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THE SPIRIT IN AUSTRALIA

178

AUTUMN 2005

TEMPER DEMOCRATIC, BIAS AUSTRALIAN

SPIRIT IN AUSTRALIA AND AUSTRALIAN SPIRIT

In a review of our previous issue for the Melbourne *Age*, Fiona Capp wrote that it was presided over by "the spirit of poet Judith Wright". This new issue, I would suggest, is animated by the spirit of Patrick White.

White presented during the postwar period a powerful and sustained critique of Australian society's narrow utilitarianism and materialism and attempted to articulate a positive alternative to this culture in his richly symbolic, metaphysical fiction. He believed that unless Australians placed certain fundamental cultural values above the imperative of maximising profit, then the society would finally self destruct. He criticised the conformity, conservative Anglocentrism and lack of imagination of his New England squattocratic family and the Australian ruling class of which it was part. He was equally intolerant of the anti-intellectualism and greed of the union movement and the radical left, though he reserved his really impressive hatred for the nouveau riche of the post-Whitlam free-market age: the developers, bankers, financiers and advertisers, and for the 'mates', such as Bob Hawke, who spoke the language of social justice, in an Aussie drawl, while doing the bidding of big business at home and abroad. In the first *Overland* lecture of 2005, a printed version of which appears here, Veronica Brady builds on White's anti-materialist legacy, suggesting that Australia's "sceptical and utilitarian spirit . . . may be the reason for many of the problems which confront us as a community today".

White espoused an idiosyncratic and eclectic spirituality, emphasising humility and humanity. Brady writes that the essential "message" of religion "should be one of mutual respect and concern for the well-being of all, particularly the less privileged". Perhaps these two thinkers have in mind something like Gandhi's 'Satyagraha', loving non-violence, which lay at the heart of his political actions. The movement Gandhi led, after all, can be seen as providing the practical and philosophical inspiration for the later struggles for social justice of 'third world' nations and oppressed 'first world' minorities. In this issue, Paul Magin writes on the spirituality of the Burarra people of remote central Arnhem Land, part of Australia's 'fourth world' minority. White thought there would come a time when people would find it impossible to believe that a person of Gandhi's vision and integrity lived on our earth.

Of course, questions of religion, culture and politics have been at the forefront of public debate in recent months, a discussion spurred along by the impact of the Family First Party during the 2004 federal election. All of a sudden it seemed that the political landscape had changed, that issues of personal morality were going to assume a greater importance within formal political contests. ABC television and radio, corporate television and the broadsheet press, and writers across Australia's 'fifth estate', the independent journals, have all commented on this phenomenon. One sensationalist exposé that did not appear is revealed by Linton Besser in this issue. Within scholarly circles, the identification of often unconsciously held religious bases of morality and ideology appears to be a growth area: David Marr wrote on the rise of morally conservative Christianity in his 1999 *The High Price of Heaven*; Judith Brett in 2003 examined the Protestant origins of Liberalism; and in her new book, *God Under Howard*, Marion Maddox argues that democratic and egalitarian Australian traditions are now under threat from the Right's co-option of characteristically American, socially conservative forms of Christianity.

Brady notes here that the rise of fundamentalist Christianity is linked to its commercialisation. Emotive marketing campaigns claiming that belief will induce material 'blessings' from God are likely to advance the Christian product. Patrick White, who in his later years was increasingly angered by American cultural influences, railed against this process. In a customarily clear-eyed piece, however, Peter Holding reminds us of the differences between US and Australian culture and suggests that, rather than panicking about the rise of right-wing Christianity, political progressives should concentrate on working with that bulk of Christians for whom social justice is consistent with their religious beliefs.

'Spirit' is a very complex word. As a noun alone, the *Macquarie Dictionary* lists twenty-five meanings. In writing about the spirit in Australia, Brady inevitably writes about the spirit of Australia, described by A.G. Stephens in her piece as "that undefined, indefinable resultant of earth, and air, and conditions of climate and life". If such a thing exists, it must contain within it a great many inter-

nal differences and realise its final form through the dominance, or at least pre-eminence, of a particular group.

Until at least the 1970s, 'Australianness' tended to be defined by its perceived difference from the spirit of the 'parent' nation, England, or alternatively by the perceived dominance of that English spirit within Australia. *Overland* was founded as part of a wider intellectual and political struggle to assert Australia's uniqueness, its difference and independence from Britain. But as Robert Pascoe recounts in this issue, Humphrey McQueen argued in 1970 that it made much more sense to see Australians as British loyalists, founders of a Roman style colony, of 'a new Britannia'.

White's British-Australian aristocratic heritage and hostility to materialist philosophy contributed to his rocky relationship with the Left, though as McQueen noted upon White's death in 1990, he had opened up important new spaces for the development of Australian intellectual and cultural life. Moreover, if White's conservatism was a product of his British heritage, so too was his radicalism. His latent puritanism left White a vehement opponent of his society's rampant individualism, egoism and consumerism. The liberal tradition provided the foundations of his unyielding concern for the less fortunate, his tolerance for and empathy with society's outsiders, and his strident commitment to truth.

These debates between the radical nationalists and their opponents are in some ways echoed in present arguments over whether or not Australia still has a dominant culture, or is indeed multicultural. The nature of Australian identity is examined in this issue by Mary Kalantzis. She suggests that in spite of Prime Minister Howard's 'Queen and country' posturing, the multicultural realities of Australian society are such that the imposition of a monocultural national identity is simply untenable. Australian culture, she suggests, has been profoundly de-centred by "underlying historical trajectories".

Kalantzis rejects the peculiarly British pessimism of White, his puritan association of materialist greed with personal and social corruption. Where White remained preoccupied with those missing out within free-market capitalism, with the tendency of wealth within this society to trickle up, rather than down, Kalantzis finds a positive relationship between free-market forces, economic growth, social cohesion and individual happiness. Intriguingly, there is evidence to support each interpretation. It is perhaps only in the longer term, and with greater awareness of the cultural bases of competing political ideologies, that the effects of this economic and social policy context will become clear.

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ON JUDITH GREGORY'S LETTER

I am grateful to Judith Gregory for her comments on *Free Radicals* in *Overland* 177. The details about Ian Turner's family background are particularly illuminating.

The evidence of Turner Senior's membership of the League of National Security is purely circumstantial. I would refer readers to Michael Cathcart's discussion of White Army mobilisation in the Wimmera in his book *Defending the National Tuckshop* (1988), and particularly page 27, where he writes that "In Nhill, the silos were guarded against terrorist attacks". The White Army recruited from the Masonic Lodge, ex-servicemen, Protestants and local middle-class townspeople. It is likely that Turner Senior would have been approached. As I said in the book, there is no clear evidence. I may also have confused the League of National Security with the White Guard, and both should be distinguished from the fascist New Guard.

—JOHN McLAREN

ON PETER CRAVEN

I have kept a review written by Peter Craven ('Lost and found in the naked city', *SMH*, 17 June 2000) which I read at the time with incredulity, unable to believe that such a confused, rambling, and lazily written article had been, firstly, *written*, and then *accepted* for publication. In this article on Catherine Ford's *NYC*, a book which "shows that she belongs to the forefront of Australian fiction", Craven writes: "Ford is discernibly in a tradition that includes Garner, as it includes Raymond Carver". What tradition could that be, one wonders? He talks about Ford's "great sense of drama simmering or erupting in the foreground"—surely 'simmering' is a prelude to 'erupting'? "This is not the kind of fiction that has every hair in place, it's the kind of writing that has its hair standing on end—sometimes staggeringly—and it can have the same effect on the reader." Writing that makes one's hair stand on end conveys an idea of tension, which the adverb 'staggeringly' then deflates. "It's a book of great intelligence and some innocence, too, though the upshot is riveting all the way through." As 'upshot' is defined as 'the final or eventual outcome or conclusion' this praise is meaningless. "It helps that Catherine Ford has a complete command of the New York idiom which she recuperates like an imaginary landscape." How can an identifiable way of speaking then be described as "an imaginary landscape"? But in any case "the reader ceases to care whether [the voices] are 'American' or 'Australian' and that is partly because the verisimilitude is very fine as far as it goes". Verisimilitude of what? What sort of critical assessment is "very fine as far as it goes"? Indeed, the critic's effusive attempts to praise the work paradoxically result in quite the opposite meaning: we are told that it is "a compelling novel", "a multi-faceted shemozzle of a book . . . a book which bristles with implicit judgments . . . [which] . . . extrude into the rhetoric of the narrative". Making a leap into prophecy unsupported by any evidence in his review, Craven avers that "My hunch is that she will be able to write the biggest kind of book she attempts, never mind the flaws". And never mind the flaws in the language and argument of the critic, it would seem. I agree entirely with the article in *Overland* [177] by Peter Hayes.

—JANE ZEMIRO

I'd have thought that Peter Hayes would have been more careful in criticising the literary critic, Peter Craven ('The Stuff of Nightmare', *Overland* 177), to make sure that his criticisms couldn't be turned back on himself. Most obviously, he accuses Craven of "overwriting" yet produces a seven-page critique, the most damning point of which is Craven's own admission that he would prefer to read some English classics in "modern translation". This speaks for itself. Yet Hayes wastes time with vague quibbles (too many to mention). He spends paragraphs on Craven's reviews of Proust translations, which could be summed up by saying that Craven ignores the French original. He takes Craven to task for "assertions" that are assumed to be "self-evident", but doesn't explain, for example, why he thinks Craven is ignorant about Nabokov. And amid his cataloguing of Craven's shortcomings, Hayes reveals that he doesn't know what it means to "beg the question". Only in the concluding paragraphs does Hayes raise the serious accusation that Craven abuses his "power" as a critic. And after skewering Craven's "pretensions", he ends with the hyperbolic assertion that "It would be hard to imagine a situation more grotesque". Well, perhaps all literary critics could do a bit more reading.

—NIALL CLUGSTON

AUSTRALIA FAIR

Realities and Banalities of Nation in the Howard Era

TO TELL THE TRUTH, I was startled when I was invited by Nathan Hollier, the editor of *Overland*, to present the end of 2004 lecture. He ran through the list of luminaries who had this honour before me—Stuart Macintyre, Mark Davis, Amanda Lohrey, Marcia Langton, Bob Connell, Bob Ellis, Linda Jaivin and David Marr—all icons of the Australian intelligentsia.

I said, "about what?" and he suggested I talk on "nationalism in Australia during the Howard era, perhaps with an eye on the future". I hesitated, rattled by the expectation. He reassured me that I would not have to deliver the lecture until after the election and things would be clearer then. The election's over now, and when it comes to the question of nation, I am not sure whether things are any clearer.

My mind instantly flashed back to an Australian sage who had said, in a review of something I had written many years ago, that my views on the nature of nation in Australia came from the "Donald Horne School of breathless optimism". It just happens that this man's wife had earlier examined my PhD thesis in Australian history. It was improper of me to tell grand narratives about Australia, she had said, not only because grand narratives were themselves improper, but because my expertise was in "ethnicity". I should really have stuck to doing a history of migration and settlement. Instead, I had interrogated the ideas and realities of Australian nationhood, assuming a role well beyond my station. Such are the inconsequential barbs that lurk in the depths of one's consciousness. The request from *Overland* made me anxious again. Here I am again, the daughter of immigrants, presumptuously trying to talk about Australian nation and nationalism—past, present and future.

But presumptuous I am going to be. And yes, indeed I carry baggage. I was born in rural Greece at a time when it was torn apart by a civil war. The resistance fighters who had helped expel the Nazis, previously supported by the Western powers, were now the enemy within, hunted down for fear a new Greek Government might align with the Communist East. Mainly, it was the British who intervened on the side of the Right, so little wonder that, in Australia, I was shaped by a heritage of ambivalence towards all that was 'English', as well as a nostalgic sense of a distant homeland, a European sensibility about the 'social' and a fervent curiosity about the country in which I grew up and to which I had been introduced (literally) as an alien. There is no removing the effects of experience and subjectivity from our thinking. No amount of scholarship or expertise can erase life's agendas when it comes to history and its telling, let alone imagining the future.

In my professional life, I have done three things, and each of these things connects back powerfully to my life's concerns. First, I have done history, investigating and telling the interrelated stories of centre and margin that shaped people and events. At the risk of looking as if I'm treading into the domain of grand narrative, I have tried not to do a compartmentalised history, or even one with discrete chapters, neatly separating out the Indigenous, immigrants and nation. Rather, I have tried to tell the tangled story of the way we, as a nation, made each other, consciously and unconsciously.[1] Only big picture history can do that.

Second, in the spirit of our times, I have engaged in critique. Those who don't find this palatable call it 'political correctness'. Over the course of the twentieth century Australia became a very different place

to what it had been at its official birth at Federation in 1901. It has been a symbolic and practical metamorphosis, and one that is still far from complete. The nationalism of 1901 was not remarkable for its times or unique in its character. As a British colony, being white and British was its defining feature, and with this came economic and military ties to the motherland. Indigenous peoples were located outside of the imagination of the ambitious newcomers, eager to take up the resources of the new land and make something of them in exchange for its much-vaunted hardships. This resulted in systematic forms of exclusion, of Indigenous peoples within and unacceptable aliens beyond the borders of the new nation. As the century moved on, the antidotes to this legacy were multiculturalism, Indigenous self-determination, reconciliation—all the stuff of 'political correctness' in the eyes of those whose sensibilities are still rooted in an older version of nation.

Third (and I daresay this is where I belong to what my critic called the 'Donald Horne School'), I have maintained an active appreciation of the strain of inclusiveness that has, even in the darker moments, run alongside the tendencies to exclude. The other side of the Australian spirit has always imagined that, in this Great South Land, an egalitarian haven could be built, a place airier and lighter than the stifling, class-rigid, uncaring kingdoms the migrants had left behind. This was a place where, ahead of anywhere else in the world, a woman could vote and social security would underpin the basic wage. It was a place built on the ethos of the 'fair go'. And, extending these principles not too much further, couldn't that also be the case for immigrants of non-Anglophone origins, non-white immigrants and the Indigenous peoples of this continent? Despite our anxieties today, despite moments where 'fairness' is, once again, for them and not for us, there has been a shift in the big picture. The principles of inclusiveness that underpinned the Australian nation at its foundation have been so extended as to undermine profoundly the exclusive tendencies upon which it was also underwritten.

MAKING A NATION

Let me go back to the beginnings of nation. Then, the national anthem was one-and-the-same as the Imperial Anthem, 'God Save the Queen'. And so it remained until 1976 when the Fraser Government set 'Advance Australia Fair' as the national song alongside 'God Save the Queen'. It was first used as the National Anthem at the Los Angeles Olympics in 1984.

Australia's sons, let us rejoice,
For we are young and free;[2]

These were the opening lines of the song, written by Glasgow-born Peter Dodds McCormick in 1878. When it became the national anthem a century later, the opening words of the first line were changed from 'Australia's sons . . .', to 'Australians all . . .' Such political correctness is more than wanton moralising. Something profound had happened to gender relations in the intervening century: real and significant even if that something remains incomplete.

The first public performance was at the St Andrew's Day concert of the Highland Society on 30 November 1878. McCormick was a prominent member of the Presbyterian Church in Australia, and one of his better known musical works was 'The Bonnie Banks of Clyde'. Only a Scot would have granted the Celtic margins of England—and its first colonies—a part in the Australian story, as he did in the third stanza:

From English soil and Fatherland,
Scotia and Erin fair,
Let all combine with heart and hand
To advance Australia fair.

He was, nevertheless, a Scot fully reconciled to Empire. How else would the song have become such a huge success, even in McCormick's own lifetime?

When gallant Cook from Albion sail'd,
To trace wide oceans o'er;
True British courage bore him on,
Till he landed on our shore;
Then here he raised Old England's flag,
The standard of the brave;
"With all her faults we love her still
Britannia rules the wave."
In joyful strains then let us sing
Advance Australia fair.

I want to concentrate, however, on the word 'fair'. If Australia at Federation was to be anything, it was to be 'fair', to be a place which aspired, if not to equality, then a more limited promise of equity—equal chances for all to share in its material benefits. This, surely, was the aspiration to which McCormick was referring in the song, a promise that arose in the

settlement of the great conflict of class and the emergence of trade unions and the Labor Party in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. But a promise to whom? For whom? And at the expense of whom?

Take, for instance, the Chinese, who had been coming to Australia in large numbers since the gold rushes in the mid nineteenth century. This is Edmund Barton's view of what was 'fair', our first Prime Minister, speaking here to the first Australian Parliament:

> The fear of Chinese immigration which the Australian democracy cherishes . . . is, in fact, the instinct of self-preservation, quickened by experience. We know that coloured and white labour cannot exist side by side . . . Transform the northern half of our continent into a Natal, with thirteen out of fourteen belonging to an inferior race, and the southern half will speedily approximate to the condition of the Cape Colony, where the white are indeed a masterful minority, but still only as one in four. We are guarding the last part of the world in which the higher races can live and increase freely for the higher civilisation.[3]

> The doctrine of the equality of man was never intended to apply to the equality of the Englishman and the Chinaman. There is a deep-set difference, and we see no prospect and no promise of its ever being effaced. Nothing in this world can put these two races upon an equality. Nothing we can do by cultivation, by refinement, or by anything else will make some races equal to others.[4]

The Immigration Restriction Act and the legislation to repatriate the South Sea Islanders who had worked in the sugar industry in Northern Australia were two of the highest priorities of the first Parliament.

