutual (academic) obligation' among students, then their academies may find a constitutional basis upon which to develop the student vocation as an integral, rather than peripheral, part of the academy. This may have to be the way for universities to subvert this government-led destruction of student associations. It may have to be via this legislative route that university students rediscover the student vocation.

An unanticipated consequence of this legislation may be greater dissatisfaction with government control over universities. It may encourage further reflection on the possible benefits of a non-state-controlled public sector within Australian higher education. Compliance with the constricting ideology of voluntary student unionism, and not just with the principles of freedom of association, will be a legal requirement for Commonwealth grants once this legislation is passed. It remains to be seen whether this legislation, and its implementation, allows for the invasion of non-state tertiary education. Bible College and Theological Seminary students also qualify for AUSTUDY. This is Commonwealth money and in some ways AUSTUDY makes smaller non-state tertiary education viable. Will such institutions have to comply with VSU?

The Coalition's failure to be critical of the rampant commercialisation and corporatisation of universities now cements a thick layer of ideological icing on Dawkins' cake. It will put an extra obstacle in the way of students' contributing to the reform of the academic sphere of the university.

The contribution of student associations to the academic work of the universities fell into hard times when corporatisation was all the go in the 1980s. Government and university administrations required it. But the VSU legislation covers up the Coalition's complicity in the process and stringently avoids the real reform issue requiring government attention. Universities are places of and by students; and student associations need reform, not the ideological decimation that this legislation by all accounts will bring about.

Bruce Wearne
Point Lonsdale, VIC

Future at stake

From Ken O'Hara

How can John Howard go on repeating his tired old 'mandate' theory on the Liberals' GST proposals when they only received 40 per cent of first preference votes, with scores of other issues then being voted on as well?

And how can he continue to claim that it was 'all fully explained' in the election, when it was only the work of the main people's organisations, and the experts at the Senate inquiries, which revealed its essential shortcomings and dangers?

But their set of GST proposals was suspect from the start, since it was cooked up in deep secret by a few top Liberal politicians and advisors, not even involving their own backbench members, main people's organisations, or the Parliament itself.

Yes, these massive proposals, to affect everyone's livelihood, had not been presented to Parliament before being launched on the electorate as 'Government Policy', using our tax money to pay for this great deception. How the power of office can go to people's heads! What's wrong with a specific referendum, with full disclosure, on such massive changes?

So watch out now for all changes likely to come from this wreck, for, as Senator Harradine so wisely said, the future of our children, our grandchildren, and their grandchildren for generations to come, is at stake.

Ken O'Hara
Gerringong, NSW

Social cohesion

From Dr Philip Mendes
Whatever the final outcome of the Howard Government's tax legislation in the Senate, the ongoing debate allows us to reflect on what the fundamental objectives of a tax system should be.

Much emphasis has been placed by the Government on the need to make our tax system more globally competitive, and to meet the upwardly mobile aspirations of average taxpayers.

However, most of this rhetoric ignores the core *raison d'être* of tax systems in democratic societies: that is to redistribute income from those who have too much to those who have too little. In addition, revenue from the tax system must be adequate to fund universalistic community services such as health, housing, education and social security which are crucial for our social cohesion.

Instead of seeking to promote ideological objectives which appear to be narrowly economically rationalist at best and overtly regressive at worst, the government should rather be seeking to shore up public support for the tax system and its core ideals. Thus any changes to existing tax legislation should at the very least be accompanied by a publicly funded campaign to promote the civic duty of paying a fair share of tax.

This campaign should emphasise that individual citizens have obligations to others as well as rights, and that governments have a right to intervene to limit the rights of powerful individuals (or groups of individuals) when this is deemed necessary to protect the rights of other less powerful individuals or groups.

Philip Mendes
Clayton, VIC

Nudging profit and power

From Jack Gregory
Settling into a pew in the Collins Street Baptist church in May, waiting for the first of the 'Transformations' lectures to begin, this one entitled *A Secular Society? Politics and the Church*, I was impressed that so many people were coming, and paying, to hear speakers on such a subject. I had had to choose between coming here or going up to the University to hear my one-time colleague Inga Clendinnen lecture, at exactly the same time but for free and undoubtedly in her usual fluent, fascinating way, on child martyrdom in Mexico. *History Through the Looking Glass* that lecture was called, but I chose some face-to-face history, listening to two representatives of the Church—albeit from rather different branches—reflecting on their experiences in dealing with the State in Australia in both its federal and regional manifestations. A hard choice, but secularism was a good deal closer to my interests, and times, than child martyrdom, so here I was.

I was not disappointed, enjoying not only the ecumenical ambience of the evening but the lucidity, integrity, political balance and realism displayed by both speakers, evident not just in their prepared addresses but also in their answers to questions. If these were meddling priests, as Paul Keating had once called Frank Brennan, or yesterday's men as (I think) Jeff Kennett once dismissed Tim Costello and other clerical critics of government promotion of gambling in this State, they certainly spoke with both sense and decency. We surely need such churchmen to help challenge, and hopefully curb, the near-divine-right assumptions of some of the over-mighty subjects who gain political office in our society.

I found myself wondering why there was a question mark in the first part of the title to the lectures. An exclamation mark would seem to have been as appropriate, for there can surely be no question as to the extreme 'this-world-and-only-this-world' nature of our society and its politics. We may still have prayers opening our parliaments, and a humble invocation of God in the preamble to our federal constitution, but when it comes down to the real business there's no doubt that Mammon rules. I tried to recall the lines of Bernard O'Dowd in his splendid sonnet of a century ago on Australia:

> Are you for Light, and trimmed, with oil in place,
> Or but a Will o' Wisp on marshy quest?
> A new demesne for Mammon to infest?
> Or lurks millennial Eden 'neath your face?

There cannot be much doubt now, if there ever was, as to the answer.

But maybe the question mark was meant to raise the issue of whether a thoroughly secular society, with politics to match, is really what we want. If we don't then we certainly need churchmen, plus a good many others, ready to nudge our political leaders away from major policies directed only towards profit and power. We certainly don't want to live in a theocracy, as Fr Brennan commented, but a society obsessed with getting and spending is hardly more appealing, and likely to be, in a blind sort of way, as unjust and intolerant as any theocracy. So, secular historian though I have been, I was ready to give at least two cheers for a church militant, one ready to keep reminding the State that it should have a conscience, and sometimes be guided by it.

I went home and looked up Lord Acton, who never managed to write the great work on the history of freedom in Church and State that he had in him, but did write, in one of his essays:

> It [the Catholic Church] is not only an institution but a system of ideas in which all true principles of policy are rooted, and the guardian of that true liberty which is the privilege of Christian nations ... The Church has to remind princes of their duties and nations of their rights, and to keep alive the spirit of personal dignity and independence without which the religious and political character of men are alike degraded ... that is no position worthy of her in which she exercises no moralising influence upon the State.

Today, for 'princes' read presidents, prime ministers and premiers; and for 'the Catholic Church' churches!

Jack Gregory
Balwyn, VIC




The Month's Traffic

Reaching Cooktown

MUCH OF THE ADVENTURE was in getting there, which is probably what Lieutenant James Cook felt in the seven days' limp to Cooktown after his ship was holed on what is now Endeavour Reef. The journey from Cairns had taken nine hours and three buses. At Mossman, both bus and driver, the nature-lover Mick, were replaced. In their stead was a high-set 4WD Centurion with a cracked windscreen, and the sardonic, unshaven Steve. Here an Aboriginal family boarded, and a feral American whose bag was decorated with shell, feathers and bone.

Thus far the run had been idyllic. On the way to Port Douglas, rainforest truly meets reef, as advertised. Out in the Coral Sea are Double Island, the Scout's Hat, the Low Isles. Moving away from the coast after Mossman, we were again among sugar cane, while a signpost directed us along a road untaken to the Karnak theatre run by Diane Cilento and Tony Shaffer who—in another world—wrote *Sleuth*.

Other names resonated. We turned off for 'the Daintree', site of one of the most bitter conservation battles. A ferry came across the river out of a background of thick greenery down to the water's edge. We crossed to find that protest was not yet done. Several car-loads of middle-class residents were there to object, decorously, that because of tourism's demand for the picturesque, they had no mains electricity. But we were climbing away, up the Alexandra Range, past a tea plantation and then through thick rainforest in the National Park, before plunging down to Cape Tribulation, another of the places along this coast for which Cook found a heartfelt name. For Steve this was a three-fag stop and for me the chance to encounter a poster with a coloured photo of Daniel Nute from Devon, last seen hereabouts in July 1997, but whom his fond parents still believe to be alive.

It soon became evident why Steve had fortified himself. The road turned rough and steep, throwing its passengers bruisingly around as it climbed first one mountain range and then another. In between we ploughed through the waters of creeks like the Tatchalbadga, only to come to others that were dry and rock-strewn. Still others, pale green, meandered through the forest, in and out of the sunlight. After the Bloomfield River, where the causeway was just water, we passed the Wujal Wujal Aboriginal Community. At Bloomfield we changed to a van, piloted by Smithy. The road got worse. Summer rains had washed whole sections away. Moving at a fast walking pace, we were mocked by the 100km speed-limit signs. At one point the road shrank to a single lane with a vee-shaped storm gutter running down the centre.

By the time Black Mountain filled the front windscreen, we were on a better road. This is a volcanic outcrop thickly strewn with boulders whose covering of algae gives the place its name. The mountain is replete with tales of people who have vanished within it. This is the habitat of the rock-haunting frog and of two other species found only within a few kilometres of here. Cooktown came soon, the final approach disarmingly easy. For all its burden of history, this was at first sight just a pleasant country town. My destination was the Seaview, which looks out at the Endeavour River at the place where Cook careened his bark for repairs.

In the morning I ate breakfast at the Cook's Landing kiosk on the pier. The sausages and eggs were good. Chilli con carne and fried scones N/A. The Endeavour is no small stream near its mouth, but half a mile wide, with a view across to sand dunes and—in the distance—one of the last escarpments of the Great Dividing Range. It was a day so tonic that mine host (who looked like a refugee Peter Porter) declared that 'You could call the Queen your aunt.' This was a cheerier view of the world than that of the previous night's waitress who joked tiredly that Cooktown people were so slow it takes them an hour-and-a-half to watch *Sixty Minutes*.

Climbing to the top of the 162m Grassy Hill, I shared one of the great historically charged views in Australia: south to the reef where the *Endeavour* struck, below to the river, north to the mountains that Cook's party named—Fantastic, Surprise, Unbelievable. At ground level, back in town, there was much to remark on a smaller scale. There is a statue of Cook ('He Left Nothing Unattempted') and a memorial in grey stone, decorated with native animals. A fountain bears the deathless verse of a former mayor in memory of Mrs Watson who—in 1881—escaped from Aborigines in the pot her husband used for boiling down trepang. She died of thirst, so the fountain is not the most considerate remembrance. Her grave is in the local cemetery, overgrown by bougainvillaea. Here too are memorials to some of the 20,000 Chinese who came in the 1870s for the Gold Rush at the Palmer River and to the 'Normanby woman' who grew up among Aborigines and died when returned to what her grave calls 'civilisation'. It is a cemetery like no other. To encourage contemplation there is a lane of trees that passes by giant termite mounds and ends in mangrove swamp.

Housed in what had been a Catholic convent, the regional museum boasts of being the best in Australia. It arrays Aboriginal implements near those of the first white farmers; reconstructs a joss house; remembers Mrs Watson; offers a view of the river from the top verandah and flies the red ensign out the front. Strongest of all is Cook's presence, in relics of the *Endeavour* found on a dive in 1971. Here are cannon, and iron and stone ballast cast overboard to lighten the ship so that it could clear the reef and reach the place that now bears Cook's name. Here men may have felt that they truly had vanished, but after 48 days the voyage began again, a still hazardous passage through the reef was negotiated, and they survived to bring news of this continent home.

—Peter Pierce

Gone camping

IT IS CURIOUS THAT camping has been overlooked as a significant part of our history. Almost no attention has been paid to it. I am not aware of any histories of camping in Australia. A cursory check of the State Library catalogue reveals directories of camping grounds and catalogues of camping equipment and seasonal articles in the weekend magazines, but no serious studies—not even a coffee-table book.

Yet camping has powerful mythological importance for Australians. It is a relationship to place that spans the settlement divide. Camping has been a common human activity for a very long time. Europeans may have brought tents to Australia but they did not bring camping. The Aborigines are great campers. From their arrival, Europeans found it natural to refer to Aboriginal 'camps'. The middens along the coast tell us how they moved from one good spot to another, visiting the same sites year after year. And the camper's eye notes what

well-chosen sites they are: near the beach but out of the wind; near a creek but sheltered behind the dunes. Exactly the sort of spots that came to be prized by other campers until they too were driven back from the foreshores by the same conniving partnership of government and land-grabber.

You query the term 'campers' to describe Aborigines, fearing that it may be derogatory? Then you are not a camper. Camping is a tradition indigenous and non-indigenous share without having to anguish about it. It is a love of sitting down on a spot for a while. The Aborigines would arrive at a spot they knew from last year (and the year before that and the year before that), knock up a bark lean-to, light a fire and throw on a feed. Exactly as campers do now with aluminium, canvas and a gas bottle. And, given the chance, we choose the same sort of spots to pitch our camps. We do this because our parents showed us where and how to do it. The lore of camping is sustained by oral, not written, tradition. Technological innovations cannot hide the fact that the activity itself has not changed over thousands of years. Nomads, gypsies, travellers, campers—we all sustain this living link to the pre-settlement period. Making a temporary camp somewhere, then moving on, still remains the best way to know this or any country.

When anyone landed here they camped. The Buginese camped while they fished for sea slug. The Portuguese and the Dutch camped (but didn't choose good spots). And when the British arrived they camped too—in rows, with flags. Constructed of canvas and rope and wooden poles, these tents were made of the same elements as the sailing ships by which they came. Today, the pitches may have morphed into domes and the rope into synthetic fibre, but tents are still very much with us. We like to have one. How many million tents would there be in Australia? What family does not have one tucked away in the garage or under the house? For there is a handed-down wisdom: we'll be all right so long as we have a tent. Don't worry about Y2K: if the worst comes to the worst, we can always camp out.

Explorers carried tents. They were followed by the squatters and settlers whose first dwelling was almost invariably a tent. When gold was discovered, tent *cities* sprang up. These were our greatest-ever gatherings of campers. S.T. Gill's drawings illustrate how ubiquitous were the little domestic tents, but there were also tent stores, tent hotels, tent courthouses and tent theatres. It was tent everything. And on the other side of the creek, the Chinese camped in tents too. Even our artists camped. Pictures of tents hang in our national collections. You cannot think visually about Australian history without seeing camps and tents.

When we felt the need to prove ourselves in war we sent campers. We sent campers to the Crimea and campers to the Boer War. And when the big one came in 1914 we created vast canvas encampments at Broadmeadows and then packed them up and took them with us to Egypt. At Heliopolis there were thousands of AIF tents immaculately laid out within sight of the Pyramids. We took tents to Gallipoli. And by God we wished we'd had them at Ypres when the trenches were full of freezing water.

SUMMA theologiae

Wobbly wheels

WHEN I WAS YOUNG, I used to be a fan of St Thomas. We studied a philosophy, said to be his, in Latin. I had no difficulty in accepting that it gave a true account of the world: I grew cool towards it only as my interest in rhetoric grew. When I tried to write my Thomist philosophy in English, I could not believe that any imaginable reader would take it seriously. And so for the first time I became personally involved in the troublesome relationships between Catholicism and modernity.

This question is discussed at a considerably higher level in *New Blackfriars* (April 1999). A number of Catholic philosophers reply to John Haldane's lucid article on Thomist philosophy and the future of Catholic Philosophy. Haldane argues that, historically, Thomism has been healthy when it engages with other schools of thought. He regards it as unfortunate that many Catholic thinkers have seen the post-Enlightenment world as hostile to faith, and particularly have separated themselves from the dominant stream of analytical philosophy. He argues that serious contact would be beneficial for both.

To a non-philosopher, the responses to Haldane are of interest as much for the temperaments displayed as for the arguments which they underlie. Some reflect the pain of working in a field which is often hostile to religion. Others clearly exude delight at broad catholic exploration of many worlds of philosophy. Others are proudly combative under the banner of one faith, one baptism, one pope and one Catholic philosophy.

The most stimulating response comes, as those who admire his work might expect, from Charles Taylor. He argues that the contact will benefit analytic philosophy, for it, 'like most gins is much better in a cocktail than taken neat'. But while acknowledging that the fusion of philosophies often leads to innovative thought, he remarks that, because of their desire for a synthesis, Thomist philosophies have difficulty when accounting for history or differences. Other philosophical and theological positions are often treated reductively or patronised in order to be dealt into the synthesis.

In *Church History* (March 1999), Laurence Moore addresses the relationship between religious education and modernity in 19th-century North America. He argues against the common belief that confessional religious education was forced on students and produced conformity of thought. Only when religious instruction in schools was systematised, tamed and instrumentalised did it induce a lack of interest, Moore asserts. In the early 19th century, however, exposure to what Benjamin Franklin dismissed as 'polemical divinity' encouraged independence of thought. For those communicating the faith so trusted in its power that they allowed fierce debate.

Among many examples of the power of religious controversy to strengthen independence of mind, I was particularly taken by Frances Willard. She transformed the Women's Christian Temperance Union into a powerful lobby group for women's health. Her more enduring claim to fame, however, is in the history of bicycling. To encourage independence in other women, at the age of 53 she learned this then scandalously liberating skill. She was attended by three men, variously porkpie, bowler and top-hatted, to ensure that she remained upright on Gladys. On the basis of her learning, she concluded grandly that 'all failure was from a wobbly will rather than a wobbly wheel'. My experience has led me to be less categoric.

Bicycles then were modern. In *Modern Believing* (April 1999), Adrian Hastings explores the pejorative meaning of 'modern', found equally in Arnold's 'strange disease of modern life' and in the rhetoric of Pius IX and Pius X. But in Christian tradition, modernity has not always been scorned. In the 14th and 15th centuries, the *devotio moderna* was encouraged as a movement of spiritual reform. It emphasised experience, and valued interiority and spiritual freedom against reliance on institutional conformity. The emphases of the *devotio moderna* found expression in the very different works of Erasmus and of St Ignatius. Both were suspect in their day for emphasising the sanctity of the inner relationship between God and the human person, the castle of the conscience.

Like a well-formed and sensitive conscience, modernity keeps questioning. So, appropriately, a larger than usual number of *Concilium* (1999/1) is devoted to Unanswered Questions.■

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

Camping is central to the Australian military experience. Being in the field is called being 'under canvas'. War is more about camping than about killing. We were still camping in Korea and Vietnam. The heavy-duck, centre-poled, wooden-floored army tent remains about as solid a tent as you can get. You can run up one side and down the other without causing the slightest damage. It's the brick-veneer of tents. In the housing shortage after the Second World War, people bought them as first homes.

The arrival of the car ushered in the period of the auto-tent. This developed into an annual migration of a large part of the population from suburban villas to the seaside. By the 1950s, camping was the chosen form of holiday-making for most Australians. Campers took over all the most desirable foreshores of the eastern coast. Inland, tents were strung like canvas pearls along the banks of every decent river.

The Golden Years of camping lasted until the late 1960s. This was camping by choice rather than necessity. Although there were designated camp grounds, usually administered by local shires, many people preferred to find a quiet little spot of their own, away from everyone else. You could camp almost anywhere. The law was lax, or rather, relaxed. The beach side of the coastal roads belonged almost exclusively to the campers. You won't find many tents there now. Only 'No Camping' signs.

But Australians are a camping people. It's in the blood. When I set out as a 22-year-old to cross Asia to Europe on the overland trail, I carried a tent (as well as a billy, a frying pan, flour and salt). That was in 1966, not 1866. I carried my house on my back. I slept out. I was self-sufficient. That seems quaint today, but once it guaranteed survival.

Campers pride themselves on getting by with as little as possible. This is not a fashionable attitude. Camping is for getting on the cheap what others pay for. That is heresy in a world that says the best should be reserved for those who can pay the most. And even though it is now possible to support your camp with all sorts of clever gas appliances, the basic experience of camping remains that of *doing without*. For tens of thousands of Australians it is an annual pilgrimage to celebrate a simpler life.

It goes beyond proving that you can survive without electricity. Camping connects you directly with the earth and the sky, the vegetation, the animals and especially the birds. The strength of the wind; the power of the waves; they

overwhelm you. You understand the scale of things and your own place. Camping is a test of endurance. You can't avoid the elements. 'Going inside' a tent is no escape. You have to tough it out. But if you want to know this land, experience it, there is no better way. When you camp you live *in* the dirt, *in* the rain, *in* the sun.

But camping is unfashionable in government circles. It resonates too much with the old values. For above all it is a profoundly egalitarian experience. It is a greater leveller than spectator sport and it remains staunchly amateur. There are no corporate boxes (although they're working on that). While there are classes among campers, they reflect camping skills and not wealth. The rich do not necessarily have the best gear and those with the best gear are not necessarily good campers. Good campers are those who camp well, using what they have.

In campgrounds everyone is always *on view*. A popular pastime is walking along the lines looking into other people's camps and acknowledging particularly elegant or ingenious set-ups. The only fences here are windbreaks made of hessian. This lack of privacy is another thing non-campers find abhorrent. It is also why privatisation is inimical to camping. Camping is a public, communal activity where 'privacy' is respected by keeping your radio down, not by hiding your bodily functions. The great gathering place is still the public bath—now known as the shower block

Improvisation is particularly admired by campers. Camping is one of the few activities where skill with a piece of fencing wire, or similar, is still appreciated. If this seems a compendium of old Australian virtues, it is not surprising. Camping sustains the old culture. Camping lore is passed down from hand to hand, generation to generation. Skills and tools are shared. People keep an eye out for one another's stuff. Children wander freely in next door and are rewarded with a biscuit. Above all, campgrounds exhibit every known form of the extended family, gathered in an atmosphere of kindly tolerance.

And yet for some years simple family camping—this quintessential Australian experience—has been coming under sustained attack. We have been driven back from the beach side of the road. We have been corralled into reservations. They won't let us have our dogs. Sound familiar? Campers are being pushed away from the coast for the same reasons as were the Aborigines. We are in the way of progress. We mess up the view. Our primitive encampments 'greedily' exclude those who want to enjoy the scenery through picture windows. Quite simply, we have found ourselves in the way of profit.

Camping is becoming an endangered activity. It should be protected. It is important for the culture. But the family camping holiday does not sit comfortably with the tourist industry because camping is about minimising economic activity rather than maximising it. The last thing most campers want is more *service*. It's all about *doing it yourself*—another of these old Australian values.

Now the Victorian Government wants to force the shires to sell off their campgrounds to entrepreneurs who will 'make better use of them', meaning that they want to extend upmarket accommodation at the expense of campers. This is a violation of the whole tradition of camping on public land that has been a continuous part of our national culture not only recreationally but also historically and spiritually

So far this battle has been joined mainly with respect to high-profile places such as Wilson's Promontory. But for many years campers have been feeling the squeeze all over the state. Privatisation of publicly owned campgrounds is the last stage of this process. The plan has been drawn up. But this is not simply about certain places. There is something else at stake. How is it that those in power seem to have missed the historical and cultural significance of this simple, inexpensive, inclusive, very *Australian* activity? Perhaps it is because no-one has put it in these terms. Or perhaps it is because it is so cheap. In dollar land, nothing cheap is valuable.

There is an ideological mote in the government eye that seems to prevent it from seeing the cultural importance of camping. It may be true that there is a relatively small economic advantage to be extracted from it compared with farming tourists. Family camping is essentially a domestic activity. It is not marketable to the international trade. In fact, as at The Prom, it is seen to get in the way of potential business by taking up valuable space. Even more distressing may be the suspicion that campers actually seek to *subtract* financial value in order to add spiritual value. Camping links us both to our ancestors and to the land.

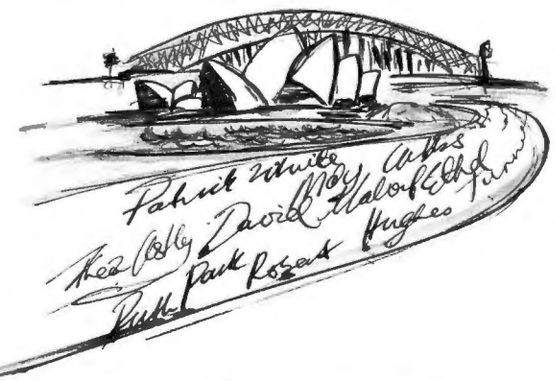
It is time to defend it as a major cultural form in its own right.

—Bill Garner

Collins class

A FEW WEEKS AGO, 360 of the great and good of Sydney's literary life (if you can imagine) gathered in the parliamentary dining room to celebrate 20 years of the NSW Premier's literary awards. Fair enough—these awards were the first, and are still the most valuable, of the state literary awards. David Malouf, Thea Astley, Helen Garner, Drusilla Modjeska, Les Murray, Ruth Park, Nick Enright, Christina Stead—these are some of the names who have saluted the judges over the years.

Curiously, the man who started it all wasn't there. It seems that no-one had ensured the attendance of Neville K. Wran, premier 1976–1986; although his wife, the literary agent Jill Hickson, was at her



customary place. Wran picked up the idea from Donald Horne and Richard Hall and ran with it.

Another Man Who Wasn't There was Peter Collins, until recently leader of the state opposition. When the ALP lost government, in 1988, there was talk of scrapping Wran's awards and they were saved only by the intervention of Peter Collins as arts minister. Writers have long memories. When one of the speakers mentioned the saving advocacy by Collins a decade earlier, there was a burst of applause.

Writers remember Collins for something else as well. As arts minister, he initiated the Writers Walk, the arc of plaques curving round Circular Quay between the Opera House and the international cruise wharf. The plaques commemorate writers for every taste, from Patrick White to May Gibbs and from Ethel Turner to Robert Hughes. Arts ministers come and go—the best you can hope for is that they don't interfere too much. But Peter Collins made a difference. Gone now but not forgotten.

—Edmund Campion

One day less to go

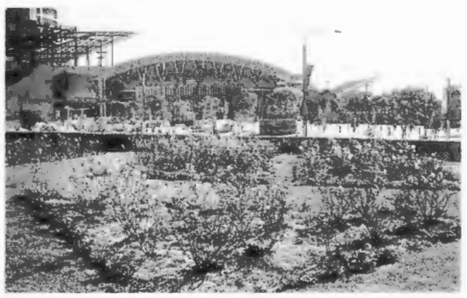
For $10, you can take a bus tour of the Olympic Site at Homebush Bay. Our driver has badges on his hat from all over the world. He lets us know that he is filling in for another driver who hasn't had his lunch yet. He's doing us a favour

'It's been a darn kerfuffle'.

He lets out the handbrake and the bus moves.

'Ripper Rita', he says. 'At least something works around here.'

It's mid week and the bus is full of older people. Two television advertisements have recently been featuring this age group and their grandchildren. One is for health awareness: the old person has lost a son and the child a father. The message is that at least they have each other. The other advertisement is easy to mistake for the first. The grandchild is asking the older person about the time he went to the Olympics. The message is obvious. Going to an Olympics was the highlight of the grandparent's life. This campaign must be effective. My seven-year-old niece has been asking if her family will be going to the games. They live hundreds of miles from Sydney. Not many events cause somebody that age to plan for something that far away, that far ahead.



Above: Olympic architecture, 1990s—Stadium Australia.
Right: Gardening, 1930s—the rose garden outside Homebush's Heritage Café.

