

50 YEARS 1954-2004

overland

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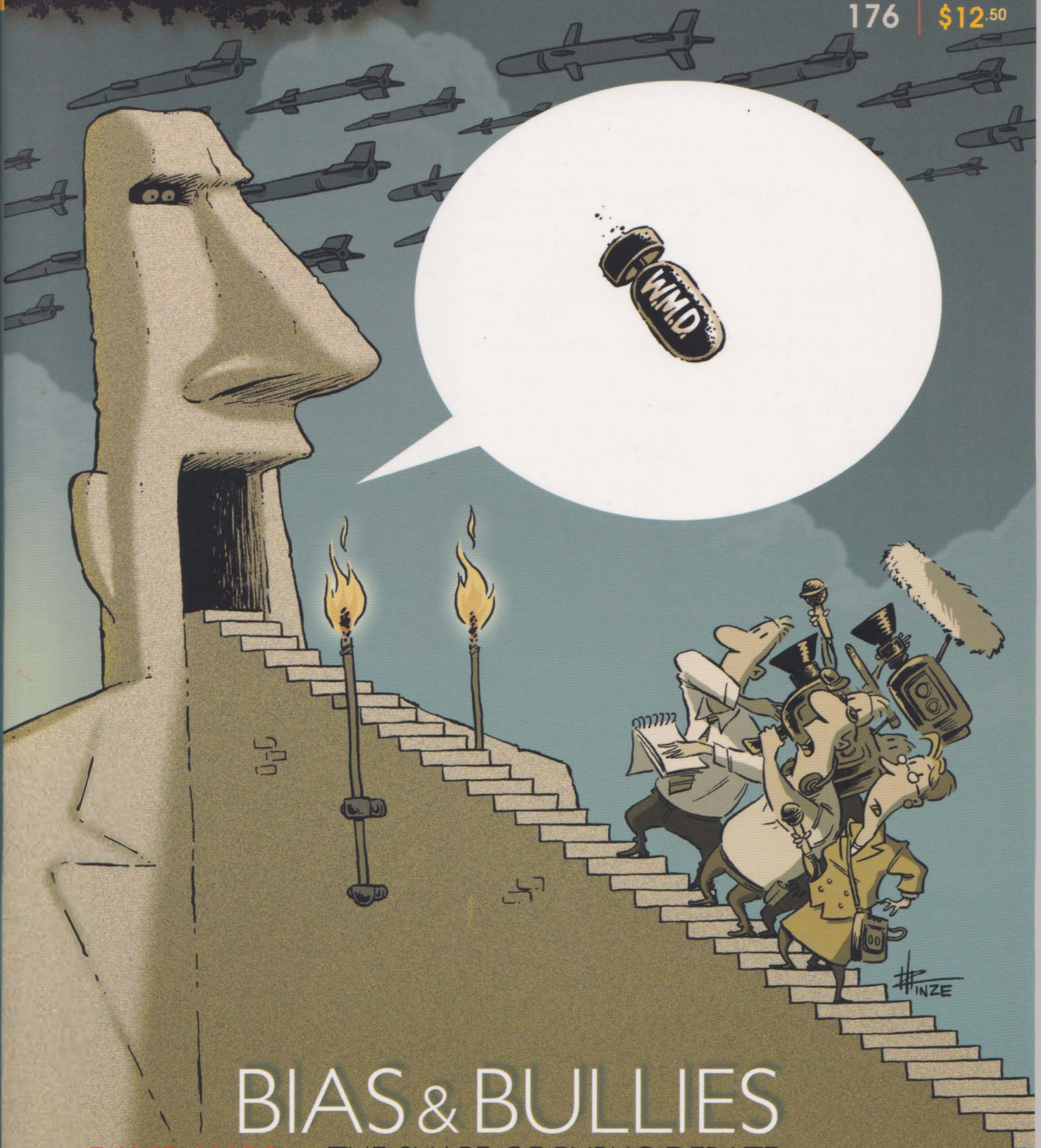
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SPRING 2004

TEMPER DEMOCRATIC, BIAS AUSTRALIAN



HOW DO YOU SPIN a non-story into five pages of newsprint? Jot down the *BRW* Rich List, insert your famous friends, and ‘Our 40 most influential people’ is born. Compiled

by the *Australian’s* ‘editorial team’, this catalogue of moguls (including non-Australian Rupert Murdoch), property developers, politicians, CEOs and celebrities gives free advertising to some very, very rich folk. And to placate those thinkers out there, included are three ‘radicals’: Noel Pearson (token black, albeit anti-black-welfare); expatriate Peter Singer; and the real leader of the Opposition, Bob Brown. A dearth of educators, public intellectuals, whistleblowers, publishers, human rights advocates, inventors, artists, women (there are six; two of them—Kylie Minogue and Nicole Kidman—expatriates), welfare workers, film-makers and unionists illustrates just what sort of ‘influence’ Murdoch’s flagship wants to impress upon its readers.

It wasn’t so long ago that then ACTU leader Bob Hawke had colossal media presence. He and figures like Germaine Greer and David Williamson would almost certainly have topped the ‘influential’ lists, had these no-brainer fillers been fashionable in the 1970s. Of course, the media itself always wielded enormous influence; yet this is increasingly shaped by money.

And not just that of advertisers and proprietors. Margaret Simons has observed that newspapers “always had to make profits”, but “now the demand is for *huge* profits”. Newsroom rationalisation has seen investigative reporting replaced with speculative comment (as this is cheaper and more ‘efficient’), emptying political reporting of content and filling it with what *Gangland* author Mark Davis has called “corridor politics and leaked memos” or what Simons has called “the tactics, rather than the substance of policies”. Margo Kingston and Michelle Grattan have documented the ways journalism in general no longer scrutinises the real forces driving policy and cultural change. This, suggested Davis in *Overland* 163, is attributable to a “new free-market bipartisan consensus guided by an elite of editors, advisers, broadcasters, columnists, lobbyists, economists, researchers and funders”. Their campaign has played a major role in a free-market consensus culture signalled by Hawke/Keating third-wayism and refined under Howard’s neoliberalism. Cathy Greenfield and Peter Williams have found that, since the 1980s, Australian journalism has not been an observer of the market, but a participant; “actively shaping public attention and categories of thought”. Finance journalists assume the market “is essentially beyond politics” and that “con-

sumers are dependent on ‘the market’ . . . for their economic well-being [and] their democratic freedoms”.

This market-populist view of democracy has influenced the political process itself. Davis has documented the rise of corporate-funded free-market think-tanks designed to “change . . . public opinion” because politicians now “only accept what is in the public opinion polls”. Many recent *Overlands* have reported on the ways these think-tanks, especially the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA) and the Centre for Independent Studies, have campaigned against the ‘anti-democratic’ ‘failings’ of non-commercial institutions (particularly those critical of government policy or corporate thuggery). *Age* journalist Gary Hughes has said that new journalists have little idea of the commercial-political interests that drive these ‘disinterested’ think-tanks. Yet, as Davis has pointed out, they enjoy disproportionate media coverage:

Thousands of people have attended the ABC rallies, attracting relatively little media coverage. Fewer than forty people, including speakers, attended a recent IPA-promoted anti-ABC conference, but the event generated coverage in almost every Australian newspaper, including the reprinting of many of the speakers’ papers.

Those who challenge market populism are characterised by public figures—including former ABA Chair David Flint—as the ‘new elite’, while the institutions they defend have been recast in mercantile terms: the ‘welfare industry’, the ‘multicultural industry’ and the ‘Aboriginal industry’, with ‘self-interested’ lobbyists in charities, academia and unions fighting for a ‘nanny state’ and a ‘tax burden’. Sean Scalmer and Murray Goot have documented how ‘elite’ spin, which harnesses the language of egalitarianism to advance a free-market agenda, has been entrenched since the 1990s among journalists including Paul Kelly, Glenn Milne, Frank Devine, Mark Day, Michael Duffy, Piers Ackerman, Dennis Shanahan, David Penberthy, Peter Charlton, Dennis Atkins, Matthew Franklin, Ron Brunton and Lawrie Kavanagh. Their journalese has, according to political scientist Marian Sawer:

normalised a view of the world where there are no divisions between capital and labour . . . The only division is between elites selfishly pursuing a social justice and environmental agenda and ordinary taxpayers who just want to pay off their mortgage . . . The idea that any defence of welfare is a self-interested elite activity is itself now mainstream . . . the Murdoch press tell[s] us every day that elites sneer at, look down on, and despise ordinary people.

So entrenched is this that the non-commercial ABC is now said to be staffed with ‘elites’, and the ‘logic’ of the market is being used to ferret them out. In his tremendous *Overland* lecture, David Marr writes of the pressure to monitor the ABC using market research methodology which “can’t measure bias” because it “can’t assess the issue that lies at the heart of bias: the issue of fairness”. The charge of media bias supposes a norm, which might now be free-market consensus. Marr writes that the problem for a government concerned predominantly with furthering the interests of capital is that some journalists “keep raising issues like equity, lawfulness, candour, dignity—issues that don’t have much to do with money or can stand in the way of moneymaking”. As his lecture suggests, informed public opinion and democracy as a system of popular control over public policy cannot exist without access to accurate information. Howard has sought to control and filter this not just through his media handmaids and culture warriors, but with the imposition of a ‘user pays’ system of information access, exacerbated by privatisation of the public service. Kingston has written that information once freely available to journalists and citizens is now classified ‘commercial-in-confidence’, while the cost-prohibition and other failings of FOI are well known. Moreover, Howard government spending on corporate-style spin doctors is unprecedented in Australia’s history. “It might be an application of the free market,” Grattan has written of the proliferation of corporate-style spin in politics, “but there is certainly no level playing field when it comes to prime ministerial access.”

In this issue Martin Hirst and Robert Schütze examine another source of media bias and bullying: Americophile Greg Sheridan, the *Australian’s* influential foreign affairs editor. Matthew Ricketson discusses the perils of ‘truth’ in literary journalism, and Lynda Hawryluk dissects a literary spin campaign. Linda Jaivin pokes fun at TV ‘reality’ and presents a posse of ‘elite’ stereotypes offering ideological ‘makeovers’. Anthony O’Donnell looks at the influence of media and money on food consumption. Prue Torney-Parlicki writes on a historical episode of political interference in the ABC. And in our fiftieth year, we’re proud to publish Robert Phiddian’s splendid profile on the doyen of Australian political cartooning: Bruce Petty. Some of the earlier issues of *Overland* were privileged with Petty’s distinctive work, and Phiddian’s essay traces his influence on the tenor of cartooning and politics.

Other contributions to this issue continue *Overland’s* tradition of publishing important perspectives and analyses that are unavailable in mainstream media. On that matter, I’d like to express my appreciation for my co-editor Nathan Hollier’s visionary and lucid approaches to editorial content throughout our collaboration. Nathan’s consistent bias is toward the less-obvious structural and cultural analyses that seem to be vanishing from much contemporary journalism for the very (invisible) reasons suggested in this issue, which marks the last for me as co-editor. I’m grateful to Ian Syson and the *Overland* board for entrusting me to work with such an important cultural institution. And thanks to the insightful, talented, generous and supportive editorial coordinator and friend Alex Skutenko. *Overland* would be adrift without her.

—KATHERINE WILSON

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*There are two John Leonards associated with poetry in Australia. Please check *Overland* website for clarification.

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**ARTS
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★ RESPONSE TO MARTIN THOMAS

I WANT TO THANK *Overland*, and Martin Thomas, for his generous and thoughtful comments on my novel *The Outside Story*, which is centred on the early history of the Sydney Opera House. He has addressed the book in terms of its significance as cultural history, and though he has his reservations on my fictional strategies, I am grateful for his seriousness and for his response to mine.

At two points, he opens questions in a way which invites a reply. “Prudently” he says, I didn’t attempt to convert Utzon, his confrères and numerous enemies into fictional characters, or to “directly recreate the saga”. Right—but as Mae West might have said, prudence had nothing to do with it. There was never any question of disguising the real story, while ‘the saga’, as commonly understood, had been only too well rehearsed already. As the notes to the book explain, the work began in research for a documentary, undertaken with two filmmakers, a project which couldn’t in the end be realised. The real history wouldn’t loosen its grip; costume drama would never have met the case.

At that rate, the necessity of fiction needs explaining. Thomas comments that “[T]he considerable amount of primary research . . . raises the question of why Lawson did not attempt the cultural history . . . which still screams out to be done while various protagonists are still alive.” On that, I have news for him, and perhaps for others: it’s been done. The architect and scholar Françoise Fromonot’s superb *Jørn Utzon et l’Opéra de Sydney* was published, in French and Italian simultaneously, by Gallimard and Electa-Gingko in 1998. An English edition, rather stiffly translated, appeared in 2000. To my knowledge it hasn’t even been reviewed in Australia.

As to ‘why’: I became a novelist almost accidentally, surprising myself as the detective work of research insisted on becoming embodied in imaginary sleuths, whose worlds then multiplied, irrepressibly, around them. It was in part ‘the passion of remembrance’, emerging through the voices of the oral history gathered in research, and the persistent sense that there was more at stake than even one great building. If you set aside the fiction, you miss some important bits of history. The real villains of this story were neither politicians nor bureaucrats; and there’s no need to push the vindication of Utzon any further. The thwarted artist is no longer a story—thwarting comes with the territory; and when his canonisation becomes a middle-class convention, essen-

tial understandings are lost. It’s the work that matters, what happened to it and why. The epigraph from J.-L. Godard—*l’oeuvre n’est pas pour l’auteur, mais l’auteur pour l’oeuvre*—was chosen with intent.

So the heroics were set in the background, while the foreground story had to be my first detective’s own: that of the ordinary person learning to think through and past what she has been handed; to ask her own questions, make sense of the mess, and do the hard work of writing while everyday life keeps running out of control. Through the process, for her and her collaborator, there’s not only the drive to knowledge; there are also the struggles with depression, and the strange relations between depression, anti-depression and work. These are tracked at close quarters through the second-person narration.

That, for better or worse, is the book’s energy—though I don’t think, as Thomas does, that this amounts to anything “radically unconventional” or to “literary experimentation”—there are many precedents. For each reader, the strategy works or it doesn’t; you’re along for the ride or you’re not. In around forty years of writing, *The Outside Story* was some of the best fun I’ve ever had. I thank you again for your welcome to it.

—SYLVIA LAWSON

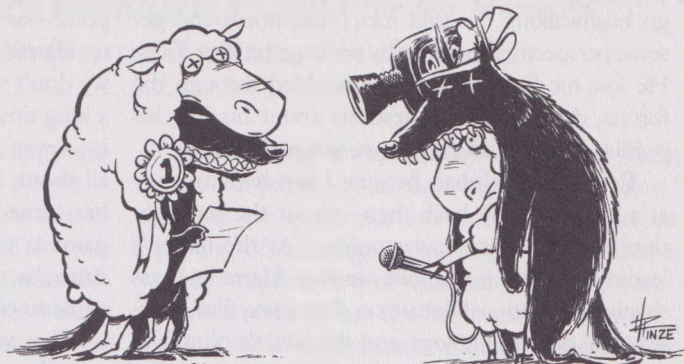
★ RESPONSE TO DAWN COHEN

I DON’T KNOW WHAT circles Ms Cohen mixes in but in my circle of friends and work colleagues to make any remark that could possibly be construed as anti-Jewish is to take your life in your hands. What is true is that many Australians do not distinguish between Israel and Jewishness, even though most Jews don’t live in Israel and many Jews are as disgusted with Ariel Sharon, for example, as the Australian Left is.

‘Scratch the surface of the average Aussie’ and you will find a person who knows nothing about the Jews except what happened to them during the Second World War—and that is hardly calculated to make them blame Jews for ANYTHING. Australians work with and go to school with people who are Jewish but they are completely uninterested in whether or not they’re Jewish. There is no culture of discrimination against Jews in Australia today yet Cohen claims that even the hair-dresser is in on the plot!

—ANTONIA HILDEBRAND

THE SHAPE OF THE ARGUMENT



WE WERE AT IT AGAIN the other night: a bunch of journalists, old friends and colleagues, eating, drinking and thrashing out the problems of the country. Over the years we've argued our way through the rise and fall of half a dozen governments, the collapse of the House of Fairfax and the passing of three or four regimes at the ABC. We've been at it through booms and busts. The ideological sharp edges have all been rubbed away. There are no Pollyannas left. None of us expects too much would change if the government changed in late 2004.

Around the table the other night, I was struck by the gap that's grown between the stories we're telling each other and the stories we're telling the public; between our talk and our work. Journalists spend their lives swapping stories that never see the light of day. But I'm talking about something else: the gap that's opened up between our take on these times and the pallid version presented in the media. Much of the time the newspapers and networks we work for seem to be reporting another country and another government—like our own, but not the Australia and the Howard government it's our business to know. Creating this gap between private and public argument has been a major achievement of the Howard years.

Newspapers and television have not been censored or bludgeoned. This is not Singapore: the government is not wielding defamation laws against its critics. Yet the media is rattled. Some of the reasons for this are as old as the hills. The conservative instincts of proprietors are as strong as ever and they know they'll make more money under Coalition governments. That's simply a fact of life. But reporting is also more difficult now. Canberra doesn't leak in the way it once did. The cabinet and

the party room are superbly disciplined. Bureaucrats are nervous. Leaks happen, but these days the government leaks to favoured journalists who give the public sneak previews of government policy. It's a tactic that keeps journalists friendly, too. And the spin out of Howard's Canberra is brutally clever.

I'm interested in something more difficult to pin down: the media's faltering confidence in its own purpose. After nearly a decade of sustained bullying from government—this goes back into the Keating years—the media is in a quandary, has lost its edge. Not everyone, not everywhere. But it has happened. What I am exploring here is how that loss of confidence has come to shape public debate.

I've been addicted to newspapers most of my life. But I've never read so much, watched so much and listened to so much as I have since joining the *Media Watch* team three years ago. What I have to say about the drift of public debate in John Howard's Australia—the way we argue and what we argue about—comes from this recent immersion in the media after spending twenty-five years moving backwards and forwards between books, broadcasting, editing and writing. I can only offer impressions. These things can't be proved. The conclusions I draw are inevitably personal and coloured by my own politics. But that's the only way any of us can make sense of the country and the times in which we live.

IN THE SUMMER OF 1997 I flew down to Tasmania to interview Brian Harradine. No other interview I have ever done has stuck in my head like this. In those days, Harradine's senate vote could make or break legislation and the only colour in that remarkably bare office on the Hobart waterfront was a wall of red Senate Hansards. I remember him sit-

ting in the corner like a grasshopper in grey daks and the strange indirection of his conversation. I should go bushwalking, he told me. Head north and get some perspective on things by walking the Blue Tiers. He lost me for a while as he rambled through the forests, deflecting my questions about his life, his politics and his faith. Then we got to Hitler.

I'd come to Hobart because I was hacking away at a story—lonely back then—about the resurrection of religion in secular politics. As the nation's leading backroom Catholic warrior, Harradine was shaping the national debate on drugs, sex, film, overseas aid, new technology and the law, shaping it in strange ways according to Christian doctrine. The fact that he was pursuing the Vatican's agenda in the Australian senate courtesy of the votes of about 32,000 Tasmanians, struck me as an affront to democracy.

"You remember how Hitler came to power?" Harradine didn't give a fig for the maxim that once you start citing Hitler you've lost your argument. "Hitler came to power by popular vote." I'm ashamed to say when I wrote this interview up for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, I made fun of the senator's shaky grasp of late Weimar politics.¹ Any schoolkid knows Hitler never won a free election but it was unfair of me not to acknowledge Harradine's point: that Hitler was popular. Despite the thugs and violence he could not have done what he did without popular backing. Euthanasia had brought us to this point in the interview. I'd brought along a copy of the Hobart *Mercury* showing 54.3 per cent of Tasmanians wanted euthanasia legalised. That made no difference to Harradine's absolute opposition. He asked: "Should we take account of public opinion polls when we're dealing with fundamental issues such as this?"

What's nagged me ever since is the memory of this strange, unsympathetic man talking life, death and opinion polls. He told me most Australians want the death penalty restored. "Does that make capital punishment right?" But surely we'd all given up on hanging long ago? Later I checked his figures and found he was right. Name a horrible crime—and it doesn't have to be the Bali bombing—and most Australians reckon the guilty should swing.² That's a fact, an important fact. But does popular backing make it right? Make it good? Or make any moral difference at all? Harradine hasn't swayed me on condoms, censorship, stem-cell research or Lesbian motherhood but I've come to see the question

he raised in his bleak office in early 1997—do we settle big issues of principle according to opinion polls?—as *the* question of the Howard years.

Harradine's challenge takes people like me places we don't want to go. I work to shape opinion. For a long time I believed that winning over the majority—even if way down the track—was what it was all about. But that's naïve. It's also an idea Howard has turned brilliantly against his critics. Of all the gambits used to bully public debate in Howard's Australia, the most effective has been this false model of democracy as a perpetual popularity contest.

That was *Tampa*. Turning back refugee boats was always going to be popular. Howard wasn't struck by some fresh insight the night he ordered that Norwegian freighter to take—to Indonesia or anywhere—those four hundred or so shipwrecked asylum seekers. Australians had wanted that to happen for a long time. Any politician who could read an opinion poll had known since the first boats arrived in the late 1970s that there's a big constituency hungry to see them turned away.

For a time after the fall of Saigon everyone on board those boats was automatically designated a refugee. The exodus was being managed by Jimmy Carter's United States with humanitarian skill and supported by Malcolm Fraser's government with unprecedented sympathy. But polls taken in Australia in those years showed hostility to boat people was profound. Less than 10 per cent of those polled thought Vietnamese boat people who reached Australia should be allowed to stay. Thirty per cent said all of them should be turned back—all of them—and that figure stands even higher at 35 per cent today.³ Pauline Hanson was speaking for a great slab of the electorate when she proposed One Nation's solution: "We go out, we meet them, we fill them up with fuel, fill them up with food, give them medical supplies and we say, 'Go that way'"⁴

So why did it take Canberra so long to take up this sure-fire vote winner? My guess is that good people in politics and the bureaucracy were simply appalled at the prospect of violating Australia's obligations to vulnerable people, to the refugee conventions, to the UN, to world shipping, to the international rules of sea rescue and to our own Migration Act. John Howard's genius was to understand that whatever impact turning the boats away would have on the way the world saw Australia, none of these violated principles would have much traction at home.

The rest of the world—apart from New Zealand—told Australia to fuck off. It's a big story with a humiliating payout for the Howard government. It's barely rated a mention in the media.

They could be swept aside by the overwhelming popularity of taking tough action against boat people.

Howard is a master of this brand of raw democracy. One reason Marian Wilkinson and I wrote *Dark Victory* was to try to come to grips with this. The popularity of Howard's strategy was both a starting point for the project and a theme of the book. Even so, we were routinely accused of not acknowledging the support enjoyed by the blockade and the Pacific Solution. Pointing to the many passages in the book where this is analysed didn't get us far. The point being made by our critics was that raw popularity meant there really wasn't much point grappling with the difficult issues of principle raised by the fate of these people. Popularity was enough.

It gets worse. Both sides of politics—Labor and Coalition—claim whatever galvanised Australia in the *Tampa* crisis can't be called racism because it was so pervasive, so popular. Manipulating race for electoral advantage is a hallmark of Howard's government but he insists on the right to cut down Native Title and turn back boats filled with Moslem refugees without this being named for what it is, "without being accused of prejudice or bigotry, without being knocked off course by . . . phoney charges of racism".⁵ And the press, itself scared of facing the xenophobia of this country, lets Howard get away with it. It's textbook political correctness: the demand that Australia's pervasive racism be shown democratic respect by leaving it unnamed.

Media proprietors read the same opinion polls as politicians. The same focus groups are telling newspapers what they want to read and political parties who they'll vote for. The popularity of what Howard did in the *Tampa* crisis explains, in part, the widespread failure of the media to grasp what was really going on here and cover these events the way they deserved. There were honourable exceptions to this failure—I particularly exempt the *Australian* and the ABC—but to be working inside a newspaper as this shameful episode in the country's history unfolded, is to know the power of the media's willed indifference to issues of pure principle when these collide with overwhelming popular support.

These principles were, of course, debated freely on op. ed. pages, on talkback radio and on television. But the media was too rattled to organise its reporting of these rapidly moving events around a worldly, sceptical view of what the Howard government was really up to. The language of the government—'border protection'—was not contested but became the language of reporting. The fundamental principles being ignored by Canberra were treated by the media as moot points. Reporting was not organised around the plain violations of due government process going on day after day. Howard and his ministers were continuously offered the benefit of the doubt. Shock was domesticated. Awe went missing. The result was called balance but it was, in fact, poor reporting because the media was missing the story.

This continued long after the 2001 poll. How could there be so little interest in the evidence presented to the Certain Maritime Incident enquiry? So little curiosity about what happened to the sailors and asylum seekers caught up in the naval blockade of the boats? How so little protest from the media—virtually none—at finding itself banned from Operation Relex and from Australia's gulag on Nauru? So little curiosity to examine why, after going to such extreme lengths to keep these Afghan and Iraqi refugees out of the country, Australia was forced in mid-2003 to begin bringing them ashore? I can tell you the answer there. It's because the rest of the world—apart from New Zealand—told Australia to fuck off. It's a big story with a humiliating payout for the Howard government. It's barely rated a mention in the media.

What is going on here? Blaming it all on media proprietors being too sympathetic to the government is too easy. It's not enough—though true—to argue that Australians don't want to know how the outcome they so welcome has been achieved. The gross failures of reporting since the *Tampa* have been driven by the knowledge that Canberra's radical course was hugely popular. The media was not the only institution to fail in the face of this popularity. The courts, the bureaucracy, the opposition and the media were all rattled.

BY THE TIME I MOVED from ABC Radio National to the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1996, Labor had met the fate it deserved and Howard's people were taunting their critics with the trademark line: "Don't you know Paul Keating lost the elections?" Mocking the democratic credentials of journalists in this way worked particularly well in those early years, tipping journalists onto the back foot, undercutting their confidence, introducing a note of apology into public debates. And though Keating is a distant memory in 2004, we still hear from time to time this one-size-fits-all rebuke of Howard's critics: "Don't they know Paul Keating lost the elections?"

Like nicknames and urban myths, abuse needs a grain of truth to stick. Many critics made the mistake of treating the new government as an aberration, an interruption to the normal course of politics which would soon resume. They underestimated the new man and the new government. Howard would prove to be the most professional political operator Canberra had seen for forty or fifty years. And he would show himself to be a new kind of prime minister, the first for a long time who came to office with no talk, however vague, of changing Australia for the better. Except for a bit of a hiccup in the McMahon years, every prime minister from Menzies to Keating told us some sort of national self-improvement was in the wind.

In an odd way, this notion led us to avoid looking Australia in the face. If we were already heading somewhere else—becoming more open, more tolerant, more reconciled to Indigenous Australians, more attuned to Asia, more in love with the arts, a great independent republic in the south etc.—then we didn't have to bother looking too closely at Australia as it really was. We could wait for change to arrive. But Howard came with a different message. Of course he had plans for economic change but that was just about that. He wasn't planning to take us anywhere. He left us with no choice but to take a long, hard look at Australia as it really is. John Howard is the confrontation with Australia many Australians have been waiting to have.

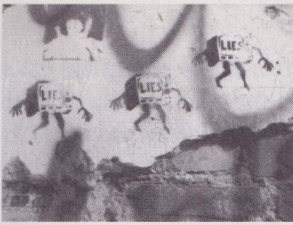
But to return to that trademark taunt: "Don't they know Paul Keating lost the elections?" What's the message here? That the people have done more than elect a new government, they've changed the shape of public debate. People who keep banging on about issues that mattered under the old government—the republic, reconciliation—will be ridi-

culed as irrelevant, out of touch, members of some self-appointed elite. And if we persist in arguing minority views, we'll be accused of suffering from 'moral vanity'.

Brian Harradine has never been troubled by this accusation. Nor should the press. But this tabloid thuggery has been astonishingly successful in sapping the confidence—and wasting the time—of Howard's critics in the press. Of course, the rhetoric is not original. It's all imported from the United States, part of the arsenal of the Republican Party. But you would imagine those dishing out this abusive rhetoric would remember where they've heard such demands before, demands that the intelligentsia submit to the will of the people. Doesn't it remind them of Eastern Europe before the Wall came down? The same savage tabloid hacks who—quite rightly—make heroes of Soviet dissenters, vilify Howard's critics for failing to see him through the eyes of the people. And they're unembarrassed—perhaps unaware—of the grim echoes of their own abuse.

Another very John Howard idea lurks in the Keating's-been-defeated taunt: the idea that criticism of government is by nature partisan, that critics can never really escape the party divide. This is one detail in a bigger, bleaker picture. Out from Canberra over the past seven years has spread a stultifying image of public life as a contest between government and opposition. I've never been so aware of loyalty—party loyalty—mattering so much in Australia. A great deal has been written about the impact of this on the public service, on government appointments and the freedom of NGOs to speak their minds. But the notion that press criticism is also inescapably partisan—if you're *against* us you must be *for* them—has worked to muffle debate across the media, particularly in the beleaguered ABC.

MAURICE NEWMAN—stockbroker, chancellor of Macquarie University and ABC board member—was visiting Canberra in March this year. At Parliament House he bumped into a former advisor to Richard Alston and they fell to talking. Newman returned to Sydney very keen about an idea Alston was pushing in his time as Minister for Communications: the continuous monitoring of the ABC for political bias. Newman sold the idea to the ABC board almost without debate and since Budget night in May, Reham has been running a stopwatch over the ABC's political coverage and trying to assess whether



This whole attack on the ABC was generated inside Alston's office and the Liberal Party with essentially no popular backing.

it's "favourable, neutral or unfavourable to the political parties and/or candidates being reported".⁶

When a new detergent is launched, outfits like Rehame monitor how effectively advertising dollars are spent. It's not a subtle business. Truth and fairness aren't at issue. Pay a small fortune to Rehame and a team of bright kids wearing headphones and pushing buttons can say how often Easy Squeeze™ is discussed on air and if these mentions are favourable, neutral or unfavourable. The reach and balance of advertising messages can be measured quite objectively. But such analysis cannot—simply cannot—make sense of the media's response to a product as complex as politics.

To begin with, balance and bias are not the same. Bias is about fairness. These monitors can't assess the fairness of the ABC's reports—or Channel 9's for that matter. They can't tell if criticism of a minister is fair or unfair, shrewd or partial. They're in no position to check the accuracy of stories or judge if a viewpoint deserves the attention it's getting. They don't look at what's missing in a story. They can't know what stories should—but never do—get to air. These are hard questions even for old-timers in the press gallery to answer. Kids pressing buttons marked Favourable, Neutral and Unfavourable aren't even in the paddock.

The best the ABC can expect from the current monitoring is to be able to tell fairly accurately how much *attention* has been given to the government and opposition since May—and a rough assessment of its *tone*. This isn't useless by any means. Over the years, exercises of this kind show the ABC's political reporting has indeed been 'balanced' in the attention it's given to government and opposition. Rehame will no doubt report much the same after the 2004 elections. Such results demolish John Howard's fundamentalist view that ABC news and current affairs comes from the far side of a partisan divide, spruiking for Labor.

So why worry about this latest exercise? Why kick up a fuss about the ghost of Richard Alston working through Maurice Newman to set up a de facto regime of continuous monitoring? Because it

is not measuring fairness, professional excellence and good judgement. When a government deserves a drubbing, concern for Rehame's kind of mechanical balance—a balance of favourable and unfavourable mentions—always skews reporting in that government's favour. And John Howard's government has deserved a terrible drubbing this year as report after report has attacked the honesty and competence of the politicians who took Australia into the Iraq War. To come through that with Rehame showing the ABC's reporting was 'balanced' pro and con, would look to me like a triumph for bullying.

Bullying is the word. Richard Alston claimed to speak for the public when he sent the managing director of the ABC, Russell Balding, a dossier of complaints of bias about AM's reporting of the first weeks of the Iraq war. He told Balding he had received "a number of complaints of biased and in particular anti-American coverage by the ABC, particularly the AM program". This was strange because the ABC itself had received very few complaints about its coverage. Very few. So *Media Watch* decided to use the Freedom of Information Act to find how many citizens had complained to the minister and what they were complaining about.⁷

We expected a mountain of paper, but all Alston's people could rake together were nine complaints received in the months between the invasion of Iraq and the minister flagging his attack on the ABC: nine complaints from the public and none of them even mentioned AM. There was a tenth that did get stuck into AM and its presenter Linda Mottram, but this came not from a member of the public but the Federal Director of the Liberal Party, Brian Loughnane. In truth, this whole attack on the ABC was generated inside Alston's office and the Liberal party. It was made with essentially no popular backing. But Alston was entirely unembarrassed by these revelations on *Media Watch*. After the ABC's complaints executive, Murray Green and the ABC's Independent Complaints Review Tribunal both overwhelmingly rejected his complaints of bias, Alston took them to the Australian Broadcasting

Authority and its friendly chair Professor David Flint. As *Overland* went to press in late-August 2004, the verdict of the ABA was expected at any moment. And how was the war going in Iraq? Not so well.

The combined impact of ministerial bullying, 'continuous monitoring', fear of budget cuts and interference from some members of the board is threatening the ABC's ability to do its work. Public support is overwhelming. Ratings are better than ever. But the hostility of the Howard government is unabated. And the ABC is only marginally more popular with Labor. There are men and women going grey in the ABC's service who remember when Paul Keating came to loathe the national broadcaster, just as John Howard does today, for promoting the Other Side. Of course, journalism is suffused with politics. It couldn't be any other way. But the true divide that gets on Howard's goat is not partisan, is not some inherent bias against the Coalition. It's the natural divide between reporters and reported, between the values of government and those of journalism, between what Blair identified as "the difference between leadership and commentary".⁸

And sitting around the Cabinet table in Canberra since before John Howard's time are suburban backwoodsmen on both sides of politics who wonder, as they read the clips, why they should pay hundreds of millions of dollars a year for the ABC to do this to them.

I'D LED A QUIET LIFE until I went to *Media Watch*. Then I discovered I was a notorious Lefty. This amused my friends and surprised me. Most of the time, the label was applied as abuse, the counterattack of choice for those we exposed on *Media Watch*. After taking many swings at the *Herald Sun*'s Andrew Bolt over the past couple of years, it was no surprise to read him calling *Media Watch* "the ABC TV show which Left-winger David Marr uses to attack personal and political foes".⁹

The old tectonic struggle between Left and Right still shapes public debate in this country—less often as a great contest of values, more often as abuse. A twist of history makes this peculiarly Australian. Conservative hard heads have imported for their own use the wedge tactics of the Republicans, the divisive politics of 'the family' and the patriotic rhetoric of George W. Bush's America. But they can't make hay as they do over there by abusing their opponents as 'liberals'. Bob Menzies gave that name

to his new political party in the Second World War and all these years down the track it's just too confusing to tell people to despise liberals and vote Liberal. So in Australia, these warriors of public debate are stuck with the old-fashioned and rather overblown language of Left bashing.

Sidestepping tough arguments by smearing your opponents' politics is the oldest trick in the book. But few have mastered it as brilliantly as John Howard. When 'children overboard' blew up in his face again in August, he didn't hesitate: lumping his critics together in the Labor camp and going their motives. "They've never accepted the legitimacy of my Government, they resented the fact that I won the last election, they felt they were robbed . . . And subsequently they've invented this incredible conspiracy story that was all about children overboard."¹⁰ It was pure, desperate Howard.

But slagging off the Left and its motives has particular—and puzzling—potency. How can this be in a country which again and again shows its indifference to great contests of principle; a country where you have to struggle to remember the last time the Left had decisive influence on national politics? Four commentators known for wielding the Left word as a weapon, often savagely, are Andrew Bolt of the *Herald Sun*, Piers Akerman of the *Telegraph*, Tim Blair of the *Bulletin* and Gerard Henderson of the Sydney Institute. I emailed all four: "I'm trying to pin down what commentators mean by 'Left' these days . . . how they identify a Lefty in Australia in 2004." I had the idea—perverse I admit—of using this *Overland* anniversary to record what the Left had come to mean, not for the Left itself but for the Left's detractors—a guide to the use of the word as a weapon.

They came to the party. But only on one point did all four agree: the Left they demonise is anti-American. Forget Marx and Engels, the core complaint against the Australian Left today is disloyalty to the United States. That in turn entails for most of them the Left being anti the Iraq war, reluctant to tackle Arab extremists, hostile to Israel and pro-UN. On the home front, opposition to private schools is high on the list of Left vices, along with scepticism about Christianity and an indulgent attitude to homosexuals, boat people and the ABC. But thereafter these four lists diverge, often wildly. So here they are, published in *Overland* as a ready reference for those who may need to know some-

time soon what it means to be called a Lefty by Akerman, Blair, Bolt and Henderson. For that ancient warrior of Murdoch's tabloids, Piers Akerman, the Left are John Howard's opponents: "those who support the admission of undocumented refugees, who are anti-US, pro legalisation of drugs, pro social engineering, opposed to private schools, opposed to parliamentary prayer, support gay marriage, wish to re-regulate the industrial sector, those who fail to see the Iraq conflict as part of the war on terrorism, those opposed to the existence of the state of Israel, those who refuse to support measures aimed at Islamo-fascists."

Those on Tim Blair's Left—"Greens, Dems, the ABC, and the Carmen wing of the ALP"—are chauvinists, republicans and by nature intolerant. His Left "opposes commercial media (except Fairfax), wealth that doesn't grow at the same rate for everybody, lack of media diversity (except at the ABC), media deregulation (except censorship), doing anything that makes Australia a terrorist target (except supporting East Timorese independence), liberation of oppressed peoples by any means other than impossible global consensus, inaccurate commentary (except from John Pilger and Michael Moore), scientific advances in agriculture, and an increasingly pleasant, warmer globe. But what is the Left for? Aside from broad, rarely-defined motherhood notions like 'democracy', 'greater accountability', and 'justice', it's hard to tell. A Lefty friend supported the return of South Sydney to the NRL; maybe that's it."

Andrew Bolt's Left is a New Age creature in flight from "the responsibilities and terrors of freedom and into the 'securities' of tribalism". The result is a society breaking up into self-regarding little communities. "So we are divided into First Australians, and given distinct rights on the basis of race. Or we're hived off into a political class called 'women', and given a special bureaucracy to deal with our common claims against the rest. Or we're funded to remain forever Greek, or offered special seats in Parliament because we're Maori. We're given UN recognition if we're of some Aboriginal race and hold out against integrating with more advanced civilisations. We're excused terrorism as Arabs that would never be tolerated among Anglo Saxons. We gloat in our anti-Americanism, and form communities of sexualities." Bolt accuses the Left of inventing its own gods: "Nature gods. Tree spirits. Water sprites. Gaia." He calls these faiths demean-

ing and incompatible with reason—unlike Christianity. "For that reason, the Left now is not just an enemy of humanism, reason and freedom, but of Christianity, too."

That's a mighty indictment and a very individual view of Christianity. But Bolt is right to raise the issue of faith. It keeps creeping into this argument. What caught my eye in a recent assault on the national broadcaster by Gerard Henderson—this one in late June—was his attack on what he called the "leftist orthodoxy" of the ABC.¹¹ Here was an image of the Left as a bunch of people bound by an old and accepted creed. My immediate thought was: well what is this dogma Henderson's readers are supposed to know all about? What Henderson came up with was both more intelligent and more flexible than a Nicean creed of the Left. This was not abuse but analysis; not a binding set of beliefs but an ideal list of nine points Henderson believes most—but not all—on the Left would share. Here are the points in full:

1. A belief in the desirability of wide scale government intervention (funded by taxation) in the domestic economy—in such areas as education, health, welfare and the environment. Along with a corresponding scepticism about private solutions in such areas as education, health, welfare and the environment. In other words, a view that the public sector is good in itself and that the private sector is, at best, a dubious exercise.
2. A belief that governments should not interfere in the realms of private morality—covering such areas as abortion, censorship, same-sex relationships etc.
3. A scepticism about Western religious beliefs—in particular traditional Christian churches and the emerging fundamentalist Christianity.
4. An unwillingness to support the use of military force abroad—along with a disdain for patriotism at home. An ambiguity towards, or outright opposition to, the Australian-American Alliance—along with concern about Israel's role in world affairs.
5. An abiding sense of shame and guilt for the past acts of Western nations in their colonial manifestations—a commitment to reconciliation with native peoples.
6. A belief in the sanctity of international solutions to international problems—comprising a commitment to the United Nations, despite its evident inefficiency and virtual impotency.
7. Opposition to the globalisation process of economic reform—including a resentment to such in-

ternational organisations as the World Trade Organisation, World Bank, International Monetary Fund. A preference for international aid over the reform of the political systems and domestic economies of third world nations.

8. A tendency to be alienated from elected mainstream political leaders (whether conservative or social democrat) and a conviction that the modern democratic system is inhabited by politicians who lie by habit.

9. A tradition of moral compromise—leading to a belief that democracies are not much better than dictatorships in the way they operate. In other words, moral equivalence.

Henderson's list gets a bit ragged towards the end. Who beyond a few remnant Stalinists believes these days that democracies and dictatorships are morally much the same? But it's a notion that might spook a few people. On all four lists are ideas capable of sparking fears in the community. But not great fears. The lists don't come near explaining how effectively denunciation of the Left shapes public debate in Australia: rattling the media, sabotaging big public contests of principle this country is so reluctant to face. What is the spectre behind the abuse?

I went back to all four combatants and asked: is it really about money? The Left is never going to seize the assets of the rich, but the Left has plans and they're expensive. They cost a lot of other people's money. Is this where the fear comes in? The idea drew a blank with all four of these anti-Left warriors. But I would put my money on money. No-one fears these days that the Left is going to break up the estates and nationalise the means of production. But the contest of Left v. Right remains potent because it's still about the public purse v. private purse; wages v. dividends; regulation v. profits; public spending v. tax cuts.

What's worse, the Left challenges the prerogatives of money, and the prerogatives of a government intent on turning Australia into a moneymaking machine. The problem with 'Lefty' journalists—particularly at the ABC—is that they don't give money its due. They keep raising issues like equity, lawfulness, candour, dignity—issues that don't have much to do with money or can stand in the way of moneymaking. It's bias again. The fear that such people might get their hands on the levers is reason enough to demonise the Left—especially

now, in these miraculously prosperous times.

My father died a very Australian death three years ago. He was a beach fisherman and body surfer. Melanoma got him. A few days after the funeral, one of my mother's neighbours remarked: "I'm sure he left you comfortable." Not till she told me this—rather unkindly, for she was a snob about language—did I finally twig to the meaning of Howard's line about us all becoming 'relaxed and comfortable'. It's a rather Sandy Stone use of the word that survives among Howard's battlers: "Not rich but comfortable."

Bullying politicians, rampant populism, nervous journalists, conservative media, subterranean Left v. Right struggles—shape public argument in Australia today. But one last intangible needs to be thrown into this mix: prosperity. Despite everything, John Howard has been trusted for so long because this country is enjoying the longest uninterrupted run of good fortune any of us can remember. Not for everyone. Not everywhere. But most of us have never been so comfortable. Howard is running the great popularity contest of democracy and nearly all of us are in line for a prize. Measured only by money, these are very good times. And there is a visceral—entirely human—wish to keep it that way. So it is a time to hold back. We don't want the media rocking the boat. We want no distracting rows, no dissent, no great public arguments. We just want to keep going. While it lasts.

1. *Spectrum*, 1 February 1997.
2. *Capital Punishment*, Australian Institute of Criminology, Trends & Issues, no. 3, February 1987.
3. For late 1970s figures see Katharine Betts, 'Boat people and public opinion in Australia', *People and Place* 9:4, 2001, p.40. A Newpoll taken mid-August 2004 shows 14 per cent in favour of all boat people staying and 35 per cent in favour of turning all of them back..
4. *Daily Telegraph*, 15 February 2001.
5. *Dark Victory*, Marr & Wilkinson, 1st edn, Allen & Unwin, 2003, p.176.
6. *Invitation to Tender to Provide an Independent Audit of ABC's Output leading to the 2004 Federal Election*, available at ABC Online for *Media Watch* broadcast on 17 May 2004.
7. See *Media Watch*, 3 November 2003.
8. Press conference, Rome, 21 February 2003.
9. *Herald Sun*, 25 June 2004.
10. Howard to John Laws on Radio 2UE, 18 August 2004.
11. 'How Howard Lost the Culture Wars', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 June 2004.