McCormick's 'fair' had a double meaning. The maiden of nation was clearly fair in complexion before she was fair by nature. And so, the settlement as to what was procedurally 'fair' (a living wage, social security, national industries protected from foreign competition) was to be limited to the fair-skinned descendants of migrants from the British Isles.

THE MENZIES YEARS

I want to take this doubly fair Australia of Federation as my counterpoint for considering contemporary Australian nationhood. To do this, I will focus for a moment on the life and times of Australia's longest serving Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies, and then the man who has become our second longest serving Prime Minister, John Howard. Both, at first glance, seem men who are true to the exclusivist rhetoric of Federation. Neither man, however, was true to his own times. In both cases their exclusivist rhetoric proved to be increasingly anachronistic. Both men followed more than they led, and insofar as they led, changing realities proved both wrong. This is the enduring irony captured in Donald Horne's notion of the 'Lucky Country':

> Australia is a country run mainly by second-rate people who share its luck . . . Although its ordinary people are adaptable, most of its leaders . . . so lack curiosity in the events that surround them that they are often taken by surprise. A nation more concerned with styles of life than with achievement has managed to achieve what may be the most evenly prosperous society in the world. It has done so in a social climate largely inimical to originality and the desire for excellence (except in sport) . . . According to the rules Australia has not deserved its good fortune.[5]

Our good fortune, I will argue, has been not only to have prospered, but also to have developed by world standards a diverse, tolerant, outward looking, cosmopolitan society. And this, despite our leaders.

Menzies had a clear view of nation, and who were acceptable outsiders. Supporting appeasement, Menzies had visited that paragon of nationalism, Adolf Hitler, in August 1938, and praised the 'spiritual quality' and 'national pride' Hitler had invoked in the German people. When, in the lead-up to the war, he was asked mischievously by Winston Churchill, "Hitler says that sixteen million Jews ought to go and live in Australia. What do you say to that?" we are told by an observer that he "had no good quick answer".[6] Half a century later, John Howard was to show a similar lack of sympathy towards refugees. Meanwhile, the Australian press of Menzies' time were supporting the notion that Australia should accept Jewish refugees. The usual labour complaints, the *Sydney Morning Herald* noted in December 1939, had been "removed by the approval given to the project by the Australasian Council of Trade Unions" and this "would not only make a contribution to the solution of the refugee problem" but would "justify our right to" retain "this great continent" in the face of "a land-hungry world".[7] Menzies demurred.

After the war, Menzies led a country which seemed to define itself largely in terms of its English

connections. The British Commonwealth of Nations had replaced the Empire. "Elizabeth the Second, by the Grace of God of the United Kingdom, Australia and her other realms and territories Queen, Head of the Commonwealth, Defender of the Faith, already enshrined by ancient ritual in her noble heritage, is now enshrined in the hearts of the people of her great southern Dominion."[8] So began the *Official Commemorative Volume* created by Menzies' Australian News and Information Bureau to mark the occasion of the Queen's first visit to Australia in 1954. The success of the visit was a measure of the considerable effort and expense that the Menzies Government invested into it. Seventy-five per cent of Australia's nine million people saw the Queen at least once.[9]

But by the time of her second visit, in 1963, the crowds were much smaller. Only three thousand people turned out to see the Queen when she arrived in Canberra. And when, in a welcome speech, Menzies quoted the Elizabethan poet Barnabe Googe "I did but see her passing by and yet I love her till I die", even the Queen is reported to have looked embarrassed.[10] An Anglophile to the end, Menzies did have to relent when his suggestion that the new Australian currency be called the Royal, rather than the dollar, was overruled by his cabinet colleagues. When Winston Churchill died in 1965, the Queen appointed Menzies to succeed him as Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports, an arcane English honour.

Meanwhile, the real business of transforming Australia was being undertaken by Menzies' ministers, business which would, in the passage of time, turn Menzies' Anglophilia into an anachronism. Harold Holt, destined to be Menzies' successor as Prime Minister, was installed as the Minister for Immigration when the Liberals came to power in 1949. Not only did Holt continue the immigration program begun by Labor's Arthur Calwell at the end of the Second World War; he worked vigorously to expand it well beyond his predecessor's expectations. He set a target of two hundred thousand immigrants annually from 1950—a far cry from Calwell's target of seventy thousand or 1 per cent annual population increase through immigration. With a target of this size, together with the failure to attract sufficient numbers of British immigrants, it became "clear, therefore that new sources of foreign migration must be tapped".[11] The three Immigration Ministers that followed Harold Holt during the Menzies years, Athol Townley, Alexander Downer and Hubert Opperman, all presided over a program which moved progressively further away from the old framework of White Australia and immigration restriction.

The image of Anglo-Tory conservatism projected by the persona of Menzies is really quite deceptive. During Downer's ministry, the new 1958 Migration Act abolished the centrepiece of the old White Australia Policy, the dictation test. Downer was the father of another Alexander, who would, decades later and by dint of political inheritance, become John Howard's Minister for Foreign Affairs.

If the Citizenship Convention of 1958 was any measure, the tenor of nation had unmistakeably shifted away from Anglophilia. At the back of the stage was a mural which incongruously juxtaposed immigrants folk dancing with the iconography of Australian development—its steel mills, its muscled shirtless male workers, its scientists in lab coats. To this backdrop, Alexander Downer said "we have received that indefinably precious infusion of ideas from the Continent: new ways of living, looking at life, of painting, architecture and other emanations of the mind. These are attributes which our rather stodgy Anglo-Saxon communities are much in need of".[12] He spoke of an historical mission that would shift Australia away from a predominantly British self-image, "so that we can mould Australia into an Anglo-European community".[13] In fact, in the light of this new conception of Australia, the story of its past itself needed to be rewritten. Take Arthur Phillip, that old hero of the moment when imperial Britain consummated its claim to sovereignty over New Holland:

> Apart from his fine personal qualities, there is one aspect of Phillip which is not widely recognised. Wrapped up in his genealogy was a portent of the Australia he was destined to found: for whilst his mother was English, his father was a German, from Frankfurt, who in his youth had settled in London. Thus, right from the start the signpost pointed to the creation of an Anglo-European community.[14]

A similar transformation was underway in Australia's sense of its place in the region. Here is Downer again, this time speaking to the Australian Institute of International Affairs in 1960, and referring to the Colombo Plan which was by then bringing thousands of Asian students to study in Australia, the new Australian diplomatic and trade missions in Asia,

CEMENTING HIS PLACE IN HISTORY

and the South-East Asian Treaty Organisation. These were evidence that Australia was creating a more positive sense of its place in Asia:

> What we are doing is only a beginning; the pro-Asian momentum in knowledge, understanding and outlook must gather speed in the mutual interests of ourselves and our neighbours . . . Does the wisdom of attuning our minds to Asian ideas and requirements imply that our future lies with Asia, that in fact Australia is an Asian country, that sooner or later to the unbroken stream of peoples pouring in from Europe there must be added a confluent flow from Asia?
>
> . . . Part of our destiny may well be with Asia; if so, we must fulfil it spiritually, unselfishly, with shining enlightenment.[15]

This destiny was to be realised sooner than Downer might have expected. The Australian Labor Party deleted White Australia from its policies in 1965, the last party to do so. Downer's successor as Immigration Minister, Hubert Opperman, announced limited Asian Immigration in 1966, and the first large-scale Asian immigration to Australia for more than a century recommenced under the Fraser Government in 1976.

Menzies left office in 1966. By then, his vision had well and truly become something of the past. Australia had changed, and a lucky thing too. To return to Donald Horne, the luck was undeserved given the country's second-rate leadership. But the fact is that we didn't end up trading in 'Royals', and we got a society that was diverse, cosmopolitan and outward looking, less and less like Menzies' national vision, which amounted to the creation of a 'new Britannia in another world', to reuse an expression of the prominent nineteenth-century New South Wales colonist William Charles Wentworth.

THE WHITE PICKET FENCE

John Howard became Leader of the Opposition in 1985. In 1988, he released the Liberal Party's 'Future Directions' policy. On the cover was the image of a family behind a white picket fence. On the inside was all the rhetoric of Anglophone conservatism—Thatcher was Prime Minister of the United Kingdom at the time and Reagan the US President—small government, labour-market deregulation and supporting individual initiative and enterprise. Howard's extra touches to economic neo-liberalism were drawn from his personal repertoire of cultural conservatism, particularly the traditional family and the dangers of identifying with groups—one of the key failings, in his view, of the multicultural and indigenous policies of the time. These views Howard rolled into a policy he called 'One Australia'. In the sharp light of retrospect, the name and the rhetoric eerily foreshadow the One Nation Party that emerged after Howard's election as Prime Minister eight years later.

His starting point was what was then publicly termed the 'Asianisation' of Australia. In an August 1988 radio interview, he said, "I believe that Asian migration is in the eyes of some of the community too great; it would be in our immediate term interests in terms of social cohesion if we could slow down a little so that the capacity of the community to absorb this would become greater".[16] "I do . . . think that the pace of change brought about by the migrant intake is an issue that any government has to keep in mind." This was why he was going to run "very strongly on the concept of One Australia" at the next election. More broadly he claimed that multiculturalism had left the country facing a "cultural identity crisis". "At the end of the day, we all have to be Australians above anything else. We have apologised too much for our past, and we are apologising too much for our current identity".[17]

Bob Hawke was Prime Minister at the time, and seized on the opportunity to condemn Howard. On 25 August 1988, he moved a motion in the Federal Parliament:

> That this house, (1) acknowledges the historic action of the Holt Government, with bipartisan support from the ALP, in initiating the dismantling of the White Australia policy; (2) recognises that, since 1973, successive Labor and Coalition governments have, with bipartisan support, pursued a racially non-discriminatory immigration policy to the overwhelming national and international benefit of Australia; and (3) gives its unambiguous and unqualified commitment to the principle that, whatever criteria are applied by Australian governments in exercising their sovereign right to determine the composition of the immigration intake, race or ethnic origin shall never, explicitly or implicitly, be among them.[18]

Four Liberals crossed the floor to vote against Howard, including the future Immigration Minister, Philip Ruddock—a source of the deep antipathy between the two men that was to last for many years. It was one of the things that spelt the end of Howard's leadership. Andrew Peacock replaced him as leader in May 1989.

For the moment at least, Howard remained unrepentant. He replied to one of his constituents in his electorate of Bennelong, a Mr C. Dawson, as follows:

> 22 May 1991
> Dear Mr Dawson,
>
> Thank you for sending me a copy of your letter of 23 April 1991 addressed to the Prime Minister.
>
> You have raised a large number of issues concerning immigration and multiculturalism. I share some of the concerns you have expressed, but not others.
>
> My own view on this issue is that Australia made an error in abandoning its former policy of encouraging assimilation and integration in favour of multiculturalism.
>
> I do not mind where immigrants come from. However, once in Australia the goal must surely be to establish a completely cohesive integrated society and not encourage separatism.
>
> Yours Sincerely
> (John Howard)[19]

After Howard, the Liberals aborted the 'One Australia' policy and desisted from attacking multiculturalism. In fact, rubbing salt into the wound, Howard's enemy and supporter of multiculturalism, Philip Ruddock, was elevated to shadow Immigration Minister. However, the Liberals continued to flounder under Andrew Peacock, then John Hewson, then Alexander Downer the younger.

In desperation, the Liberals turned back to their old warhorse, John Howard, in January 1995. It is no small irony that his first public event after being re-installed as leader was a citizenship ceremony at Ryde Civic Centre in Sydney. As he entered the hall, the Ryde District Band played the theme to *The Mouseketeers*, 'Who's the leader of the band? . . . Mickey Mouse'.[20]

One of the first things Howard needed to do was make a public confession of past error. Within a few days of being elevated to the leadership, he was to reflect on what he had said back in 1988 in the following terms:

> I obviously used clumsy language. I obviously didn't handle that thing with the right degree of sensitivity and I've dealt with that. I don't intend to go on repeating what I've said previously.[21]

In the lead-up to the March 1996 elections, the Liberals' policies on immigration, multiculturalism and Indigenous affairs were virtually indistinguishable from Labor's. Howard's Liberal-National Party Coalition won a convincing victory.

Despite his apparent backtracking, Howard still had a distinctive nation-building agenda. In an August 1996 interview, of the likely length of his term given a hostile Senate in which the Coalition did not have a majority, he said:

> There are a whole lot of reasons why it's far better to have our three years and then go to the people in '99 in the lead-up to the centenary of Federation and the Olympic Games. It's much better we have our three years. You've got an opportunity to change the culture, you've got an opportunity for there to be a flow-through benefit and you've got an opportunity for the Government to really take root in the community.[22]

Politics for Howard was to be a lot more that a management exercise—the job of balancing the nation's books and creating an environment that was good for business. More than mere looking after business, he also had a cultural project. As he reminded a gathering of Liberal Party faithful in Sydney, "government is not only about dollars and cents and economic goals and economic objectives but government is also about values, and government is also about the way we think about ourselves".[23]

So what were Howard's values? One of his persistent early themes as Prime Minister was 'Political Correctness', a code for the panoply of cultural evils perpetrated by the former Labor Government and, indirectly, a statement of Howard's contrasting values and cultural priorities. When he became Prime Minister, he said:

> one of the goals I set myself, was quite simply to bring about a restoration where people felt a little more freely, if the mood struck them, to talk about controversial issues without fear of being branded as a racist or some other kind of bigot for daring to bring up those subjects. I think one of the many criticisms I had of the former Government was the way in which it used a form of social censorship to intimidate people out of debating difficult, sensitive and controversial issues. I think we had become almost too politically correct to a fault before the [election on the] second of March.[24]

Another theme was the so-called 'black armband' view of history. He laid down the challenge:

> . . . to ensure that our history as a nation is not written definitively by those who take the view that Australians should apologise for most of it. This 'black armband' view of our past reflects a belief that most Australian history since 1788 has been little more than a disgraceful story of imperialism, exploitation, racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination. I take a very different view. I believe that the balance sheet of our history is one of heroic achievement and that we have achieved much more as a nation of which we can be proud than of which we should be ashamed . . . The debate over Australian history, however, risks being distorted if its focus is confined only to the shortcomings of previous generations. It risks being further distorted if highly selective views of Australian history are used as the basis for endless and agonised navelgazing about who we are or, as seems to have happened over recent years, as part of a 'perpetual seminar' for elite opinion about our national identity.[25]

And still another was developing Australia's relationships with Asia, one of the 'big picture' themes of

the former Labor Prime Minister, Paul Keating, and his Foreign Minister, Gareth Evans. Howard said he was not going to trade 'our history' (British, Christian, European) against our geography (Asian, Western Pacific, Indian Ocean):

> [The Coalition Parties] do not believe that Australia faces some kind of exclusive choice between our past and our future, between our history and our geography. Such a choice is a phoney and irrelevant one proposed by those with ulterior motives. We do not have to abandon or apologise for our heritage to contribute to Asia.[26]

So, what, in Howard's view, was Australian national identity? The answer was to be found in the 'great mainstream' of Australian life, the people who do not benefit from being a member of a special interest group. Here, Howard harked back to what he perceived to be Menzies' success as a politician, and a Prime Minister:

> Menzies' political success lay in building an enduring and broadly-based constituency that supported Liberalism's values and priorities. At the heart of that constituency were 'the forgotten people' of that era—the men and women of the great Australian mainstream who felt excluded from the special interest elitism of the Liberal Party's immediate predecessors and from the trade union dominance of the Labor Party . . . Liberalism faces the ongoing challenge of building an enduring and broadly-based constituency across the great mainstream of our rapidly changing society. Over recent times, a new constituency has galvanised around new issues and in support of Liberal priorities. It includes many of the 'battlers' and families who are struggling to get ahead . . . It includes all those who do not want their national government to respond to the loudest clamour of the noisiest minority . . . Liberalism now has an opportunity, unparalleled for almost fifty years, to consolidate a new coalition of support among the broad cross-section of the Australian people. It will only prove enduring if Liberalism continues to relate its fundamental values and principles to the concerns and aspirations of the Australian mainstream, rather than the narrower agendas of elites and special interests. This means building a genuinely shared sense of national purpose rather than an amalgamation of special interests.[27]

These were Howard's words about the Australian nation. His actions, however, spoke larger then words: refusal to condemn maverick MP Pauline Hanson and founder of the One Nation Party; abolition of the Office of Multicultural Affairs; cutbacks in the immigration program that were unprecedented in a time of prosperity; refusal to apologise to the Stolen Generation; closing the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation; the 'Ten Point Plan' to restrict the impact of the High Court's Wik decision on Native Title—these are just a few examples of Howard's cultural activism in his first term.[28] Then, in the second and third terms of office, there was the refugee crisis, the abolition of ATSIC, signing Australia up to the Axis of Anglos for the war against Iraq without UN or even broad-based international support for the invasion.

MR HOWARD BECOMES A NEW AUSTRALIAN

As the Howard years have passed, the Prime Minister's rhetoric and his practice seem to have changed in some of the defining borderlands of nation and identity. This is not so much the case for Indigenous Affairs, where the abolition of ATSIC, the return of programs to the Federal bureaucracy and the project of 'practical reconciliation' amount to a de facto return to the assimilation policies of the forties and fifties. However, since the late nineties, Howard's political stance has changed in the areas of immigration, multiculturalism and Australia's relations with Asia, although this should not necessarily be taken to reflect a parallel change in his private views. It is certainly not the result of some kind of epiphany in which the character of Australia was somehow revealed to the Prime Minister, and this in turn, has mutated into 'leadership'—there is little evidence of that. It is more a reflection of the strange life of a man whose primary virtues are pragmatism and resilience, a great stayer who has had to make himself, or at least his public persona, into a new Australian, if only to keep the job in which he evidently revels.