Much of the packaging of the games is about creating history before it happens. The planners have done all they can to attach a sense of almost supernatural significance to the site. Part of this means emphasising the past. The tour bus leaves from outside the Heritage Café, one of the facilities which have been installed in what was once the administration centre of the state abattoirs. This is a series of classic Sydney late-federation blue-brick buildings. Details have been preserved, such as a small cactus garden, planted between the wars when cacti were a popular form of ornamentation. Apparently this was a result of the Mexican enthusiasms of D.H. Lawrence and Aldous Huxley.

The man who makes the coffee at the Heritage Café, George, can look over his shoulder from his cappuccino machine to the 110,000-seat Stadium Australia.

'Pretty slack view,' he laughs. 'That's the place. That's where they'll have the opening and closing ceremonies. That's where history will happen.'

The bus driver asks if we noticed the rose garden outside the café. We had.

'Those roses are 70 years old. They were planted in the '30s. You know why they look so good?'

Nobody can guess.

'They got all the manure from the abattoir.'

The driver is a skilful commentator. He has the gift of being able to impress his audience and allow them the comfort of being cynical at the same time. He says that the Olympic railway station looks like the world's biggest carport but manages to let slip that during the Royal Easter Show it easily handled 43,000 travellers a day, more than it was built for. He points out the pavilions of the new showgrounds and mentions that the world's media ought to be accommodated in the cattle pavilion. He handles years of complex environmental issues surrounding the site by telling us that they got rid of the smell from the toxic dump and that the family of frogs found on the proposed tennis venue happened to be green and gold.

'So we had to move the tennis.'

The elderly couple behind us are beginning to weary.

'I'm scared to go back to the doctor,' says the woman. 'I just can't get me blood pressure down.'

She perks up again, however, when we round a corner and come to one of the most prominent buildings on the site. Opposite Bicentennial Park, standing alongside a magnificent Moreton Bay, is the NSW State Lotteries Office. This is the establishment whose introduction of the scratchie has all but destroyed the fingernails of the state. The driver tells us that his contributions would have built the verandah out the back. The man behind us says in a stage whisper that the place has done nothing for his wife's blood pressure. She chuckles.

We learn that the central avenue includes almost three million paving stones. It is the fantasy of any bloke who ever built a backyard BBQ. The athletes' village, the driver assures us, is the dream of every woman. We can't guess why.

'No kitchens. They will be going in after the games when the village will become the world's biggest solar suburb.'

Meanwhile, price tags are flashing past at a dizzying rate. A mere $700 million for the main stadium, a few bob extra for the swimming pool, a little petty cash for the hockey arena, the baseball park, the archery range, the shooting venue. Records are broken with every fresh statistic. Finally, we reach the physical centre of the site, the four-star hotel where the IOC delegates will be accommodated.

'Don't worry,' says the driver. 'We will cater for all pockets. Everyone from the backpacker to Kerry Packer.'

This is the last laugh. It's time to get off.

'What d'ya reckon?' the man behind asks his wife.

She pauses to deliberate.

'I reckon we oughta go back to the bowling club.'

—Michael McGirr SJ

This month's contributors: **Peter Pierce** is the author of *The Country of Lost Children: An Australian Anxiety*; **Bill Garner** is a Melbourne writer; **Edmund Campion** teaches history at the Catholic Institute of Sydney, Strathfield; **Michael McGirr** SJ is the consulting editor of *Eureka Street*, and the author of *Tim Winton: the Writer and his Work*.

Seek and we shall fund

PETER WILLS is an unlikely hero of medical research. In fact, Archimedes wonders if any other property developer was ever held in such high esteem by those who work at the laboratory bench. Whenever Wills enters a seminar room or lecture theatre these days, it feels as though spontaneous applause is about to break out.

It's all because Australia's medical establishment credits Wills (who among other things is chairman of Sydney's Garvan Institute of Medical Research) as the man most responsible for the May Budget's doubling of funding for medical research over the next six years. Wills chaired the Federal Government's Health and Medical Research Review, whose report recommended just such an increase in the budget of the National Health and Medical Research Council (NH&MRC).

That funding boost has resulted in an unprecedented buzz around hospital and institute corridors, a spring in the step of researchers, a feeling that Australian research is really on the way to assume its place at the table of Major Players. The only sour note has been the belated realisation that the Government's largesse has been restricted to medical research and biotechnology. Worse, the increase in funding seems to have come at least partly at the expense of other areas of research endeavour, for example, the Australian Geological Survey Organisation, university infrastructure and the CSIRO.

The Government's attitude is short-sighted, particularly as medical research is founded on infrastructure and research in other areas. In fact, it seems clear that it has been driven to boost biotechnology more by the lure of potential jobs and profits than by any newfound enthusiasm for science or research.

So far, the Government has acted only on part of the agenda outlined in the Wills report—the easy part. According to the report, Australia, with about 0.3 per cent of the world's population, produces about 2.5 per cent of the world's research output. But in order to capitalise on the nation's undoubted strength in medical research, two other changes will need to be made: major tax changes—particularly a significant cut in capital gains tax rates—and a complete shift in cultural attitudes.

At present, corporate investors in biotechnology in Australia face capital gains tax of 36 per cent and individual investors up to 48 per cent. These rates are high by international standards. In some countries, such investors are not taxed at all. 'They would face 25 to 40 per cent lower returns in Australia as compared with the UK or US solely due to taxation differences', according to the Wills report. One researcher remarked: 'I was told [by a US pension fund] that I could get $50 million in 24 hours if we could change the tax laws.' At the time of writing, researchers were generally optimistic that the Review of Business Taxation being conducted by Mr John Ralph would act to lower this barrier to investment.

But while such changes to the tax system would amount to another great leap forward, it is the cultural change which is the key. The Wills report and the Budget have led to a frenzy of seminars and discussions on the issue of how to make research pay. The most striking impression which emerges from these gatherings is just how divorced Australian research culture is from commercialisation when compared with that of the US, or even Sweden.

TAKE THE ISSUE of patents, for instance. Under the Australian system, if a researcher wishes to patent a discovery that could be developed into a product or technique, he or she initially lodges a provisional patent. This registers ownership of the idea, and gives the researcher a year within which to provide evidence to back up the claims made for the idea. But during that year, researchers have to keep a low profile. They are warned that if they talk about what they have found, they run the risk of nullifying their patent claim because the idea would no longer be deemed 'novel'. The upshot is that researchers cannot publish papers, speak at conferences or pursue most of the activities generally regarded as establishing credibility in their profession. It's almost as if they are being sent to Coventry for daring to profit from their science.

In the US, commercialisation is viewed in another way. The law is structured differently. When researchers register patent claims, they are given a year's grace to talk about what they are doing. During that time, providing they were the first to lay claim to their innovation, whatever they say may not be taken down and used in evidence against them—or, more importantly, be used to take away ownership of their concept.

This is not a trivial variation. While their Australian counterparts are shying away from the public spotlight, American researchers can be up on their tubs spruiking for business and development funds.

But wait, there's more. The US researchers are also free to publish their work in the usual way, and do not have to put their academic progress on hold. In fact, many researchers publish when they register their patent and use the scientific paper as the way to date their claim over their ideas. In Australia, researchers with a patentable idea who are required to withhold publication, lose their prime method of earning the respect of their peers and of supporting applications to funding bodies like the NH&MRC.

The Wills report, recognising this problem, recommends that patent applications be treated by funding bodies as the equivalent of scientific papers in providing evidence of research activity and success. That's as may be. But when NH&MRC boss, Professor Richard Larkins, was put on the spot at the recent Research, Investment and Commercialisation for Health Forum in Melbourne, he admitted, quite reasonably, that a paper reviewed by peers and published in a respected scientific journal was far more likely to carry weight with his agency than an application for a provisional patent for a commercial idea which may or may not work.

The irony is that a culture of commercial success has to be a culture which accepts failure. Most patents never give rise to anything. The culture in the US understands, supports and tolerates the sort of risk-taking required to build a better mousetrap. Not so Australia. We seem much happier to put up with mediocrity. Until that attitude to risk-taking and failure changes, from the Government down, commercialisation of our research is going to be an uphill battle. ■

Tim Thwaites is a freelance science writer.

The view from the kampung

*When **Peter Mares** spoke with some Jakarta residents before the historic June election, he found both scepticism and hope.*

IT'S SATURDAY LUNCHTIME, just two days before Indonesia's national election, and Anggerek Mall is buzzing. From the packed-out Pizza Hut to the chaotic whirl on the glassed-in ice skating ring, tenants in South East Asia's biggest shopping complex are doing a roaring trade.

'It's a good sign,' says anthropologist and social activist Bambang Rustanto. 'It shows that people feel relaxed and safe. It's not normally like this just before elections. Usually everyone stays at home in case there's trouble.'

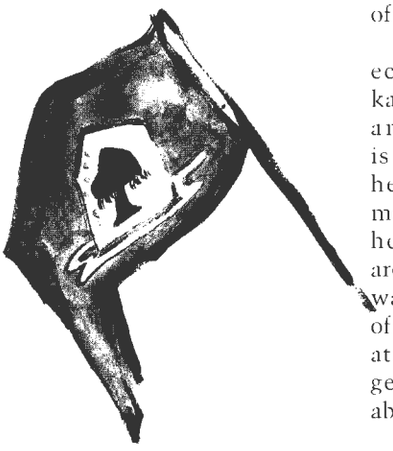
'After all, it was malls like this that got fire-bombed during the riots last May,' points out Bambang's colleague, Australian researcher Lea Jellinek. She takes me to a walkway suspended high on the fifth floor and we slip behind booths selling CDs and perfume so that she can point out the view. Below us tracts of vacant green land are sandwiched between the concrete flyovers of the airport expressway and spacious estates where housing is reserved for senior government officials.

'A lot of the poor communities that lived here have been cleared away,' says Lea. 'It's like Los Angeles superimposed on rural Java. Thirty or forty years ago the place was called Kampung Sawah (the village of rice fields) and people describe paddy fields and trees and a river flowing by.'

Not all the remnants of that old world have disappeared. Clinging to narrow strips of land are clusters of makeshift dwellings, some inhabited by original Betawis, natives of the Jakarta region. Time and again they have been forced to move on as different waves of development washed over the city; their family land long lost to bitumen or brick. In their ramshackle, impermanent community, the Betawis have now been joined by migrants from other parts of Indonesia, especially central Java.

Nestled below the seven gleaming towers of Anggerek Mall, the community of Kampung Kemanggisan is home to some 2000 of Jakarta's poorest citizens. Bambang and Lea have selected this community to set up a micro-credit scheme, providing seed money for saving and credit circles, to help people establish themselves in small business or trade and to help rebuild community networks along with way.

Lea and Bambang have agreed to let me trade on the rapport and trust that they have built up with local people by taking me on a tour of the kampung. I am seeking a bottom-up view of Indonesia's historic June 7 election.



The inspiration for Lea and Bambang's credit and savings project comes from a woman in her late 30s called Siti. Siti is a native Betawi and, since her husband left her for another woman, she has brought up three children on her own, working in a variety of different jobs. Currently, she collects vegetables that fall off trucks at the market, sorts and cleans them, then sells them in the kampung. Siti has always ensured that she has enough money to pay the monthly bills by putting aside a little of her earnings each day in separate tins; one tin for the rent, one for the children's education, one for health care, one for emergencies and so on. While Siti's three children are voting for different parties in the election, she herself says she is *bingung*, or confused. The right to vote freely seems to weigh on her like a heavy responsibility.

'I'm afraid that I may choose the wrong party,' she says. 'Then there won't be any change.'

One of Siti's main concerns is the high cost of living. She hopes that a new government can bring down the price of basic goods, prices that sky-rocketed in the wake of Indonesia's financial crisis in mid 1997. It is a simple, straightforward and obvious wish, but one which is extraordinarily difficult to achieve. It is a subject that has not been broached by any of the major parties in the election. In fact, all the parties have vowed to abide by the terms of IMF restructuring packages provided to Indonesia, which means that there is no way that they will be able to introduce new subsidies to cut the cost of basic goods.

Siti's concerns are echoed by other kampung residents. In a narrow alley a woman is pounding a whole head of garlic in a mortar and pestle while her neighbours sit around in their doorways passing the time of day, children playing at their feet. It's easy to get people talking about the election.

'There's a big difference between this election and the previous ones,' says Siswono, who has lived in the kampung for 10 years and works as a street-trader selling fried rice. 'Previously, we were gathered together in the village and given a lecture

about who we should choose. We were sometimes forced and there was money paid. We're not having any of that experience now. There's no instruction on who to vote for, there's no force and I haven't encountered any people paying money.'

Siswono knows the names of most of the major parties in the election and can identify the leaders. He has decided to vote for the PKB, the National Awakening Party, because of its links to Indonesia's largest Muslim organisation, Nadhlatul Ulama, or NU. Back in his village in central Java, Siswono and his neighbours were among NU's 30-million-plus members and he holds the organisation's leader, the near-blind Abdurrahman Wahid, in great esteem.

'He is recognised as a great scholar, knowledgeable about Islam and we have hopes that if he could become president, then he would change things dramatically. We feel very strongly about him.'

While Siswono puts his hope in Abdurrahman Wahid, his wife, Aminah, has made a different choice. She plans to vote for PDI-P, the party led by Megawati Sukarnoputri, although she is a little bit confused about Megawati's relationship to Indonesia's founding President Sukarno.

Much to the amusement of some of her neighbours, Aminah is not quite sure whether Megawati is Sukarno's wife, or his daughter, but either way she believes the connection is important because she knows that Sukarno was someone who fought for the nation of Indonesia.

Aminah works washing clothes for the middle-class families who live in the government housing compounds near by. She, Siswono and their three children share a plywood shanty about the size of a chicken hutch. But neither she nor her husband mention housing as an issue that they would like to see addressed in the election. Their aspirations are more modest. Like Siti, they hope that the price of basic foods like cooking oil and sugar can be brought back down to pre-crisis levels.

Siti, Aminah, Siswono and their neighbours say no-one has visited their kampung to drum up votes, not even the ruling Golkar party, which always used to tell them how to vote and which has its national headquarters barely a stone's throw away down the road.

'Golkar has not cared for us even though we're located very close to their headquarters,' says Siswono. 'They have pushed us to the side and they've been mismanaging things at the top. So that's why we don't like them.'

FOR MANY kampung residents, the election campaign has been a chance to have fun, to take to the streets and join the huge, festive parades. But others, like Sri Mulyani, have been afraid.

'I'm a bit scared,' she says. 'I'm a bit worried about what's going on out there in the city during the campaign and one of my children told me I should stay at home. I could get caught up in a riot.'

Sri Mulyani is a single mother with five children, who earns a living by selling soft-drinks. She also comes from central Java and has lived in Kampung Kemanggisan for almost 30 years, but she tells us she is still only a visitor to Jakarta. Sri Mulyani says that we look like Golkar officials, because we are so well dressed. But she says Golkar officials wouldn't dare come to the kampung these days.

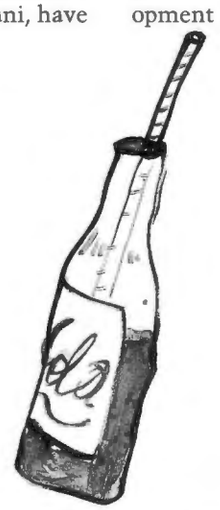
'No-one has been here and they're not courageous enough to come here to tell us how to vote.'

Like her neighbours, Sri Mulyani's biggest concern in the election is the price of basic foods.

'Look, don't ask me about leadership. I haven't got the foggiest idea. I am in the house. I am working all day. I have to pay 75,000 rupiah ($A15) for the rent each month. I've got to feed my children, educate my children and pay this rent and I'm jolly confused about who is which leader. I see them on TV and I can't see any difference between one and another.'

Sri Mulyani is typical of many older voters who say they find it confusing now that there are so many different parties and leaders. This does not mean that she is nostalgic for the tight restrictions of the Suharto decades, when only three officially sanctioned parties were allowed to compete in the polls and when Golkar was assured of at least two-thirds of the vote. However, the struggles she has experienced in her life make her somewhat sceptical of this new era of democracy, with its campaign hoopla and easy promises.

Younger voters are often more enthusiastic about the new array of choices on offer to them. Like millions of her contemporaries, Sri Mulyani's 18-year-old daughter, Indrahastuti, is voting for the first time. She has chosen the Islamic United Development Party, PPP, because of its symbol, the Ka'aba, Islam's holiest site, in Mecca.



'As we pray, we face the Ka'aba and so it's a good symbol for us. We like that party, it's a sign of Islam.'

However, by the end of our visit, Indrahastuti is having a bet both ways. As we leave, she gives us the hand signal for the PDI-P Party, and she's wondering whether perhaps Megawati Sukarnoputri might be the best leader after all.

This puts her more in tune with majority opinion in the kampung, where most people see Mega as the great hope for the future. The working class have flocked to her banner, raising her into a symbol of resistance to Suharto, a manifestation of their burning desire for change.

On the last Thursday before the vote, hundreds of thousands of PDI-P supporters turned Jakarta into a sea of red and black. As they danced in the street, their euphoria was infectious. In a play on words, slogans referred to Megawati not as Sukarnoputri, but as Srikandy, a reference to a Boadicea-like figure from the *Ramayana*, the classic tale portrayed in the *wayang*, or shadow puppetry. 'We support Megawati because she is *kuat* (strong),' people tell me. But when I ask why she is strong, their answer has a circular logic: 'She is strong because we support her.'

Megawati appears to have done little to earn this adulation. As Goenawan Mohamad, poet and founding editor of the once-banned, now re-launched news magazine, *Tempo*, comments to me on election day: 'She rarely speaks her mind. She rarely speaks about her plans and rarely comes out with ideas. She is not very open about her ambition to be President. In other words she treats the people as a part of the democratic process that wants her, rather than [admitting that] she wants the people

to elect her. So it's a kind of regal attitude towards democracy, which Suharto also had.'

There are also concerns about the influence of Megawati's businessman husband, Taufik Kiemas. Five of his relatives were included on the PDI-P's candidate lists, hardly a reassurance that Megawati is

committed to combatting the nepotism that so characterised the Suharto era. Megawati's policy pronouncements have been infrequent and vague. Where she has taken a clear stand on an issue, it has usually been expressed in the negative; a definitive no to federalism for Indonesia and opposition to independence for East Timor.

Like many intellectuals, Goenawan Mohamad decided to vote for PAN, the National Mandate Party led by Islamic scholar Amien Rais.

'PAN has a clear agenda, committing itself to freedom of the press, and also its stand regarding the East Timorese question is very sound. It agrees with the holding of a referendum in East Timor,' Goenawan says. He adds that PAN, unlike other parties, has broken free of many of the hang-ups of Suharto's New Order. 'Its stance on opening debate on a federalist state and on amendments to the constitution indicates its true character of reform.'

As leader of PAN, Amien Rais was far more articulate and specific in his policy pronouncements than rival presidential candidates. Unlike Megawati and Abdurrahman Wahid, he has stated clearly that he believes the military should be completely out of politics after the next election (under the current system the armed forces retain a crucial 38 seats in the national parliament) and he has consistently called for the prosecution of former President Suharto, not only for corruption, but even raising the issue of Suharto's crimes against humanity.

Back in the kampung though, while many people have heard of Amien Rais, few know about his party, PAN, or can identify its symbol, colour or number. Given that voters mark their ballot by punching a hole through the party symbol of their choice, this is a bad sign. It helps explain why PAN failed to live up to its promise and its high profile in the Indonesian and international media. PAN's election campaign was driven by ideas and, as leading Jakarta political commentator, Mohamad Hikam, noted, 'To attempt to lead Indonesian politics in an intellectual way is a big mistake.'

By contrast, the campaign of Megawati and PDI-P was heavy on symbolism and almost devoid of ideas, an approach that appears to have paid off.

Toni is a 28-year-old man who works as a driver. With a tight T-shirt and tattoos on his heavily muscled arms, he looks like a bit of a thug, but in conversation he is reserved and reflective. He supports PDI-P and says that one reason people like Megawati is that, unlike other leaders, she doesn't make too many promises. For years, he says, the ruling party Golkar pledged to bring about development, to eradicate poverty and make people well-off. But nothing changed.

He says his support for Mega comes from the heart. It's a matter of feeling, of instinct. He hopes that she will bring change and make it easier to find work.

I cannot help but fear that Toni's quiet faith in Megawati is somewhat misplaced.

Peter Mares presents 'Asia Pacific' on Radio Australia and Radio National (weeknights at 8.05pm and on Saturday mornings at 8.05am).

Donations to support the savings and credit scheme being established by Bambang Rustanto and Lea Jellinek can be sent (in US or Australian dollars) to Yayasan Jounal Perempuan—SIP, Account No: 8000.18245, City Bank, Jalan Jenderal Sudirman, Jakarta, Indonesia. Or contact leajell@rad.net.id

FOREIGN CORRESPONDENCE: 2

How to be Lao

***Jon Greenaway** surveys the heavy traffic between Laos and Thailand.*

LAOS IS A QUIET SPOT in Asia populated by an unassuming people—outwardly at least. It's not surprising though that Laos is often forgotten when you consider that this tiny mountainous nation of seven million is bordered by China, Burma, Thailand Cambodia and Vietnam.

It may be unkind, but Laos seems most famous for getting in the way of history (as when American planes showered it with bombs trying to eliminate the Viet Cong on the Ho Chi Minh trail that ran along the Laotian border). Or last century when the French took a leaf out of Britain's gun-boat diplomacy textbook and took ships up the Chao Phraya river in Bangkok and trained their cannon on the Royal Palace—thus convincing the King of Siam to cede his control of the region.

Yet despite the fact that Laos has been tossed around by Western colonialism and its sometimes volatile neighbours, the people of Laos don't keep the world at arm's length. In its capital, Vientiane, Westerners are treated warmly and, surprisingly, are not gawked at like side-show alley freaks as elsewhere in Asia. They accept Thai baht as hard currency and most speak a faultless North-Eastern Thai dialect.

The ironic thing is that tour operators tout Laos as the untouched pearl of South East Asia, a place devoid of foreign influence. It may appear that way because many villages are without electricity and running water, and there is not a KFC to be found anywhere. But Laos has always found it hard to be itself.

More than 50 per cent of the government's budget is made up of aid. Over the last decade, the Tsars of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party have taken a similar approach to that of Vietnam and China: they have freed up markets but maintain a tight grip on power. Cynics among the expatriate community would suggest that there is too much money to be made to let the people put anyone else in control of the cash flow.

One American who has worked in construction in Laos for five years told me that the US asked the Laotian Government if it would like to have a consignment of jeeps they had been using during the UNTAC administration of Cambodia before the 1993 elections. He swears that the government would accept the gift only if the US paid the duty and administrative costs as well.

In the absence of any large industry or manufacturing, and with forestry being the

biggest local business, aid money is the only show in town. One Western diplomat told me that Vientiane is stage-managed in order to continue the assistance packages. Visiting delegations see the cracked pavements and ditches in the middle of major roads and it puts them in the mood to hand over the cash.

But free enterprise crops up in the most unlikely of places and Laos is no exception. Most of the businesses that have come in recent years either originate or are based in Thailand. Politically, Vientiane might take its lead from Hanoi, but Thailand is weaving its way more tightly into the fabric of everyday life. As Laos staggers towards modernisation, more people are moving to urban centres out of reach of traditional farming and into contact with the 20th century, for which Thailand is the filter.

TWO WEEKS AGO, sitting by the Mekong river and looking back to the Thai town of Nong Khai, I was eating Gai Yarn and Som Tham—traditional foods from the neighbouring Isaan district of Thailand. Someone had a radio tuned to an FM channel broadcasting the latest Thai pop hits and advertisements for a Thai internet-service provider.

To wash the meal down I had a couple bottles of Beer Lao and watched a storm roll in from across the Thai border. Beer Lao is a product of a gargantuan Thai conglomerate that is currently undergoing debt restructuring—a very fashionable thing these days for a Thai company.

Laos' economy is so closely linked to Thailand's that the value of its currency, the kip, has moved up and down in harmony with the Thai baht ever since the 1997 crash. No banks and investment fund were putting money into speculative property deals in Vientiane. Laos, which still has 85 per cent of its population predominantly engaged in subsistence agriculture, is seen by international money gurus as a satellite province of Thailand.

And that is okay for the people from the Isaan and Ubon provinces of Thailand, who have an affinity and cultural identity with their Lao neighbours. Before the French carved Thailand up, many of these provinces were under the control of Laotian fiefdoms. They also suffer the condescending attitude shown them by their wealthier counterparts in Bangkok and the southern provinces.

At the Asian Games in Bangkok last December, a bantam-weight from Laos, who trained on a dirt floor gym yet had to compete with the might of the Philippines and the former Soviet Republics, managed to squeeze his way into the quarter-finals of the boxing. The Thai boxing fans, maniacally patriotic, cheered the little fellow as if he were one of their own.

He lost, but on his way from the ring he waved to the crowd in appreciation of their support.

At the top of the French-built Monument in Vientiane, which has roads radiating from it like spokes of a wheel as a kind of Indochine Arc de Triomphe, I got talking with a retired teacher. He spoke to me first in French but when I responded in grunts he switched to Thai and we crawled our way through a conversation.

At one point I asked him what defines a Laotian. I thought he might say something about the ethnic difference of the Lao and Hmong cultural groups, or maybe even give me some handed-down revolutionary dogma about the victory of the people in 1975.

'We come from the hills,' he replied after a long pause. ■

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

JOHN SENDY

Remembering China

1949 WAS PACKED with interest and excitement—maybe more so for an active communist. Mao Zedong's armies triumphed in China. Cold War conflicts escalated and anti-communist hysteria in the West reached new heights. Victoria held a Royal Commission into communism. The coal strike saw communist union officials jailed; it bruised the Labor Government but brought a crushing rebuff for the communists from which they never really recovered. The year ended with the defeat of the Chifley Labor Government and the election of Robert Gordon Menzies as Prime Minister.

My 1949 was spent as the country organiser of the Communist Party in South Australia, based in Whyalla. What I lacked in worldliness and sophistication was compensated for by energy and passion. I travelled about rallying scanty forces, cultivating contacts, distributing literature and speaking at factory, wharf, ship, street, hall and house meetings wherever possible.

The press reeked of anti-communism. This brought hostility, fear and scepticism, so different to the modest but significant support for the Communist Party accrued in the years of World War II. No doubt, severe setbacks were deserved due to the massive Stalinist crimes in the USSR (which naively we did not believe) and to our own fundamentalist attitudes.

Unlike many of my colleagues in Adelaide and the eastern states, I was abused only rarely in the country and never howled down or beaten up. We were losing ground at home but gaining it abroad. By January 1949, Chiang Kai-shek's armies on China's northern plains had suffered complete defeat. By March, Mao Zedong entered Beijing and the communist advance flowed southwards until, on 1 October, the People's Republic of China was declared.

Whyalla, in 1949, was a company town. BHP owned or influenced everything except the weather. The rows of new homes housed young couples. The men worked for the BHP, the women looked after them and young children. The roads, mostly unsealed, were dust bowls in summer and quagmires in winter. The population of 12,000 was alleged to be the fastest-growing in the State. This honour, according to the locals, arose because the ore train to Iron Knob clanged noisily out of town at 5am each morning waking everyone up; too early to get up and too late to go back to sleep!

Lithe, skinny-bummed and herring-gutted,

When in Whyalla I stayed with George and Anne Robertson. Good-humoured and generous, they hailed from the far outback. Visitors were always welcome. 'There's always plenty of meat and bread in this house.' George had been a stockman on enormous sheep and cattle runs around Innaminka and Cooper's Creek. He'd seen 'DIG' on that famous tree way back in the 1930s. Lithe, skinny-bummed and herring-gutted, he'd lived a lot in the saddle and walked as little as possible. He worked three shifts, week about, round the clock, at the BHP foundry. Try it some time.