David Marr, ABC's *Media Watch* presenter is a journalist and writer. The second edition of *Dark Victory*, written with Marian Wilkinson (Allen & Unwin) has just been released.

left eye FOR THE RIGHT GUY

A beat-up Holden screeches to a halt in front of a posh mansion in an exclusive suburb on Sydney's North Shore. The mansion is fronted by a beautifully manicured garden full of exotic flowers and plants. A Filipina housekeeper opens the door, regards the Holden suspiciously, scoops up the *Financial Review* from the lawn and goes back inside. The Progressive Posse jump out of the car, slamming the doors behind them (one of which falls off and clatters down onto the bitumen, disturbing the quiet of the leafy street). They are:



MORTON—Leftist academic. Early 40s, balding with aureola of fine, unkempt hair around the shining crown. Pudgy body, soft hands. Buttoned-down ill-fitting shirt, jeans that are too blue, unscuffed workman's boots. Copy of something by Chomsky under his arm.

GAYA—Greenie. Massive dreadlocks dyed in multiple fading colours. Early 20s. Wears wide, rainbow trousers tied at the waist and a Jabiluka protest T-shirt, braided cotton bracelets and rings on her fingers, thumbs and toes. She has two nose rings in one nostril and nine earrings in each ear. She is barefoot. Her feet are crusty. With each move her jewellery jangles and she raises a small cloud of dust, like the character Pippen in the comic *Peanuts*.



FIONA KATAUSKAS



SEAN—All-purpose political activist. A Mao badge is pinned to his Che T-shirt. His trousers are the black-yellow-red of the Aboriginal flag. He has a clueless yet immensely purposeful air. He clutches leaflets in hand. About 28 years old.

PIP—Social worker. Late 30s, no make-up, mousy brown hair in a no-nonsense, fashion-defying cut. Apricot T-shirt, jeans, sandals.



cont. →

The posse goes into a huddle on the lawn.

SEAN: Who's the victim today?

MORTON (*looks at notebook*): James. 37 years old. Member of the Young Liberals at uni. Worked for some time for Big Guy Promotions—company motto 'Looking out for the Big Guy'.

GAYA (*interrupting, making a face*): They represented the company that wanted to woodchip the Wollemi pines. Almost got away with it too.

PIP: I remember. They also handled spin for the developers who were trying to close the Women's Refuge so they could put up an exclusive gym and spa. I'll never forget their slogan—'Still serving women—but in *style*'. Made my blood boil. Wonder if he was responsible for that?

MORTON (*consults his notes*): 'Fraid so.

SEAN: Fucker!!

MORTON: TV, Sean, TV!

SEAN: Shit, forgot. (*to camera*) Take two. Ready? ... Wanker!!

MORTON: Gets worse. For the past five years, James has written a weekly column for the *Daily Panic*, the biggest selling tabloid in this country, and hosted a popular talkback radio show on 2PU in which he has railed against, let's see, how 'Leftists Smother All Public Debate' (26 columns, 39 hour-long shows), how 'Tree Hugging Elites Block Harbour Views' (17 columns, 23 shows) and, on the subject of multiculturalism, how there are 'Criminals and Terrorists—from Al Capone to Al Qaeda' (29 columns, 31 shows). But he's starting to feel bad about this. I think the whole WMD fiasco was a turning point. Let's have a look at a little scene we filmed secretly last week.

Shot of Elizabeth Street in the Sydney CBD, near doorway of Tattersalls Club. A homeless old woman leans in the doorway. James arrives with a bunch of suits. "Spare a dollar?" she pleads. "I'm so hungry." James shakes his head. "Get a job," he says. "Who'll give me a job?" she asks, showing them she's got no legs. "Hey, James, give the old glove puppet a job, will ya?" says one of his mates. "Or maybe she can give you one." The men laugh and backslap as they disappear into the club. A few seconds later, James sticks his head out the door and slips her a tenner. He looks embarrassed. Cut to studio

shot of a professional woman, 35, well groomed, with styled and streaked blonde hair. Margarite.

MARGARITE: I met James when we were at uni. I thought the Young Liberals was just a phase. But he really does have a conservative streak. And it's gotten worse in recent years. Once, he even slapped one of those poor bears, you know, the ones who collect money for the trees? The bear was a bit pushy, but still. We had an argument that night, and he admitted he could use some help.

The posse nod and give each other the thumbs up. They race to the door. The effort leaves Morton puffed and bent over. Sean knocks. James, knotting his tie, answers the door. He recoils, as though detecting a bad smell.

JAMES: We don't need any. Whatever you're selling. And please remove that vehicle from the front of my house before my property values plunge.

MORTON: We're the Progressive Posse. We're here to give you your ideological makeover!

JAMES (*embarrassed smile*): Oh, hell. Of course you are. I'm so sorry. Come in, come in. (*He tries not to flinch at the sight of Gaya's feet.*) It's just that I thought . . . I mean . . . I suppose I imagined you would look like the guys in that other show, you know, arriving in a limo and looking . . . clean or something.

Morton self-consciously tries to tame his defiantly academic hair with his fingers. Gaya stares at James and steps closer, as though challenging him to escape her quite tangible aura.

SEAN: Mate. You'll see. We're clean on the inside. You will be too when we're done.

The posse enters. The house is impeccably decorated and tidy. They look around, shaking their heads, and start to fan out. James looks uncertain, then follows Morton over to where he's examining the bookshelves. Morton pulls out a pair of tongs from his jacket. He begins picking through the bookshelf, his face crinkling with disgust, speedily dispatching bound copies of Quadrant, a fawning biography of

John Howard, Roger Scruton's The Meaning of Conservatism, and Conrad Black's biography of Franklin Delano Roosevelt into a biodegradable bin bag. He squints short-sightedly at the shelf, shaking his head each time he spots another work by a right-wing Australian, American or British social or political commentator and bins it. He does a double-take at the sight of works by Keith Windschuttle, David Flint, Paul Sheehan and The Collected Works of Piers Ackerman, which sit on the shelf next to The Wit and Wisdom of Miranda Devine, and consigns them to the bag with a special expression of distaste.

MORTON: Tsk tsk.

JAMES: Those . . . er . . . I had Ackerman's and Devine's columns specially bound. That's high quality cardboard.

MORTON (*clapping him on the back*): Don't worry. We're not throwing them away. We're taking them off to be recycled.

Sean appears from the kitchen with something in his hand.

SEAN: Yeah. Next time you buy toilet paper, who knows whose thoughts will be gracing your bum?

JAMES: But . . . er . . . my bookshelves. There are lacunae.

MORTON: James, my friend, in just a few minutes, we're going *shopping!*

James looks nervous but excited.

SEAN: Guys, look what I've found! (*He opens his hand and they all gasp.*)

MORTON (*recoiling in mock horror*): It's an anti-terrorism fridge magnet!

GAYA: Far out.

JAMES (*shuffles his feet awkwardly*): Yes, well, you never know.

SEAN: True James, you never know. But believe me, there are worse threats to our security and freedom than terrorists, and things you ought to be even more concerned about. And you'll be going to a few meetings today where you're going to learn just what these are.

JAMES (*weakly, after a pause*): But what'll we use to hold up the shopping list?

SEAN: Got just the thing. (*scrounges in his canvas backpack, comes up with a Greenpeace fridge magnet*) Ta da!

Margarite appears, ready to go to work. She greets them warmly, telling them to make themselves at home. Gaya nods in response and a swarm of tiny insects rises out of her dreadlocks before settling back in. Margarite's smile dims for a moment.

MARGARITE: Well! All right then. See you tonight. Have fun, darling!

She winks at the posse, gives James a peck and leaves. Pip approaches with the housekeeper, who is smiling massively.

PIP: Filomena is very happy with her pay rise and the news she is entitled to sick leave and weekend loading.

James' mouth opens as though he wants to say something but thinks better of it. He nods and looks sheepish as Filomena shakes his hand gratefully.

JAMES: Take the day off. It's okay.

FILOMENA: Oh, thank you, sir, thank you!

Gaya strides back into the kitchen with Sean, followed by James, who watches with a brave smile as she pulls genetically modified foods out of the fridge and bins them in more biodegradable bags. Then she goes to the bathroom, where she is confronted by neat rows of expensive hair- and skin-care products on the gleaming shelves and bench.

GAYA: All this product! What does anyone need so much product for?

James starts to explain when Gaya interrupts.

GAYA: You don't need much more than Sorbolene and tea-tree oil. That's all I use.

Sean enters the bathroom, shakes his head.

SEAN: No posters on the inside of the toilet door?

James looks down at his feet. Sean pulls a few posters out of his backpack. He lays them on the floor and studies them. One makes direct and

derisory reference to a major international corporation. He holds it up against the bathroom door, checking to see how it would look.

JAMES: Oh, uh, maybe not that one. The CEO stays with us when he's in town.

Sean shakes his head. He pulls out one with an environmental theme. It features a pretty picture of trees.

JAMES: That's good. I could live with that.

Morton pokes his head in. He's with Pip.

MORTON: Ready?

Sean and Gaya give James the thumbs up. They'll keep working on the house while Morton and Pip take James out for shopping and makeover. James, Morton and Pip dash outside. James stops short at the sight of the car. Someone's picked the detached door off the street and thrown it into his flower bed, where it is crushing the flowers. James gasps.

GAYA (from the doorway): Don't worry, those weeds won't be here when you get back anyway!

JAMES: We could take my car.

PIP: The four-wheel drive? I don't think so! Anyway. Nothing wrong with this one. I'll take the seat by the missing door, if you're worried about that.

JAMES: Oh, no, I couldn't let a lady . . .

PIP: 'Woman', James. And we can make our own decisions. You don't need to protect us.

Treating him to a withering look, she hops in the back, sitting by the missing door with such nonchalance she doesn't even bother with the seatbelt. James, against his better judgement, gets into the passenger seat next to Morton, closing his own door gingerly. They take off. A few minutes later, Morton screeches to a halt by the curb and he and James look back anxiously. Pip, her clothing torn and a few bruises on her arms and face, struggles up to the car.

PIP: I'm fine, I'm fine. Maybe I'll just sit on the other side.

She climbs back in. The car stalls. They walk

back to James' house and climb into his 4WD. They drive off again.

MORTON: I've never been in one of these things before. Amazingly smooth ride. Lots of leg room too. And it's great up here above the traffic. Uh, that CD player, does it really take five disks?

PIP: Morton!

First stop is Gleebooks. The owner, David, is there to greet them and guide them around the shop. David picks up Gotcha by Catharine Lumby and holds it up experimentally.

JAMES: I don't think . . . I mean . . . Catharine Lumby isn't really me. Do you have anything a little less, um, postmodern?

DAVID: Fair enough. How about . . . *(he rummages for a moment then holds up Dark Victory by David Marr and Marian Wilkinson)?*

JAMES (blushing): Actually, you know, it's funny but I've always been attracted to David Marr. I just never . . . did anything about it.

MORTON: You've got hidden depths, James. *(beaming)* Now look at you. Won't Margarite be pleased! Those bookshelves are going to be looking good!

They continue to browse, adding more books to the growing stack. On their way to the cash register, James snatches up a copy of Michael Moore's Dude, Where's My Country?, adding it to the pile and earning praise from the others. In the next shot, James, Pip and Morton are throwing bags and bags of books into the boot of the 4WD. David waves them off. There's time for lunch. They go to an organic vegetarian café which, Pip explains, hires and trains homeless youth as chefs.

JAMES: I'll nip off to the bottle shop. Um, we don't have to drink Chardonnay do we? I much prefer Verdelho.

MORTON: You can drink whatever you like, James. I'm having a beer, myself.

JAMES: Actually, I wouldn't mind a boutique beer. I mean, if that's okay.

PIP: Of course, James. You're supporting small business over global corporations. What's not okay about that?

James begins to relax. He is liking the new him! After lunch, they rush to their next appointment, with a refugee action group in Balmain. Now Pip takes over.

JAMES: I'm a trifle nervous about this. You know I've always been a vocal advocate of border protection.

PIP (*shaking her head as if that's the most pathetic thing she's ever heard*): Yes, well. Everyone wants this country to be safe James. It's just that this government's best kept security secret is that mistreating asylum seekers doesn't make us one bit safer. We'd be better off reconsidering the implications of our current relationship with America.

She takes him by the arm and leads him in. The activists are expecting him and he is warmly welcomed and immediately given a stack of envelopes to address for an upcoming fundraiser. A Temporary Protection Visa holder from Afghanistan called Hamid arrives. Hamid tells James why he ran away from his country and why he is still terrified to go back. James listens with an abashed expression. When he finishes talking, Pip looks at her watch and says they've got to race to get to the next appointment.

HAMID: Thanks, James.

JAMES: Thank you!

They arrive at a community centre for Aboriginal youth in Redfern, where Pip introduces James to some kids. They talk frankly to him about their lives and experiences. As they drive back to the house, James wipes away a tear and stares hard out the window. Morton and Pip exchange fond glances, as though to say, 'isn't he sweet?' Back at the house, James gasps with wonder. Gaya has torn up his lawn and flower beds and replaced them with a virtual rainforest of densely planted, low-maintenance, water-conserving local species. And they're beautiful! Inside, he's a little less sure of what he thinks of the land rights flag hung over the sofa, or all the posters Sean has sticky-taped to the wall. The kitchen is full of cloth and string bags and organics, and there are refillable vials of tea-

tree oil and other natural products in the bathroom.

But there's not much time to waste, for he's got to make a lentil salad and chickpea dip before Margarite comes home, when he'll present her with two tickets to a screening of a John Pilger film for that evening. The posse gives him a group hug, and he just avoids gagging on Gaya's extraordinary body odour, which has intensified after a full day of working in house and garden.

Finally, the Progressive Posse is sitting on patched bean bags, VBs in hand, in a squat in Chippendale, watching James on a flickering old television set which Pip has to kick every few minutes to stabilise the picture. They watch as Margarite comes home and squeals in delight as James shows her the new books on the shelf. She kisses him when he shows her the Greenpeace fridge magnet.

SEAN: So sweet. They're an awesome couple.

PIP: Oh, no . . . what's he getting out to drink with the salad? Is that . . .

GAYA (worried): What do we think about him drinking Grange?

MORTON: That he's one lucky bastard!

They laugh and clink tinnies. They ooh and ah as, on the way to the theatre, James bends to speak with a homeless man for a while and then hands him a note, and then a little further on, takes some leaflets from one of Sean's mates, carefully reading them and entering the dates for future demonstrations and rallies into his Palm Pilot.

PIP: He's gorgeous.

GAYA: Hot!

SEAN: So left!

End.



DUCKSPEAK CRUSADER

Greg Sheridan's unique brand of seculo-Christian morality

“

There is a core of faith in the Bush administration

that the US-Iraq coalition will prevail in Iraq. And I am sitting in the office of Optimism Central, here in the Pentagon where Paul Wolfowitz, the US Deputy Secretary of Defense, chief intellectual architect of the Iraq invasion and high priest of the neo-conservatives sits.

”

WE'RE NOT TOLD how Greg Sheridan got so close to the centre of American military power in April this year. We may never know what strings were pulled by Bush-supporter and *Australian* publisher, Rupert Murdoch, or by Australian officials. However, Sheridan's exclusive interview demonstrates the extraordinary access that the *Australian's* trusted reporters have to the current US administration.

Foreign Editor for the *Australian*, Sheridan is a very powerful journalist, beholden to no-one except perhaps his employer. The *Australian* describes him as “the most influential foreign affairs analyst in Australian journalism”,² a line repeated in promotion of Sheridan at an American–Australian Association function in New York this year.³

Sheridan is a Catholic who, despite the “sex scandals . . . the general disarray and the rampant tomfoolery” in the Church, is “still a believer”.⁴ These influences—Murdoch and Catholicism—might explain the language he uses and the positions he takes against so-called Islamic extremism in column after column of newsprint. Sheridan's brand of seculo-Christian morality has much in common with that

of the two neo-conservative leaders he so fervently admires and supports, John W. Howard and George W. Bush. It's now well-known that the American military-political machine is dominated by neo-conservatives: Wolfowitz, Cheney, Rice and Bush himself, all shrouded in a narrow Christian rhetoric.⁵ Philosopher Peter Singer identifies Bush as America's “most prominent moralist”, saying: “No other president in living memory has spoken so often about good and evil, right and wrong”.⁶ Just as Singer dubs Bush “the President of Good and Evil”, we might call Sheridan Australia's most prominent journalist of good and evil. His columns are peppered with the language of moral absolutism: “good versus evil”, “right versus wrong” and “us versus them”. These are the recurring emotive frames he uses to discuss the so-called ‘war on terror’ and the invasion of Iraq.

When one looks closely at this oeuvre, what becomes clear is that Sheridan is an ideologue, a crusader and an apologist for one of the most barbaric regimes on the planet. A regime whose acolytes, without question, back the war crimes and despotic violence suffered by those who disagree with its religious fundamentalism and lust for world domination. In Sheridan's world view it is legitimate to vilify, denigrate and misrepresent your intellectual and political opponents, while maintaining your own position in the face of competing facts and analysis.

THE JOURNALIST OF GOOD AND EVIL

Despite Sheridan's protestations that the ‘war on terror’ is not a war against Islam or a clash of civilisations,⁷ his columns repeatedly cast the world within a good versus evil framework, reflecting the pervasiveness of a post-Cold War ‘terrorism’ news frame in contemporary mainstream media report-

ing.⁸ This is reminiscent of the old Cold War news frame, which dramatised superpower rivalries and pitted East against West, or capitalism against communism.⁹ With the ‘reds’ purged from under the beds, bomb-wielding Islamic fundamentalists have emerged as the new scourge of the modern world. As Christopher Kremmer notes:

Media reporting on the war on terror is riddled with the simplistic notion that this is a battle between innately good, wise, Western, liberal, democratic paragons and dark-skinned, bearded, fanatical, evildoers.¹⁰

The concept of the Other being demonised to define and reproduce a positive self-image, personally and culturally, has reached widespread academic acceptance, particularly through the writings of Edward Said. Yet what is interesting about the terror news frame, and particularly Sheridan’s invocation of it, is the Christian ethic implicit in depicting the ‘war on terror’ as a fight against evil:

“the *evil* men who murdered our people and others in Bali”;¹¹

“Hezbollah, and its *evil* dealings with the fallen regime of Saddam Hussein”;¹²

“the *evil* and the danger represented by JI and its affiliates”;¹³

“the pure *evil* that was communism”;¹⁴

“the *evil* which the US and its coalition partners are fighting in Iraq”;¹⁵

an “*evil* moment in the relationship between Islam and the West”.¹⁶

In this respect Sheridan has much in common with Bush, who famously coined the term ‘axis of evil’ to bizarrely unite the otherwise disparate states of Iraq, Iran and North Korea. Singer notes:

Bush often talks of “the evil ones” and even occasionally of those who are “servants of evil”. He urges us to “call evil by its name”, to “fight evil” and tells us that out of evil will come good. This language comes straight out of apocalyptic Christianity.¹⁷

The urgency with which Sheridan demands action against the “existential threat”¹⁸ of terrorism is reminiscent of the Christian prophesy that a dramatic rise of evil will precede the triumph of God’s forces before the second coming of Christ. His frequent references to “evil men”, his strident support for military action in Afghanistan and Iraq, his identifi-

cation with the “good guy”¹⁹ and his childlike reverence for America as it “spreads its all-powerful wings”²⁰ suggest a similar apocalyptic concern with the struggle between God’s benevolent forces and His satanic enemies.

WAR OF SURVIVAL

On the first day of the *Australian’s* coverage of the Bali bombings, Sheridan dubbed them the work of “evil men” who specifically targeted Australians.²¹ Three days later he deduced a motive behind this evil, proclaiming “They hate us for our oddly persistent goodness”.²² A self-styled, homegrown terror expert, Sheridan chides the “self obsessed” liberal intellectuals who focus too much on failings of the West in analysing the causes of terrorism, instead of getting inside the minds of the terrorists.²³ If terror is the result of evil, then what can be done but stamp it out with military force—it’s all “they” understand. Debate about the structural causes of terrorism, like Western imperialism and the injustices inherent in global capitalism, is then closed.

By April this year, Sheridan was taking care to distance himself from Bush’s “uncharacteristic slip of briefly using the term crusade”,²⁴ describing it as a term full of “menacing historical overtones of religious war for Muslims”. Yet he himself had ascribed motives of “purely religious hostility” to what he describes as “Islamist extremists”, such as al-Qa’ida and the Muslim Brotherhood. Responding to this hostility, Sheridan’s writing reveals a distinctive tone of pious duty in the call to arms against Islamic terror. In an early post-Bali piece, ‘This nation we love must face the threat, and fight’, Sheridan speaks of facing the “existential threat” of terrorism and the need to fight for justice:

As we bury our dead we must know that it is right to demand justice and to determine to prevail in the broader war on terror.²⁵

This righteousness is linked to a patriotism borne of faith:

I love it (Australia) because, of all the nations on earth, it’s mine. I feel about it exactly as I feel about my family—of all the families in the world, God chose this one for me to be part of and look after. So, too, he chose this nation for me and I accepted his choice.²⁶

The language of a God-chosen land has almost a Zionist flavour. Thus when ‘Terror hit home’²⁷ on 12 October 2002, evil had taken root in Sheridan’s promised land, justifying and demanding a “war of survival”.²⁸

Despite the religious overtones, Sheridan argues that the war on terror is not, as some have suggested, a war between civilisations, but a war within the Islamic world between moderates and extremists. He cites Anthony Cordesman of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Washington DC,²⁹ arguing that the motive of the “extremists” is to “create an unbridgeable gap between the West and moderate Islam so that the extremists can claim political leadership in the Islamic community on the basis of their anti-Western posture”.³⁰

This is a convenient position, as it absolves the “moderate” West of any responsibility for creating the “unbridgeable gap” between the Israeli and Arab regimes (a gap in part created by such war crimes as the assassination of Palestinian religious and political leaders by Israel, with the full if covert support of Washington, and the illegal invasion and occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq). It also ignores the crucial role of the American and Pakistani security intelligence services in the initial formation of ‘extremist’ Islamic organisations such as the Taliban in Afghanistan.³¹ Like Howard and Bush, Sheridan parrots the absurdity that Israel is the only democracy in the region and that by ‘stabilising’ Iraq, it will create the conditions for other Arabic regimes to embrace the market and ‘democracy’.

Perhaps the logic is too blinding for such an eminent analyst of foreign affairs, but it seems all too simple: where is the democracy in Israel? On the one hand, Iraq was a dictatorship with limited electoral participation under Saddam Hussein. People were regularly beaten, tortured and killed to maintain the regime, but Iraq under Saddam did not have stockpiles of WMDs. Compare this with Israel, which has a limited parliamentary system under the effective dictatorship of Ariel Sharon. People are regularly beaten, tortured and killed to maintain the Zionist regime which is illegally occupying land, and Israel *does* have stockpiled WMDs.

THE NEO-CONSERVATIVE INTELLECTUAL

An infinite number of monkeys given an infinite number of typewriters probably couldn’t write *Hamlet*, but it can’t be beyond the bounds of possibility

for a piece of software preprogrammed with the Liberal Party’s playbook to reproduce the thoughts of some of Australia’s right-wing commentators.³²

Dennis Glover’s *Orwell’s Australia: from cold war to culture wars* provides some useful insights into the coterie of senior newspaper journalists to which Greg Sheridan belongs—a group whose members:

see it as their duty to shield their favoured politicians and promote their political causes while stabbing at their opponents from close range . . . today they are overwhelmingly on the side of the conservatives, supporting the Prime Minister’s culture crusade. Orwellian language is their forte, and Orwell would immediately have recognised their vices.³³

Glover neatly draws a comparison between the ‘newspeak’ of Orwell’s *1984* with its “imprecision that justified political barbarism” and “ugly political sound bites that expressed the orthodoxy” of Oceania’s ruling class—to the ‘duckspeak’ that has “infected much of Australia’s contemporary political commentary”.³⁴ He notes that many conservative commentators have expressed sympathy for the ideas of Orwell, but that their work represents “at best an ossification of Orwell’s ideas, reduced to a cliché . . . they represent everything he detested”.³⁵ Sheridan is a master of duckspeak—the art of saying something loaded with codes and meaning, without relying on the relevant factual analysis to create true believers. As Glover notes:

If the speaker or writer can use Duckspeak without hesitation or embarrassment and the listener or reader can take it without twitching or reaching for a revolver, they are believers in the true faith.³⁶

John Howard is clearly one of Sheridan’s ‘favored politicians’. We don’t have to dig very far into the bedrock of Sheridan’s duckspeak to find his fervent support for Howard (or his ‘stabbing’ at opponents such as Mark Latham). A week after the Bali bombings, Sheridan gives Howard’s handling of relations with Indonesia a near perfect score:

In this respect the Government has performed exceptionally well this week. Howard’s tone and substance have been as close to perfect as you could get in this type of crisis.³⁷

Over the year, Sheridan followed Howard’s line so closely that a bad week for Howard symbolised a



Sheridan has adopted the shrill neo-conservative and peculiarly American rhetoric . . . his language of a God-chosen land has almost a Zionist flavour.

bad week for the war in July 2003, when terror suspect Al-Ghozi escaped from a Philippines jail: "This has been a landmark bad week in the war on terror, symbolised by John Howard's difficult tour around Asia".³⁸ When Howard proffered a muted objection to what he saw as soft punishment for the alleged spiritual leader of Jemaah Islamiah, Sheridan said he was "*admirably* and correctly restrained in expressing disappointment at the lightness of the four-year sentence given to Abu Bakar Bashir".³⁹ Even as Sheridan was lambasting Australia's woefully under-funded intelligence capabilities after the Bali bombings, he was quick to shield Howard from blame, proffering: "None of this is a criticism of the Howard Government".⁴⁰ And, as if the conservative Howard government needed defence against critical voices, in a country where Murdoch's conservative newspaper empire controls two thirds of the metropolitan daily newspaper market and more than 75 per cent of the lucrative Sunday market,⁴¹ Sheridan took up the fight against so-called 'liberal' intellectuals who "should realise it is possible that a thing can be true even if Howard says it is true".⁴² In March 2004, when public criticism of the ongoing debacle in Iraq was again mounting, Sheridan launched a scathing attack against the ABC's *Radio National*, *Media Watch* and, for its treatment of Howard, *Lateline*:

While all the perfidies of George W. Bush, all the wickedness of John Howard, all the agonies of the fallen angel Tony Blair are nightly excoriated on *Lateline*, can you remember the last time the program took a look at what motivates al-Qa'ida?⁴³

This was in the week following the bombing in Madrid, and Sheridan parroted the argument that an amorphous 'left-wing' intelligentsia in Australia was acting as a form of fifth column for 'terrorists'. Sheridan has adopted the shrill neo-conservative and peculiarly American rhetoric of using the term 'liberal' to describe a political position with which he disagrees (usually someone more rational or left-wing and often both). The use of this term is open to whatever interpretation suits Sheridan's purpose.

In 'Writing off unreliable memoir' Sheridan favourably quotes an article by the usually suspect "liberal foreign affairs columnist" Tom Friedman in the *New York Times*.⁴⁴ Why? Friedman's column was critical of the Spanish government's decision to withdraw its troops from Iraq. Sheridan described this decision as a 'victory' for al-Qa'ida: "a victory for bombs over solidarity among the democracies . . . Everything Friedman says about the Spanish Socialists applies with equal force to Mark Latham . . . Labor under Latham has weakened its position, apparently in response to the bombing".⁴⁵

UTILITARIAN DUCKSPEAK

Today too the enemy is clear. It is not the Iraqi people. It is Saddam Hussein's cruel and murderous regime, its deadly weapons of mass destruction and the support it gives to international terrorism.⁴⁶

All war is terrible and should be treated with reverence and awe because it involves the disposition of human beings. But some wars are necessary. They are not only just but constitute the lesser evil of all available alternatives.⁴⁷

At the start of the Iraq invasion Sheridan was firmly committed to the duckspeak that Iraq posed a threat because there was an identified link between the regime, terrorists and WMDs (which we now know weren't there). At the same time, to treat war with "reverence and awe" is to accept its horrors as some form of divine penance. The "disposition of human beings" means wasted lives, horrible deaths, destruction and suffering. What "available alternatives" did the American regime even attempt over Iraq? At every turn they opposed and blocked efforts to prevent the war. In what sense was the illegal invasion of Iraq necessary?

Sheridan's reference to necessary wars and "lesser evil" invokes a type of utilitarianism evident in his claim that "labels don't matter—only results count".⁴⁸

The Iraq invasion is going to be judged on its results. Only specialists will worry about its legitimacy if the outcome is a stable Iraq that represents its citizens' human rights much better than Saddam did.⁴⁹

So the end justifies the means. The body count of Iraqi civilians ('collateral damage') and the torture of prisoners in Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay will be vindicated by a 'favourable' outcome in Iraq. This means 'democracy'; but there is no way of determining when the 'war' is over. As Ninan Koshy asks, "When will this War on Terror end? How will it end?"⁵⁰ Similarly, Singer points to the "virtual certainty that war will bring great suffering, without any comparable assurance that it will have the desired good consequences".⁵¹

Utilitarian arguments for war are an appeal to realpolitik sensibilities among conservative readers. Their (false) pragmatism should be read as a cover for the more contentious Christian morality that underlies Sheridan's support for the religio-imperialist war on terror.

THE COALITION OF THE SURPRISED

Three months before the invasion of Iraq, in the aftermath of the Bali bombings, Sheridan was leveraging public emotion to make a domestic justification for invading Iraq by naturalising the dubious link between Saddam and al-Qa'ida:

It is nonsense to suggest this tragedy shows we should concentrate on the war on terror and ignore Iraq. Gruesome as these terrorist outrages are, imagine what they would be like if they involved weapons of mass destruction. Iraq remains the most likely source of WMDs for al-Qa'ida.⁵²

And again:

This week John Anderson told the Australian parliament what we all really know but try not to face, that there is a connection between terrorism and rogue nations with weapons of mass destruction.⁵³

At the outset of the Iraq war, when things seemed to be rosy for the invading powers, Sheridan was certain that WMDs would be found in Iraq and his language reflected this belief. A year later, Sheridan's soaring rhetoric took on a deflated tone as he was "Mugged by Reality"⁵⁴ when evidence of the US torture of Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison came to light. But he had already been forced to grapple with the uncomfortable reality that the WMDs he used to justify his support for the war had not been found. It is here that Sheridan's backpedalling in the shifting sands of Iraq sink his leaden argument for war and expose its true seculo-religious colours.

Sheridan was a constant and loyal disseminator of the line that the Baghdad regime had WMDs and was prepared to use them. That they hadn't been used early in the 2003 conflict was put down to the efficiency of the coalition forces in deploying "its vast intelligence strength" ("without the presence of coalition forces it could have used WMDs easily"); and to Saddam Hussein's rational thinking ("use of chemical weapons would therefore be little short of a suicide gesture").⁵⁵

But by the end of the first year of the Iraq crusade, when the WMDs were more elusive than ever, Sheridan became increasingly befuddled, and formed a Coalition of the Surprised to share the embarrassment. Chief among Sheridan's tame sources was the former hotshot Australian ambassador-turned-analyst Martin Indyk, who he lauded as "impartial" because Indyk was a Clinton man.⁵⁶ Sheridan was

“refreshed” that this impartial observer was also wrong on the nukes and nerve gas:

Refreshingly, if disconcertingly, Indyk admits that he, like everyone else, just does not know what happened to Hussein’s WMDs and why none of them can be discovered.⁵⁷

At first, Sheridan remained steadfast in his support for Howard and his mates in the ‘coalition of the willing’, maintaining they never deliberately deceived the public:

On the big things—such as Saddam Hussein’s weapons of mass destruction—Bush, Blair and Howard have told us the truth.⁵⁸

When a parliamentary inquiry cleared Howard of deception in March 2004, Sheridan took solace and tried to close off debate on this uncomfortable subject, saying the report “puts the Iraq issue to bed”.⁵⁹ The failure to find WMDs was not an intelligence failing or an act of political deception by Bush, Blair or Howard. Rather it was Saddam Hussein’s fault for telling us he had WMDs:

The only world leader who practised big deception over this issue was thus Saddam . . . It was Saddam who intentionally convinced the world that he had WMDs so the coalition had to act on that assumption.⁶⁰

This remarkable statement would draw accolades from even the most professional of duckspeakers. Yet if Sheridan had so much faith in the veracity of Saddam’s word, why did he not believe his protestations that his weapons were gone? Blaming Saddam rather than ASIO, ONA, MI6 and the CIA for the intelligence failure is desperate sophistry at its most laughable.

Yet despite his claim that the parliamentary report “puts the Iraq issue to bed”⁶¹ Sheridan’s apparent unease about the missing weapons leads him to call for an explanation. He says it is “not good enough” that neither Bush, Blair nor Howard have offered a grand narrative on WMDs, even though “electorates no longer care about this issue”.⁶² Interestingly, Sheridan revokes his earlier self-assumed authority to decide whether Iraq possessed WMDs, saying on 20 May this year: “These questions deserve to be answered and they cannot be answered by newspaper columnists or the speculations of former officials”.⁶³ Compare this with Sheridan’s



certainty, on day two of the war, that he could answer these questions: “He certainly has biological weapons . . . he certainly has chemical weapons, which he has used before”.⁶⁴

The great irony, though, is not that Sheridan passes the buck when he gets it wrong on WMDs. It’s that he, alongside Federal politicians, moves the goalposts so that WMDs are no longer the reason for going to war. He decides that it was about regime change and altering the face of Arab politics in order to address the root causes of terrorism:

The war in Iraq really does confront the roots of terrorism because it offers some hope of breaking the relentlessly destructive paradigm of modern Arab politics.⁶⁵

Having removed WMDs from the core of his argument for war, Sheridan comes back to the Christian moral framework and concludes that the war was a success because, “Hussein was an evil tyrant, and his removal is good for Iraq and the Middle East”.⁶⁶ Since evil is an absolute rather than relative concept, the task of God’s forces, when the conflict is framed as a battle between good and evil, is to root out this evil like a weed. Sheridan’s justification for war makes sense in this context. Even if the pre-emptive strike was illegal under international law and the threat falsely conceived because there were no WMDs, the war becomes a success within the religio-moral frame because, with Saddam deposed, it has reduced the net power of ‘evil’ on earth.

It's duckspeak that got him there, the quacking out of bureaucratic lines and official lies to keep the propaganda machine rolling.

CONCLUSION

Given that for Sheridan, this has been a moral war between good and evil, with a (utilitarian) moral imperative to maximise good and minimise evil in the world, it would be interesting for Sheridan to reflect on the teachings of Paul in his Bible:

Do not repay anyone evil for evil . . . Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.⁶⁷

Or Jesus, from his Sermon on the Mount:

Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.⁶⁸

Do the people of Afghanistan and Iraq feel overcome with good? Perhaps they can take heart from this wonderful piece of duckspeak from Bush in a May 2003 speech, the one declaring the war in Iraq was over:

We have more work to do in Iraq. A free Iraq, a peaceful Iraq will help change an area of the world that needs peace and freedom. A peaceful Iraq and a free Iraq is part of our campaign to rid the world of terror. And that's why the thugs in Iraq still resist us, because they can't stand the thought of free societies. They understand what freedom means. See, free nations are peaceful nations. Free nations don't attack each other. Free nations don't develop weapons of mass destruction. There will be a free and peaceful Iraq. What's taking place in Iraq is the evolution of a society, to be democratic in nature—nature, a society in which the people are better off.

As for Greg Sheridan, where else can you go when you are publicly lauded as Australia's most influential foreign affairs analyst? It's duckspeak that got him there, the quacking out of bureaucratic lines and official lies to keep the propaganda machine rolling. As Orwell noted in his famous article, 'Politics and the English Language':

In our time it is broadly true that political writing is bad writing. Where this is not true, it will generally be found that the writer is some kind of rebel, expressing his private opinions and not a 'party line'. Orthodoxy, of whatever colour, seems to demand

a lifeless, imitative style . . . When one watches some tired hack on the platform mechanically repeating the familiar phrases—*bestial, atrocities, iron heel, bloodstained tyranny, free peoples of the world, stand shoulder to shoulder*—one often has a curious feeling that one is not watching a live human being but some kind of dummy: a feeling which suddenly becomes stronger at moments when the light catches the speaker's spectacles and turns them into blank discs which seem to have no eyes behind them . . . If the speech he is making is one that he is accustomed to make over and over again, he may be almost unconscious of what he is saying, as one is when one utters the responses in church. And this reduced state of consciousness, if not indispensable, is at any rate favourable to political conformity.⁶⁹

Orwell would almost certainly have regarded Sheridan as a 'Blimp',⁷⁰ a fulminating member of the militaristic and imperialist middle-class intelligentsia wedded to glorified notions of Empire, loyalty and morality. This wouldn't be such a bad thing if the Australian press and the Murdoch papers in particular were open to dissenting voices, but unfortunately they're not. Sheridan is one of a whole phalanx of conservative and neo-conservative columnists at the *Australian*, and there are others like him at all the other 'quality' papers. Quack, quack!

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A threat we ignore at our peril



PETTY NOTIONS, GRAND DESIGNS

IF BARRY HUMPHRIES had set out in 1965 to come up with a satirical name for an Australian cultural commentator, it's hard to believe anything better than 'Bruce Petty' might have come to mind. It's almost too good as a shorthand label for the intelligentsia of Menzies' Australia, as seen from a dissenter's perspective. Even the creator of Edna Everage (the average Melbourne housewife) and Sandy Stone (that decaying monolith of suburban contentment) may have had to reject the name as too obvious a caricature.

He would also have had to reject it because it was already being used by an Australian cartoonist who has devoted his life to proving that the naming gods have a perverse sense of irony. Petty's cartoons, animations and books have steadily sought to draw the big picture of our public life for more than four decades, and he has undermined our insularity wherever he has found it. He is the most analytical and least petty cartoonist we have.

In this piece, I focus on Petty's early years, until the major sea-change in his and Australia's career marked by the events of 1975. While I deal with images in approximately chronological order and gather some information about his life, this is not primarily a biographical sketch.¹ It is Petty's engagement with public life and debate that I seek to outline, to describe his developing perspective on the issues of the 1960s and early 1970s.

1975 marks a turning point in Petty's career and attitudes. He identified strongly with a pair of projects that once ran along parallel lines: Gough Whitlam's plan to renovate Australia's social and political life; and Rupert Murdoch's desire to shake up the post-war political, media and business establishment in Australia and elsewhere. For Petty before 1975, the promise of a better and freer society lay in pursuing a project that had clear progressive goals and was

gathering momentum; afterwards that promise lay in working out what has gone wrong.

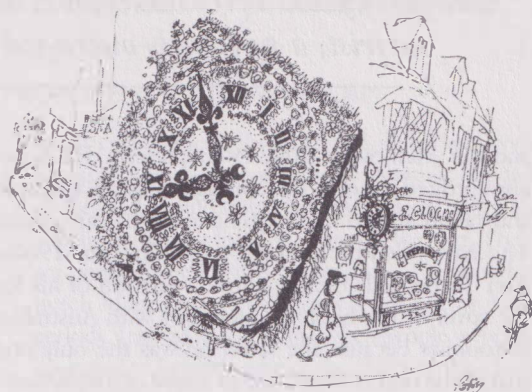
FROM 1964 UNTIL mid-1975, there was no unmanageable tension between Petty and the editorial line of the *Australian*, because tomorrow seemed to belong to liberal-progressive social and economic policies: the Whitlam government brought in the Family Law Act *and* cut tariffs, and the Murdoch press was in favour of both. Moreover, the *Australian* was an experiment in starting a new, national, liberal broadsheet for the country so, under editors like Adrian Deamer (1969–71), it was a hotbed of progressive opinion and experiment. When Murdoch and his papers turned on the Whitlam government and helped precipitate the constitutional crisis, many who had been with Murdoch for a decade or more had to choose a side. Petty was one of them.

So, while there are strong continuities in Petty's long argument with the nation's dreams and delusions, the split between his years spent at the *Australian* and those spent since 1976 at the *Age* is a real one; an attempt to map that second movement must be held over for another time. Here I will concentrate principally on Petty's editorial cartoons from newspapers and his own observations on his art. This leaves out a lot—the fifteen animated films, the five sculptures, the seven big books, the illustrations in others' books, the etchings, etc. He has lived long and kept at his work persistently. In this essay I'm only scratching the surface. It's not just his single life that matters. If you look at him and his works over the long haul, you get a witty and passionate view of Australia's public life in the second half of the twentieth century. He has been a long-distance idealist: in both senses of the word, it seems to me, Petty has lived and continues to live an exemplary life.

BEGINNINGS

Petty was a child of the Depression, born in 1929, the second of three children to Les and Minnie Petty. He grew up in Doncaster, on a fruit farm east of Melbourne that has long since been engulfed in suburbia. He was right near the front of the queue in the postwar generation—16 years old at the end of the Pacific War—that missed war service and entered adulthood during the gathering boom. “My lot,” he wrote in 1994, are “those white Australians who had their chance in the 1960s and 1970s”.² After a couple of years working on the farm, going to church and playing football, he turned his hand to illustration, first in a small advertising and animation firm called Owen Brothers in suburban Box Hill, then for Colorgravure in Melbourne “a Herald and Weekly Times publishing arm which did books”.³ In this first decade of drawing, he did plenty of commercial illustration to cover the costs of living, but he has never had any other sort of job since he left the farm: he has supported himself “by drawing throughout [his] adult life”.⁴ Though he enrolled from time to time in technical drawing and art school courses, he learnt most of his drawing craft on the job. He started out in something like the *Smith’s Weekly* style, with thick, sweeping lines in the ‘decorations’ to Fred Lord’s *Look Who’s Talking* for Colorgravure in 1953,⁵ but he rapidly developed his characteristic wispiness of line through the mid-1950s, influenced by the styles of Thurber, Ronald Searle, and especially Felix Topolski. At Colorgravure, he also contracted an interest in aesthetics and ideas from some of the other artists, who represented Melbourne bohemia of the early 1950s. He started to read and think about things that had not seemed relevant in the pragmatic world of the farm and his schooling, and he hasn’t ever stopped. Without the mixed blessing of a university education and the overconfidence it induced in some other members of the postwar intellectual generation, like Humphries, Greer, Hughes and James, he has developed a broad, inquisitive, and eclectic knowledge of the ways of the world.

More typical for a creative member of his generation, he made the pilgrimage to London in 1954, and enjoyed success there. He even attracted a warm introduction to his first book from Ronald Searle as that “rare” thing, a “promising young artist”.⁶ He made a living with commercial work and also sold comic illustrations to *Punch* and *The New Yorker*, like this one:



Flower clock from *Punch*, 15 October 1955

The style is recognisably that of the mature Petty—busy, sketchy, and detailed; intensely expressive, but not pretty; full of motion and incitement to thought; refreshingly lateral. What this picture lacks, compared with Petty’s later work, is a point. It’s a gag that, with appropriate modifications to the background architecture and physiognomy, could be made anywhere since the invention of the flower clock. Still, it was in London that Petty discovered politics: “[T]his was where a first whiff of politics happened. London in the 1950s. The Cold War. The end of the Suez Crisis, and Hungary. All of a sudden Britain wasn’t quite sure where it was”.⁷ Gags were no longer enough, so the expatriate genius plot changed. Dissatisfied with being a humourist of the generalised human condition, Petty returned to Australia in 1960, hoping to get a job as a political cartoonist.