To take the issue of immigration and border control, Howard's hard line on refugees has been in the headlines for years on end, the high point of which was the *Tampa* incident of 2001. A Norwegian ship, the *Tampa*, picked up asylum seekers heading to Australia and whose boat was sinking. The Government subsequently refused the ship entry to Australia, and then concocted the 'Pacific Solution' in which the asylum seekers were detained at the Australian Government's expense in various locations in neighbouring countries, mainly Nauru.[29] The story

If you were appalled by the Howard Government's stand on asylum seekers, there were no political alternatives. One thing for certain, though, with Latham as Leader and Ferguson as Shadow Immigration Minister—both opponents of immigration and less than enthusiastic about refugees—Labor would reduce immigration if elected.

doesn't bear telling again. Suffice it to say, the Opposition equivocated and the Government won a convincing third-term election some months later.

The less known story is that, however reprehensible the posturing and the now well-documented politics of deceit, the refugee program remained substantial and immigration was significantly growing. The story unfolds as a personal drama fought out between the two longest serving members of the Federal Parliament, John Howard and Philip Ruddock. Both were elected in 1974, midway through the years of the Whitlam Government. Howard's dislike of Ruddock was intense. Giving Ruddock what was then the outer Ministry of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs—Howard stripped the Office of Multicultural Affairs out of the Prime Minister's Department within days of taking office and threw Immigration out of Cabinet—was little more than a sign of his contempt for the person who had contributed to his demise as Opposition Leader in 1988.

Ruddock set about running the Immigration Portfolio in his characteristically plodding, methodical way.[30] He knew the area well from his earlier stint as Shadow Minister. One of his prime objectives, he said, was to "restore public confidence in the immigration program". He was a high immigration man, and believed the program should be rigorously non-discriminatory---quite the reverse of Howard in these respects. However, as a devout Sydney Anglican, teetotaler and a man who never swears (and unlike Howard in these respects, too), he considered 'queue-jumping' by asylum seekers to be an affront to Anglo rectitude, and one of the things that eroded public confidence in the program.[31] Australia had an obligation to resettle refugees, and it would continue to do this at a per capita rate higher than almost every other country in the world, but Ruddock was determined that priority and need should be determined by the United Nations' refugee agency, UNHCR, and not by whichever 'queue-jumpers' happened to present themselves on Australia's shores.

The irony was that, although Ruddock's and Howard's underlying agendas were fundamentally different, they converged at the flashpoint of Howard's political pragmatism. Ruddock was elevated to the Cabinet in 1998 when Howard came close to losing the election in the wake of the meteoric rise of Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party. He became a hero of the Liberal Party and John Howard's saviour at the 2001 '*Tampa* Election'.

In Howard's first term, Ruddock had not been a happy man. His submissions to Cabinet on the immigration program (on the few occasions when he, as a Junior Minister, was invited in), were all cut back. He nearly resigned from the Government when Howard wanted to allow Holocaust-denying historian, David Irving, to be given a visitor's visa to speak in Australia. Howard relented. However, the more Ruddock made himself indispensable to Howard's survival, the more wins he started having against Howard on the key issues upon which they had always disagreed. This was a peculiar victory, because Ruddock's public rhetoric and the way it had been used by Howard, was at the expense of his own integrity and the respect he had garnered in his courageous stand against Howard in 1988.

Take immigration: The program had been set at 82,000 in 1995–96, the last year of the Keating Government. Despite Ruddock's protestations, Howard reduced the program to 67,000 in 1997–98 and 68,000 in 1998–99—the lowest immigration levels ever for a period of economic prosperity. By 2002–03, this number had jumped to 108,000, with 116,500 projected in 2003–04.[32] These were the program settings; the actual outcomes were even higher. In the year after the *Tampa* incident, net overseas migration reached its highest level since the 1980s, 126,000. Of these, only 22.2 per cent were European. It was the least white immigration program ever. At the same time, the pace of human movement has been quickening. Leaving aside tourism, there were 280,000 long-term arrivals (includ-

ing temporary workers, business people and students) to Australia in 2002–03, nearly double the figure for the last year of the Keating Government. Twenty-seven thousand of these were from China alone. New visa categories were even introduced, such as nine thousand onshore permanent residence visas for international students. Family migration grew, even for aged parents.[33] These results, paradoxically given his developing public persona, were a testimony to Ruddock's persistence, and then that of his factional friend, Amanda Vanstone, who took over the Immigration portfolio in October 2003. Finally, Ruddock had won the practical battle against John Howard's anti-immigration sentiments.

Meanwhile, the refugee program, large by world standards, remained steady, even through the most negative moments in the public storm: 13,700 in 2001–02 and 12,500 in 2002–03. It has been estimated that, on average, it costs $100,000 to settle each refugee. This contrasts with other areas of government, such as foreign aid, which has significantly dropped during the Howard years. Moreover, there has been a progressive shift of refugee intake in recent years, away from Eastern Europe, towards Africa (now 47 per cent of refugees) and the Middle East (37 per cent). In just a few years, the program had changed in such a way that it now consists almost exclusively of non-whites or non-Christians.[34]

And the Labor Opposition's view? After its fourth consecutive election loss in October 2004, Shadow Immigration Minister Laurie Ferguson questioned the very nature of the refugee program. Refugee advocates would have a more realistic view if they lived in areas where most refugees resided, he said, as the Member for Reid in Sydney's west, where many refugees settled. As for asylum seekers, "I get a bit sick of being lectured to by people," he said. "What I do question is that people who don't want any rules, don't want any controls, don't want any checking (of refugee claims) are usually people whose contact is limited to a few niche cases that they get very emotionally involved in. These people lack knowledge, quite frankly, of the broader issues."[35] If you were appalled by the Howard Government's stand on asylum seekers, there were no political alternatives. One thing for certain, though, with Latham as Leader and Ferguson as Shadow Immigration Minister—both opponents of immigration and less than enthusiastic about refugees—Labor would have reduced immigration if elected.

As if the Government had some kind of personality disorder, it expressed two kinds of vision, perhaps cynically designed to be regarded positively by two kinds of person. Some people were happy because the Government had got tough on border control. It had taken a 'tough stand', but perhaps they hadn't noticed the substantial rise in levels of immigration? Interestingly, high immigration had been a constant anxiety, constantly in the news, during the Hawke period, but this issue seemed to have been completely displaced in the Howard era by the fracas about a few thousand people in a few dozen boats. Whereas the Hawke and Keating Governments had tried to assuage people's fears with multiculturalism, the Howard Government used unfounded fear as a ruse.

This was one kind of person. Another kind of person whose attention was elsewhere would have noticed, however, a reassuring rhetoric of nation around immigration and multiculturalism. As it turns out, this rhetoric was substantially the same as Hawke and Keating's. This is typical of the way in which the Howard Government has catered for multiple constituencies, even if this meant they had to feed them conflicting and mutually contradictory messages. The political impact was immediate. In the wake of Howard's refusal to speak out against Pauline Hanson, there was a substantial swing within the nearly half a million Chinese community behind Labor; by the 2004 election, many had swung back to the Liberals, a natural choice given their background as migrants and their economic aspirations in Australia. Howard had made himself over sufficiently to win their support. The Labor Party seemed to have forgotten that these were issues which had some influence on election results.

While the Labor Opposition backed away from multiculturalism, even removing the word from the name of its shadow ministry, John Howard, of all people, could be talking the talk. In 2003, the Prime Minister wrote the foreword to its renewed policy, *Multicultural Australia: United in Diversity*, launched to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary year of Malcolm Fraser's first national multicultural policy. "The Government remains committed to nurturing our inclusive society with its proud record of community harmony," Howard said. The policy reaffirms "the Government's commitment to promoting diversity" and represents a "renewed statement of our multicultural policy".[36] Even to get Howard to say the 'm' word had been a huge achievement. And the

basic ideas behind multiculturalism and the programs enunciated in the document remained unchanged from the Hawke–Keating era—the Access and Equity Program, the Productive Diversity Program and the Living in Harmony community relations program. The engineer of these ideas back in the 1980s had been the former head of the Office of Multicultural Affairs, Peter Shergold, new head of Howard's Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. The Government even changed the *Citizenship Act* in 2003 to allow Australians to take up a second citizenship—something that had been tried during the Labor years, but which had never won sufficient support.[37]

All this because the realities of nation were such that there was no other reasonable way to put it. Some six million people have migrated to Australia since 1945, including 650,000 refugees. Forty-three per cent of the population is either born overseas or had one parent born overseas. Overseas-born comprise 23.4 per cent of the population, more than double that of the other great country of immigration, the United States. The consequence was a nation which, in Ruddock's words, had "brought people from across the globe and with them their diverse cultural heritages". Central to this ongoing nation-building exercise was "a migration program that does not discriminate on the basis of ethnic origin, gender, race or religion". "Together, we have built a country that is vibrant, successful and outward looking, a country that provides safe haven for the dispossessed, and a bright future for us all." [38] The realities of nation were so incontrovertible as to be on the verge of sounding like banalities. This was not a country where the older John Howard could have found a viable role. The pragmatist had at last caught up with the realities.

Much the same can be said of Australia's relations in Asia. Here is John Howard speaking, the same man who in 1988 had expressed his serious reservations about the pace of 'Asianisation'. The occasion was the address of China's President Hu Jintao to a joint sitting of both houses of the Australian Parliament, and Howard was speaking of the state of Australia–China relations:

> It is a very mature and practical relationship. The people-to-people links are immensely important. If I can describe it this way: the most widely spoken foreign language in Australia today is a dialect of Chinese. Three per cent of the Australian population—no fewer than 550,000—claim Chinese ancestry. Speaking personally, 13.3 per cent of my own electorate of Bennelong in Sydney claims Chinese ancestry. There are 34,000 students from China studying in Australia. Mr Speaker, China is now Australia's third largest trading partner. Last year, the signing of the natural gas contract for the supply over twenty-five years of natural gas to the Guangdong province was a veritable landmark in the evolution of the economic relationship between our two nations. Two-way trade between Australia and China has trebled since 1996.[39]

Nor has the Howard Government toed the US line on Taiwan, something that is noted with appreciation by the Chinese leadership.[40]

Howard is now sounding more and more like the man he scorned as trading our history for our geography, former Prime Minister Keating. In fact, Howard has made twenty-three visits to countries in the region during his eight years as Prime Minister, compared to Hawke's nine and Keating's thirteen.[41] After his fourth consecutive election win, he said it was time for a "rebalancing" back to the region and the "great opportunities" that lay there:

> There's the building on what we've achieved in China, the election of a new president in Indonesia . . . a new Prime Minister in Malaysia, the good state of our relations with Thailand, the fact that we've kept our relations with Korea and Japan (in good shape) . . . I see myself focusing, spending quite a bit of time dealing with the region, countries in the region, over the next year or two.[42]

The Howard Government, needless to say, rushed to join the Axis of Anglos in its crusade against the Taliban in Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein in Iraq, even though the latter was largely unsupported outside the Anglophone world. And Howard the man still showed traces of his old Anglophilia in his visits to the Queen and attendance at cricket matches at Lords. He also managed to derail the shift towards a republic, despite polls showing majority support, by craftily splitting the 'yes' vote. His message to the Constitutional Convention of 1998, held in Canberra's Old Parliament House, was nevertheless 'politically correct' to a word, albeit disingenuously so:

> Never before has this historic chamber received such a wonderfully diverse gathering of Australians . . . It is a vastly different assembly from that which met in

> Melbourne a century ago: there were no Indigenous Australians present at the 1898 Convention; it was an all male gathering; the names of the delegates were overwhelming Anglo Celtic, and I doubt that any delegate was aged under 25-years-old.[43]

Even his defence of the case to retain the monarchy was close to apologetic:

> Paradoxically, the developments of the past forty years are both the main reason why this issue is now under debate yet not necessarily a conclusive argument for change. In my view, the only argument of substance in favour of an Australian republic is that the symbolism of Australia sharing its legal head of state with a number of other nations is no longer appropriate. As a matter of law, Elizabeth II is Queen of Australia. As a matter of indisputable constitutional convention, the Governor-General has become Australia's effective head of state.[44]

The republic was unnecessary, Howard seemed to be saying, because Australia was already a virtual republic, and ultimately the question was not one of "removing the symbolism which many see as inappropriate in our present arrangements"; rather it was whether "the alternatives so far canvassed will deliver a better system of government than the one we currently have".[45] If it ain't broke, don't try to fix it, and the question of whether the symbols are appropriate or not is the last thing we should be worrying about.

So, what is Howard's nation at the beginning of the twenty-first century? Here he is trying to explain things to that paragon of New World nations, the United States, at a joint sitting of both houses of the Congress in 2002:

> Our pioneer past, so similar to your own, has produced a spirit that can overcome adversity and pursue great dreams. We've pursued a society of opportunity, fairness and hope, leaving—as you did—the divisions and prejudices of the Old World far behind. Like your own, our culture continues to be immeasurably enriched by immigration from the four corners of the world. We believe as you do that nations are strengthened not weakened, broadened and not diminished, by a variety of views and an atmosphere of open debate. Most of all, we value loyalty given and loyalty gained. The concept of mateship runs deeply through the Australian character.[46]

That old chestnut, 'mateship' still pops up now and again, the glue that supposedly holds the 'mainstream' together, or its boys at least. But set against this is the image of an immigrant nation and a diverse nation.

By the beginning of his fourth term, Howard had also proved himself to be a middle-of-the-road politician in the areas of social and economic policy. He had initiated less privatisation than the Hawke and Keating Governments. Even economic hawks, like the *Economist*, admitted that the real structural 'reforms' preceded Howard.[47] Indeed, Howard decisively turned his back on the rigours of 'economic rationalism' as espoused by former Liberal leader John Hewson and practiced by Victorian Premier Kennett. He was to increase Federal taxation and government spending as a percentage of GDP. Bizarrely, one of the planks of the Labor Party's losing platform in the 2004 election was to shrink the size of government. Meanwhile the Government was spending big on iconic infrastructure projects, such as the Alice Springs–Darwin railway, a decision hardly motivated by immediate business opportunity. "There is a desire on the part of the community", Howard said, "for an investment in infrastructure and human resources and I think there has been a shift in attitude in the community on this, even among the most ardent economic rationalists."[48] Howard also gave cash bribes to 'mainstream Australia' for buying a new house and having babies. And, reminiscent of the Whitlam years, Howard was to pull the centre of gravity of government programs and activities away from the states and back towards Canberra. National accreditation of teachers, the establishment of Vocational Education Colleges and the abolition of the Australian National Training Authority, are just a few examples of this in one portfolio area. Being a centralist on economic policy was an easy row to hoe given that Australia had one of the most buoyant economies in the developed world. Interest rates were low, and steady. Per capita GDP was growing to such an extent that Australia's rank in the league table of the world's richest countries rose from 10 in 1990 to 7 in 2000.[49] This is the stuff that election victories are made of. Plus the cunning of out-Laboring Labor.

WE, THE PEOPLE

So, here is one version of Australia halfway into the first decade of the twenty-first century. We have showed ourselves to be heartless by denying refuge

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to people fleeing regimes which are undeniably ugly. We have shown ourselves capable of passing laws that flaunt international human rights protocols to which we are signatory. We have proven ourselves to be slippery characters by consorting with the bankrupt and corrupt state of Nauru, and for no better reason than to buy political advantage during an election campaign. We have taken back the reigns of Indigenous development and cast Indigenous People as irresponsible abusers of each other. We have turned narrowly to the USA, not expansively to our neighbours, particularly the communities to our immediate North. We have made ourselves vulnerable and even possible targets by highlighting to the world our xenophobia in recent years. Worst of all, we have shown ourselves to be willing to betray our historical trajectory as an inclusive nation.

In these respects, Mr Howard has managed to change our sense of ourselves. He has made us believe ourselves to be smaller and meaner than we are. His continuing success in the polls reflects his narrow vision of Australia, manipulated by five years of wedge politics and disingenuous talkback radio gigs. We appear under Howard's leadership to have turned our backs on the necessary, difficult dialogues that had led us on the path to reconciliation, multiculturalism and openness to our region. This, incidentally, would be the stuff of a serious and effective 'war against terror', one which tackles its root causes.

But there's another version of the Australian nation, to which even Mr Howard has been forced to adjust. Our curious good luck has been the ambivalence about who we are and our diversity as a nation of immigrants, as a nation in Asia and as a nation facing the moral inevitably of having to address the question of original Indigenous ownership of this continent. The last of these questions, Howard does seem to have successfully swept under the carpet for the moment at least. But on the former two questions, the reality of the Howard Government, although not its fear-inducing border control talk, has been to continue the trajectory of national self-transformation. This trajectory takes us still further away from the foundational premises of nation at the time of Federation. Mr Howard has been forced, reluctantly perhaps, to reinvent himself, to become a new Australian.