During cold weather he sat by the wood stove on one side with legs stretched across to the hob on the other side while easy-going Anne cooked across those legs. Imagine it! My eyes used to boggle while with arms spread he read the *Advertiser*, railed against 'that bastard Menzies', or cheered wildly at radio news about the advances of the Chinese People's Liberation Army. 'You bloody beauty!' he'd yell ecstatically when Xuzhou or some other city had fallen. Short on Chinese geography, he'd yell again: 'John, where in the bloody hell is Xuzhou?' Then, zombie-like, towards midnight he'd lurch irritably out the door clutching his gladstone bag, to work the night away.

Whyalla, in 1949, was a company town. BHP owned or influenced

With some exaggeration and a liberal slice of male chauvinism, George pantomimed with some accuracy communist attitudes to the Chinese revolution of 50 years ago.

The Whyalla CPA branch had some 30 members and sold over 100 copies of *Tribune* weekly. Its President was Joe Brazel, the popular, mild-mannered, beer-loving bachelor secretary of the Port Pirie–Whyalla branch of the Federated Ironworkers Association, the only full-time union official in Whyalla at that time. Nevertheless, when Prime Minister Chifley visited the town, Joe, as part of the welcoming group as a prominent unionist, was introduced to him as President of the Communist Party branch. 'What, are they here, too?' Chifley was alleged to have commented. 'Everywhere, Mr Chifley,' replied Joe at his jovial best.

Years before, he'd been decorated with the King's Medal for Bravery for hauling a fellow-worker, Tim Hunt, out of the BHP ore-crusher, at great personal risk, in an exercise that took some hours because tons of ore could have engulfed both men.

Brought up in a Catholic orphanage then sent to work on farms, Joe graduated to drive a horse and scoop on the Baroota Dam site in Port Germain Gorge. Before getting work for the BHP in Whyalla he was on the Port Pirie wharf during the 'bull' days when men lined up for work and the foremen picked those who looked strong and active or those who gave them a sling.

There was something about Joe, a simplicity and kindness, a child-like smile, a certain sadness, a great loyalty. The sight of him, so long ago, remains with me, a big man in a crumpled none-too-clean brown suit, leaning over the bar of the Whyalla or Bay View Hotel yarning good-naturedly.

Looking eastwards from Whyalla, across Spencer's Gulf, the heights of Mt Brown and the Devil's Peak loomed in the Flinders Ranges near Quorn. My first glimpse of Quorn came in the dark in 1945 from a troop train en route to Alice Springs. On a poorly lit platform a couple of hundred of us enjoyed a light meal served by a group of Quorn women. They did this throughout the war, serving an estimated one million such meals. Max Fatchen paid tribute:

> We were many or few in the trains rolling through
> We were homesick and sometimes forlorn
> But they served us in style with a quip and a smile
> The wonderful women of Quorn.

My visits to Quorn always brought delights. I boarded the train in Port Augusta, sometimes the only passenger, and as we chugged slowly up picturesque Pichi Richi Pass, craned my neck out the window to savour the wildness of the wickedly curved Devil's Peak. Unusual for an Australian country town, everything in Quorn appeared to be built of stone. The bat-wing bar-room doors of the hospitable Transcontinental Hotel intrigued and invited, too.

My main contact was Dan Keneally, a middle-aged cobbler who operated from a shed in the backyard of his stone cottage. Men mending shoes always fascinate but Dan had the added advantages of a faint Irish brogue, a quiet sense of humour, a great knowledge of the district, and, to cap it off, he was a poet. His self-published *Hills of Longing, Lore of the Flinders Ranges*, over 100 pages, ran into three editions and sold in many thousands over the years. Dan lived nearly all his life in the Flinders Ranges and loved them.

Wordsworth maintained that poetry is 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origins from emotion recollected in tranquillity'. Unemployed in the Depression, Dan drew upon his love of the ranges, their history and flora and fauna. In addition, Quorn provided plenty of tranquillity. That Dan had poetic ability may be deduced from this portion of a letter he sent to me when he was 84:

> I was born in a farm house on the Boolcunda Plains on April 14, 1892. My parents came from Ireland, County Cork and County Clare. They were among the earliest settlers in that barren land and like all the others made the fatal mistake of trying to grow wheat on bluebush and saltbush country.
>
> It was in a little galvanised schoolhouse called Castle Springs that I was first initiated into the mysteries of life in a drowsy world. The summers at the turn of the century were scorchers and our gentle lady teacher had to walk three miles to school each morning and I think I can see her now being raised from the ground on a sultry morning mirage, only occasionally did her feet touch the ground. She wore skirts sweeping the ground, wasp waisted, a blouse with a stiff bone-mounted collar, hair done high over the forehead and a hat pinned on with murderous hat pins and to top it off an umbrella which acted as a parachute as she gyrated and heaved and swayed. She had a very subservient collection of boys and girls.

All these people and many others, long since dead, invested great hopes in the Chinese revolution. They faced the cold war blitz against them and their beliefs with steadfastness. Their faith carried them through, bolstered by the strength of the Soviet Union, the spread of communist governments abroad and the imminent victory in China which seemed likely to swing the world balance in favour of a socialist future. Chinese communists were expected to end starvation and illiteracy, develop industry and science, overcome the feudal legacies and eventually put the people in command; and for some years there existed a widespread belief that this was happening.

Australian communists usually knew little of China but many of us had read Edgar Snow's *Red Star Over China* (1938) and *Scorched Earth* (1941), Agnes Smedley's *Battle Hymn of China* (1944) and a few articles and booklets by Mao Zedong and Liu Shaoqi, enough to give those leaders together with Zhou Enlai and the famous generals Zhu De and Lin Biao absolute hero status in our eyes.

Therefore, imagine the thrills and amazement with which I received news of being selected to spend three years in China studying communist theory! I had just turned 27 when leaving Australia in June 1951. Not even my parents knew my destination, and their loyalty to the Party and to me meant they did not ask.

NEARLY 50 YEARS AGO the hills outside Beijing had that smoky-blue look known so well in Australia. From the train we had thrilled to breath-stopping glimpses of the Great Wall precariously perched on distant spiky peaks, like pictures out of the fairy-land we were in.

And so, a dozen of us, young Australian communists, arrived at the Beijing railway station after an almost unbelievable sea, air and land journey: Sydney, Brisbane, Singapore, Marseilles, Geneva, Zurich, Prague, Moscow, and then nine days by train across the expanses of the Soviet Union and north-east China.

We straggled down the platform rather dazed. We were in the ancient capital of China, the city of Kublai Khan, where Marco Polo had been 700 years before. Centuries later it was the scene of the Boxer Rebellion, then occupied by the Japanese for eight

And so, a dozen of us, young Australian communists, arrived at the Beijing railway station.

he'd lived a lot in the saddle and walked as little as possible.

everything except the weather.

years until 1945, now made great again. It teemed with people and avalanches of bicycles. Chill snowy winds bedevilled it in winter and summer heat and dust made Beijing dwellers unsurpassed exponents of the arts of hawking and spitting.

The dust of Beijing is famous. Putnam Weale's *Indiscreet Letters from Peking* (1906) described it well:

> The weather is becoming hot ... The Peking dust distinguished among all the dusts of the earth for its blackness, its disagreeable insistence in sticking to one's clothes, one's hair, one's very eyebrows, until a grey-brown coating is visible to every eye, is rising in heavier clouds than ever. In the market-places, and near the great gates of the city, where Peking carts, and camels from beyond the passes—jostle one another, the dust has become damnable beyond words, and there can be no health possibly in us. The Peking dust rises, before, in clouds and obscures the very sun at times; for the sun always shines in our Northern China ...

Motor vehicles were not numerous enough to disturb the quietness. Tall buildings were few. Women with bound feet could still be seen hobbling about. Foreigners like us caused large crowds to gawk in awe, muttering about 'the long noses'.

But the politics had changed. Gone were the foreign soldiers and trading companies. Illiteracy and starvation were being tackled. Bustle and excitement abounded as did an unmistakable enthusiasm for the future such as we had not experienced in Prague and Moscow. Great things, it seemed, were in the offing, for it was less than two years since Mao had proclaimed the People's Republic.

We were mainly industrial workers, idealistic, naive, eager, typical of Australian communists but probably more devoted than most. All of us, in one way or another, believed the communists in Australia would go from strength to strength until a socialist society, free from poverty, unemployment and wars, ushered in a new life of plenty, beauty and enlightenment, where everyone would enjoy science and technology, literature and art, where mindless apathy would be a thing of the past.

Our faith was secure. After all, China had been liberated and the largest hunks of Europe and Asia already had communist governments which we believed were good and just. Back home our comrades led some of the biggest trade unions and, despite the consequences of the coal strike, the threats of Menzies and the unprecedented anti-communist Cold War atmosphere, we still sported thousands of members and heaps of zeal.

Turgenev once wrote that the young require simple answers even if they are illusory. As we walked down the Beijing platform perhaps it was just as well we didn't know what the future held in store.

Selected to study in China for three years! A sobering thought, for Menzies had alerted Australia to be prepared for war in those same three years. While we travelled across the world, Australia had waged the fierce referendum battle to decide against outlawing the Communist Party.

We studied the Stalinist version of Marxism, Marxism–Leninism, as well as 'the Thought of Mao Zedong' and the history of the Chinese revolution. We shook hands with and looked in awe at Mao Zedong; 'cunning as a shithouse rat' one of our number irreverently described him later. We drank a toast with Liu Shaoqi and all agreed that 'his bloody eyes go right through you'. We were charmed by the poised, immaculate, handsome Zhou Enlai. We gawked at Zhu De, the great general who someone once went overboard to describe as having 'the kindliness of a Robert E. Lee, the tenacity of a Grant and the humility of a Lincoln'. These men, together with Chen Yun, Kao Kang, Chen Yi and Peng Dehuai, comprised the core of the Chinese leadership. During our whole time in China I do not recall ever hearing of Deng Xiaoping. Today, all are dead. With the exception of Zhou Enlai all were to be, at one stage or another, down-graded, disgraced, jailed, or (in the case of Kao Kang) to take his own life.

Who among us would have thought this when the works of Liu Shaoqi were nearly as widely read as those of Mao, and as we drank the toasts of Chen Yi when he was mayor of Shanghai and applauded Marshal Peng Dehuai when he inspected troops in Tiananmen Square?

Who of us would have believed possible the madness and brutality of the Great Leap and the Cultural Revolution or that Chinese soldiers would shoot down demonstrating students and workers? The collapse of the communist world and the demise of our own Party were simply unimaginable.

Nevertheless, the China of those earlier years of communist government impressed most visitors. The country seemed enthusiastic, full of optimism and possibilities. There was a widespread hope throughout the world that the feudal past and the legacy of foreign domination could be overcome, left behind in the development of production and democracy. Certainly, we Australian communists had a romanticised view, our prejudices were well set, and we failed to see the fanaticism and authoritarianism contained in 'the Thought of Mao Zedong' and the other things we imbibed.

Perhaps we were fools. Certainly, humiliation and shame gnaw at the guts of some old communists as the evidence of the brutalities, crimes and stunning failures of the communist regimes have piled up.

As we walked down the Beijing platform perhaps it was just as well we didn't know what the future held in store.

What will happen in China? Will capitalism win out completely? Will the greed and creed of the Bonds, Elliotts, Packers and Murdochs become the Chinese blueprint as seems most likely? Will the present synthetic communist power group orchestrate this or acquiesce to it? Or is China set for violent confrontations? Perhaps, by some miracle, China could develop a third way, a middle course of development, marked by sagacity and sanity providing a balance against the dangerous, sole superpower new world order which the USA revels in today. Whatever happens, for better or for worse, China will probably rival the USA economically and as a world power well within the lifetime of my grandchildren.

China does things on the grand scale and affects people in the same way. Looking backwards to it brings me pleasure and pain: memories of all those who fought so hard for a new society, the mountain ranges of dead victims of invasions, wars, revolutions and oppression, the smoky blue hills outside Beijing, the Great Wall on distant peaks, the industrious, long-suffering millions, and the dashing of so many dreams and expectations. ■

John Sendy held official posts in the CPA from the early 1940s to 1974 when he relinquished all positions and went to live in north-central Victoria.

Guy Rundle

Skateaway

Whitechapel Ice Palace, but it could be any tacky ice rink in the world, they're all decorated along the same plan. Frayed wet carpet leading into the lockers, past broken drink machines, video games, the serving hatch where they dish out the skates. Hand over your shoes, and get a pair of blunt chipped 'Superfasts'; pull them on, lace up, now you're a skater. Sign on the wall 'No running in skates'. *Running*? I can barely walk. *Superfast*? Yeah, right.

Finally out at the rink, dazzling white under fluorescents, and it's chockers. Families, teenage couples, but mainly kids kids kids, birthday parties, youth groups, playing tiggy, twirling in chains (against the rules), the hockey goals and flags of Europe hanging from the ceiling. Could be St Moritz, St Kilda, of beloved memory, but for the girls in full Muslim get-out swooping round at 40ks an hour, the ends of their scarves flying behind. Billie pumping out of the sound system: *You're looking real cool, you're looking real cool. Do you have a girlfriend, do you have a girlfriend?*

No to both of those as it turns out, but there's Karolina, my Finnish companion, agent of my induction back into this bizarre Northern activity, last done at Scott Ballis' 12th birthday party, where I spent ten minutes on the ice and the rest of the time throwing up half a gallon of trifle behind the Space Invaders machine.

Now I'm more focused and Karolina has been teaching me basic moves, i.e. not falling over, and now demands on-ice companionship while she assuages homesickness. Good move, bad move. Finns are great skating teachers, rotten skating companions. On the ice from birth, they assume that once you are upright and moving forward your problems are over and your mind will have spare capacity to process things like chat, or breathing. Besides which they have the most fiendishly difficult language in Europe, with 15 noun declensions. By the time they're four they can skate and talk Finnish at the same time, which would qualify most people for a senior position in NASA, but which they seem to regard as par for the course. At 14 they add their drinking culture to this, which largely consists of sucking down vodka until paralysis takes over, and then those that haven't been chemically blinded get up and skate some more. Still drunk from Saturday night, Karolina can do a backward figure eight while declining a noun whose ending varies depending on whether it is 'of' (as part of), 'of' possessive, or 'of' as in 'emerging from'. She can decline a noun which varies six ways over the same pattern. She can decline anything, except more vodka.

Finns are great skating teachers, rotten skating companions ... By the time they're four they can skate and talk Finnish at the same time, which would qualify most people for a senior position in NASA.

Faced with such mastery I act humbly and maturely, and regress to the age of 12 in a matter of seconds, sliding around the rink like a rogue beebie in Satan's executive toy, clutching adults, children, small sickly children as I hit the cold surface.

Frustrating, embarrassing, injurious, and totally addictive. Skating calls me back again and again because I am so transcendentally crap at it that nothing above actual competence is demanded of me, and continuing verticality is an achievement. The activity demands agility, physical courage, trust in your own body, and an ability to not be distracted by 15-year-old girls in pom-pom skirts coming backwards towards you tush first, and there is nothing on this planet I am less constitutionally suited to, with the possible exception of breastfeeding.

But I come back and I come back and it gets easier every time and soon you're up and moving forward in something approaching forward motion. Then you're in play and focused on staying up and moving forward, and there's the big reward: not thinking. The mind disappears, sinks into the body for minutes at a time. Move, slide, turn, swerve, stop, and that's all there is, and that's all you are, and it's only when mind comes back that you wind up banging into something. So it's whoosh whoosh whoosh and 'hey cute' and bang! and whoosh and 'must buy bread' bang, and 'how does sociobiology explain delayed child-rearing, given ...', bang, and Karolina circles and throws me a Finnish noun thump and 'hey still cute' bang bang thump and apart from the twitching is your kid all right?

So the sport provides its own discipline, and after spending more time on ice than Sunny Von Bulow, you're starting to be able to steer and actually look

around you, circling the families and the birthday parties and the whole of it is there really in all its glorious unfairness, the sleek families in leather skates and custom tops sliding around hand-in-hand like trained gazelles, the shorter, lumpier families hobbling around on rented numbers as if they were being force marched across tundra at bayonet point, the ice mothers—in every sense—drilling their sequinned progeny in figure-skating moves, the parties with the lean athletic kids swooping around the rest—the asthmatics, the rugged up, the kids whose thick glasses are misting up, the 12-year-old Lionels and Berthas shunted along to an ice rink party with a Ventolin inhaler and a list of foods they can't eat pinned to their orthopaedic spencers. They stand bewildered and collapsing on the ice as the others circle around them like ferrets on a guided tour of a bunny farm. Or they abscond to the video games—which they're crap at too—and want to be home home home, gobbling down Mars bars and torturing their pets.

Thinking this while going arse over tit and hurting a pair of small twins, I recognised myself among them, and my heart went out. Adolescence will be hard enough for these kids before they can become television comedy writers or parking inspectors and start to get a bit of their own back. To make them do portions of it balanced on a slippery surface at the end of thin strips of metal is a practice which should probably be brought to the attention of Amnesty International. On the other hand, I thought, doing a half-decent twirl and slide brake, and watching them stand there, picking their scabs and clouding up like Volvos in fog, and feeling sorry for themselves and superior at the same time, they, I, could have had a bit of a bloody go instead, just go, kids. It's not that hard. Bang.

Still, better late than never. Everything we love can be saved. Everything we hate too, you think, gritting ice-chipped teeth as you start up again, and dodge between the flying families, teenagers, kids coming back towards you, and you push on and assume you'll stay up and assume you can get round that group and assume you can stop when you need to, and you make enough assumptions, and suddenly you are halfway round the rink, past Karolina, hangover kicking in, ice boogieing (*ice boogieing*?!) with some six-foot Rasta, the frayed carpet and the beeping Galaga machine, past the families, the twirling nymphettes, the fat kids, the teenage lovers, and you are flying, just flying, astonished, ambushed by the achievement of what you were seeking but could not will, this sudden grace. ■

Guy Rundle recommends Germolene for bruises.

VICTORIA STRUTT

The geography of silence

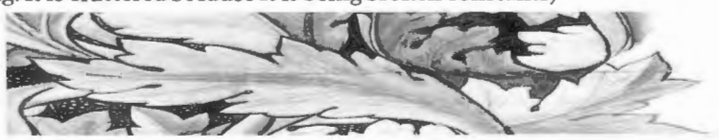
Silence and speech and quiet space have long been integral in Western and Eastern religious traditions—as in popular music. 'Hello darkness my old friend', sang Simon and Garfunkel in 'The Sound of Silence'. Today, words come easily, but the spaces between the words are more problematic—we are no longer as practised in silence as we once were, nor as able to find it when we want it. So this month, while most of the world is gabbling, ***Victoria Strutt*** *ponders the dynamics of silence in two Vipassana meditation retreats.*

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE THREADS AND YARNS OF LANGUAGE that weave and bind all of us together each day are intentionally removed? How is sustained silence in a meditation retreat felt and experienced? What is its topography and texture? What follows is an examination of the nature of silence that I experienced in two meditation retreats, three months apart.

IT SHOWED UP AS A BUSY AND NOISY PROCESS. The noise is relative. A noisy library is not 'noisy' like a 'noisy' restaurant. An outsider witnessing the group of meditators would certainly have heard next to nothing. The experience from the insider's point of view was very different.

Sustained silence exists in many religious or meditation retreats, but here the focus is on Vipassana meditation. Most of these retreats last for ten full days and the silence lasts for nine of those.

It would be wrong to say that there is total silence, that the nine days of silence are fully language-free. But the language that does exist frames and defines the silence and is sparse, patterned and largely instrumental. It is language for practical purposes: linguistic minimalism. The silence is also highly structured, cluttered and profoundly rich in meaning. It is cluttered because it is being broken constantly by people who have found a need to speak—not to other students but to the retreat managers or the meditation teachers. So here, the existence of language—not silence—is what needs to be explained—the reverse of most other social settings.



Language becomes the figure to the assumed ground of silence—again the reverse of most other social settings which are not highly ephemeral, which have some sense of event in themselves.

Silence has a place in a wide sweep of religions. Its purpose is always meaningful for spiritual growth, and at two levels—the social and the individual. Our vocal silence allows us to listen to and begin to understand our inner voice or voices—the still small voice within—and its council of advisors. That is, it allows for the tinier shades and subtleties of ourselves to come to light. Mice don't come out in the church where the choir is singing. This silence also allows us to notice the difference between the inner silence and quietude of our minds and the outer silence of the sensate world.

Retreats are about cutting down the outer silence to get to the inner, but only social silence is given attention here. The theologian and philosopher, Thomas Merton, in his book, *Love and Living*, discusses the spiritual and psychological purposes and benefits of 'creative silence'. C. Stenqvist, in her 1994 essay on Merton, 'Zen and Phenomenology', in the journal *Studies in Spirituality*, summed up silence by saying, 'through an act of withdrawal the person grasps reality ...' That is, through the experiencing of the sustained silence, the participant gradually comes to insights about the self and the foundations of his or her being. It seems reasonable, also, that the meanings and associations different people have about silence, would have an impact on their ability to deal with the sustained silence.

We attribute various meanings to silence and we negotiate our own identity in the silence through these meanings and through the inner conversations that preoccupy us or sometimes rise to engulf or confound us. The way we see ourselves in relation to the other people in the retreat, and the way we have seen our purpose for being there, help us to deal with the unaccustomed expanses of time and silence and the unvarying timetable.

Silence and the making of meaning

By maintaining silence according to all the requirements in the retreat, we may be indicating to ourselves and to others the solidarity we have with the group and the extent one identifies with the aims of Vipassana philosophy. These aims are outlined on the first day, but students can read them in flyers they receive with their application forms.

The similar social role, function and prominence of silence in religious communities such as the Amish of the USA is relevant here. The use of silence among the Amish is far more valued and prevalent than in the mainstream North American culture. Silence is a social tool. It can be used positively and negatively—to indicate solidarity, or a shared perspective about one's purpose when carrying out a task, say, like cooking or cleaning. It can also used to sanction—to separate—as in shunning, when someone is punished by isolation for unacceptable behaviour.

Silence also has to be an active and co-operative venture. The contribution of one's sustained silence is distinctive and obvious in such religious and meditative contexts, and an act of identity and community. It seems obvious, but is important that one person alone breaks everyone's experience of silence. This has meaning in the same way as a whisper in a library has clear meaning apart from the meaning of the words that make up the whisper. Violation of norms and expectations in any social context brings identity and identification into action and so is an act of social generation and reconstruction. In effect, we make and take community with every word we say. Likewise, we make and take community in every word we do not say—in our sustained collaboration in maintaining the silence—in a meditation retreat. This brings us now to the complex concerns of control and language.

Within the meditation retreat, the meditation teachers and managers (one for the men and one for the women) may talk to the students. Students are the only ones who have taken the vow of silence. The students, in replying, break their own silence and the silence of those within earshot. The intrusion of language that replying requires may not have been welcome: the student may have wished to have remained silent. In such simple interactions we see where social control lies. The use of language in the constant creation of community is central to the functioning of a silent meditation retreat and, of course, to all communities and relationships.

Some students do seem to talk without real need—though who defines need? Because silence is the norm, it has an impact on the manner and content of the sanctioned speaking. It seems that generally, first-time sitters talk more to the teachers and manager than do 'old' sitters. (At this retreat one is able to distinguish who are the old and new sitters: 'old' sitters do not eat solid food after midday and they sit in front of first-time sitters in the meditation hall.) It is reasonable, then, to assume that the old sitters are more acculturated, more habituated, and have identified with the Vipassana ethos. Alternatively, one may be maintaining the silence because of one's own affinity with self-discipline. Or the two factors could be entwined.

What one is allowed to speak about and *to whom* is outlined during the introduction talk on the first day. During the course, one is allowed to ask questions of the teachers, but on matters of meditation technique only, and to talk to the manager only about matters of personal comfort and well-being. Interactions take place only when necessary. The timetable and the vows one takes are also discussed during the introduction.

'No distractions' is the foundation principle at work in the retreat and is the reason for 'Noble Silence' itself. This promotes 'right concentration' and 'right awareness'. These and other basic cohering principles of the retreat are described in many basic texts on Buddhism, including Bercholz and Kohn. The organising concept of 'no distractions' affects the quality of much that occurs throughout the ten days. One is asked not to draw attention to oneself so as not to distract others from their contemplation.

The location and texture of broken silence

The silence of the nine days is rarely silent. It is broken into lots of little silences. It is never absolute, and the silences have different qualities depending on time and place. I shall return to this point later. Let us first look at some of the breaks. They are structured in their content, location and style. Gesturing and eye contact are supposed to be avoided (the introduction session and a notice on the notice board emphasises this), but at heavy-traffic places—

all doorways, the dining room, the ablution blocks, quite a bit of both occur naturally as part of orderly movement. Some people hold doors open for each other, indicate by gesture that 'you go first', hold up the tea towel or dish brush to indicate 'you can have it now', make eye contact to establish who is in fact going to go first, then avert eyes to indicate, 'not me'. They make eye contact to accept the food offered at meal times, use gestures to indicate 'enough', 'more', 'too much' at lunchtime, the main meal of the day. You can tell from the rate of this gestural and visual exchange who is engaging rigorously with the tenets of the retreat and who is defining them more loosely. And who is thoroughly absorbed.

Most subtle communication occurs in the meal-time queues, in the serving of food (done by kitchen volunteers) and in the dining room. It is both gestural and subtly linguistic. Meal times are the main secular social events of the day and the frequency of student contact with the female manager, Rachel, did not seem to vary over the nine days. (Rachel was the female manager on the two retreats this discussion is based on.) As many people seemed to be asking her questions towards the end of the courses as at the beginning and the middle. Speech was, however, in very low whispers, often done very close together, with heads bent down, suggesting privacy, confidentiality, and minimising sound. At other times, eye contact was clearly being used to generate social engagement. It was sometimes through just catching Rachel's eye that communications such as 'I want to talk to you' were made.

There is a rich literature on gesture in communication (see Birdwhistell, Critchley and Poyatos, for example). Most of it deals with gesture as a paralinguistic feature, an accessory to the main message which is carried in the words, rather than being the bearer of the meaning itself. And it seems consistent with all our experience that eye contact, in itself, often bears meaning without words. The meaning as always, comes from the context, and not only the immediate circumstance but from the relationship of the people involved. Do these gestures and eye contacts constitute language because of the shared meaning? If they do, then silence is broken. The absence of verbal language does not constitute silence. Critchley devotes two pages to gesture in religious communities, but is concerned primarily with the sign-language developed by the Trappists. That, he says deftly, has been 'handed down'.

Such signs, to me, are only the most simple kind of silence—non-verbal, but not non-linguistic. They have been created as symbolic of meanings within verbal language, so *are* language. People using such signs are no more silent than the person who writes down his or her thoughts instead of speaking them. They are still immersed in language and the noise of the meaning of language and community. What they do achieve, however, is a maintaining of the silence for others. Tom and Dorothy Hopkins discuss an instance of this behaviour, where an Indian sage, Meher Baba, did not speak from 1926 to 1969, but wrote down everything he wished to say. Poyatos gives the place of silence and stillness some attention in chapter six of his book, but all but one paragraph deals with the paralinguistic silence of discourse and dialogue. Later he touches on silence in a spiritual context, saying only that he is aware of it. He makes no attempt to stop and explore what silence represents. The merging of silence with stillness is, however, important: we see their correlation. 'The more silent, the more still', and perhaps vice versa, seems to be an equation worth investigating to see how true it holds. It surely is an assumption behind silent retreats.