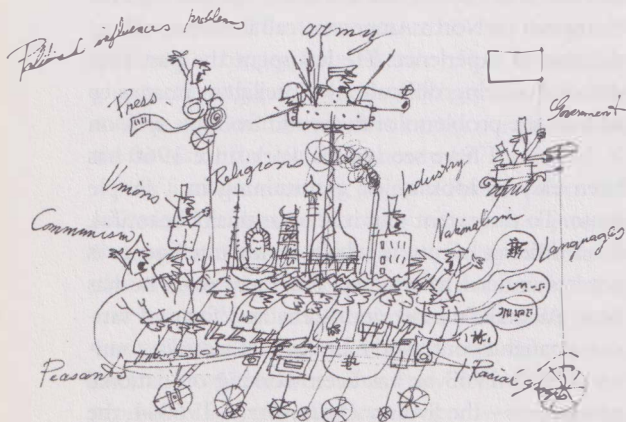
This was no retreat to the provinces. He has drawn the world from Australia as if this were perfectly natural; unlike some who stayed in London or New York, he betrays absolutely no nostalgia for European or North American (call it metropolitan) richness of experience. He has spent the past four decades creating difficult and intelligent images to address the problems of the world from his spot on it. Nothing I have seen of his work since 1960 has been easy to look at, or entertaining in a simple sense. To the extent that it is occasionally beautiful, it is a difficult beauty, in which critical intelligence is never sacrificed to whimsy. For forty years he has been Australia’s most consistent and focused satirist, a patiently outraged moralist in ‘the lucky country’.⁸ Since 1963 he has been working on national newspapers—the Sydney *Daily Mirror*, 1963–4, the Canberra- then Sydney-based *Australian* 1964–76,

For forty years Petty has been Australia's most consistent and focused satirist, a patiently outraged moralist in 'the lucky country'.

and the *Melbourne Age*, 1976–present. He is acknowledged among his colleagues as an example and father figure to the generation of cartoonists who have ruled the editorial pages since the 1960s; Ann Turner tells me she chose a cartoon of his for the cover of her book of interviews with Australian cartoonists because she knew he was the only one that all the others would accept ahead of themselves.⁹ He is not the most popular cartoonist—no-one comes close to Michael Leunig for that honour—but he has a good claim to being the most influential over the long haul. And he is a satirist pre-eminent for his steady refusal to descend to the relative comfort of comic commentary on the events of the day. He is an eccentric but persistent analyst of the idiocies of Australian public life, a cartoonist who is always pushing against the tendency of his art to over-simplify issues.

Petty has not deliberately followed a fashion since 1960. He has, however, managed often to be ahead of the times. Shortly after returning from the Old Country to (still officially) White Australia he left again in 1961 to visit the neighbours. Years before members of the English-speaking world became embroiled in the Vietnam War, he went to South East Asia, and the images of people and places in *Australian Artist in South East Asia* are remarkably (if not entirely) free of orientalising tendencies. He also began to draw process rather than gags or tableaux:

Below: South-East Asian politics



This asks to be read as well as viewed. You read it as a metaphor for complex cultural and political processes rather than as a comment on a particular event. Petty has always been at war with the tendency of the pictorial image towards stasis and order. His perspective comes from a fresh and disconcerting angle; sometimes from another planet. His deliberately casual line is what Brecht would call an alienation effect, or the Russian formalists de-familiarisation. Satirists have been doing it for millennia, trying to disrupt the rhetoric or imagery of normalised perception. Words, images, ways of viewing the world do political work by becoming automated, and that political work has a habit over time of becoming corrupt. The satirist's aim is to jolt the audience (and by extension the public) out of automated assent to the activities of the knaves and fools who wield power.

The uncontroversial point here, before arguments about ideological content cloud the issue, is that power tends to mystify itself. Petty has throughout his career fought this mystification, and he shows a remarkable capacity not to flog dead horses. He never wasted much time on the residual power of the old establishment that melted away so suddenly after Menzies' retirement.¹⁰ In the *Australian's* very first issue (15 July 1964), commenting on Barry Goldwater's accession to the Republican candidacy for President, he fixed his attention on the new imperial power rather than the Britain still often thought of as home in Menzies' Australia. As early as 1966, he was attacking American cant in Vietnam:

Hearts and minds



and we're winning the hearts and minds of what's left

Petty firmly resists the easy gags from the arsenal of political slapstick.

And in the eighties and nineties he attempted to draw money and global business, as they increasingly took over political processes as the real channels of power and corruption. My point is not that Petty has been *uniquely* perceptive about the flow of history. But he has nearly always been ahead of the pack, exposing Australian insularity and stupidity, prodding us towards wisdom. As far as is possible, given the constraints of the single frame on the editorial page and the need to fill it six times a week, he firmly resists the easy gags from the arsenal of political slapstick. And when they do appear, such gags are very rarely the sole point of a cartoon. This is how he described his business in 1966:

A cartoonist feels he can do little more than to query, to query institutions and attitudes that have already been established, to challenge people and their views and statements, to challenge these things as being fallible. In other words, it's eternally a destructive kind of activity, and I suppose this is one reason why cartoonists are never completely delighted with what they're doing. I think it's still valid that this should go on, because particularly in this country there are so many institutions and statements made by people, and views held, which are never queried. We're just not an inquisitive race any more, and it looks like we're less and less likely to become inquisitive.¹¹

This is self-effacing—humility was considered a virtue when Petty was young, and is an ingrained habit—but it points to a mission that he has pursued tirelessly. Though a remarkably gentle, decent, and generous man in person, in his public role as satirical conscience for 'the lucky country' he has always pricked our complacency, and tried to make us a more inquisitive people. His contribution to our public sphere has been a militant and considered honesty that, viewed over time, gives a provocative image of Australian public life. As a body of work, it can be read as a Socratic commentary on that common life, as a gadfly's annoying truth-telling. It is not unduly difficult to imagine a regime where Petty might have endured Socrates' fate of execution for his persistent insolence towards authority; Suharto's Indonesia would at least have silenced him for his persistent support of the East Timorese. Fortunately, for all its failings, Australia isn't as bad as that.

FROM MENZIES TO WHITLAM

In any case politics is always absurd. There are always necessary contradictions between its public face and all the snarling and slobbering that goes on privately as politicians move from one fiasco to the next. There are periods when this is covered up. The time between Menzies and Whitlam was not one of those periods. Instead it was a time when people were encouraged to behold some of the follies of the carnival of politics.¹²

Petty had a front seat at the carnival of decay and confusion that marked the Holt, Gorton, and McMahon governments.¹³ It was the local version of a widespread pattern of decay and dislocation in established patterns of social, political, and cultural order experienced throughout the western world in the 1960s and 70s. After Menzies, the script of Australian public life kept turning to farce. That a Prime Minister should drown is bad enough, but that the Harold Holt Memorial Pool in Malvern should be named after him seems an inevitable monument to the ruling class of the era: well-meaning enough, but clueless. Petty was confident that he could see a better future if the crimes and idiocies of the present were faced and righted. When the young, crusading Rupert Murdoch started the *Australian* in 1964, it was to be in the vanguard of the new, internationalist Australia, and Petty relished the opportunity to be its first cartoonist:

We all went to Canberra like a big wagon train. We were there to enlighten the world. I was pretty much allowed to choose what to draw, but it would be the story of the day or yesterday's story. And in those years the stories were the most powerful that I have known. Australia joined the rest of the world. Asia was joining, but not on our terms. We each had to invent politics based on fairly random inputs and experience.¹⁴

Independent thought and moral judgement were the things Petty wanted to see, not the half-smart cargo-cult mentality of going, in Holt's lone memorable phrase, 'all the way with LBJ'. The Liberal-Country Party Coalition struggled with the new world order, and seemed to be gradually losing the plot from almost the day after the resounding victory at the 1966 election. Even ministers like Paul

Hasluck thought Australia ill-led: asked by his wife whether he might wish to lead after Holt's death, "I said that I did not want the prime ministership, had too little regard for many members of the Liberal Party to wish to lead them, and in any case, I had been 'rubbished' so successfully by McMahon and undermined so much by Harold himself that I doubted anyone would want me".¹⁵ During the 1950s, Australian politics had often appeared to be quite a dignified business, but it was running ragged by the late 1960s. The social, party-political, and international contexts were all unstable and, for a left-wing cartoonist like Petty, it was a field day:

crecy, then took some days to check that he had the numbers to sack Gorton. Some hours after this cartoon appeared Gorton was sent into bitter exile on the back bench.

Petty's work in his years at the *Australian* contains much more than the mere comic commentary on the passing absurdities of politics and public life. The late 1960s was his period of confident opposition to the Vietnam War and the US alliance, to the sclerotic establishment, to world capitalism, to conservative social policies, to Australian insularity dressed up as self-satisfaction, to ascendant consumerism:



The fan, 13 August 1971

There aren't many weeks in Canberra when you couldn't draw this cartoon, but the context of Coalition decay in 1971 was particularly pungent. This came at the end of a tragic farce that might be called the Gortondämmerung. On March 10, John Gorton had nobly resolved a tied vote on his leadership by making a casting vote against himself. McMahon was duly elected, then Gorton mischievously nominated for Deputy Prime Minister and "in an incredible rush of idiotic sentimentality his colleagues voted him in with a very handsome majority".¹⁶ This was never going to work, and after a few months of being steadily frozen out of the action by McMahon, Gorton decided to respond to Alan Reid's hostile account of his prime ministership in *The Gorton Experiment*. Instead of leaking denials through friends, Gorton contracted to write a series of articles about his government for the *Sunday Australian*. It was just the sort of uncalculating candour that had made his prime ministership so troubled. McMahon (an aficionado of the leak and a stranger to candour) insisted that the first article involved an open flouting of cabinet se-



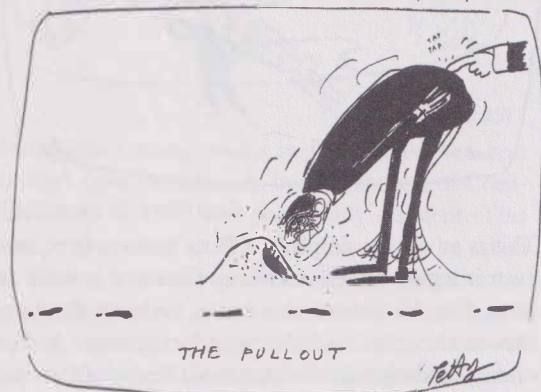
Man on the moon, 10 July 1969

The capacity to see a bigger picture than the mere events of the day is already apparent. This appeared four days before Apollo 11 lifted off for the first manned moon landing, successfully completed on July 20. It illustrates the binocular vision of the satirist: one eye on the public spin of the event, and another on the underlying political and economic structures that stop anyone from seriously considering an option like spending the money on alleviating poverty. Petty is exceedingly good at laying bare the nature of vested interests, and his villainously rapacious businessman is one of his most durable caricatures. It may be worth noting that these must logically be US businessmen (look at the skyscrapers outside the window, and consider whose space program it was anyway), but this is not a specifically anti-American cartoon. It is primarily as greedy businessmen blinded by self-interest that they are being attacked, not as representatives of American economic empire. Like the grinning generals pursuing death and destruction in many of the war cartoons, they are professionally deformed and wilfully ignorant of the

power of the cartoon. The second bemoans dimmed hopes for peace in Vietnam.¹⁹ The crosspiece is made of Johnson's words, and the upright is made of Ho's.

Though they have considerable conceptual and artistic depth, these last two images do not belong to the genre of the well-drawn cartoon—collage was a newish idea in cartoons at the time, and the bodies are ideograms of people rather than portraits or caricatures in Australia's long-established black-and-white tradition. Petty was a major influence in freeing up the 'look' of cartoons in the 1960s, and in focusing the viewer's attention on thinking through the complex issues of public policy more than on laughing at the passing parade of public foolishness. To draw the suffering Christ on the *via dolorosa* as a Vietnamese weighed down by a cross of rhetoric is still shocking, and must have startled many a good Christian over breakfast at the time. In both these cartoons, the 'otherness' of the enemy, on which the rhetoric of war depends, is shattered. And the dignity on which political authority depends is hilariously attacked in this obscene comment on the weakness of Australian policy on Vietnam:

Pull out, 23 April 1970



A politician with his head in the sand is an image that must date back very nearly to the time of the first Renaissance account of the ostrich's alleged tendency to hide by putting its head in the sand; cobwebs on an inactive politician may go back even further. However, the obscenely penile quality of the finger poking the head of government perilously close to the anus is a breach of the sort of propriety apparent in mid-twentieth-century newspaper cartoons. Gorton is ridiculous here because the Coalition's foreign policy of slavishly following US policy was unravelling before Nixon and Kissinger's secret diplomacy. Australia had been supine in the face of US demands and was now being left in the lurch, so the gratuitousness of the image has a valid political point, which the shock permits viewers to appreciate.

tousness of the image has a valid political point, which the shock permits viewers to appreciate.

Petty's cartoons became funnier when Billy McMahon succeeded Gorton as prime minister. Billy Big-Ears' face was a cartoonist's dream, and he seemed to make things worse for himself whenever he opened his mouth. Compared with the vigorous alternative presented by Whitlam, McMahon seemed to be a victim of events and his own shortcomings. The most flagrant illustration of this was over the recognition of communist China:

McMahon 'Stand By' on China policy, 31 July 1973



Whitlam had visited the People's Republic of China, a country whose government Australia did not recognise, as opposition leader in early July 1971. He had a prominent meeting with Premier Chou En-Lai, and gave clear indications that his future government would deal with the communists as the actual rulers of the world's most populous nation. This flew in the face of Cold War orthodoxy, and McMahon went on the air with a traditional Liberal Party red scare, of the kind that had been so successful for Menzies. I leave the rest of the story to a journalist who accompanied Whitlam on his Chinese tour:

At home, McMahon reacted instinctively . . . "We must not become the pawns of the giant Communist power in our region . . . Mr Chou had Mr Whitlam on a hook and he played him as a fisherman plays a trout." However, on 15 July, President Nixon announced that as a result of secret talks in Beijing . . . he had accepted an invitation to visit China to establish a better US-China relationship. Kissinger had actually been in Beijing at the same time as Whitlam.²⁰

The Coalition government's most trusted ally, with whom they had gone to war in Vietnam, didn't think to warn them about this seismic change of policy. McMahon looked a desperate fool in his attempts to respond to this reversal and lost in a moment any hope of being able to trot out the hardy perennial of a 'Reds under the beds' scare in the election that had to come. Petty's cartoon says all this in four frames.

“A DIFFICULT TIME TO KNOW HOW RADICAL TO BE”²¹

The proverbial warning is that you should be careful what you pray for, because you might just get it. For many of the confident progressives of the 1960s, the Whitlam years were both exhilarating and confusing, and this was particularly the case for Petty. In 1972, the *Australian* barracked strongly for a change of government, and the *Age* in Melbourne did so more judiciously.²² The progressive forces in politics and culture knew that their chance was coming.²³

It is always a bit of a problem for a satirist to be on the winning side—in the great age of early eighteenth-century British satire, Swift, Pope, Gay, Fielding, and Hogarth thrived on opposition from and to the established regimes of Walpole and his successors, and they had artistic trouble on the odd occasion when they found themselves in sympathy with their rulers. So the victory of the Whitlam-led Labor Party in the ‘It’s Time’ election of December 1972 presented difficulties of judgement that Petty had not yet been forced to face in his straightforwardly oppositional career. Fortunately, Hazel De Berg interviewed Petty for the National Library of Australia’s oral history collection on 1 December 1972, the day before the election was held.²⁴ His sense of expectation is palpable in this interview, but the excitement is leavened with a degree of reserve. The principal reason for this, no doubt, was that he could not quite bring himself to believe that the first federal Labor victory in his adult life was really about to occur; and there is also the fact that being a cartoonist made him a professional sceptic. But, perhaps, there is also a deeper reserve about the capacity of Whitlam and his team to deliver. It is certainly possible to detect a pattern of hope tinged with doubt in this pair of cartoons from the campaign:

SuperGough, 14 November 1972



Silly Billy, 15 November 1972



These cartoons ran on consecutive days after the official Labor and Liberal campaign launches; the gentleman with the G on his front is the often ‘tired and emotional’ DLP leader Vince Gair, whose campaign launch had played to very poor reviews. These are clearly partisan cartoons that seek to project a likely result. In the face of the challenge presented by Super Gough, McMahon and Gair are clearly gormless. And missing is the one Whitlam opponent who was hard to ridicule, the Country Party’s capable and personable, smiling and ruthless Doug Anthony.²⁵ His presence would have complicated the pro-Whitlam message of the cartoon, but I’m not sure that the message is entirely uncomplicated in the end. Perhaps hindsight is colouring my interpretation, but the Whitlam figure looks just a little over-stuffed and jowly to be the modern superhero. Though never petite, photographs of the time show Whitlam as a more svelte figure than this,²⁶ and it’s tempting to see some satirical prescience about the softer and more indulgent elements of the Whitlam dream in this basically approving image. If I’m over-reading to find critical reserve in the campaign cartoon, its presence can hardly be denied in this cartoon from six months into the Whitlam era:

Is that all? 5 June 1973



This cartoon is the first Petty drew after a three-week break, and is not tied to any specific political event. Instead, it is a summary of the new government's first few months, and is deeply and provocatively ambiguous. Is this disillusionment with the people who cannot see the significance of the issues, or with a government that has become so involved in its own manoeuvrings that it has forgotten the electors? The cartoon can be read both ways. Its openness makes it better at instilling doubt in the reader; it is more provocatively honest than a straightforwardly preached message can be. This cartoon is not kicking a government when it was down: the loans affair and the various sackings that gave an air of chaos to the second Whitlam government were more than a year away at this point. Only Lionel Murphy's mad raid on ASIO had yet occurred, and the government was full of purpose, seeking to fulfil 'the mandate'. Given his convictions, Petty probably intended that the cartoon be read as a complaint that real changes were not happening fast enough. It can also be interpreted as presciently highlighting the fragility of the coalition between the ALP and middle Australia, or as hostilely pointing to the prospect of an activist government creating its own alternative reality. The crucial question is whether you read the middle class as right to be disengaged from the legislative and bureaucratic activity. Very probably Petty was sympathetic to the government rather than the overdressed and coddled middle class, but his cartoon is anything but dogmatic.

This is not to say that Petty maintained a scrupulous critical balance throughout the Whitlam years. Far from it. For example, he also had business to finish with Nixon as Vietnam wound up and Watergate reached its climax, which he executed vigorously:

Bearing the responsibility, 3 May 1973



Nixon had just made his last serious attempt to dodge responsibility for the Watergate cover-up by openly accepting responsibility and promising to clean it up. Petty had spotted the flaw in the logic, and was determined in this savage cartoon to sheet home the blame for a much greater crime.

Domestic politics rapidly became more complicated for him, because he identified strongly with the aims of a government that soon ran into various sorts of trouble. He even drew a logo for the ALP campaign in the 1974 double dissolution election forced by Billy Snedden, where an ALP government was narrowly returned.²⁷ Generally, he tended not to attack the government as vigorously as he did the opposition. He drew Snedden as a diminutive fairy godmother (with tutu and wand) and then Malcolm Fraser as a long dark figure of Dickensian gloom. By contrast, Whitlam and his ministers generally appear human and dressed respectably in suits. Larry Pickering (then at the *Sydney Morning Herald*) shot to prominence depicting a comedy of errors marked by union thuggery and government incompetence. It was an easy, if hilarious, story to tell, and it suited the increasingly reactionary mood of the times. By contrast, Petty was disinclined to draw this government as a bunch of fools, so his cartoons sought a more complicated explanation for why things were not working out for the progressive party in power. Some then and since have taken solace in conspiracy theories about capital strikes and CIA interference, but Petty made a more disciplined effort to understand the new.

The big new thing was a recognition that the economy was really central and important, not something boffins tweaked to ensure that governments had the funds they desired to pursue their plans. Petty had always been interested in drawing the mechanisms that underlie human conduct, so economics had long been a theme in his cartooning. Now it became central:



Oil shock, 5 September 1973

If you had to choose one cartoon from anywhere to explain what went wrong with the Western economies in the early 1970s, this would be it. The long postwar boom was fragile for many reasons, but it was the leap in oil prices during 1973 that pushed it over the edge. It also injected petro-dollars into the game of global finance at exactly the time when the US seemed least capable of maintaining its leadership of the free-market world. It had not won the war in Vietnam, and it seemed incapable of maintaining Johnson's vision of the Great Society. The dislocation was not as intense in Australia, but it was real enough, and the social-democratic hopes of Whitlamism were looking increasingly unachievable. Petty's deepest wish was for a more equitable distribution of wealth, as this bitter cartoon shows:

Redistribution can't weather the storm, 26 October 1974²⁸



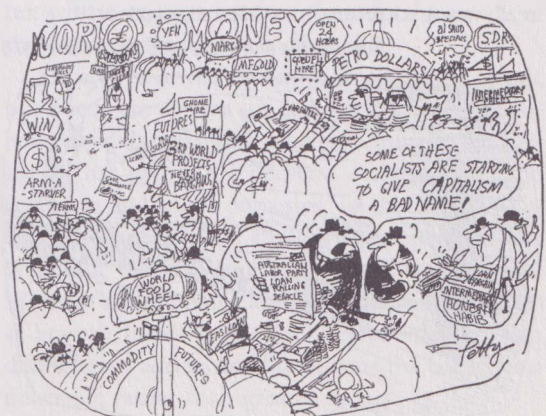
In a spirit of hope, industry, unions and the public service had been sent by Gough to the water of wealth redistribution, but the gathering storm of the money crisis has sent them fearfully running back up the beach to cover. The partisan charge is increased by the fact that Snedden appears pleased to see the retreat, while Whitlam is clearly annoyed. The understated sadness of the cartoon intimates that greed and fear will win over hope and equity every time, that humans (or Australians and their institutions, anyway) are not courageous in the pursuit of ideals. This was the darkening theme of Petty's cartooning as the events of 1975 flowed relentlessly towards the denouement of the constitutional crisis.

The hinge on which it all turned was the loans affair. The Labor government was already expansionary in its programs, but it needed a lot more money for the biggest dreamer of them all, Rex Connor. The traditional sources of capital in Europe and North America were drying up, so the government chased the new money in the world system to fulfil the desire of the Minerals and En-

ergy Minister to guarantee Australian (and largely government) ownership of the country's mineral wealth. This gave rise to a situation where it appeared that several people were spruiking Australia's desire to borrow up to \$4000 million among the newly wealthy Middle-East money men. The constitutionality of the permission to seek loans was dubious—to avoid scrutiny in the Loans Council, the money was supposedly being borrowed “for temporary purposes”—and the intermediaries looked seedy: Mr Tirath Khemlani did not fit the general public's image of a suited Anglo-Saxon banker. Consequently the loans affair did more to undermine public trust in the Whitlam government than anything else. At this distance, it is hard to know how seriously to take it. The money was pursued so incompetently that there was never any risk of a loan coming in, and a prudent government should have known that, but the actual risk to the nation's finances was not grave. It just wasn't going to happen.

Whatever the fundamental rights and wrongs of the case, the Fraser-led opposition and the press were hysterical, especially in the *Australian* once Les Hollings had been installed as editor with a clear remit from Rupert Murdoch to push for a change of government.²⁹ The editorials from this time suggest a very distinct change of tone towards the government from 12 June 1975. Before then, the editorial tone on the loans affair and sundry crises like the sackings of Crean, Cairns and Cameron had been critical but balanced. From June 12 onwards the balance disappears and a clear gap between the attitude of the editorial and the editorial cartoonist is evident. Petty tended to ignore the loans as much as possible, and sought to palliate the government's responsibility when the topic could not be avoided:

Socialists giving capitalists a bad name, 5 July 1975



Petty was not sacked at this point, but he was clearly demoted for a cartoonist much more in tune with the Australian's new editorial attitude; Pickering had even stood as a candidate for the Liberals.

This strong cartoon sponsors a dark thought: did it get into the paper more easily because it addresses domestic politics only glancingly and points to events that had not been dealt with well by the Whitlam government? Petty is true to long-term convictions on East Timor and South East Asia generally, but does this cartoon provide a convenient stick for the *Australian's* new editorial line on domestic politics? It could be read as turning Whitlam's Dismissal line 'Shame, Fraser, Shame' back on himself; many on the left have thought that, on this topic, he deserved it.

Anyway, Petty did not last long at the *Australian* after the December 13 election. On 25 February 1976, 'a special correspondent' who was, in fact, Rupert Murdoch himself, broke the story of the Iraqi (as they spelt it then) offer to pay US\$500,000 to the ALP for election costs, and called for Whitlam's head on a platter. On 28 February the front page announced the arrival of Larry Pickering, "Australia's top political cartoonist". By all accounts, Petty was not sacked at this point, but he was clearly demoted for a cartoonist much more in tune with the paper's new attitude; Pickering had even stood (unsuccessfully) as a candidate for the Liberals, in Fraser (ACT) at the 1974 election. People have told me that Petty and Pickering cartooned opposite each other for a while, but the microfilm tells another story: no Petty cartoon appears in the *Australian* after 28 February and he even goes unmentioned in a magazine piece called 'Cartoonists are funny people' by Rosalind Dunn.³¹ The disappearance was sudden and coincided with both the employment of a right-wing cartoonist and Murdoch's personal hatchet-job on Whitlam. There is no mention in the paper of Petty's departure and I cannot get anyone to tell me whether the *Australian* silenced Petty or whether he withdrew his services. It is hard to believe that the parting was not acrimonious.

While the *Australian* was treating Petty as a non-person in 1976, Jonathan King thought him important enough to pen the foreword to his major anthology of Australian political cartoons, *The Other*

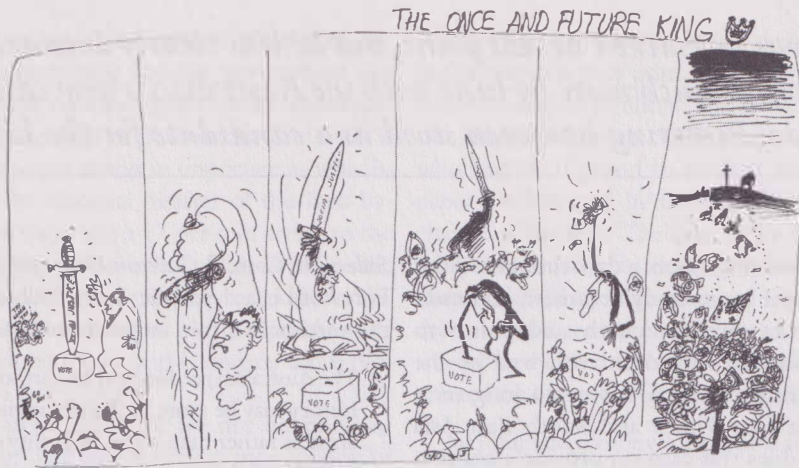
Side of the Coin: A Cartoon History of Australia. The Foreword is a dyspeptic, even disillusioned take on the cartoonist's role in Australia:

The Australian predilection for cartoons over its short history may be more accurately attributed to mental laziness rather than a special facility of communication. Nevertheless mental laziness, if that can be sustained as an Australian characteristic, need not be the ultimate indictment. Like the search for the work proof vacuum cleaner, the search for mental short cuts produces some worthwhile ingenuity. We have now a unique version of history of Australian processes held together by the slender lines of cartoonists drawing for their respective generations over the years.

But the cartoon is an appalling abbreviation. Many times in the practice of producing a cartoon the decision at the deadline, lies between an accurate statement and an entertaining one. Entertainment usually prevails.³²

This is bitter, but it has not been the end of the matter. While some have tried to live eternally in melancholy remembrance of the Whitlam years, Petty has always forged onwards into the coming world, even when it has not looked very alluring. What he had lost in 1976 was the absolute confidence that Australian people would rise to the challenge of equity, of social, economic, and international fairness. He has kept working towards this goal, but with a stronger sense of the seductive power of the forces arrayed on the other side.

He arrived at the *Age* in June 1976, still angry, but free again to vent his feelings in a paper of liberal tenor. Increasingly he drew multi-frame cartoons that depict the perverse complexity of the economy and social processes, so this last cartoon can be seen to close his engagement with the Whitlam dream. It comes from the time of Whitlam's retirement, after his humiliating defeat at Fraser's hands in the 1977 election. It is both disillusioned and inclined to resume the battle for a richer life rather than greater riches:



Once and future king, 17 December 1977

This cartoon looks back to the lost hopes of the Whitlam era, but it also looks forward to the political world dominated by economics that has been the way for the past quarter century. Whitlam is a combination of Christ on Calvary and the Hunchback of Notre Dame; a figure deserving tragic sympathy, but also definitively gone politically. In the multi-frame format that Petty favoured in this period, even greater complexity of argument is permitted, and here it is obvious that, while mourning moral loss is important, the urgent battle is to rise above the seduction of the man with the fistful of dollars. It is not at all clear that we are winning this battle yet, a quarter of a century later.

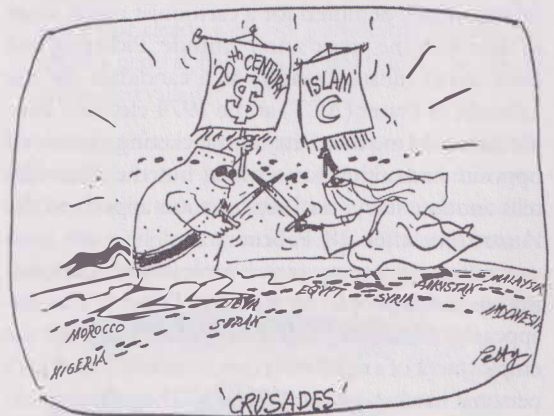
CONCLUSION

But that's another story, for another place. Let's finish instead with a reminder of the prophetic power good cartoons can accidentally wield. In researching this essay, the thing that has struck me most is how often Petty cartoons from the 1960s and 1970s could be reprinted in today's paper. All you need to do is to digitally remaster the faces of the politicians, and reprint. Take a Vietnam cartoon with Holt and Hasluck going all the way with LBJ, for example, replace their faces with Howard, Downer and George W. Bush, and you have a vision that provokes thought about the war in Iraq. Downer is taller than Hasluck, so you might have to lengthen the legs there a bit. But the rest can stand.

In 1976 he may have felt that the inability of cartoons to pursue a sustained argument is a limitation,³³ but the momentary access to a diverse audience permits a particularly valuable perspective. As he commented in a more recent interview:

[A] trap for cartoonists is to have a point of view and keep pushing it; people gradually qualify every drawing you do, discounting its message as being personal, idiosyncratic, rather than a universal sort of view that comes from, I don't know where, outer space or wherever . . . the inspirational ones come from some weird sort of source.³⁴

When Petty calls out an image from the "weird sort of source" that lifts the audience out of the hurly-burly of the media sport of politics, it can, momentarily, reassess the shape of the world. Consider this one in the context of the War against Terror:



Crusades, 23 July 1971

Only the names of the countries beneath the feet of Islam and the twentieth-century \$ give the date away as the early 1970s. It's not Petty's fault that this cartoon still makes you think. It's ours.

1. For profiles of Petty, see Craig McGregor, *The Australian People*, Hodder & Staughton, Sydney, 1980, pp.274-82. Candida Baker, 'Bruce Petty: The Thinking Person's Sketch

- Symbol', *Sydney Morning Herald*, Good Weekend, 18 March 1989, pp.71–6, Adrian McGregor, 'Mr Squiggle', *Australian Magazine*, 27 September 1997, pp.41–5; the most extensive of these is the first. An interview that deals extensively with biographical material appears in Ann Turner, *In Their Image: Contemporary Australian Cartoonists*, NLA, Canberra, 2000, pp.25–36, and the full transcript of that interview, along with audio tape of it, is housed in the Oral History collection of the National Library in Canberra, 'Bruce Petty Interview, 1996', ORAL TRC 3521.
2. Bruce Petty, 'Try listening to Softer Voices', in Duncan Graham ed., *Being Whitefella*, FACP, Fremantle, 1994, p.32.
 3. Turner, *In Their Image*, p.27.
 4. Transcript of National Library of Australia oral history interview, 1996, p.17.
 5. Fred Lord, *Look Who's Talking*, Colorgrave, Melbourne, 1953.
 6. Ronald Searle, 'Introduction' to *Bruce Petty, Australian Artist in South East Asia*, Melbourne, Grayflower, 1961.
 7. Turner, 2000, p.31.
 8. This phrase should be read with all the irony built into it since Donald Horne coined it as an insult in his book of 1964, *The Lucky Country*. It was taken up as boosterism in the sixties and seventies, and it was overlaid with Bob Hawke's half smart rhetoric about 'the clever country' in the eighties. One day we may get the joke.
 9. Ann Turner, interview with author, 24 April 2004.
 10. See Donald Horne, *Time of Hope: Australia 1966–72*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1980, on the sudden rise of trendiness after 1966. No doubt the validity of this argument can be queried, but it seems to be roughly how Petty saw it. By comparison, Barry Humphries still seems to be fighting the culture wars of 1950s Melbourne when he addresses Australian issues. Expatriation is clearly an issue here, as well as Humphries' lack of restlessness in finding targets.
 11. 'Bruce Petty on Commitment', *Spectrum*, ABC TV, 1966. For a transcript see State Library of NSW, Q 153.66 1.
 12. Horne, *Time of Hope*, p.165.
 13. As recently as 2002, in an interview for a profile on the ABC's *Dimensions in Time* program he has characterised the period this way.
 14. Turner, *In Their Image*, p.32.
 15. Paul Hasluck, *The Chance of Politics*, Text, Melbourne, 1997, p.148.
 16. Mungo MacCallum, *Mungo: the man who laughs*, Duffy & Snellgrove, Potts Point, 2001, p.208. The fullest account of these chaotic and amusing events appears in Alan Reid, *The Gorton Experiment*, Shakespeare Head Press, Sydney, 1971, pp.416–46, but Reid's reliability is limited by his very strong pro-McMahon bias. Gorton puts his perspective in the *Sunday Australian*, 29 August 1971, p.8, and this is elaborated in Ian Hancock, *John Gorton: He did it his Way*, Hodder Headline, Sydney, 2002, pp.311–35. Malcolm Fraser set the events in train by resigning as Defence Minister, describing Gorton as not "fit to hold the great office of Prime Minister", and his biographer explains his angle, Philip Ayres, *Malcolm Fraser: A Biography*, William Heinemann Australia, Richmond, 1987, pp.175–85.
 17. *Australian*, 29 March 1966; this was the main story on the front page of the paper from the day before Petty's cartoon, and the meeting was part of the by-election campaign in the Melbourne seat of Kooyong occasioned by Menzies' retirement. It is tempting to see this as a sign of a sudden change of national mood once the Menzies era ended, though it was no more than a sign of changes that had already started and had a long way to run.
 18. See the Bible, Mark 15.21, Matthew 27.32, Luke 23.26.
 19. *Australian*, 24 March 1967, p.6.
 20. Wallace Brown, *Ten Prime Ministers: Life among the Politicians*, Longueville Books, Double Bay, 2002, pp.109–10.
 21. Bruce Petty, interview with author, 15 March 2004.
 22. See Bridget Griffen-Foley, *Party Games: Australian Politicians and the Media from War to the Dismissal*, Text, Melbourne, 2003, chapter 7.
 23. For a good account of the culture and politics of Whitlamism, see Lindsay Barrett, *The Prime Minister's Christmas Card: Blue Poles and Cultural Politics in the Whitlam Era*, Power, Sydney, 2001.
 24. 'Conversation with Bruce Petty, 1972', National Library of Australia, ORAL DeB 640.
 25. It is also true that the Country Party launch did not occur until later, 20 November, but that gives Petty an excuse for not depicting Anthony rather than a cogent reason.
 26. See, for example, the photographs of Whitlam in Laurie Oakes and David Solomon, *The Making of an Australian Prime Minister*, Cheshire, Melbourne, 1973. As this book came out within months of the election, its choice of images cannot, logically, be coloured by the travails of the Whitlam government and attitudes towards its dismissal.
 27. For an account of Petty's involvement in the ALP campaign, see Laurie Oakes and David Solomon, *Grab for Power: Election '74*, Cheshire, Melbourne, 1974, pp.277–8, 293, 348. At one point, apparently, the NSW party office handed out ten thousand Petty badges in thirty minutes.
 28. There is a full year between these two cartoons. For half this time (October 1973–March 1974) Petty was on leave of absence from the *Australian*, pursuing travel and projects in visual animation. When he returned, he cut back to cartoons three days a week; Mike Lodge did the editorial cartoon Mondays to Wednesdays for the rest of 1974 and 1975.
 29. This change is attributed to the arrival of Bruce Rothwell by William Shawcross, *Rupert Murdoch: Ringmaster of the Information Circus*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1992, p.169; and Griffen-Foley, *Party Games*, p.217, but the information on the *Australian's* intranet (provided to me by Lindsay Foyle, a cartoonist at the paper) has Rothwell as editor-in-chief of the paper from July 1971 until 1977. It also notes that Les Hollings replaced James Hall as editor of the paper in June 1975.
 30. *Australian*, editorial, 12 November 1975.
 31. *Australian Magazine*, 27 April 1976, pp.30–32. So far as I am aware, this is the only survey of Australian cartooning in the past half-century that fails to mention Petty.
 32. Jonathan King, *The Other Side of the Coin: A Cartoon History of Australia*, Cassell Australia, Stanmore, 1976, pp.8–9.
 33. And there are still those who are inclined to agree with him. See, for example, Nick Richardson, 'The Last Laugh', *Australian Quarterly*, August–September 2000, pp.6–8; he argues, to my mind perversely, that cartoons are lampoons rather than satire.
 34. Murray Bramwell & David Matthews, *Wanted for Questioning: Interviews with Australian Comic Artists*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1992, p.254.

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THE WAY WE EAT NOW



"IF YOU'RE A FAN of Nigella Lawson's cookbooks, you may have noticed she makes an inordinate number of references to 'double zero flour'. . . And yes, you can buy it here."¹ You certainly can, and not only from Simon Johnson and The Essential Ingredient, the upmarket outlets recommended by the *Age*. Italians grade their flour not by strength or protein but by the degree of sifting: the lower the number, the more refined the flour. So '00' signifies the whitest flour, too refined for making those rustic loaves of bread still found across Europe, but good for making pastries. In the northern suburbs of Melbourne, where I live, '00' flour has been fairly easily available for many years, tucked in alongside a host of other Italian ingredients, on the shelves of local shops frequented by the Italian mothers and grandmothers who settled here decades ago.

We like to tell ourselves that the waves of post-war immigration are responsible for Melbourne's claim to be a culinary mecca. Spruiking a new edition of the *Age Cheap Eats* guide on 3RRR's 'Eat It' program, editor Roslyn Grundy off-handedly noted that whatever people's views on immigration, you couldn't deny that it had greatly improved the quality of our eating.

Heck, let's not undersell it. Immigration means we've got someone to clean our offices at night, and it also allowed us to keep a textile and footwear industry going until we decided we didn't need one any more.

But if middle-class Anglo-Celtic Melbourne starts cooking with '00' flour, postwar immigration will have had little to do with it. There are far more important factors at work when it comes to tracing

the dissemination of new foodstuffs. Here, then, are the true 'foodways' of the twenty-first century. An Italian ingredient is praised by a British celebrity chef whose TV show is franchised in Australia; with the result that it is imported by gourmet food retailers and announced as 'available' in the lifestyle supplement of the city's main broadsheet.

Trotting out the argument about the link between our culinary sophistication and immigration reduces myriad human stories of upheaval, transit and sometime exile to our ability to get a good cappuccino in Lygon Street. But it also masks the vital role played in our eating by commercial and cultural intermediaries. The way we eat now is as much to do with good old fashioned marketing and product placement as it is about an increasing cosmopolitanism, sophistication and multiculturalism.

PART TRADE FAIR, part tourism bonanza, the annual Melbourne Food and Wine Festival, held for the past dozen or so years, illustrates the process in concentrated form. A few years ago, Italian rice producer Gabriele Ferron and television chef Antonio Carluccio cooked risotto at the Festival using two different kinds of rice: *vialone nano* and *carnarolli*. Before the festival, a commentator tells us, Australian chefs and domestic cooks were blindly attached to *arborio* rice for risotto. Mamma mia! Thank god the scales have been lifted from our eyes, with the major importer of *carnarolli* and *vialone nano* now importing one hundred times the amount as before the Festival. Last year, the same importer hoped *vincotto*, a wine syrup from the south of Italy, would capture the culinary imagination in

the same way once it has been shown off by Sicilian chef Fabio Giuffrè at public demonstrations.²

Celebrity chefs, food journalists, niche retailers: all are part of a global provisioning system that distributes not only new food around the globe but also knowledge about new foods and how to value them. They provide a cashed-up urban clientele with a critical infrastructure, they foster an inquiring and aesthetic attitude toward consumption, they promote and then assuage anxieties about how to make upscale consumption choices. The result, argues urban sociologist Sharon Zukin, is not just a shift in taste, but a shift in the way taste is produced.³

This provisioning system emerged at a time when, as Karen and John Hess put it, a newly affluent society had the money to live well but no idea how to do so; nor the time to work at it.⁴ So, in the postwar period, we got on the one hand ‘fast’, ‘convenience’ and ‘junk’ food; on the other the ‘discovery’ of exotic flavours. Again, we seem blind to the implications of this. Grundy’s interviewer on ‘Eat It’ volunteered the other half of the immigration-equals-good-food canard, observing that we must have eaten pretty badly before the migrants started arriving. Really? Talking to people of my parents’ generation, or reading their memoirs, I’m struck by the reliance on backyard chooks, local dairies, rabbits brought down from up the country, vegetable gardens and backyard fruit trees (plums in Melbourne, mango and pawpaw in Cairns, figs everywhere). George Seddon has suggested that the prewar backyard functioned as a gesture towards functional self-sufficiency, not complete but not totally dependent on a web of urban services as we are today.⁵ In many ways, the prewar generation had a closer relation to their food sources than is possible in the increasingly industrialised world of mass haulage, centralised warehousing and a food retailing business that dissembles about the labeling of genetically modified products. Whereas today we know our food’s cultural biography, its context and cachet, we know less about where our food actually comes from than ever before—which, given where a lot of our food *does* come from, is perhaps no bad thing.

I WAS ONCE served lunch by the wife of a multinational executive. She had, she said, over the past forty years seen the Union Jack come down in a number of countries and described her skills as

“shutting up house and moving on”. The dish came from Elizabeth David, whom my host swore by. When I made the connection between Elizabeth David and our contemporary love affair with Mediterranean cuisine, the glossy coffee-table cookbooks, the spate of *A Year in Provence/Tuscany/Corfu* gastro-memoirs and so on, she looked genuinely put out. There was no connection that she could see between the mass marketing and gourmet food press of the 1990s and the pure, limpid prose of David.

I now see her point. For me—and for many of her readers—David had remained a fairly elusive figure until fairly recently, when two biographies appeared in quick succession. By Lisa Chaney and Artemis Cooper, they managed to situate her childhood nicely within a fading Tory aristocracy, her prewar and wartime travels through the Mediterranean facilitated by various upper-class and bohemian connections, populated by a cast of diplomats, aesthetes, military spies and the independently wealthy. David’s early books were as much about travel as cookery, and reflected, according to Chaney, a class milieu where good writing was achieved through an apparently effortless insouciance. When, in later life, she began writing dense, scholarly works on English bread and the history of icecream, many of this milieu would have distrusted such ‘bookishness’.

I’m sure the insouciance of David’s writing still appeals to many of the same class or peripatetic generation. And no doubt many still see David’s contribution as being as much literary as culinary. As the proprietor of a Notting Hill bookstore explained to me, “I *read* Elizabeth David, but I *cook* from Jane Grigson”.

A couple of years ago journalist Michael Shmith complained of the monsters of marketing infecting British cookery, with TV chefs buying football teams and spruiking cooking equipment. Elizabeth David, he pointed out nostalgically, was not a television star and didn’t own a football team; she just wrote cookery books.⁶ Well, he’s right about the football teams, but wrong about most else. In a fairly blatant piece of branding David opened her own kitchenware shop, called simply Elizabeth David Ltd. There the postwar upper middle class could indeed get its hands on the imported equipment that went hand in hand with the ‘Mediterranean’ lifestyle she was promoting through her writings. And, contrary to Shmith, these were not to be found only in her

books. In the 1950s she wrote regular columns for large-circulation magazines: first *Harpers* and later *Vogue*, where her writing was illustrated by full-page photographs by decorator and stylist Anthony Denney. Together, they helped raise cookery writing from the Mrs Beeton focus on 'household management' to one based precisely on aesthetic and lifestyle considerations. For better or worse, it is the tradition in which New Labour luvvies like Jamie Oliver and Nigella Lawson still work.

(I'm less sure about Delia—the owner of the football team, by the way—as her stern good sense and apparent reticence to derive demonstrable pleasure from food might make her the Mrs Beeton of the twenty-first century, and probably connect her more easily to that great mass of people—mainly women—for whom cooking remains primarily a chore and a responsibility.)

So the question is one of degree, rather than kind. That much food writing is now about fashion and product placement for the weekend cook is not new, it's just that with celebrity chefs more ubiquitous and promoted more vigorously than ever, we like to think that it is.