Just as Howard cannot claim the prosperous Australian economy as his own doing, nor can he claim a role of any significance in the shaping of national identity. His principles may have sometimes acted as a brake, but not for too long, as pragmatism kicks in. Howard is a man being dragged into the future, more than he has managed to shape the future. We are a nation whose changing shape is being chiselled by underlying historical trajectories rather than leadership and vision. We are 'lucky' (Donald Horne's ironical 'lucky' again) despite the lack of national leadership. There's plenty of historical precedent for this in Australia. As a country, we seem to have thrived on weak leaders and in spite of their anachronistic understandings of nation. Menzies and Howard have now been Prime Minister for twenty-five of the post-war years, and we've still managed to come a long way towards creating an open, cosmopolitan, outward looking country.

It is easy from a conservative perspective to be triumphalist and from a progressive perspective to feel cast into the wilderness by the events of the Howard years. Neither view is accurate. In fact, speaking for the moment as a strategic optimist, not even the most atavistic leader has been able to define Australia in old-fashioned ethnic terms, aligned only to an imagined Western, or even more narrowly, Anglo kith and kin. This is ineluctably a nation where you can have multiple loyalties to other places and communities in the world, where you can speak any language and practice a wide range of acceptably different lifestyles, and still be a good citizen. This is a lesson that still has to be learnt in many of the world's trouble spots. It has been something that was possible for us to achieve in Australia. This is a nation that could show moral, cultural and political leadership in a world pulled apart by conflicts over

borders and belonging. And when our leaders won't or can't articulate our achievement, we, the people, will have to do it for ourselves.

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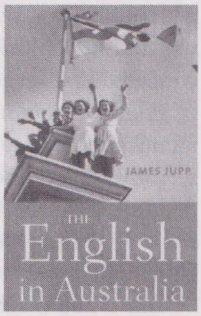
THE LONG-ACCUSTOMED YOKE?



| James Jupp: *The English in Australia* (CUP, $37.95)

Not long ago, some might have bristled at this book. Perhaps there are those who still do. Certainly, some have expressed concern that practitioners of new studies of the British in Australia reflect a conservative Howardite agenda of nostalgia for imperialism, amnesia concerning the consequences of colonialism and a disregard for the preferences and injustices exercised under White Australia. Others have cautioned that the history of British migrancy in Australia cannot be reconstructed as 'just another multicultural story'. But there is what seems to be a growing group (witness recent issues of *Meanjin*, the *Quarterly Essay* and other journals) who believe we need more and better histories of the British—and particularly the English—in Australia. James Jupp's *The English in Australia* is a welcome publication for those who support such views.

Of course nobody could accuse Jupp of the oversights or narrow focus mentioned above. One of the most prolific authors on Australian immigration, Jupp's work (including the magisterial *Encyclopedia of the Australian People*) has long been required reading in this area. And indeed one of the strengths of this work is Jupp's capacity to contextualise and provide an authoritative overview of a complex migration history while also rejecting stereotypes often used by Australian, British or English nationalists. Jupp has produced a nuanced understanding based upon his broad and detailed knowledge of Australian migration, focused most productively perhaps on a concern with the socio-economic status of the English, what Jupp is happy to call 'class'.

Most evident is Jupp's rejection of the simplistic equation of Englishness with conservatism. From the start, Jupp is concerned to outline that the English (and, while noting the ways in which a simplistic division cannot always be made, Jupp means the *English* in particular and not the *British* in general) have always been divided by social class, dialect, local loyalties, education, urbanisation and industrialisation. Thus, while acceding that Banjo Paterson had some purchase on English *environmental* experience when he wrote in 1901 that "The narrow ways of English folk/ Are not for such as we,/ They bear the long-accustomed yoke/ Of staid conservancy", Jupp seeks to redress the "silliness of stereotyping English and Australians over the entire two centuries of settlement. The English were governors, warders and convicts; slum dwellers and businessmen; working class and farmers; trade unionists and clergymen".

Such variety noted, Jupp's main purpose is to outline that while English migrants to Australia were indeed "the largest group of immigrants registered in each year between 1788 and 1996", most came for economic reasons and by the twentieth century constituted largely a "wage-earning, moderately educated working-class population with little evidence of social mobility into the middle classes". Thus Jupp's earlier chapters examine the effects of the Poor Law and penal system and how social and economic conditions in large cities and new industrial towns created massive upheaval and provided key recruiting areas for the over 150,000 convicts sent to Australia before 1868. Similarly his analysis of the recruitment of agricultural labourers (who, with domestic servants, constituted the largest social class in Britain until 1914, and were the backbone of assisted migration until at least the 1880s) leads Jupp to underline that many emigrated as a way of escaping a system of deference to 'betters': the complexities and confines of class.

Later chapters, especially those focusing on the post-Second World War period, extend such observations while risking also some generalisations, such as that the English have been well-known for an insularity that could become xenophobia, that "they

brought it to Australia, where it was often turned against them". Such observations form part of a wider discussion throughout this work of the ways in which English and Australian identity have been conflated or diverged. Jupp notes the ambivalent role of English migrants in attempts to define Australian identity: that they have supplied radicals and conservatives alike, and that Australian national identity developed on the basis of distinguishing the society from England—both "aristocratic, snobbish England" and "poverty stricken, cloth-cap England".

But while positing a list of "basic English attitudes" (and underlining "the tragedy of English food"), Jupp argues that any attempt to specify the influence of the English in Australia founders on the difficulty of distinguishing and disentangling a mixed inheritance that many *Australians* are still trying to work into a consistent pattern of national identity. Jupp relates, for example, the history of the "large number but largely unexceptional qualities" of post-war English migrants who "most[ly] melted into skilled working and white collar classes". Noting their widely spread settlement, Jupp finds that most were wage-paid workers and their families and most stayed that way. While he remains alert to the privileges the English in Australia have shared, Jupp's emphasis is that they "have not on the whole constituted a ruling elite". In this respect, Jupp's work will be usefully supplemented by the work of those charting the more intimate social particulars of these histories as well as broader cultural dimensions. Yet on its own it does much to lift the 'yoke' of stereotype and simplification, and provide a better understanding not only of the English in Australia but of the country in which, as he notes in the title of his final chapter, we now think of "the English as 'foreigners'".

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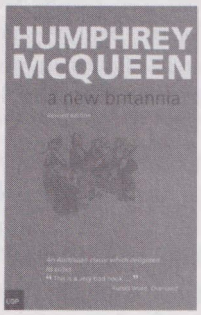
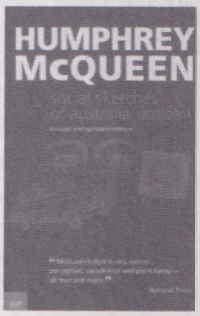
review | **ROBERT PASCOE**

McQUEEN TURNS HIS BOAT AROUND





Humphrey McQueen: *A New Britannia*, fourth ed. (UQP, $24.95)

Humphrey McQueen: *Social Sketches of Australia 1888–2001*, revised ed. (UQP, $24.95)

It is one of the more curious vessels plying the waters of Australian historiography. Yet here it is again, bobbing up for the fourth time since its original launch in the heady days of 1970. It is Humphrey McQueen's *A New Britannia*, looking for a new readership in the age of John Howard's record-breaking fourth term as the Prime Minister of one of the more interesting democracies on the planet.

There are very few other contemporary works of Australian history that are reprinted with quite the same regularity as *A New Britannia*—in this respect McQueen is in the illustrious company of Manning Clark, Donald Horne, Henry Reynolds and Geoffrey Blainey. (However, not all McQueen's books have enjoyed the same popularity: it will be interesting to see if the latest edition of McQueen's companion work, *Social Sketches*, shorn of most of its black-and-white illustrations, will also find a new readership.)

For those readers who arrived late, the argument of *A New Britannia* can be put very simply. McQueen interrogates the radical nationalism of the Old Left historians, fellow Marxists, and finds their glowing account of nineteenth-century working-class Australians all too saccharine. It is a ship laden with cargo plundered from the research of other historians. Our white male ancestors, McQueen argues, were petit-bourgeois racists who, far from wanting to create an Antipodean socialist republic, merely

sought to cooperate in the building of 'a new Britannia' on the other side of the world.

Famously, the colonists were so eager for social advancement that they dragged pianos by the score to this new land. They craved property for themselves. And they devoured the writings of an author, Henry Lawson, whose work was proto-fascist.

Provocative stuff indeed. It was in these very pages, in *Overland*, that some of the sharpest points in the debate ensued, a quarter century ago. At the University of New England, its resident radical, the late Russel Ward, normally unflappable, a gentleman-socialist attired in smoking jacket and cravat, his handsome face ornamented by a white moustache, went positively apoplectic in his debate with the 28-year-old controversialist. *Overland* was the appropriate forum for this clash of perspectives. In those days *Overland* was a bastion of Old Left writing—by bringing the debate to these hallowed pages McQueen was farting in the very temple of left-wing orthodoxy.

McQueen was then new to academe. He had just been appointed a tutor in history at the Australian National University by Manning Clark. It was in Canberra in 1972 that McQueen was arrested for distributing anti-conscription leaflets in a public place where he could be photographed. He used this photograph as his professional mug-shot, his version of the historian in action: "This is a striking pictorial representation of McQueen's public self-image," I wrote later that decade. "He wears striped trousers, an ill-fitting suit coat, hands in his pockets, goatee, darkened glasses, unkempt hair and a smile for the readers of the *Canberra Times*. Photographers in front of him, plainclothes police behind him dwarfed by his stature, McQueen strides confidently on to whatever fate the court system has in store for him."

This image captured the moment perfectly. *A New Britannia* was read avidly by young radicals as a guide to what had gone wrong with the Left in Australia. McQueen knew he was fighting the good fight alone:

> For the next two hundred odd pages I shout, wave my arms and frantically dash from one battlefield to another. But sooner or later the besieged will call a council-of-war and realise that despite the sound and the fury they are not outnumbered.

These words were prescient, for McQueen remained an isolated figure in what we now term The History Wars. He left academia within the decade and did not attempt to cultivate a school of New Left historians. Instead of the agenda set by McQueen, the controversialists of the discipline during the subsequent decades pursued the new personal-is-political issues of gender, sexuality, the environment, etc.

McQueen does not approve of this trend: "the historical profession has suffered a loss of nerve in its scope and scale. No doctoral student today would be allowed to attempt the expanses of Russel Ward or Robin Gollan," McQueen now argues. He is particularly dismissive of the profession's leading journal, *Australian Historical Studies*, for fleeing political history "as the view from Government House verandahs", "to slump into an antiquarianism masquerading as postmodern".

In this distancing from the profession he reminds me most of Brian Fitzpatrick later in life, writing from a left position outside the academy. But, also like Fitzpatrick, he continues to produce populist accounts that are found on people's bookshelves. At each moment in the reworking of *A New Britannia*, it has caught the fresh breeze of historical change in Australia and set sail once more.

The second edition, in 1975, coincided with the dismissal of Whitlam and a need to know what dark elitist forces were loose in this land. By 1986, the third edition spoke to those who wanted to see behind the papier-mâché version of socialism offered by Hawke and Keating. This third edition was wonderfully illustrated by the cartoons of Keith Looby.

Now the fourth edition is launched at another new moment in the national political history. Perhaps this latest edition will help young readers understand the dark underside in Australian life to which Howard's continuing electoral success can be attributed. This time the problem is seen not as the inadequate research of the Old Left (1970), nor the machinations of the conservatives (1975), not even the pseudo-socialism of the Australian Labor Party (1986).

Perhaps the blame lies with the people, after all. The argument of *A New Britannia* is sufficiently many-sided to tick-tack its way across the uncharted waters of the Australian political future. The voting public cravenly follows a political party that has now disgraced the word 'labor'.

This curious unsinkable ship will no doubt collect many more passengers along its latest journey.

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THE SPIRIT IN AUSTRALIA

Religion and National Character

Taking a handful of sand from the landscape of awareness and calling that handful the world.

THIS QUOTATION, from *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, sums up the first point I want to make, that religion in Australia has not been a central concern in Australian history. Writing in 1904, shortly after the Commonwealth came into being, A.G. Stephens saw the environment as essentially unfriendly: "Our fathers brought with them the religious habit as they brought other habits of elder nations in older lands. And upon religion, as upon everything else, the spirit of Australia—that undefined, indefinable resultant of earth, and air, and conditions of climate and life—has seized." In its case he believed that the tendency had been to destruction, partly because, typical progressive thinker of his time, he thought that "with the spread of mental enlightenment the tendency is everywhere to decay in faith in outworn creeds" but also because in his view "there is in the developing Australian character a sceptical and utilitarian spirit that values the present hour and refuses to sacrifice the present for any visionary future lacking a rational guarantee".[1]

By and large I think his diagnosis was right, and I will be arguing that this may be the reason for many of the problems which confront us as a community today. As a nation Australia has been officially and actually secular, in contrast with the USA where, despite the official separation of Church and State, private religious enthusiasms and the belief in America as 'God's own country' have been so strong that they seem to govern not only the sense of national identity but also of national purpose. Most Australians, however, shrink from this kind of religiosity, thinking until recently of religion as a private matter, and regarding its public parade as a form of bad taste. One recalls, for instance, Kylie Tennant's response to Patrick White's *Voss*: "When Patrick White gets mystical I creep out the door"; and this response was echoed by many of his critics.

White himself understood this, though significantly and, I think, presciently, he located it in what admirers of the present government like to call 'the chattering classes' who tend to be devotees still of the Enlightenment and the pragmatism which succeeded it. He presents them in action, for instance, in a scene in *The Vivisector* in which a group of them are gathered before his last exhibition opens to discuss Hurtle Duffield's so-called 'God paintings'. One opinion that in them Duffield is "painting himself", echoes Marx's view that religion is merely a projection of the self and its desires.[2] And another regards them as "nightmares of perversion, really bad, mad things",[3] "blasphemous muck".[4] They generally agree, however, that "God is dead, anyway. Anyway—thank God—in Australia".[5] But White himself does not agree.

Duffield, the novel's centre of value, is by no means an edifying figure in conventionally religious or moral terms. But feeling from childhood that he is not "his own dynamo"[6] he is preoccupied with the question of God, "a grandeur too overwhelming to express, a daily wrestling match with an opponent whose limbs never become material, a struggle from which the sweat and blood are scattered on the pages of everything the serious writer writes";[7] or in Hurtle's case, the painter paints. He dies trying to paint this intuition of God, "the otherwise unnameable I-N-D-I-G-O", a reality which he "had been reaching towards" all his life and with which he had had "a longstanding secret relationship".[8]

This is not the 'God who fills the gaps', a projection of the need for comfort and security. For White

in fact God was more of a riddle than anything else, a challenge to commonsense, a 'call to go further', if you like. David Marr describes a crucial point in this understanding. A few days before Christmas on their farm at Castle Hill in 1951 White was "carrying a bowl of slops to a litter of wormy pups" when he slipped in the mud and, as he told Marr, standing in the rain, the water up to his ankles, and "pouring off him, I proceeded to curse God". But [as Marr paraphrases him] "how could he curse what did not exist?"[9] This contrasts with the materialist positivism Stephens expresses, with its uncritical belief in its own premises and methods, which as I will be arguing later represents "a closed circle around sameness"[10] and is at odds with the kind of world we live in today.

In this world, religion, by which I mean the beliefs and practices of institutional Christianity, unable to capture the centre, has retreated into its own world, or better, series of worlds. It has thus failed to take up one of its main tasks in other cultures, to serve as a force for stability and to bless, that is, give an existential depth to, the status quo. The religious wars of the seventeenth century in Europe, for instance, were resolved by the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio* which made the religion of the ruler the official religion of the people—a principle still evident today in George Bush's America.

But the Australian situation has been different, largely I think because the convict beginnings made authority more suspect and because those who later became the Establishment—the squatters—initially made their fortunes in defiance of authority.[11] One result was the lack of metaphysical moral authority at the centre, which is evident today in many of the actions of the present government. There was never an Established Church here, though the Anglican Church tended to assume that position unofficially, largely because of their association with the secular Establishment. Not surprisingly therefore relations between them tended to be mutually supportive rather than critical, though, to be fair, this has been changing recently. In general then the anxieties of migration meant that the different groups within colonial society found their religious identity in harking back to their origins elsewhere, instead of coming to terms with the future possibilities of this new place on the other side of the world.

Before we go any further, however, it should be pointed out that in discussing religion we are talking almost entirely about Christianity and reactions against it. There is an interesting story to be explored in the Jewish and Muslim and more recently Buddhist experience in this country, to say nothing of Indigenous religion which, battered as it has been, continues to exist. But there is no time to do so here. Even the word 'Christianity' covers a range of different and often antagonistic institutions and practices which, as Martin Marty points out, are created "not so much by ideas that one has but by ideas that one is".[12] This makes generalisation difficult since it may obscure the underlying causes and passions which drive behaviour and underlie different believers' sense of identity. The passions in particular, largely fuelled by memories from the other side of the world, have exacerbated the divisions which have such evident social and political effects, as each group attempts to establish a place in the social and political arena, once again diverting religious energies from what is properly their centre, the challenge to commonsense which the word 'God' represents, and making them rivals with one another, further reducing their influence. Consider, for example, the ways in which the education debates of the 1870s, which led to the creation of a Catholic subculture, raised Protestant distrust of Catholics and generated a sense of persecution among Catholics. This made bigotry and division a feature of public and private life for generations and perhaps laid the foundations of the wedge politics which our present government has used and continues to use so effectively. These divisions, I suspect, have made religion problematic for many and distorted its message, which essentially should be one of mutual respect and concern for the wellbeing of all, particularly the less privileged.