In these retreats, because of the background of silence and the recognition that there should be no gestures, when people *did* make them, they seemed to be done discreetly, in 'whispers': the more silent, the more still. The principle, 'no distractions', had clearly been violated, but the small size of the gesture kept the violation to a minimum.

Now to return to the silence: it 'weighed' differently in different places. That is, it had a different quality according to time and place. Where European Australians had expectations of speaking, the silence was 'denser'—made more obvious because of the absence of language. In the dining room at meal times, especially lunch or dinner, people would, in normal circumstances, converse. Not speaking at this time was the most clear violation of normal social behaviour. In order to avoid the juxtaposing of silence and eating, people often took their meals outside and sat alone, well apart from others. There would also normally be 'chit chat'—formulaic or phatic language—in queues where people are in one another's company, repeatedly and over a number of days. Likewise, in the dormitories, while getting up or going to bed, one would normally speak to the people with whom one is sharing a room. These times or places of transition would have been filled with trivial talk to shape the group into one—to make and take community. Jaworski discusses formulaic talk and formulaic silence in secular settings and recognises its cultural foundations.

Without talk for nine days, the only thing that could mould the group into one was the slow accumulation of the experience itself, which was then discussed and defined on the last day—the day of 'Noble Speech', the day of celebration. Some conversations that started at registration on the first day were picked up on the tenth day and the 'group identity work'—the making of community through shared experience—got done that day. The other significant element of unity was the shared awareness of the others' being engaged in the same inner exploration. This was also dealt with through language on the tenth day.

Another element affecting the 'weight' of the silence was whether it was day or night. When darkness fell, the silence was less of a concern, so the quiet of queues for the toilets between meditation sessions in the evening was less obvious than during the day. The silence in the queues outside the meditation hall was also easier than the silence in the shower queue—spiritual space versus secular space. Likewise early mornings: there seems to be an allowance made for silence in the early morning that does not exist for later in the day. In the dark or in the early morning one was in one's own inner world. These variations are certainly culturally determined. Other cultures may respond differently in different ambiences. Extremes in weather mattered: 'suffering in silence' through these extremes made the silence more pressing.

Silence in the meditation hall was expected of students even on the 'talking day'—the last full day of the retreat. The assistant teachers talk in low voices to the students, individually and at close range, in specific tuition times, twice a day in the hall but only at the front of the hall where the assistant teachers sit. The students could ask the assistant teachers questions during the question time after lunch (for individual questions) or in the evening in the group sitting. Goenka, the teacher, was allowed to 'talk' (nightly video discourses) but at no time could student talk to student in or near the hall. This was a clear violation of Vipassana practice, so when, on the 'talking day' on one retreat, some students did so, Rachel's reaction was immediate and memorable: 'No talking in the hall,' she called to the men on the far side. It was clearly meant as an order. The men were in their 20s, 30s, 40s and 50s. The silence was sudden and total. They had accepted Rachel's authority.

It was easiest to see control at work in the hall because that was the only place where everyone was together—the site of the retreat's reason for being. The silence that followed Rachel's strong utterance had a different quality from the silence that had existed for the previous eight days, and its meaning was different. The meaning of silence clearly is determined from its linguistic and socio-cultural context, and specifically from the force of the utterance or the non-linguistic stimulus (for example, a painting, a view, an incident witnessed) that leads to it.

Silence, language and social control

The overt and covert dynamics of control thread through all aspects of communication at the retreat. Who is sanctioned to speak, who gets sanctioned *if* they speak, why people get sanctioned and how this is done, who accepts, who resists control and how they do it: these are all questions that spin out from the dynamics of control. All are negotiated and maintained by language. Control in silence and control of silence was being negotiated by managers and the assistant teachers all the time, and it was also being done primarily through language.

The kitchen was the one room where most of the quiet administrative talking—the language of overt institutional control—was done during both retreats. This was most active during meditation times, when people were in the meditation hall or meditating 'in their own place'. This usually meant the dormitories or the foyers of the dormitories or the tents of people who were sleeping in them, as there were no other places to be in and one was not supposed to meditate outside. The silence at these times—late mornings and late afternoons—was 'lighter' than during the times when everyone was in the hall. People occasionally got up from their meditation spots to move around for a few minutes before starting again, but no personal activity such as showers or laundry was allowed during meditation times. A sign at the doorway of the ablution block announced when students could take showers and this excluded all meditation times. The assistant teachers on both retreats were husband-and-wife teams, so they would have been able to talk about the students while in their own quarters.

Managers also initiated interaction with students, to tell them it was meditation time (if the students were involved in any activity that was not consistent with the daily timetable), to tell them that meditation time was not the time for showering. They also discussed matters to do with students wanting to leave the retreat, organised discreet times for those who did leave—while everyone else was in the hall in a meditation session for example—so that their going would not be a distraction.

The linguistic silence also ran to the language on the walls. Both camps were held in scout camps, but all 'scout language' was covered, leaving only Vipassana notices, and there were only three or four of these. This too was done for the purpose of 'no distractions'. Thus, to return to the original description of the language which punctuated the silences, we recall that it is sparse, patterned and highly instrumental.

Conclusion

The language is sparse. Some students do go through the whole retreat initiating talk with neither the teachers nor the manager, but they must answer the teachers when addressed in tutorial times—about once a day, and even then with only one or two short answers to short questions. Many others, however, have questions they put to the manager about sleeping arrangements or food, so initiating several short utterances over a few days was not uncommon. Students did have to answer the assistant teachers' questions, but this could be done often with 'yes', 'no' or even a small nod or shake of the head.

The language is highly patterned in where it occurs, when it occurs, who uses it, how it is used and what its field is. Teachers and managers are the main initiators of exchanges. (The exchanges students initiate and the nature of those exchanges lies outside the focus of this discussion.) The language is also highly patterned in its paralinguistic features, in the tone of voice, the associated gestures and the proxemics.

The language is also very instrumental. The student may ask questions of the teachers only about matters to do with learning the meditation technique. The teachers may ask questions only about the students' experience with learning the meditation technique. Furthermore, both teacher- and student-initiated talk may only occur at specific times and places. The managers may speak or be spoken to only on matters of students' comfort and well-being. All participants may use language only to get a specific job done.

So, the silence is far from absolute. Silence and the noise of language are not wholly binary. Because silence exists within a social context, there are gradations, shades, blurred edges. And because silence, too, is social, some styles of silence are more sustainable than others. Silence is the background on which other activity can occur—the discovery and exploration of aspects of self. Silence constitutes part of the social setting. It is far more foregrounded in a silent meditation retreat, but it surely is the foundation of all social interaction, the ground from which all else rises and to which all social action can also fall. It is the baseline—but also a constant possibility. By extension then, the silence in any given context can be described, analysed and speculated about. It certainly needs continual ratification by everyone to maintain it. One person alone can break it for all. For people in the group who are of the same cultural background, where the silence is broken and when it is broken and under what conditions, will perhaps illustrate the meaning that silence has for the group. That in turn will tell us something about the speaker and how he or she is connected to the group.

Future Directions

Other questions surround and proliferate in the silence at these retreats. One question at a general level is this: how does the individual's experience become transformed by language into the doctrinaire and the dogmatic? That is, how does the essentially inner spiritual energy get channelled by language into the institutional? This perhaps is a theological or philosophical question, but also a linguistic one in that language will always be the carrier—the tool doing the work. The vague, inadequate and poetic/metaphoric language one uses for the inner world gets jammed, Procrustean-style, into religious terms, and individual behaviours get regulated into the rule-bound, the repetitious and the rigid. This is the essential conundrum at all spiritual/religious edges—the individual/the institution. Still other issues include the further exploration of control and language's part in that, the way the retreat itself gets defined in the 'talking day' at the end, and the different qualities one's language has after the retreat, and the impact this has on the people with whom one interacts. The meanings one attributes to and generates from silence also range widely, given such topical variables as gender, culture, age and social status. And as with all terrains that one explores, one small pathway in, one small view of a new insight can have a sudden and breath-blocking impact. One catches a glimpse of new possibilities.

The foreground and background to everything during the retreat is the conversation one has with one's inner 'council of advisors', over the ten days. This is also a dark and teeming region to explore and of course it is part of the point of being there. The rest is silence. ■

Victoria Strutt is a Melbourne writer.

To preserve confidentiality, the name of the manager ('Rachel' in this piece) has been changed.

Bibliography

Bercholz, S. and Kohn, S.C. (1993), *Entering the Stream*, Shambhala, Boston, Massachusetts; Birdwhistell, R.L. (1970), *Kinesics and Context*, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia; Critchly, M. (1975), *Silent Language*, Butterworth, London; Jaworski, A. (1993), *The Power of Silence*, Sage, Newbury Park, California; Hopkinson, T. and D. (1982), 'The Indian Sage Who Was Silent for 43 Years', *Media Development Journal of the World Association for Christian Communication* 29 4, 33-36; Merton, T. (1985), *Love and Living*, Harcourt, Brace and Company, Orlando, Florida; Poyatos, F. (1983), *New Perspectives in Nonverbal Communication*, Pergamon Press, Oxford; Stenqvist, C. (1994), 'Merton, Zen and Phenomenology', *Studies in Spirituality*, 4, 236–244.

Ramsholt Revisited

The Painter and Poet: Arthur Boyd and Peter Porter

MARGARET GOLDRICK

Above: *Bathers with skate and Halley's Comet*, 1985, by Arthur Boyd. Oil on canvas, 267 x 415cm. Right: Arthur Boyd, painting *Bathers, speedboat and Pulpit Rock*; photograph taken under the auspices of Don Featherstone. Arthur Boyd's work reproduced with permission of the Bundanon Trust. Images supplied by Australian Galleries.

In 1993, ARTHUR BOYD and his wife Yvonne gave their Shoalhaven properties and a large collection of artworks, letters and photographs to the nation. Boyd was convinced that 'no-one could really own a landscape'. 'You can,' he said, 'only keep something by giving it away.' This altruism, fostered in him by his parents, the potters and painters Merric and Doris Boyd, was spurred on by his ever-present fear that the beautiful Shoalhaven he had come to know so intimately and love so well would fall victim to developers' bulldozers. He wished Bundanon to be a centre for the arts and a repository for some of the work of the four generations of Boyds, a family who have played a large part in the history of Australian art for the past 100 years.

On 24 April this year, Arthur Boyd died in Melbourne at the age of 78. I was contacted during the week following Arthur's death by journalists wanting to know more about Boyd and Bundanon. A press photographer wanted a final picture of the artist's house and studio and I watched as he set up still-life arrangements with paint-spattered chair and battered straw hat lying beside palette and brushes, an unfinished painting on the easel—*nature morte*—layered with paint. It was a sad, busy time filled with the memories of long afternoons spent with Arthur hearing him speak of his life and work.

So it was felicitous for *Eureka Street* (May 1999) to arrive that same week with Peter Steele's evocative examination of Peter Porter's poem 'At Ramsholt'. It was there in May 1998, at the English cottage the Boyds have leased since the '70s, that I last saw Arthur. We had driven from Campsea Ashe near Woodbridge through lanes bordered with lilacs, skirted the River Deben with its boats and picnickers, and sighted the ancient round tower of All Saints Church, so familiar to us from the two small paintings on the stairs at Bundanon. A few yards further and we came upon Keeper's Cottage, a small thatched house half-buried in the lush spring growth.

Arthur had become increasingly frail over the years I had known him, but on that sun-filled day in Suffolk he looked particularly well. We walked with him and Yvonne to the church and learnt about its famous flint, brick and septaria tower. A chart of 1287 showed it as a seamark, and earlier it may have been used as a watchtower by the Saxons against the Viking invaders sailing up the Deben River. We talked of Bundanon and how it was developing. Our last sight of Arthur was as he and Yvonne stood in the lane leading back to their cottage, waving farewell.

In the early '70s, Peter Porter and Arthur Boyd worked together on the biblical story of Jonah. The result—poems by Porter with etchings and drawings by Boyd—was published by Secker & Warburg. In 1975, further collaboration produced *The Lady and the Unicorn*, followed by *Narcissus* in 1984 and *Mars*, a bitter examination of war, in 1988. Poet and the painter shared a power of associative thinking that called into service a huge range of mythological, religious and intensely personal imagery, sometimes shocking, often arcane, always memorable.

They worked well together. Boyd—painter, sculptor, engraver, potter—had some of the versatility of a Renaissance man. Porter's work is full of his love of music and painting. He has written for composers and over the time of his collaboration with Boyd developed 'a steadily increased interest in painting as an art. I haunt London's National Gallery, and whenever abroad try to see as many pictures as possible, especially in the galleries and churches of Italy.' ('Working with Arthur Boyd', *Westerly*, March 1987).

Porter would have visited the Boyds in Suffolk and through his poem I have the pleasure of revisiting Ramsholt. For Porter it is later in the year, towards the end of September, a dry summer coming to its end, with the harvest in and the pheasants like jewels fossicking along the road, oblivious, as they were during our spring visit, of the fact that time was running out for them. On the Boyds' Bundanon property the lyrebirds, their Attic tails trailing, run and dance freely, snared only by the painter's brush.

After the rural calm of his first verse, Porter's line, 'This is the Deben, not the Mekong', juts out. Though perhaps it might, paradoxically, have soothed the nightmare of a long period of anxiety for Boyd during the early 1970s. The horror of the self-immolations—in protest against the Vietnam war—that took place on Hampstead Heath near Boyd's London home had been burnt on the painter's mind. In a series of 34 paintings, he examined the theme of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, who in punishment for his pride was 'driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws'. In 'Nebuchadnezzar on fire', he painted the tormented king falling to earth in flames, like a burning star, a Phosphor plunging over a waterfall, watched by one of Boyd's powerful and persistent images, the black 'voyeur bird'.

Above: *Evening star*, 1993, by Arthur Boyd. Oil on canvas, 152 x 122cm.

Porter's 'a painterly Dutch sky' reminds me of Arthur's belief that if he 'got the sky right first then the whole picture would work'. Suffolk shares the same sky and latitude as the Low Countries—Ramsholt is a short smuggler's run across from Holland. Boyd often painted the Deben estuary, finding a familiarity in the flatness of the land, handling its pale silver light with the same confidence that made the flat, warmer-toned Wimmera landscapes of the late 1940s so successful.

In 1987, a devastating storm swept through the southern counties of England. Arthur told me he had feared that his studio would collapse, and in the darkness and noise he fought the wind, trying to prop the walls up with his body. The dawn was as terrifying as the night—the sun rising over desolation, the sky filled with shifting lurid colours mirrored in the water-soaked land. In his *Australian scapegoat*, 1987, exhibited at the Biennale of Venice the following year, he used that kaleidoscopic sky of burning colour. A couple of torn and ragged trees stand in the distance beside the Ramsholt church tower but, as so often in Boyd's work, there is also a redemptive sign: a rising sun in the broken landscape. (*The painting is reproduced on the cover.*)

I found the history of Ramsholt lightly sketched in a small pamphlet I picked up in All Saints Church

for 60p. In 1991 the population was 34. In medieval times it was probably a considerable settlement. The river Deben was much larger before the marshes were drained in the 14th and 15th centuries, and in 1346, during the Hundred Years War, Edward III moored his fleet at the mouth of the estuary before the boats set sail for France carrying the 32,000 men who were to besiege Calais the following year. In 1978, Porter watches the slow progression of the swans and uses a naval image of a flotilla of destroyers: '... The swan on the canal, /with nine cygnets, is the Home Fleet, 1936.'

The swan with its mythological connections and its flair for metamorphosis is a favourite image for painters and poets. The Deben estuary is a natural habitat for swans and there is a painting by Boyd of *Two swans by a pool, Suffolk*, 1973. Some of his superb Shoalhaven paintings have a single black swan floating on its own reflection in the still khaki surface of the river.

Above: All Saints Church, Suffolk, with its 'famous flint, brick and septaria tower'. Photograph by David Chalker.

In the Ramsholt Churchyard there is the tombstone of William Waller. The Wallers intermarried with the Baines family and the crossed bones on his coat-of-arms are possibly a pun on the name. It might otherwise be tempting to suggest a piratical connection, the Wallers being one of the great ship-owning families connected with Ramsholt for over 400 years.

In a conversation between Boyd and Porter recorded by Peter Smark and published in *The Australian* in 1971, Arthur spoke of having 'an image of myself eventually working in a lovely studio in the middle of the Australian bush one day, but I don't know when that day will be'. The day came at the end of that year when he discovered the Shoalhaven River and surrounding country in New South Wales. The story of his first sight of the River on a hot December day has been told many times—how his paints melted and ran off into the sand and how the sun and hot wind beating down on the painter's head signalled a major change in his life and his art. Later Boyd recalled this personal revelation in a painting of Jonah outside the city of Nineveh, expiring in the heat beneath the gourd shrivelled by God to deprive His prophet of the comfort of shade.

In 1973, the year that *Jonah*, his first book with Porter, was published, Boyd bought Riversdale, an old farm with a splendid view of the Shoalhaven River. He extended the house, built a studio and moved there with his family. In 1975, Porter visited Arthur at Riversdale. 'The Orchid on the Rock' followed:

> Two hundred yards from the house
> Where the sounds of trees commence
> With water always in descent
> From the hundred veins of the creek,
> The orchid rears its dozen necks
> On a cushion of self ...

In their next book, *Narcissus*, published in 1984, Boyd and Porter replaced the narcissus with the Australian rock orchid as the solipsistic flower in their poems and etchings.

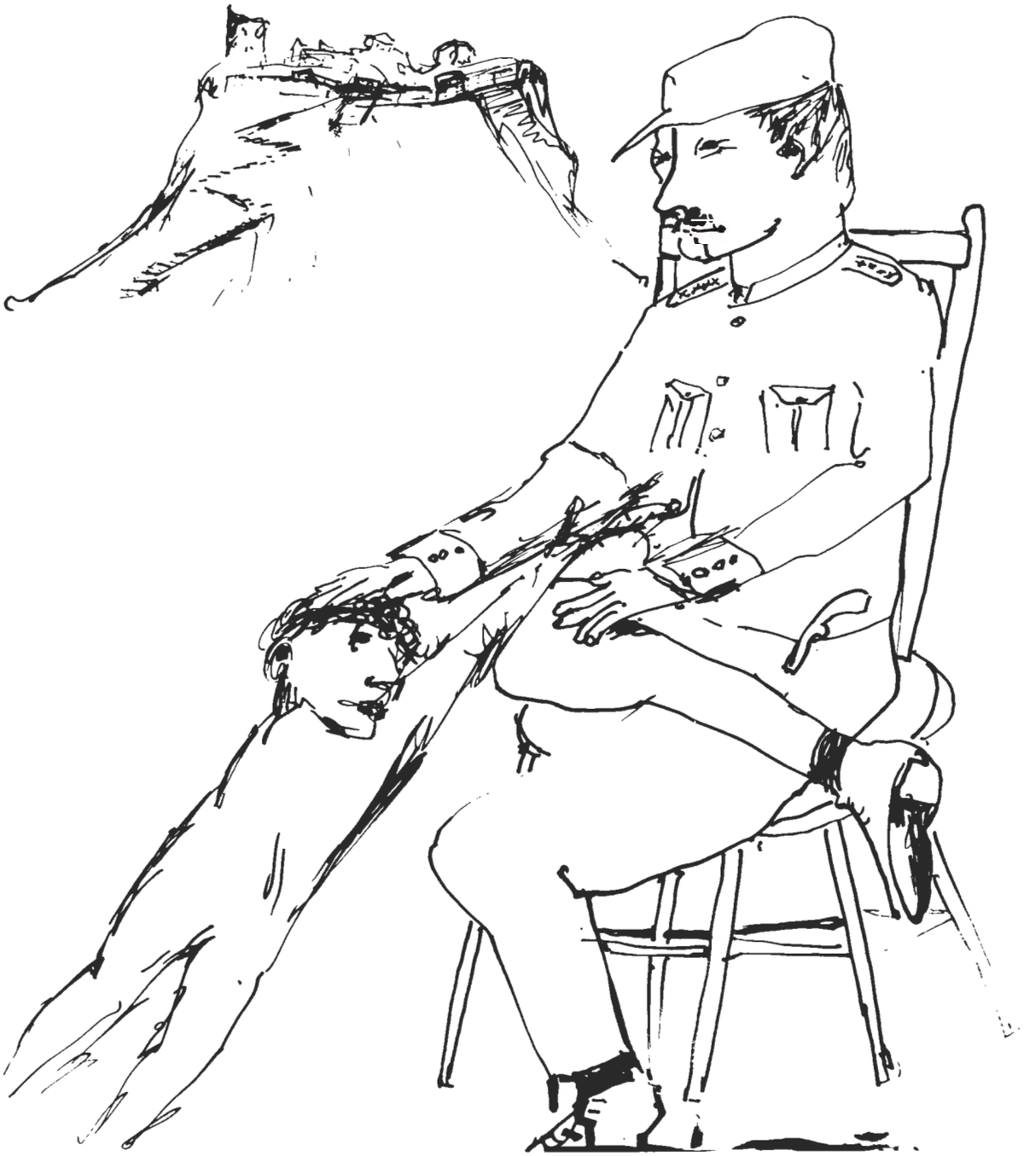
Boyd bought the neighbouring property, Bundanon, in 1979. Behind the homestead there is a large clearing in the bush with a wall of rock that creates a natural amphitheatre. In October this rock wall is covered with cream rock orchids. Singers, musicians and poets have performed there—realising Arthur's dream that Bundanon should be a place to inspire the practice of all the arts. Before his death Arthur was able to see the success of the Artists in Residence program at Bundanon, which allows artists, writers and composers to stay in their own apartment at Bundanon with the use of a studio and the Study Centre.

Both Porter and Boyd spent many hours in the National Gallery in London. At his first visit, in 1959, Boyd was attracted by Piero di Cosimo's mythological painting of the dead nymph, Procris. Soon, floating female figures appear in his paintings, sleeping, perhaps waiting to be given another shape, while a watching dog—reminiscent of the hound in *Cephalus and Procris*—takes its place in the Boyd vocabulary.

Porter has spoken of the National Gallery collection forming 'a sort of water table of vision for me in writing poems to go with pictures' ('Working with Arthur Boyd', *Westerly*, March 1987) and while visiting Riversdale he remarked how the view of the Shoalhaven river from the house reminded him of the background landscape in Piero di Cosimo's *Cephalus and Procris*. In 1978 he wrote 'Piero di Cosimo on the Shoalhaven':

> Here on a broad river's side, my glasses
> Squandering the sun, I put rhyme into paint.

Near *Cephalus and Procris* in the National Gallery hangs another Piero painting, *The Battle of the Lapithae and the Centaurs*, an Arcadian marriage celebration turning into a scene of mythological mayhem. The twisting and contorted bodies of this painting recall how Boyd often transformed his entwined lovers into strange, hostile shapes. Ursula Hoff writes in *The Art of Arthur Boyd*, 'Consciously or unconsciously Boyd felt the attraction of this streak of primitivism, the slightly macabre association of eroticism and death in Piero's painting.' Porter shared Boyd's painterly eye when he describes a rock orchid



as having 'the roundness and gloze of a lapith's bum'.

In his poem 'Painters' Banquet', written in 1976, Porter peoples Riversdale with painters and writers bringing '... their gifts of the senses ... Waiting for heaven to happen ...'—happy portent that is now being realised. This year, the Arthur and Yvonne Boyd Education Centre opened at Riversdale. The building, designed and executed by Glenn Murcutt, is set on Porter's 'violin shore'.

I have on my desk a postcard Porter sent me in 1996. It is of Poussin's *Arcadian Shepherds* (*Et in Arcadia Ego*). He wrote: 'Working with Arthur has been one of the great satisfactions of my literary life. Staying at Bundanon, as I did in 1985 and 1988 and also at Riversdale in 1975 was another extraordinary pleasure.'

Arthur Boyd was a remarkable man, a great artist and a great Australian benefactor. My friendship with him has been an extraordinary pleasure. ■

Margaret Goldrick has been closely involved with Bundanon since the Bundanon Trust was set up by the Commonwealth Government in 1993, and for the past four years has chaired the Bundanon Local Advisory Committee.

Above: Another tower, another time. Ink-on-paper drawing by Arthur Boyd accompanying Peter Porter's poem, 'Mars Psalm', in the *Mars, Arthur Boyd and Peter Porter* collaboration, published by André Deutsch in 1988.

Bludgeon, dirk and

ONE OF THE PRIME functions of art critics used to be advising their readers what to buy. When Daniel Thomas started writing for Sydney's *Sunday Telegraph* in 1962, he not only gave the price range of works in the exhibitions he reviewed, but occasionally identified works he reckoned either irresistibly cheap or excessively expensive. According to Donald Brook, who began writing for *The Sydney Morning Herald* in 1970, what 'everyone really wanted was capital appreciation dressed up as the natural reward for exercising fine sensitivity'. In 1973, Brook was sacked because his interest in ideas rather than objects made him 'bad for business'. In 1980, *The Australian*'s Sandra McGrath defined her role as identifying 'the best specials at Woolworths this week'.

More recent critics have been more concerned to advise their readers what not to buy. A shoal of writers at *The Age*, *The Australian* and *The Sydney Morning Herald*, including Christopher Allen, Giles Auty, Gary Catalano, Christopher Heathcote and John McDonald, have devoted one column after another to expressing their outrage at much contemporary art. At the same time, these critics have devoted increasing space to what to see in art museums. While private institutions have gradually supplanted public ones in most other contexts, the opposite has occurred in art writing: the big museums have come to occupy ever more of the space once filled by commercial galleries. Critics were once involved in making the reputation of contemporary artists. Now they are at least equally involved in making the reputation of museum curators and directors.

The most significant exponent of this new type of writing has been John McDonald, the newly appointed head of Australian Art at the National Gallery of

grease

Australian criticism: '... nasty, brutish and short, given more to taunts than to enjoyment; hopelessly vitiated by jealousy, hidden loyalties and personal vendettas.' That was Bernard Smith's view in 1962. **Tim Bonyhady** asks, what has changed since then, and what continues?

Australia. Through two stints at *The Sydney Morning Herald*, from 1986 until 1990 and then again from 1994 until 1998, McDonald distinguished himself by both the quality and quantity of his prose. Although the standard requirement of a weekly review means that art critics typically write more than art historians, McDonald has been exceptional. Since the mid 1990s he has written more about art than anyone else in Australia. More significantly, he has probably reached a larger audience because of the size of the *Herald*'s readership and his capacity to entice and hold readers who have no particular interest in art.

McDonald got his opportunity to be the *Herald*'s senior critic when Terence Maloon left for the Art Gallery of New South Wales. For much of this century, critics who made this type of move immediately became gallery directors, if only because art museums had few or no other professional staff. The Melbourne *Herald*'s art critic, J.S. MacDonald, became director–secretary of the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1928, then director of the National Gallery of Victoria, before returning to art writing in 1943 as *The Age*'s critic. From the late 1940s through to the early 1970s, Laurie Thomas made even more such moves back and forth between Grub Street and the National Gallery of Victoria, the Art Gallery of Western Australia and the Queensland Art Gallery. But by 1986, museums had become much larger, more professionalised institutions, so Maloon simply became one of the New South Wales Gallery's education officers, despite five years with the *Herald* and, before that, two years with London's *Time Out*.

McDonald's claim to Maloon's spot rested on his contributions to an array of magazines and newspapers, including *Art Network*, the *Age Monthly Review* and the *Herald* itself. While the old jibe, 'art critics are failed artists', was on its way to being replaced by 'art critics are failed art historians', McDonald was safe from both taunts, having studied English at Sydney University. At 25, he was one year older than Patrick McCaughey when McCaughey became *The Age*'s art critic in 1966; he was five years older than Robert Hughes was when Donald Horne asked Hughes to write for the fortnightly *Observer* in 1960, after sacking its Sydney critic for committing what Hughes has described as 'some colossal goof'—reviewing an exhibition without having seen it.