David was the first to popularise Mediterranean food as an ensemble, but in fact the first edition of her *A Book of Mediterranean Food* was overwhelmingly a collection of French recipes, with a few Levantine ones thrown in from her wartime sojourns in the Greek Isles and Cairo. Other Mediterranean cuisine didn't fair so well; she introduced paella with the observation that it is the Spanish version of risotto, which suggests a certain thoughtlessness as regards either Spanish cuisine or Italian cuisine, or both.

If the book was first written for an artistic, literary and travelled elite, by the time of the first Penguin edition in 1955, a larger, newly affluent middle-class audience was being addressed. For them, as Chaney notes, David's writing represented something else, the dream of escape, and later books on Italian food and French provincial cooking were offering more practical advice on achieving this dream in the home kitchen.

Today, the 'Mediterranean diet' is ubiquitous, not just in cookery books but also in health promotion. It is merely one example of how, as anthropologist Sidney Mintz has observed in the North American context, every localised taste opportunity is taken by commercial enterprise and turned into

some new national fad, made available without regard to place or season.

And whatever is the current agglomeration of fads and appropriated styles is periodically trotted out as amounting to an 'Australian cuisine' or 'Pacific Rim' cooking or 'fusion' cuisine. Almost at random I come across a recipe from a cookbook called *Blue Ginger: East Meets West. Cooking with Ming Tsai*, in which the northern Italian winter staple of polenta is mixed with the Maghrebi condiment of preserved lemons. The author observes: "I didn't invent polenta but I was the first to add preserved lemon to it". Yes, but why? I can't help but be reminded of Fran Lebowitz's comment: "People have been cooking for thousands of years, so if you are the very first to have thought of adding fresh lime juice to scalloped potatoes, try to understand there must be a reason for this".

Two nations between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by different breeding, are fed different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws . . . The rich and the poor.

—Benjamin Disraeli, *Sybil, or The Two Nations*, 1845

The theme emerging in fashion is all about 'class'. This was the pronouncement made by David Shah, a Paris-based fashion trend forecaster . . . and a professor at London's Royal College of Art . . . The classes were dividing very strongly into two polarised camps, Shah said. They were "the celebrity type—who buy brands and can spend \$6000 on a dress". And the new tasteocracy—"responsible consumers who cycle to work, live in lofts, have lots of open space and zoned living, who believe in self-improvement and gourmet consumerism and who will spend \$6000 on a Smeg stove".

—Age, Domain supplement, 11 April 2001

THE HARRIED MIDDLE CLASS has always envied, and distrusted, the aristocracy above it and the counterculture, bohemians or slackers below. Nevertheless, the bohemians are worth watching because they can suggest ways to achieve, outside of hereditary privilege, an approximation of the aris-

Simple moralism, even when clothed in science, misses the economics of diet . . . today it is only the well-heeled who can manage to buy an escape from the depredations of industrial progress, be it time, labour, unfiltered olive oil.

ocratic sense of ease, detachment and respite from the accelerated pace of modernity.⁷ Thus the Slow Food Movement, where the affluent are appropriating the countercultural critique of industrialisation and revaluing craft and simplicity. John Newton, writing in the *Age* Good Weekend magazine, listed the preoccupations of the modern 'gastronome': simplicity, growing food close to where it will be eaten, concern over GM foods, battery farming and so on. But lest you get the idea that the green movement had staked out this ground some decades before, Newton quoted the founder of the Slow Food Movement declaiming "many greenies eat bad food and think it is good for them".⁸

Who are these greenies? Where do they do lunch? I tend to run into greenies at the Friends of the Earth food co-op in Collingwood, rummaging around amongst the Le Puy lentils, the French sea salt and cold-pressed olive oils. Of course, all these products are available down the road at Simon Johnson but, let it be noted, at considerable mark-up.

Shoppers at Simon Johnson were offered a line of organic products in 1999. Imported from Belgium, their main selling point, judging by the SJ catalogue, appeared to be the Philippe Starck packaging. Down at the co-op, they were making do with BYO recycled plastic bags, which might have explained the price differential. And the idea of paying for organic muesli to be shipped halfway around the world would have to raise a smile, even had Belgium not been rocked by a major food contamination scandal a few months after Johnson began stocking the range.

Some high-profile participants in the Slow Food Movement in Australia are doing creditable work: Stephanie Alexander's work in an inner-city Melbourne school, Barbara Santich's scholarly work on regionalism, Stefano di Piero's concern with salination in the Murray-Darling basin. But more generally Slow Food becomes an occasion for ostentatious simplicity. Why make common cause with the greenies when you can afford to be much more

conspicuous in your inconspicuous consumption? Just make sure to distinguish your type of spending from the crass consumption of the 1980s, and go for the 'real' or 'authentic' as well as, ideally, the artfully designed and packaged. In this way many of the perspectives generated by the Slow Food Movement—in Australia, at least—can be effortlessly integrated into the workaday foodie press, shorn of critique, and merely further provoking and then assuaging the status anxiety of the upwardly mobile.

DURING THE EIGHTEENTH and nineteenth centuries the only major additions to the English diet were sugar, tobacco, coffee and tea. The subsistence diet of women and children was white bread and jam, tea and sugar. Men fared a little better as wives and kids were—in many cases still are—systematically undernourished because of cultural conventions stressing adequate food for the 'breadwinner'. Social commentators in the nineteenth century deplored the eating habits of poor people, who were seen as slothful, too lazy to prepare proper food, too easily led by a passion for sweets. Today, nutritionists wield the body-mass-index as an unreliable proxy for obesity, and obesity as a proxy for a range of diseases.

Simple moralism, even when clothed in science, misses the economics of diet. Sugar one hundred years ago was a ready source of short-term energy for industrial workers. In the twentieth century people took the same combination of sugar and caffeine in Coca-Cola. Now you can get Coke, and a host of other products, that is sugar and caffeine free, which seems to be all that workers need nowadays since they're sitting around in front of computer terminals. As American writer Susan Willis has noted, if capitalism was once able to sustain a workforce on a poor diet, rich only in calories, it is now realising it can do so on a diet diminished even in these.⁹

George Orwell bemoaned the physical degeneracy of the English in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, acknowledging the role of the Great War but more

David Marr &
Marian Wilkinson

DARK VICTORY

CRITICS CALL IT
A POLITICAL MASTERPIECE
COMPELLING
GRIPPING
HEARTBREAKING
WILL SHOCK AND AMAZE
AN EXTRAORDINARY STORY
OF POLITICAL POWER
A MASTERPIECE OF
FACTUAL REPORTING AND
COOL HEADED INDIGNATION
AN ENGROSSING NARRATIVE
IMPECCABLY RESEARCHED


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convinced the cause was an industrial lifestyle that provided the working classes with “cheap substitutes for everything”. “We may find in the long run”, he wrote, “that tinned food is a deadlier weapon than the machine gun.”

Nevertheless, if the way we eat now is still about class and economics, it is worth recognising that the transition to industrialism entails a strange inversion. Once the poor were those left behind or excluded from the forward march of progress; today it is only the well-heeled who can manage to buy an escape from the depredations of industrial progress, be it time, labour, unfiltered olive oil, shiraz from hand-pruned vines or farmhouses in Tuscany. Compared to the old days of fine dining, now labour and time are enough to raise even poor ingredients to luxury status: hence the attractions of ‘peasant cuisine’ and ‘slow food’.

Australian food writer Jill Dupleix, now with the *Times* in London, spruiks a recipe for lamb shanks with the words: “Traditionally poor people’s food, this is the new luxury, food cooked with no rushing, no pressure, no worries”. Here we have what Ivan Illich calls the ‘modernisation of poverty’: “The underclasses are now made up of those who must consume the counterproductive packages and ministrations of their self-appointed tutors; the privileged are those who are free to refuse them”. This pinpoints the paradox at the heart of the way we eat now.

1. Age, Epicure supplement, 18 September 2001, p.3.
2. Charles Wright, ‘Bumper Harvest: Victoria Reaps Festival’s Rewards’, *Weekend Australian Financial Review*, 15–16 March 2003, p.45.
3. Sharon Zukin, *Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World*, California University Press, Berkeley, 1991.
4. John Hess and Karen Hess, ‘Icon Flambe’, *The Nation*, 15 December 1997.
5. George Seddon, *Landprints: Reflections on Place and Landscape*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997, p.153.
6. Michael Shmith, ‘Goddesses and Monsters’, *Age*, Epicure supplement, 6 February 2001.
7. Warren Belasco, *Appetite for Change: How the Counterculture Took on the Food Industry*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1993, p.52.
8. John Newton, ‘Good Taste Prevails’, *Age*, Good Weekend supplement, 15 April 2000.
9. Susan Willis, *A Primer for Daily Life*, Routledge, London, 1991.

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LIES, DIPLOMACY AND THE ABC

Revisiting 'the Russo affair'



FOLLOWING THE RECENT claims about anti-American bias in the Australian media, it is instructive to recall a controversy that erupted four decades ago when an Australian broadcaster criticised aspects of American foreign policy. Peter Russo, an authoritative commentator on international affairs, claimed at the height of the 1962 Cuban missile crisis that both the Americans and the Russians were lying about their involvement. As in the recent imbroglio over its coverage of the war in Iraq, the ABC was forced to defend itself against accusations that it was a vehicle for anti-American sentiment.

Russo is vaguely remembered today, despite being one of the most contentious figures in twentieth-century Australian journalism. He spent the 1930s in Japan and returned to Australia on the eve of the Pacific War amid suspicion that he was working for Japan's militarist regime. In his postwar newspaper columns and broadcasts he rejected Cold War theories of communist expansion in Asia, and relentlessly criticised Western foreign policies. His outspokenness earned him many enemies in conservative circles and prompted several highly-publicised attacks in federal and state parliament. Attempts were made to have him removed from his position as a regular commentator for the ABC, and ASIO kept him under constant surveillance.

The broadcast that prompted 'the Russo affair', however, was mild by Russo's standards and certainly less robust than most of today's media commentary. US president John F. Kennedy had told the American people on 22 October 1962 that the Soviet Union was transforming Cuba into an important strategic base by constructing nuclear missile sites on the island, and that, as a consequence of this "reckless and provocative threat to world peace", the US had decided to impose a blockade

around Cuba. The president had also indicated that he was requesting an urgent meeting of the UN Security Council at which the American ambassador would present a resolution calling for the withdrawal of missile bases and other offensive weapons. The next day in parliament, Australian prime minister Robert Menzies pledged his government's support for the president's actions. Menzies noted with particular approval Kennedy's reference to the vital importance of regional defence agreements authorised by the United Nations Charter and the readiness of the US administration to bring the matter promptly to the UN. Having been advised that morning in a personal communication from Kennedy that the purpose of the proposed US resolution was to secure the complete dismantlement and withdrawal of offensive weapons, he reported, the Australian government had instructed the Australian ambassador to the UN, Sir James Plimsoll, to do "all in his power" to support the resolution.¹

The Australian response was swift, but in Russo's view the premise on which it was based was highly questionable. There was little point, he observed in his 'Notes on the News' presentation of 29 October, in attempting to judge who was right and who was wrong "in a game of Russian roulette in which the Americans were spinning the chamber". Of course the Russians had lied about the recent build-up of their Cuba-based missiles and the Cubans had ended up as the "expendable puppets" of Russia's Cold War program for the Latin Americas. But, Russo argued, when "we match the quality of Russian lies with American lies . . . we merely get back to the . . . maxim that anything goes if you can fool the people in a good cause". Only a month earlier, when America was still assuring the world that it would not take action against Cuba or pres-

sure Latin American governments into joining such action, the truth of these statements was being undermined by developments such as the television interview in which the Peruvian ambassador predicted that most Latin American countries would support the US in the coming blockade of Cuba, and reports that volunteers were being trained for the Cuban invasion in Guatemala, Nicaragua, Panama, Haiti and the Dominican Republic. If the Russians kept on “needling” the Americans and the Americans went on “expecting the world to be cast in their own righteous image”, Russo warned, a crisis of the same proportions could and would happen again—“perhaps only once more”.²

The substance of Russo’s argument was hardly new. Four days after Kennedy’s broadcast, *New York Times* columnist James Reston claimed that truth had been the first casualty in Washington during the crisis. According to Reston, the power diplomacy that Kennedy had pursued in the days before his decision to blockade Cuba—“no consultation with allies, parliaments or international organisations”—exacted a cost. First, many people found it difficult to believe that the Soviet missile sites in Cuba had suddenly ‘mushroomed’ over the weekend before the broadcast; second, many diplomats within the alliance disagreed with the decision to confront Khrushchev publicly with the choice of fighting or withdrawing; and finally, the press had been misinformed about the Soviet build-up, and still had doubts about the veracity of what they were being told.³ The suspicion that information had been withheld from the US media and that the details released to journalists were also distorted had been kindled by the suddenness of Kennedy’s broadcast, soon after the administration’s denials that there was any threat to America in the Soviet arms deliveries to Cuba. It was reinforced by the government’s refusal to let media representatives near the blockade operations. Resentment grew until early December, when the US assistant secretary of defence, Arthur Sylvester, made the remarkable admission that news had been “generated” by his government during the crisis, and declared that the government had an “inherent right” to lie in order to save itself when faced with nuclear disaster.⁴

Thus the theme of lying was present in American media commentary from the time of the crisis itself, and Russo did little more than introduce it to Australian public discourse and endorse its senti-

ments.⁵ In airing his views so boldly, however, he took a lonely path. Even when Sylvester’s comments were made public—in the midst of the controversy over Russo’s own commentary—the *Sydney Morning Herald* was the only Australian daily to comment on them, and even then it was equivocal. There was an important distinction, it editorialised, “between withholding information—culpable as this may be—and the deliberate distortion of information”, and all the evidence suggested that the Kennedy administration’s worst mistake was to withhold information. Candid comments such as Sylvester’s, moreover, did not help the US government to defend its policies: his “brash” pronouncements on the “right to lie” should not go uncontradicted by Kennedy who, himself, must have been aware of critics among America’s allies, during the early stages of the crisis, who justified their criticism by casting doubt on the accuracy of the threat to America.⁶

In any case, there were some who distinguished between the freedom of the US media to criticise Kennedy’s actions and the right of Australian commentators to do the same. On 3 December, the Australian postmaster-general, Charles Davidson, telephoned the ABC’s chairman, Dr James Darling, to pass on complaints he had received about Russo’s commentary. The next day Darling went to Canberra “voluntarily” to discuss the matter with Davidson.⁷ When they met, the two decided it would be “desirable” to include the prime minister in their discussion. At the meeting, Davidson and Menzies reaffirmed the government’s commitment to a non-interference policy, but expressed their view that the ABC should avoid airing commentaries that might endanger Australia’s national interest in world politics or cause friction between Australia and her allies.⁸ For his part, Darling defended the ABC’s right to give commentators the scope to express dissenting opinions, telling journalists after the meeting: “A man is entitled to his point of view, and the ABC should publish all points of view.” Russo had not been reprimanded, he said, and had been retained on the list of ABC news commentators. Darling hoped that the incident would not result in any change in ABC talks policy.⁹

Shortly afterwards, the ABC’s National Talks Advisory Committee met in Sydney to discuss the affair. A diverse group comprising an *ex-officio* chairman—the ABC’s director of talks, Alan

Carmichael—and delegates from each state, the committee carried a resolution saying that one of the ABC's greatest responsibilities was to broadcast a wide variety of opinion on the important issues of the day.¹⁰ Insight into the thinking behind the resolution was provided in a letter to the *Sydney Morning Herald* from one of the committee members, J.L.J. Wilson. Australia was not prepared, wrote Wilson, to abrogate the right of media commentators to critically evaluate overseas news "like one of those impotent little central American 'banana republics' of the pre-1914 days which cringingly suppressed their newspapers or turned out governments whenever a minor US Consul found them not to his taste". In a world in which Sylvester could blithely claim for the US president the "right to lie"—not only to Americans but also to the governments and peoples of allied countries—it was vitally important to suppress with the "utmost vigour" every agency of information that sought to separate falsehood from truth.¹¹

Despite this support in principle for Russo, Carmichael temporarily forbade federal talks supervisor Selwyn (Dan) Speight to use the controversial journalist on his programs.¹² Carmichael, a cautious man who had been director of talks since 1956, seems to have regarded Russo highly and was usually supportive of his independent stance.¹³ Nevertheless, this was not the first time that he had intervened to influence a broadcast. In November 1956 he attempted to censor a script on the Suez crisis by the journalist and author Rohan Rivett; and an apparent lack of support for his actions by the Commission, when the matter was raised later in parliament by opposition leader Dr H.V. Evatt, might have made him even more circumspect.¹⁴ Carmichael's initial response to the Russo incident was to distance himself: he told reporters that he had been away at the time of the broadcast and that the talks department was not going to "buy into" the controversy.¹⁵ But it is clear from his subsequent actions that he thought it wise to keep Russo off the airwaves until the dust settled.

The matter might have rested there, but on 15 December the fortnightly journal of opinion *Nation* sparked a controversy when it ran an editorial alleging that the complaints about Russo's commentary had emanated from a US diplomat in Australia, and that the government regarded the matter with such urgency that on the night of 3 December security officers accompanied by an ABC staff mem-

ber had broken into a cabinet at the ABC's Sydney office to obtain a copy of Russo's script. The incident, said *Nation*, raised questions for the future. How many foreign countries would now protest to the prime minister whenever an ABC commentator refused to take the declarations of their leaders at face value and criticised their actions? Would the privilege be reserved for Australia's allies? Would criticism of Britain's policy on the Common Market be forbidden, in case the British high commissioner followed the example of his American colleagues? Were there precise limits to what could be said about the United States?¹⁶

The American consul-general in Australia, Laurence Vass, denied categorically that he had complained about any ABC commentaries on the Cuban crisis, and Darling told journalists that he had "every reason to believe [the affair] had nothing to do with a complaint from the Americans". The chairman also dismissed as "absolute nonsense" the allegations concerning the request for a copy of Russo's script.¹⁷ The latter point, at least, seems to have been justified. ABC talks officer Reginald Neal, who worked closely with Russo during this period, has pointed out that the original of the script would have been in Melbourne (although scripts were sent to Sydney for duplication), and he would have been aware if anyone had broken into the cabinet in question. In any case, under ABC policy copies of scripts were readily available upon request to members of the public.¹⁸

Still, there is no doubt that in the prevailing climate Russo's broadcast could have been embarrassing for the Menzies government. Department of external affairs documents show clearly the extent of the government's anxiety about the implications of the Cuban crisis, especially the need for Australia to demonstrate its support for US policy. Two days before Kennedy's broadcast, the department sent a cablegram to Australian embassies listing aspects of the crisis to be borne in mind, including Australia's declared support for the United States; acknowledgement that a grave threat to the Americas existed; emphasis on the importance of regional defence arrangements; and, most notably, the "*need to prevent a situation arising which would concentrate United States attention on the Caribbean and Europe, and thus reduce her capability to take effective action, if necessary in South-East Asia*" (my italics).¹⁹

This went to the core of Australia's concerns.

The speed and decisiveness with which the Menzies government endorsed Kennedy's actions, especially its emphasis on the UN, were tied inextricably to recent developments in Australia-US relations. Over the previous two years the perception that the US was not honouring its obligations under the ANZUS agreement, particularly in regard to the West New Guinea dispute, had tarnished its image in Australia. By 1958, Australia's pro-Dutch stance was placing her at odds with her allies. Under pressure of events in Indonesia itself—the increase in Sukarno's personal authority and the growing influence of the communist party upon his administration—the United States and Britain, prompted by a desire to keep Indonesia from falling into the communist camp, sold arms to, and, in the case of the US, worked assiduously to maintain friendly relations with the Indonesian government. When Kennedy was elected to office in 1961 he made it clear that the US would not intervene in the dispute: West New Guinea must be ceded to Indonesia.²⁰

There were other developments also contributing to Australian disillusionment. In August 1961, when the UK's Macmillan government applied for membership of the European Economic Community, the US gave little support to the objections raised by Australia and New Zealand, who feared the consequences for sales of their primary products. And Australia and the US differed in their attitudes towards China: Menzies believed the West's policy of non-recognition of Peking would be unsustainable over the following decade, while Kennedy stressed the need for Western solidarity on non-recognition, and suggested a new regional organisation—the New Pacific Community—as a means of further isolating China.²¹

In the aftermath of these events, it was a matter of considerable urgency to the Australian government for the US to be drawn into Southeast Asian affairs and for Australia in return to be involved more closely in US policies.²² In early May the government approved the establishment of an American naval communications base at North-West Cape in Western Australia; its anxiety to have American support in Southeast Asia and its belief that the base was firmly in Australia's interests led Cabinet to reject a recommendation that Australia maintain some measure of control over its use. Then at an important meeting of the ANZUS council in early May, US secretary of state Dean Rusk made further re-

quests to which Australia agreed, notably for Australian assistance in Thailand if the war currently raging in Laos spread over the border, and, more significantly, for Australian military support in Vietnam. Australia's own security interests, however, were peripheral to this intensification of US involvement in Southeast Asia, and American support could not be relied upon in the event of Australia becoming embroiled in tensions with Indonesia.²³

In these circumstances the Menzies government seized the opportunity provided by the Kennedy administration's response to the Cuban crisis, particularly the president's references to regional agreements and the role of the UN, to demonstrate unequivocal support for its powerful ally. Having done that, it then sought from the US state department its views "on the possible repercussion in South-East Asia of the Cuba crisis". In a secret cablegram sent to Australian embassies on 27 October 1962, the department of external affairs revealed several concerns relating to the region, especially the fear that "[The] Chinese . . . might possibly see United States preoccupation with Cuba as an opportunity for testing the US position in the Far East".²⁴ The columnist Douglas Wilkie wondered whether Menzies had Australia's nuclear dependency on the US in mind when he endorsed Kennedy's blockade "more promptly, more unqualifiedly" than any of America's other allies: "Inevitably there's scope for eyebrow lifting when the Government of a small nation, remote from the vortex of cold war currents, loudly declaims its judgment while big nations are still muttering under their breath".²⁵ But the conservative *Herald* journalist Denis Warner was in no doubt that Australia had acted "promptly and properly" in throwing its support behind the US. If Australia was not prepared to accept the responsibilities of its alliance and hesitated in a crisis, it could not expect help from Washington if its own shores were endangered: "And where would we look for help", Warner asked plaintively, "other than to the US?"²⁶

In this sensitive climate, any reservations expressed publicly about American policy or about the alliance were inflammatory. Throughout the Cold War the government had revealed its anxiety about ABC talks concerned with US foreign policy and a preparedness to exert pressure to influence their content. This had been particularly evident in 1953 when the then foreign minister, Richard Casey,

attacked political scientist William Macmahon Ball over a broadcast in which Ball expressed doubt that the Americans really wanted an armistice in Korea. On that occasion Casey had complained privately to ABC chairman, Richard Boyer, about the commission's policy on commentators, but Boyer had explained that the ABC sought variety and balance and did not censor scripts unless they contained libellous or indecent material. Nevertheless, Ball's broadcasts from that point were severely curtailed and future invitations for him to speak were rare.²⁷

The Commission's capacity to resist political pressure was assisted considerably by the strength and integrity of chairmen such as Boyer and Darling. Russo's broadcast, like Ball's before it, expressed a dissenting view but was neither libellous nor indecent. Yet Russo received only lukewarm support from the mainstream press. Most editorials mechanically applauded Darling's resistance to the government's interference while avoiding a direct endorsement of Russo's views and qualifying their insistence on diverse opinions in the ABC. "Russo's supercilious style and dissident opinions", a Sydney *Sun Herald* columnist remarked drily, "irritate some listeners; others find his comments stimulating". In this case, his comments on the Cuban crisis "did not warrant the fuss that has since been made".²⁸ A *Bulletin* editorial described Russo's comments as "not particularly sensible". It was "deplorable" that Darling had to defend Russo's right to be wrong, but commendable that he did so.²⁹ Supporting the ABC, declared the *Sunday Telegraph*, did not mean supporting Dr Russo. The broadcaster's poor taste in commentators had implications for Australia's international relations and for the media's freedom of speech. The ABC had a double duty: "to be free and impartial in its comment, and to use this freedom so wisely that no future government [would] have the excuse to whittle all freedom away".³⁰

Such responses suggest a degree of ambivalence towards Russo within the journalistic community, especially in view of the media's traditionally hardline stance on interference with the ABC. The primary motivation, however, seems to have been a need for consistency. Most of the mainstream press, while emphasising the gravity of the Cuban situation, had commended Kennedy's actions during the crisis, and unequivocal support for Russo a month later would have been, in effect, a concession that Kennedy's stance might not have been fully justi-

fied at a time when the Menzies government was doing everything in its power to maintain the goodwill of the United States.³¹ Most of those who commented on the Russo dispute circumvented the problem by distinguishing between Russo's right to express an independent view and the view itself, but a number were unable to hide their anxiety about the ABC's choice of commentators.

Russo remained above the clamour, remarking to journalists that the current controversy was "nothing unusual" and that people had been taking exception to his opinions for thirty years.³² His own attitude regarding the "cause macabre", he wrote to *Nation's* editor Tom Fitzgerald, insofar as it concerned Australia's future, was one of increasing despair. "I re-read my piffingly 'controversial' broadcast, and I doubt whether it would have caused a stir even in Guatemala".³³ Replying to Russo, Fitzgerald expressed satisfaction that the ABC had appeared to show "reasonable firmness", but indicated that he still felt that the Americans were behind the whole affair.³⁴

Nation was reluctant to let the matter die, even after it received letters from the prime minister and the US embassy denying that any approach had been made by US representatives to the Australian government regarding the broadcast. A second editorial, 'The Russo Affair', on 12 January, presented two possible scenarios. First, US representatives might have complained to an agency other than the prime minister—although this did not tally with a statement from the US embassy that it recognised Russo's right to express his opinions. The other possibility, which the author seemed to give less credence, was that the complaints originated from within the government: "[I]f Mr Menzies and Mr Davidson were not concerned about United States reactions, why did they bother? Did they simply seek to frighten the ABC because they do not like Dr Russo's views?"³⁵

Such questions suggest a certain naivety on *Nation's* part. While an extensive archival search has so far failed to reveal the source of the original complaint about the broadcast, the available evidence—especially the official documents covering the government's response to the Cuban crisis—and the history of attacks on Russo by members of the Menzies government, make *Nation's* second scenario highly plausible. It appears unlikely, given the lively nature of US media debate on the crisis and the vehemence of Vass's denial, that the complaints were made by US diplomatic representatives. That

the US sought approval from its allies for its actions over Cuba is undeniable; but it was far more important to Australia to give the support and to be rewarded for giving it. The Menzies government had made its position crystal clear, and all it needed was a compliant media to echo its sentiments or at least to tone down any criticism of American policy. Russo did neither.

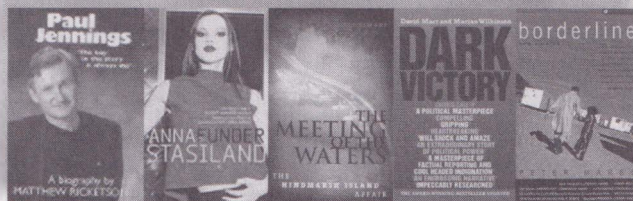
Russo's broadcast was neither the first nor the last source of tension between an Australian government and the ABC over perceived bias. The history of the public broadcaster is littered with similar incidents that have occurred when the ABC has disseminated views judged by governments of the day to be unbalanced, especially views on Australia's international relations. The Russo case is distinguished by the mystery surrounding its origins, the dramatic international context in which it was played out, and its impact, real or imagined, upon Australia's relationship with the United States at a pivotal moment in history.

1. *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates (CPD)*, House of Representatives, vol.37, 23 October 1962, p.1781. After warning Americans about the threat posed by Soviet missile bases in Cuba, Kennedy announced seven measures to be taken immediately. Number 5 stated in part: "We are calling . . . for an immediate meeting of the organ of consultation under the Organisation of American States to consider this threat to her hemispheric security . . . The United Nations' Charter allows for regional security arrangements—and the nations of this hemisphere decided long ago against the military presence of outside Powers. Our other Allies around the world have also been alerted." See 'President orders 7 initial steps', *Herald*, 23 October 1962, p.5.
2. 'Dr Russo's broadcast', *Nation*, 15 December 1962, p.5.
3. James Reston, 'Kennedy's new diplomacy in Cuba', *New York Times*, 26 October 1962, p.30.
4. 'The lie as a "weapon" of foreign policy', editorial, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 December 1962, p.2.
5. This point is also inferred in 'Peter Russo supplement', *Brian Fitzpatrick's Labor News Letter*, vol.4, no.43, 18 December 1962, p.6.
6. *Ibid.*
7. 'Government policy reaffirmed on ABC freedom', *Age*, 15 December 1962, p.3.
8. *Ibid.* E.H. Cox, 'Government and ABC in Cuba talk clash', *Herald*, 14 December 1962, p.1.
9. 'Full marks', *Daily Mirror*, 16 December 1962; 'Government policy reaffirmed'.
10. 'ABC committee's decision', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 December 1962, p.4.
11. J.L.J. Wilson, letter to editor, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 December 1962, p.2.
12. K.S. Inglis, *This is the ABC: The Australian Broadcasting Commission 1932-1983*, MUP, Melbourne, 1983, p.237.
13. See for example Carmichael to Russo, 12 January 1961, series 1, box 1, MS 8202, NLA.
14. Inglis, *This is the ABC*, pp.191-2.
15. 'Action by PM on Cuba broadcast', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 December 1962, p.1.
16. 'US complains over ABC', *Nation*, 15 December 1962, p.5.
17. 'US envoy denies ABC "complaint"', *Daily Telegraph*, 16 December 1962, p.3; 'Government policy reaffirmed on ABC freedom'.
18. Reginald Neal, interview with Peter Jeppesen, 'Our speaker today is Dr Peter Russo', tape no. 87/10/195, 20 November 1986, ABC Radio Archives.
19. Department of External Affairs cablegram, 20 October 1962, A1209/80 1962/920 Part 1, NAA, ACT.
20. Gordon Greenwood, *Approaches to Asia: Australian Postwar Policies and Attitudes*. McGraw-Hill Book Company, Sydney, 1974, pp.290-2; David Marr, *Barwick*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1980, p.169.
21. Peter Edwards, *Crises and Commitments: The Politics and Diplomacy of Australia's Involvement in Southeast Asian Conflicts 1948-1965*, Allen & Unwin in assoc. with Australian War Memorial, Sydney, 1992, p.232.
22. Marr, *Barwick*, p.174.
23. 'American alliances give only limited security', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 October 1962, p.2.
24. Department of External Affairs secret cablegram, 27 October 1962, A1209/80 1962/920 Part 2, NAA, ACT.
25. Douglas Wilkie, 'Menzies' guided missile', *Adelaide Advertiser*, 26 October 1962, p.2.
26. Denis Warner, 'Friendship or enmity?', *Adelaide Advertiser*, 31 October 1962, p.2.
27. G.C. Bolton, *Dick Boyer: An Australian Humanist*, ANU Press, Canberra, 1967, pp.190-1; Inglis, *This is the ABC*, pp.172-4; W.J. Hudson, Casey, OUP, Melbourne, 1986, pp.243-4. The Broadcasting Act of 1948 gave the ABC full discretion over "political or controversial" broadcasts, but this independence was compromised by several other provisions in the Act, including the power of the postmaster-general to compel or forbid a broadcast on any subject, and the change in source of finance from licence fees to general revenue which effectively made the ABC dependent on the government for adequate funding. Overall the provisions created a climate of conservatism that was exacerbated by the tendency of both government and opposition members, regardless of the non-interference policy, to apply pressure by various means whenever they chose.
28. Onlooker, 'Candid comment', *Sun Herald*, 16 December 1962, p.36.
29. 'The right to be wrong', editorial, *Bulletin*, 22 December 1962, p.5.
30. 'Freedom—and the ABC', editorial, *Sunday Telegraph*, 16 December 1962, p.14. For other press responses to the affair see 'Independent voice for ABC essential', *Age*, 17 December 1962; 'Full marks', *Daily Mirror*, 16 December 1962; 'Commentators on the ABC', *Herald*, 17 December 1962.
31. For a sample of editorial opinion see 'Critical trial of strength', *Age*, 24 October 1962, p.2; 'All the risks are grave', *Adelaide Advertiser*, 24 October 1962, p.2; 'Cuban crisis', *Canberra Times*, 24 October 1962, p.2; 'America's stand', *Herald*, 23 October 1962, p.4; 'Chips are down', *Hobart Mercury*, 24 October 1962, p.4; 'The American blockade of Cuba', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 October 1962, p.2.
32. *Ibid.*
33. Russo to Fitzgerald, 15 December 1962, box 3, MS 7995, Fitzgerald papers, NLA.
34. Fitzgerald to Russo, 19 December 1962, box 3, MS 7995, NLA.
35. 'The Russo Affair', *Nation*, 12 January 1963, p.4.

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THE AWKWARD TRUTH

The perils of writing journalistic books



THE LIMITATIONS AND FAILINGS of daily journalism are many and well-known: it is prone to superficiality, inaccuracy, sensationalism and prey to sophisticated spin doctoring. For these reasons, and others, a sizeable minority of journalists in Australia choose to write books that enable them to unearth fresh information, to tease out the nuances of issues and to explore a wider range of narrative styles and literary voices. The independent website, *crikey.com.au*, has counted over two hundred non-fiction books produced by Australian journalists over the past decade or so, some of which have made significant contributions to the national debate and culture. Think of *Dark Victory*, David Marr and Marian Wilkinson's forensic examination of the way John Howard won the 2001 federal election, or *Borderline*, Peter Mares' thorough and dispassionate analysis of the vexed refugee issue, or *Stasiland*, Anna Funder's brilliantly conceived and beautifully written account of how ordinary East Germans are adapting (or not) to life after the demise of their police state, to list just three recent examples.¹ But journalists who light out for this new literary territory soon learn that with the newfound freedom comes heavier responsibility, to the subjects they write about, and to the general reading public. They also learn a few things about publishing. Despite the solidity and authority that surrounds publishing houses, there is an alarmingly thin tradition of fact-checking. News organisations are far from flawless, but finding out and verifying contentious information is their meat and drink. Newsrooms are full of experienced journalists and editors who have developed keen bulldust detectors because being routinely lied to is part and parcel of daily journalism.

News organisations retain the services of specialist media lawyers because they face the prospect of defamation actions daily. Publishing houses draw on lawyers too but the threat of defamation—and its attendant hefty payouts—is not as central to their business as it is to news organisations.

The recent controversy over Norma Khouri's *Forbidden Love* illustrates many things but the most relevant here may be the absence of any rigorous effort by the publisher to verify Khouri's story before publishing. The point stands even if Khouri can substantiate her claim to be telling a true story, because the claim that she fabricated her story of an honour killing in Jordan came out long after the book was released. Questions about the systems publishers use to verify journalistic and other non-fiction books have been raised for several years, most notably in the United States by the now defunct media watchdog magazine, *Brill's Content*, which reported the alarming case of a publisher, Disney, that not only failed to check the accuracy of a self-help financial guru's claim to have outperformed the market but fought a false advertising suit brought against it over the book on First Amendment free-speech grounds.²

As far as I can tell, Steven Brill's pleas have gone largely unheeded both in the United States and Australia, but if anything they have become more pressing as non-fiction is an increasingly popular literary genre. There are numerous reasons for this but a noteworthy one is the extent to which conventional news media have in recent years emphasised entertainment over public service news values. There is an urgent post-September 11 public hunger for more thoughtful and balanced information

that offers context rather than hysteria and name-calling; this hunger has been met in the US, for instance, by the *New Yorker* magazine and by National Public Radio. The circulation of the *New Yorker* has been steadily growing for the past three years and is higher now than at any time in its history. The number of listeners for National Public Radio programs has risen 64 per cent since September 11, from 13 million weekly to 22 million, according to its chief executive, Kevin Klose.³ These outlets appear to reach the same audience that is turning to book-length journalism or more literary non-fiction. In other words, there are more journalists aiming to do more ambitious work, and there is a growing audience for this kind of work, but there has been relatively little discussion about the ethical issues such work throws up. Such discussion is important because the journalistic stakes are higher, the ethical issues thornier and the audience expectations keener, as was evident in the sense of betrayal in the public response to the claims about *Forbidden Love*, and, several years before it, to questions about the veracity of Helen Garner's *The First Stone*.

The main difference between the ethics of daily journalism and the ethics of book-length journalism springs from the length of time journalists spend with the people they write about. Researching and writing a journalistic biography of the popular Australian author, Paul Jennings, I realised daily journalism is essentially a smash-and-grab exercise. As a journalist you see only a snapshot of a person's life. You might think you are ethical, but it is easy to slide over the impact your work has on another person's life because your contact has been brief. You can't do that as a biographer because the subject is still there large as life the next day, and the day after. Of course I wanted the biography to be as truthful as possible but not at any cost. Jennings may have been a public figure but he was neither a politician nor a public official. His family and friends were only part of the project because of their relationship to him. Over time I conceived a sliding scale of disclosure; the closer to Jennings the more that could be disclosed; the further away, the less. To give a trifling example: if one of Jennings' acquaintances proved to be a crashing bore I did not see the need to labour that in print.

Useful as the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance's code of ethics was, its shortcoming for me was that it was aimed at the cut and thrust of daily

news, not at a journalistic biography. Struggling with this one day, I recalled a scene from Tom Stoppard's play *Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead*, where the Player shows Ros and Guil how mortifying it was when they left in the middle of his grand performance: "Think, in your head, *now*, think of the most . . . *private* . . . *secret* . . . *intimate* thing you have ever done secure in the knowledge of its privacy . . . Are you thinking of it? *Well, I saw you do it!*" I arrived at a simpler, second guideline: how much would I want people to know about *me* if I was the subject. That was a sobering thought.

I had also set out with the guideline to include material about Jennings' private life only where it impinged on his professional work, on the ground that prospective readers would know of Jennings through his stories. It was a neat theory but proved muddy in practice. This was crystallised for me by the English biographer, Humphrey Carpenter, *after* I had finished the project: "Actually, I haven't come across a single instance—neither writing nor reading biography—where the murky areas of an artist's life *aren't* part of the creativity. I don't think you'll find a single creative artist whose personal danger areas aren't right at the centre of the creative personality".⁴ That gives me pause when contemplating another journalistic biography of an artist, but even before the Jennings book was published I'd seen that the journalist-biographer makes a kind of Faustian pact. I gained a great deal of access to Jennings but I gave up some independence. What later struck me was that Jennings made a similar pact. When he said at the start of the project that he did not mind what I wrote about him as long as I did not hurt his family, I was sceptical. But he was as good as his word. As he wrote in an Afterword to the biography:

Some of what Matthew Ricketson has found is painful too. I have to say that I don't like a lot of what he has described. I would like to think that I am a nicer, kinder and wiser person than the one he has found . . . I am constantly asked why I agreed to a biography? Looking back I think that on a conscious level I naively thought that the persona projected to others was the real one—Kind father, successful writer etc. I thought my name was Nice Bloke and that I would come out of it pretty well. But nobody is really interested in Nice Bloke and Matthew went looking for other names. To my horror he started

The journalist-biographer makes a kind of Faustian pact. I gained a great deal of access to Jennings but I gave up some independence.

talking to schoolmates, old girlfriends, enemies and people I had hurt. My pact to allow him to say what he liked about me as long as he didn't hurt my family backfired. He discovered some other names for Paul Jennings—Petulant Child, Selfish Husband, Ambitious Lecturer and Show Off.

It is easy to imagine subjects trying to protect not only their family but their own reputations. Instead, Jennings deliberately provided more and more candid material about himself to counterbalance the lack of detail about some aspects of his family life. He allowed his wife Claire to tell stories against him that were embarrassing, even painful, and he shared several revealing dreams and his work on them under the guidance of his Jungian psychotherapist, Dr Peter O'Connor. As a result, he was far more honest in discussing his life than are most subjects of biographies.

The reason he felt this need, I suspect, was that he really did trust me and knew that I was agonising over the process in much the same way he was. Just as there were some things that he kept private, so there were some he told me off the record that I kept off the record. This curious pact points to the notion that at some level biographers choose subjects who resemble themselves. After spending six years writing his biography of Patrick White, David Marr said he realised that in a sense he had been writing about himself. Jennings noticed this, as he wrote in the Afterword:

After the obligatory drunken dinner [following submission of the first draft] in which we spilled our guts to each other I came to the conclusion that Matthew has chosen a subject who is very like himself. He certainly has a similar memory of childhood and carries scars that are like mine. It is not unreasonable to assume that in trying to find out who I am he is trying to discover himself. I am sure that in looking for my demons he is also finding some of his own.

I agree, though I'd add that if I had not already begun the task of looking for my demons, as he put it, I would not have been able to write his biography, or it would have been prey to the traces of envy that are found in most biographies. Early on I

did feel envious of Jennings' success and had to face that, but in my view the biography was not driven by envy. Jennings expressed a similar view in his Afterword. As the subject he was in the best—and the worst—position to know.

Where a journalistic biography magnifies the volatility and sensitivity of the relationship between journalist and subject, Margaret Simons faced an array of even thornier issues when she set out to examine the controversy over the Hindmarsh Island bridge that raged through the 1990s.⁵ The Hindmarsh Island affair became a fierce contest between those who were determined to take seriously Aboriginal culture and those who thought the Labor government's decision to grant a heritage order preventing the building of a bridge between Hindmarsh Island and the South Australian mainland was the epitome of soft-headed political correctness. The contest was fought out in a Royal Commission and also between members of the so-called commentariat and the commentocracy in the nation's newspapers. In 2001 Justice von Doussa of the federal court overturned the Royal Commission judgement that Ngarrindjeri women had fabricated their culture.

At the annual general meeting of Free Speech Victoria this year, Simons argued that: "Most of the real story of defamation takes place a long way from the courts. A good journalist cannot avoid defaming people. Most journalism worth reading is potentially defamatory. Like most other journalists I can tell stories about the articles that never made it to print." She came to believe that most publishers do not understand the Realpolitik of defamation law, but in the wake of massive payouts, as in the Abbott and Costello case over Bob Ellis's book, they are nervous of it: "Fear and ignorance is a bad combination. The next mistake they make, perhaps understandably given the profit margins in the business, is to try and economise on legal advice." What is needed, instead, is to build fact walls in the manuscript, with each brick bedded in its little mortar of evidence:

You also have to make sure the whole wall does not add up to more than the sum of its parts, because if you are sued it is the innuendo that will matter; that is, what the reader drew from what you wrote, not

the literal truth. The issue is not whether something is worth knowing, which is the usual standard, but whether it means, or could be taken to mean, more than you can prove. Writing this kind of book is like playing Twister. You put one limb after another on some spot hoping it is safe, aware all the time that the result may well be so contorted that the reader cannot make out what you mean. Some reviewers criticised me for not being more forthright in some places, or for holding back judgement. I would suggest they don't understand defamation law.

Several months before *The Meeting of the Waters* was published in 2003 Simons considered whether it was possible to isolate her (relatively humble) assets in case of legal action. Her contract, standard in publishing, guaranteed she would indemnify the publisher against legal action; the publisher probably would have followed the tradition of not invoking the clause but it was still possible she could have been sued. She considered putting her family home in her children's names, but decided against it after learning the prospective stamp duty for such a transaction. She took the risk and a year after publication neither Simons nor her publisher, Hodder, has been sued. "It may be possible to do good investigative journalism despite the chilling effect of defamation, but it is not possible to have a vigorous or acrimonious debate, or even to publish a fact-based account, without a very high human and financial cost."

Books about controversial issues are, by definition, unlikely to please everyone but during the research and writing Simons wondered whether anybody featured in the book would be happy with it. *The Meeting of the Waters* may give comfort to the Aboriginal women who made the original claims about the sanctity of Hindmarsh Island but Simons struggled to find ways to present Ngarrindjeri culture and beliefs fairly. To do her job as a journalist meant she would have to offend some Ngarrindjeri customs. Secrets hold different values in black and white society. She wrote in the book:

The notion that powerful secrets must remain secret is particularly galling to journalism. The culture of the newsroom is naturally disrespectful and suspicious of secrets. Exposure is good. Secrets exist in order to be uncovered, and published on the front page. It is particularly important that powerful people's secrets be revealed. This is called accountability.

I have believed these things for most of my life.