Martin Marty argues that if we make opposition the key point of any comparative study of religion, or indeed of its practice, we ignore its essential element, a commitment to a reality beyond and superior to secular reality. This in turn has its effect on society, leaving it with a limited notion of reality and a deficient sense of a common moral identity which in most cultures is based on the belief that, as a Chinese proverb has it, "States and governments come and go but the mountains remain".[13] A new society in an uneasy process of formation, such as Australia was in the nineteenth century, in my view badly needed the foundation this kind of belief might have provided. Instead, however, we have had to settle for the legitimation provided by the quest for prosperity and the good life defined largely in material terms.

This lack is increasingly evident today, as the limited moral capital formerly provided by the churches diminishes, in the apparent lack of concern with the Howard Government's treatment of asylum seekers, the plight of Aboriginal Australians, our involvement in the war in Iraq, the environmental crisis, and a growing indifference to the idea of the 'common good'. Moreover these trends seem to be assisted rather than criticised by the growth of religious fundamentalism which puts its emphasis on individual satisfaction and sees prosperity as a sign of God's blessing. This growth seems to close the gap between religion and society which Stephens presupposed.

But it is probably more accurate to say that it represents the incorporation of religion into consumer society, a surrender which critics like Joseph Furphy foresaw in the nineteenth century, when he attacked the "comfortable ecclesiasticism". In his view this kind of accommodation "marked a full stop" in the realisation of the Christian Gospel, "blasphemously evading the completion of a sentence charged with the grave truth, that the Light of the World, the God-in-Man, the only God we can ever know, is by his own authority, represented for all time by the poorest of the poor".[14]

Furphy is putting his finger here on a crucial reason why many of the Left were and have been alienated from religion. But there is another reason too, which also underlies this alienation. By and large the Left has not been happy with the status quo. But religion—as distinct from faith or, if you like, 'spirituality', which is another matter, the "commitment to realities at present unseen"[15]—tends to produce in believers a particular kind of personality, what Robert Lifton calls the 'holdfast' type, which is rigid and dogmatic, seeks to bring reality under its control, and is highly conformist.[16] While there were many of this type on the Left, radicals associated themselves with the folk image of the 'easygoing' and laconic Australian, open and adaptable, ready to respond to whatever happens with a shrug and 'she'll be right', the kind of person Lifton calls 'Protean' (the god Proteus in classical mythology was the elusive god who resisted capture by changing shape).

Certainly the 'holdfast type', and with it institutional religion, did not fit very easily into life on the frontier. As Ian Turner observes:

> A religion which was appropriate for the ordered society and regular living of rural England seemed irrelevant to pioneering labour. Men carved their own lives out of a remote and monstrously difficult wilderness; what they achieved they owed to themselves, and they found little for which to thank their fathers' heaven.[17]

Religion was therefore much stronger in the city than in the bush, and this may be one of the reasons why, by and large, it has mostly failed to connect with the land. There is also the problem that the Christian liturgical calendar reflects the seasons on the other side of the world, where Christmas is in winter, coinciding with ancient festivals of light, and Easter in spring, the time of new growth. Associated as most of them have been with the culture of conquest, in general they have also failed to respect or learn from the religion of the land's First Peoples, insisting instead on imposing their own world-view on them. This is perhaps not surprising. But it is another reason why the churches' influence has been less than prophetic.

My argument so far then is summed up in my opening quotation. In general the churches have taken "a handful of sand from the landscape of awareness" which confronted them in this place and called that handful the world. In that sense, rather like the Modernist movement at the beginning of the twentieth century, they have been fighting a rearguard action against history and attempting to create their own autonomous and formally organised world, retreating from the conversation with—as distinct from dogmatic pronouncement about—the reality and values of the new society in which they found themselves. But in this way they have helped to perpetuate not only the forms but also the tensions and rivalries of British society, in this new place, so that Manning Clark was able to situate the early stages of the history of Australia along the fault lines of the religious divisions of the old world.

To turn now to the story of the different churches. The Catholic Church is perhaps the clearest example of this Modernist reaction. Initially most Catholics were poor Irishmen and women who brought with them memories of religious persecution and oppression at home and many of them in the early days were convicts, prisoners of the Crown and therefore beyond the social pale. Throughout the nineteenth century poverty and oppression brought increasing numbers in search of a better life. Many prospered but their memories often made them suspicious of and sometimes hostile to the largely Protestant society in which they lived and the imperial history which

It is probably more accurate to say that the growth of religious fundamentalism represents the incorporation of religion into consumer society.

had produced it and these suspicions were reciprocated by the wider society, which often saw them as dangerously subversive. Irish convicts, for example, figured strongly in the Castle Hill uprising at the beginning of the nineteenth century and in the middle of the century at the Eureka Stockade and in the 1880s an Irishman was responsible for the attempt on the life of a visiting member of the Royal Family.

Cardinal Moran's defence of the Unions in the Great Strike of the 1890s and Archbishop Mannix's opposition to Conscription in the First World War confirmed the view that Catholics were dangerously unpatriotic, even subversive—a view which B.A. Santamaria's 'Movement' and its attempt to take control of the Union Movement, which led to the disastrous split in the Labor Party in the 1950s, did little to allay. As mentioned, the education debates of the 1870s, which led the Catholics to set up their own independent school system, and the passion of Church leaders who defended their decision by condemning public education as 'godless', also increased these suspicions.

The Catholic Church's response was to retreat into its own religious state within the secular State, with its own schools staffed largely by nuns and brothers and some priests, its own code of morality, which was particularly preoccupied with sexuality, its opposition to 'mixed marriages', and so on. Catholics also marked themselves off as different by their large families, by trooping to Mass together on Sundays, not eating meat on Fridays and giving their allegiance to values which they regarded as more authoritative than those of secular authority, since they believed they derived from some more intense and abiding supernatural reality. As Martin Marty described their situation, they were almost a separate tribe, "distinguishing themselves from the others who lived in another valley and [heeding] the call of a different set of church bells [which would have been a threat] only if there had been any positive contact".[18] When in fact they began to do so in the 1960s as a result of Vatican II, the foundations of Catholic identity began to shift, dividing what was once a monolithic community. But that is a story to be followed up later.

This community, however, being largely 'holdfast', was not particularly democratic; which also made it suspect, and was patriarchal as well: women were decidedly second-rate citizens. In the nineteenth century particularly, when many Catholics were poorly educated, the priests and especially the Bishops became tribal chieftains, laying down the law but also guiding their flocks in a world which many of them did not fully understand and therefore saw as threatening and hostile to them. The doctrine of infallibility proclaimed in Rome in 1870, however, increased their confidence, exalting religious over secular authority, seeping downwards to make them less than accommodating in their attitudes to other churches and to society's values generally and more determined to assert their rights as well as their values against what they regarded as its 'errors' and 'false values'.

At the same time they were perhaps more radical in their politics. Since most felt little loyalty to the British Empire they were often ardent nationalists, though often they looked to the Holy Roman Empire as its alternative. Ken Inglis gives the example of the account in Sydney's *Catholic Press* of the St Patrick's Day procession in 1899. It is described as the celebration of "a feast that proclaims victory and triumph for Catholicity, and that trumpet-tongued declares that there is no power on earth that can crush the undying spirit of Irish nationalism".[19]

But other influences were at work. Papal teaching which upheld the rights of Trade Unions, ideas of the Welfare State, and the need to restrict the unrestrained behaviour of Big Business, until recently propelled many Catholics into the Labor Party. The Bishops' annual Social Justice Statement, canvassing issues like unemployment, Aboriginal Land Rights and the treatment of asylum seekers, made a significant contribution to the formation of a social conscience, and Catholic schools also emphasised these issues.

Significantly, however, growing affluence has led to a change in allegiance, so that today the Howard

Government has a record number of Catholic MPs and even Ministers. Like members of other religions, it seems that Catholics have also decided that 'if you can't beat them, you can join them'.

This has been helped perhaps by the fact that until Vatican II, Catholic theology was largely immune to trends in the other churches, which were influenced by current philosophy and social thought. It had little time for reflection on actual experience, insisting on a neo-scholastic approach which claimed to be based on the thought of Thomas Aquinas but had little of his ability to combine theology with contemporary thought or fashion. Its emphasis was formalist, based on reason, dry and hard and aiming at accurate, precise and definite descriptions of reality, with little concern for the pragmatic, mobile and unfinished nature of contemporary experience.

This was particularly evident in moral theology, which largely rested on 'holdfast' notions of a universal Natural Law, over and above cultural difference and historical change. This, together with a complex of patriarchal attitudes and what someone has called 'galloping infallibility', was the basis of the ban on all forms of contraception, apart from the so-called 'Rhythm Method', which led to widespread dissent. Many people, including many priests, left the Church, and many more, women in particular, felt increasingly alienated from an institution which seemed increasingly out of touch and often at odds with the culture in which they lived.

As Goethe said, mere ratiocination drives poetry away, and ratiocination, preoccupation with what a contemporary theologian has called the "tiresome matter of being in the right",[20] had become an essential element of Australian Catholicism until quite recently. Catholic radio featured programs like Dr Rumble's 'Question Box' in which the priest had an answer to all queries. At school too students were taught Apologetics, a subject designed to give them an answer to all questions, from the existence of God, the causes of the Reformation and the reason why the Catholic Church was 'the One True Church', to the absolute rightness of its teachings and moral pronouncements. At the same time the reforms initiated by Vatican II, which replaced Latin with English and streamlined the liturgy and got rid of many traditional devotional practices, robbed many of a sense of the poetry implicit in them. So, as in most other Western societies, the Catholic Church is undergoing a crisis of membership and allegiance and is divided between those who want to respond more intensely and intelligently to crises facing us today, and those who want to hold on to the orthodoxies of the past.

In that sense wider society's suspicion of Catholicism probably remains, since on the one hand elements seem determined to live in their own autonomous world, indifferent to changes going on around them, while others insist on contesting social injustice and working for international peace and justice for Aboriginal Australians. So the question posed by Henry Mayer in his introduction to the 1961 collection of essays *Catholics And The Free Society*, when he asked whether communication was possible between Catholics and Australian society in general, remains. As he saw it, the authority on which Catholics relied was different from the secular authority most Australians acknowledged. His view in effect echoed A.G. Stephens': "Any theocentric concept must clash with an anthropocentric one . . . What is sinful pride in one is proud independence to the other. To think these differences could be settled is the work of a cultural barbarian".[21] This is a point which throws light on the tension between certain Church authorities today, in Sydney especially, the wider culture, and more liberal or if you like 'Protean' Catholics.

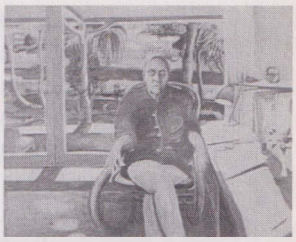
As far as the other churches are concerned, the gap between them and the wider society was not so extreme, and they have been more sympathetic to social and cultural change. Initially they drew on their British inheritance but did not dwell there, as many Irish Catholics did with their Irish inheritance, tending instead to embrace the culture in which they found themselves, intent on material progress and expansion into the future, both of which were more congenial theologically. So, with the possible exception of the Anglicans, who mostly cherished a loyalty to a more conservative view of society, they were more in tune with the commonsense of Australian society, regarding wealth and social success as signs of God's blessing and taking seriously the task of 'getting on', the commonsense which current fundamentalism has intensified.

Protestant churches also were more democratic and in tune with the open and dynamic society of colonial Australia, and their laity were usually better educated and more at home in the culture than most Catholics. Then as now attending a church school was more a mark of affluence or ambition than religious obedience. Doctrinally also they were more flexible, though they did and do insist on moral

righteousness, especially as far as sex and alcohol were concerned and in these matters differentiated themselves from the free and easygoing mainstream. But that was because they saw religion as the source of public order, not because they distrusted that order, as Catholics tended to do. They believed in it and saw themselves as part of its development and supported the process of modernisation going on around them.

True, many of them believed that they had a special mission to make it a 'godly' process, in the tradition of John Dunmore Lang, who insisted in 1833 that migrants should be selected "in the interests of virtue" and "consist exclusively of married persons and such unmarried females as they can severally induce to accompany them".[22] In many ways they saw themselves as moral policemen, leading the temperance movement, defending marriage and family life, the proper observance of the Sabbath and generally upholding 'respectable'—that is middle-class—behaviour. That set them at odds with the easygoing life on the frontier but very much in tune, then and now, with the ethos of the upwardly aspiring classes in the cities. But as success came the religious content seemed largely to drain out or to reduce itself to a kind of civic religion—a religion which made it possible in recent times for middle-class Catholics to join the Liberal Party or vote with it in increasing numbers.

Like the Catholics, though in a different key, nineteenth-century Protestants had a high esteem for perfection and dogmatic certainty and in that sense largely belonged to the holdfast type. But in the long run this certainty rested on subjective grounds, the belief that ordinary people using ordinary commonsense gain knowledge of the 'real world' by acting with social and economic responsibility. Unlike Catholics most Protestants seldom questioned the status quo and generally supported the various imperial wars in which Australia has been involved, patriotism being seen as an aspect of religion. Their horizon was thus essentially this-worldly and conformist. They were also more individualistic and less tribal and more democratic than Catholics since Protestants had no place for priestly mediation, a tendency which linked them to the suspicion of 'government', which has become the stock-in-trade of conservative parties. Recently, however, as the shape and nature of the world has become more confusing, many have turned to the fundamentalism which provides not only black and white certainties but also the sense of personal power and righteousness otherwise under threat in a postmodern culture.



Protestant suspicion of those who thought and acted differently therefore rested on rather different grounds from the Catholics, which in theory at least was theologically based. For them conformity mattered, the need to have 'one law, one nation and one people'—as the slogan of those opposed to Aboriginal Land Rights puts it—though it also applies to other recent developments like multiculturalism and gay rights. By and large they turned their backs on the reformist tradition, in effect asking to be left in peace to pursue their own goals. As their numbers grew they became the group conservative politicians came to rely on and profit by, Menzies' 'forgotten people' and more recently John Howard's 'battlers'. With increasing prosperity and a media devoted to conspicuous consumption on the one hand, and an increasingly fragmented and dangerous world on the other, their assumptions have come to be widely accepted, even, as we have noted, by many Catholics.

It is also true, however, that radical Protestantism was important in the nineteenth century especially and, as it did in Britain, made a significant contribution to the Trade Union Movement and to the struggle for justice generally. Charles Strong's 'Australian Church' which met next door to the Trade Union headquarters in Melbourne, for instance, strongly influenced Joseph Furphy's attack on the "ecclesiastical Christianity" which backed the Establishment. The cross which "has become the proudest insignia of Court-moths and professional assassins", he wrote, is "no longer the cross of [the] Christ" who had "come to make all things new".[23]

It could also be said that in many ways Protestants made a more substantial and disinterested contribution to the quest for a 'fair go' than many Catholics, who often tended only to look after Catholics; though recently many Catholics, inspired by Vatican II and the connection it made between Christians and the struggle for justice, have become part of this larger quest. Yet for all that, until recently it was by and large the Protestant churches which led the way in the Aboriginal ministry and in social ministry generally, Catholics generally being more concerned to care for their own. Today, for example, an

Aboriginal Church with its own Indigenous ministers is part of the Uniting Church. With the spread of fundamentalism it is true that this social concern seems to be diminishing, but the Uniting Church in particular continues to struggle for justice on a wide range of issues, often going out on a limb to do so.

The Anglican Church, to mention it finally, has in some areas also been part of the struggle for justice with organisations like the Brotherhood of St Lawrence and welfare agencies like Anglicare and speaking out on behalf of asylum seekers, Aboriginal Land Rights and so on. It was never officially the Established Church, as it was in Britain, but it was more closely associated with the Establishment than the other churches, which was in many ways a handicap. During convict times, for instance, Anglican clergymen as prison chaplains presided over floggings and executions and usually officiated on public occasions. These links with authority have also meant that it has seemed less 'Australian' and more associated with Britain and traditional British values, and generally more 'genteel', than the other churches.

At the same time its respect for ritual and ceremony has given Anglicanism generally[24] a poetic quality which sets it somewhat apart from the pragmatic utilitarianism of Australian society in general, pointing in the direction of Patrick White's "grandeur too overwhelming to express", generally absent from our society, and offering respite from the pressures of merely secular life. This kind of longing seems to be growing today, as society grows increasingly impersonal and as the effects on the environment of the pursuit of material development become clear. Many environmentalists have a feeling for the natural world which is religious in all but name, while others are drawing inspiration from the deep sense of community and the sacred to be found in Indigenous spirituality. Ken Gelder and Jane Jacobs write interestingly about this development:

> Some of us may think of Aboriginal sacredness as anachronistic in a modern, secularised society such as Australia. It can seem as if modernity had somehow left it behind, as—in a time in which 'nothing is sacred'—sacredness can only be conceived of nostalgically as something good which has been 'lost' and which at best exists only as a residue in the form of heritage sites or preserved objects.
>
> Yet in their view it may be the "very thing [this] modernity needs".[25]

As I see it, then, Australian society and culture has reached a point at which the secular paradigm which sustains it seems to be breaking down, challenged on the one hand by the growth of fundamentalism and on the other by growing dissatisfaction with the lack of what Peter Berger described as a "sacred canopy": some overarching sense, in some cultures explicit but often merely implicit, of a larger reality beyond the social and political, informing the culture as a whole. Rudolph Otto called this sense 'the sacred', some *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, a mystery at once terrifying and fascinating, at the heart of existence. However defined, it binds a society and culture together at a profound level and, situating it in the cosmos, gives it the security which is able to recognise and welcome difference.