The challenge for McDonald, as for other critics, was to make his writing something more than Australian art criticism had appeared to be to Bernard Smith and Robert Hughes in 1962. In the first edition of his *Australian Painting*, Smith maintained that, because it was the province of 'ageing painters soured by lack of recognition or very vocal young ones clamouring for it, what passed for criticism was, like the life of Hobbes's first men, "nasty, brutish and short", given more to taunts than to enjoyment; hopelessly vitiated by jealousy, hidden loyalties and personal vendettas.' Hughes, who was the prime 'very vocal young' artist Smith had in mind, was even sharper in the fortnightly *Nation*: 'the tools of Australian art criticism are the bludgeon, the rusty dirk and the pot of emollient grease'.

McDonald's critical standpoint always started with aesthetics. As he once put it:

> The fundamental issue is not whether an art work is 'new and innovative' but whether it is actually any *good*. Claims of political allegiance or theoretical sophistication are of minor importance if a piece does not provide a sufficient visual stimulus to encourage the viewer to look, to linger and contemplate.

Within this context, one key issue was the breadth or narrowness of McDonald's taste. But how he dealt with art which fell outside his aesthetic canon was at least as significant, given that his position at the *Herald* was the key critical platform in Sydney.

McDonald distinguished himself from the outset by the pugnacity of much of his writing. Although he castigated Adrian Martin and Meaghan Morris in 1986 as exemplars of the 'critic or theorist *radically out of sympathy* with the objects he or she addresses', he himself fitted this description when he set upon what he dubbed the 'Academy of the Avant-Garde'. While he acknowledged occasional exceptions, as when he admired some of Mike Parr's self-portraits for their 'forcefulness and integrity', McDonald maintained that much 'progressive' and 'radical' art was as pretentious as it was puerile. That its practitioners received institutional recognition only fuelled his outrage. When he reviewed *Perspecta*, the Art Gallery of New South Wales' biennial exhibition of contemporary Australian art in 1987, McDonald dismissed Parr as 'conservative'. He derided John Nixon's Malevich-like crosses as 'the longest-running and most boring serial since *Days of Our Lives*'.

McDonald extended this assault in 1988 by comparing Nixon's austere crosses to the decorative still lives and dalmations of Australia's 'most social' artist, Patrick Hockey. Even the most favourable press about Hockey typically ignored the quality of his art. Instead it dwelt on how he sold paintings to the Prince of Wales and Kerry Packer, was included in 'best-dressed' lists

and wrote for *Vogue*, *Belle* and *Mode* about visiting Palm Beach for the parties, Rio for the Carnivale or Venice for the regatta. In his joint review, McDonald paid as much attention to Hockey's art as that of Nixon. Since Hockey worked hard and many people bought and derived pleasure from his paintings, who, McDonald asked, 'is to say that Hockey is any less serious an artist than Nixon?'

The outcry was immediate. Tony Bond, the curator of contemporary art at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Paul Foss and Paul Taylor from *Art and Text* and Mike Parr, all wrote to the *Herald* in an attempt to unseat McDonald. But while McDonald's position at the *Herald* was not strong—he described himself as simply having 'a kind of toehold on the arts pages, more or less up for negotiation every week with a sympathetic editor, as to how much space ... will be allowed'—the *Herald* did not even publish these protests. Meanwhile McDonald announced that he had received a letter containing a dead cockroach in the mail and accused Nixon of sending it to him anonymously. Although Nixon denied it, McDonald's claim excited even more attention than his original article. As the *Bulletin* reported, 'The cockroach story buzzed around Sydney's art world more quickly than you could say Mortein or Mehitabel.'

This small war dragged on for months. When the art glossy, *Tension*, finally published the letters from Parr, Taylor, Foss and Bond in June, it deplored the *Herald*'s failure to allow 'serious argument'. In a lecture published by the tabloid *Agenda* in August, Parr engaged in extended formal analysis to establish that Hockey's *Dalmations: Dick and Belinda* were 'strictly incommensurable' with Nixon's crosses. Meanwhile, McDonald's new identity as Australia's most castigated critic strengthened his position—though not his salary—at the *Herald*. In 1990, when he quit Sydney for London in order 'to spend the next few years writing books', he was still on $350 a week, although, as the *Bulletin* reported, 'a lot of people, including John McDonald, think that John McDonald ... is the best art critic in Australia'.

When Robert Hughes quit Australia for Europe, he caught the attention of the editors of *Time* with his *Heaven and Hell in Western Art*. When McDonald went to England, the closest he came to a book of his own was when he edited *Peter Fuller's Modern Painters*—a selection of late writings by the English critic—and provided it with a nine-page introduction. Instead of breaking into international criticism in significant fashion, McDonald spent much of his time sending pieces back to Australia. Yet when he decided to return to Sydney in 1994, he was in a stronger position than ever because the *Herald* had failed to find a regular replacement for him during his absence and *The Australian* was also looking for a new critic to replace Elwyn Lynn.

When the *Herald* got McDonald back, part of his much higher price was a new platform. In his first stint at the *Herald*, his columns had typically been squashed between music and drama, occupying less than a quarter of a page. Like his counterparts at *The Age* and *The Australian*, his reviews had rarely exceeded 1000 words. From the start of his second stint, McDonald wrote 2500 words or more on his own page, one of the largest spaces enjoyed by a newspaper critic anywhere in the world. McDonald promptly became one of the anchors of the Saturday *Herald*—the cultural counterpart to the veteran Canberra commentator Alan Ramsay in the *Herald*'s political pages—enjoying the rare opportunity to write genuine essays about art for a mass audience as well as facing the large task of doing so on a weekly basis.

McDonald could not have been more enthusiastic when he began his new page. Having opened his first piece with a stanza from James McAuley's 'Terra Australis', he continued: 'After almost four years in Great Britain, one turns to the poets for words to describe the thrill of being back in Australia.' But while McDonald was delighted to discover a new 'impatience with unauthentic, derivative and rhetorical art based on fly-by-night international fads', he denounced the 'anti-art' of Dale Frank at the Sherman Goodhope as 'one of the silliest, most cynical things one might see within the walls of a reputable gallery'. Despite a decade as a critic, he was quick to identify himself with the 'non-artworld initiate', as affronted by the excesses of the avant-garde as he was 'relieved' to encounter traditional painting.

Before long, McDonald had found a new target in Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art, which had opened in his absence in 1991. He had also returned to many of his old battlegrounds. While he acknowledged that Mike Parr had 'put his stamp on Australian print-making in the most indelible fashion', McDonald railed against his performance pieces, likening Parr's appearance in bridal gown, wig and make-up to 'a front row forward dressed in drag for a gruesome TV footy revue'. He also displayed an increasing appetite for the *ad hominem*:

> ... no Australian artist is more ruthless or determined, no-one has such an overwhelming belief in the importance of his or her art ... If he ever tires of an uncertain income from sales of work and Australia Council grants, Parr should consider starting his own religious cult. He has all the necessary ingredients: a messianic sense of self; a charismatic, domineering personality, and the ability to treat human interactions as abstract, theoretical constructs.

Just as Laurie Thomas' successful recasting of *The Australian*'s arts coverage in the late 1960s had spurred *The Age* to give more space and prominence to Patrick McCaughey, so McDonald's return to the *Herald* led *The Australian* to revamp its arts pages in 1995. Instead of running one or two art reviews every Saturday, it decided to carry its regular metropolitan reviews as part of its Friday arts section and appoint a roving national critic to write a Saturday column of up to 1000 words. Up until then, the post of art critic had never been sufficiently important for an Australian newspaper to employ anyone not immediately at hand. (The unintended fruit of this policy was that a host of critics from Robert Hughes through McCaughey to McDonald got their break.) Now *The Australian* made the unprecedented decision to recruit its new critic from overseas.

The Australian's choice was the 59-year-old Giles Auty, whose 'illuminating experience of Velasquez' in the Prado in 1963 led him to conclude that 'modernist claims for equivalence, let alone advance' on 'the masterpieces of the past' were 'fundamentally false'. By 1984, when Auty finally secured a regular critical position with the English *Spectator*, his values were set. Like McDonald, he abhorred modernism's pursuit of novelty for novelty's sake. According to Auty, this 'dangerous and stifling orthodoxy' had long been so powerful that its critics were not just derided as 'traditionalist', 'reactionary' or 'academic', but usually shared 'the career prospects of

the dodo'. Yet Auty was as heartened by his own new seat at the *Spectator* alongside Auberon Waugh, Paul Johnson and Christopher Hitchens as he was encouraged to see the modernist ethos in retreat before 'a tougher and more invigorating artistic climate'. In keeping with this enthusiasm, Auty wrote his first weekly columns there with some verve.

A decade later, when Auty had become an institution at the *Spectator*, his argument was unchanged. He continued to rail against the 'misuse of power' by Britain's 'publicly subsidised galleries'. After inspecting an exhibition of portraits by Andy Warhol, he restored his 'enduring faith in the value of the everyday by a pleasant walk in the park'. But Auty also dwelt on his continuing failure to secure a larger public platform despite speaking, as he maintained, for 'a large body of opinion from a thinking public' if not 'a majority of thinking people'. He was also wont to recount where he had been for the weekend and whom he had sat next to at lunch, while lamenting the avant-garde's dearth of humility and humour, subtlety and skill.

Auty's few Australian columns for the *Spectator* were undistinguished. When he reviewed *Aratjara: Art of the First Australians* at London's Hayward Gallery in 1993, he was confronted by an unprecedented array of Aboriginal art, ranging from some of the earliest surviving bark paintings to major works by contemporary artists including Rover Thomas, Clifford Possum Tjapaljarri and Emily Kngwarreye. Yet Auty still concluded that Aboriginal art had 'generally declined in quality in direct proportion ... to the amount of interested input from non-Aboriginals', so that 'the earlier the work the more pleasing and authentic the appearance'. After first visiting Sydney and Melbourne in September–October 1994, Auty declared: 'Australia is a strange and wonderful land where the people I talk to about art, whether informally or from a platform, are characterised by a common innocence and passion.'

Auty's performance in Sydney, where he delivered the annual Jack Manton lecture at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, was similar. Having begun by maintaining that he had been misreported as describing the Museum of Contemporary Art as 'crap', he proceeded to deride it in much the same terms. He accused young artists of having lost the 'inalienable satisfaction of making art' in their pursuit of fame and fortune, and berated art schools for compelling promising students to toe a party line instead of encouraging them to 'develop their individuality'. As a result, even John McDonald, who declared that he was in 'broad agreement' with many of Auty's opinions, acknowledged the crudity with which Auty expressed them. According to McDonald, Auty 'tended to over-simplify a complicated situation' as part of relying on an easy opposition of 'good guys versus bad guys'. *The Australian*'s Elwyn Lynn branded Auty an 'aesthetic arsonist'.

Less than nine months later, Auty was on his way to *The Australian*. In his farewell piece in the *Spectator*, he made the attractions of his new position clear, explaining that he had spent more time on radio and television in his six weeks in Australia than he had done in 11 years of working as a critic in England. At the same time, Auty dwelt on the life he might have enjoyed in England. He explained that, had he been willing to spout the 'prevailing progressivist orthodoxies', he could have become director of the Bear Lane Gallery in Oxford in 1967. From Bear Lane, he continued, it was 'quite possible' he would 'have preceded Nicholas Serota at the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford through the dovetailing of gallery interests which took place later'. By implication, he might then have also preceded Serota as director of the Tate Gallery.

In Auty's four years at *The Australian*, his columns have occasionally been hilarious, as when he noted a report that one in five Australians are now suffering from some form of mental illness and could not 'help wondering about the role self-inflicted torment bred by political correctness plays in this'. They occasionally have also been risible, as when he announced that Bernard Smith and he had 'much territory in common'. But mostly they have been as dull as they have been pompous. In between lauding 'traditional values' and beating up his pet bogeys of modernism and post-modernism, feminism and deconstruction, Auty has indulged in ever more autobiographical anecdotage.

BECAUSE THESE COLUMNS never posed a challenge to him, McDonald might simply have continued writing as he had done. Instead, he gradually began shifting ground, paying ever more attention to art museums. While the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the Museum of Contemporary Art and the National Gallery of Australia became his staples, he also went further afield—to the National Gallery of Victoria and the Queensland Art Gallery. When he wrote a retrospective of 1997 for the *Herald* at the start of 1998, he discussed nothing else. Commercial galleries, let alone contemporary art spaces, might as well not have existed. The art world for McDonald had become the art museum.

The obvious justification for this new focus was that the size of the museum audience far outstrips that of other galleries. Critics have an obligation to write about what many of their readers want to look at. Yet this focus also involves a questionable shift away from the contemporary to the historical and from the Australian to the non-Australian. The role of art museums—led by the National Gallery of Australia—in securing this critical attention, if not affection, is all the more troubling. Because of the failure of newspaper proprietors to protect their journalists' independence by paying for their travel—and the reluctance of the few well-paid critics to fund their own trips—a critic who reviews an exhibition out of town is usually flown in by the museum. Before an international 'blockbuster' arrives, the host museum often provides both critics and their arts editors with trips overseas.

McDonald has been one of the few critics to acknowledge, let alone discuss, the local dimension of this traffic. The occasion was the opening of *Escape Artists: Modernists in the Tropics* at the Cairns Regional Gallery in mid 1998. As part of inviting McDonald to Cairns, the Gallery promised him an air ticket, courtesy of its sponsor, Ansett, so long as he acknowledged the airline's sponsorship in his column. But having boarded the aircraft, McDonald was evicted because a later flight had been cancelled and Ansett decided that passengers with 'sub-load' tickets should make way for full-fare passengers. McDonald decided to stay in Sydney.

He discussed this episode in the *Herald* partly to berate Australian corporate sponsors for being all too ready to put their names over everything to do with an exhibition, while contributing as little as possible to the event they claim to be supporting. Yet in doing so, McDonald explained his ethics—a subject he has dwelt on more than most of his colleagues. Quick

to deride other writers for 'arse-kissing', he has made much of his own independence. 'Critics should not be seen as collectors', he has declared, with good reason. 'What is criticism if it merely echoes museum propaganda?' he has also asked. In relation to *Escape Artists*, McDonald explained that he was happy to accept the ticket because, 'As is always the case with such freebies, the deal can only be "no strings attached". In other words, there is no guarantee of a favourable review, even though it would be perverse to travel to see a show one knew to be bad.'

McDonald's preparedness to accept free travel on this basis may be reasonable: a flight from Sydney to Canberra (if not so readily one to Cairns) can be seen as a modest extension of the customary provision of free books to reviewers and free tickets to opera critics. Yet even so, there is a question whether being wined and dined on repeated trips may not soften the edge of even the sharpest critic. By accepting such trips, critics risk losing the appearance of independence, regardless of whether they do so in practice. Rather than fly to Cairns, McDonald could have avoided any perception of conflict of interest by not reviewing *Escape Artists* until it reached Sydney.

This issue is all the keener for overseas travel, because the perks are more alluring. When the National Gallery arranged for Christopher Allen to be flown to Paris in 1993 prior to the opening of its blockbuster *Surrealism: Revolution by Night*, Allen felt obliged to report his jet-setting. As a result, he concluded the first of two pieces about the exhibition in the *Sydney Review* by acknowledging 'the generosity of Qantas, who sponsored the exhibition and allowed a number of critics, myself included, to fly to Europe and refresh our memories of the relevant art'. This acknowledgement was striking because Allen might have written his first piece about the ideas underpinning surrealism without venturing beyond Sydney, while his second piece about the exhibition simply required him to travel to Canberra. That none of the other beneficiaries of this 'refresher' reported it was even more striking.

One consequence of John McDonald's evolution into a museum critic was that it took him away from the contemporary where he had made his mark, whether by assailing his *bêtes noires* or, less often, writing persuasively about artists he admired, such as William Robinson. When McDonald entered the domain of Australian art history, to write about Conrad Martens, Arthur Streeton or Russell Drysdale, he typically wrote fluently but without particular originality. So too, as he pursued touring international exhibitions, which ranged radically over time and place from *Treasures from Assyria in the British Museum* to *Knights from Imperial Austria*.

McDonald made up for these more or less humdrum pieces by engaging in ever-greater pyrotechnics when assailing museum exhibitions of contemporary art. In addition to displaying rare wit and skill, he also wrote with a degree of nastiness rarely found in any other part of the press.

As the *Herald*'s Bruce James noted when discussing one of Giles Auty's more inflammatory reviews of exhibitions staged as part of the 1998 Mardi Gras, 'in any other context—a sporting supplement, a political analysis, a recipe page', such writing 'would have had the newspaper's lawyers in one unholy funk. But it was art: no-one at the editorial table cared.'

One of these pieces was characteristically excited by Mike Parr. In 1997, McDonald reported that Parr had invited him to see his installation, *Dead Sun*, at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. There McDonald had found Parr not just ensconced in the director's chair but planning to rename the gallery 'MoMA'. McDonald explained that the new 'Museum of Mike's Art' would open with a retrospective of Parr's own work,

> including some 2357 works, dating back to his earliest sketches drawn in the margins of Little Golden Books. To represent a slightly later stage of his career, several toilet walls are being removed from a primary school in Queensland by a team of conservators and will be sent down to Sydney in climate-controlled crates. The gallery will be cleared to make way for this project, which is tentatively titled Parr for the Course. A satellite show is planned for the restaurant across the road, featuring the works of lesser contemporary artists specially chosen by Mike. This exhibition will be called Below Parr ...

Several hundred words later, McDonald admitted to a concoction—he had written a dream piece, his own 'complete fantasy'.

A number of similar shafts were directed at the Museum of Contemporary Art. When *Pictura Britannica* opened in 1997, McDonald damned this exhibition of recent British art partly by railing against works which were not included in it. He also set on its curator:

> In another age Bernice Murphy would probably have been heavily involved in the Church. She is a practised exponent of the leap of faith, who appears to accept the importance of any artist or art form that bursts onto the international stage, and then sets about rationalising that acceptance. She brings to this task a matchless ability to interpret a work in precisely the opposite way to that dictated by common sense. Where many viewers see something small, insignificant and dull, Murphy may see untold riches. Where some works seem mechanical or derivative, Murphy can find imagination and originality.

McDonald was at his most vehement when Hany Armanious was awarded the Moët and Chandon fellowship for 1998 at the National Gallery of Australia. In a midweek column which still ran to 1350 words, he proclaimed:

> Even though one should never be surprised by anything in the contemporary art world, it seemed that someone whose work was little more than a series of gags—by turns, funny, nasty, slight and scatological—would never become an obligatory inclusion in touring shows and public collections. Hany's subsequent rise and rise has been a stark lesson in the art world's appetite for self-humiliation. The writing was on the wall when Hany was selected for the prestigious Aperto section of the 1993 Venice Biennale, by a team of international curators who shuffled through a bunch of slides provided by the Australia Council and chose a token Australian. It was a multicultural theme that year, and Hany had the added advantage of having been born in Egypt. Since the Aperto has usually been one of the most puerile and depressing events known to Western civilisation, one suspects that Hany was chosen chiefly for his obvious lack of aesthetic merit.

McDonald's tone was warmer when Brian Kennedy was appointed director of the National Gallery of Australia, in mid 1997. When McDonald first interviewed Kennedy in Dublin, while he was still

working as deputy director of the National Gallery of Ireland, McDonald presented him as the stereotypical Irishman—charming, a good talker and lucky—and gave every indication that Kennedy had all the makings of 'a key figure in the Australian cultural landscape'. In his piece on the most significant events of 1997, McDonald gave Kennedy what he admitted was a 'rave review'. McDonald declared that Kennedy had 'taken the local scene by storm. The more one sees of Kennedy in action, the more impressive he seems.'

One expression of this enthusiasm, relating to the National Gallery of Ireland's Caravaggio, *The Taking of Christ*, proved embarrassing for both men.

In 1990, when the Jesuits of Dublin's Lower Leeson Street asked the National Gallery of Ireland to restore this painting—then in their keeping—it was regarded as the work of the Dutch artist Gerard van Honthorst (aka Gherardo delle Notti). As recounted by the Superior of the house, Noel Barber SJ:

> Then assistant director Dr Brian Kennedy agreed at once to undertake the project free of charge ... He then brought the restorer Sergio Benedetti to examine the painting ... [O]nce Benedetti, an expert on seventeenth-century painting, saw the canvas ... he realised that it was either the best copy of a lost Caravaggio or—dared he think such a thought?—it was the original.

Three years later, Benedetti's article establishing the painting as a Caravaggio appeared in the *Burlington Magazine* for November 1993. A few days later, the National Gallery of Ireland unveiled the painting in *Caravaggio: The Master Revealed*, with the exhibition catalogue written by Benedetti who, among other acknowledgements, thanked Kennedy 'for his skilful and discreet help and advice'.

Although not included in the *European Masterpieces from the National Gallery of Ireland* exhibition (which first brought Kennedy to Australia in 1994), Benedetti's 'discovery' was made much of by the Gallery's Director, Raymond Keaveney, in the exhibition catalogue.

McDonald reported things differently. In August 1997, when he first flew to Dublin to profile Kennedy for *The Sydney Morning Herald*, he credited Kennedy both with playing 'a leading role in reorganising the impressive collection of old masters in the National Gallery of Ireland' and with having 'found' Caravaggio's *The Taking of Christ* 'in a nearby Jesuit college'. In February 1998, McDonald went further in another profile of Kennedy for London's *Art Newspaper*. According to McDonald, Kennedy had 'hit the headlines' in the early 1990s 'when he "discovered" an oil by Caravaggio, "The Taking of Christ", in the collection of a nearby Jesuit College. The find was quickly authenticated by a conservator, and the work now hangs in the National Gallery of Ireland as one of the masterpieces of the collection.'

The National Gallery of Ireland responded immediately. In March 1998 it published the following letter in the *Art Newspaper*:

> The National Gallery of Ireland wishes to point out that the credit for the discovery and authentication of Caravaggio's 'The Taking of Christ' belongs to Sergio Benedetti, Senior Curator at the Gallery. It was Mr Benedetti who spotted the painting in a Jesuit home in Dublin, and over a period of three years conducted extensive research in Ireland, Scotland and Rome. Only then was the process of authentication completed, and it is to his credit that this work, long-believed to be lost, is now one of the finest paintings in the National Gallery of Ireland collection.

McDonald helped generate another embarrassment for Kennedy when he declared in his survey of 1997:

> It took a degree of courage to give the top job in Australian art to a 36-year-old Irishman ... Kennedy's actions have made it clear what Australian art has been lacking for a long time: leadership. It is a hot topic in politics, and no less necessary in the cultural sphere.

Nine months later, when the National Gallery of Australia published a glossy 13-page *Good News Story* to celebrate Kennedy's first year in office, he wrote of himself:

> It was a courageous move on the part of ... Senator Richard Alston, and the Chairman of the National Gallery of Australia, Mr Kerry Stokes, to select an Irishman in his thirties to become third director of this important institution.

An opinion piece by Kennedy, published in *The Australian*, continued in the same vein:

> It was a considerable risk for the Art Minister and the chairman of the gallery to select an Irishman in his 30s to become third director of this important institution. What Australia needs is leadership ...

On this occasion, the *Bulletin*'s Joanna Mendelssohn provided the correction. Drawing on her longer memory of Australian art museums, she explained:

> Australia has a history of granting major cultural appointments to men in their 30s, with the idea that they will provide institutional stability for at least 20 years. James Mollison was in his 30s when Daryl Lindsay strategically placed him to become the NGA's first director, at 40. Doug Hall, Edmund Capon [another import] and Patrick McCaughey were all under 40 when they became directors in Queensland, NSW and Victoria, respectively.

By then, McDonald had taken a 'sabbatical' from the *Herald*, apparently jaundiced by the art of his immediate environment. On first quitting the *Herald* eight years before, he had declared it 'a good time to finish with Sydney' because there were 'a lot of important exhibitions in the commercial galleries'. He devoted his final review to the 'undoubted highlight of the week'—an exhibition of the work of Michael Johnson at Macquarie Galleries. When McDonald wanted to end his second stint on a 'high note' in 1998, he seemingly could find nothing in any of Sydney's art museums or private galleries. Instead he looked overseas. His choice was two new books about the French artist, Pierre Bonnard, whom, he explained, he had 'always revered'.

McDonald stood down from the *Herald* in order to finish a history of Australian art on which he had made 'halting progress' for five years. But he had always intended to continue contributing to the *Herald* on an irregular basis, when time and topic permitted. The National Gallery's self-proclaimed 'good-news day' in October proved such an occasion. In addition to its *Good News Story*, the Gallery released its annual report for 1997–98 and a corporate

plan embracing its new acquisitions policy which Kennedy had originally intended to deliver in March. The Gallery also unveiled its first major acquisitions under Kennedy's leadership, including a Bonnard costing $4.4 million. McDonald opened his article:

> When the Irishman Brian Kennedy stepped into the job as director of the National Gallery of Australia just over a year ago, he complained that the NGA lacked 'an adequate sense of purpose'. His solution was to announce an open debate about the role and purpose of a national gallery, with the aim of producing a definitive policy statement. What followed was a great haunting silence, broken only by a few random murmurs and a mixed bag of ideas extracted from his own curators. Kennedy has found that his detractors have been happy to deplore him in private but unwilling to engage in discussion. It was Lesson No.1 in the intellectual etiquette of the Australian art community.

McDonald's complaint about the dearth of public debate overlooked the fact that *Art Monthly Australia* had carried two extended articles—one by Daniel Thomas; the other by this writer—which considered what the Gallery should collect and display. McDonald's introduction also begged the question of why he himself—given his platform at the *Herald*—had not made this type of contribution. Moreover, why, just because Kennedy had asked basic questions about the Gallery, should others do the hard work of providing the answers for him? Had Kennedy presented a coherent set of arguments about the Gallery, McDonald's expectation of a substantial public response would have been much more reasonable.

McDonald's assertion about the quality of debate within the National Gallery was intriguing. As a journalist, he is hardly likely to have been present at Brian Kennedy's discussions with his staff. McDonald presumably only knew that Kennedy had 'extracted' a 'mixed bag of ideas' because one of the curators themselves, or Kennedy himself, told him.

McDonald went on to applaud the Gallery's new corporate plan as 'the first comprehensive statement of purpose issued by an Australian public gallery'. He maintained: 'Never before in one document has an institution provided so much data about itself, nor so many pledges about its future directions. On one hand it is a bold, symbolic gesture; on the other, a reference tool that advances the NGA's renewed commitment to accessibility and accountability.' McDonald declared that, while the Gallery's plan might 'sound too good to be true', its principles could 'hardly be faulted'. The launch of the plan was 'a momentous occasion for Australian public galleries'.

Yet in reaching this conclusion, McDonald acknowledged aspects of the Gallery's plan which contradicted his accolades. He described the language as 'bland and simplistic, full of bureaucratic goodwill but vague on details'. He declared that the plan's significance did not lie in its policies, which represented 'no radical departures from the tenets in early NGA publications', particularly James Mollison's *Genesis of a Gallery* from 1977. He maintained that the vagueness of the plan was 'a device to enable the gallery to maintain maximum flexibility within a tight policy grid'.

The Australian's coverage of the Gallery's announcements was more mixed. It gave Kennedy the opportunity to detail the plan in an opinion piece, and Giles Auty was enthusiastic. However, *The Australian's* visual arts writer, Susan McCulloch, commented that the plan was 'as devoid of creative solutions as the annual report of any major company'; the 'only significant breakthrough appears to have been the loosening up of procedures for loans from the collection'. *The Australian*'s Sydney critic, Ben Genocchio, was more disturbed by the Gallery's direction: he noted that it had begun losing valuable staff, and deprecated Kennedy's purchase of the Bonnard as 'safe and unambitious'.