I would not have written this book if I did not believe in these things. But ideology can cloak baser motives. Perhaps I would not have written this book were it not for rank curiosity—specifically, the desire to open the famous secret envelopes.⁶

Truman Capote put great store in the thoroughness of his research and in his ability as a novelist (best known for *Breakfast at Tiffany's*) to mould the raw clay of life into a work that was grounded in reality, read like fiction and drew out serious artistic themes. His *In Cold Blood* (1965) is regarded as a modern masterpiece. It has been translated into twenty-five languages and remains in print nearly four decades after its publication. It tells the story of the brutal murder of four members of the Clutter family in the remote Midwestern town of Holcomb in Kansas. But there is a growing body of evidence that Capote distorted the truth of various events and people portrayed in the book. Gerald Clarke's authorised, comprehensive 1988 biography revealed that the book originally ended with the execution of the two murderers of the Clutters, but Capote felt this reality too bleak and wanted to close with a life-affirming moment so made up an entire scene that never happened about the chance meeting of two characters at the Clutters' gravesite.

George Plimpton's 1998 oral biography quotes two people involved with the case who said Capote had distorted the portrayal of two people for the purpose of creating a stronger character. Capote painted one of the killers, Dick Hickock, as a "sex fiend . . . just to make a better story", according to the Kansas gaol chaplain, James Post. This came out after Hickock's son, who was a baby when his father had murdered the Clutters and had taken his stepfather's name after his mother's remarriage, was studying *In Cold Blood* at school. The boy was shocked when he eventually worked out his relationship to the notorious killer. Post was called in to help the teenager sort fact from fiction. Most people find the other murderer, Perry Smith, the most compelling figure in the book. At the time Capote's friends were struck by the physical similarities between the two (both were short and odd-looking) and by the similarities in their miserable childhoods. Capote kept reflecting on the different paths they had taken in their lives, but he clearly identified with Smith. Both men were homosexual, and one of the detectives on the case, Harold Nye, also told



Plimpton he believed Capote and Smith had become lovers while Smith was in gaol awaiting execution. Plimpton provides no corroborating evidence, but as far as I know the allegation has not been refuted. At the end of *In Cold Blood* Capote describes the executions in detail but while he watched Hickock hang, he fled the room when Smith was led to the scaffold. If all these statements are true, they spoil the book or at the least diminish the faith readers have in its veracity.

What these three examples illustrate is that journalism's ethical issues grow in direct proportion to the length of the story. As Walt Harrington, another American literary journalist, who these days writes primarily about ordinary people rather than celebrities, has put it: "If you aren't learning intimate details about your ordinary subjects that you believe are too personal for print, you're probably doing a poor job of reporting. If you don't often struggle with the ethics of what you will include in your profiles of ordinary people, you're either a schmuck or not really facing ethical dilemmas".⁷

1. Anna Funder is not a journalist, but she used journalistic methods to gather information: interviews, first-hand observation and gathering documentary source material. In an interview published in <fifth.estate.rmit.edu.au>, she said her models were literary journalists like George Orwell, Helen Garner and Janet Malcolm.
2. Steven Brill, 'Selling Snake Oil', *Brill's Content*, February 2000, pp.66-9.
3. Klose was interviewed on ABC Radio National's *The Media Report* on 5 August 2004.
4. Humphrey Carpenter, 'Learning about Ourselves: Biography as Autobiography', in *The Art of Literary Biography*, ed. John Batchelor, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995, pp.272-3.
5. For an account of this controversy see Margaret Simons' lecture 'Habits of Disdain: Myth, evidence and culture warriors', *Overland* 172, 2003, p.32.
6. Margaret Simons, *The Meeting of the Waters: The Hindmarsh Island Affair*, Hodder Headline, Sydney, p.220.
7. Quoted in *Literary Journalism: A New Collection of the Best American Nonfiction*, eds Norman Sims & Mark Kramer, Ballantine Books, New York, p.154.

Matthew Ricketson is a journalist and academic. A senior lecturer at RMIT, he has run its journalism program since 1995. His biography, Paul Jennings: 'The boy in the story is always me', was published by Viking in 2000. His anthology, The Best Australian Profiles, has just been published by Black Inc.

MISS GEMMELL REGRETS

Anatomy of a PR campaign

Honesty can be the most shocking thing of all.

—Nikki Gemmell, *Age Good Weekend*, 2004

MARCEL DUCHAMP's *The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even* was exhibited for the first time in 1926 at the Brooklyn Museum. Shortly after, it was accidentally broken. Duchamp, who had described the work as a "hilarious picture", carried out the laborious repairs himself. The piece, created from oil, wire, foil and dust on two glass panels, depicts the haphazard progress of "an encounter between the Bride in the upper panel, and her nine 'Bachelors', gathered timidly below amidst a wealth of mysterious mechanical apparatus".¹

This is a neat metaphor. Duchamp demonstrates that all too often women are left waiting while men attempt to sort through the myriad foreign apparatus that separate them. Fittingly, it is the artwork Australian author Nikki Gemmell refers to in the title of her most recent novel, *The Bride Stripped Bare* (HarperCollins Australia, 2003). Thematically, the novel relates well to Duchamp's vision of sexual politics. A central concern is the difficulty experienced by men and women relating to and communicating with each other. More interestingly, there are also parallels between the history and events surrounding the release of the artwork and the novel.

The Bride Stripped Bare was introduced to the world in October 2002 under the deliberately ambiguous name, 'Anonymous'. Marketed as "an explosive novel of sex, secrecy and escape",² it was touted as the work of an average London housewife, depressed and bored within the confines of her oppressive existence.

At least, that's what agent David Goodwin was telling everyone at the Frankfurt Book Fair: that the book had been sent to him anonymously. This was designed to send the Book Fair into a spin, and it did just that. By the fair's end, the *Daily Mail* was describing it as "the publishing sensation of the year".³ But the ensuing flurry of anticipation and mystery was ruined almost from the outset by the revelation that the novel had been written by ex-pat Australian author Nikki Gemmell. An established author, Gemmell was hardly the epitome of the bored housewife; and upon the book's release, Gemmell distanced herself from its content, initially denying her authorship and later expressing surprise at the fuss this created.

How was Gemmell exposed as the author? Reports vary—Gemmell herself claimed she had been outed by someone from within her publisher. Others speculated that the whole thing was an elaborate publisher ploy to generate interest. This is not entirely the truth because Gemmell in fact exposed herself. Back in September 2001, she did an interview with the *Australian's* Murray Waldren, where she not only described her next project as an honest account of sex and marriage, but also revealed the title of the novel. When Gemmell was reminded of this in a later interview with the *Australian*, she stated she had "completely forgotten giving such details to a journalist".⁴ She reiterated that her identity had been discovered by a British journalist who had relied on that most elusive of characters: the senior publishing source. Gemmell appears to be keeping with this version of events, later retelling it to Andrew Denton and other interviewers, and de-

cribing the experience as having been “unmasked very brutally by the British press”.⁵

This conscious creation of the ‘author self’ is not new, having been pioneered by Walt Whitman and Mark Twain to great effect. As with these authors, Gemmell effectively becomes the “author-commodity [wherein] . . . the author’s work and life [are] inextricably linked”.⁶ This has worked, with the hype surrounding *The Bride Stripped Bare* and very decent sales continuing.

The novel’s main claim to fame was its notoriety. From its inception it was promoted in terms of its perceived bravery, honesty and no-holds-barred approach to its subject matter: sex and marriage and what women are really thinking about, or in this case cringing about, in bed. Reviews were mixed. *The Bride Stripped Bare* is a polarising book: even when the brouhaha surrounding authorship (and therefore ownership) isn’t noted. One review “placed [the novel] at the intellectual and literary apex of chick lit”,⁷ while another described some of its sex scenes as “more error than Eros”.⁸

Every reviewer began by dealing with the issue of authorship and Gemmell’s exposure. Most then outlined the novel’s main theme: the apparent sexual liberation of a woman bound by the shackles of matrimony. It was generally agreed that the book offered food for thought, though how nourishing that food was, remained a source of contention.

A number of reviewers held that *The Bride Stripped Bare* is an unconvincing expression of modern feminist dogma. Michele Hewitson pointed out in the *New Zealand Herald* that “if the novel is supposed to be a portrait of a modern marriage it fails from the outset”. Deriding the novel’s “ugly depiction of a peculiarly old-fashioned marriage”, Hewitson also found herself “wishing . . . the good wife would give up . . . sexual liaisons with strangers and get herself a divorce lawyer”, adding, “now that might be liberating”.⁹

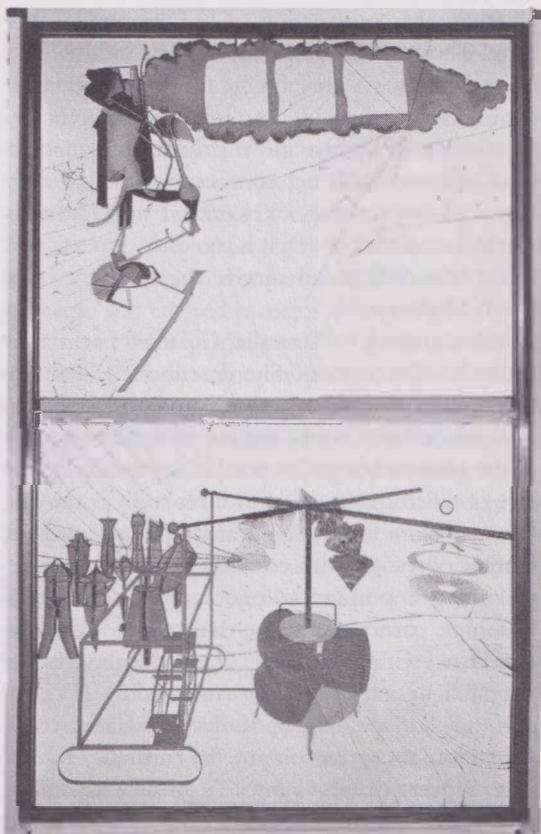
The negative response to the novel seems influenced by the reading of it as autobiography. Gemmell exacerbated this by promoting her book as if there were no apparent distinction between author and narrator, detailing how her feelings of marital dissatisfaction led her to write this novel, and how the novel has led to unresolved tension within her marriage. These ideas are expressed in interviews Gemmell gave and articles she wrote during a promotional visit to Australia.

An *Age* article describes Gemmell as “cheerful, direct, wildly outgoing and much, much too loud”. This, we are told, is “every Brit’s image of the expatriate Australian”.¹⁰ The interesting detail about this interview is the accompanying photograph. Gemmell is photographed in a faintly sexual pose, baring arms, legs and a hint of cleavage, smiling and relaxed. This looks like the sort of pose an agent would devise to ensure the headline: ‘The Author Stripped Bare’.

The image is one of a carefree and happy author, the very picture of success and contentment. But behind the giggly exterior lies the truth. Journalist Stephanie Bunbury notes that Gemmell needed a glass of wine to carry out the mid-morning interview. Gemmell’s nervousness seems at odds with the image she is attempting to project. While the author is depicted as casual and carefree, the person is nervous and calling for Dutch courage. In any case, Gemmell is gritting her teeth and bearing it.

This is one of the themes of *The Bride Stripped Bare* and one Gemmell is keen to open up for de-

Marcel Duchamp (1915–23), *The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*



Psycho,¹⁴ and then maintained complete silence for a year. In 1991 he conducted one interview with *Rolling Stone*, where he laughed off criticism, said that reviews meant nothing to him and that the novel had no autobiographical elements. In 1997 Ellis admitted the novel was autobiographical in parts and that he found the criticism hard to take. The next year he revealed that writing the novel coincided with a nervous breakdown and drug problem. But by 1999 literary critics were calling for this work to be added to the canon.

The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even, or 'The Glass' as Duchamp's work is known, draws people because of its "witty, intelligent and vastly liberating redefinition of what a work of art can be".¹⁵ If Gemmell had chosen to promote her novel more wisely, she might have enjoyed such praise. 'The Glass' was broken during its first exhibition and then repaired by the artist himself. Gemmell too may need to distance herself from the novel, and in the process repair perceptions of it.

1. Philadelphia Museum of Art, 'Modern and Contemporary Art', 1998, <www.philamuseum.org/collections/modern_contemporary/1952-981.shtml>.

2. Front cover blurb, Anonymous, *The Bride Stripped Bare*, Fourth Estate, London, 2003.
3. Stephanie Bunbury, 'The author stripped bare', *Age*, 28 June 2003.
4. Emma-Kate Symons, "'Anonymous" author stripped bare', *Australian*, 30 July 2003.
5. *Enough Rope with Andrew Denton*, ABC TV, 24 October 2003.
6. Joe Moran, *Star Authors*, University of Michigan Press, 2000, p.22.
7. Kathy Hunt, 'The Bride Stripped Bare', *Bulletin (Books)*, 13 August 2003.
8. Katharine England, 'Nikki Gemmell: The Bride Stripped Bare', *Advertiser*, 30 August 2003.
9. Michele Hewitson, 'Anonymous: The Bride Stripped Bare', *New Zealand Herald*, 18 August 2003.
10. Bunbury, *Age*, 2003.
11. Jason Steger, 'Author stripped bare as sex novel touches raw nerve', *Age*, 31 July 2003.
12. Paul Gray, 'Winfrey's Winners: Oprah recommends a book on TV and—bingo!—Her viewers turn it into an instant best seller', *Time* 148:25, 2 December 1996, p.84; Daisy Maryles, 'Behind the bestsellers', *Publishers Weekly* 244:9, 3 March 1997, p.18.
13. 'The Getting of Wisdom', *Age Good Weekend*, 10 January 2004, p.7.
14. Bret Easton Ellis, *American Psycho*, Vintage, New York, 1991.
15. Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1998.

Dr Lynda Hawryluk is a high school teacher and University of Western Sydney academic. Her PhD focused on Bret Easton Ellis and the author as celebrity.

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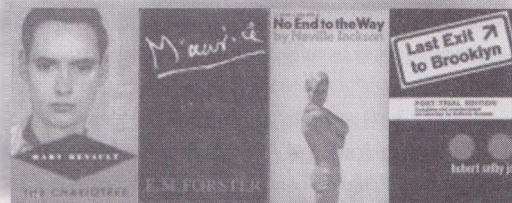
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CUDDLING THE WRONG CHARACTERS

Reading, writing and gay self-identity



CUDDLING UP WITH a good book. Wheezing and exhausted with childhood asthma, I was happy to read, to travel to other worlds on the words of numerous writers. I'd fall asleep and dream of being the cabin-boy sailing off with a galleon of pirates, camping in an Antarctic tent in the embrace of my loyal companions, sitting atop an elephant lurching through the jungle, firmly in the grip of my faithful bodyguard close behind me, bedding down in the hay with the other knaves while our knight went to seek his fair damsel, or working with my special friend to help resurrect the town after the flood. Finding pleasure in reading offers a lifelong diversion in solitude. Mark Mordue has suggested that Ivan Southall's books for children also helped him "fall in love with reading" and that Southall "put me on the path to becoming a writer".¹ I share these sentiments, though with hindsight I can see I was reading myself queer through gaps in Southall's (and other writers') narratives. I cuddled all the wrong characters as I cuddled up with my book. It wasn't until considerably after puberty that it dawned on me that most other boys weren't reading books this way. By the time I was 16, in 1968, I knew that the queer way I was reading texts was very much part of me. The only way I could find this part of myself was to read between the lines, to try and interpret seemingly impenetrable codes. There seemed nothing that directly identified even approximately what I felt.

At 16, of course, I was thinking about sex and looking in books for much more overt signs that there were other people like me in the world. Even if there'd been such a thing as a gay and lesbian

section in the local bookshop and library of the country town I grew up in, I wouldn't have been brave enough to get anything there. My eldest sister was trying to get me to walk "more like a man", and my father was cautioning me not to laugh too much with the "queen" in the bottle shop. In this climate, I found Brendan Behan's *Borstal Boy* and Hubert Selby Junior's *Last Exit to Brooklyn* appealed to me for their male-male relationships. But neither could be described as 'gay friendly'. While I was being treated everywhere to full and frank images of heterosexuality, there were no images with which I could identify.

Perhaps for this reason, as an adult I have spent many years seeking out reflective works of fiction that help me define my place as a homosexual in the modern world, as well as trying to create such works for myself and others. As Colm Tóibín notes, the "hidden part of the gay self remains hungry for such ratifying images".² At the outset I needed assurance I wasn't alone; then, as time went on and I was just another gay boy, books and writing provided comfort as I lost friends to AIDS. Now it's more . . . well . . . just what I do. And fortunately, these days, there are texts that speak directly to me, many created by writers doing much as I have done.

Serendipitously, my coming of age coincided with a change in social and legal perceptions of male homosexuality in the United Kingdom, the USA and Australia. This was slowly reflected in writing. In the early 1970s, as I emerged from my country cocoon, I began to discover both the coded works of the past and the uncoded works of my present. This was not a unique experience. Dennis Altman

has written that for him books “provided the most accessible sense of a larger community, and a way of understanding and accepting feelings which remained outside the norms of possible discussion. By the end of my teenage years I was beginning to find coded references to homosexuality in novels, even though they were for the most part extremely cautious ones”.³

These references were coded because in the United Kingdom and Australia laws relating to what was criminal and obscene governed what could be published. English law prevented the publication of works in which male homosexuality was written about approvingly. The legal logic was that, since male homosexuality was illegal, such works encouraged others to commit criminal acts.

Before 1967 in the United Kingdom the context of a happy homosexual conclusion, as exists in E.M. Forster’s *Maurice*, was problematic—it recommended criminal activity. *Maurice* was written in 1913 but not published until 1971. Forster held the book back from publication because, even if he had found a willing publisher in 1913, the ‘happy’ ending of the book would have been offensive to public morality.⁴ It is hardly remarkable that homosexuals in fiction have not been with us long. My friend the late Stephen Kirby wrote: “The critic and writer Nabokov claimed that the first homosexuals in modern fiction were a pair of degenerate lovers in Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*. By the turn of the [twentieth] century a series of works such as Gide’s *The Immoralist* and Mann’s *Death in Venice* had established the idea of the homosexual as outsider in Western literature”.⁵ It would take most of the twentieth century before a homosexual was seen to be an insider, that is, for there to be literary works with an overt homosexual point of view written and published in English-speaking countries.

For much of the twentieth century, the works that were published and had homosexual characters were either reproving of homosexuality or very difficult to interpret. As an example of the latter, Henry Handel Richardson’s homosexual character Krafft in *Maurice Guest* “is presented in such veiled terms that only someone reasonably good at reading between the lines could work out what is going on. Krafft is hysterical, easily over excited and given to passionate attachments to men. At first none of the other characters realise what is happening although one of them does remark that ‘there is too

much of the feminine in him’. When one of the main male characters is finally told, he is appalled”.⁶ Even if the reader can read between the lines, he or she can only absorb the accepted response to homosexuality; covert presentation, and then revulsion.

Censorship of works judged obscene according to strict and rigorous criteria was all-pervasive, and, with what opposition there was being met by the response of the creation of a severely curtailed funding body, there was little discontent or commentary expressed by booksellers or publishers or academics.

The popular press largely ignored homosexuality, with some indication coverage was deliberately excluded, especially by the newspaper proprietor Warwick Fairfax who lunched with his editor every day and pushed his views on content.⁷ As Graham Willett notes:

Part of the Australian authorities’ work was done for them . . . by overseas interests, particularly in relation to mass entertainment where censorship of books, plays and films reduced, if it did not eliminate, the depiction of homosexuality. Where it wasn’t ignored, it was portrayed negatively, or it was censored. Even when the thaw began in Europe and North America, Australia’s elaborate censorship structures continued their work. James Baldwin’s *Another country* was banned, as were Gore Vidal’s *City and the pillar* and even an eminently respectable academic work like D.J. West’s *Homosexuality*. In 1963, the British film *The leather boys* was banned for its depiction of homosexuality. And the major distributor of comics and magazines in Australia, Gordon and Gotch, ran its own private censorship system, in which it used its market dominance to force content changes upon publishers. One commentator [Charles Higham] noted that any sexual content was suspect to the company; homosexual content must have been even more so.⁸

There was little public outcry against this censorship although: “the lack of opposition to censorship in Australia can in some measure be attributed to the secrecy of the system. Until the 1930s few people outside the government and the book trade had any idea how it worked”.⁹ In practice, academics, librarians, members of professions such as medicine, labour leaders and, especially, the book trade, were ‘unofficial’ controllers of print in Australia. The book trade preferred to maintain a system of self-censorship. There was at any rate sufficient support for maintenance of the Customs agenda.

But, despite a labyrinth of bureaucracy devoted to keeping Australia free of the fictional 'filth' being published overseas, works did filter through, coded and uncoded, and they had their effect on readers. In my essay on G.M. Glaskin,¹⁰ I described the effect Glaskin's book *No End to the Way* (written under the pseudonym Neville Jackson) had on me as an emerging homosexual. Carolyn van Langenberg has since written that Glaskin received many letters from readers at the time of the book's publication that thanked him for the novel's honesty and positive ending.¹¹

When *No End to the Way* was first published in 1965, male homosexuality was still illegal both in the United Kingdom and Australia and this situation remained in some states for more than twenty years thereafter. The book met with the same problems identified by Forster, even though it was written fifty years after *Maurice!* The lack of punishment meted out to the main protagonists still presented problems. *Ozlit* is a web site that permits writers to place information online about themselves (so I assume an entry for Neville Jackson was contributed by Glaskin or an intimate). Apparently the pseudonym of Neville Jackson "was insisted upon by publishers Barrie & Rockliff, London, when [the book's] absence of the obligatory tragic ending by death of the main protagonist took three years to be passed by the UK Home Office".¹² The 1965 edition, according to this same source, was banned from entry to Australia, but brought in for sale in airports in 1967.

Graham Willett states that *No End to the Way* is the strongest literary representation of the fear that homosexuals experienced in the 1950s and that:

[t]he characters . . . are, in Ray's pithy phrase, perfectly well adjusted to their maladjustment, [yet] nonetheless subjected to the relentless pressure of a society that neither understands nor approves of their kind. All of this is reflected in a debilitating day-to-day fear: of the disapproval of family and friends; of being beaten up by the men they meet in bars; of blackmail; of police entrapment; of arrest, exposure, and disgrace. It is reflected too, in intolerable constraints on daily activities: in only being able to kiss good night if the street was dark enough; only being able to hold hands in cinemas and in the car if their touching was out of the line of sight; in searching for a flat where the windows were not open to on-

lookers who might see them forget themselves for a moment and kiss.¹³

This reading of the text suggests it is a perfect manual for how to live a gay life in 1950s and 1960s Australia. But what is important for a homosexual reader of Glaskin's narrative is that Ray doesn't renounce his sexuality or his promiscuity or even feel guilt over these. He surmounts, accepts, the difficulties and fears of the gay life.

No End to the Way is a fictional account of how individuals coped with this repressive life, but it accords with factual recollections. In April 1997 I interviewed Ron Austin, a longtime gay activist, born in 1929. Austin came to Sydney around April, 1954, to study at Art School. He told me:

When I came to Sydney, initially I shared with a young person from Art School. Our lives began to revolve around Art School—but I gradually began to move away from that and began to explore the nether worlds of gay society doing beats. At the same time I met a wonderful, very interesting woman with whom I had a relationship, but I began to see where my sexuality lay. The relationship with the woman was combined with very regular visiting of beats—at least each night of the week—and I was meeting some very interesting people. I was living in Crows Nest. I met Trevor. He was older than me and invited me to dinner at the Royal Automobile Club. He was ten years older than me—very successful, he had his own motor vehicle—he courted me, tried in a very indirect way to tell me whom I was. But I couldn't form a relationship with him because I wasn't mature enough to do so. If I'd been a little more grown up, it might have been a possibility but it's difficult to say because things were illegal and it was very hard to see things clearly. Trevor gave me *Quatrefoil* to read, one of the first gay novels, originally published in 1950. It was at one time published under another name. Interesting for the time it was written. I prefer *The Charioteer* by Mary Renault.¹⁴ I was aware when he gave it to me he was telling me something about myself.

When I look back at how I started to read and write works that reflected my own lifestyle I have to admit that sex tended to be key to my selection of works, and I devoured the most obvious first. My reading of Burroughs' erotic *The Wild Boys* in 1973 coincided with my coming out and the beginning of

a sex life. I read Vidal's *Myra Breckenridge* before I attempted *The City and the Pillar*. I didn't read Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* until 1977, by which time I was making my first attempts at writing with a homosexual voice. Having been gripped by a 'liberationist' ethos, I was also reading and writing with a political bent. It is not surprising that my first overt homonarrative appeared in a journal of sexual politics,¹⁵ though in 1975 when this happened there were even fewer outlets for openly homosexual work than there are today.

The editors to the first collection of Australian gay and lesbian writing in 1983 wrote that "many of the contributors [of whom I was one] are publicly speaking out for the first time about what is, for them, personal and individual and *still*, despite the remnants of liberal humanism, regarded as contemptible and threatening by a large section of society".¹⁶ In his foreword to the book, Dennis Altman notes "that lesbian/gay writing is precisely writing which names the previously unnameable . . . [and] that whatever homosexual feelings and emotions may have existed throughout history and across cultures, the idea of an identity based upon such emotions and behaviour is a comparatively recent and historically specific one".¹⁷ The book was reviewed in *Meanjin* under the heading 'invisible people'.¹⁸

Later, when sex was no longer the primary *raison d'être* for being gay, and I was progressing with my own writing, I diverted myself time and again in Joseph Hansen's books about the insurance investigator Dave Brandstetter.¹⁹ In the 1970s they were a pleasant diversion, as Hansen extended "the possibilities of the [detective] genre by imagining a range of male gender social roles with their own norms, particular identity and structure". In doing so, "not only the sexuality but also the sociocultural realm of men is pushed beyond the dominant and limited images of masculinity which prevail in popular cultural forms and social experience".²⁰ There are many other fine books from this period, many with more literary finesse than Hansen's works. Edmund White's *A Boy's Own Story* (1982) is an example. However, Hansen's complex meta-narrative details in intricate fashion an intriguingly consistent character, and with each of the novels there are aspects of narrative that, with differing degrees of success, provide a web of interests and issues to be explored. There are other American writers, such as Michael Nava, creating similar bodies of work, but such

extended narratives with male homosexuals as both protagonists and antagonists in Australia are still relatively hard to find, in spite of the fiction of Graeme Aitken, Peter Blazey, Tim Herbert, Dennis Altman, Clare McNab, Garry Dunne, Sasha Soldatow, Neal Drinnan, Phillip Scott, Christos Tsiolkas and Con Anemogiannis; and the poetry of Dorothy Porter, Margaret Bradstock, Joanne Burns, Louise Wakeling and Ian McNeill.²¹ There is nothing in Australian literature that yet provides the sustained, complex characterisation of the Brandstetter books.

By and large, I *am* happy with the progress and development of a distinct body of Australian homosexual writing since the 1970s. As a writer of works mostly with a homosexual perspective, I'm used to more rejection slips than most other writers, but I persevere because I feel a commitment to tell stories that are relevant to me and people like me. However, one recent rejection by a literary publisher disturbed me because the editor involved couldn't see why two gay male characters would still be afraid to be totally open about their sexuality. "It's 2003, after all," she in effect said. "The situation doesn't ring true. Gays are everywhere." Homosexuals may have a greater visibility, even acceptance, than when I was 16, but there are still difficulties for any current 16-year-old in accepting he or she is gay and in being accepted as such. Images everywhere, even subliminally, reinforce heterosexuality.

There is also still a strong cultural antipathy to homosexuality, despite legislative and social advances, alongside a pervasive sense that there is no longer a homosexual 'issue'. A colleague said to me just a few weeks ago, and she felt she was offering constructive advice: "Why do you have to make such a thing of it? Do you have to let everybody know you're gay?" For me, it's difficult to remain silent when the Anglican Archbishop of Sydney, Peter Jensen, repeats his dogma that God believes homosexuals are unworthy to minister to believers and the NSW Parliament has only just equalised the age of consent for male homosexuals and heterosexuals.²² Before the NSW laws were first changed in 1984 I had committed criminal acts for over fourteen years. It was a very significant event to me when finally I was aligned with the heterosexual majority, even if my colleague felt I should simply shut up and get on with life. (*Note to self*: what else have I been doing?)

While it mightn't seem as important as being

legally able to love another, being able to read about one's own sexuality is crucial. As with the legal status, openly gay fiction is a recent phenomenon. There remains a need for works that can offer positive narratives, as with *No End to the Way*, *Maurice* and the Brandstetter books.

A 1998 study by Macdonald and Cooper suggests that homophobic attitudes and lack of support for a divergent sexuality are reasons for the escalating incidence of suicide among young Australian males. Their study "initially focused on how the young men negotiated their sexuality during the process of coming out, and outlined key social issues and factors which the subjects felt had impacted on the process. Suicide attempts emerged as a significant theme in this process".²³ The dilemma of a divergent sexuality has been largely ignored in studies of youth suicide, perhaps deliberately so. "While the sexuality of young gays, lesbians and bisexuals is considered different to heterosexuality, in that it is not legitimised equally by law, religion and science," writes Mic Emslie, "the stories of this significant group will always be oppressed and excluded by these discourses, and subsequently marginalised and ignored in youth suicide policy and responses".²⁴ As Macdonald and Cooper note: "Young heterosexuals can turn to family and peers for support; however, young gays and lesbians find it difficult to seek help from family and friends. Thus the traditional areas of support for young heterosexuals—peers, family, and school—are often not available to gay young people".²⁵ Homosexuals, and male homosexuals in particular, also remain targets of hate crime. Motives for this are that "gay/lesbian bashings [are seen] as a recreational activity for some perpetrators because of the low social standing of homosexuals who are marginalised by social structures and legislative inequalities" as well as "the desire to defend one's place in a social order that disapproves of homosexuality and the belief that lesbians and gay men are unprotected and considered unimportant in society".²⁶

Colm Tóibín writes: "Other communities who have been oppressed—Jewish people, say, or Catholics in Northern Ireland—have every opportunity to work out the implications of their oppression in their early lives. They hear the stories; they have the books around them. Gay people, on the other hand, grow up alone; there is no history".²⁷ At present, despite the practical initiatives of writers such as Jenny

Pausacker, Australian literature offers Australia's young people few means of identifying with characters, themes or subjects that offer a viewpoint more in line with their developing identity. The continuing effect of this institutionalised homophobia highlights the need for young gay people to find a friendly point of view somewhere comfortable—perhaps cuddling up with a book and finding oneself in the pages.

1. Mark Mordue, 'The Secret Life of Us', *Australian Author* 35:1, 2003, p.8.
2. Colm Tóibín, *Love in a Dark Time*, Picador, Sydney, 2001, p.232.
3. Dennis Altman, *Defying Gravity*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1997, p.56.
4. In his terminal note to the book, written in 1960, Forster writes: "Happiness is [the book's] keynote—which by the way has had an unexpected result: it has made the book more difficult to publish. Unless the Wolfenden Report becomes law [which happened in 1967, legalising homosexuality], it will probably have to remain in manuscript. If it ended unhappily, with a lad dangling from a noose or with a suicide pact, all would be well, for there is no pornography or seduction of minors. But the lovers get away unpunished and consequently recommend crime". *Maurice*, W.W. Norton, New York, 1971, p.250.
5. Stephen Kirby, 'Gays in Oz Fiction', *Outrage* 51, 1987, pp.29–31.
6. Kirby, 'Gays in Oz Fiction', pp.29–30.
7. Robert French, *Gays Between the Broadsheets: Australian Media References to Homosexuality, 1948–1980*, Gay History Project, Sydney, 1986.
8. Graham Willett, 'The Darkest Decade: Homophobia in 1950s Australia', *Australian Historical Studies* 28:109, 1997, p.124.
9. Deana Heath, 'Literary Censorship, Imperialism and the White Australia Policy', in Martyn Lyons & John Arnold (eds), *The History of the Book in Australia 1891–1945: A National Culture in a Colonialised Market*, UQP, St Lucia, 2001, pp.77–8.
10. Jeremy Fisher, 'By permission of G.M. Glaskin', *Overland* 169, 2002, pp.55–8.
11. Carolyn van Langenberg, 'Correspondence', *Overland* 170, 2003, p.5.
12. <www.cf.vicnet.net.au/ozlit/writers.cfm?id=699> (Neville Jackson)
13. Willett, 'The Darkest Decade', p.129.
14. Mary Renault, *The charioteer*, Sceptre, London, 1986 (originally published 1953). Unfortunately, Ron did not remember how Trevor had obtained a copy of *Quatrefoil*.
15. J.A. Fisher, 'Fragments', *GLP: A Journal of Sexual Politics* 6, 1975.
16. M. Bradstock, G. Dunne, D. Sargent, & L. Wakeling (eds), 'Introduction', *Edge City on Two Different Plans*, Sydney Gay Writers' Collective, Leichhardt, 1983, p.16.
17. Dennis Altman, 'Foreword', in Bradstock, et al., *Edge City*, 1983, p.13.
18. Bev Roberts, 'Invisible People: Homosexuals in Australia', *Meanjin* 42:4, 1983, p.486.
19. Some of the books are: Joseph Hansen, *Fadeout*, Grafton Books, London, 1986 (first published 1970); *Death Claims*, Grafton Books, London, 1987 (first published 1973); *Troublemaker*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1981 (first published Harper & Row, New York, 1975); *Known Homosexual*, Brandon House, North Hollywood CA, 1968; *Stranger to Himself*, Major Books, Canoga Park CA, 1977;

- The Man Everybody Was Afraid Of*, Henry Holt and Company (Owl Books), New York, 1981 (first published Holt Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1978); *Skinflick*, Henry Holt and Company (Owl Books), New York, 1980 (first published by Henry Holt and Company, New York, 1979); *A Smile in His Lifetime*, 1981; *Backtrack*, Gay Men's Press, London, 1987 (first published 1982); *Gravedigger*, Panther Books, London, 1984 (first published 1982); *Job's Year*, Plume, New York, 1983; *Pretty Boy Dead*, Gay Sunshine Press, San Francisco, 1984; *Nightwork*, Panther Books, London, 1985 (first published 1984); *The Little Dog Laughed*, Henry Holt and Company (Owl Books), New York, 1987 (first published Henry Holt and Company, New York, 1986); *Early Graves*, Mysterious Press, New York, 1988 (first published by Mysterious Press, New York, 1987); *Obedience*, Mysterious Press, New York, 1989 (first published 1988); *The Boy Who Was Buried this Morning*, Plume, New York, 1991 (first published 1990); *The Country of Old Men*, Plume, New York, 1992 (first published 1991); *Bohannon's Country*, Penguin, New York, 1994; *Living Upstairs*, Plume, New York, 1993; *Jack of Hearts*, Plume, New York, 1996 (first published by Dutton, 1995).
20. Roger Bromley, 'The Novels of Joseph Hansen', in Derek Longhurst ed., *Gender, Genre and Narrative Pleasure*, Unwin Hyman, London, p.105.
 21. Each of these writers is worthy of separate discussion, as is Nigel Triffitt's *Cheap Thrills* (Outlaw Press, Fitzroy, 1994), that beautifully depicts a truly 'tragic queen' but has received almost no notice.
 22. This aberration had been in place since the parliament reluctantly removed laws against homosexuality in 1984. The challenge this posed for the right and left wings of the Labor Party, and the involvement of then Premier Neville Wran, is well documented in George Petersen, *George Petersen Remembers: The Contradictions, Problems and Betrayals of Labor in Government in New South Wales*, George Petersen, Shellharbour, 1998, pp.316-17, 363-5.
 23. Ross Macdonald and Trudi Cooper, 'Young gay men and suicide: A report of a study exploring the reasons which young men give for suicide ideation', *Youth Studies Australia* 17:4, December 1998, pp.23-7.
 24. Mic Emslie, 'Ignored to death: representations of young gay men, lesbians and bisexuals in Australian youth suicide policy and programs', *Youth Studies Australia* 15:4, December 1996, pp.38-42.
 25. Macdonald and Cooper, 'Young gay men and suicide', p.25.
 26. Jenny Mouzos and Sue Thompson, 'Comparison between gay hate-related homicides of men and other male homicides in New South Wales 1989-1999', *Current issues in criminal justice* 12:3, March 2001, pp.305-29. Mouzos and Thompson (p.318) document the brutality meted out to male homosexuals, and the relationship this has to their social activities: "... gay hate-related homicides of men are significantly more likely to involve a high level of brutality. For example, it is not uncommon to find that male victims of gay hate-related homicide have been repeatedly stabbed to death. In one incident, the gay victim had been stabbed approximately 75 times in the chest, and in another incident, the victim had been stabbed 35 times in the neck. Similarly, over the years the NHMP [National Homicide Monitoring Program] has recorded three cases of mutilation and dismemberment involving male victims. All of these cases involved gay hate-related homicides of men."
 27. Colm Tóibín, *Love in a dark time*, Picador, Sydney, 2001, p.9.
- Jeremy Fisher is Executive Director of the Australian Society of Authors. This work, written in a personal capacity, emanates from research at the University of Technology, Sydney.*

opinion | NIGEL FEATHERSTONE

LEGITIMACY

Fear is the parent of cruelty.

—James Anthony Froude, 1877

IMAGINE YOU HAVE a daughter, let's call her Mandy. She's your only child, bright as a button although recently you've noticed that something's troubling her. She's 29 years old, ahead of her a highly promising career as an architect. She lives in an old weatherboard house that she bought with Sam, her beloved partner of yonks—the two of them have done the place up and now it looks a million dollars. For a year Mandy and Sam have been talking of getting married, not the whole engagement-wedding-reception shebang, just something low-key. You love

the idea, you think Sam is one of the best people you know. Finally, a date is set and Mandy and Sam and you and your own beloved head down to Births, Deaths and Marriages. "Hi," says Mandy, her arm around Sam, "my partner and I are here to get married." The officer behind the counter looks at you all blankly. "I'm sorry," he says. You can't help yourself: you butt in: you ask him why he's sorry. "To get married couples have to be made up of a man and woman," he says without batting an eyelid. "This here is two women."

Over the course of the past year some of our world leaders—Australia’s Prime Minister and his close buddy the President of the United States, as well as the Pope—have firmly stated that the idea of homosexual marriage is simply wrong. John Howard has said that marriage is “the bedrock institution of our society”:¹ it is about children, and as homosexual people cannot have children, or so he thinks, then gay marriage is not good for the survival of the species. The Vatican has called for politicians to oppose the “gravely immoral” idea of a couple of blokes tying the knot.² And Mr Bush—well, he would probably just like to pile up a whole heap of naked gay men into a pyramid and have dogs bark at them, taking a few happy snaps along the way of course. Your Mandy is now classed as wicked as a terrorist, the princess of darkness, dressed in a hooded black cape, sickle in hand, coming for all and sundry.

What Mr Howard in particular does not tell us is that disallowing gay marriage contravenes Australia’s international commitments to human rights. What he also does not care to share with us is his real reason for not allowing people with differing sexualities to have their unions legally recognised. And that reason is fear. Fear of inspiring major social change. In an address on 8 July 2004, Mr Howard said, “I admit to being rather ambivalent about some of the changes we see in contemporary society”.³ No shit.

But first some obvious facts. Gay people have always existed and will continue to exist. Loving someone of your own sex is not inherently immoral. Some gay people form lifelong relationships. Some gay people choose to have children. Gay people can become parents whether they like it or not. Some gay people, like others, suffer from wandering eyes, tricky little hearts. How about that Butler quote: “What a mischievous devil love is”?

However, here’s one very important fact. Australia has made numerous commitments to the international community to uphold the rights of all people. Our nation has ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the International Labour Organisation Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention 1958. As such the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission has confirmed that our nation has undertaken to prohibit discrimina-

tion including on the basis of sexual orientation and trans-gender identity.⁴

But this is all just words on paper and legal shenanigans. It is fear, that supremely powerful emotion, that is the crux of the issue here. And since 11 September 2001 it’s on the basis of fear that we’ve been regularly asked to make our decisions, not on understanding and knowledge. Mr Howard wants us to believe that there’s more chance that we’ll be blown up by a terrorist than being hit by a car, and that our families are terribly under threat by gays and lesbians. As the Equal Rights Network has noted, “Forget Iraq and terrorism, the most urgent threat to Australia in the government’s eyes is legal equality for same-sex couples”.⁵

What happens if we forget about fear for just a few moments?

Legitimising homosexual marriage might help those lucky enough to be in love, but more importantly it would legitimise homosexuality full stop. Legitimising homosexuality would bring about consistency in Australia’s age of consent laws. It would allow gay and lesbian people to have the same leave entitlements as other workers. It would ensure that taxation obligations and benefits are the same for all regardless of sexuality. It would bring about changes in family law which currently do not protect rights and entitlements for all types of relationship. It would make fair how a deceased gay partner’s assets would be distributed. Perhaps most importantly, legitimising homosexuality would allow our gay students the opportunity to exist without being called faggots. Only Tasmania, NSW and the ACT include anti-vilification protection. In 2001 the Australian Family Association (AFA) was found guilty of vilification by the Advertising Standards Board (ASB) when it posted a billboard in West Perth that associated child sexual abuse with gay males. The ASB directed the AFA to remove the billboard, but the direction was ignored. No Federal or WA law currently exists to stop such blatant attacks.

But wait, there’s more.

It shouldn’t be unreasonable to hope that maybe this type of social change may even bring about a creative rethink in how our country deals with other matters of the heart and soul. Such as assisting those seeking refuge in this first-world country of ours. Improving Aboriginal health and achieving reconciliation. Reversing environmental degradation. Getting our relationship with our South-East Asian

neighbours back on track. And addressing the issue of our maturity and independence, that is, the idea of becoming a republic. But these are fringe issues and we're increasingly being told to fear the nastiness of the fringe.

The AFA believes that gay marriage would be the final nail in the coffin of heterosexual marriage and family. This view, the organisation says, is not discriminatory but just life. How's this for logic: "Yes, it is true, a homosexual cannot legally marry. But neither can a whole lot of people . . . A 5-year-old boy cannot get married. Three people cannot get married to each other . . . A girl cannot marry her pet goldfish"⁶ The Australian Christian Lobby has the same position, essentially because it believes "homosexual relationships are transitory" and because if gay marriage was allowed then "justifiably Australia could then equally define builders as bakers, cricket teams as football teams, teachers as dentists".⁷ The mind really does boggle.

But in reality it is our government's steadfast refusal to allow gay and lesbian people formal recognition of their relationships that is in fact the final nail in the coffin of freedom of full human expression.

The sounds of hammering were pretty loud on Thursday 27 May 2004, when the government tabled its Bill that sought to change the *Marriage Act*. Through this Bill the government seeks to insert a definition of marriage so that it will confirm the current common law interpretation that marriage is "a union between a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others". The Australian Labor Party sided with the government as it too believed the insertion of the definition was consistent with existing law and that "there has not been any broad community debate about changing the definition of marriage".⁸ However, the good news is that along with the Democrats and the Greens, Labor sent the issue, with that of same-sex adoption, to a Senate Committee for further investigation.

And while we're clutching onto the skerrick of good news that comes our way, in June this year the Democrats won a decade-long battle to end the core discrimination against same-sex couples under Commonwealth Superannuation Law. Since 1995, the Democrats have been calling for equality for same-sex couples so that a surviving partner can claim the death benefit of their loved one, and not

then be forced to pay a death tax on the lump sum payment, in keeping with the arrangements for heterosexual couples. This has now been achieved. Yes, good news indeed.

So, despite our fear-mongering Prime Minister and his band of yes ministers, aided and abetted by a we-agree-too Opposition, how about we have another go at imagining you have a daughter, Mandy, she's your only child. For a year she and Sam, her beloved partner of yonks, have been talking of getting married and now here you all are at Births, Deaths and Marriages, as happy as a tiddly family having Christmas lunch. "Hi," says Mandy, her arm around Sam, "my partner and I are here to get married." The officer behind the counter smiles and says, "Congratulations angels, come with me."

POSTSCRIPT

On 13 August 2004, after intense lobbying from the Christian right which culminated in a thousand-strong National Marriage Forum at Parliament House ("Blacks cannot stop being blacks," reckoned one speaker, "but gays can stop being gay"), the government reintroduced its Marriage Amendment Bill into the senate, where it was passed. The Australian Labor Party did not honour its commitment to allow full public consultation through the senate inquiry process and voted with the coalition. The Senate Committee is not scheduled to release its findings until October.