According to Mircea Eliade the first duty of people settling into a place hitherto unknown to them is therefore this task, the "transformation of chaos",[26] to situate themselves in the cosmos. But the culture which governed the foundation of Australia—essentially that of the English Enlightenment—was more or less allergic, as one sociologist puts it, "to the *apeiron*, the indefinite or impossible to define".[27] The eponymous hero of most colonisers at that time, as Luiz Carlos Susin suggests, was Ulysses, who left home and journeyed through strange places, but always with the intention of returning home again, regarding all those who got in his way to this goal as monsters or enemies.[28] It therefore represented a "closed circle around sameness".[29]

So there was little attempt, at first especially, to come to terms with the strangeness of the land or the nature and power of Indigenous culture. Instead it was seen as *terra nullius*, an empty stage on which to play out a conquest and affluence,[30] of establishing "a new Britannia in another world" as W.C. Wentworth put it in his prize poem of 1823.[31] This 'circle around sameness' gave rise to the pursuit of a White Australia, for example, our support of British and more recently American imperial adventures, and the notion of Fortress Australia, which underpins our present government's treatment of asylum seekers. Psychologically it represents a rejection of difference, of the other but also of what Emmanuel Levinas calls the Other, making us a people who, to use Patrick White's image, cling to the fringes of the self as we cling to the fringes of the continent,[32] devoted to the preoccupation with, if not worship of, affluence. As Felix Wilfred argues, this creates "a

weak person and a fragile culture"[33] and tends to absolutise the status quo.

I want to argue that, whatever may be said about the past, this is no longer a world view which will serve in the kind of world in which we now find ourselves, that, to borrow from Susin again, our model should be the Biblical figure of Abraham, "a pilgrim to what is beyond any horizon . . . in a sense a fugitive exposed and vulnerable to the approach of others".[34] The "great triumphal march"[35] of imperial conquest manifests itself "as critical understanding, distinguishing and identifying good and evil in a very particular way based on itself, on its glorious position as basis and referent of all of reality spread out at its feet".[36] This kind of narcissistic understanding (which is one of the root causes of war), this "fabric of self-sustaining illusions",[37] will no longer do, on an overcrowded and increasingly fragile planet. Nor will the 'religion' which, as Marx noted, is "the generalised theory" of this kind of understanding and its "*point d'honneur*".[38] This may be contrasted with the kind of belief in 'realities at present unseen', in some reality other than this world, over which, as Max Horkheimer puts it, "the fixed rules of nature, the perennial source of doom have no dominion" and which may therefore offer some resistance to the world of "docile masses governed by clocks".[39]

As Horkheimer sees it, this kind of belief stands "in utter opposition to conformism, since its interrogation of present commonsense, based on self-determined obedience to Someone Other than the status quo",[40] may represent the great hope for a different and better world. Joseph Furphy would have agreed. There is nothing "Utopian . . . in the sunshiny Sermon on the Mount", he wrote. For him it was "no fanciful conception of an intangible order of things, but a practical, workable code of daily life, adapted to any stage of civilisation".[41] This is so, I suggest, because it is also reinforced and empowered by a sense of 'the grandeur too overwhelming to express', the mysterious presence we call God. There is no need then for religion to take a mere handful of sand from the landscape of awareness and call it the world. It lies at the heart of the mystery of the universe, as contemporary science increasingly reveals it: as complex, dynamic and open to infinite possibilities.

1. Ian Turner (ed.), *The Australian Dream*, Sun Books, Melbourne, 1968, p.x.
2. Patrick White, *The Vivisector*, Cape, London, 1970, p.612.
3. White, *The Vivisector*, p.610.
4. Ibid, p.612.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid, p.147.
7. Patrick White, *Flaws In The Glass*, London, Cape, 1981, p.70.
8. White, *The Vivisector*, p.641.
9. David Marr, *Patrick White: A Life*, Random House, Sydney, 1991, p.281.
10. Luiz Carlos Susin, 'A Critique of the Identity Paradigm', *Concilium* 2, 2000, p.87.
11. I am referring here to their defiance of Governors who in the early days of settlement attempted to limit its spread.
12. Martin Marty, 'Fundamentalism: An Overview', *Concilium* 3, 1992, p.6.
13. Marty, 'Fundamentalism', p.11.
14. Joseph Furphy, *Such Is Life*, John Barnes (ed.), UQP, St Lucia, 1981, p.90.
15. *Hebrews*, 11, 1.
16. Robert Lifton and Nicholas Humphrey, *In A Dark Time*, Harvard University Press, 1984, p.26.
17. Turner, *The Australian Dream*, p.14.
18. Marty, 'Fundamentalism', p.10.
19. Henry Mayer (ed.), *Catholics And The Free Society: An Australian Symposium*, Cheshire, Melbourne, 1961.
20. Christian Duquoc, '"Who Is God?" becomes "Where Is God?"', *Concilium* 3, 1992, p.3.
21. Mayer, p.3.
22. Turner, p.17.
23. Furphy, pp.89–90.
24. The Sydney Anglican Church is the great exception, being the product of nineteenth-century evangelical influences.
25. Ken Gelder and Jane Jacobs, *Uncanny Australia*, MUP, Melbourne, 1998.
26. Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Or Cosmos and History*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1974, p.10.
27. Susin, 'A Critique of the Identity Paradigm', p.79.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid, p.87.
30. Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, Faber, London, 1987, p.xiv.
31. Turner, p.12.
32. This is the image which structures his novel *Voss*.
33. Felix Wilfred, 'Searching For David's Sling: Tapping the Local Resources of Hope', *Concilium*, 2004/5, p.88.
34. Susin, p.88.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid, p.80.
37. Carter, p.xv.
38. Lloyd Easton and Kurt Guddat, *The Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*, Anchor Books, New York, 1967, p.250.
39. John Hughes, 'Unspeakable Utopia: Art and the Return to the Theological in Adorno and Horkheimer', *Cross Currents* 53:4, 2004, p.485.
40. Hughes, 'Unspeakable Utopia', p.85.
41. Furphy, p.89.

Veronica Brady was one of the first Australian nuns to teach in a university, broadcast on radio and engage in sociopolitical debate. She became an Associate Professor at the University of Western Australia in 1991 and has spoken out publicly against the Vatican stance on abortion, homosexuality and contraception.

Brett Whitely, *Patrick White*, detail, oil on canvas, courtesy of State Library of New South Wales, page 27.

THE SKELP MILL

JIMMY THE KID bustles across the factory floor. He's a man on a mission of mercy so he's got no time for things as trivial as work. Today is Christmas day and he's there with B crew at the Skelp Mill because it's triple time on public holidays and Jimmy's got three kids from two failed marriages to support. But then again, there's the other children he's got to look after today; the men of B crew, most of whom would rather be at home with their wives and kids than working in the dirt and shit of the mill.

"Triple time can go and fuck itself!" says one of the fitters to Jimmy as he waddles by.

Bright orange steel bars roll past Jimmy the Kid as he heads for the back of the reheating furnace. He ignores the hot metal. He may be a fat bastard as he admits to the other blokes when they're showering after a shift, but he's light on his feet should a cobble come about when he's close to that hot shit that pays his wages and feeds his kids.

A cobble is when the hot steel doesn't go through a roller cleanly. Instead of the roller rolling the hot metal flatter and wider, the molten metal hits an obstruction in the roller because of incorrect alignment and then you see the men on the mill floor run like buggery. A huge dinosaur spine of hot metal rises to the corrugated iron roof of the mill then falls back to the floor sighing with white fire and red sparks flying in every direction like crackers on a public holiday.

Jimmy hasn't time to think of maiming because he's got to get to the back of the reheating furnace. It's the heart of the mill because it's the place the cold metal ingots are placed to be reheated before coming out the arse end of the furnace to be rolled into giant watch springs and shipped off to GMH.

Jimmy the Kid's on a mission because he knows just about everyone in the mill is as cranky as a cut snake. B crew has been working five twelve-hour shifts a week, day work and dog watch, for months now. Just to keep up with demand. Jimmy's no psychologist but he knows that today being Christmas day is just as likely to be the straw that breaks the camel's back. Not being at home with their families rubs most of the mill hands, the tradesmen, the operators, the floor sweepers, right up the wrong way. It'll take the smallest of incidents and there'll be a blue, make no mistake.

"It'll be on for fucking young and old," mutters Jimmy to himself as he finds the back of the furnace. Just like when George Mackeroff lost his temper last week. Jim Davis, by mistake, drank George's can of coke out of the fridge in the crib room. "Christ almighty," thinks Jimmy, "you could have knocked me down with a feather to see George throwing them big haymakers." George Mackeroff is one of nature's gentlemen, the rest of the crew love him like a grandfather the way he comes in every second day with a basket full of the vegetables he's grown in his backyard in Mayfield East and tells the blokes to help themselves. All of the men on B crew are tetchy, on edge, because they know that if someone as placid as George Mackeroff can be set off by the uninten-

tional filching of a can of coke, then all of them must be close to the edge.

From the corner of his eye, Jimmy sees Al Brown, one of the furnace men, and one bastard who shouldn't be talked to because he isn't to be trusted. Al Brown is a spy of sorts. He listens in to all the conversations among the men and reports back to management. Any dissent, any likelihood of a strike is nipped in the bud.

Jimmy swerves as the furnace man goes to open his mouth to engage him in conversation. Al Brown has a terrible lisp and the story goes his speech impediment is a result of having his tongue stuck so far up the super's arse he can't pronounce his words correctly.

Jimmy the Kid sees the big metal box lined with steel shelves inside almost completed, and Marco Stavros putting the finishing touches to the box of metal screwed into the hindquarters of the reheating furnace. A grin brighter than Nobby's Lighthouse spreads across Jimmy's fat face.

But he can't help noticing that Marco is miserable, worn down like the others by the constant, long shifts, so he doesn't launch into the usual routine he and Jimmy have perfected over the years in the Skelp Mill. Usually when they meet Marco begins with: "Fuck me fuckin' dead I've had a fuckin' gut full of this fuckin' place. That's it, Jimmy the fuckin' Kid, I'm fuckin' well goin' fuckin' home. Don't fuckin' well try t' fuckin' stop me. This fuckin' place is fuckin' dreadful."

Jimmy's reply is: "Now now Marco it's not that bad. There's no need to get so upset. I know how you fucking feel."

Marco's response, with mock horror on his face is: "Such language you use Jimmy the Kid. You wouldn't fuckin' well hear me fuckin' well fuckin' swearing like fuckin' that."

It's a sketch they put on for the crew, all of whom have placed bets over the years as to how many times Marco Stavros can say 'fuck' in one minute. But no-one knows what the record number of 'fucks' is in a minute because no-one has been able to count that quickly.

Marco looks at Jimmy now and asks: "Jimmy the Kid, just what is this box of metal doing attached to the furnace?"

"I'm going to cook Christmas dinner in it," says Jimmy.

"You're fuckin' well goin' to do fuckin' what?!" asks Marco.

Not answering, Jimmy the Kid is off, away from his foreign order oven, heading for the crib room where he's got two big boxes of potatoes and pumpkins placed in the bottom of the fridge. In his haste, he almost runs straight into Sleepy Bob standing in front of one of the rollers.

Sleepy Bob is one of the men who attempt to keep the rollers in good order and more importantly in alignment, so there won't be cobbles of steel all over the mill floor. Jimmy knows it's a pain in the arse, a cobble, not just because it means a drop in the slim production bonus the men get, but because the crane usually has to be used to pull the renegade lump of steel out of the rollers. The partly rolled ingot has usually twisted into a knot of rapidly cooling steel. Sometimes the crane dragging out the steel means damage to a roller and extra work for Sleepy Bob because he'll have to replace the damaged roller with a new one and align the bastard to boot.

Sleepy Bob is called Sleepy Bob because he falls asleep standing up, especially on dogwatch. That's what the other men on B crew reckon. You can go up to Sleepy Bob and talk to him with your face only inches away from his face and he won't hear you. He'll stare straight ahead, won't blink because to all intents and purposes he's asleep.

But Jimmy the Kid knows it's the wheels of the rollers that hypnotise Bob so it seems as though he's fallen asleep standing up. He's really awake but he's like one of the chooks Jimmy brought to feed the men this Christmas day. Jimmy watched the butcher in his backyard drag his finger in the dirt in front of the chook's beak. Over and over the butcher dragged his finger through the dirt until the poor bird was hypnotised, couldn't move until the butcher gave it a good kick up the arse. Then chopped its head off and laughed watching the body sprinting madly

around the yard, the neck pluming blood everywhere. And a dozen kids from the neighbourhood, lining the top of the paling fence, came to watch.

Jimmy pauses to look at Bob. He doesn't need a kick up the arse to wake him up, Jimmy knows. There's nothing the matter with Bob. It's his way of coping with the dreadful boredom, the monotony of steel making.

Jimmy trundles down the cement ramp leading to the crib room. He ducks between the men drinking their tea and coffee on the ramp because it's the rule of management that crib time is to be spent on the mill floor, unlike lunch when the crew can sit down in the crib room and eat and play five hundred.

Many of the men manage a smile for Jimmy. Some poke him in the rolls of fat on his ribs, some give him a mouthful of cheek but that's okay. If they didn't show their affection for the fat man by pulling his leg or insulting him Jimmy would know there was something wrong. To be called a cunt by some men of B crew is to feel the warmest form of affection they can bestow.

Inside the crib room Jimmy sees the walls covered by posters of naked women, but he has to look up to see them. Sometimes he has to crane back his head, so high up have the pictures been placed. Whenever a man on B crew decides to place a picture of a naked woman on a wall of the crib room, he doesn't stand on the cement floor to do it. He'll get up on one of the tables, raise himself on the tips of his toes and paste the naked woman as high up as he can manage.

Jimmy knows the men exalt women. They love them, even worship them, and that's why they make sure the women are given the highest of places. It is as though the naked brunettes with big breasts, the redheads with long legs, the blondes with long legs and big breasts are looking over the men, somehow keeping them safe until they escape the grease and dirt of the mill.

But the men of B crew will tell you that this is all bullshit and the only reason they put the women high on the walls is so they can look up any time and get an eyeful of a whopping great set of tits or a plump, desirable snatch.

The only other man in the crib room, Cowboy, is sleeping. He's sleeping because he's been working for three days, on and off, at the mill. He's actually living there, in a sense, because he's what's called a 'lifer'. Jimmy shivers, because he's close to being a 'lifer' himself. A 'lifer' is a man who is in so much debt, usually due to failed marriages and children to support, or just plain bad financial management, he has to work forever. Usually a 'lifer' has no trade. He's only good for performing the most menial of jobs around the mill. So management know he will do whatever they tell him to and if they demand him to work never-ending shifts, he'll do it. And as with Cowboy, sometimes it's not worth going home, so he'll sleep on one of the benches until he's due to go back onto the mill floor.

Cowboy is grimy from three days of tying coils of hot metal with loops of wire. Jimmy looks at him and he can see the salt of sweat that's dried, formed a cocoon, that will only come off when Cowboy gets around to having a shower. He'll have to ask one of the other men to scrub his back and shoulders to get the shit off.

Jimmy can see the mouth of the man clawed into deep creases because Cowboy has taken so many salt tablets. Working close to hot metal all the time washes the salt from him. His mouth looks like a chook's arse, thinks Jimmy.

Another man, Crazy Horse, comes down the steps into the crib room. Jimmy and the men know Crazy Horse is called that simply because he is completely nuts and prepared to do almost anything to maintain his reputation as a loon. It keeps most of the mill bullies at bay because they don't know just what Crazy Horse might do and they're not prepared to risk finding out.

Like the time Crazy Horse got a cutthroat razor, Christ knows from where, and half shaved one of the fitters who'd been working two 'doublers' back to back. The man was so fatigued, so deeply slumbering on one of the wooden benches in the crib room, he didn't feel a thing when Crazy Horse shaved off the left-hand side of his moustache and beard. Only when the men on the mill floor keeled over with

laughter, did the fitter realise that something was up.

Crazy Horse goes up to Cowboy now and bends his head close to the sleeping man. Cowboy is out like a light but Crazy Horse whispers in his ear: "Elvis Presley is a fuckin' prick with ears."

The effect is galvanising. Cowboy is awake in an instant. He jumps up, eyes blazing fire. He jumps up on the table and clenches his fists and yells at the top of his lungs: "Elvis Presley is not a fuckin' prick with ears! Elvis Presley is the greatest singer the world has ever seen and heard! Elvis is the one and only!"

And so it goes, with Crazy Horse grinning, standing quietly listening to Cowboy rave. Jimmy hasn't time to listen the way he usually would. He has things to do and the first thing is to cut up a whole box of potatoes and pumpkins and a whole box of onions. And he's got some bottles of olive oil to rub the potatoes and pumpkin with before he puts them in the metal box with the dozen chooks. Providing it'll all fit. But he's not sure about the olive oil. It's taken years for Marco Stavros to educate him into using olive oil rather than the dripping Jimmy's mother used at every meal when he was a kid.