THE USUAL PRACTICE in such circumstances is for critics to have their say and move on to the next exhibition, the next acquisition, the next corporate plan. If one critic admires what another abhors, that is just the way of things. McDonald breached this norm when he again interrupted his 'sabbatical' to return to the *Herald*'s pages with another 1700-word column assailing his counterparts at *The Australian*. Without acknowledging how inadequate the Gallery's corporate plan had appeared in his own first article, he began: 'Did the National Gallery of Australia release only one policy statement on October 22, or was there a second, shonky version slipped to the journalists from *The Australian*?' His conclusion, once again, was *ad hominem*. McDonald maintained that Ben Genocchio's 'burning passion for more of the same old schlock' was 'especially surprising' since Genocchio liked to dissociate himself from the 'dreary ranks of conservative critics'. Genocchio, McDonald suggested, felt it 'much more laudable to be a purblind reactionary'.

WHEN MCDONALD wrote a 'modest retrospective' of his life and times at the *Herald* (3 June 1999), he elaborated on the context in which he had worked:

> In the field of visual arts criticism, it is rare indeed for a critic to accept the responsibility of judgment. A large number of so-called reviews are nothing but press releases that have spent a few minutes in the microwave. When the critic does speak his or her mind, it may have little to do with the exhibition he or she is supposedly reviewing ... There is even a form of review which is a coded job application: 'Please recognise my support for your exhibition, and consider me for a curatorship, a publication, etc.' How many exhibitions are described as 'major', 'important', 'significant', even when the critic goes on to express a few guarded doubts?

McDonald also dwelt on the importance of adopting 'an adversarial role in the face of art-world complacency'. 'Critics have a special responsibility to tell the truth ... the critic must be a fearless sceptic', he asserted. 'There should be no mercy for those artists, curators and institutions that patronise the public intelligence with their dull but vainglorious activities.'

Other critical stances are possible, stances which involve neither charity nor flattery. Daniel Thomas demonstrated as much when he reflected, in 1964, on his writing for Sydney's *Sunday Telegraph*: '... it should not be necessary to bring out big guns every week. Practically all exhibited work, even if inadequate, is at least terribly sincere, and may find somewhere a someone whose spirit it will stir. So one reports on it in hope of providing any kind of lead-in, and passes on hastily.'

Tim Bonyhady was a curator at the National Gallery of Australia, 1980–81. He is now a member of the ANU's Urban and Environmental Program. His books include *Images in Opposition: Australian Landscape Painting 1801–1890*.

KIRSTY SANGSTER

Connective issues

The people's death
was as it had always been:
as if nobody had died,
nothing,
as if those stones were falling
on the earth, or water on water ...
nobody hid this crime.
This crime was committed
in the middle of the plaza.
—Pablo Neruda

MELBOURNE, NOVEMBER 1998. For that month footage from London flashed across our screens. It showed frosty streets and angry banners and people shouting outside the High Court. They were Chilean refugees demanding the extradition of Augusto Pinochet to Spain, to face charges that he had committed Crimes against Humanity. That same month I received an email from a lawyer friend who works for a human rights organisation in the Middle East. He wrote that a Sir Ron Wilson had visited them and told them about the report on the stolen generation. He asked if all Australians sounded like that ('he had a funny accent just like yours'); he also wrote that he had been really shocked by what he had read in the report: 'it sounds like genocide to me.'

This is a brief reflection, prompted by the email, on the great difficulty we have in connecting.

TRUTH COMMISSIONS are extra-legal bodies set up by the state to uncover the truth about human rights abuses perpetrated by a former regime or as the result of civil war. These commissions—in which the survivors and their families testify about what has happened to them—are very similar to the recent Australian Human Rights Commission's hearing and report on the 'stolen generation'.

Australia has much to learn from the ways in which other states have attempted to come to terms with their past. It is important to look at these other places in order to understand our fundamental relatedness. This 'relatedness' is not about drawing crude and direct comparisons, or attempting to find the perfect justice program. Rather it entails recognition of how similar we are to everywhere else in our lack of moral imagination, a lack which leads to human rights abuse in the first place, and then to a refusal to acknowledge that such things have occurred: 'the evil ... is that they hold for certain they are in the light'.

Recognition is a difficult thing—as witnessed by the uproar over the so-called black-armband historians. In the international arena, we don't like to think of ourselves as being anywhere else but on the moral high ground. The publication of the stolen generation report should help—it disrupts the nice, neat suburban history we have given ourselves and replaces it with a picture that is less than nice. It bears witness to Aboriginal people's present pain and insists on the connection between this pain and the events in the (not so distant) past.

A few years ago I worked on an Aboriginal lands council farm. The women I lived with spent many hours telling me stories about how the Aboriginal people in that area had been dragged off their land in long chain-gangs. They described their childhood: being brought up as orphaned 'mission blacks' and looked after by the mission sisters. The tribal elder I lived with explained it to me like this: '*You* have to listen because you are here to listen; there is only one way for healing to happen in this country and that is for women like me to adopt you white girls and tell you what has happened, and tell you some of our knowledge. That's the only way healing is going to start and the shame job end.'

Remembering (that is, telling the story) is part of a spiritual lexicon for the Aboriginal women I spoke with and it makes the whole report and the Reconciliation Conference seem just part of a natural process of justice and reconciliation. Yet for me and other 'gubbas' (the Murrumbidgee area term for whites), that 'natural' reconciliation process doesn't come easy. It is also harder for us to understand that social justice requires the truth about the past be told. Our lack of comprehension is summed up in John Howard's refusal to apologise. The refusal is a real 'shame job'. Unfortunately, the Prime Minister, like many not trained to think in terms of symbols and connections, cannot grasp the symbolic and political import of such a gesture. Nor is there an understanding of apology—'saying sorry'—as anything other than an admission of guilt. Yet in this particular context, 'saying sorry' is more about acknowledging the pain caused and the loss endured than about taking or allocating blame.

The active acknowledgement of the past relates to the act of return. The content of the word 'nostalgia' is almost saccharine nowadays, but in the original Greek, nostalgia meant 'painful homecoming'. Such a meaning restores to memory an intensely physical and, at the same time, spiritual quality; remembering some person, place, event can be as palpable and painful as the real thing.

In Chile, after General Pinochet had finally allowed for general elections, the new president, Patricio Aylwin, formally apologised on national television for the abuses that had occurred under the military (thousands had been 'disappeared'). Aylwin, who had no connection or involvement with Pinochet's government, nonetheless understood the need for the people to be given an apology by the new representative of the state. To apologise for abuses committed by a dictatorship that your own party had toppled—that's generosity and depth of understanding indeed.

CHILE'S TRUTH and Reconciliation Commission did not work because it failed to establish one of the most important truths: where the dead were buried. Chilean families needed to know where their sons, daughters, sisters and brothers had died. Or if they were still living.

Australia's reconciliation process will fail if we continue to pretend that nothing happened 'as if those stones were falling on the earth, or water on water'. We can pretend this and not say sorry, or we can agree to our painful homecoming, and join the rest of the world. At this far end of the 20th century, maybe it's about time. ■

Kirsty Sangster is a postgraduate student in Anthropology and Legal Studies at La Trobe University.

Integrity: the long walk

The final part in ***Antony Campbell****'s series on an unconditionally loving God. This month—Mystery: silence and speech*

VII

For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed,
but my steadfast love shall not depart from you.
(Isaiah 54:10)

THERE IS NO WAY WE AVOID MYSTERY in dealing with God. If we've got a beautifully clear picture, then somehow we've got it beautifully wrong. But mystery doesn't let me off the hook. We have our lives to live, our choices to make, and I can't put them off by appealing to mystery. The mystery of God is the context within which I have to make most of my choices and live my life.

An element in the mystery of God is our needing to choose among our options for our God. Not only judge or lover. Involved surely are the God of the few, the God of the many, and the God of all. The God of the few is something of a selective breeder: single out the perfect and discard the rest. The God of the many might be doing the laundry: discard the irreparable and put the rest through the wash. The God of all is mysterious: loving the lot, finding the lovable in each. Most mysterious of all is that we cannot discover which of these is God; we must instead discover our decision and our choice.

Mystery stretches minds. There is a wonderful exchange in the book by Fynn, *Mister God, This Is Anna* (Collins, 1974, p117). Anna had just been explaining to Fynn that 'the bigger the difference between us and Mister God, the more Godlike Mister God became'. Fynn wanted to know what this had to do with the Sunday-school teacher Anna claimed 'don't teach you nuffink about Mister God'. So he asked and he got his answer.

> Anna: 'When I find out things it makes the difference bigger and Mister God gets bigger.'
> Fynn: 'So?'
> Anna: 'Sunday-school Teacher makes the difference bigger but Mister God stays the same size. She's frightened.'
> Fynn: 'Hey, hold on a tick. How come she makes the difference bigger and Mister God stays the same size?'

He nearly lost the answer. It was one of those real 'give-away' lines. Tossed off so quietly.

> Anna: 'She just makes the people littler.'

That's the risk of not letting our minds be stretched by mystery. We make our lives smaller and we make God smaller—and we sell both down the river in the process.

I have a lot of the dour Scot in me and I'd rather my life wasn't a mystery. It's taken me a long time and a lot of soul-searching to realise that it is. (Some of us dour Scots are not all that quick.) For me, the major bit of mystery in me and in all of us is that elusive quality we name 'spirit'. I am fascinated by the realm of spirit. Art, literature, and music give access to it; mountains and oceans touch it, great trees and evocative waters whether surging or still; church, liturgy, and prayer can touch it—whatever speaks to our hearts and calls to the contemplative in each of us. Intimacy and relationship touch it. Augustine touched it when he said: 'You have made us for yourself, O God, and our hearts can find no rest until they rest in you.' That is part of the mystery: we can reach into the realm of spirit; we cannot rest there.

God is mystery. Making God smaller so that we can understand God better doesn't work. So is God judge or lover or what? My father always answered those questions with: 'Probably or what.' On this, he'd be right if 'or what' was another way of saying 'mystery'. One wise old Jesuit gave this advice for theology students facing exams: 'Never bring the mystery in too early and always make sure there is some mystery left at the end.' It's good advice.

Human language admits to mystery but ought not indulge it with obfuscation or linguistic snake oil. Mystery does not admit of regimentation. Vision decisions cannot be imposed on others. To run two metaphors only, if there is a lot of judging and very little loving in the range, I am ill at ease. Does such an image adequately reflect the Judeo-Christian tradition? I want to say it doesn't.

If I bring the mystery in too early in my thinking, I'll try and live my life without committing myself to a loving God or another view of God. It may not work. I'm a limited human being and I have to work with human language and human attitudes. My attitude to God and my faith in God's attitude to me are part of that. I have to choose. Or I have to recognise the choice that has somehow happened within me.

I've got to make sure there is some mystery left at the end of my thinking. Otherwise I've sold God short. God is God. God is other. Whether we like it or not, God escapes our limited human categories. Mystery is not chickening out; it is facing fact.

Archaeology yields to palaeontology as, beyond the neolithic that we know, our imagination recedes into the ages of oh so long ago. How many generations existed between those we might call 'pre-human' and those in whom we would recognise our forebears? What was their destiny? For me, it is shrouded in mystery. It's been said that in a few more thousands of years people may look back on our generations as 'early Christians'. A challenging thought that underlines the mystery of human life. Most generations have thought of themselves as near the end of time. Towards its end, the Newer Testament shifted to awareness of itself as the middle of time. What if in fact we are only near the beginning! The end may be further out of reach than the beginning.

THERE ARE AREAS THAT I WRAP IN MYSTERY, because I recognise them as out of reach. One of my brothers was mentally disabled, autistic I think. I believe he lived life as fully as was possible, but it was far from the rich and full life I wish he might have had. There was a Home of Compassion next to my school, caring for children with incurable birth defects. I know they were lovingly cared for, but where rich and full human life is concerned it seems they had been sold short. I believe that God loves them and cares about them more deeply and passionately than their carers or their dearest ever could. I have to entrust them to the mystery of God.

A doctor in London enabled my mother to care for my disabled brother. The doctor's name was Morgenstern, 'morning star'. From Vienna, his twin maiden aunts were taken to the gas chambers on their 80th birthday. So many millions have been victims of unthinkable inhumanity. I can only believe in the immense anger, grief, and pain of God—and that has to be mystery.

Another aspect comes under mystery: the inactivity of God. Some would consider talk of anger and grief in God to be an absurdity. What's the point of pain if you have the power to change the situation—and surely God has the power. That is where I differ. My observation says that God does not normally exercise that sort of power; my conclusion is that, to all practical effect, God does not have that sort of power. Arguments can be made for God's permissive will, allowing things for whatever good reasons. I do not find myself convinced. The Older Testament has no problem with the expression of God's anger, grief, and pain. I experience God as non-coercive, non-violent. If God is deeply loving, as well as non-coercive and non-violent, God is going to feel anger, grief, and pain. And that too has to be mystery.

The price of accepting an unconditionally loving God may be acceptance of the loss of an all-powerful God. The loss may be already there; its acceptance is a further step. Faced with oppression, some want God's justice rather than God's love. What we want we do not always get. We may have to settle for God's anger, grief, and pain. Anger can coexist with love. No believer in God's love can be dismissive of God's anger or God's grief and pain. Is justice met by oppressors' eternal confrontation with the truth of their own selves as well as the truth of a loving God? In claiming divine justice after death, do we ask God to do for us later what we cannot do for ourselves now? My inclination is to let a future life take care of itself, but I cannot leave it there; it determines my attitude to life now. If I demand God's justice in the future, do I diminish my acceptance of God's love in the now? I do not believe that justice, whether in this life or the next, brings pain to closure. Forgiveness is not merely a charity I extend to the offender; it is also and above all a gift I offer to myself for my own healing and my wholeness. Does that make oppressors any less vicious bastards? Of course not!

Talk of forgiveness raises three questions, provocative but real. In some circumstances at least, can forgiveness—ours or God's—open the way to transformation in those who are forgiven? Are we at times challenged to accept God's power to forgive and to love? Do we want to face forever our unforgiving refusal of our own healing?

We've known, from the outset, that the idea of a loving God is not new to Christian faith. What has been argued here is the rank or priority to be given to God's love in our faith. Traditionally, the loss of God—'the pain of loss'—is said to be acutely felt by the lost. Equally, the loss of those who are loved would bring grief and pain to a loving God. How often do we weigh God's loss? Or does God refuse to lose, refuse to be definitively rejected within a world as uncertain as ours? Is the priority to be given to God's love paramount? Is God's love unconditional?

Human language admits to mystery but ought not indulge it with obfuscation or linguistic snake oil. Mystery does not admit of regimentation. Vision decisions cannot be imposed on others. To run two metaphors only, if there is a lot of judging and very little loving in the range, I am ill at ease. Does such an image adequately reflect the Judeo-Christian tradition? I want to say it doesn't. If the range has a little

Talk of forgiveness raises three questions, provocative but real. In some circumstances at least, can forgiveness—ours or God's—open the way to transformation in those who are forgiven? Are we at times challenged to accept God's power to forgive and to love? Do we want to face forever our unforgiving refusal of our own healing?

Above left: A fusing of human and divine love. Michelangelo's *Pietà*, in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo in Florence.

Emphasis on God's unconditional love can contribute to bridging one of western Christianity's deepest doctrinal divides. Divine grace, so important in the language of Roman Catholic theology, can be appropriately understood in terms of the activity of God's love. Love is not earned; it is a sheer gift of grace. Justification by faith, so central to Reformation theology, can be understood as appropriately expressed in the language of acceptance in faith of God's unconditional love. Love is not proved; it is taken on faith.

more judging than loving or a little more loving than judging, at this stage I keep my distance. I have had my say; people's priorities are theirs, not mine. If there is a lot of loving and very little judging in the range, I am comfortable, I smile, and I trust that I too am there. As the relationship with God grows into one of unconditional love, I hope the judge may disappear altogether. When unconditional love is the context for our living, we can be sure that appropriate behaviour will be its hallmark.

Why we should be as we are is a question we cannot answer. That there is goodness and lovableness in us is open to our perception. That there is suffering and misery in life is evident. Why it should have to be so is mystery, without answer. Debunking the mystery improves nothing—perhaps it eases our intellectual or emotional tension.

In it all, in this moment of now, I have to make choices for my life. A colleague commented once: when you are more at ease with the mystery of your own person, you'll be more at ease with the mystery of God. True, but I can't wait indefinitely. I am not comfortable with mystery—only stuck with it. And stuck with the awareness that somewhere deep within I believe in an unconditionally loving God.

Peter Steele quotes Joseph Brodsky as saying, 'The ability to see meaning where for all intents and purposes there is none is a professional feature of the poet's calling' (*Eureka Street*, April 1998, p41). Even for those who are not poets, the task of theology ought to be the sheer pursuit of meaning in faith ('*fides quaerens intellectum*'). Maybe the ultimate poet–theologian who can find meaning in all of us is God. Maybe it is possible for God to love us all—deeply, passionately, and unconditionally.

A mystery of stellar magnitude!

Afterword

THESE REFLECTIONS ARE ABOUT THE CHANGING FACE OF FAITH. Not a change in faith; a changing face. We are all aware of how one and the same person can show us different faces at different times—now a glum scowl, now a beaming smile. For faith, the change is under way.

Evidence of change is today's widespread and accepted affirmation of God as loving. The metaphor of face is strong—and very human. The faces of those who judge are imaged as hard and stern, of those who love as soft and radiant. A Georges Rouault painting has the caption: '*dura lex sed lex*' (a hard law but the law); the stern judicial face painted is as hard as granite. If God is spoken of as a loving God, to have integrity the features of faith's face must have harmony. That is what these reflections are about.

If Christian faith gives priority to God's love, Christ's incarnation (God's becoming human) is the central act of God in human history. God's becoming one of us because of love for us is the motivating force that leads to Christ's death and resurrection.

Christ's death and resurrection flow out of God's commitment to the ordinariness of our human lives—the 'long littleness of life'. In Christ, God became one of us and in love accepted all that was involved—even to death, death on a cross. Christ's incarnation is the central expression of God's unconditional love of human life. Passion and death are the consequence of incarnation.

The origin and the destiny of human life attract attention. For our origin, it is possible within Christian faith to affirm that God took the risks of creating an evolutionary universe or an evolutionary world, risking its possible defects. Our ignorance about our origins is vast; it allows for a multiplicity of answers. Risked evolution is one of these, among many other possibilities.[1] For the destiny of human life, the possibility of enduring memory and therefore a commitment to enduring truth has been raised and cannot be avoided.

The seed has always been there in Christian scripture. It may be time for the full flowering to be visible in Christian faith.

It is not surprising that God should be believed to love us unconditionally. Any good we can do, God can do better. Confronted with human wrongdoing, the argument for God's unconditional love is simple and classically traditional. Mothers can do it, fathers can do it, others can do it; who are we to deny that God can do it?

It is not surprising that many human authorities should favour belief in God as judge; it reinforces the power of those authorities. According to such belief, the right to judge has been delegated by the divine judge to the human authority. But you don't delegate love. According to such belief, the right to dispense favour has been delegated by the divine judge. But a universally loving God does not act selectively, dispensing favour. According to such belief, insistence on law and order has the approval of the divine judge. But Jesus Christ, the embodiment of a loving God, had a reputation for eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners (Matthew 11:19 and 9:10–11). The ultimate retribution can be expected from a God who judges. With a God who loves, the outcome may be the ultimate truth of each of us. To relinquish an aspect of privilege and power in moving from stick to carrot may in the short run seem unhelpful; in the long run it may prove surprisingly wise.

If God's unconditional love belongs to the face of faith, discordant features should not mar that face. Redemption for instance should not be understood in ways that contradict God's love—imaged as a debt

or a price to be paid, pictured as the overcoming of divine alienation. Love does not insist on payment; love is not alienated from the beloved.

Redemption is liberation from a wretched plight. It can free us to see meaning in life, in the sense of seeing deeply into the values of life rather than being arrested at the level of the images we perceive or remember. It can liberate us from captivity to life's evident pain and misery by challenging us to see and value what God sees and values in us. It can set us free by removing the shackles of fear and anxiety, enabling a radically new context for human living. Redemption can liberate us from the conviction of our unlovableness before God and set us free to respond to God's unconditional love. Redemption is the flow-on from incarnation; its expression needs to grasp God's love for us and God's longing to be one with us.

Much traditional expression sits uncomfortably alongside language of God's unconditional love. A shift of attitude will often allow the traditional to resonate again with truth and meaning. For example, the Lamb of God who 'takes away the sin of the world' can be richly understood as removing all that blocks our acceptance of God's love rather than as paying off the debt of sin.

Emphasis on God's unconditional love can contribute to bridging one of western Christianity's deepest doctrinal divides. Divine grace, so important in the language of Roman Catholic theology, can be appropriately understood in terms of the activity of God's love. Love is not earned; it is a sheer gift of grace. Justification by faith, so central to Reformation theology, can be understood as appropriately expressed in the language of acceptance in faith of God's unconditional love. Love is not proved; it is taken on faith.

Most change challenges. Acceptance of an unconditionally loving God may make sense of life; it demands bigness of faith in God. What we know of life and our world does not allow for little gods. It stretches belief to allow God to be big. We can stretch both time and space. In time, we can look at Christian faith from the viewpoint of a couple of hundred thousand years rather than the mere couple of thousand that have passed so far. In space, with more than a hundred thousand million galaxies, if only one planet per galaxy were peopled, that would make for more than one hundred thousand million peopled worlds. Peopled or not, it makes God and the universe as unbelievably big as the world of subatomic physics is unbelievably small. In all of this, our faith may be that we are unconditionally loved by God in the ordinariness of our lives.

It stretches belief; but belief in nothing may be stretching it more. The absurdity of Christian faith. The even greater absurdity of anything less. ■

The origin and the destiny of human life attract attention. For our origin, it is possible within Christian faith to affirm that God took the risks of creating an evolutionary universe or an evolutionary world, risking its possible defects. Our ignorance about our origins is vast; it allows for a multiplicity of answers. Risked evolution is one of these.

Antony Campbell SJ is professor of Old Testament at the Jesuit Theological College within the United Faculty of Theology, Melbourne. This series is in process of publication with Paulist Press, New Jersey.

1. For some, evolution goes along with a denial of the presence of God; for others, evolution coexists with a belief in the presence of God. For the latter, the evolution of God's universe may be described as unguided, or guided, or risked. 'Unguided': God creates and sustains an evolutionary universe and leaves it to its own devices. 'Guided': affirms God's creative activity, initial and continued, and allows for the presence in one form or another of this divine activity and of evolution, so that the universe is as God wills it to be. 'Risked': might affirm that God took the risk of creating an evolutionary universe, is with it in its evolution (with joy and sorrow, happiness and pain), but without controlling the process itself.

POETRY

XIAO

College Memoir

Come and sit beside the river
Listen to the music of silence
the silence of wandering
In wonder, I discover
the strength of quietness
slipping along the river bank
this your shoulders
passing through spring sun, autumn wind

Sunlight, as many years ago
shimmers through that ancient willow
Under the tree, the chair is still
Too many memories to tell
Too many faces to count
All are written on the white hair

Perhaps only the old corridors know
how many times you have walked back and forth
Only the graduation photos witness
your forever young smile
And now, you are as calm as a river
gentle and endless

This poem is inspired by and dedicated to one of my theology lecturers.

MOIRA RAYNER

Justice and power players

Upington, Andrea Durbach, Allen & Unwin, 1999. ISBN 1 86508 063 2, RRP $24.95
Catching the Waves: Life in and out of Politics, Susan Ryan, HarperCollins, 1999. ISBN 0 7322 5959 2, RRP $29.95

BRAVERY HAS MANY FACETS. In 1988, a young Cape Town solicitor, Andrea Durbach, agreed to instruct barrister Anton Lubowski in a battle to save 25 black women and men from the death penalty after they had been convicted of the gruesome murder of a black policeman in Upington, during a political riot. The final decision wrecked her happiness and saved their lives. Her book is a hymn to the rule of law.

The Upington 25 had been convicted after an unfair trial. One white Johannesburg barrister had to represent them all, without support and, in the last few months of the trial, without payment and in face of the whole machinery of state. That included an apartheid system which created the situation, and a judge—Jan Basson—who would not believe one word the accused said in their defence. They had rioted, he found, with the purpose of making their town ungovernable.

Members of the Upington 25, outside Pretoria Central after their release from Death Row.

Whatever the legal system, getting justice is a matter of chance. Much depends on the people: their legal skill, courage to challenge the official view and risk offending an opinionated judge, intelligence, resources, and persistence. Much also depends on the principles and open-mindedness of the judges; on the law and its assumptions about guilt; on complex rules of evidence and procedure which determine how stories are told, and therefore who is likely to be believed. It also depends on the prevailing values of the society.

The truth does not always come out. In Australia, a mishandled or unfair murder trial can, at worst, result in a long jail sentence. But in South Africa, at the time of the Upington 25 trial, a botched defence, or a prejudiced judge, could mean death for the accused.

Lawyers Andrea Durbach and Anton Lubowski had to act quickly. Judge Basson was determined to sentence the 25 accused four days after conviction. This would not have allowed enough time to put a case for extenuation, as the law allowed, so they had to argue for, and win, an extension of time, and the money to prepare the extenuation case. Without funds or extension, there was no chance of appealing successfully against the verdicts.

The verdicts were, for the most part, perverse. Of those convicted, most had played a minor role in the murder—as part of a crowd. Several were in the dock by chance. They had agreed to take part in an identification parade, and to their astonishment, were identified by the deceased's distraught family as participants in the rock-throwing and chasing of a policeman. Their alibis were dismissed as 'unreliable'.

Those who had chanted, thrown rocks or chased the deceased were convicted on a controversially broad interpretation of the 'common purpose' doctrine: they were deemed to have been as culpable of the killing as the one man who smashed the policeman's head in, and the others who 'necklaced' what was almost certainly his dead body. Most had not struck a blow, or lit a match.

Durbach lived for the case, from 1988, until, in May 1991, the death sentences were overturned. She is still living it.

For the first two years, she virtually lived in the little town of Upington, losing her comfortable life and Cape Town practice to take her place in a community which was obsessively concerned with the case. We live it with her:

> There were long nights when the air was hot and still and we worked in our rooms with extended families of mosquitoes, when perhaps we drank too much with dinner and ate anything with lots of sugar. And there were mornings when simple fairness and compassion from the court had been too big an ask, and over lunch in my room, Anton and I would order in a whisky and a packet of Camel filters and wait for the dread to subside.'

This was not just a criminal trial: it was political, and Durbach and Lubowski opened it up to the world by taking it to the media. There was a punitive reaction. One of the accused, sent for medical treatment, was tortured by police once away from the hospital and the protection of his lawyers. There was the ever-present shadow of violence and the gallows.

Had they not been so deadly, the attitudes of the judge, Basson, would have been ludicrous. When he announced his intention of sentencing the accused a week earlier than agreed, the accused were distraught—their families had arranged to travel very long distances to be with them. When Lubowski asked for 'compassion', Basson replied, 'This is a court case, not a burial.' During sentencing, when one of those about to be sentenced to death expostulated, Basson warned Lubowski to control his client because there would be 'serious consequences' if he did not. Indeed so.

The 14 sentenced to death, and most of those jailed, were released in 1991 by an appeal court whose judgment was scathing of the Basson trial. But by then Durbach had paid a high price—exile, in Australia—and Lubowski a higher: he had been assassinated, apparently by a hit squad. Durbach still grieves.