1. From commercial radio broadcaster Neil Mitchell's interview with the Prime Minister on 28 May 2004.
2. *Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons*, from the Offices of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Rome, 3 June 2003.
3. Transcript of the Prime Minister's address to the Enterprise Forum Lunch, entitled *Getting the Big Things Right: Goals and Responsibilities in a Fourth Term*, Hilton Hotel, Adelaide, 8 July 2004.
4. Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's Occasional Paper No. 5, February 1997.
5. Equal Rights Network press release, 23 June 2004.
6. *Clear Thinking on Equal Rights and Discrimination*, December 2003 <www.family.org.au>.
7. As stated in the ACL's suggested form letter response to the Senate Inquiry <www.acl.org.au>.
8. As stated in a letter to me from Bob McMullan, Member for Fraser, dated 23 June 2004.

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FOOTBALL, CULTURE & VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Or how the law lets women down

FROM THE WRITINGS of barrister Jocelyne Scutt¹ to the research by the Victorian Law Reform Commission² there is a growing body of anecdotal and empirical evidence that violence against women, of which rape is one form, is one of the great untold stories. Since the murder of my sister by her ex-boyfriend in 1987 and the manslaughter verdict that followed, I've pored over pages of court transcripts. These transcripts bristle with stories that offer profound insights into the culture of rape and the legal system's complicity, unwitting or otherwise, in it. The words of an accused man during the rape of a girl in the back seat of a Holden in Broadmeadows in 1966 were emblematic. When the girl cried, "I'll tell the police", our archetypal suburban thug had a ready-made answer. "We've done this before and never been caught," he replied with a laugh. It encapsulated the brazenness of the perpetrators of sexual assault found in files that have rarely, if ever, been deconstructed by academics or legal researchers.

Violence against women, whether rape, assault or murder, is one of our society's blind spots. It's for this reason that I've taken issue with the proposition by *Age* journalist Pamela Bone, that 'honour killings' are confined to Third World countries and Islamic states. On the contrary, most Western murders of a woman by her estranged or about to be estranged partner are about honour and are interpreted that way by our courts. Men invariably kill in these circumstances because the woman's departure has deprived them of a possession and, in their perception, belittled their status. Stripped of romantic clichés produced by a compliant media—'love pulls the trigger' (*R v. Cromie* [1987])—these family

murders are no more than savage 'honour killings'. And while our courts don't literally describe them this way, too often the rulings of judges and the legal precedents they apply have the same meaning.

In 1982 for example, not a soul protested when Justice Lush allowed a defence of provocation to a Turkish Muslim man, Mr Dincer. The fundamental test for a defence of provocation is that the actions of the deceased might cause an ordinary man, with the characteristics of the accused, to lose self-control and do what he did. Dincer stabbed his 16-year-old daughter Zerrin in the bedroom of her boyfriend's house. Colin Lovitt QC (of Jaidyn Leskie fame) argued that Zerrin's behaviour—having what was alleged to be an intimate relationship with her boyfriend—had brought dishonour on her father's family and his position in the community. That was the reason offered by defence counsel for the defendant driving to the house, losing control, dragging a knife from his sock and killing her. The judge who, instructively, had the power to refuse a defence of provocation, accepted the argument. It was also accepted by the jury, which found Dincer guilty only of manslaughter. In every sense this was an honour killing. Yet, it was not about Islam or race, but proprietary rights, rights that have become enshrined in the common law that underpins the defence of provocation.

The recent allegations of sexual assault in Rugby League and the Australian Football League, and the media narratives that have accompanied them, are consistent with the growing body of evidence of mainstream violence against women. The only thing that has changed is that women are more likely to

*'Sexual misconduct' and 'sex scandals' came to replace
'rape allegations' as a description of the events.*

make an allegation of rape than they might have before the arrival of contemporary feminist theory. What hasn't changed is the response of men in power. From Channel Nine's *Footy Show* panellist Sam Newman, a bastion of the old world, to the Offices of the Public Prosecutors, a narrative that continues to either blame women or work on the assumption that the community will never believe them continues to suppress the rights of women.

Whatever the truth of the rape allegations levelled against the two St Kilda Football Club players in April 2004, the narrative accompanying them was unequivocally discriminatory. While the events surrounding this celebrated case were sufficiently unusual and confused to make the laying of charges problematic, the same can hardly be said of the allegations in South Australia involving three AFL footballers. After the circumstances of this alleged sexual assault were detailed on the ABC's *Four Corners* program in May 2004, there was general disbelief in the community and the legal fraternity that not one of the footballers named as being part of the assault was charged.

The problem with the publicity surrounding the sudden raft of sexual assault allegations in the sporting community is that it might lead us to the dangerous conclusion that violence against women is confined to a subset within the culture rather than something institutionalised across the class divide. Without the complicity of a legal system created and fashioned by the educated middle class, this violence could not survive. That it does says much about the nature of power and gender relations in our society and probably explains why progressive intellectuals—with the exception of the likes of Jocelyne Scutt—have failed to document how the rights of women have been compromised by the criminal justice system. While public intellectuals have never been afraid to expose the perceived moral and ethical failings or bias of political leaders and historians, they've singularly failed to expose the intellectual and moral bankruptcy of those lawyers who, armed with patriarchal law, have bullied and harassed women, dead and alive, in our courts.

Without the 1987 murder of my sister and the facts unearthed in writing my book *Just Another Little Murder* (Allen & Unwin, 2002) I'd never have known that defence counsel Bob Kent (later judge Kent) believed that naked photos of Christine Boyce taken by her husband, Kevin Crowe, should be admitted as evidence in *R v. Crowe* (1987). I would never have discovered how Kent persuaded Justice McDonald that the jury would better understand why Crowe 'lost control' and shot his estranged wife dead in front of her two children. Kent successfully argued that the naked photos of Christine Boyce enabled the jury to understand that she was not only intelligent but "attractive" and that she was "somebody whom we could understand him (the killer) having a great passion for". Bob Kent died in 2001 from a heart attack, after months of criticism and a concerted campaign by his brothers on the bench, concerning his failure to complete his tax returns. How insignificant this seems in comparison with arguments he tendered in *R v. Crowe*.

If we understand how judges and defence lawyers have interpreted violence against women, as barrister Bob Kent did in *R v. Crowe*, and judge Justice Hampel did in *R v. Keogh* (my sister's case) we'll better understand the narrative that has accompanied the celebrated football allegations this year.

St Kilda coach Grant Thomas is a father of eight and Essendon legend Tim Watson has five children, three of whom are girls. In 1994 Watson was voted Victorian Father of the Year. They'd take a dim view of anyone suppressing the rights of their daughters.

Yet when allegations of rape engulfed two St Kilda players in April 2004, Watson and Thomas showed little empathy for the position of women. Thomas was reported in an *Age* article as saying the event would galvanise the club. Although they didn't say it publicly, St Kilda FC knew he should not have said this. When interviewed after a match a couple of weeks later, Thomas was far more circumspect.

Alongside the article in which Thomas was reported as using the term 'galvanise', Tim Watson began his weekly sports column on the back page

of the *Age* (Thursday 18 March) with the curious statement, “the past 48 hours has become a living nightmare for St Kilda players and officials”. He asked rhetorically what young footballers were expected to do with “women, banging on your door at 2 am”?

I know Watson personally and was disappointed with the article. In a response in the *Age* I asked why he ignored the emotional suffering of the alleged victim and wrote that he’d “unwittingly reinforced many of the prejudices that beset women who ‘cry rape’ and that the alleged perpetrator had become the victim and it was women that were implicated if not blamed for allegations of rape”.

Tim and I subsequently spoke about these issues. He was of the view that I’d misunderstood him and that with three daughters he couldn’t possibly condone sexual assault. Whatever his intentions, I was disappointed that yet again the culture that eulogised courage on the football field appeared to find itself looking for excuses or inadvertently explaining away the allegations of bullying and violence against women.

In the *Age* I’d put it this way:

Maybe Tim missed the fact that the woman making the rape allegation told police she consented to sex but not to sex with a second man? Leaving aside the veracity of this claim, in what subculture is it assumed that if a woman has sex with a man in one room she has consented to sex with a different man on the same night?

Until the rape laws were changed a decade ago the courts virtually demanded to know whether a woman was a virgin or was sexually active. They even wanted to know what the woman was wearing when the rape occurred. And despite welcome changes to the law defence barristers still have a field day with women who allege rape. That’s why rape is massively under reported and why only a very small percentage of rape cases result in a conviction. Women just aren’t believed.

Let’s state the facts. There is no evidence that men are commonly the victims of women who lie about rape, or that young men can’t differentiate between consensual sex and rape. Retelling stories about women allegedly chasing footballers for sex—as many men did in the aftermath of the allegations—only plays to the lies and the myths.

Throughout the whole saga it’s blokes who’ve

run the debate. When the *Footy Show* convened a panel to discuss the issue, no insider with a radical view of the culture of rape was interviewed. Not surprisingly, it was the *Footy Show* that announced there would be no charges against the St Kilda players. “The police are probably at the victim’s house as we speak,” a reporter told Eddie McGuire. The woman, a 19-year-old university student, was devastated when she saw the report on TV.

Then, in the wake of the allegations in Adelaide, one of the AFL’s more independent thinkers, Jason Akermanis, waded into the quagmire. On the *Footy Show*’s 13 May edition he said the *Four Corners* program was “biased” and he’d become the victim of “rumours”. Although he had every right to be upset that some people had privately and wrongly suggested he was present in a room in London where a woman told *Four Corners* she’d been sexually assaulted (no charges were laid), Akermanis should have at least addressed the allegations made by the woman and pondered why she was paid \$200,000 in compensation by three AFL footballers. Yet again the celebrity footballer had become the victim. Whatever the truth of the London allegations, and whatever the failings of the *Four Corners* program, the Adelaide allegations were astounding and the refusal of the DPP to press charges disturbing. This, unfortunately, is the world of rape and violence against women.

Half a season later these sexual allegations, like the majority of claims made by women, have been buried at the DPP. So focused are the St Kilda players that the club sits on top of the AFL ladder. Yet in the community and in the ranks of women there is a discernible disquiet.

Had the Victorian Director of the Office of Public Prosecutions, Paul Coghlan QC, addressed the assertions in the dominant male narrative he’d have said there would be no trial only because ‘there was no reasonable prospect of a conviction’. More importantly, he’d have said ‘the woman was telling the truth when she said she believed she had been raped’. If pressed he’d have added that she was a ‘courageous’ modern woman who, like the overwhelming majority of women who bring rape allegations, was telling the truth when she said she had engaged in sexual acts on terms that weren’t her own. By reinforcing the view that she was not a chattel this woman was breaking new social and cultural ground. Whatever the accused man thought about the mat-

Public intellectuals have singularly failed to expose the intellectual and moral bankruptcy of those lawyers who, armed with patriarchal law, have bullied and harassed women, dead and alive, in our courts.

ter of consent, the woman believed her rights had been infringed. And it was for this reason, not because of malice, that she sought redress.

If only Paul Coghlan had looked down the barrel of the camera and told the blokes this. Regrettably, the absence of a proper press conference to explain why no charges would be laid has meant that the public understanding of the laws governing sexual assault has not been enhanced. As a result, the more vociferous in the male bastions in the media would continue to have us believe footballers are potential victims of conniving women. This was no better illustrated than in the public comments of Wayne Carey's manager Ricky Nixon, who, after his client was famously charged with grabbing a young woman's breasts in King Street Melbourne, late at night in 1995, told the media that footballers would be too scared to go out at night. That Carey was found guilty of the offence only confirmed how irrational and inappropriate this comment had been.

Nearly a decade later, the St Kilda FC was asked to answer a question that was as damning of women as Nixon's aside. In the *Age* the club denied that it was considering laying defamation charges against one of the women. The club says it has no idea where this story came from. Yet like Nixon's comments in 1995, the question carried the clear implication that women were predators and that sexual assault allegations were a means by which women brought men down.

On face value it appeared that a narrative that began with all the promise of cracking open the edifice of misogyny and secret men's business had died on the altar of legal due process and cultural prejudice. It was left to Sam Newman to deliver the coup de grâce. "Women are liars and schemers," he told his audience, in the aftermath of a story that a St Kilda player had grabbed a woman by the arm in a Sorrento hotel and attempted to drag her into the toilets. The woman, who had only gone public after comments from St Kilda to the effect that it didn't occur, swears that it did. There was no allegation of rape, but was it another example of the

proprietary view of men towards women? And is it really the end of the debate?

In just about every narrative that accompanied the allegations in Sydney and Melbourne men were portrayed as victims. On ABC Morning Radio, former AFL coach and player and co-host of Channel Seven's *Talking Footy*, David Parkin, described footballers as "risk-takers". Coming from an educated and thoughtful man it was a puzzling comment. Even if elite athletes were 'risk-takers', such an explanation in no way dealt with the vexed cocktail of power and sex that is rape. Feminists might be forgiven for saying it had the capacity to romanticise abusive behaviour and institutionalise discrimination against them. Did the dominant male narrative mistake the female assault on criminal rape as a broadside against male philandering? How else do we explain the irrationality of this narrative and its inability to accept that consensual sex is fundamentally different from rape and that men are not confused about this issue? That the expressions, 'sexual misconduct' and 'sex scandals' came to replace 'rape allegations' as a description of the events suggests this might be the case.

Former Carlton president, John Elliott, didn't bother with euphemisms when interviewed on the *Four Corners* program. His outrage at AFL CEO Andrew Demetriou's call for women who claimed to have been sexually assaulted to come forward had all the hallmarks of a man fighting to protect this secret men's business. Without even addressing the issue of whether men raped women, whether rape was under-reported or whether there had been sexual assault cover-ups in football, Elliott savaged Demetriou. Collingwood president Eddie McGuire had also expressed reservations about Demetriou's public statements on the matter. Educated in working-class Coburg and at La Trobe University, Demetriou clearly understands the social framework in which the rape allegations are occurring.

Although rape laws have changed in such a way as to preclude defence counsel from questioning a woman about her sexual history, it remains a cru-

cial question for the courts. Despite NSW Detective Chief Inspector Jason Breton saying there was evidence of rape, and that the woman who made the rape allegations against the Canterbury Bulldogs in Coffs Harbour was devastated by what had happened, no charges were laid. When all the legal argument was swept aside, one telling fact remained. As the *Australian* confirmed with a headline that carried the words ‘admits previous group sex with players’, there’s more to rape than the question of consent.

Whatever happened by the swimming pool in Coffs Harbour, the woman’s sexual history was obviously an impediment to her proving her allegations. It’s often argued that because our society is increasingly sexualised and women are more sexually active than in the past, it’s more difficult for a woman who alleges rape to be believed. This is something of a paradox. In the case in Adelaide it was said that the woman was a virgin. This clearly didn’t help her to mount a case. The empirical evidence doesn’t necessarily support the proposition that rape is harder to prove in a more sexualised society.

Most women are raped by someone known to them. In such cases, even in a less sexually active time, the defence invariably draws a link between the woman’s sexuality and the sexual dimensions of the rape. If the alleged victim isn’t sexually active she’ll be portrayed as being in the act of seeking sex. The criminal records carry any number of such cases. At the Preston Magistrates’ Court on 8 May 1959, Frank Galbally followed this time-honoured duplicitous legal path:

Galbally: What did you give as your occupation?

Girl: Trimmer.

Galbally: You normally wear cosmetics, lipstick?

Girl: Yes.

Galbally: And powder?

Girl: Yes.

Galbally: You haven’t any on today, have you?

Girl: Yes.

Galbally: What? Have you your normal cosmetics on your face today?

Girl: No.

Galbally: Why haven’t you your normal cosmetics on today?

Girl: I don’t usually wear them during the week.

Galbally’s intentions were clear. If he’d been able to substitute the vernacular for the legal ruse he’d

probably have said, “a girl dolled up with lipstick and make-up is obviously looking for a fuck, Your Honour”.

When the case went to the County Court, defence counsel Mick O’Sullivan adopted the same theme. O’Sullivan offered an interpretation that cut to the heart of the prejudice that confronted women then and continues to confront them nearly half a century later:

Your Honour, here is a girl with her background. At the time she was a 14-year-old kiddie, going out with boys, drinking beer. The type of girl who is taking a bottle to her own home, 14, early 15, going off into hotels buying bottles of beer, taking them to the pictures and hiding them down the lane at the back of the pictures. And at half-time inviting the boys of the village down to drink beer with them for twelve or eighteen months before this. I am not blaming the kid, but that is her background and she is a girl who has gone to these rough ballrooms where the police have to break it up. And she has been to these various places and talked amongst her girlfriends in the language she described, and in the permanent company of boys who talk and give lectures on sex. She has to go home and tell her parents she ‘went down the lane’, ‘what were you doing there?’—‘I go there with boys’.

“I think I appreciate fully the way that is put,” replied Justice Adam. It seemed to matter nought that the girl was a virgin before the rape and that there was no evidence to suggest that the girl behaved in the way O’Sullivan claimed. Yet just as the contemporary male narrative blamed women when they made rape allegations (girls banging on your door at 2 am) so defence counsel blamed the girl for the bullying and fighting of young men in the local picture theatres. Even if she had been in the company of these men, what relevance did it have to the allegation, substantiated by her girlfriend, that she had been dragged screaming from a bus stop outside some shops in Station Street, Northcote and raped in an adjoining laneway?

Upon the jury returning a guilty verdict the judge delivered the final card in the deck of prejudice:

I do take into account also the fact that this young girl, was, to say the least of it, acting indiscreetly and unwisely. And that had she known that she was to be subjected to the attacks that were made on her, she no doubt would have acted differently. She did act

unwisely with her companion in . . . remaining out after the pictures that night, looking for fun . . . [and] . . . walking the streets in this mood . . . it should provide a lesson to many parents . . . they have no business to be out at this very late hour. It was court-ning trouble . . .

To accuse two girls of “acting very indiscreetly” and “remaining out after the pictures that night, looking for fun . . . [and] . . . walking the streets in this mood” was to severely restrict the human rights of these girls and ameliorate the actions of the men.

While the law was allowed to damn the young woman in Northcote by way of the company she kept and the social class she inhabited, it's instructive the jury appeared to act with a level of common sense and sensitivity that eluded the judge.

Forty years on, many of us find it hard to believe that this form of questioning went on in a courtroom. But has the legal and cultural narrative that accompanies rape allegations and trials really changed? Whether the girl in the laneway in 1959 said ‘yes’ or ‘no’ seemed far less important than whether she knocked around with girls who drank beer, wore lipstick or, as defence argued, used the word ‘cunt’. A girl who frolics or stays out late, even if she's a virgin, can't be raped. Was that the moral of the story? Had the judge been on the jury would he have found the men guilty of rape? I have my doubts.

The crime of a married woman who alleged rape in Brunswick in 1961 wasn't that she frolicked, but that she was the object of a man's desire. In court the defence made much of the fact that she swam at the Brunswick Baths and that in a swimsuit she was a picture of beauty and object of carnal desire. She was even asked whether she knew that local men called her ‘the body’. Forty years later the hypocrisy was brought into stark relief as members of the Brunswick community objected when Islamic women argued that they should have recourse to women's-only pool sessions at the same pool.

The irony is as breathtaking as the words of the judge when he summed up the Brunswick rape case. “Decent respectable women deserve the fullest protection of the law,” he said. What if she wasn't decent or respectable? What if she was forced to earn her living as a sex worker like Christine Boyce or the woman in the celebrated *R v. Hakopian* (1990) case? In the latter case a judge ‘discounted’ the penalty on the grounds that as the raped woman was a

sex worker she was less likely to be traumatised by the act than a ‘chaste woman’. What if she was a so-called ‘groupie’ or the kind of woman who chased after footballers?

The narratives that accompanied the allegations in Coff's Harbour and Melbourne are as worrying as those in the 1950s and sixties. In Coff's Harbour a woman who had once said ‘yes’ found it extremely difficult to prove that she could at another time say ‘no’. In Melbourne some men appeared to find it totally absurd that a woman who had engaged in consensual sex with one man could claim to have been raped by his mate.

On the day that charges were dropped against the two St Kilda players, human rights advocate and County Court judge Marcus Einfeld told the ABC's *LateLine* program that women ‘groupies’ needed to understand just how difficult it was to prove rape if you had previously engaged in consensual sex of that kind. What I believe he should have done was to explain why the use of pejorative language such as ‘groupie’ was as inappropriate and discriminatory to women as ‘queue jumper’ was to asylum seekers.

The rape and murder cases cited in this article are not atypical of the criminal justice system. They're emblematic of how the system has failed to enshrine the rights of women. It's scandalous that so little has been written about cases such as these. In no other intellectual discipline is so much hidden from proper scrutiny and assessment. The argument that the absence of criticism is a product of the law's passionate commitment to a presumption of innocence has had its day.

It's time to affirm the human rights of all women, irrespective of their sexual behaviour, and enshrine in law their inalienable right not to be killed after they leave or threaten to leave a man. As long as we allow the law of provocation to be used in the way it has been by judges our society is complicit in the violence against women. Every time we let a judge grant a defence of provocation on the grounds that, as was my sister's case, she allegedly swore at an armed man when he confronted her at her car door, we diminish a woman's rights. Whenever we allow public prosecutors to enlist outdated understandings of what the community believes is ‘a reasonable prospect of conviction’, we legitimise violence against women and give comfort to the narrative that sees women as culpable for what men do. It's hardly sur-

prising that one of the law's greatest critics, Tasmanian Anti-Discrimination Commissioner Jocelynn Scutt, is one of the strongest voices for allowing more rape allegations to be decided by juries rather than the Public Prosecutor.

In the old puritanical world where John Howard's picket fence was a symbol of safety, harmony and respect for women, criminal justice records reveal that even virgins ran the gauntlet of discrimination when they 'cried rape'. Today the 'liberated' modern woman endures new forms of prejudice should she say 'no' to sex. And equally, the much-vaunted common law, as applied in criminal justice, is a minefield of discrimination against women. And all the protestations about 'presumption of innocence' are mere cant designed to allow the legal system to draw on deep-seated layers of institutionalised prejudice.

While it's imperative that the legal profession begins to muster the same passion for the rights of

female victims of intimate violence as it does for refugees, it alone can't solve the problem. The woman who alleged rape at the hands of a St Kilda player did as much as any lawyer has ever done to liberate women from the vortex. Even if the act to which she objected was not rape, it was, she believed, an act of proprietorship, one that offers an insight into the cultural landscape of sexual assault. Maybe this and the emerging revelations will be a starting point for the debate we must have if we're all to be liberated from the myth that women are liars and schemers.

1. Jocelynn A. Scutt, *The Incredible Woman: Power and Sexual Politics*, Artemis Publishing, Melbourne, 1997.
2. Victorian Law Reform Commission, *Sexual Offences—Law and Procedure: Discussion Paper*, 2001.

Phil Cleary is a political leader, teacher, journalist, author and Victorian Football Association legend. He delivered this lecture at Trades Hall in Melbourne on 30 June 2004.

opinion | LIZ CONOR

IN A LEAGUE OF THEIR OWN

IN THE TAWDRY PILE of sexual misdemeanours by footballers, recently come to light, there are two exchanges that will be hard for the AFL to erase from memory, in spite of expensive campaigns to win back women supporters. As the rape allegations surfaced the Canterbury football club was asked to verify whether the club had orchestrated gang-bangs with prostitutes to promote team bonding. In 2002 Wayne Carey had consensual sex with his vice captain's wife. Carey resigned from North Melbourne in disgrace.

These consensual trysts are small fries against rape allegations. But they will stick in the AFL craw because they are instances of the same unwritten code. In male-only organisations women or images of women become sexually exchanged between

members as a means to affirm and express that membership. Carey transgressed that code by sexually possessing a woman who belonged to another member. To some extent his flouting of this code had more serious consequences than if he'd been accused of rape, which is within the code.

This code is not particular to football clubs. It can be found in any homosocial organisation that is built on the exclusion of women. It can recruit some young men into a distinct sexual identity: a sexuality in league, in which men perform sexual acts in each other's company—that is, *with each other*—via the medium of a woman's body. In recent studies Australia has the dubious distinction of being the only country in which men visit prostitutes in groups and have sex in each other's company.

Historically, homosocial organisations have included the Catholic church, the armed forces, the private business sector and government and the elite private boys' schools that supply them. Most have histories of sexual abuse and harassment of women and some of children. Some include the bastardisation of young men who resist recruitment into league sexuality. Statistically, studies have found a correlation between sexual assault and the lack of women's participation in decision-making and positions of authority. Countries with no or few women in positions of government, for instance, are known to have higher incidences of sexual assault.

The privilege and authority of these organisations has gained legitimacy over time through the exclusion of women. Their anachronism today has been exposed in their responses to sexual assault. The football industry is going through the same upheavals the Catholic church, the army, and many other 'male bastions' have variously negotiated. What none of them has seriously considered however, is how important women are to their identity as organisations, how the exclusion, abuse and sometimes the sexual exchange of women in fact organises the masculine identity of these 'male bastions'. Nor have they considered how crucially

important that exchange of women is in deflecting the uncomfortable association of homosociality with homosexuality.

The occasional admission of women into these fraternities for ritualised sexual acts, with prostitutes, in gang-bangs or rape scenarios, is how homosocial organisations enforce and guarantee their identity as heterosexual. The woman in question represents the feminine and has to be both repudiated and desired at the same time. She is positioned as central to the sex act; in fact the organising feature of homosocial sex is that men are fucking in each other's company, which is a short leap from, *together*. The ambivalence about her very presence, not to mention about these heterosexually-identified men having sex together, makes her vulnerable to misogynistic derision and violence.

Sexual assault allegations strike at the core of the homosocial order—it's no small wonder they're so often mishandled. Unlike drink driving or drug abuse, rape unmasks the organising principle of homosociality: the operational exclusion and the sexual exchange of women between its members.

The kudos that comes with membership is used to exploit victims: the moral authority of the priest, the weaponry of the soldier, the celebrity of the footballer. The closing of ranks in the face of rape allegations shows up the real game as being men's hierarchical relations with each other, and the game will go on. Not one charge of rape has been brought against an AFL footballer in twenty years. Mother's day bonanzas notwithstanding, the *Footy Show* will never include women as anything more than bystanders, fans, or props for the real action between Newman and McGuire. The AFL responded to calls to change its gender culture by launching a range of women's lingerie in clubs' colours, to coincide with Women's Week. Female Board Members from Collingwood and Carlton criticised the launch, describing it as inappropriate.

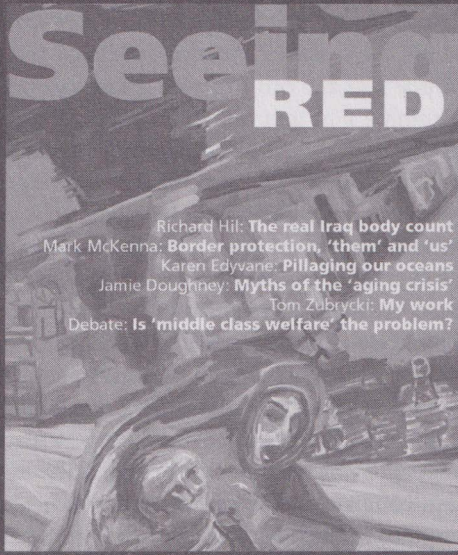
If the AFL is genuine about a culture of respect for women it needs to include more women in the decision-making of the league, drawing on years of voluntary labour and grassroots knowledge of the game. If it fails, the AFL faces the prospect of women supporters and volunteers telling them, "You're on your own boys. Really".

Liz Conor is the author of the recently-released book The Spectacular Modern Woman and a postdoctoral Research Fellow at Melbourne University.

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WORDS

IF ONLY I'D BEEN more . . . what's the word? When you know what to say, and can say it properly so they understand. Look it up. That's what they always told me at school when I couldn't spell something, or couldn't think of the right word. So how are you supposed to look it up when you can't spell the frigger or don't even know what it is? Just the feeling. Like what *are* the right words to describe what it feels like to wake up with someone inside you and a fist in your face?

What was it he said to me, right after *Call me Allan*? And after he told me there wasn't much hope, since *he* got himself an expensive lawyer, who'd had heaps of time to prepare, while Allan just got the notes this morning but he'll do the best he can. Prosecution's stretched pretty thin. What was it he said? Try to be more . . . articulate. That was during the five-minute meeting we had before court. That was the word. Articulate. I didn't quite twig what it meant until afterwards. When he told me I'd been anything but. He wasn't mean about it or anything. He just looked tired. He packed his briefcase slowly, and left the room. He didn't look back at me.

Articulate. Well, the teachers used to tell me to look things up. So let's give it try. Maybe there was something useful in it all, after all. **Articulate.** Able to speak coherently. What does that mean? The thesaurus. Miss Wieck used to swear by the thesaurus. Give that a go. Clear, coherent, comprehensible, eloquent, expressive, fluent, intelligible, lucid, meaningful, understandable,

well-spoken. Well, Allan was right. I was the opposite. I guess that's what they mean by antonyms. Dumb, faltering, halting, hesitant, incoherent, poorly spoken, unclear . . . voiceless.

I didn't take school all that serious. You don't need Senior to gut the chickens at the meat works. And you just have to suck up to the shift boss to get to do the hosing. And have a little upper body strength. I always love that job. Holding the great nozzle, directing the flow just where I want it to go. A great rush, like when the fires came to school, and showed off the hose. OK, not quite so big, but a great foaming rush all the same. Mixing with the blood. Gallons of it. But I can water it down and make it less angry. Wash it all off the cool cement, into the creek, where it can do some good. When I was little, I used to imagine everything that went down our drains went to feed a whole race of beings that lived beneath the house, even the shit and piss from the toilet. Nothing was wasted; anything that was washed away went to do some good purpose somewhere else.

Well, I like to think that the blood and guts and shit of those poor dumb birds does some good somewhere as well. Something in that creek must like to eat it. Eels or something. Yabbies. Even a short shit life should serve some purpose. So I like to stand there and direct that foaming rush. Tell it where I want it to go and it does it. Turns off when I'm ready for it to. Don't need Senior for that. Not even to be shift boss. Just have to boss people around.

And even if I was smarter, I don't think there's a word for I-was-stupid-to-trust-a-stranger-stupid's-not-a-crime-rape-is.

Juries hate criers. Another thing Allan told me. But I had to sit there and look at him. Sitting there like Mr Happy-go-lucky. They didn't make *him* get up and describe his sex life. They didn't discuss *his* medical records. And they didn't trot out *his* underwear to show to everyone. Let them take it into their little jury room and have a good look at it. A good sniff.

He just looked so *normal* and *OK*. I couldn't come up with the words to describe what someone who seemed so nice turned into in a split second. *Mean*. That was the best I could do. *Mean*. I could see Allan shrinking with every crap answer I gave. The thesaurus. I should've had that damn thesaurus with me. *Mean*. Bad-tempered, churlish, disagreeable, hostile. Not even close. Despicable, dishonourable, hard-hearted, low-minded. Maybe it wouldn't have helped. Maybe the words really don't exist.

It's cold comfort. But I console myself with it anyway. It was my lack of words. Or believability. Is that a word? Well *believable* is. Acceptable, authentic, credible. *Credibility*. Believability (there, it does exist), integrity, reliability, trustworthiness. I failed to convince anyone that I was trustworthy. But I am. I can be trusted. I tell the truth. Why didn't I pick the right words to make them see that? Why didn't I have the right words? I just didn't know them. I still don't. So there's nothing more I could've done. It was me, not him. Me being thick, not him being innocent.

Which is why I found myself this morning, stand-

ing on the footpath outside the courthouse, catching my breath and rummaging in my bag for a hankie. *You are free to leave the court*. The words which condemned me. Because I'm out here. And so is he. And I know I wasn't meant to, but I overheard the bailiff. In the foyer, as I was waiting to leave. I wanted to thank Allan for at least trying. I couldn't help it. I was watching Judge Judy on the TV. They didn't see me there. It happens a lot. *That's not the first time we've seen him. And it won't be the last. Maybe next time he'll make a mistake and we'll have him eh?* The two of them disappeared into the staff tea-room.

So I had it. They score demerits against mistakes, and the best tally wins. I'm no good at games and I'm no good with words. I'm just good at gutting and plucking and hosing gore out of sight.

So I was out there on the footpath. The late afternoon sun made my shadow look like a stilt walker. Trying to sniff back snot and those pathetic tears with a little girly hanky. *Kitten says meow* in faded lettering, with a picture of two greeting-card kittens smiling damply at me. I had to laugh. How long since I bought hankies? Never. This one came with me when I left home. Mum told me to carry a clean hanky and not to talk to strangers. But she didn't tell me what a stranger is. That a stranger can be a guy you know.

And there he is, striding down the street, like a man who owns the world, which is what he is. He's off to celebrate freedom. At the pub. Where everyone knows the right words. The young girl at the corner of the bar, sampling the big wide world for the first time, *You look like a nice guy*. And him, *You look like a nice girl. Let me buy you a drink*.

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TALK IS CHEAP

ANDY SMOKED A JOINT before he set off for his first session alone with Suzie. It was a spur of the moment thing, a whim really. Living with his parents had caused him to regress and sneak around like he did when he was a kid. He'd found the stash in the garage when he was searching for a bicycle pump. He rolled it up with the dregs of stale tobacco he'd found with it, a crumbling little handful of Bank, and sucked the smoke deep into his lungs.

It was supposed to be couples counselling, but he was booked in for a solo session at Suzie's suggestion. Suzie said she thought it would be good for him. He wondered how Suzie knew what was good for him, or for anyone else for that matter. What did they teach her at uni that made her so certain she knew what other people needed? What about her own life? Shouldn't she say more about that and use it as an example? But she never let anything slip.

He thought about what it might be like, just the two of them in her consulting room with its lush amber glow and the smell of aromatherapy oils burning on the coffee table. How would she be with just him there and no ally, no Liz with whom to exchange those knowing looks?

Every complaint that Liz had made about her husband in their sessions with Suzie, from his obsessions with cars and motorbikes to his poor time-sense to his apparent infidelity, seemed to require no evidence. None at all. Suzie took Liz on her word. Her word was law. Liz was never pressed to give any examples to back her claims or even ex-

pand on them, while his defence often came under intense scrutiny and usually had to carry the burden of proof. He hoped this wasn't his own paranoia and now that he had smoked the joint it made it even harder for him to think clearly about what was going on in that room with those sensual, warm colours and low, soft lighting. Like an old-style bordello.

"Can you be more specific, Andy? We can't work with generalities," Suzie would say and Liz would nod and say "You see?" to Suzie. And he would be so stunned by the injustice of it that he could hardly speak. Specific? What about her? Where are her details? All she has to do is talk about her feelings—vague stuff—and that's enough. It was a muddle to him, the rules always shifting and adjusting so that he couldn't keep up while Suzie and Liz seemed to know instinctively how to talk and make sense to each other. There was a lot of nodding going on between them, a lot of agreement. And plenty of cold stares directed at him, many withering looks, as if he was a fool of indescribable proportions. It was as if they were talking another language, one that he was too stupid or too selfish, to comprehend.

This time, with just him and Suzie, he could clear a few things up, and maybe be more specific if that was what she wanted. In fact, he would get right down to tin tacks.

The dope had certainly enhanced the pleasure of the ride from the northern suburbs where he was staying with his parents, to Suzie's place in the hilly backstreets of the east. They were wide streets with

plane trees, well-tended gardens on large blocks with that dignified hush that was the special preserve of people with money. People were more private in these kinds of suburbs; they stifled their sobs and muffled their shouts behind rendered double brick, behind thick hedges in houses set well back from the road. It was the kind of place that Liz aspired to from the middle range suburb where they lived. Even in that part of the world you could still hear your neighbours arguing; the brick was just veneer after all.

Right from the start Liz had admired Suzie's house, the silver Citroen out the front, the English garden with its camellias and rhododendrons and rose bushes and the kidney shaped lawn with neatly clipped edges and the liquid amber shading the yard. If they had such a place it would be Andy who kept the edges clipped, the hedge trimmed and it would be he who raked and swept the leaves that would litter the ground like chip packets blowing around in the autumn winds. He didn't like trees that made rubbish. But even if he could afford a gardener he would never, under any circumstances, pay someone to do something he was capable of doing himself. That was a line he wouldn't cross. He wasn't sure he and Liz were on the same track at even the most basic levels, like where to live and how to live, what to spend money on.

Lately, during his exile, he had been enjoying the chaos of the narrow streets and close housing of his old neighbourhood, the cramped hodgepodge of home-made sheds and other add-ons, bright green painted concrete, statues of David and Venus in seashell fountains, the vegetable gardens squeezed between slabs, the squawk of chickens and the occasional belligerent crow of a rooster and the barking of dogs enclosed in small yards. He liked the smells, the blend of cooking tomatoes and garlic, of onions in olive oil. He liked the poorly tuned radios playing top ten hits that crackled from panel beating workshops oozing grease and the sweet utilitarian sound of metal against metal. He liked the human voices arguing and laughing. He didn't want it all pushed back and hidden and yet whenever Liz

raised her voice and started with that sarcastic tone, something inside him withered and shrank away and he wanted to run and hide.

As he pedalled, he felt the muscles in his quads tighten and tingle. It was a good, solid feeling. The more they tightened, the harder he pedalled. He was revelling in the pain, enjoying this battle with himself. His mouth was getting dry from the wind and the joint and the sheer effort of the journey. This again was where he fundamentally differed from Liz. She was five-star, she wouldn't mind if a team of people carried her in an armchair. And she'd sit back and cop it, no problems. Whereas Andy couldn't stand it if someone tried to buy him a drink; the generosity of others made him squirm and panic. And yet his constant attention to her needs seemed demeaning at times. He knew he rebelled against this world of his own creation. But it was hard to explain this to Suzie with Liz ready to jump in and override his floundering by talking about how things made her feel, laying all responsibility for every fluctuating emotion of hers squarely at his feet. No wonder he began to itch as the time for each session approached; his eczema starting at the back of his knees.

As he began the steep climb up the hill that led to Suzie's house he decided that he must tell her how much of a slob Liz really was. He could see from the meticulous garden and the fresh smell of her house that she was a woman who couldn't stand mess and might see it as a character failing in others, although as a shrink she was not supposed to judge. But Andy knew she couldn't help it. She was human after all. He would tell her that Liz never picked up after herself and now, her children too were leaving a slovenly trail behind themselves as they went in search of gratification from the plasma screen TV to the kitchen and back. She was teaching them to be pleasure seekers with no sense of responsibility and this bothered him; they might end up as drug addicts and criminals. Any discipline he tried to enforce she would undermine with her McDonald's thick shakes and Burger Rings. He

would tell Suzie that he frequently found potato chips down the back of the couch and in the car and that he spent at least 70 per cent of his time at home sweeping or wiping up spills that had been left to congeal and dry on bench surfaces. Liz wanted to get a cleaning lady. He would tell Suzie that he himself had worked as a cleaner before he had become a lab assistant, which, where he came from, was like moving to another galaxy. His mother had sent photos back to Greece of him in his lab coat, making claims to the people in her village near Sparta that he was a doctor. When he went there for a holiday he was so embarrassed he couldn't bring himself to correct them. They treated him like a king. Wouldn't let him lift a finger. It drove him crazy and he went to stay in a monastery, hoping for some spiritual guidance and maybe even a little salvation. He enjoyed the hard beds and the simple food, but he thought the monks were as mad as snakes. When he came home he'd shouted at his mother.

"Why did you lie? Are you ashamed of me? Is that it?"

She threw herself onto the plastic-covered vinyl couch sobbing and wailing.

"It was for you," she snivelled, "because I love you so much."

"Yeah, right," he said, sensing for the first time where his confusion had stemmed from with this ham actor for a mother.

Suzie's front room, the one she used for her consultations, was about the same size as his parents' little single-fronted weatherboard in Coburg. The whole house would have fitted in her room. He was floored briefly by that thought. What would they make of all this space, all these exotic cushions, all this primitive art, the Aboriginal dot paintings, and the knick-knacks, the low lighting? How would they be in this setting, upending the nonsensical minutiae of their lives with a stranger? What would they know about being honest? Their whole lives they had been too frightened to express a genuine emotion lest it be used against them as they had

used the feelings of others against them. How could they justify their emotional blackmail and their skullduggery, their snooping and eavesdropping and gossip? All they would be able to do in this room would be to wonder how much everything cost and how hard it would be to keep clean.

Andy's parents were beyond counselling. His father had long since given up resisting the histrionics of his mother and had surrendered all power to her in exchange for a few quiet moments. The notion of couples counselling was utterly alien to them anyway; they pestered Andy about what went on in the sessions.

"But why do you pay a stranger to listen to you talk?" his mother asked. "Talk is cheap," she said in English. She must've heard it on the TV.

Years back his father had revealed a secret plot to leave his mother and Andy had given his blessing and encouragement and said he fully understood and had even looked forward to bonding more closely with his father without his mother pulling the strings. But for some reason his father stayed put. Andy was disappointed in his lack of resolve and lost most of the respect he had held for his father's quiet determination, seeing the same quality now as cowardice rather than stoicism. They never discussed this reversal but the fact of it had changed how he felt about his parents.

And now he too was well and truly on his back in a permanent state of submission, paws folded over, tail wrapped around his genitals waiting for either Liz or Suzie or both to deliver the blows. The marijuana had exaggerated in his mind the sense of embattlement. He felt like a lone warrior with his bike helmet beneath his arm and his trusty steed by his side. He was ready to take on whatever she had to dish out.

Suzie came to the door with a benign smile on her face. She was a small woman with muscular calves and a cropped, black head of well-washed and well-cut hair. It had a razor-sharp line that swooped from close to the base of her skull at the rear to two little points at either side of her face. It

was a small, neat face with bright, dark eyes that he could see now were a little playful. He'd never noticed that before. He'd seen them previously as penetrating and accusatory. Suddenly he felt his own sweat and heat as he stepped across the sponginess of the beige wool carpet and into the clean luxury of Suzie's consulting rooms.

"I'm a bit sweaty," he said, "sorry about that."

"Not a problem," said Suzie, "would you like a glass of water?"

She gestured to the coffee table where a tall glass sat on a coaster with a jug of water next to it, a lemon wedge floating in it.

He poured himself a glass and drank it down in one go.

"Goodness," said Suzie, "you were thirsty."

He smiled at her, still sitting on the edge of the lounge chair that faced hers. She sat back with her athletic legs crossed elegantly. She linked her fingers together and said; "So, tell me what's been happening."

Suddenly Andy felt a sense of intimacy between them that seemed both uncomfortable and pleasant at the same time. He felt sweat trickle from his temple and wiped at it. Without Liz, the whole ambience was different. Suzie's eyes were dancing; the room seemed less dense with heavy colour and appeared to have more light.

"Nothing much," said Andy in response to her question.

"How do you feel about the time you've spent away from Liz and the kids?"

"I feel fine," he said, "good as gold actually."

"Fine?" said Suzie, smiling suspiciously.

"What do you want me to say?"

"It's not what I want that's important," said Suzie.

"Well," said Andy, "that's where you differ from my wife."

"So you feel your needs aren't being met?" she said, uncrossing her legs and recrossing them at the ankles.

Andy laughed sarcastically and poured himself some more water.

"What do you reckon?" he said.

"I'm asking you about *your* feelings, Andy," she said. "It's got nothing to do with mine."

"My feelings? Since when has anyone given a flying fuck about my feelings?"

"You're saying your feelings aren't being validated?"

"Not being what?"

"That you have been . . ."

"Explain something to me, will you, Suzie," he said, sensing that certain things, certain truths, might slip out.

"OK," said Suzie. "Go ahead."

"Why is it that women want so much stuff?"

"You mean material possessions?"

He nodded.

"Double-drawer dishwasher, upside-down fridges and stainless-steel this and that. It never ends. But why? What for?"

"It's the society we live in," she said flatly.

"Why do they want these new things all the time? All's I want, to be honest with you, is to live in a single room with nothing but a bed and an alarm clock and one bowl and one cup for my coffee and that's it. But I'm underneath a mountain of shit in that house. I can't get out. I don't understand what the hell we need all this stuff for and how I'm supposed to keep up with it all, the repayments on the car, you know?"

He stopped to take a drink of water.

"And here we are," Andy said, leaning back into his chair.

Suzie had been watching him as he spoke, her face impassive, her finger playing with a strand of hair.

"Goodness me," she said finally. "You do feel under pressure, don't you?"

His mouth was getting dry so he took another sip and sat back in the lounge chair and could feel that the cushions were stuffed with feather down the way they exhaled a cool breath around him. It was quiet. Almost serene. Then through the quiet he could hear some distant violin playing.

"It's nice here," he said, "You've got a nice big house here with nice things," he gestured around the room at the art on the walls. "How did you get all these things? Did you buy them yourself?"