"Still don't know about this wog muck," says Jimmy to himself.

He holds up the bottle of olive oil to the soupy light filtering through the window half buried by earth and bricks. It's as if he's expecting so see something alive and swimming, wriggling in the olive oil. But there's nothing there except the beautiful green and amber colour and Jimmy does have to admit the olive oil crisps the vegetables like nothing else.

Jimmy starts with the onions, peeling them, cutting them into thin rings he'll put in at the last minute when everything else is almost done. It doesn't matter how much he turns his head away while he is peeling and cutting, the fumes are so strong the tears flow down his flushed, capillary-broken cheeks.

Stan Blake comes into the crib room and of course he's pissed just like he usually is when he's at work.

"Fuck me Jimmy! What's wrong? Who's died?" says Stan.

Stan doesn't even see the onions Jimmy's cutting because of the extra three schooners he downed at the Stag and Hunter up the road, just before he started the shift. The Stag and Hunter, nicknamed the Staggering Hunter by the men of B crew, is the regular watering hole of the men.

From the corner of his eye, Jimmy watches Stan lurch across the floor towards a bench and flop down on the seat. Jimmy sees the chest rise and fall, heave with deep breaths, and Jimmy the Kid knows Stan might be sleeping deeply thanks to the booze, or he might be crying.

It wouldn't be the first time Stan Blake got pissed and went to the crib room and cried. Not that any of the men say anything when they come across the big, former first-grade rugby league prop forward, sobbing. They don't try to talk to Stan because they know how embarrassed he'd be. There's no talking out this matter of fear. Stan Blake works at the end of the mill that houses the twist chute. It's the place where the rolled steel emerges onto big moving tables of steel.

The rolled hot steel is flat on the moving tables. It is Stan Blake's job to step onto the moving tables, step up to the giant tongue of hot rolled steel, take the huge tongs he carries, get a grip on the end of the steel with them and turn the hot steel up on its edge to feed into the twist chute.

Once this is done the steel is rolled at enormous speed into the clock springs of metal. But Stan Blake is convinced he's going to slip one day just as he's turning the hot tongue of metal on its side to feed into the twist chute. That's why he drinks, to take away, to numb that fear he will end up melted to a maimed mess of flesh and bone.

But it's the booze that's going to make his fear a reality if he keeps on drinking the way he does, Jimmy knows, as he finishes peeling the onions. The tears keep washing down his face. Jimmy remembers the old Stan Blake, the man who worked his present job without a care in the world, without a thought that he might slip and fall onto the hot metal. It just cannot be explained, Stan's fear that seemed to come almost overnight.

A bit like being in a war thinks Jimmy as he starts peeling the potatoes. Constantly under fire so one

day you lose your nerve and suddenly you're a wreck because of the shell shock. That's what Jimmy sees when he looks at Stan Blake, a man suffering shell shock. Jimmy's got an uncle who served in the Pacific. Jimmy sees the tremors in the old soldier's body, the composed vacancy in the uncle's eyes, hiding the fear, when they meet occasionally.

But while the others on B crew can sympathise with Stan Blake, the sympathy only reaches to a point. They cannot afford to connect too closely with the man because they fear they will end up like him. When they see him crying in the crib room they know there's only a hair's breadth between Stan Blake and themselves.

Another man comes down into the crib room. It's Davo, the foreman for this shift. Like many of the men his nickname is his name. Most of the men of B crew would be pushed to tell you his full name.

Davo is after Stan Blake. The foreman knows he'll usually find Stan here and the foreman knows about Stan's problem. It's a problem for Davo as well because he likes Stan and sympathises with his plight. But the foreman is caught between his like for Stan Blake and his duty to management. If Stan keeps on coming to work pissed he'll have to report it and Stan will get the bullet.

The foremen in the mills are usually recruited from the men on the mill floors, ex-labourers and operators of machinery. Jimmy can see they're caught between loyalty to men they used to work with and loyalty to management, who expect them to come down hard on the men when needed. It's a twilight zone many of the foremen find themselves lost in, former work mates refusing to have anything to do with them, members of management refusing to socialise with what they see as an upstart worm wriggled straight out of the dross of the mill.

But Davo manages better than most. He looks a lot like Paul Newman and goes about giving everyone that sparkling, blue-eyed grin and the men cannot help but like him. As well as this Davo carries about with him an enormous pewter teapot. He seems to drink cups of tea all the time, usually with the men, as he goes from site to site on the floor of the Skelp Mill. This pewter teapot prop makes him look faintly ridiculous. It's as if he doesn't take his job seriously, even though he does.

Seeming to not quite take his job seriously appeals to the men whether they know it or not, thinks Jimmy. This larrikinism identifies Davo as one of them. The men of B crew feel that Davo is just pretending to be a foreman, that it's all an act, that he's pulling the leg of management.

"Come on Stan. Wakey, wakey. That's it, on yer feet. There's work to be done but before that I'll make yer a nice cup of tea to get rid of some of that beer yer've downed," says Davo.

Jimmy the Kid watches Davo help Stan Blake up the stairs of the crib room. It's not the first time he's seen this foreman help the man back onto the mill floor, sober him up and coach him back to the twist chute to do some work.

But Jimmy knows that in the back of Davo's mind is the thought of what might happen if he reports Stan Blake to management. If Stan gets the sack, the men will just as likely go out on strike even though Stan Blake deserves to be sacked. And Davo will find himself ostracised by the men on the mill floor, who like him, and management, who loathe strikes and the loss of steel production that goes with them.

Jimmy the Kid struggles up the stairs of the crib room carrying a box filled with the vegetables. The chooks are still in his fridge at home but he's arranged for one of the men, who's actually taken the day off, to meet him at the side gate at an appointed time and hand over the plucked and trussed birds.

Jimmy is short of breath and his legs ache from the sores that are forming more regularly on his legs these days. And it's getting harder to heal those sores. Jimmy's been told by his doctor he's got diabetes but that doesn't stop him meeting the others after work at the Staggering Hunter and drinking six or seven schooners every night. Or morning if they've been working dogwatch. He knows he shouldn't, but he just can't bring himself not to drink with the others after work. Besides, he hasn't anyone to go home to. Hasn't seen either of his ex-wives in years and his children live far away.

Waddling across the mill floor, wheezing like a steam train, Jimmy has to stop and put down the box. Greg Burrows comes to his rescue, picking up the box and asking Jimmy where he wants it taken. Greg Burrows is at the mill for a short time because he's a uni student. The works employ several hundred at the end of the academic year. It's a PR exercise and the money comes in handy for the students during the year. Many of them, like Greg Burrows, will labour for as long as possible before going back to the antiseptic and hallowed halls of Newcastle University.

Jimmy grins as he follows the young man. He remembers the first week Greg spent at the mill. Jimmy was supposed to look after him. The first thing he had to do was to convince Greg not to call him Mr Kid. When the other men on B crew heard him call Jimmy that there was no end to the ribbing Jimmy received, on the mill floor, in the showers, in the crib room, every fucking where.

But Jimmy still remembers the fear in the young man's eyes that first week, the way he sat next to Jimmy in the crib room and did not eat, confused and intimidated by the other men and their foul language, the aggressive manner they even managed to bring to a game of five hundred. Cursing, slamming down fists on a table if they lost a hand.

It took Jimmy a long time to get Greg Burrows involved in the life of the mill, if you could call such an existence a life. Greg Burrows was like the new kid at school, on the outside, just ready to be bullied by the others if he didn't hurry up and fit in. And his quietness, his shyness, made him a marked man unless Jimmy did something fast.

There was only one thing to be done. Jimmy took Greg home after work and taught him to play five hundred, an almost instant passport into the world of the mill and the crib room. True, Greg got his fair share of abuse as he messed up more than a few games, but he caught on quickly and soon was one of the best players on B crew, and therefore in demand. It's difficult, Jimmy thinks, to underestimate the importance cards play in the lives of the men.

And as he became more accepted, as the men forgot he was a uni student and not one of them, the more Greg Burrows opened his mouth and gave as good as he got.

"Burrows yer fuckin' dreadful at hot tying and fuckin' dreadful at cards," one fitter declared, to cover up the fact that he had messed up with his card partner Greg Burrows.

"Tim yer wouldn't know the difference between a good hand and yer arsehole," returned the quiet Greg, much to the delight of the others.

In fact it became a game of sorts amongst the others to get Greg Burrows to shoot off his mouth and give one of the others a tongue-in-cheek dressing down. It amused the permanent members of B crew to see the quiet young man come down to their level and wallow there.

"When are you going to stop drinking?" says Greg Burrows to Jimmy as he places the box of vegetables on the floor near the metal box.

"What?" says Jimmy feigning ignorance, surprise.

"You know what I mean Jimmy. Look at that sore on your left leg, it's getting bigger," says Greg.

"Look there's nothing the matter with my legs. Why are yer lookin' at them all of a sudden? Do yer fancy me?" says Jimmy.

"Have it your own way Jimmy. You know what I mean though," says Greg and walks off.

"Fuckin' smartarse uni student," mutters Jimmy. "Look after 'em and they think they can run yer fuckin' life for yer."

Jimmy the Kid heads for the side gate where he knows The Birdman will be waiting. The Birdman works at the mill performing a number of jobs. He never seems to have one particular job but floats from site to site doing whatever the foreman for that shift tells him. He's like a migratory bird, flying here and there, so the men call him The Birdman.

But there's more to it than that. The Birdman has a number of other jobs outside the Skelp Mill, jobs he seems to wander in and out of. Some of the men see him collecting empty glasses at the Staggering Hunter, others see him panel beating in his backyard, others see him driving a taxi.

It's his job as a taxi driver that has come in useful for Jimmy. As the fat man reaches the side gate, he

sees The Birdman waiting there with the cab and the boot already open. Inside are the twelve chooks placed in grey plastic crates The Birdman has stolen from the local milkman over the years.

Next to the chooks are two big metal eskies full of crushed ice, from the servo down the road, and bottles of Gala Spumante. The bubbly is for the washing down of the baked chooks and vegetables if Jimmy manages to get the job done.

"Thanks Birdman," says Jimmy. "What do I owe yer?"

The Birdman waves his hand, gives Jimmy back the key to his flat. Grimaces as if to say he is insulted by the question. He rarely speaks so he doesn't say anything now but takes hold of two crates of raw chooks and starts carting them towards the mill. Jimmy manages one crate and leaves the others and the two eskies of sweet, tooth-rot bubbly to The Birdman.

The Birdman completes the job quickly. There's no fat on the man and that's because he spends his life working. He sends money back to Greece to his parents and relations.

Once in a while The Birdman disappears. He goes back to one of the Greek islands to visit his parents and aunts and uncles. There he is greeted as a hero, a saint of sorts. Then he returns to the works and Mayfield East where his cycle of labour continues; a lifetime of toil, but the man refuses to yield. He is driven by something most of the men on B crew cannot understand. The men see The Birdman as hungry for work and therefore to be despised to a degree.

Some of the crew, when they pass The Birdman on the mill floor, mimic money by rubbing their thumb and index finger together in his face. This usually happens when The Birdman is doing a 'doubler', a sixteen-hour shift. The men say to him: "Doubla, plenty money."

The Birdman does long hours at the Skelp Mill in the hope that one day there will be enough money to bring his parents to Mayfield East to spend the remainder of their lives.

Jimmy the Kid places the chooks with the vegetables in the metal box made by Marco Stavros and slams shut the door. News has been spreading among the mill about what he is up to and there's almost a buzz of excitement, of expectation amongst the men. Jimmy stands in front of the big box and wills the heat of the reheating furnace to do its job. The theory is the outer skin of the furnace is so hot it should heat the metal box and bake the chooks and vegetables.

He hears the voice of Les, the crane driver, as he swears blue murder trying to stack the steel billets neatly so they won't topple over. The electric crane picks up four or five of the steel bars and Les must place them on the skids. The skids are a series of big steel arms that shuffle back and forth, sorting the steel billets into size and length, into some sort of pattern, before they're pushed into the reheating furnace.

Normally Les would do this standing on his head but he's as cranky as buggery with fatigue like the other men and with anger comes mistakes and a loss of confidence in his ability to do a job he's been doing for years.

Les lives in Cooks Hill, far away from the industrial suburbs of Mayfield and Tighes Hill where most of the other men of B crew live. Les is a mystery. He's a bachelor, a man who doesn't socialise with the rest of the men. One or two of the others on B crew have seen him sitting in a café in Cooks Hill drinking coffee as they drive by. But that's it. You won't see Les in attendance at one of the get-togethers the Skelp Mill Social Club puts on, usually at one of the local pubs or clubs.

So Les is treated with a certain amount of suspicion. A man who doesn't mix, who keeps to himself, will never have an easy life in the mill.

JIMMY THINKS it's time and he opens the door of the box and the smell of roasted chook and vegetables is overpowering. Jimmy's mouth waters and he slams shut the door and goes around to the front of the furnace where Michael Green operates the furnace door. The furnace door is where the almost molten bars come out of the reheating furnace to be fed through the rollers.

Jimmy gives Michael the nod and Michael allows a hot metal bar to come from the furnace mouth.

Then he shuts the furnace door and reverses the rollers so the bar does not go straight through the rollers but remains stationary, cooling very quickly. When the bar has cooled to a sombre grey with only patches of hot orange here and there, Michael puts the rollers back into forward and feeds the 'cold' bar into the first roller and runs.

The steel wraps itself in a question mark around the rollers but there's no siren to signal a cobble. Someone's managed to disconnect it. No-one from management comes to the window of the office block to check why production has stopped. The crane doesn't move towards the trouble spot to drag out the steel. In fact the rollers stop, every piece of machinery comes to a halt.

The men gather on the mill floor and Jimmy the Kid appears pushing a foreign-order steel trolley on which are twelve smoking roast chooks and piles of baked potatoes and pumpkin. He goes amongst the throng handing out cardboard plates piled high with food. Behind him comes Marco Stavros handing out glasses of Gala Spumante.

Jimmy the Kid is called Jimmy the Kid because his name is James Kid. But there's more to it than that. He looks like a kid. He looks like Billy Bunter with his fat knees, but without a school uniform. But he's not just a kid, he's a child; with the innocence of a child; with the compassion of a child; with the luminosity of a child shining from the flabby folds of his face.

The men stand together and they toast Christmas day with spumante. They toast their families at home. They toast each other.

They toast the blessed and sacred silence.

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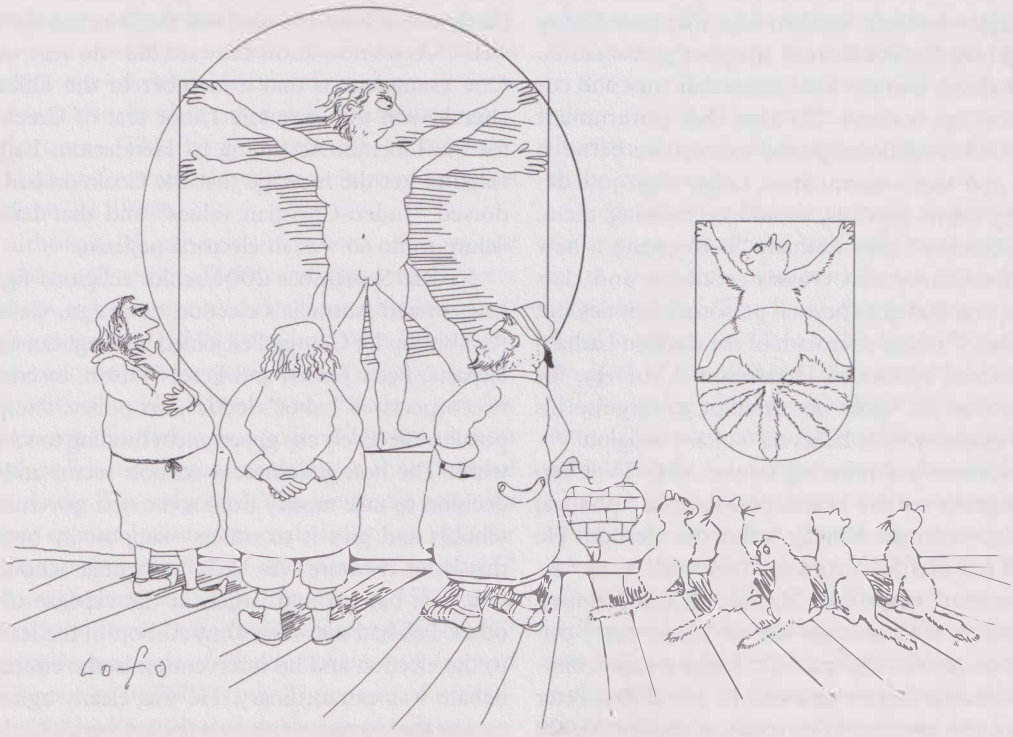

HOWARD'S BELIEVERS

Religion, Culture and the Future of Progressive Politics

LATE IN 2004 Mark Latham reacted to Tony Abbott's attempt to reinvigorate debate on abortion by stating that religion and politics don't mix. Latham confirmed Labor's commitment to the secular state in his speech to the Victorian ALP's state conference on 20 November 2004. But in the same speech he also stated that he appreciated the "social capital" created by evangelical churches that were active in his electorate. Social capital, contemporary sociological jargon for community cooperation and development, played an important role in Latham's politics. In *From the Suburbs: Building a Nation From Our Neighbourhoods*, Latham says that community development matters more in an age of globalisation. He says that it is in the local realm that trust and cooperation are learned. He says that government should broker relationships and connections between people and that communities, rather than just demanding better services, should be running them. "The objective" says Latham "is to create a new kind of solidarity that crosses economic and class barriers, one that goes beyond personal identities and prejudices."[1] In the aftermath of the election Latham was criticised by Gerard Henderson in the *Age* for the fact that he "does not attempt to disguise his lack of empathy with believers—of any religion".[2]

Henderson was referring to the ABC TV *Compass* program on the beliefs of Australia's political leaders aired on the Sunday before the election. He pointed out that John Anderson emerged as an "active Christian" while John Howard depicted himself as a believer who chooses not to "share every private moment with the public". Latham called himself a humanist and an agnostic. In July 2004, Peter Costello, a lay preacher in his youth, addressed 20,000 members of the fundamentalist Hillsong congregation at the Sydney Entertainment Centre. Costello told those assembled that more lives had been "transformed by faith in Christ than by editorial writers".[3] (Interesting that Costello mentioned editorial writers and not politicians.) Henderson pointed to comments made to *Lateline* by former ALP pollster Rod Cameron on the impact of Costello's visit to Hillsong and of evangelical Christianity in the electorate. Cameron told *Lateline*: "You tend to find these churches in the outer suburbs and in regional Australia and that's where the marginal seats are . . . and that's where John Howard will think he can do very well".[4] As we now know Howard did "do very well". One example was that a member of the Hillsong church won the once-safe Labor seat of Greenway for the Liberals. According to Henderson, Latham failed to get the message that the Coalition had endorsed "Judeo-Christian values" and that Labor's failure to do so was an electoral negative.