She came back for the final appeal, filled with a sense of personal inadequacy—she had left South Africa for Australia—and of responsibility for the divisions that had grown among the accused while she was away. It seems this has never left her. Her description of her return to a different South Africa, of her mixed joy and loneliness on hearing, over the telephone from Australia, the cheers of the crowd celebrating Mandela's release, is devastating.

Andrea Durbach's account of the Upington trials reveals the vicious but also dreary face of apartheid; and the bright, terrible responsibility that some lawyers—good people with a passion for truth—assume.

To value and continue to believe in justice, we should know about such brave lawyers who saved lives at the cost of their own. Andrea Durbach is a modest, vulnerable hero who can write. Read her book.

SUSAN RYAN is another courageous woman whose autobiography, *Catching the Waves*, reminded me of the dashed hopes of the Whitlam era. Ryan's passion for justice is burning still, though dimmed by disappointments. I was saddened by the price women pay in public life: she didn't seem to have a lot of fun.

Though Ryan is not the writer Durbach is, her book is a valuable record of the achievements of women—Ryan was an early feminist. It is also a chronicle of the ALP's loss of vision and direction, and the policy decisions—education, anti-discrimination law, monetary deregulation and competition policy—which have shaped the Australia of today, and left her party struggling to maintain what she calls the 'social democratic' tradition. It isn't particularly flattering about Beazley. I do not think that she believes there are heroes and leaders in her party.

Susan Ryan was brought up as a good Catholic girl, and educated at the Brigidine Convent at Maroubra. She wanted to make a difference, and transferred her faith from the personal, individualist approach of the early feminist movement to the Labor Party. She entered federal politics—after some years of community activism, particularly through the Women's Electoral Lobby—in 1975.

I was left with the feeling that Ryan felt as disappointed (to say no more) in the ALP, as it embraced economic rationalism in the 1980s, as she felt betrayed by and alienated from her church after the 1968 papal encyclical letter on the regulation of birth, *Humanae Vitae*.

Ryan attributes her success in public life to both innate qualities and her Catholic education. She apparently always exhibited what one disapproving sister called 'brass'—others might call it strength of character—fuelled at least in part by her being punished, on her first day at school, because she refused to play with dolls: she wanted to start learning. Of her education, she believes that the leadership qualities instilled in her by her teachers, and in so many other Catholic girls—Germaine Greer, Anne Summers, Carmen Lawrence—were the result of a deliberate strategy to create in them the character they would need, as Catholic women, to stand up for what was right in the face of hostility and ridicule, which she has clearly had to do a lot of. Though the church expects obedience, Ryan says that if you value intelligence, honesty and independence, you cannot expect to achieve diffidence and submission: these 'rigorous and unconventional women's adversarial approach worked well with strong-minded girls who gained self-confidence by standing up to it'.

Ryan also attributes her understanding of parliament and the ALP to what she learned about institutions through the church, though she has long distanced herself from her childhood allegiance. She may have left the institution, but it has never left her.

Ryan has had a rough ride. From her marriage to Richard Butler, and her dutiful travelling with him overseas as he pursued his diplomatic career, to her return to Canberra with two small children after (as she puts it) she lost the trust that underpinned the partnership she had expected to be for life. From motherhood on her own and feminist activism in Canberra (she was a founding member of the Women's Electoral Lobby) to a political career, and ministerial portfolios in Aboriginal affairs, education, and women's interests. Ryan was the only woman in the Hawke Cabinet from 1983 until she ran out of steam and resigned in 1988. Plastics and superannuation don't have quite the same buzz, but she has found them rewarding activities.

Above: Ministers at Government House, 1984. Ryan had been reappointed Education Minister and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on the Status of Women. Left: Speaking at UNESCO, Paris, 1983.

Susan Ryan's political contribution has been remarkable. Most of all, she should be remembered for shepherding sex discrimination and affirmative action laws and institutions through caucus, cabinet and the parliament, gaining a powerful ally in Hawke, and neutralising the defensiveness of many within her own party. Without the Sex Discrimination Act, and the principles and remedies it created, and affirmative action reporting, without equal opportunity programs in the public sector, the status of women in Australia would have been nothing like as outstanding—and we still lead the world. Yet she was hurt by the lack of support and recognition for these achievements at the time. She was, and still is, disappointed and a little caustic about the feminists who criticised her as a 'wimp'

and a sell-out when she was a minister; who took their 'shop-steward' in the cabinet for granted, and who criticised the inadequacies of the 1984 Sex Discrimination Act. As she recalls it, they had the gall to complain when she retired from political office 12 years ago

Was she done over by 'the boys'? She says not, but I have my doubts, reading her careful account of it. I think she was a stoic. Her struggles, in and out of parliament, seem to have left her with little time for fun. But perhaps (and there is a hint in this book) my impression is more to do with her choosing not to gossip, as I would have liked, about the peccadilloes of her political colleagues, or her own personal life. I am left with a distinct sense that she was not supported—or not included—by the majority of her male colleagues. Politics, in the '70s and '80s, seemed like a hard and thankless calling for women.

This is an important record of a critical time in our political history, and told, for a change, from the point of view of an intelligent, principled, feminist woman, who nonetheless laughed at—and loved him for saying it—Mick Young's description of her (and all other Labor women) as a 'boiler'. None of today's young turks would try it. And nobody could, or did, 'Stop the Ryan Juggernaut'.

For my part, I salute Susan Ryan for running with unpopular causes, taking her losses womanfully, and getting out gracefully when her heart was no longer in it. Thank you, Susan Ryan. You, too, paid a helluva price. ■

Moira Rayner's most recent book is *The Women's Power Handbook*, written with Joan Kirner and published by Viking.

BOOKS: 2

PENELOPE BUCKLEY

Beyond craft

Coming up for Light, Aileen Kelly, Pariah Press, Melbourne, 1994. ISBN 0 949245 20 8

THE LAST TIME a book of poems gave me this kind of excitement was in 1960, when I read the typescript of Gwen Harwood's first book. Perhaps because Aileen Kelly has waited even longer to publish a collection than Gwen Harwood did, *Coming up for Light* shows an even greater craft. She is already a master.

Kelly's early poems showed some of the features in which *Coming up for Light* is so rich, unforgettable phrasing ('some clumsy brute of a me') and powerful end-stops:

> So they stand up to the great
> muscle-men and puzzle them;
> crowds and touch them;
> power brokers and break the power back.
> —'Wonders will never cease'

In other ways she has passed over a chasm.

The book opens with the return of the repressed in an angry mother-ghost imagined as she never was:

> The floor was slippery with botched
> cooking none of us had eaten which
> she had
> thrown down of her power.
> —'Encounters with my mother's ghost'

Only this kind of mother has such power, since it depends on the previous establishment of boundaries and taboos. In the world where the mother's self was denied and her 'power' unacknowledged, there was also creativity, movement, grace, which came via her self-repression to her family:

> Where every pastry rose to our clean fingers

The line is filled with delight. The poem envisages no integration in the mother-ghost between that rising grace and the power to throw down. In the book, however,

in the voice and human presence of its main speaker, there is just such an integration: neither power nor grace is diminished or denied.

For example, on two facing pages are the beautiful elegy to a vanishing reference point for metaphysics and the self:

> Then you danced with one
> or a thousand other angels
> and a whole galaxy was
> brought to light
> Don't tell me you have lost
> the will
> to body
> Then you danced
>
> and the head of that pin
> was my fulcrum ...
> —'Then you danced'

And the sulphur-fuming little poem 'Boss':

> When you say Jump I
> jump they jump ...
>
> penned between you and the window
> who wouldnt jump

Some sense of invisible lines not to be crossed does remain, deeply internalised, but felt to have power to hurt. She has been down deep.

> What rises? I punch
> it down. What
> rises? Punch
> Darkness down
> —'All down darkness'

Striking out in the unface of horror is one recourse; another is the watchful semiparalysis of 'In turn', where whatever threatens is also malevolent or sly, defying the speaker to discover whether it is within or outside the threshold of the self: this 'Split' becomes a dialogue of self and soul.

Tell me there is nothing
to fear and I tell you in turn
truly I fear it ...

In that brave act of naming, the 'I' is precariously whole.

Many poems engage with strangers seen in car, tram, train, mind's eye, prison or street, through barriers, windows or in mirrors: signals flash between people or between surfaces and selves.

Good to look from a tram at the boys
propping their corner,
muscles defined by the cut-back T-shirts,
at ease in their art-work ...
flashing their metal, asking to be looked
at ...

Good to pass fast behind glass, good not
to be on their street,
not see myself strange and old in the flat
mirror of their stare ...
—'Good looking'

The speaker rejoices in being free to rejoice in their otherness without being reduced by it; yet with the freedom comes some pain, that the empathy goes only one way. She can cross a mental barrier, only to come up hard against 'the flat mirror' which divides her from herself. But even this awareness gives common ground with others 'fast behind glass'. Elsewhere, windows are companionable and transparent.

In the poems about loved people there are moments when their otherness too is touched with strangeness. 'Looking for Andy' records a frightening displacement of intimacy. In the comically nightmare-ridden love poem 'Where you come in', it is the self that is strange in the other's unpractised absence. Mutability is at work, turning nephews and nieces into 'half-known adult faces' and a house move into an exercise in *memento mori*. In 'Twenty' a mother sees her pregnant daughter as a foetal child wrapping her own child in layers of relationship:

knees tucked to belly packaged by
shivering arms
in two sweaters, one yours, the other his.

Though lives may feel precarious or threatened, that awareness is tempered by Kelly's wonderful ear:

When it's really bleak you take the cat
on your knee.
Fur under your hands and life under the
fur. —'Still life'

Such rhythmical and tactile perfection must give delight, as does the soft impact, 'the dog hits chin on thigh'. There is separation in this poetry, but also collision, the impact of one existence on another. Here it is reassuring. Elsewhere it can mean pain. But running through all the life-forms—dog, bird, cicada, cat, fox, human mind, water-meadow, God—and the spare verse, the rhythms are intensely communicative, whether they are long and delicate as in 'Substance', or jaunty under reverses:

Well who do they think they are
arriving in swish skirts and swiss shirts,
bow-tie eyes, top drawl, business class
going up....

The last line, with its new tempo, is a world away from the first:

now who do you think you are?
—'The party of the second part'

'The given flesh' is the only villanelle I know which keeps moving its meanings all the way through instead of just pretending to: in this, the grace 'Where every pastry rose' is transmuted into grown-up metaphysics of a high order. 'Cat and cicadas' is perfection on a knife-edge. 'My brother's piano' closes the collection with some mysterious role-reversals powerfully worked out. Anyone who is sceptical about my claims for Aileen Kelly can test this poem against one of those by Gwen Harwood about piano-playing and dreams.

Coming up for Light is valuable beyond craft for the human presence it establishes: to me it feels like the work of someone who can hear 'that roar which lies on the other side of silence' and stay sane. The book has sold out; one must hope for a reprinting. Meanwhile there is another book to look forward to. Ripper. ■

Penelope Buckley is a writer and former lecturer at the University of Melbourne.

GEOFFREY MILNE

Class acts

THE VICTORIAN ARTS CENTRE has been home for most of May and part of June to a pair of co-productions from the Queensland Theatre Company, or the 'qtc' as it has been cutely called since Robyn Nevin became its artistic director three years ago. This remarkable residency has also given us a splendid opportunity to examine Nevin's work as an actor and as a director in some detail before she takes over the Sydney Theatre Company later this year.

The two productions were Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into Night* in the Fairfax (produced in association with the Bell Shakespeare Company) and David Williamson's *Corporate Vibes* in the Playhouse (a co-production with the STC). Both were presented as part of the Melbourne Theatre Company's subscription season.

It's a long while since we last saw O'Neill's harrowing autobiographical saga of the ultimate in dysfunctional families; the most recent production I can recall was at Marian St Theatre in Sydney in 1987 with Ron Haddrick and Dinah Shearing. This present revival turned out to be an inspired co-production by two companies whose artistic directors are both outstanding and revered actors. The production, directed by expatriate Australian director Michael Donald Edwards and designed by Michael Scott-Mitchell, functions on two slightly different levels: the production and the performance.

I found it a somewhat over-produced in the way that a lot of state theatre company productions have been in recent years. The set's principal feature is the living room, naturalistically enough strewn with the right kind of furniture, props and light fittings, and surrounded at the sides and rear by high solid walls encrusted with bookshelves and inscribed with bits of O'Neill's text. Typescript also covers the diagonally splayed floor. Downstage is a sort of verandah below the main floor level, to which the characters can gain access at any point; there are no fixed doorways. Hanging ominously over the living room is a sloping upstairs room—the spare room where Mary Tyrone paces away her sleepless nights and visibly injects the 'poison' which has reclaimed her at the onset of Edmund's illness.

In other words, a somewhat operatic production pushes back the boundaries of naturalism in ways that I think the play needs nowadays. Nonetheless, I could have done without the jangling music and eerie lighting effects that accompany each of Mary's ascents of the staircase. That said, the act two finale is terrific. As the light closes in around Mary in the spare room, and as she bares her arm for the shot of morphine that will make her afternoon bearable, a ray of stray light just happens to hit the bottle of whisky that the menfolk have been getting stuck into on the dining-table below. This gently underlines the fact that she is not the only substance-abuser in the family and it is insights like this that make revivals of classic texts satisfying.

The text itself is rendered in fine fashion, and without American accents. Dialogue in the incessant arguments in the early acts is overlapped, as it is among families, and the whole thing proceeds at a cracking pace. The performance takes just under three hours, which is considerably quicker and more audience-friendly than when I last saw it. But this kind of approach achieves two other ends. One is to underscore the fact that these are all familiar arguments; the Tyrones have gone over much of this ground time and again before. But it also provides the leeway to adopt a more measured tempo later on, once what appears to be just another day in a monotonous summer turns into a very special day. Some of the great 'arias' in acts three and four have all the time in the world to punch home their dramatic impact.

As the tight-fisted old ham actor, James Tyrone, John Bell gives one of his finest performances for many years. Like quicksilver in the first half—turning on the charm at the drop of a hat and then turning viciously on his sons and, in turn, equally quickly flashing into apology—Bell's Tyrone is ever the actor. Everything is dramatised. But his second half is even better. As Tyrone desperately struggles to comprehend the double tragedy of losing his wife and his second son—and to defend his appalling miserliness—the old ham does descend into the kind of melodramatic performance he built his fortune on. But Bell's clear-eyed performance of Tyrone's 'performances' has something of a Brechtian

Corporate Vibes by David Williamson.
Left to right: William Zappa, Lydia Miller, Tony Llewellyn-Jones.

quality about it; Tyrone might be melodramatic but Bell isn't.

Robyn Nevin is just about perfect as Mary. For a start, she is the right age and has the right look for the part. O'Neill's directions call for a Mary with a 'young graceful figure, a trifle plump, but showing little evidence of middle-aged waist and hips ...' and this is exactly what we get. It is the decline of her youthful energy under the influence of the morphine that so upsets Tyrone, and if Mary hasn't got that to begin with, the play dies. Furthermore, the trajectory of her long day is beautifully calculated. At first slightly brittle and fussing about everything from her hair to the arrangement of the furniture (but fundamentally bored rigid by yet another summer in this hated place), Nevin's spiral into craving for her 'arthritis cure' is played with a slightly increased edginess and an obsession with her hands, leading imperceptibly on to a muted wildness of look that we know will inevitably drive her back up those stairs again. And again. It is a mesmerising performance, as memorable in its subtlety as her bravura Miss Docker in *A Cheery Soul*, and one's eye is quickly drawn to the actors and the text and away from the slightly heavy-handed production values.

It must be a gruelling way to spend an evening, acting your heart out in one play while another you've directed is playing simultaneously next door.

IN HIS FARCICAL Sydney satire, *Corporate Vibes*, David Williamson yet again reveals that he can write about something of little of substance in a broadly entertaining style. Interestingly, Williamson's other new Sydney play this year (*Face to Face*, for the Ensemble Theatre in March) was a play about conflict resolution in the workforce; this one is ostensibly about personnel management in an architect's company. The company belongs to Sam Siddons, as loud-mouthed a bully as you could wish to see, whose midas touch with 'cutting-edge' but 'liveable' housing developments has recently deserted him. His latest blot on the Sydney landscape is simply not selling, while his rival and former colleague's work is moving like hot cakes. For this he blames his principal architect Angela, his leading salesman Brian and his PR woman Megan, as one does; they're dead wood and must be sacked. Never mind the fact that the latest project is a plain dud.

Enter the new personnel officer with a psychology degree. She's a Koorie named Deborah who's been hired by 2IC Michael during Sam's absence overseas and a clause in her contract (slightly unusually, I would have thought, for a company like the one Sam runs—with a rod of iron) states that no-one gets the sack without her say-so. Deborah starts out by interviewing the 'dead wood', one by one, entreating them to listen to their own inner voices, to find their own song, and all will be well. Her next step is to convene a staff meeting at which the company's ills (especially the personnel problems) and the staff's desires will be aired, Sam will see the light and change course.

Robyn Nevin and John Bell in Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into Night.*

As if! What happens is that the staff fight among themselves and get brow-beaten by Sam yet again. Interval comes with their jobs still about to disappear—including Deborah's.

Meanwhile, Deborah (she interprets the duties of a personnel officer in a fairly comprehensive sort of way, this girl; but then, this *is* her first job) cooks up a scheme whereby Angela will design a building according to her own ideas, with Brian doing the interior design (!), and Megan will dream up the PR campaign from heaven. They have all evidently found their inner songs. Another staff meeting. Sam agrees to the scheme and it turns out just fine (but not before a face-to-face between Sam and Deborah in which she suggests he listen to the six-year-old within him). The project sells, the firm is saved and Sam throws a party for the staff. Happy ending. Sam proposes to Deborah.

Implausibilities of plot, situation and character aside, there are some very funny lines here, most of them from Sam. We laugh or groan (depending on where we sit with this kind of satire) with a mixture of delight and dismay at his sexism, his bullying and his pig-headed anti-intellectualism.

Given the slender resemblance that any of this bears to how we actually work nowadays in organisations dominated by ruthless and all-powerful proprietors and CEOs, one begins to wonder what has driven Williamson to write this play. I suspect, from the contrived dramaturgy and the way he loads the emotional dice, that *his* main interest lies in the arch-bastard Sam and his road to Damascus conversion from autocrat to caring employer. Sam is another in Williamson's extensive gallery of 'loveable rogue' characters, which includes Frank in *Travelling North*, the father in *Brilliant Lies* and the Brian Toohey figure in *Sons of Cain*. Williamson skilfully manipulates the situation to the extent that Sam is the centre of our focus and even (believe it or not) our affection. He would seem to argue that corporate management can be employee-friendly *and* profitable, given the right circumstances and (female? new age?) stimuli.

But even this fanciful thesis is undermined by the glib confession that letting the dead wood (and especially Deborah) go would reflect poorly on the company's equal opportunity/affirmative action profile.

With this two-dimensional stuff to work on, Robyn Nevin does a good job in maintaining our interest through the evening. She draws committed and entertaining performances from all of the cast, especially from William Zappa (Sam), Caroline Kennison (Angela), Tony Llewellyn-Jones (Brian) and Lydia Miller (Deborah) and moves the action along very smartly. She has the cast shift the wheeled tables of Stephen Curtis' set around in a deftly choreographed series of little robotic ballets, which is nicely in keeping with the nature of their roles in the company, and above all she never allows the pace to flag.

No doubt Nevin will have better material than this to work on with the Sydney Theatre Company and I trust she will have the chance to tour from there as well. I hope she can also find the time to keep acting. ■

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

LINDA WILLIAMS

Art and about

The Melbourne International Biennial:
Signs of Life

Above:
An escape artist. From Robert Gligorov's video *Bobe's Legend*. Over a time-lapse sequence, the bird in the mouth hatches, bides its time and then flies free.

THE INAUGURAL Melbourne International Biennial could not be described as a slick or glitzy production in comparison with the influential global circuit of well-established cyclical exhibitions. But what it lacks in international glamour is offset by its risk-taking verve and the way it connects with currents in contemporary art that have not yet necessarily met with art-world approval.

Its closest model in this sense is the deliberately loose and rambling Aperto section of the Venice Biennale, where young artists who are not chosen as official national representatives are still given some international exposure. The Melbourne Biennial provides a similar opportunity for Australian artists.

Like the Venice Aperto, the major part of the Melbourne Biennial is shown not in a gallery but in an old building in the centre of town. The former Melbourne Telephone Exchange, on the corner of Russell and Little Collins Streets (about to be converted into a fancy apartment block by the architectural firm Nation Fender Katsalidis) has, in the interim, been an ideal site for the Biennial—with its eight floors of semi-industrial space, lofty ceilings, and views across the city.

Along with satellite exhibitions spread across several Melbourne galleries, the major exhibition on Russell Street, called 'Signs of Life', includes work by more than 60 artists. It is ambitious both in scale and curatorial intent, as Artistic Director, Juliana Engberg, makes clear:

> Art is still one of the most effective and meaningful measurements of the pulse of life. By its own complexity and search for meaning among the metaphors, art delivers to us a synthesis of thought and outcome which reflects our need for a renewed sense of humanity as we ponder the reasons for existence into the next century.

This is a tall order for artists. And Engberg will be attacked by some critics for having a seriously 'uncool' humanist premise.

Not that this was all that clear from the dismissive response of probably the most widely read art critic in Melbourne, the *Age*'s Peter Timms. Timms is widely perceived among contemporary artists and critics as a fairly mild-mannered conservative who would appear to have few problems with the humanist values Engberg espouses. Of course his conservatism is no hanging offence, and unlike some other critics, Timms does consistently write about art.

Nonetheless, Timms' review of the Biennial was a denunciation which should not go unquestioned. His claim that much of the work is obscure and inaccessible is in accord with the cynical joke among art students that to receive a favourable review by an art critic from the Australian press is a sure sign of artistic failure. But this joke has been around for years now, and it is beginning to wear very thin.

Of the 60 artists in the show, Timms deems four worthy of approval. The rejects are either 'decadent' formalists determined to avoid any moral position, or artists whom he has simply dropped into the too-hard basket. The message is unmistakable: the Biennial represents a vanguard of contemporary visual art which has somehow lost its way, and is unworthy of serious critical attention.

This strikes me as serious critical folly. Undoubtedly, 'Signs of Life' has its weaker points, but with a small number of exceptions—work which was simply banal—these weaknesses are those of young artists whose sometimes portentous concern for the Big Issues overwhelms their capacity to give these concerns adequate form, rather than fundamentally self-indulgent exercises in decadent formalism.

But these are the weaker points. There are many strengths to the Biennial which evince the energy and creativity of contemporary art. One of the best things about this show was its lack of the usual solemn reverence for art 'stars', so that an influential artist from New York or London could be presented alongside a 25-year-old artist from Melbourne with an ease which seemed to act on that naive postmodern cliché—about the centre no longer holding and the peripheral voices attaining equality—as if it were actually true.

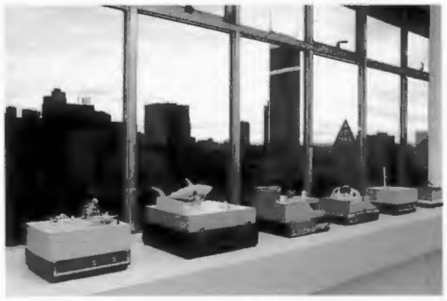
The exhibition emphasises some of the broad conceptual and iconographic themes of recent art, like the recurring anxiety about ecological fragility, alongside mythopoeic readings of nature, and these two form a kind of uneasy *ménage à trois* with the sexiness of high technology. These themes are linked to the broader interest in testing the boundaries of symbiotic relationships of all kinds, including questions of gender. Myth, history and landscape appear in other guises too, in post-colonial themes of mapping and spatial ordering, and, less predictably perhaps, in the links to the idea of childhood as another country.

WHILE ON NOTIONS OF CHILDHOOD: it has been some time since I have seen parents having to argue with their kids to drag them away from a piece of contemporary visual art. Yet I saw this on two occasions when small children had to be moved on from Macedonian artist Robert Gligorov's video *Bobe's Legend*, where the artist holds a bird's egg in his mouth until the chick hatches, and over a time-lapse sequence, the little bird finally gains the confidence and independence to fly out of the artist's open mouth. It doesn't require too much reflection to imagine why this odd enactment of nurturing, trust and the final flight from dependency should fascinate children. Yet it is also a piece that demonstrates the slightly crazy determination of artists to reach beyond formal restraints and endure absurd physical discomfort in order to find the simple, corporeal means of articulating symbiotic relationships.

The Glaswegian performance and video artists, Smith/Stewart, with a video work called *Static*, also took a very fundamental bodily theme: the ambivalence of the face, as deceptive mask or as the most powerful conduit of emotion. On one screen, the surface of a female face concealed beneath lurid pink cloth is felt and explored by a male hand; on an adjacent screen a male face, identically concealed, is felt and explored by a female hand; and the sound of friction from this whole process is amplified through large speakers. This is a dramatisation of symbiosis too, but one that is never separated from an underlying psychomachia. The cinema-screen format of this piece and perhaps some of its inchoate violence, bear the influences of another, now widely acclaimed, artist from the dynamic Glasgow School of Art, Douglas Gordon. But Smith and Stewart transcend this influence in a number of works which explore the boundaries of power, individuality and mutuality.

The installation of 12 Xerox diagrammatic drawings, *People Stop Using Things*, by the Edinburgh-based artist Chad McCail, is one of the best works in the show. These images illustrate the slow, ironic process of a range of utopian ideals being put into practice and culminating in a large ground-plan graphite drawing, *Spring*, which is a view of a housing estate, brilliantly documented in aerial perspective, as if from a satellite camera. McCail captures the moment-by-moment details of a social revolution as it might take place in the suburbs. His interest in the infamous Milgram Obedience Experiments imbue his simple drawings with an effectively aggressive edge.

Like McCail, Australian artist Ricky Swallow constructs models of figures in urban contexts, but they are animated little toys operating in tiny habitats reminiscent of museum display cabinets. In his miniature dramas drawn from the imagery of dystopian sci-fi, Swallow has fun undermining the gravity of the taxonomical organisation of natural history and our unquestioned authoritative status within it. A similar approach is taken by two Paris-based artists in their *Art Orient Objet*. Their work, closely aligned with an interest in the Animal Liberation movement, has points in common with Swallow's but lacks his technical skill and deflationary Australian wit. Their comment on vivisection, *Rabbit*, is a good example of the work of young artists with moral concerns which nonetheless falls flat because of the earnest literalism with which they are expressed. But their doll-house *Museums of Natural and Human Horrors* retain the rough-edged poetics of many Surrealist assemblages and the pop allure of gothic sci-fi.



Above: Ricky Swallow's urban objects in an urban context.

Australian artist David Noonan's *Saturn Return; the mishap* is a four-minute VHS loop in a Star-Trek room that dramatises a recurring image from one of the most popular genres in contemporary cinema—the moment when the space cadet dies inside the cold technology of the ship. A metaphor for the times it seems—and one that many of the artists in the show pursue, one way or another. The clean lines of international-style modernism in architecture combined with American '50s tail-fin streamlining are as fundamental to the legacy of contemporary design as they were to the deck of the *SS Enterprise*—a point made by artists as disparate as the Kyoto-based Kenji Yanobe with his driveable, fallout-resistant Japanese variation on the Mini, *The Atom Car*, and the colder spaces of modernity evoked by the Melbourne-based installation artist, Terri Bird.

Other artists from Melbourne extend this interest in artificial space. Patricia Piccinini takes us for a stroll through a digital forest, painter Stephen Bush alludes to the remnants of the sublime which seem to exist only in advertising: manifest in an Oldenburg-scale packet of Beaumont mayonnaise hovering over an over-determined

Alpine landscape, and Callum Morton exposes the functionalist pretensions of Mies Van der Rohe's high modernist glass architecture.