"Some of them," said Suzie.

"Liz likes your house, you know. She wants a house just like it she said. How much is it worth? Seven hundred, eight hundred grand?"

Suzie shrugged.

"More, I'd say," he said. "I'd say eight hundred easy, in this area, on a hill. That's a lot of moola. Maybe Liz should be married to you instead of me. She says you understand how she feels and I can see that you do. But you're having trouble with me, aren't you? You don't know what the fuck my problem is."

"I can tell that you're frustrated," said Suzie.

"Maybe she is my problem, mate. And to be honest with you, no offence, but I think you might be part of it too. You're supposed to be the marriage guidance whatever but you're just raking it in at our expense. My expense actually. Am I right? When what we need mate is a mercy killing, that's what we need."

Andy stood up.

"I think you'd better calm down, Andy," said Suzie who had lost her playful smirk and was looking nervous, although she remained seated.

"If you were a mechanic mate, you'd have the decency to tell us to cut our losses."

Then he gestured around the room. "Are you happy with this, mate?"

"Andy, I think you're getting a bit agitated."

"Yeah, yeah," he said.

"I think we'd better wind things up for today."

"Fine, but first just tell me, are you happy? I'd like to know."

He was standing close to her now and had fixed his gaze on her. His mouth was like sandpaper and he could feel the tight saltiness of the drying sweat on his face.

"Happy?" she said.

"Happy." He flapped his hands on either side of his face.

"Depends what you mean."

"What I mean?"

"Well, yes, I suppose I'm happy," she said, sounding a little less anxious.

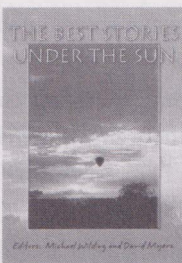
"As long as you're happy, mate," he said with a wink. "I wouldn't want you not to be happy."

"But I think our time's up," she said.

"Your time's up," he said.

"Well, time has run out," she said.

"Exactly," he said, putting his helmet on and tightening the strap under his chin, looking forward to letting the bike fly down that steep hill.



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A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH

ALMOST EVERY WEEKEND we go to the bush. We have built a house on the side of a mountain near Tallarook. It sits right out on an escarpment facing the sunset and behind it, on the uphill side, the road runs past beyond a thick buffer of blue gums and blackwoods. You can't see the road, but if you are outdoors you can usually hear the cars passing. Their tyres hiss on the gravel and I'm aware of an irony of the current age: cars now are quieter, motor-bikes noisier—*as long as we're bikers, we might as well make a scene of it.*

One cool evening around ten I walk outside into the night and I hear a car approaching, catch a glimpse of its headlights through the trees. Then the car brakes suddenly, skids in the loose stone, and there is an unmistakable thud. Like a cricket ball dropped on carpet, it is the sound of an unhappy contact; you know instinctively that absolutely no good can come of it. I had been sitting quietly inside when I decided to go out into the dark to piss. I stand there, legs astride and fancy I'm colluding with other warm-blooded mammals. It is a moment to absorb the peace—a rare and mighty thing in itself. Standing there for just a minute in the moonless black, far from the city's mad tear, you'd expect nothing out of the ordinary. But who can explain coincidence? On this night, during that brief airing of my private parts, something happens, something that takes me back to a time I'd rather forget.

I strain my ears to listen. The ear: such a malformed second-class organ if ever there was one—we've been sleeping on it too long. Faintly through the forest I can hear people getting out of the car. Suddenly there is a woman's voice, "Oh no!" she cries. Then the car doors slam and the vehicle drives slowly away. I take the torch down from the shelf and head up the slope, navigating between the trees, tripping in the drought-stressed grass, seeing nothing beyond the feathered glare of the light. I already know what to expect. Emerging from the trees, I start along the road, sweeping the torch across the ground. It is strange peering at the world this way; there is no peripheral vision, no landmarks for orientation. The light offers proof of nothing beyond the oval patch just one stride ahead and the detail is eerily picked up and presented in an odd, uncharacteristic way. Suddenly some shards of amber glass and skid marks appear at my feet.

Just off to the side of the road an Eastern Grey Kangaroo appears in the bright beam. A female, she lies on her side and the head lifts toward me as I approach. The eye is full of fear and pain. The chest is heaving, one of the hind legs is smashed appallingly, jagged bone juts at right-angles from the bloody flesh. If the animal had been killed, perhaps the unfortunate incident would have been forgotten like the other animals that we see lying dead by the side of our road. But the kangaroo is alive and I am implicated.

“Try Wildlife Emergency.” “What about Wildlife Rescue?” Back at the house I dial the Operator for help. Finally I locate a voice that gives me the number of someone who lives at the nearest town some twenty kilometres away. The number rings and rings, it is very late after all. I imagine a farmhouse outside of town, a dog barking at the insistent ringing and a light coming on as someone rises from the horizontal. Finally a woman answers. “It will have to be put down,” she tells me calmly. She suggests I phone the police and they will attend to it.

I decide to return to the site before alarming anyone else. Outside now the night is still and the air, thick with peace, has folded back over the incident. Again I sweep the beam and it is just as difficult to locate the site as it was earlier. Now the kangaroo lies motionless, the head is down, eyes glassed over, the heart is still. I crouch down and put my hand onto her, the fur rising fine through my fingers. She is young; a truly beautiful animal. Like a warm current, a wave of sentimentality passes through me and I can see nothing for the limpid fluid welling in my eyes. “I’m sorry,” I say stupidly. “I’m sorry.”

JOHN HOWARD WOULD be aghast. But I was sorry. Sorry for fences and farms and everything that has been *introduced* to the country. I was sorry for cars and headlights and haste and for holding the spotlight so adeptly for my father in the back of the truck near Anglesea. For holding those eyes so perfectly in the beam while he squeezed off one blood-quickenning round that split the night and set my ears ringing, sending that nob of lead whining to the kangaroo’s unwitting chest. Dog’s meat. My father carves it up in the scrub, the blood spilling in the grass, the steam rising while Blommy and I stand dutifully by. But that was before my father met Rhoda and they left for the Northern Territory.

When I was 21 and living in Coburg he came back and we had a chance to get to know each other much better. I planned our reunion in Victo-

ria carefully. I could think of nothing that might suit him more than to go rabbit-shooting in the country. We could stride man-to-man, side-by-side up a ravine through the long tussocks just like we did when we lived on the farm in Gippsland. And so we did and I carried the old single-barrel shotgun that he’d given me as a teenager; a *Harrington Richardson*. It still had the kick-absorber mounted on the butt to spare my youthful shoulder.

“She may be plain,” he once told me, “but never a gun had a tighter choke than that one!” And not a pit in the barrel. I slipped a shiny red cartridge into the breach and carefully snapped it shut the way I’d been shown, the way we did it on the farm when I was 10. I held the slick instrument out to him. And this is the moment my life took a sharp and unexpected turn. I held out the well-oiled gun my father had given me, offering him the honour of the occasion, and my father said, “No”.

“No,” my father said, “you shoot if you want, I’d just as soon leave them to run around.” My life turned. How could this tower of bush knowledge, this man who had attuned me from birth to the ways of the hunter, who had established for me watertight principles for why we kill, why the hunter and the hunted complete a natural and honourable part of life’s scheme, suddenly, and without discussion, announce that he’d *rather see the rabbit run free?*

I thought we loved hunting. As a 20-year-old I *did* love hunting. I loved nature and the ways of the bush and I loved hunting. They were basic elements of country life; as grit is to the gardener, so hunting seemed to infiltrate the pores of my body. Now I was faced with a new potential—an *alternative*. And so in those first years of my twenties I gradually began to unpick the snarled mess of the hunter mentality, sort out the mindlessness of it all, and with no pattern to go on, to respin a new *modus vivendi* that left out the taking of life. Perhaps a little over-zealously, now I can’t even justify swatting marsh flies and I have difficulty stepping on the bushland ground-cover. *I’m getting soft in my old*

age, a phrase made famous by my very own father who used it often to cope with his own growing concern for things living.

TONIGHT I AM here by the side of the road with a dead kangaroo, my face awash with stupidity, squeegeeing away tears with the back of my hand. Then through the watery smear I notice the movement. The kangaroo's pouch is flexing with the unmistakable thrust of offspring. The joey is tiny, no larger than a rat. It is hairless, its eyes are covered with a pink membrane and I decide there is nothing to be done but to let it die quietly in its mother's cooling pouch.

Life is precious—the whole of society says so. But when I look into the eye of the kangaroo, I wonder where this idea really comes from. My long lineage of country forebears seemed to feel that life and death were just two opposing forces, each pitted against the other and if something had to die for food or shelter or to clear it out of the way, then so it was. And my mother's frayed Bible, its pages discoloured from handling, had only one thing to say about killing: *thou shalt not*. But the commandment is designed for human life, and yet even then it is ignored when conflicting doctrines meet.

Now there are a growing number of people who believe we must have concern for the world in a much broader context. They say we must protect the world's *bio-diversity*, a term that sprang into existence a decade ago after a meeting of over one hundred world leaders at the *Earth Summit* in Brazil. *Maintain bio-diversity*—it seems to be the project for the modern age. In one sense, perhaps it is our way of perpetuating Darwin's Evolution Theory. He tells us that life is just one great cone of variation with its tiny point in the dark annals of pre-history, that life started from a few witless blips in the past and expanded into the complexity we see today. But just like my forebears, there still seem to be plenty who read Darwin's theory backwards. They seem to believe that it is natural for species

diversity to be *decreasing* as the most well-adapted spread out and usurp the weak. Life is precious, they seem to say, unless we want to eat it, or it is in the road of what we want to do.

To let be or not to let be, that is the question, and it seems that it's entirely up to us. A human being, according to Mary and John Gribbin in *Being Human*, "is programmed not to fulfil a specific role but to be able to learn new roles as the need arises." They say we don't maintain one ecological niche like other animals but modify ourselves to make the most of new situations as they arise. If John and Mary are right, we have self-determination, we don't have to follow the patterns of the past, we can pick a new course away from what our genes and our society has planned for us. It's an interesting concept—a future world where we all choose not to destroy things.

A week after the kangaroo's death we return to Tallarook. It is October and we're enjoying the sunny spell, a *phenomenon* at this time of year. Jill sits in a deckchair, the view to the west rising above the top margins of a novel, and I roam aimlessly about peering up eucalypts or into wombat holes. Overhead, in the lofty bluegums, cockatoos accost me with their raucous alarm calls. I am offended—as if I would do anything to harm them. This week there is a putrescent whiff in the air as the corpse by the side of the road begins the slow process of decomposition. Is this the end of the story? Well as we know, in the real world stories never end, or even begin for that matter.

Months later I am out planting tubestock, replacing the trees that some diligent farmer has ploughed away, when I come across a creamy artefact lodged in the grass. It is a lower mandible, molars neatly stacked and picked clean like a new denture. I take it back to the house and stand it on the window-sill.

Robert Hollingworth is a writer and artist. This is an extract from his forthcoming memoir about art and environment—Nature Boy.

Up in the Sky

Inspired by Tracey Moffatt's 1997 photographic series of the same name

White Madonna, black babe,
wrapped in milky glory,
they await the arrival
of the pied wise ones
who dance in unholy joy.

A dangerous time.
Nothing is sacred or real.
Men crawl in the dark,
and dance to ward away evil.
Men crawl in the light.

Invaders are here.
Precise, brainy, brawny, violent.
They build and rebuild,
all the time tearing down
the fabric of time.

The pied wise ones
celebrate the black babe.
Precious child! Protect him.
They will hide him. For them
it's just another habit.

But lo, the sacrificial calf
has already been spotted,
the time-tearers have sensed
betrayal, sussed out the game.
They wait for the kill.

White Madonna of the tears.
Buckets cannot contain her
torrents. In a child's pool,
she immerses herself.
She does not drown.

This has been ordained.
She knows. She saw
the bridge of knowledge
over the ring of eternity.
Child's play.

Lost, haunted face swimming
in mad, happy crowd.
Imminent loss. A mother's face
in a motherless place.
She is calm.

The chicken man said,
"All will be well", as
cock's blood flowed to
the ground. Life, death, life.
All will be well.

The Three are not welcome.
The crowd waits and watches,
trouble is not wanted.
Not from the Three.
Not from the time-tearers.

Go away, Three.
Black Joe fights the skinny
white devil. Get thee behind me.
Do not take me with
a pinch of salt.

Sweet babe sleeps
while the world turns to metal.
The time-tearers test
the mettle of flesh.
Still sweet babe sleeps.

Black Joe walks
into the desert. Forty days,
forty nights. Save my son,
he cries to the wilderness.
He breaks, dies.

White Madonna mourns.
Black grief, ochre anger,
she runs away from yellow fear.
Nothing will stop her.
No spirit. Nothing.

In the desert,
alone, death rules
with rigour, and the
faceless ones reach
for eternity.

KAREN BAYLY

Days of concrete, blues and gold

Memories of the Albion Hotel, Carlton

1.

thrashing power chords chopped and chunky
tremolo aching bent notes wobbling
as he sharpened his axe with slide riffs
ripping up the summer night on Faraday Street
the bottleneck blues right at home at this of all hotels
his band left to chug along way behind him
down in the lower lounge barely a support act
if ever the grandstand guitar chose to go it alone
out on the pavement all too much a solo

not having the remotest control back then
no cordless guitars in the Seventies
he could soar to gasping heights air thin as ageing hair
like that greatest of Carlton frontmen

Jesaulenko, you beauty!

and just like Jezza he too knew the value
of a good long lead

while the assembled crew
right out there too yet always in
just gave its laconic nod

2.

the boss at best a cook no chef, he
bragged of learning his trade on Bougainville
where the native boys were bugged
literally syphilis up the

steak-and-kidney pie
never a surprise on his daily specials board
he'd leave a pot chock full of kidneys
to simmer all afternoon a stench that had you
screaming for a gag viscous fluid steaming
alchemy outside its eon urine distilled to gold
worse than the pub's *pissoir* if fully clogged with butts

a loathing ever since for offal of any genre
for the inner organs of beasts and fowls
so relished by Joyce's Bloom

3.

the child's cut-price serve
a promotion scant exploited
in this stale and smoky lounge
with its reek of flat spilt beer
with malt and hops gone sour

while regulars were mostly childless
at least while out here drinking
one man without a youngster
stammered such an order

soon due to collect used crockery
you sensed that you could catch him
crouched in some dim corner

when he looked up gulping
guilt-edged insecurity his half-price
meal half-gone the shame in his gaze
made you feel half your self

4.

occasional visits to the upper lounge
made by the professor emeritus of literature heroic
lover of seafaring tales Viking legends Nordic myths
romance ballads Scottish lyrics
stoutest defender of Robbie Burns
frail only in his frame
champion of old-world simplicity
no friend of the obscurantist

*poetry doesn't have to be too damned difficult
just to be good, young man!*

a tottering gait but too proud for a cane
the soles of his slippers adhering
to carpet made sticky with spillage velcro before its time
he'd set to his solitary meal and seven-ounce shandy
his cutlery shaking yet tucking in hearty
an old-fashioned mixed grill
best repast on offer at this of all banquet halls
before breasting the fiord on one last rising tide
in that longest boat of all

5.

ever cheery the relief chef would smirk
 as he thumped a customer's meal down
 to steam on stainless steel lasagna sagging
 schnitzel singed before he'd quip
there's somethin' to put lead in ya pencil, mate!
 only to leer at any female handy
but he's gotta 'ave someone ta write to, eh, luv?

mindful of paradox in his advice if not his approach
hasten slowly, my lad—hasten slowly!
 the veteran bar manager spurred by spirit
 once felt rash enough to fondle your buttock
 as you bent to clear plates from a table

6.

in the corner the performance poets gathered
 an eyelid out for their gothic gig
 deep in converse and coven
 with witches of white magic and their warlock
 junkies or so went that night's bar-room bulletin

in the city weeks later you chanced upon one
 studying tarot in a bookshop she asked
 if anything had been taken from you back at the hotel
 no, no, not your innocence! not even money, no
 just a sliver of fingernail? some hair? one blond curl
 from that Afro of yours? would they have used their own
 scissors? you wondered with but a flicker of a grin

one long blink she gave at your second little jest
 eyebrows plucked thin arch in response
 her lashes long and lustrous
 black magic at least in mascara

if they have nothing of yours to cast a spell with
 she murmured they'll hold no power over you, then
 her fingers stroking yours dark forces about now beware

been a while she added turning away
 since you've been seen around the scene
 I quit you sighed since since the stabbing
 oh, that? yeah, well, take care . . .

7.

with closing time approaching
and bar staff bellowing *time to go!*
the greatest of all stalwarts *bohème authentique*
lay collapsed by the cigarette machine today's golden
beers and heavy spirits protests and philosophies
cares and dreams all crushing him floorward
his bushranger beard stretched across his chest
like a welcome mat to the door
of his mouth where the meal you'd served
had wiped its feet and then shown the manners
to leave a tip

8.

in a bar that debated
all the big questions of the day
 what was essential to Sartre's essence
 when the Left would gain full Marx
all the key issues of the times
 Australia timorous in Timor
 Kerr's cur -sory sacking of Gough
one night a fight broke out
about the volume of the juke box

strolling across Lygon Street
the first-round winner by knockdown
paused outside Johnny's Green Room
but broke no frame at the pool hall that evening
he met with a blade through the kidney instead
no pot left there to stew his piss in
his blood staining more
than police chalk on concrete

 while the assembled crew
 right out there too yet always in
 just gave its laconic nod

RODNEY WILLIAMS

Dancing with the Flag

A (more-or-less-well-meaning) giant
is stumbling round the world.

To signify *esprit de corps*
he wears his flag unfurled.

He lumbers here; he lumbers there;
he wishes he'd stayed put.
The scorpions he's kicked by chance
are nipping at his foot.

They're biting on his ankle now;
they're midway up his calf.
Though more-or-less intending good
he can't do things by half.

He has the power to smear the lot
at one step with his boots
or tear his row of troubles up
like turnips by the roots.

The problem is his head's too high;
it's too far off the ground.
He kicks a rock by accident
and, look, see what he's found . . .

scorpions with fiery tails
and very narrow views.
It's hard for giants to win, of course,
but, equally, to lose.

Our giant will never understand
the reasons for such hate.
Scorpions are made that way.
It's surely just his fate

to stagger hugely round the world.
We buy it with the size.
He's really well-intentioned but
he'll never quite be wise.

No matter how the battle goes
his feet begin to drag.
It's hard work wearing size eighteens
and dancing with the flag.

GEOFF PAGE

happiness

the electron image of the virus
shows a chicken bone
caught in an oval of fire
and I can't help thinking
this this this
on the radio a girl sings boogie oogie oogie
til you just can't boogie no more
outside you can hear them saying things
like *yeah* I hated that movie
why the hell was anyone laughing?
in a flurry
police walk the streets four deep
with pups and lighthouse smiles
a man sits at home in a shock of weeping
his sailor boy has sailed away
the war of happiness has begun

TIM DENOON

Since you've been away

The sky a sagging blanket grey as grief
Lets down a ceaseless waterfall that quells
The dust, washes clean my wrinkled skin,
Restores earth-life, withered from excess
Of sunny climes. Since you've been away
Rain has failed, this place become
A desert. Waiting has consumed my days
And the sun, softened by a cooling breeze,
Has stared brazenly hour by hour
On empty seas and drooping greenery
Where no one filled those lengthened afternoons.
Now the rain whispers you are coming,
The shrubbery revives and birdsong
Rises to refresh my heart with expectation.

DAVID KERR

Axis of Evil

1. Burning Bush

Flag star oil
Spy planes over the desert
resulting in a lack of vision
ready for worship.

One year on is Private Lynch
teaching her mid-West students?

The effigies burn
across the middle east.
God's voice is smoke.

Welcome to democracy.

2. Howard's End

Your power-walk across the Potomac
wearing green and gold
relatively free of security and static
(who knows in Washington
you're worth killing?)

is 15 seconds of boredom
on the evening news.

Where are the million men
white boy?

What's your dream?

Where's our dream time?

3. Bin Terrorised

Us mob, ceremony of
art markets and dust,
walk into the sun,
terror of memory
terra nullius.

GARY PRINGLE

Trades Hall Blues

A rainy Melbourne Saturday in November
he takes himself serious, sober at his launch
trying to make his wolf's face meek, not old.
He's too small and shabby for splendour.
He's been noisy, spat and bled too much.
The past, the past, a miracle of survival.
Making a speech brings him to his senses
remembering crumbled highways no longer used.
He mingles, conversation dripping on him.
Nobody knows the iron grief in his heart.
When he reads, light through dusty old glass
that has reflected scenes of preening before
seems to watch over his shoulder for lies.
His own words sound so soggy to him
he might be reading a newspaper.
He recognises language but it's only words,
visualises a lone grey wolf, dazed.
When he signs his name his veins feel drained,
his flesh itches with self-doubt, burns
with longing for perfection, a blues refrain,
the need to bury his face in his own pillow.

IAN C. SMITH

THE FUTURE OF AUSTRALIAN FICTION

Craig Bolland: *I Knit Water* (UQP, \$19.95)

Patricia Cornelius: *My Sister Jill* (Random House, \$19.95)

Stephen Reilly: *Ninety East Ridge* (Macmillan, \$30)

Penelope Sell: *A Secret Burial* (Flamingo, \$21.95)

After judging the 2003 Miles Franklin Award, Hilary McPhee reflected:

Why, in an era of continued growth and activity, when the number of new Australian authors has never been so great nor their novels so polished and various, do I still feel uneasy, as if our literature is in danger, like the topsoil of the Mallee, of blowing away?

It's frustrating that McPhee seems so comfortable passing judgement on a scene of which she seems at best only partly aware. In the two thousand words she wrote in the *Age* last year bemoaning the state of new Australian writing she fails to mention any new writing or new writers or new novels or new publishers or new whatever. What we get is lots of lists of overseas writers or the good Australian writers of a previous generation, hypotheses, imaginary situations and the ideas of *this* anonymous friend on *that* unclear set of authors. But we get no sense of her having read any new Australian writing. No Stephen Reilly, Craig Bolland, Penelope Sell or Patricia Cornelius, the new writers under review here. Just descriptions of things that didn't happen or could have . . . kind of.

There is a terrific future for Australian fiction writing if these four first novels are anything to go by. Like its subject matter, Stephen Reilly's *Ninety East Ridge* is an overambitious honourable attempt; Craig Bolland's *I Knit Water* is a powerful work that hits its straps about halfway through—unfortunately, long after a lot of readers might have given up; Penelope Sell's *A Secret Burial* is a quietly voiced and powerfully atmospheric story of grief; and Patricia Cornelius's *My Sister Jill* is a significant work of sheer class. This last novel was one McPhee read and apparently ignored in her judging of the 2003 Miles Franklin Award.

Ninety East Ridge is a work of speculative fiction, set in a time and geo-political region a little like our

own. It is based on the immediately alluring premise of a massive cylindrical structure built on the bed of the Indian Ocean and rising above its surface, within which will begin a new society, green and fair, politically independent from the rest of the world. This hole in the ocean, 'Ninety East Ridge' is the brain-child of the central character Anna Spires.

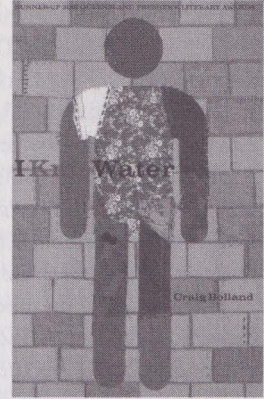
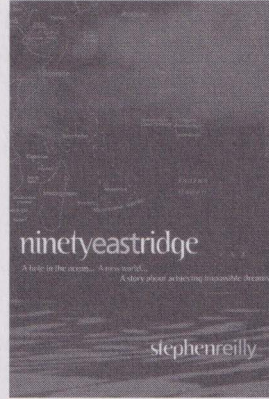
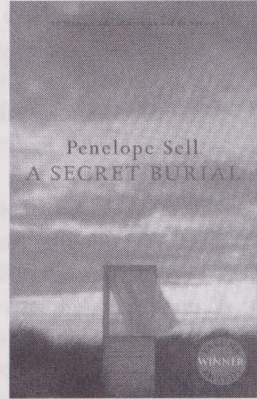
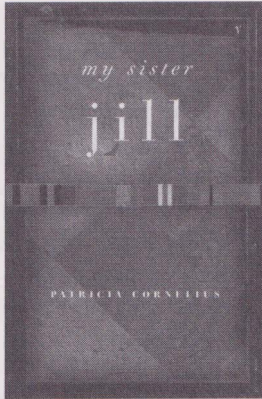
The central problem of Spires's project is that she has to get into bed with capital, literally and figuratively, her project being supported by her mega-wealthy husband who sees her as a trophy (albeit an intellectual one). The overarching problem of her utopian project is ultimately that it has to exist alongside and trade with capitalism.

Perhaps inevitably, the walls of the cylinder and the concept come crashing down. This outcome is driven both by the internal logic of the story and by the narrative and ideological pressure upon the writer to end his story with a defeat. Just how does a writer convincingly end a utopian story such as this with a victory?

Reilly has made a good fist of writing this novel but he was not helped by the odd gaucherie, the most bizarre of which is an Ian Fleming-like scene towards the end. Anna and her new man have escaped the cataclysm in a rescue pod: "in those few moments, as the pod drifted towards the light, towards rebirth, a life of love together flashed before our eyes". The book's several editorial glitches notwithstanding, Reilly is a writer with a future.

I Knit Water, published in 2002, has left me wanting to read a lot more of Bolland's work. He writes with a surprising sensitivity to the subtleties of land possession and place, reminiscent of Andrew McGahan's *1988*. Indeed, I first thought that Bolland was trying to write like a combination of McGahan and Brisbane bullshit artist John Birmingham and that while it is OK for a writer to wear his influences on his sleeve, these two are incompatible. Try to imagine *Praise* having been written by Birmingham and you'll see what I mean. For grunge to work it required at least a modicum of sincerity.

The novel opens in inner-suburban Brisbane with



its central character and first-person narrator Mark Heron moving into an old Queenslander modified into a block of flats. Hardgrave Lodge is renamed ‘Heartbreak Lodge’ by its ragbag of residents. Typical post-grunge themes—ennui, meaningless sex, poor interpersonal communication and excessive drugtaking—are all there; and I very nearly gave up, feeling that the book was just too derivative of an earlier phase of writing. Another annoying aspect was some of the language use: as far as I can tell Australians do not yet have assholes (at least those of us who don’t keep Donkeys); nor do we take a piss (though we do take *the piss*).

But I’m glad I stayed with it because at some point the spectre of Birmingham leaves and the novel improves measurably. *I Knit Water* transforms into an exploration of the way a group of fragmented individuals deal with an external threat. Their home is bought by a developer who wants to knock it down and put up a block of units in its place. Through this they develop a rough unity and learn more about each other.

Bolland displays a great deal of skill and sensitivity in revealing the story of Errol, a widower and failed Olympic athlete, who used to own the house until it was bought from under him years before. The house represents to him a memorial to his wife Millie and he cannot conceive of leaving or allowing the house to be destroyed without a fight.

In a climactic scene Errol is up all night wrecking his own flat in an apparent self-destructive rage. Yet it is revealed to the reader and the narrator in the morning that he has spent the whole night constructing a picket fence around the developer’s bulldozer parked on the property. The ineffectuality of the act is inversely proportional to the effectiveness of its symbolism—Bolland writes at the end of the

book of “finding the courage of ordinary things”. And the gentle wit of the picket pun adds to the scene’s poignancy.

While the book ends with a sense that Mark Heron has been through a genuine transformation and readers will be pleasantly surprised by the book’s course, I sometimes felt that Bolland doesn’t quite understand or is not in control of his own sensitivity. But he too is a writer of the future.

Set in Atherton in far north Queensland (but never quite seeming green enough), *A Secret Burial* tells the story of a young girl, Elise Stringer, and her younger brother, whose mother dies at home. Rather than alerting the authorities she buries her mother in the back yard, afraid that they will separate the siblings.

The book has a quiet pace and despite its several calamities obtains little tension. Even the tense moments are rendered calmly. This helps to create the long-distance perspective of the narration. We are not told all that much about the internal workings of Elise’s mind. She appears not to be rocked by her mother’s death and, as Nikki Tranter has pointed out elsewhere, “Her first sexual experience . . . runs about a half-page with little insight [given] into what having a farmhand’s hands down her pants means to Elise”.

Despite the almost autistic failure to focus on what might appear to be important if not crucial aspects, Sell has written a nonetheless mesmerising book in which land and atmosphere are more important than character. Rather than exploring the characters’ reactions to human drama, Sell paints a canvas upon which readers can draw their own reflections. As in life we observe scenes and events and have no direct access to the inner psychological workings of others.

For this book's manuscript Sell won a Varuna Award for Manuscript Development and it will be no surprise if she goes on to win further prizes.

Patricia Cornelius's *My Sister Jill* is the best new Australian novel I've read for a long time. Conscious in its allusion to *My Brother Jack*, it is a working-class novel of immense significance. Set in Brighton, Victoria, in a family scarred by two wars, it traces the development of hatred and love between the family members. The novel at once understands, condemns and forgives the psychological damage inflicted by the father Jack upon the six siblings and his beaten-down wife Martha.

At times almost too achingly sad, the book details those little moments of naked bullying and aggression, by a damaged father, against hopeful, trusting but always frightened children.

My Sister Jill would be a tragedy if not for the character Jill, the eldest child, whose strength is only nurtured by her father's ill-treatment of all the others. Jill is the character who steps in—either subtly or overtly (depending on circumstance)—to deflect their father's wrath away from the young ones. Jill too is a victim, with a seething rage in her heart; but she is also a survivor and a leader—paradoxically much like her father.

A prose corollary of Geoff Goodfellow's *Poems for a Dead Father*, this book is a perfect foil for John Howard's warmongering. It demonstrates the folly

of expecting organised mass violence to do anything but breed rage, psychological damage and suburban time bombs, sometimes called returned servicemen. It is a book that many working-class Australians would find engrossing and is nothing short of brilliant.

Yet even as *Overland* goes to print we read Michael Heyward of Text Publishing echoing the McPhee mantra of 'nothing doing in Australian fiction' in the *Age*. Heyward observes the mainstream publishing preference for non-fiction over novels and stories but extrapolates this into a general cultural problem. And, he claims: "I haven't met anyone who is arguing this is a rich period for Australian fiction." One answer to that problem would be for Heyward to get out and meet more people.

McPhee and Heyward embody the myopia of a littocracy that is unable to acknowledge the quality of new and emerging fiction writers around them. Maybe it's a little unkind to suggest they are too implicated in the maintenance of a previous cultural revolution to see the new growth and change around them. But these four sparkling first novels could only be dismissed by the feeble and wayward craven cringers keeping-safe the reputations of yesteryear's heroes.

Ian Syson runs the Vulgar Press, which has recently published several works of new fiction.

The Well Dwellers

JUDITH RODRIGUEZ

| Janet Kelly: *The Colour of Walls* (Vulgar Press, \$24.95)

This book is precious. Because it is true. It is also a feat of fine writing.

Its materials are not the stuff of the typical spiffing first novel, nor are they easily accessible to research. Its observations were not made from a safe distance. The book is not a manoeuvre, nor an editorially titivated take on a current topic of concern. Or even just fun in the reading and money in the till, the Lette insouciance, thumbings-of-the-nose in the bombast of gender-battles. It does not emerge from concern with the craft, or a writing career. It was difficult to do, as true things are. I imagine that its writer did not finally know it could be done till a lot of it was there.

Of course it has been researched. Its references are there, and they have been used with intelligence and with passion.

There was a time when it was fairly true to say that fiction stopped outside the bedroom door, and that most novels finished with acceptance of the decision by a young woman and a young man to be married. Honourable exceptions were the eighteenth-century Defoe's *Roxana*, the pioneering portrayal of a tangle of originally defensive lies, delusions, and guilt, and Fielding's *Amelia*, the study of a gambler and a gambler's wife.

Janet Kelly has written her way into that company; Kelly's Erica Williams would have things to talk about with Amelia.

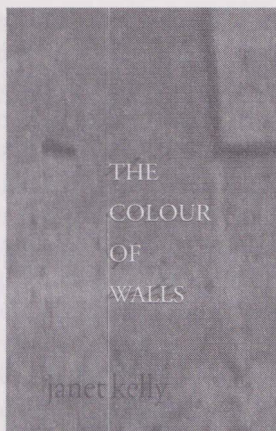
All of us hope to live lives in the open, to be surrounded by friends and family who tell the truth, who can afford openness and truth. And many of us find that that is not to be our fate, that what is said conceals a silence, secret desires, dark places. In *The Colour of Walls* Erica Williams longs for loving partnership, for fulfilment for herself and her girls. But their lives are the cruel playing-out of father-daughter incest, compounded by lies and evasions, the abuse of gender- and family-politics, and the obtuseness of most social agencies.

How many writers can register the shades of embarrassment, shame, incredulity, the desperate feeling of incapacity to deal with behaviour that is beneath contempt but, bewilderingly, becomes the principal and empowered reality?

Even now, when many jurisdictions extend the interpretation of provocation to violence, so as to include a lifetime of harassment along with sudden incitement—when school bullying and the targeting of gays have swum into the sights of social work and the Law—most of us know that *The Horror! The Horror!* does not have to be sought at the source of the Congo. It is found in the human heart, the heart that may beat beside yours or mine.

One wonderful thing about Janet Kelly's writing is that she finds images for both the abuse and the struggle against it. And she knows how ambiguously intertwined they are with one another. Two women, Lindy and the heroine Erica, decide when they're alone together to write a story for Erica's illustrations: it is called *The Well Dwellers*. It is to realise a creative upwelling in both of them. But they can't ever finish this story. Only later does Erica look back at the distorted faces and figures she has put on paper and realise that they represent the not-then-understood darkness of her and her children's existence.

Yet this story, still in pieces, just glimpses, odd squares of a whole fabric, she and Lindy have briefly clasped about themselves. It is self-defence by creative understanding, which Erica seeks early in her life and pursues as and when she can. A try at a welded horse, a journal kept in secret, graffitied walls of the safe home, visionary nightmares in which she is able to articulate the danger to her



children, the imagined exposure of her writing to an interested group—these are a frayed but real lifeline. To me they are Janet Kelly's statement of faith.

The narrative moves from one challenging subject to another, linked by causality: from crime and immediate suffering, to its working-out over years and decades. Police, lawyers and courtrooms are necessary but passing elements of the story as the author depicts the plight not just of her narrator, but also of the direct victims of incest. These are her children and also the children of our city.

Melbourne's late 1980s and 1990s have not been sweetness and light. Sorry if you thought so. But many will find an echo in themselves for what Kelly has to report of Erica's desperate mothering—those who have been on the phone to *Lifeline*, and gone to squats near Merri and Rushall railway stations and to the beats at St Kilda in search of their children. The drug scene is there and there are written accounts of it—many of them incomplete, victims like their makers. Janet Kelly writes it as it is, and where I wondered, around page 190, how this novel could move on without some falsity, some upward or downward or sideways move that I would not believe, she has given an extraordinary narrative persistence to the faltering, immensely moving, subtly distinct survivals of the children who suffered and for whom the struggle has been maintained.

Nobody picks up a novel in the hope of reading bad news; and this novel is not bad news. Instead of consigning her heroine to the shadows of the cruelty she has battled, the author finds a remarkable device which to me anchors and verifies Erica's gutsy spirit, tenderness and realism. Her meditations include mental sketches—not escapism but drafts, trial-structures, part of her developing identity. How it would have been if she had been widowed, if the boyfriend of her schooldays had proved able to take up again their teenage love, if . . . The strange tense, 'would have . . . if', carries some of the best passages of this last third of the book. It extends Erica's creative lifeline beyond the imaging of actualities, to touch on a wider range of possibilities that are real in terms of her life even if they will not happen.

There is always the temptation to identify the

struggle of the author of such a book with that of the protagonist. In this case it is not wrong to do so. The author did encounter opposition and refusal to accept her *knowledge*; she found courage and persevered. This is a strong, challenging, true,

and ultimately consoling and triumphant novel that Janet Kelly has brought into the world.

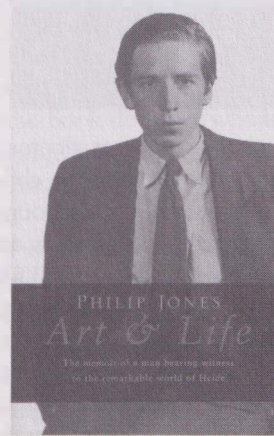
Judith Rodríguez is a poet and librettist, and is directing an October production of Two Gentlemen . . . (of Verona St, Melbourne).

Literary Memoir Leaves Much Untold

JANE GRANT

Philip Jones: *Art and Life* (Allen & Unwin, \$49.95)

In his introduction to his memoir, *Art and Life*, Philip Jones writes: “I have worked on this autobiographical memoir with a certain diffidence. I am not myself a person of outstanding achievement. I have, however, known many of the creative people of my time and country.” While Jones’s self-effacement is refreshing, his ‘diffidence’ about being the autobiographical subject of *Art and Life*



is problematic. In striving to write both an autobiography and a record of creative friends and acquaintances, he is perhaps trying to do too much. In recent years, Jones has built a reputation as an obituarist and his drive to practise his craft in *Art and Life* is almost compulsive. Too many profiles of famous and less than famous people crowd these pages and overshadow his own life story. This is a shame, because buried beneath the layers of biography and gossip is a fascinating personal history.

As a young man in Melbourne in the 1950s, Jones began a love affair with the poet and editor, Barrett Reid, and was drawn into the orbit of John and Sunday Reed at Heide. A formative period followed in which Jones worked on a series of Reed initiated and financed cultural enterprises: as an editorial assistant to Barrett Reid on the *Ern Malley Journal*, as the assistant director to John Reed at the Museum of Modern Art, and as the manager of the East End Booksellers. Jones freely admits that his tastes were moulded by the Reid/Reed nexus. It was, though, John and Sunday Reed who exerted the more lasting influence. The Reeds were his ‘surrogate parents’. Subtitled: *The Memoir of A Man Bearing Witness to the Remarkable World of Heide*, Jones writes a very personal and sometimes mov-

ing account of the later years of the Reeds’ lives. Unfortunately, he is less convincing on an earlier period that he did not personally ‘witness’.

Sunday Reed’s affair with Sidney Nolan, her refusal to leave her husband and Nolan’s eventual marriage to John Reed’s sister is familiar to many who will read *Art and Life*. So too, is the disputed ownership of a number of paintings that Sidney Nolan left behind at Heide and the subsequent breach between the two couples. Although it is understandable that

when the Nolans and the Reeds were alive their friends felt compelled to take sides, it is disappointing that long after their deaths an objective account remains so difficult to tell.

Despite Jones’s recognition that this drama was “labyrinthine in its complexity”, his account is strongly distorted by personal bias. He might rightfully dismiss accusations that Sunday Reed was “simply a selfish bitch” as a “superficial analysis of her personality”, but he fails to display the same degree of compassion in his treatment of the Nolans. Predictably, Sidney Nolan is described as “fuelled by a certain avarice” and “an opportunist” who “finally traded love for ambition”. Perhaps it is a desire to protect Sunday Reed’s idealised version of her affair that incites Jones to write: “Some say the marriage of Nolan and Cynthia was never sexually consummated”. These subjective and unsubstantiated opinions contribute little to the reader’s understanding of a complex and human story of love and betrayal that wrought permanent damage on all four lives.

Jones became a writer late in life and his insight into the constraints on his creativity is one of the most intriguing aspects of *Art and Life*: “Having known artists and writers, some famous, had led to

a kind of inhibition on my part. I saw myself as an appreciator rather than a creator". If the creative environment that Jones inhabited was a general source of insecurity, he also hints that his relationship with Barrett Reid was the cause of deeper and more complicated feelings of creative inhibition. It was only after the break-up of his thirty-year relationship with Reid that Jones began to write. Initially, writing was a form of therapy. His first published piece of writing was the 'warts and all' obituary of Reid who died in 1995: "It does seem appropriate that Barrie launched me on a new career in late middle age. He had introduced me to

the prospect of writing, and in a sense I owed him everything." It is, however, frustrating that this ambivalent and uneasy acknowledgement of creative debt is not more fully and centrally explored in *Art and Life*. In not revealing the dynamics of his relationship with Reid, Jones omits much of the context that might make real sense of his creative insecurities. In effect, this interesting and important story of becoming a writer is more suggested than actually told.

Jane Grant is currently writing a biography of Kylie Tennant for the National Library.

Mapping Music and Dance

JOHN JENKINS

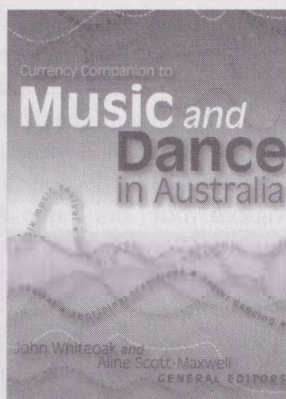
John Whiteoak & Aline Scott-Maxwell
(eds): *Currency Companion to Music and Dance in Australia* (Currency House, \$120 hb)

Eagerly anticipated and representing more than a decade of work, this sweeping 'panorama' of music and dance in Australia is a cause for celebration. An essential reference for scholars and specialists, and sure to be a useful addition to any public or institutional library, it will also fascinate any interested readers who can afford the cover price of \$120.

The great strength of this book is its historical depth and level of detail, combined with a very impressive breadth and scope. The work's project is no less than the comprehensive mapping of each and every strand of music and dance in Australia, from European settlement until today, including Aboriginal and 'multicultural' traditions and their contemporary expression.

Importantly, it is also the first general reference on dance in Australia. Just about every "practice, activity or process" of dance and music has been included—or, at least, I couldn't think of one that's overlooked.

The two general editors (one a musicologist, the other a Research Fellow, and both singers/musicians in their own right) have been assisted by 275 contributors, all experts in their particular fields.



There are large foundation sections on popular music, opera, ballet, classical, jazz, folk, rock, country and so on. But 'minority' and 'marginal' music and dance forms are also fully represented. These include everything from patriotic songs to gay and lesbian choirs, eurhythmics to cow punk, drum and fife bands to sound sculpture.

There are also entries on "the infrastructure . . . that support[s] and shapes these activities", including print

and electronic media, music and dance publishing, teaching methods and theoretical perspectives.

The larger entries are subdivided. The excellent section on jazz contains twenty separate sub-compartments—documenting everything from symphonic jazz to eclectic fusion.

The book starts with a cappella singing, followed by ABC and Aboriginal influences and it ends—more than 370 alphabetic entries and 687 pages later—with Yodelling, Youth orchestras and Zither.

Under 'S', an entry on striptease recalls the history of sexy dancing on the goldfields and ends with a lament that the stripper's art has lately degenerated to mere lap-dancing (which has nothing to do with Lapland). This entry is immediately preceded by one on serial music, or composition by twelve-tone series, a highly abstract and conceptual practice, in which musical structure can be contemplated almost as a form of mathematics.

The mix is as eclectic as it is generous. Above all, it is democratic and inclusive, resulting in a rigorously objective 'cultural mapping', without a sniff of prejudice or bias, and leaving the reader enabled to explore his or her own tastes and interests. There are also entries that respond to specific 'cultural sites' in Australian life—such as the playground, the pub and the country hall—suggesting the editors have more than a passing interest in social, as well as cultural mapping.

The notion of a companion, rather than a directory or guide, implies something highly user-friendly—an attempt to almost go with you personally on your various explorations of music and dance, like a helpful and pleasant companion at your side. The friendly promise is made good the more you open this book, particularly as you leave the well-worn (CD) tracks of your own taste and interests, and let it help you discover something about, for example, cabaret torch singing or western swing hits.

Each listing is followed by a helpful 'see also' note. And one of the book's pleasures is to dip into a particular entry—say, Choral singing—and find that not only have you become completely absorbed by the subject, but have somehow navigated your way or wandered back to a cappella singing, after doing a U-turn at Welsh choirs.

Another starting point for enjoyable meandering of this kind is the book's fourteen thousand or forty-six pages of meticulous index listings.

A book like this can often become a happy hunting ground for pedantic reviewers—but I resisted the opportunity to go snare a bag of typos or small errors, because such petty concerns only seems justified if errors actually spoil your reading somewhere.