Australian Lyndall Jones' sound and video projection, *Boys in Loud Cars*, at first appears to be a large room with an interesting sound loop, but is in fact the only work which can be seen from outside the building. It becomes visible at night when the video projection takes effect across the windows of the second floor. Zurich-based Ugo Rondini's *Shadow of Falling Stars* is a strangely lyrical piece which also opens the building out on to the city—quite literally in one way. Rondini has removed an entire wall and replaced it with planks, through which a five-storey breeze flows, and one magenta-coloured window through which the city appears momentarily transformed as an image of fading sublimity.

The elusive, nostalgic search for the traces of the sublime as it may appear at the end of the millennium is a recurring issue in Mariele Nuedecker's work, which has received considerable attention in London recently. Her *Unrecallable Now* is a massive, milky-white sculptural topography of the lost landscapes of European Romanticism and it dominates the first floor. But her smaller installation, *I don't know how I resisted the urge to run*, conveys, I believe, a more effective sense of the sublime, which for the Romantics always had a link with the terrifying, destructive forces of nature, from Grimm's fairytales to Turner's almost abstract images of natural forces.

In an odd kind of way the acclaimed New York artist, Robert Gober, also approaches an edenic evocation of the sublime. His work unfolds marvellously from an old suitcase, yet it is a vision of sublimity which would have been incomprehensible in a pre-Freudian, and pre-feminist world. It is an ambitious and difficult work, not least in the way it comments on Marcel Duchamp's final work, *Étant Donnés*, which is an even more difficult, and still widely debated work by the most deeply influential artist of the 20th century.

This brief review has only introduced some of the artists, and one or two of the themes of the Biennial. There are many other interesting works, such as Melbourne artist Peter Kennedy's which receives the recognition here it clearly deserves (and does not always receive). His first-floor installation *People who died the day I was born, April 18 1945* and *People who were born the day I was born, April 18 1945*, is a spatial record of a moment in time which tells stories that extend far beyond the minimal lists he appears to present.

And finally, if there was one work which was remarkable for its truthfulness to experience and current political relevance it was Andrea Lange's *Refugee Talks*, a 35-minute video of a number of refugees, filmed in their own sitting rooms, each in turn singing the story of their own land and history. A simple enough idea, and a persuasive piece of art which turns out to be anything but marginal or obscure. ■

Linda Williams lectures in the Department of Fine Art, Faculty of Art, Design and Communication at RMIT, Melbourne.

FLASH IN THE PAN

Time to blink

Cookie's Fortune, dir. Robert Altman. It's difficult to say why this film works as well as it does. Many of the characters stretch credibility. Camille Dixon (Glenn Close, right) is a small-town tyrant in Mississippi. She lords it over the local church's amateur theatrical society and keeps her younger sister, Cora Duvall (Julianne Moore), under her thumb. Camille is waiting for her aunt, Jewel Mae 'Cookie' Orcutt (Patricia Neal), to die so she can inherit her rambling house and, presumably, oust her aunt's black friend, Willis Richland (Charles S. Dutton). Then Cookie does die and, for one last time, Camille tries re-writing the script to suit her own convenience. She gets stuck in her own performance. Camille is a cartoonishly awful character, as horrible as Willis is loving and gentle and Cookie is self-possessed. You can hardly believe that such a person exists, even in the gothic world of the deep south.

Yet this is one of the funniest and most deeply satisfying films I've seen in ages. Its effect comes partly from its exquisite pace. The characters seduce you into believing in them: Cookie's wayward granddaughter, Emma Duvall (Liv Tyler), emerges as a delicate soul, as do even the white coppers, the publicans and the black bar singers. The film includes a number of running gags. One involves the door of a gun cabinet which won't close, another involves the subtle arts of fly fishing, another involves keeping score in a game between Cookie and Willis, the exact nature of which only becomes clear at the end. More than this, *Cookie's Fortune* seems able to chuckle at bizarre human behaviour while garnering respect and affection for the dysfunctional individuals it portrays. It is a film which is devotedly, even blindly, in love with its characters, its environment and its social milieu. It is a heartfelt, beautiful and moving film. It comes from a director who has often seen the world with tired eyes and who, for some reason, has decided it's time to blink.

—Michael McGirr SJ

Sick transit

The Phantom Menace, dir. George Lucas. The rot set in when the text rollout immediately undermined the beginning: 'A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away ...' *Phantom Menace* adds something about trade blockades and a federation, and maybe a note about paperclips in the accountant's out-tray—I couldn't remember exactly what because it was such a worry striking a boring bit in the first three seconds. Fairy stories begin with things like 'Once upon a time', 'There once was a ...' or even 'It is a truth universally acknowledged ...'

Such openings should set you on the right track: they promise the security of form that can generate its own meaning as naturally as Mozart's music. You shouldn't have to spend fruitless moments wondering about the state of the author's soul and whether having almost as much money as Bill Gates and Rupert Murdoch has put George Lucas into the moral dangers of what Mother Basil used to call Bad Company. But the rollout was at least honest in its lack of poetry—we were getting Lucas' preoccupations now that he is old, rich and self-satisfied. The borders of aesthetics and morals rub quite a bit; the great American epic of rebellion, father wounds and frontiers whether spatial, technological or spiritual was only do-able if one had a firm grip on priorities. Since *Star Wars'* success, Lucas probably hasn't made a cup of coffee for 20 years. All that living in mansions decorated and cleaned by others, coupled with the corrosive effects of constant flattery, has made his dreams too different from mine. Trade rather than Han Solo's freebooting; grandiosity that rivals Mad King Ludwig rather than the grandeur and mystery of the Force.

My favourite Star Wars movie was and still is *The Empire Strikes Back*. There was a grittiness in it, a genuine shock the first time you heard that Luke Skywalker's father was Darth Vader, and Vader really was evil. You could look at his looming Nazi-headed darkness and never have to wonder about what was underneath because the outward shape was Vader's own fearsome inner life made visible. *Return of the Jedi* unfortunately redeemed Vader, much in the way of Peter Cook's Satan's complaint about Mussolini's final repentance in *Bedazzled*: 'I work on him for years, then when he's about to die, it's "*Scusi, mille regretti*" and up he goes!' If the sentimentality of *Jedi* (not to mention those bloody Ewoks) was a problem, then the obvious attempt to rehabilitate Vader completely by making him the focus of *Phantom Menace* is a total stymie: a cute snub-nosed all-American child has now to carry the weight of the known future, and can't do it. Oh, they make noises about his being special but it doesn't wash. What Lucas has done is to infantilise the story, to drain it of mystery and imagination and replace those qualities with show.

Some of the showiness works well—the underwater city looks great if you can overlook the fact that Lucas has filled it with muppets of a banality and unfunniness that sear the eye and ear. Jar Jar Binks, the new 'comic' relief, makes Yoda look like De Niro in *Raging Bull*. You almost forgive

the Ewoks retrospectively, because the furry suits didn't allow them to pout and make their eyes wide. (Some—not all—children in the audience laughed at Jar Jar Binks. But it was probably red lollies kicking in.) In *Star Wars*, Princess Leia's ear-doughnuts were an endearing piece of movieana; her slinky frocks were believable as things to wear and move in—the look had a weird alien credibility. The young Queen Amidala dresses as though the Last Empress had a nasty collision with a Christmas tree. And the music is dead too: fake Orff for the action bits; fake Elgar for the soppy bits. And visual ideas pinched from *Dinotopia*; the pod race stolen wholesale from *Ben Hur*.

Someone should start saying 'no' to Lucas—he needs the exercise.

—Juliette Hughes

Thoroughbred monster

Gods and Monsters, dir. Bill Condon. There is not a better performance in current cinema than Ian McKellen's portrayal of James Whale, the man who directed the original Frankenstein films in the early '30s. It is a sad comment on the Academy Awards that he did not receive an Oscar for best actor, for which he was nominated.

Based on the book by Christopher Bram, the film postulates what may have been the events which led, in 1957, to Whale's being found fully clad and dead in his swimming pool.

The once-famous director is shown living in elegant obscurity in his fashionable Hollywood home. Wickedly predatory, he is attracted to the new gardener, Boone (played by Brendan Fraser, last seen in *George of the Jungle*!). Whale seems besotted by Boone's macho good looks and sets out to befriend him. Flattering Boone, he persuades him to pose for a portrait and the audience settles down to watch a 'will he or won't he' film, as Whale inveigles himself into Boone's life.

The truth, however, is far subtler than that. Whale has a hidden agenda, directed at much more than the conquest of Boone's body. Somehow, Boone is to be Whale's escape hatch, but what he is really seeking from Boone is never apparent to his naive victim or indeed to the audience until the final scenes.

McKellen's performance is awesome. Whether it is by a raised eyebrow, a knowing leer, a twist of the mouth or an angled head, he demands attention. Images of the past dominated his life. Flashbacks interweave his Hollywood triumphs and his working-class childhood.

Acting and script achieve a subtle redirection of the film from pointed humour to gripping pathos. Blessed as they are with a fluent and coherent screenplay by the director Bill Condon, the surrounding performances could never have been anything less than first rate. Lynn Redgrave (an unsuccessful nominee as Best Supporting Actress at the Academy Awards) plays the devoted housekeeper, never competing with McKellen, but succeeding in milking the best out of some very funny lines. Her belief that she can see what Boone can't, that is, that his body is in real danger, is high comedy.

Brendan Fraser makes a believably gauche and impressionable Boone, overwhelmed by Whale's past fame and outwitted by his manoeuvring. His role is suitably underplayed in the presence of and in juxtaposition to McKellen's formidable performance. There is only room on the screen for one acting leviathan.

The revelation of Whale's last hours and the realisation of the significance of Boone's presence in his life, comes with dramatic suddenness. This is a thoroughbred movie, beautifully written, well directed and containing performances which should be compulsory viewing for any up-and-coming actor.

—Gordon Lewis

Sane about the boy

The Winslow Boy, dir. David Mamet. What should a suffragette read when in love? *The Social Evil and the Social Good*? Or should she read Lord Byron? A vexed question indeed, but tackled with much esprit and humanity by David Mamet in his film adaptation of Terence Rattigan's play, *The Winslow Boy*. But this film is not primarily about the nature of romantic love or the politics of suffrage. It is about the emotional flux of family and the difference between public and private perceptions of truth.

Based on the real-life story of a young naval cadet accused of stealing a five-shilling postal order, Mamet's film is a stirring account of the emotional reserve and tenacity of a middle-class British family. Convinced of his son's innocence, Arthur Winslow (Nigel Hawthorne) and his daughter Catherine (Rebecca Pidgeon) doggedly pursue justice for young Ronnie (Guy Edwards) and, in an attempt to 'let right be done', the Winslow family expose much that is rotten in Britain's social and legal systems.

Lying in the folds of such gentle language as 'setting things right' is a sharply constructed screenplay that tackles much more than the straight facts surrounding the guilt or innocence of a young boy accused. Mamet, inspired by Rattigan, has made a film about the cost of holding to a principle, and the fine line between courage and intractability.

Benoit Delhomme's cinematography, inspired by the paintings of John Singer Sargent, deserves high praise. The image of Ronnie, clutching his notice of expulsion, and half-hidden by rain and garden, was nothing short of exquisite.

—Siobhan Jackson

Not enough

The Last Days, dir. James Moll. Some things are best grasped firmly. It may seem a preposterous thing to say about a film documenting the Holocaust, but *The Last Days* isn't tough enough.

Steven Spielberg's Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation has been recording the testimony of Holocaust survivors since 1994. *The Last Days* is the first feature documentary to come from the project, though two non-cinema documentaries have previously been released. The film chronicles the murder of Hungarian Jews in the final months of World War II. In the nine months following German occupation in March 1944, an estimated 500,000 Jews were killed—500,000 individual testimonies to the hatred so desperate that it devoted resources to genocide ahead of war. In this film, five survivors of that attack tell the broader story through their individual experiences. Bearing witness to the unimaginable, they stop you in your tracks. These stories deserve to be heard—directly and respectfully. By all means go and listen.

But I can't help comparing the film with *Shoah*, Claude Lanzmann's nine-and-a-half-hour gash of a film recording Holocaust testimony of all descriptions—from victims, perpetrators and idle witnesses. The deep silences, Lanzmann's questions at once oblique, minute, brutal and perceptive. The lingering camera. One of the many indignities of the Holocaust was that individual people were treated as numbers, mere representatives. The recording and archiving of survivor testimony, while absolutely essential, runs some risk of regarding survivors in the same manner. *Shoah* avoided this by its length, pace and

tenacity. *The Last Days*, however, is too polite, too quick and leaves too many questions unasked.

In one excruciating scene, survivor Renée Firestone asks ex-Nazi camp doctor, Hans Münch, to explain the record of medical experiments performed on her sister in Auschwitz–Birkenau. He had been the attending doctor. Faced with a man who may have regarded her sister through a microscope, she shows him the record and asks him patient, civil questions. He evades her and the film moves on; she tells us later that she was angry. With the film's policy of not including the interviewer's questions, no-one comes to her aid. This doctor just sits there and tells her how she should understand why her sister died, since she was there herself. And no-one makes him squirm. Lanzmann would have had something to say. **—Kate Manton**

Connery con

Entrapment, dir. Jon Amiel. If anyone else says that Sean Connery is the sexiest man alive, I think I will be violently ill. The latest enthusiast to affirm this piece of Hollywood lore is Catherine Zeta-Jones, his co-star in *Entrapment*, a film about nicking stuff from all over the world.

Okay, so Sean Connery has charisma, presence, and a funny little upturned smile in the middle of a face like a comfortable sofa. He's got the style to carry off the sexy-old-fella routine. But he needs help, like that given him by Michelle Pfeiffer in *The Russia House*. In *Entrapment*, Catherine Zeta-Jones goes through the rituals, but her bouncy adolescent flirtations just make Connery look silly and out of place.

The disappointing thing is that it is nice to watch Connery on the screen even if you are not the slightest bit attracted to him. But he is trapped by his own publicity, and perhaps his own poor judgment—he did after all play that maniacal meteorologist in the giant yawn that was the retake of the *Avengers* series. And he did take quite a lot of money out of his Channel Islands bank account and give it away to the Scottish National Party.

—Jon Greenaway

No go

Go, dir. Doug Liman. (Cast: Katie Holmes, Sarah Polley, Scott Wolf, Jane Krakowski.) So this is what TV stars get up to on their holidays ... If you get a sense of déjà vu on watching *Go*, don't worry, you're absolutely right—you have seen all this before.

Not only is the latest film from Doug Liman (director of *Swingers*) yet another in the current cycle of self-consciously self-conscious teen flicks starring actors best known for their TV work (think *Scream*, *I Know What You Did Last Summer*, *Cruel Intentions*), but the structure, the subject matter and the attitude are taken straight from *Pulp Fiction*. All they've done is drop the age of the lead characters by ten or 15 years and put more contemporary music in the soundtrack in order to appeal to a hip youth market. As with *Pulp Fiction*, the film tells a series of more or less simultaneous overlapping stories, following first one group of characters and then another over the events of a single night. Unfortunately, where Tarantino designed multiple points of connection and overlap between each story, so that *Pulp Fiction* offers a single whole made up of a complex series of interactions, *Go* basically gives us four separate short films whose only link is that the main characters all appear together in the first scene.

And what tedious stories they are. Let's face it, drugs, sex and guns can only hold your interest for so long if you don't care about the characters (no matter how much dance music you use to fill in the gaps), and in this film they're so self-serving and self-centred that I found myself *wanting* them to get their just deserts. Unfortunately, they didn't. Tarantino's films, violent as they are, at least are driven by questions of morality and correct behaviour (albeit a twisted, perverse gangster morality); in *Go*, not only does anything go as long as you can get away with it, but getting away with it becomes a moral stance in its own right. Dull, repetitive, unoriginal and unpleasant; if someone asks you to Go see this film, tell them to Go away.

—Allan James Thomas

The fame flame

Notting Hill, dir. Roger Michell. I thought suspension of disbelief might be the big problem with this deftly written romantic comedy—a good script would be done down by the anti-climax of stellar casting. Could Hugh Grant, one half of a couple as tabloid-famous as Bill and Hillary, possibly play your ordinary bloke in the street with credibility? Well, the answer is yes. Grant does William Thacker, hapless bookseller, with disarming style, in a flop-haired revival of the stiff-upper panache (his odd mouth helps) that has been the stock-in-trade of British actors since before Leslie Howard.

He also has more than a little help from his friends. The script, as you might expect from Richard Curtis (whose credits include *Not The Nine O'Clock News*, *Blackadder*, *Mr Bean*, and *Four Weddings and a Funeral*), is effervescent, and the supporting cast prodigally skilful—proof that English repertory is not just alive but still the forcing-house of English acting. Take just one example: Rhys Ifans' performance as Spike, Thacker's unsavoury Welsh flatmate, explains why Tony Blair countenanced a separate Welsh Parliament—anything to keep their noses out of your fridge. The five other ensemble actors match Ifans' virtuosity, and, with Grant, they make the film's incidental comedy rich and memorable.

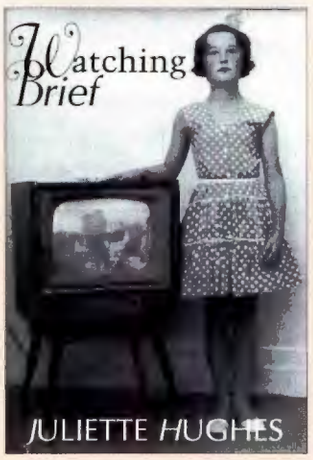
But the central romance? Hmmm. Julia Roberts, as Anna Scott, the $15-million-a-movie star who drops like a scone into Thacker's Notting Hill bookshop, seemed to me to be marking her lines rather than acting them, as though the film's extrinsic ironies will carry her. She is at her best when silent (her odd mouth helps too) but mute beauty is no great advantage in a film that runs on words.

Outside the theatre I realised I could no longer remember a single word that Andie MacDowell uttered in *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. Nor indeed one scene in which she featured. Roberts is better integrated into *Notting Hill*'s set pieces. But if anything lingers it won't be the film's two-dimensional romance: it will the low-tech car chases, the shambling family meals, the embarrassments borne with grace, and the concierge at the Ritz being kissed on both cheeks by a Japanese businessman who confuses English lunacy with English ritual. As well he might. **—Morag Fraser**

Mini wit

Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me, dir. Jay Roach. Op shops the world over must have a yawning gap in the 'groovy' section following the set and body dressing for this very silly film. If you've seen the first *Austin Powers*, you've seen more than enough of this International Man of Mystery ('not'). The only mystery as far as I can see is how someone can make so much money out of stale old toilet jokes and machine-gun breasts. *Wayne's World* was genius: this is cynical dross. Damn shame.

—Siobhan Jackson



Loony tunes

PSYCHOS (ABC Wednesdays 8.30pm) is a mad Scottish series about some mad Scots, and is well worth a look. It seems strange to think that, although we've had any number of hospital dramas, mental illness hasn't inspired much in the way of drama. In the '60s there was *The Human Jungle*, with Herbert Lom as a po-faced, omniscient, unimpeachable therapist with a Mittel-Europa accent. In *Psychos*, Douglas Henshall stars as Danny Nash, the therapist with a Glasgow accent. His empathy for his patients is more well-founded than is usual in the profession, because he has bipolar disorder, kept discreetly under control with medication.

It's tempting to say something like 'the loonies are running the bin', but the series is much more subtle than that, and the character of Danny is sympathetic and engaging. Henshall's performance makes the whole thing possible: one of the best things I've seen on TV in a dog's age is the episode when, escalating into a hypermanic state, no longer taking his lithium, Danny interviews a complex, difficult young woman who has deep-seated problems with relationships. We teeter over the abyss with him as he jousts verbally with his prospective patient like a demented stand-up comedian. The script is excellent, intelligent, not spelling everything out at once, but showing the free-associative jest that becomes uncontrolled, the tail-ends of words left off as his racing brain chases each new idea. Henshall's face is one of those lucky ugly/attractive ones, highly mobile: Branagh without the chisel. His vulnerable client mistakes his mania for confidence; the culmination is a frenzied bonk in a bar lavatory, something that could damage both of them forever.

But *Psychos* is basically comic: hard, Glasgow-comic, and the program, though it takes no prisoners, is never, despite the grim subject matter, depressing. Some of the humour may be too bawdy for your great-aunt: there are bare bottoms abounding, but it's not at all icky or sleazy.

In an effort to drum up a little communal atmosphere for this year's *Eurovision Song Contest*, held in, of all places, Jerusalem, I suggested a five-buck bet on the outcome. The teenagers scorned it, and began ambit claims for pocket money advances before going out. My savvy 11-year-old nephew Archie held out for $10, but as it turned out my money was safe. (Who could have predicted that, 25 years after ABBA won with 'Waterloo', a Swedish entry complete with platinum-headed chantoozie in flares would win with a song that should have had Benny and Bjorn ringing up some fancy Euro copyright lawyers?) Arch got carried away by the visual allure of Doris, Queen of Croatian pop. She had made some vaguely threatening gestures with a white cape before doffing it to reveal quite a bit of her bits in one of those bandage-type dresses reminiscent of *The Fifth Element*. For him it was the visual equivalent of the Sirens' effect on Odysseus: all judgment gone, a moth to her flame, he began considering Belgium as a contender with the redoubtable Doris as a second ... His money was safe too because I was betting on Iceland.

My favourite was the Polish entry: the song was nice, the guy could *really* sing (think of a cross between Andrea Bocelli and Michael Bolton) but he was never in it because his name was replete with cs and zs and he sang in Polish. Scandinavian countries have known for a long time that winners tended to sing in English, as indeed did the Swedish ABBA-clone thing. There were some deeply strange costumes (for which I was very grateful), one of the most notable being that of the Spanish singer, Lydia, who, despite coming from the country that had produced Balenciaga, and seeming to have a rather nice figure, wore a rainbow striped tent straight out of Dale & Waters, with an ill-fitting boat neck that had a red heart-shaped cushion poking out like a hot-water bottle out of a dressing gown.

The second half of the show, the point-awarding, is much more tense than the singing part, and rather like the Brownlow count, *sans* drunks. What you could predict fairly safely was that because nobody loves France at the moment, no-one was going to vote for its song, although it must be admitted that the singer did her best to handicap herself by wearing one of those Burmese giraffe-woman necklaces. Given that Eurovision rules state that A=442 instead of 440, which means everyone must sing a tidge higher than concert pitch, she was looking for trouble and found it when her final top note, held *un peu* too Gallic-arrogantly long, turned into a desperate cracking screech. In the end the votes tended to circulate between friends and neighbours—all the Balkan entries not actually at war awarded top points to each other, as did the predictable Scandinavians. The whole thing was enlivened by some rather bitter commentary from Terry Wogan, who liked Iceland too, but should be far too old and cynical to be surprised at the voting deals or at Bosnian rap.

SINGING OF A DIFFERENT STYLE was to be heard on the ABC's enjoyable concert with Cecilia Bartoli and Bryn Terfel. It was lovely to see Terfel again; his is a real, bright voice, one still young, singing well within itself and full of character, thank God, in this dull age where operatic voices seem to have lost all strength and individuality worldwide, in productions full of pretty singers who can only interest you while your eyes are open. Terfel is not at all pretty, but he can convince you otherwise while he is singing: his stage presence is very sexy indeed—his Don was compelling. But Bartoli presents a problem. I can hear signs of tiredness in her higher register. She has a method for the quick coloratura passages that is like rapid panting, instead of a seamless ripple, Sutherland style. It's not pleasant to watch her as she gurns and jerks through the runs, and when you shut your eyes you hear frantic hiccupping instead of coloratura. Watch any video of Sutherland or, for heaven's sake, compare any 'bel raggio' of hers to Bartoli's, and you'll see what I mean. The audience seemed completely unworried by all this, however; Bartoli's mannerisms are probably an endearing eccentricity to her fans. But I worry that all that jagging around will damage a beautiful mezzo voice. And she does need a real acting coach, because she has about three expressions: (a) '*I'm* a good girl, *I* am'; (b) 'Aw, the cute puppy got run over'; (c) Bride of Tourette (for rapid runs). If you closed your eyes you could enjoy her Zerlina in 'La ci darem'. The voice is still lovely and fluid when she allows it to be—Mozart makes you sing your best, always. ■

Juliette Hughes is a freelance reviewer.

Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 75, July/August 1999

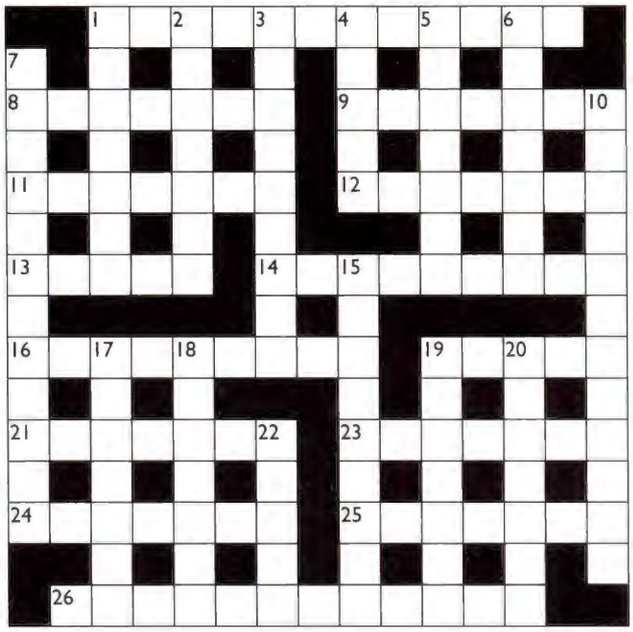
Devised by Joan Nowotny IBVM

ACROSS

1. Flickering gleam can't ruin non-U presentation on the old projector. (5,7)
8. You'd be insane to go off it. (7)
9. Sort of lights that keep coming and going. (7)
11. Complaint about mail? Ten letters went astray. (7)
12. Soothsayer holding information goes back on his word. (7)
13. Succeed in boarding the train, for instance. (3,2)
14. Regarded as fickle, Noel comes back after me taking tea! (9)
16. The first lady fell short of being spiritual like Raphael, or Luke for example. (9)
19. Understood I would be involved in diplomacy. (5)
21. Round round sound! (7)
23. Regret the cutting remark heard in the commotion on stage—it was a plant. (7)
24. Well-drilled, but little to show for it. (3,4)
25. Some artists skimp, as tonality of the work suffers from applying paint like this. (7)
26. Resolutely put off pit lady without a qualm. (12)

DOWN

1. The setting was romantic, perhaps, with night luminosity! (7)
2. Lass taking up Christmas vessel. (7)
3. Full of secret codes, like this puzzle. (9)
4. No time now—change later. (5)
5. Downpour interrupts starting point for learner of club game, for example. (7)
6. Urge fee adjustment for the homeless person. (7)
7. What stops person's development could be shortage of air? (12)
10. Doctor makes note in the records for shorter version, perhaps. (4,8)
15. Harmony I produce on the instrument. (9)
17. Has the doctor done any research into pain relief? (7)
18. Stick round Chief of Staff—it can make life sweeter! (7)
19. Rearranged liquor department, in short, and thereby took a trick. (7)
20. One could weep about girl being treated so boorishly. (7)
22. Discovered in the cadre a means of fulfilling the vision. (5)



Solution to Crossword no. 74, June 1999

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

Arthur believed that 'if he got the sky right first then the whole picture would work'

Margaret Goldrick, 'Ramsholt Revisited'

ISSN 1036-1758
06
9 771036 175017