For the sake of this review, however, I subjected all the entries in a number of areas (where I am reasonably confident of my knowledge) to a very intense critical reading. I looked for serious omissions, errors of fact, or perverse or misleading emphasis: notably, in Australian contemporary composition, new music and music theatre, modern dance and rock 'n' roll.

In all these areas, the companion scored somewhere between very well and seriously excellent. My one gripe was that I would have liked a little more detail in just a few of the rock music sections.

I also scrutinised entries in many areas less familiar to me, confident the *Companion's* impressive depth, accuracy and comprehensiveness carries through to every part, and that its quality is uniform.

The *Currency Companion to Music and Dance in Australia* has been well worth the wait. A true reflection of the astounding diversity and vitality of our music and dance, it will also quickly be recognised as a monument of (to mint a new term, perhaps) the scholarship of inclusiveness.

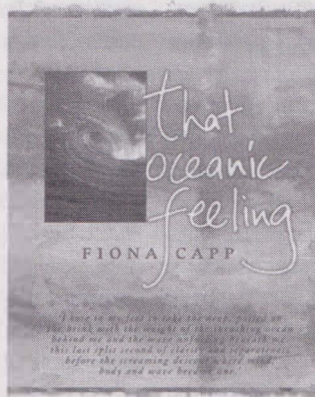
John Jenkins is the author of two books on Australian music. His latest book of poems is Dark River.

Writing the Surf

JEFF SPARROW

Fiona Capp: *That Oceanic Feeling*
(Allen & Unwin, \$35)

The government's notorious anti-terror booklet (the one with the fridge magnet) showed an idyllic beach scene, under the heading 'Protecting Our Way of Life from a Possible Terrorist Threat'. Inside, it displayed a number of images of "our way of life": snaps of bike riding, cricket playing and sausage barbecuing. Try a thought experiment: could one of these happy Australians have been shown *writ-*



ing? The question answers itself, courtesy of the long-running campaign to cast intellectuals as cosmopolitan elitists, estranged from the unselfconscious pleasures of the battlers. In the popular imagination, bookish types hunched over keyboards seem more likely to end in Guantanamo Bay than join virile Aussies in the surf.

That goes some way to explain the anxiety ("I had a sneaking feeling that I was breaking some unwritten rule . . .") that accompanied writer Fiona Capp on her journey from inner-city Fitzroy (yes, that's where they

live!) to the surf in Torquay. Yet the book that emerged from the waves with her provides an unexpected demonstration of how the issues preoccupying the chattering classes affect the rest of the country.

It's only urban sophisticates who bleat on about Indigenous culture, right? Actually, surfing traces its ancestry not to Captain Cook but those he encountered. The wave riders Cook found in Hawaii responded to the might of the British fleet with an insolent indifference to rival any black-clad postmodernist. The Captain wrote of his first surfer:

I could not help concluding that this man felt the most supreme pleasure while he was driven on so fast and so smoothly by the sea, especially as, though . . . the ships were so near, he did not seem in the least to envy or even to take any notice.

Closer to home, Capp describes beachside brawls at Portsea between surfers and surf lifesavers. What provoked them? Well, as she explains, Australian surfing developed from:

the explosion of youth culture in the late 1950s and early 1960s. To surf lifesavers, surfers were hedonists bent purely on their own pleasure, whose boards posed a threat to swimmers. Lifesaving, by contrast, was about community service and camaraderie, about being part of a team. Where surf lifesavers were highly regimented in their activities, surfers appeared anarchic and antisocial.

Rebellious, irresponsible, narcissistic: the Padraic McGuinnesses of the day condemned early surf culture in more or less the same terms that they today fulminate against the literati. Hence one cheery conclusion from Capp's potted history: the monocultural vista for which the Culture Warriors yearn is not only reactionary but entirely utopian. Every board rider provides a little demonstration of how the cosmopolitan values unleashed by the sixties now form an integral part of Australian society.

While deeply political, *That Oceanic Feeling* is not primarily a book about politics. Rather, it's a narrative of Capp's progress returning to the surf she loved in younger life. The bald description suggests the kind of narcissistic piece with which self-obsessed baby-boomers pad out the Sunday newspapers. But the pleasure of Capp's book comes from the myriad of digressions her journey pro-

vokes ("there's more to surfing than surfing"), from the effects of tourism on the Third World to an account of the re-enactment of the First Fleet in 1988.

Form thus follows content, with the text surging from psychoanalysis to philosophy to anthropology, like the Rip leaving Port Phillip Bay. In lesser hands, the technique might be annoying—just as you get interested in Duke Kahanamoku's 1914 Sydney demonstration of wave riding (on an eight-foot board hastily fashioned by a local timberyard) you find yourself confronted by Freud's theory of religion in *Civilisation and its Discontents*.

Here, it's kept together by Capp's lyricism. Basically, she could write a long exegesis on board wax, and the sparkle of the prose would leave you wanting to grab a hunk of the stuff yourself. Consider, for instance, the passage below:

If the eroding shoreline is regarded as a barometer of constant flux, the vast blue of the open ocean is an image of its opposite: eternity staring us in the face. And where sea and land collide, the ocean as an image of eternity takes on a mortal, human dimension. Time cannot be held, but when the energy silently coursing through deep water finally explodes upon the shore in a burst of white noise, the eternal becomes the now. Every wave is a perfect expression of the present tense: it can't be grasped or prolonged, only ridden.

Capp's return to the sea takes place in 2001, the year in which S11 transmuted from a demonstration to a tragedy, and 'Pacific' became inextricably linked with 'Solution'. The sense of momentous, horrible events on the horizon gives the narrative an extra edge—as she puts it, the book documents a time in which “one grew used to going about one's life while absorbing news of misery and disaster from near and far”.

It's a disturbing thought. Like Cook's Hawaiian, Capp finds surfing a supreme pleasure. These days, though, there's no activity upon which the dark events of our epoch have not cast a shadow. Trotsky once supposedly warned: “You may not be interested in war, but war is interested in you.” Even, unfortunately, in the surf.

Jeff Sparrow is Overland's reviews editor and author, with sister Jill Sparrow, of Radical Melbourne 2, (Vulgar Press, 2004).

Eloquent Exploration

ROWAN CAHILL

Lisa Milner: *Fighting Films: A History of the Waterside Workers' Federation Film Unit* (Pluto Press, \$29.95)

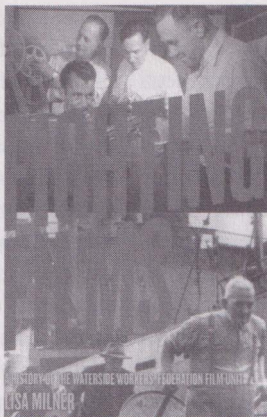
Between 1953 and 1958, the Sydney Branch of the militant Waterside Workers' Federation (WWF) supported a film unit. Adopting as its slogan 'We film the facts', the Unit (WWFFU) produced fourteen short films on 16-mm stock; ten documentaries, two animated films, and two newsreels. Seven of these were made for the WWF, the rest for other trade unions, groups or individuals.

The films focused on labour and social issues, industrial disputes, work and safety issues, industry nationalisation, and housing shortages. Sydney featured in the films. The documentaries included dramatic reconstructions and rank-and-file workers volunteered as actors, along with members of the radical New Theatre. Eight of the films featured the narrative skills of professional actor Leonard Teale, feted years later as "the voice of Australia".

Norma Disher, Keith Gow, and Jerome 'Jock' Levy, all in their 30s and members of the Communist Party of Australia, comprised the Unit. Disher was a New Theatre veteran with production and costuming experience, and worked as a clerk at the Sydney Trade Union Club; Gow and Levy worked in the small postwar Australian film industry and laboured between films on the Sydney waterfront. During the postwar era, the Sydney waterfront and the WWF provided numerous struggling intellectual and creative workers with sustaining casual work.

There is very little written history on the WWFFU. Apart from a few articles and book references, and a couple of research theses, the Unit has all but dropped through cracks in the Australian narrative and its film history. Lisa Milner rectifies this neglect; she chanced upon the work of the WWFFU in 1987, wrote a PhD on it, and *Fighting Films* is the book version of her research.

Fittingly, publication of *Fighting Films* was funded by the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA), the Mining, Energy and Construction divisions of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union, and the Australian Manufacturing Workers'



Union, three unions long involved in cultural projects promoting trade union principles and perspectives. Pdraig Crumlin, National Secretary of the MUA, has written the book's Foreword, again fittingly, since the MUA is an amalgamated maritime union that includes the workforce previously organised by the WWF.

Milner sets her account of the Unit in the political and cultural contexts of the Cold War when elements of McCarthyism found a happy home in Australia. Conservative ideologues,

politicians, and the mainstream media, espoused the idea that Australia was a classless society, and 'class conflict' an alien and false notion.

For the WWF, 'class' and 'class struggle' had currency. Waterfront work was physically intensive, often hazardous and unhealthy. Efforts by wharfies over the years to ameliorate their conditions, writes Milner, "provoked scathing attacks from the mainstream media, as well as from government and ship-owners". Wharfies were the subject of intense, often hysterical, anti-worker propaganda, misinformation, and were perceived as "marginal and threatening to a socially cohesive Australia".

Against this background, Sydney WWF branch secretary Tom Nelson resolved to use film as a weapon to promote militant working-class perspectives and to counter anti-unionism. Disher, Gow and Levy were recruited for the task, put on the union's payroll at the going casual rate for waterside workers and set to work making films on shoestring budgets.

The films were exhibited and distributed through an extensive non-commercial grassroots network developed by the Unit, the WWF, sympathetic trade unions, and left cultural activist organisations. Interest in the Unit's work was also taken by individuals and organisations in the dramatically expanding non-theatrical screen culture that was a feature of Sydney in the 1950s, and won national recognition at the Sydney Film Festival. Internationally the films screened primarily in Eastern Bloc nations where they won awards, including a prestigious Gold Medal at the 1957 Warsaw Youth Festival.

The Unit ended for complex reasons, including financial considerations and the belief by some union officials that propaganda/educational cultural

work, like film production, was not an activity the WWF should be engaged in.

Fighting Films is a small book (166 pages) with considerable punch, authoritatively claiming for the WWFFU a dynamic part in Australian film history, and a role in contributing “to a radical representation of Australian national identity”. Twenty-seven pages of scholarly notes will assist further study, and a chapter devoted to the discussion of each of the

Unit’s fourteen films ensures the WWFFU can no longer be justifiably overlooked or ignored.

Read another way, Milner’s book is an eloquent exploration of how initiative and creativity can stop the door closing completely when forces of reaction seek to limit opinion and media diversity, a message as relevant today as it was during the Cold War.

Rowan Cahill is a labour-movement historian and journalist.

No Laughing Matter

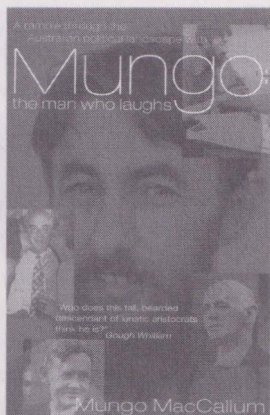
VANE LINDESAY

Mungo MacCallum: *Mungo: the man who laughs* (Duffy & Snellgrove, \$22)

“The man who laughs has not yet been told the terrible news,” a quote from Bertolt Brecht, introduces this recent reprint by Mungo MacCallum, who then proceeds to tell us what the terrible news is. As we might expect from the sharpest and on his day most pertinent political commentator in Australia, we are offered a fresh, entertaining, inside view of federal politics and the personalities and perpetrators of events from the Menzies era through to when Labor took office in 1983.

The in-between years are wonderfully evoked—the Petrov muckraking affair, royal visits from “a hereditary monarchy of dubious provenance and genetic unreliability—more than one royal tourist appeared to have lost his chin in an unfortunate breeding accident”—Menzies’ blundering role in the Suez crisis, the Labor Party split “which made Labor’s previous rifts look positively hairline”, aided by “a small prematurely balding man with piercing eyes, and sibilant voice, Bartholomew Augustine Michael (but just call me Bob) Santamaria who looked sinister, he sounded sinister; and, by always working behind the scenes rather than in the open forums of the party, he acted sinister”. The intrigues of the newly-formed Democratic Labor Party and the Catholic Action Movement in Victoria, particularly during these Cold War years, were politically and industrially brutal and ugly.

New South Wales, then a naturally Labor state,



was as Mungo reminds us largely controlled by good, middle-of-the-road Catholics with whom Cardinal Norman Gilroy of that state had few serious differences, wishing all parties good luck in elections, except of course the communists. Mannix, on the other hand, earnestly preached to his flock to vote against the ALP as a matter of conscience, not forgetting “the Red Menace”. Mungo takes us through these years of fear and student and public street demonstrations against a background of ASIO’s

agents provocateurs, infiltration of the Communist Party, the ABC and other bodies. Weaving through these observations, and recording the political struttings and antics, Mungo recalls much of his own background.

“Who does this tall, bearded descendant of lunatic aristocrats think he is?” asked Gough Whitlam. Mungo’s mother’s people were the Wentworths of infamy. William Charles Wentworth the younger sat comfortably in federal politics, making waves with his apocalyptic red-baiting; the Labor opposition claimed “he was at his best just before the full moon”. As a youngster Mungo admits that “I was spoilt, selfish, wilful and moody—ideal material, one might have thought, for recruitment to the Liberal Party. It had certainly worked for Uncle Bill.”

Although Mungo’s opening to this work states that his book “does not pretend to be either history or biography” it does describe for instance his revealing meeting with George Johnston and Charmian Clift on the Greek island of Hydra, his travels around Greece and Asia, his impressions (not good) of Eng-

land and finally his return to Australia in 1964, after failing, like many of us, to set the Thames on fire, finding Australia with Menzies still on his throne and “continuing to collect imperial honours with the enthusiasm of a child wedded to matchbox toys”. He’d been made a Knight of the Royal and Ancient Order of the Thistle, “a weed held in greater esteem in Britain than Australia”.

On a brighter note, Mungo was agreeably surprised to hear of the establishment for the first time in Australia of a national daily newspaper, the *Australian*, where eventually he found his career. He

was now in his element, doing the rounds and viewing “the steamy stew of politics” during the womanising Menzies-Holt-Gorton-Snedden Liberal years, through to the ‘It’s Time’ changeover, with the devastating Cairns-Morosi relationship and the climactic dismissal of the Whitlam government.

Mungo does not pull his punches, naming names of conspirators, drunks and skirt-chasers, while chronicling the significant events of those miserable Cold War-Vietnam Hot War years.

Vane Lindesay is a Melbourne designer and writer.

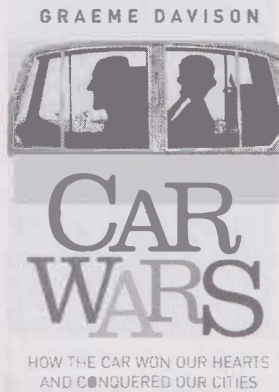
No Shaggin’ Wagons Here

HUMPHREY McQUEEN

Graeme Davison with Sheryl Yelland:
*Car Wars: How the car won our hearts
and conquered our cities* (Allen &
Unwin, \$29.95)

After the first edition of Melway appeared in 1966, this driver’s directory became almost as essential among Melbourne motorists as oil had always been to their vehicles. Its omission from *Car Wars* is typical both of the author’s threadbare treatment of everyday motoring and of the book’s want of drive and direction. Similarly, Davison’s acknowledgement of urban theorists honoured for their moral and expressive clarity, such as Marshall Berman, Mike Davis, David Harvey and Hugh Stretton, has been no barrier against his presenting suburban thinking in pedestrian prose.

Davison presents *Car Wars* as “avowedly a study of the impact of the private car, not a comprehensive history of metropolitan transport”. The result is a collection of essays held together by a large ARC grant. The ten topics traversed begin with the vehicles as ‘Dream Machines’, watch as ‘Women take the Wheel’, and chug through sex, speed, regulation and crashes. The final four chapters survey the planning for freeways. The impress of oil and auto corporations on state decision-makers gets a one-line nod to Leonie Sandercock. Davison avoids apportioning responsibility by activating an object, so that “the car created congestion” as it “conquered our cities”. GM and BP played no part.



To understand what corporations are up to, an investigator should not bother with how their press releases are recycled in the daily newspapers, but must chase up what the managers are saying to each other in the trade press. In a step forward for Australian scholarship, Davison’s research assistants have trawled through publications such as *Motor Manual*. Penetrating into the related areas of marketing would have revealed, for example, how the car radio helped to segment the sales market, bringing relief to station budgets after the arrival of television. Davison has not pointed his helpers beyond the would-be queen of the humanities to examine the scholarly journals in economics, geography, sociology, industrial relations or psychology; not even the *Journal of Transport History* gets a footnote.

Davison draws a comparison between *Car Wars* and his other full-length publication, *Marvellous Melbourne* (1978), which, he says, developed “a general theme”, namely, “the evolution of a provincial city towards the competitive, bureaucratic structures of an authentic metropolis”; that transformation, he continues, marked “a new phase in the evolution of modern capitalism”. This statement is as close as Davison comes to explaining either what capitalism evolved from, or what it became. Still less does he ask how or why the evolution was achieved. He merely drops ‘capitalism’, ‘modernity’ and ‘Fordism’ into his narrative.

The romance that Davison recounts is chaste.

No Melburnian appears to have rumbled in a back seat, still less sported a shaggin' wagon. He reports how writers such as Jack Hibberd pictured the car as a sex object, but does not challenge the pop feminist complaint that curvaceous gals are strewn across automobile ads to attract male custom. Davison's fondness for his first auto, an English racing-car green 1948 Triumph Roadster, is sedate when compared with James B. Twitchell's confession in *Lead Us Into Temptation* (1999) of the "nostalgic onanism" that led him to purchase a red Mazda 121, just so that he could sit in it in his garage.

Davison shows that the affixing of 'dream' to 'girl', 'car' and 'home' began in the 1940s as a fantasy to escape from the 1930s Depression, followed by war-time rationing. Once the postwar boom got underway, 'dream' began to subvert the domestic realm of family and wife. In reflecting on 'dream' as a keyword, Davison bypasses the linguistic turn, even as negotiated by Raymond Williams.

The love affair with the car broke many a bloke's heart as women welcomed the plastic paints that allowed cars to be other than black or olive without fading. The gender wars of the 1950s flickered around two-tone pastels, and ultimately over pink. Similarly, the significance of 'family car' drifted as mother at first chose the interior decor while dad picked the duco; he then lost that power around the same time as corporate engineers reduced his capacity to tinker under the bonnet. Next, the drive-through carwash at the remodeled petrol stations replaced the family's working together to polish the vehicle.

Paid work is nowhere to be found. Yet the dominance of the automobile restructured the labour market. Manufacture, sales and servicing required hundreds of thousands of employees, even without

counting the jobs dependent on those incomes. *Car Wars* knows nothing of the class struggle. The experience of the production line at Ford (Broadmeadows) did not win the hearts of immigrant workers, as the 1973 strike demonstrated.

Davison restricts 'Fordism' to the particularisation of labour rather than the subordination of that division to continuous flows. The latter is more relevant to traffic planners because delivery costs affect the turnover of capital, a point about time's conquest of space which Davison failed to grasp in *The Unforgiving Minute* (1993).

A chapter on 'The New Landscape' bypasses the postwar zoning that separated more labourers from their workplaces. Travel expenses are among the socially necessary costs of reproducing labour power. Their containment through cheap public transport can advance the accumulation of total capital while limiting returns to car-makers and petroleum suppliers. Equally, petrol costs and parking fees are disincentives for an unemployed person in Clayton to take a low-paid job in Carlton.

Another gap in Davison's account is the re-skilling of driving itself. Cranking gave way to self-starters, then clutches to automatic transmission and hand signals to indicators before almost every physical effort fell to power steering, power brakes and magic-eye roller doors.

Davison concedes that the car wars "both enriched and impoverished our lives". The freedoms he associates with personal motor vehicles are real but, as with every commodity in capitalism, they must first satisfy the need that capital has to expand. Every increase in real income is packaged as an impulse to buy and borrow along the expressway to credit-card peonage.

Humphrey McQueen is a freelance historian.

War for Oil

NIC MACLELLAN

Alison Broinowski: *Howard's War* (Scribe, \$19.95)

Raymond Gaita (ed.): *Why the war was wrong* (Text, \$23)

The week before the invasion of Iraq, Prime Minister John Howard told the National Press Club he'd been on the phone to President Pervez Musharraf

of Pakistan, lobbying the dictator for support for the looming conflict. Howard, an enthusiastic cricket fan, glibly noted: "I'm pleased to say that part of the conversation was an indulgence by both of us in our common love of a particular sport."

The Australian Prime Minister went on to describe Pakistan as "a very, very good international

citizen”, ignoring the Pakistani regime’s links with al-Qa’ida, possession of nuclear weapons and appalling human rights record.

Days later, Australian SAS troops were in action in the western deserts of Iraq. In *Howard’s War*, Alison Broinowski notes: “Before 2003, Australia had never participated in starting a war. This time our generals even boasted that the first shots were fired by Australians”.

Broinowski’s short text, and Raymond Gaita’s edited collection *Why the war was wrong*, challenge the justifications that led the United States, Britain, Australia and Poland to launch an illegal invasion of Iraq in March 2003. In her fierce polemic, Alison Broinowski highlights two factors that led John Howard to war: “the American alliance and the next election”. Collating a series of lectures at the Australian Catholic University, the Gaita collection focuses on issues of ideology and morality, with valuable essays by Hilary Charlesworth on international law, and Tony Coghlan and Eva Sallis pondering just war theory and the travails of the Iraqi people.

The two books analyse weapons, terrorism and liberation, the three key pillars used to justify the war: Saddam’s alleged possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD); the danger that the Iraqi regime might pass these weapons to terrorists through its alleged links to al-Qa’ida; and the suffering of the Iraqi people under Saddam’s brutal regime.

In his National Press Club address to the nation just a week before the war, Howard dismissed the overthrow of Saddam as a justification for war: “I would have to accept that if Iraq had genuinely disarmed, I couldn’t justify on its own a military invasion of Iraq to change the regime. I’ve never advocated that.”

But the benefits of liberation for Iraq have become the sole rationale today. The lack of evidence about Saddam’s WMD programs and alleged al-Qa’ida links makes the measured doubts in these two books seem overly cautious in hindsight. And talk of ‘liberation’ rings hollow—as I write, six hundred civilians have been killed as US Marines attack insurgents in Fallujah, and photos have appeared documenting torture and humiliation in Abu Graib prison, part of America’s global ‘rights-free zone’ that stretches from Guantanamo Bay to Baghram Air Base in Afghanistan and Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean.

This third issue, the liberation of the Iraqi people, causes great qualms for these writers—in his contribution to the Gaita collection, Robert Manne muses that “those who opposed the invasion, as I did, cannot wriggle away from the fact that if our opposition had been successful, the disgusting regime of Saddam Hussein would still be in power in Iraq”.

But this falls into a dichotomy—war or the status quo—without extended discussion of non-military options to dictatorship (from strengthening international human rights law and the International Criminal Court, to halting the supply of arms and torture implements to repressive regimes).

The two books skate past the hypocrisy of lectures on ‘liberation’ from governments that supported Saddam throughout the 1980s as a bulwark against the Islamic regime in Tehran—providing technical and material support for his chemical and biological weapons programs that were used against Iranian troops and Kurdish communities. Another weakness in both books is that they focus extensively on questions of morality or ideology, but have little to say about the political economy of militarism and the quest for control of energy resources.

Robert Manne’s essay explicitly argues “any attempt at an explanation of the invasion of Iraq must begin not with oil but with ideology, with the influence of neo-conservatism”. Broinowski also focuses on ideological sources for the conflict—American exceptionalism, the impact of neo-con thinkers on US policy, and the role of muscular Christianity—although she briefly scans the influence of arms traders and oil merchants on US policy.

I’d argue, however, that oil and ideology can’t be separated. There is plenty of evidence showing that the rise of neo-conservative ideology in the United States since the 1960s is intimately connected to questions of energy resources and the use of military power to manage the global economy. This has been reinforced in recent books by Bob Woodward and Bush’s former Treasury Secretary Paul O’Neill. According to O’Neill, less than ten weeks after the Bush administration took office “documents were being prepared by the Defense Intelligence Agency mapping Iraq’s oil fields and exploration areas, and listing companies that might be interested in leveraging the precious asset”.

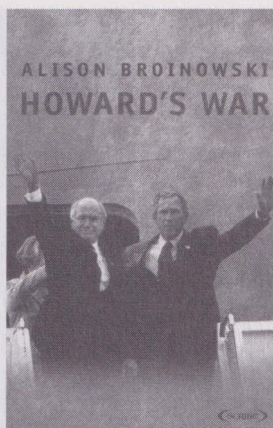
There is no doubt that right-wing ideologues fuel American militarism—citizens of Grenada, Nicaragua, Panama and Somalia have long suffered from

'chicken hawks' like the American Enterprise Institute's Michael Ledeen, who told *Harper's Bazaar*: "Every ten years or so, the United States needs to pick up some crappy little country and throw it against the wall, just to show the world we mean business."

But Vice President Dick Cheney's influence on Iraq policy derives from his role as a corporate officer in the energy and construction sector, not simply from the clash of ideas and values. One of Cheney's first jobs in the Bush administration was to head a new Energy Commission, whose National Energy Policy Report in May 2001 noted that pursuit of increased oil imports is "a priority of our trade and foreign policy".

The issue is not access to cheap reserves of oil, though that's a bonus, but control of energy resources as a lever of strategic influence. By controlling key reserves of oil, the United States can use energy costs to exert influence over global economic policy—no small matter in the face of economic competition from China, Japan and the European Union.

The US government encourages Middle East oil producers like UAE and Saudi Arabia to buy advanced US weapons systems—this recycling of oil profits ensures a huge subsidy for high-tech arms and computer corporations in the United States. Increased control of strategic oil reserves also allows huge profits for energy corporations, construction firms, arms producers, as well as petrodollars recycled to US treasury bonds, rather than Euros. In 2002, Iraq, Venezuela and other OPEC mem-



WHY THE WAR WAS WRONG

Edited by
RAIMOND GAITA

With contributions by
ROBERT MAHNE, GUY RUNDLE, EVA SALLIS,
RAIMOND GAITA, HILARY CHARLESWORTH,
PETER COGHAN, MARK McKENNA



bers were debating use of the Euro rather than the US dollar to measure the price of oil—a factor underlying France and Germany's outspoken opposition to the Iraq war and the ongoing threat to the Chavez government in Venezuela.

America's collapsing policy in Iraq highlights the folly of the Bush administration's unilateralism. But if the Republicans lose the Presidency, I have little faith that a Kerry administration will ignore the use of US military power, as energy corporations diversify their operations to the Caspian Sea, Central Asia, Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa. Howard's War will not be the last time we send diggers to far-off shores.

Nic Maclellan was co-ordinator of the Victorian Peace Network in 2003.

Selling the Farm

JEREMY MOSS

John Cain & John Hewitt: *Off Course: from Public Place to Market Place at Melbourne University* (Scribe Publications, \$30)

Imagine that in response to declining government funding for higher education a university designed a secret experiment to demonstrate what could go wrong when a public institution embraced market values. John Cain and John Hewitt's book, *Off Course: from Public Place to Market Place at Melbourne University*, is a readable account of just such a disaster played out at the University of Melbourne.

The value of this book lies not so much in the authors' prescriptions for the University, which fol-

low a familiar line, but in their documenting of the extraordinary follies of the vice-chancellor and the breathtaking propensity of the University's senior administration to act as if nothing had gone wrong.

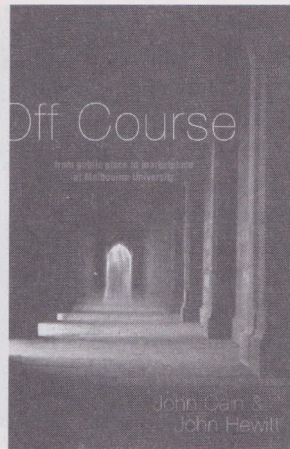
In the first half of the book the authors state their case that the University has lost its way by abandoning many of the values appropriate to a public institution. Drawing on Robert Menzies as well as Gough Whitlam, they argue that universities such as Melbourne can only properly fulfil a nation-building role if they are adequately funded *public* institutions, with sufficient autonomy over research and freedom of expression.

In place of an autonomous public university acting as the 'conscience of society', they claim that

Melbourne has embraced market values with disastrous results. Instead of acting for the good of society, the University now sees its role as advancing its prestige for its own sake and to make a profit.

The changes that led to this are assessed through a discussion of national education policy from Menzies to Dawkins, governance at the University itself and the experience of staff and students. What some will find interesting about these chapters is not so much the analysis of changes to the sector, but the access that the authors had to former politicians and University administrators. The chapter on federal education policy is full of first-hand accounts of the role that a particular minister or vice-chancellor played in designing the Dawkins reforms. While this material provides a rich anecdotal version of events, I was sometimes left wondering if the former ministers and administrators were not indulging in just a little retrospective whitewashing of their past activities.

Where the book really comes into its own is in Part II, where Cain and Hewitt document several disastrous episodes that grew out of former vice-chancellor Alan Gilbert's 'Melbourne Agenda'. They show how, in the space of just a few years, the University lost millions establishing a private university, failed to realise the true value of its privatised IT assets and invested millions in an e-learning initiative which has still not turned a profit. What is striking about these failed commercial experiments is the sheer scale of the loss that Melbourne absorbed and how limited were the effects of the public outcry on those responsible. For example, when the University privatised Melbourne IT, it realised \$78.5 million on its asset. Yet, just a few months later the asset was valued at \$350 million by the market. The real winners in the deal were the underwriters and their clients, who included three members of University Council. Similarly, the University's attempt to set up a private university, Melbourne University Private Limited (MUPL), has been marred by a failure to attract many students, produce research or pay back the original \$10 million investment. While \$10 million is a significant sum in itself, Cain and Hewitt point out that not only did the original MUPL not turn a profit, but the University



took on \$150 million of debt to fund the building program associated with MUPL, significantly limiting the University's flexibility to hire more staff or improve services. As someone who was a critic of the initiative at the time, this is the best account I have read of what went on.

The picture emerging from their account is one of a vice-chancellor's office operating unchecked and placing the University naively at the mercy of markets. While the authors are refreshingly frank about these adventures and their consequences,

describing them at one point as "poorly executed, risky, flamboyant, and wasteful", there are several issues that remain in need of further discussion. The most obvious is the industrial relations record of the University. At the time that the University's senior administration was defending itself over its handling of its commercial experiments, it was also refusing to guarantee staff pay rises in line with other universities, and even became the first university in Victoria to stand down staff when they took industrial action. In this respect Melbourne's efforts at privatisation were similar to other unsuccessful experiments in that members of the public—in this case staff and students—ended up footing the bill. Given the authors' concern that staff be more assertive, it is surprising that they do not make this link.

The book ends with some proposals about what the University needs to do to get back on track as a public institution. The authors argue that the University desperately needs more input from academics, greater transparency and governance, but they stop short of repudiating HECS. They are certainly not alone in arguing for some sort of 'public/private' mix as a continued funding solution for the higher education sector. Indeed, it is one of the dubious achievements of the Dawkins years that hardly anyone talks of a massive government injection of funds any more. However, if further failed flirtations with privatisation and a rush towards US-level fees are to be avoided, there seems little alternative than for the community to demand that governments do just that.

Dr Jeremy Moss is a Research Fellow at the Centre for Applied Philosophy & Public Ethics at the University of Melbourne.

Deep Thought, High Humour

KERRY LEVES

Keith Harrison: *Changes: New & Collected Poems*
1962–2002 (Black Willow Press, \$39.95)

“I am walking very slowly across Minnesota/ Inside a car with no engine and no seats./ I have left the seats in a hundred country towns and the/ Old squat around on them and dream of onions.” If you’ve ever read Robert Bly’s celebrated poem ‘Driving Towards the *Lac Qui Parle* River’ (whose “deep-image” portentousness used to be discussed very solemnly) you may be unable to look at it seriously after reading Keith Harrison’s droll, lethal parody. Harrison’s ‘Travelling Toward the *Vache Qui Pue* River’ (the French means ‘Stinking Cow’) is open-hearted (and open-eared) to its target, which enables it to be thoroughly unkind to the tonal artifices of its original, as well as the latter’s conceits (e.g. to Bly’s line, “The lamplight falls on all fours on the grass”, Harrison replies “The lamplight collapses on the grass/ Like a spavined frog”). ‘*Vache Qui Pue*’ comes from Harrison’s ‘The Basho Poems’, a series which plays exquisitely with a compendium of poetic conceits, including a conceited, dodgy and shameless poetic ego. The sequence does so through the figure of ‘Basho’, the sixteenth-century Japanese master of *haiku* poetry, who is recast as a time-walking creature made of equal parts fraud, ambition and concupiscence, in a series of poetic tableaux that invoke a great many later poets, including Mallarmé. This wondrous set is likely to retain its incisive edge and its magnanimous, irreverent but not at all reductive humour for as long as poetry continues to be read, and (oxymoronically, perhaps) taken seriously.

Keith Harrison’s poetry is not as well-known in Australia as it ought to be, partly because his six previous books have been published in the USA and the UK. Even though *Changes* was launched here (in the ACT, in April 2003), it doesn’t seem to have drawn the spacious, considering reviews it deserves. Harrison has written some magnificent anti-war poems, using a language of dynamic rhetorical beauty that can also insult and scorn, but that never breaks faith with the simplicity of the feelings that drive it. A poem, ‘General’, addresses its eponymous subject: “Some day, after your kind, you’ll die/ Between clean covers, dreaming of perfect

battles,/ While those who gave flesh to your abstractions/ Had their guts blown out in the sand, or legs/ Snapped up behind their backs . . .” And the poem ‘Legs’ (about war-veteran amputees) suggests: “At this, and any time, not to be paranoid/ Is highest foolishness. This executive, whose eyes/ You cannot see behind his brilliant lenses, will never hack your hands off;/ He will take what dreams in you on the twentieth floor at coffee-break—/ The part that shapes a tune for your flute, or bends a clay bowl/ To the exact form of your delight—and he will tweezer it out of you/ Very slowly.” But Harrison’s humanism also avoids the High Moral Ground, as ‘Song of a Lecherous Man’, in its no-bullshit ruthlessness, indicates: “Save when I use you in this way,” the implied poet addresses his drowsing lover, “You’d never understand . . . / So sleep,/ Curled in your dream of love/ For then I watch, and the flame/ Rises—and that’s enough.” It’s more than “enough”: it’s the ice-cold moment of knowing *exactly* what’s gone down.

Changes is a big, rangy, multi-dimensional book, and comes about as near to a pretension-free zone as its kind of poetry (lyrical, full of weather and texture, using a wide variety of forms) gets. Even such an out-and-out humanist masterpiece as ‘Winter Canticle’ argues the relatively modest claim for poetry that it can and does make us ‘imagine’ a world different from, yet recognisable as, the one we live in. The final lines of ‘Winter Canticle’ point, with admirable semiotic economy, to our (English-speaking) culture’s relationship to ‘the Greeks’ (the ancient, dark, ferocious language of the myths, along with the clarities of Plato and Aristotle). Yet this recollecting gesture is less affirmation than potent ambiguity, tied to the mimesis of human and animal single-mindedness in the poem’s first lines. Harrison seems to have read an enormous quantity of poetry, and perhaps to have learned from all of it, including Japanese *haiku* and *tanka*, along with the French symbolists. A reader starts to notice how much depends on the white spaces of Harrison’s page, the silence created through the arrangements of words. This is more than a matter of ink and paper. In Harrison’s poems the lines—the words—can seem to be making a silence into which their sounds and meanings dive and, as it were, start swimming. Harrison’s poems thus always seem to

speak into a not-fully-known world, rather than 'simply' to manifest a quite-well-known one. The ambiguities of language become salient. These poems 'posit movement': they are 'transitions', which, in Kierkegaard's philosophy, makes them akin to freedoms. And they take their liberties soberly, though with a certain levity: "At about the fortieth twist/ In

the mountain road/ A drunken bandit came at him./ *Empty your pockets*, he said./ I'm a poet, Basho said./ I live off other people's money./ The bandit lunged at him./ Basho kicked him in the cods. Stalked on."

Kerry Leves is a NSW poet.

opinion | **ANGUS GOSWELL**

WHO SPEAKS FOR US?

Young voters and the failure of political representation

THE COALITION'S unsuccessful attempt to disenfranchise potentially tens of thousands of first-time voters by introducing legislation that would have seen the electoral rolls closed on the day an election was announced is indicative of an attitude of contempt and insensitivity towards young people apparent within much of contemporary Australian politics.

The last Federal election saw 83,000 first-time voters enrol with the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) in the first week of the official election campaign. The Murdoch press suggested that, had the move not been blocked in the senate, as many as 100,000 young people could have been excluded from this year's electoral process under the government's plan.¹ Simon Castles, in an opinion piece published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 14 April 2004, responded to the proposed changes to Australia's electoral law by describing young voters as "the great unwashed of the electorate: ignored, rarely spoken about, and never, ever spoken to".²

I do not claim to write here on behalf of all young people. In a society that often seeks to silence youth, or attempts to speak for them, I am aware of how privileged I am to have the opportunity and ability to express my thoughts as I would like them to be expressed. Nor do I wish to imply a homogenous political persuasion among Australia's youth. My own experiences on university campuses, within youth media organisations, and inside workplaces,

have demonstrated the fallacy of conventional depictions of young people as predominantly left-leaning and radical. The ABC's *7.30 Report* on Thursday 15 July 2004 ran a story exploring the attitudes of young people towards the impending Federal election. As well as vox polling a few school and university students, reporter Heather Ewart spoke with politicians from both major parties as well as a number of political analysts including the ABC's own election jack-in-the-box Antony Green.

All the 'adults' interviewed agreed that the youth vote was potentially vital to the election's outcome. All also agreed however that young people have traditionally been approached ineffectively by Australian politicians. Antony Green noted that "the youth vote is critical", but that the major parties seem unable to properly set about winning it and so "tend to shrug their shoulders at it".

Despite this, representatives of the major parties interviewed in the *7.30 Report* story refused to admit that capturing the hearts and imaginations of first-time voters was beyond their capability. Liberal Senator Eric Abetz, the Special Minister of State, even went so far as to suggest that many young voters may see John Howard as a sort of "father figure for the nation".

Abetz's comment is surprising to say the least. If the Coalition was truly confident in the existence of this 'father figure' image, then it's hard to under-

stand why it would have sought to alter established electoral processes in a manner certain to exclude young people from voting.

Suffice to say that increases to the cost of higher education (despite widespread protest), an unfair and divisive allocation of taxpayer funds between public and private schools, the abolition of the Educational Textbook Subsidy Scheme and the implementation of a tax system that hurts those who otherwise would earn too little to pay significant, if any, amounts of income tax do little to convince me that the Coalition has the best interests of all young people at heart.

Still, the lack of representation and respect afforded young people in mainstream politics goes beyond legislation. Although many young people are capable of interpreting and critiquing even the most complex political dialogue and rhetoric, a key problem remains the fundamental failure of politicians to present political issues and discussion in a manner appealing to younger audiences.

Today, our leading politicians seem to think that they can make an appearance on certain programs and tick off the 'youth box' for a while. Successive Labor leaders Simon Crean and Mark Latham probably entertained visions of themselves in a similar public role to that which former Democrats leader Natasha Stott Despoja used to play when they agreed to be interviewed on Channel 10's *Rove Live*.

While it can be argued that these media strategies display something of a willingness to engage with themes and issues of importance to some, many young people are interested in policies and legislative action, and are keen to participate in their formation and implementation.

In this regard, an obvious problem is the lack of young people within our Federal and State parliaments. More traditional avenues of youth access and interaction such as Young Labor and the Young Liberals are viewed with scepticism and disdain by most young people. Political rhetoric remains almost exclusively directed at older audiences, and indeed often displays an air of anti-youth sentiment (generally in a manner consistent with the notion of 'dog-whistle' politics) found within much of Australian cultural life.

While writing this article, I spoke with a number of soon-to-be first-time voters, some of whom I was already acquainted with. While quite a few were enthusiastic about the prospect of voting in their

first Federal election later in the year, many more expressed a sense of resignation to the futility of their vote.

In her extremely critical examination of Australia's electoral system, Lisa Hall explained abstention and disillusionment with voting in terms of "an emotional and psychological response to marginalisation and isolation" as well as a political statement.³

In June 2003, in response to the lack of data available in the Australian context, the AEC announced the commencement of a four-year national study into the voting patterns of young Australians. The 'Youth Electoral Study' will involve interviews with thousands of young people, seeking to establish why they do/don't enrol to vote and their attitudes to voting itself. Electoral Commissioner Andy Becker said that the research aimed to "discover why young people have not participated in the past and how to more effectively engage them in the future".⁴ It will be interesting to see whether the findings of the study confirm Hall's arguments.

In a country that can lay claim to one of the highest rates of youth suicide in the world, it seems clear that many young people in this country experience the types of emotional hardships that Hall describes, and that the alienation many young people experience within Australian society is being replicated in the political sphere.

Recent damaging legislative developments and the lack of representation afforded to young people in mainstream politics mean that it is difficult for young people to regard themselves as valuable members of the electorate. The dismissive old adage that 'children should be seen and not heard' has been reincarnated as an official political philosophy.

However, young people are at the forefront of many progressive political and social organisations; leading social justice groups like the Refugee Action Collective; coordinating and participating in environmental movements; donating time to welfare organisations and volunteering in aged care.

Young people are driving forces in the establishment of many community-based broadcast and print media initiatives. Such projects are helping to disseminate positive portrayals of Australia's youth, in contrast to the dominant media's fascination with negative and disempowering depictions of young people as perpetrators of crime or victims of socioeconomic or violent circumstances beyond their control.

LECTURE

I'd led a quiet life until I went to *Media Watch*. Then I discovered I was a notorious Lefty. This amused my friends and surprised me. Most of the time, the label was applied as abuse, the counterattack of choice for those we exposed on *Media Watch*. The old tectonic struggle between Left and Right still shapes public debate in this country—less often as a great contest of values, more often as abuse. Forget Marx and Engels, the core complaint against the Australian Left today is disloyalty to the United States.

David Marr

PROFILE

Petty did not last long at the *Australian* after the election. On 25 February 1976, 'a special correspondent' who was, in fact, Rupert Murdoch himself, called for Whitlam's head on a platter. On 28 February the front page announced the arrival of Larry Pickering, "Australia's top political cartoonist". By all accounts, Petty was not sacked at this point, but he was clearly demoted for a cartoonist much more in tune with the paper's new attitude; Pickering had even stood as a candidate for the Liberals. No Petty cartoon appears in the *Australian* after 28 February. The disappearance was sudden and coincided with both the employment of a right-wing cartoonist and Murdoch's personal hatchet-job on Whitlam.

Robert Phiddian

CURRENT AFFAIRS

Greg Sheridan's language is duckspeak, the quacking out of bureaucratic lines and official lies to keep the propaganda machine rolling.

Martin Hirst & Robert Schütze

HISTORY

Russo's broadcast was neither the first nor the last source of tension between an Australian government and the ABC over perceived bias. The history of the public broadcaster is littered with similar incidents that have occurred when the ABC has disseminated views judged by governments of the day to be unbalanced, especially views on Australia's international relations. The Russo case is distinguished by the mystery surrounding its origins, the dramatic international context in which it was played out, and its impact, real or imagined, upon Australia's relationship with the United States at a pivotal moment in history.

Prue Torney-Parlicki

LITERATURE

How was Gemmell exposed as the author? Gemmell claimed she had been outed by someone from within her publisher. Others speculated that the whole thing was an elaborate publisher ploy to generate interest. This is not entirely the truth because Gemmell in fact exposed herself.

Lynda Hawryluk

CULTURE

This code can be found in any homosocial organisation that is built on the exclusion of women. It can recruit some young men into a distinct sexual identity: a sexuality in league, in which men perform sexual acts in each others' company—that is, *with each other*—via the medium of a woman's body. In recent studies Australia has the dubious distinction of being the only country in which men visit prostitutes in groups and have sex in each others' company.

Liz Conor

"The most exciting in its field"

| Ross Fitzgerald, *The Australian*

"Uncomfortable food for thought"

| Debra Adelaide,
Sydney Morning Herald

"A blunt challenge to the Australian media"

| Fiona Capp, *The Age*

"A journal of variety, ideas, opinion and heart"

| Christopher Bantick,
Canberra Times

temper democratic,
bias Australian

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