By late September 2004 senior religious figures had entered Australia's election campaign. Catholic Archbishop Dr George Pell joined his Anglican counterparts, Peter Jensen and Peter Watson, to criticise two aspects of Labor's education policy: the proposal to effectively cap government funding to schools within the non-government schools sector and the decision to take money from some non-government schools and give it to others—supposedly because this latter measure was likely to benefit schools of one faith background largely at the expense of another. Pell had met with Tony Abbott in the lead-up to the election and his intervention in the education debate was extraordinary. He was clearly agitating against the interests of his own flock. Overall, Catholic

schools were likely beneficiaries of the ALP's policy. Only one Catholic school, St Ignatius' College in Sydney, made it onto Labor's list of sixty-seven (predominantly Anglican and Protestant schools) that stood to suffer a funding cut under the policy.

All of this, together with the obvious impact of religion on the US election result, the emergence of the Family First Party in Australia and the apparent worldwide growth of charismatic churches, leads one to look again at the relationship between politics and religion. It also leads to the question of how Labor, or those on the progressive side of politics in general, should deal with religion.

In Australia, the ALP has always been composed of a mixture of secular humanists and those for whom religion has played a role in their embracing egalitarian values, the politics of social reform and support for human rights. Social disadvantage led many of Irish Catholic descent to join or vote for the ALP. And religion lay at the heart of the ALP's own greatest and most bitter schism—the 1954–55 split, inspired by Cold War anti-communism, Dr Mannix and B.A. Santamaria—which resulted in the formation of the Democratic Labor Party (DLP).

In the postwar era, many secular humanists on the Left and intellectuals in general no doubt believed that religion would eventually 'wither away', particularly with improved educational standards. Empirical studies of French and Italian Catholics seemed to confirm the decline of religion as inevitable in a society in which modernisation was an ongoing process. This type of research formed the backbone of research in the sociology of religions until the late 1960s.

Although 95 per cent of Italians say they are Catholic, only about 30 per cent attend weekly services (as Catholicism requires), a figure that has plummeted since the 1950s. A recent *New York Times* story explored the strange paradox of religion in Italy. By tradition, public schools post crucifixes, yet few Italians see the church as a political force, and most simply will not tolerate it meddling in their personal lives. As the *Times* reported, "In one recent poll, only 32 per cent of Italians surveyed said it was right for religion to have an influence on the laws of the state".[5]

Australia has seen similar trends. In 1971 slightly fewer than 90 per cent of Australians stated an affiliation with some type of religion but this had dropped to 73 per cent by 2001. Only 23 per cent of Australian adults had participated in church or religious activities in the three months prior to the ABS 2002 General Social Survey and this included those who had gone to a religious funeral or wedding.[6]

The USA on the other hand remains a deeply religious society. In the year 2000 around 85 per cent of the population identified themselves as religious. Seventy-six-point-five per cent identified themselves as Christian, an increase of 5 per cent since 1990. But perhaps the best indicator of religiosity in the US is church attendance. In the US 51.6 per cent of Christians identified themselves as attending church on a weekly basis in 2001. Anglicans had the lowest rate of weekly attendance (30 per cent) and the highest rates were Mormons (71 per cent), Assemblies of God (69 per cent) and Pentecostals (66 per cent).[7]

In the USA organised religion has undoubtedly become a potent political force. A US secular Republican has become almost as rare a creature as a Wet in the Liberal Party of Australia. The Christian Right has seemingly been able to persuade a significant number of voters to place so-called 'moral issues' ahead of their own economic self-interest in determining voting priorities. George W. Bush was returned to the Presidency because he won the state of Ohio. Had John Kerry won Ohio he would have won the Presidency without winning the popular vote (as Bush himself did in 2000). Ohio is a state in which some 250,000 jobs were lost during George W. Bush's presidency. Yet exit polls across the country showed 21 per cent of voters saying that 'moral values' (principally opposition to gay marriage and abortion) determined their vote ahead of either Iraq or the economy.

Some observers have continued to point the finger at poor educational standards as an explanation for the persistence and influence of fundamentalist religious belief. Tim Berra referred to poor educational standards in Ohio in his book *Evolution and the Myth of Creationism*. He notes that "well over half the biology graduate students surveyed at Ohio State University favoured teaching creationism in public schools . . . Another survey showed that only 12 per cent of Ohio's high school biology teachers could select from five choices the phrase that best described the modern theory of evolution!"[8] But poor education in the USA is nothing new and seems of itself an inadequate explanation of the emerging dominance of the US Christian Right. More satisfactory explanations lie in the spread of Bush's faith-based social welfare strategy, the improved level of grass

roots political organisation by the Christian Right and the accompanying success in convincing followers that they should engage in secular politics rather than focusing exclusively on spiritual issues.

Barbara Ehrenreich has suggested that "the faith factor" in the US election is the direct result of what Mark Latham might refer to as the 'social capital' that has been created by the Christian Right. Ehrenreich says of the right-leaning churches:

> They have become an alternative welfare state, whose support rests not only on 'faith' but also on the loyalty of the grateful recipients . . . Drive out from Washington to the Virginia suburbs, for example, and you'll find the McLean Bible Church (MBC), spiritual home of Senator James Inhofe and other prominent right-wingers, still hopping on a weekday night. Dozens of families and teenagers enjoy a low-priced dinner in the cafeteria; a hundred unemployed people meet for prayer and job tips at the 'Career Ministry'; divorced and abused women gather in support groups. Among its many services, MBC distributes free clothing to 10,000 poor people a year, helped start an inner-city ministry for at-risk youth in DC and operates a 'special needs' ministry for disabled children. What makes the typical evangelicals' social welfare efforts sinister is their implicit—and sometimes not so implicit—linkage to a program for the destruction of public and secular services. This year the connecting code words were 'abortion' and 'gay marriage'. Of course, Bush's faith-based social welfare strategy only accelerates the downward spiral toward theocracy. Not only do the right-leaning evangelical churches offer their own, shamelessly proselytising social services; not only do they attack candidates who favour expanded public services—but they stand to gain public money by doing so. It is this dangerous positive feedback loop, and not any new spiritual or moral dimension of American life, that the Democrats have failed to comprehend: The evangelical church-based welfare system is being fed by the deliberate destruction of the secular welfare state.[9]

Ehrenreich's observations illustrate the blindingly obvious. Not all 'social capital' is progressive in its politics. It does not necessarily create (to quote Latham) "a kind of solidarity that . . . goes beyond personal identities and prejudices", let alone "class barriers". Community development can operate to increase prejudice and suspicion of outsiders or minorities. In Australia religious organisations such as the Brotherhood of St Lawrence and St Vincent de Paul have provided charity to the poor as an adjunct to social services. But these services have been rendered without proselytising and the organisations have generally advocated against rather than in favour of cuts in state-supplied welfare. Nevertheless, the US experience confirms that community development is not a value-free process.

Professor Jim Ife has rejected technocratic, instrumentalist, value-free and apparently 'non-political' approaches to community development. He points out that: "In a value-free sense, perhaps one of the most successful community development projects of the twentieth century would be the Hitler Youth. It really engaged young people, it gave them a real sense of connectedness and belonging, it gave their life a purpose, it had a high level of participation. It was also part of one of the most shameful regimes in human history".[10] Of course the US right-wing churches are not the equivalent of the Hitler Youth. They oppose totalitarianism. They are not necessarily anti-Semitic. In fact some even strongly support Israel on obscure religious grounds related to the Rapture and the Second Coming. Undoubtedly these churches produce their share of seemingly pleasant and happy individuals such as Guy Sebastian, who learned his music through Australia's Assemblies of God Church. Yet there remain some disturbing similarities shared by those who participated in Nazism and the right-wing churches. Both display a Calvinistic obsession with cleanliness, purity, dress code and destiny. Both share the desire to yield one will's to an external overwhelming authority figure (described by Erich Fromm as the fear of freedom). Both tend to support militarism and a punitive approach to law and order. And both regard homosexuality as depraved.

The social capital developed by the Christian Right has been institutionalised in the USA in a manner that will not necessarily occur in Australia. The Bush Administration has established the Whitehouse Office of Faith Based and Community Initiatives which has channelled billions of dollars to faith-based organisations that proselytise in the process of delivering services. The March 2004 issue of *Church and State* reported that Jim Towey, who heads up the Bush administration's 'Faith Based Initiative' had announced to reporters that $40 billion was now available to religious charities. By studying White House press releases and the White House web site, Daniel

Zwerdling found that religious groups could apply to more than a hundred federal programs that gave out more than $65 billion. In addition, religious groups could apply for more money through state-administered programs.[11]

But while historical factors render the USA a far more religious society than Australia, the US pilgrim experience of religious persecution in Europe led the US founding fathers to ensure a constitutional separation of church and state. The First Amendment's religion clauses embrace two key concepts: the government will not endorse or oppose any particular religious viewpoint (or religion generally), and will not interfere with the right of citizens to practice their faith. As Thomas Jefferson put it, the American people created a "wall of separation between church and state".

The constitution has largely prevented state aid being given to religious schools in the US. It has even facilitated successful legal challenges to the placing of the Ten Commandments in publicly owned spaces. But Americans United Executive Director Barry W. Lynn has stated that Bush's re-election will lead to more attacks on the "Church-State wall". Lynn says that the country can expect more battles over divisive issues such as same-sex marriage, religion in public education, "faith-based" initiatives and displays of religious symbols in government buildings. The most bruising battles, says Lynn, will occur when there are vacancies on the Supreme Court. There are likely to be two to four openings on the court within the next four years. According to Lynn, Religious Right groups will demand that high court appointees agree with fundamentalists on issues like legal abortion, gay rights, government funding of religion and religion in public schools.[12]

In Australia the barriers to a Conservative Coalition government channelling taxpayer funds to right-wing churches or their fronts seem primarily political and cultural, not legal. They lie in the facts that Australia is nowhere near as religious a society as the US, that the right-wing churches are not as well organised politically here or do not have the same proportion of adherents, and that such action by the Coalition would risk political backlash.

John Howard has been reluctant to wear his religion on his sleeve like George W. Bush. Howard is a cautious and practical politician whose assessment

of political opportunities and limitations is usually accurate. He is more into the religion of politics than the politics of religion. He has dipped his toe into the latter but only so as to measure the political opportunities and risks. He has found that there are mixed results. His attack on public schools for their failure to teach "sound values" (implying that private/religious schools do teach them) seemed to create a backlash. He reigned in Tony Abbott's attempts to reinvigorate the abortion debate in the immediate aftermath of the election. This appears to have been a politically astute move given that 77 per cent of religious Australians (and even 53 per cent of evangelicals, defined as Baptists, Lutherans and Pentecostals) are pro-choice.[13] His appointment of Peter Hollingworth as Governor General was a failure. Other measures have probably been politically neutral or electorally positive, although, in the case of the latter, not necessarily due to their 'religious' appeal. These measures have included:

- federal legislation to amend the Sex Discrimination Act to prevent IVF treatment for single women (mainly lesbians);
- overriding Northern Territory euthanasia legislation;
- unnecessary amendments to the Marriage Act to appeal to anti-gay sentiment and to wedge Labor;
- agreement with the Family First Party that all government policies should be audited as to their effect on families;
- increasing the role of religious charities within

the Job Network for the political aim of cutting costs and destroying the heavily unionised Commonwealth Employment Service. (A measure which, according to Michael Duffy, became a gently festering issue within the religious organisations themselves);
- the appointment of Major Brian Watters from the Salvation Army as Chairman of the Australian National Council on Drugs.

Howard has astutely developed a conservative moral agenda without appearing to mix religion and politics to an extent that would alienate those Christians or secular conservatives who see religion as essentially a private matter. But there is nothing to be gained by the ALP in trying to emulate Howard's agenda. Such an approach will only serve to make it more indistinguishable from the Conservatives, which is the last thing it needs. Labor should be wary of the possibility of right-wing churches growing and becoming more politically organised, but should not be unduly spooked by the US experience. It should neither ignore religious opinion nor pander to it.

Labor needs to recognise that it is unlikely to ever win significant electoral support from those right-wing churches that have always formed a natural constituency for the Liberals. If, for example, a person holds religious views that lead him or her to see material wealth as a sign of salvation and poverty as a sign of moral degradation, Labor simply has nothing to offer them. This type of view is anathema to the egalitarian values that Labor must continue to espouse. Labor needs to focus on winning support from the more mainstream churches in an effort to push the right-wing churches onto the fringe of the religious community.

An idea of the battle lines might be gleaned from the first case to test the Bracks Government's *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001*. This act prohibits the incitement of religiously based hatred, serious contempt or revulsion. The Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal found that persons associated with the Catch the Fires church had vilified Muslims. The Catholic and Uniting Churches and the Islamic Council have supported the decision and Labor's legislation. Pentecostal and evangelical churches and the Presbyterian Church have called for its repeal on the grounds that it prohibits free speech.[14]

In any event, Labor needs to remind the electorate that, at least in part, secularism developed to ensure freedom of religion. It should point out that most religious people in Australia are pro-choice. They are quite capable of accepting that one's personal views about abortion are distinct from support for laws outlawing abortion, that would effectively impose these views on others. Similarly it is for the Churches to decide whether they wish to celebrate religious marriages between gay people or ordain women priests. This is quite distinct from the question of whether or not the state should maintain general laws outlawing employment discrimination against women or should prohibit civil unions for gay people. The claim that gay civil unions are an attack on the traditional family is a paranoid fantasy. John Stuart Mill's distinction between self-regarding and other regarding actions should be turned by Labor against a Liberal Party that has abandoned basic liberal philosophy for the politics of bigotry.

There are three responses to Gerard Henderson's criticism of Latham's alleged failure to endorse "Judeo-Christian values". The first is that Henderson's theory that this was an electoral negative is unproven. Bob Hawke always described himself as 'agnostic,' with no apparent negative electoral consequences. Keating was a Catholic, again with no apparent electoral consequence. The second is that either there is no coherent set of 'Judeo-Christian values' or the values are so universal that they are likely to be shared by other religions or by atheists. The phrase itself seems to conveniently overlook almost two thousand years of Christian-based anti-Semitism, persecution of dissidents within Christianity itself and the fact that there are some 34,000 separate Christian groups in the world today, whose views on social issues are as diverse as their interpretations of the Bible. If Henderson is referring to the Ten Commandments it can hardly be said that the Liberals have ruled in accordance with them. They support weekend trading, have supporting killing other than in self-defence, have coveted East Timor's oil and their leader is widely acknowledged to have born false testimony on a regular basis. The third response is that if Henderson is correct and electoral gains are to be made by endorsing 'Judeo-Christian values' (nebulous as the concept is), Labor should focus on those values that are consistent with a progressive political agenda. There is no reason to limit the scope of so-called 'Judeo-Christian values' to the conservative preoccupation with the way individuals choose to use their

bodies. Latham occasionally tried to use this tactic. When Tony Abbott was Minister for Workplace Relations, Latham claimed that his support for individual contracts and abolition of unfair dismissal laws made him "a heretic in the Catholic Church".

Nevertheless Ehrenreich's comments about the US Democrats may have some applicability to the ALP: "Democrats should not be flirting with faith but re-examining their affinity for candidates too mumble-mouthed and compromised to articulate poverty and war as the urgent moral issues they are. Jesus is on our side here, and secular liberals should not be afraid to invoke him. Policies of pre-emptive war and the upward redistribution of wealth are inversions of the Judeo-Christian ethic, which is for the most part silent, or mysteriously cryptic, on gays and abortion."[15] Many on the Left are atheists and regard religion as nonsense, or worse still as an opiate of the masses. But whether religion is nonsense, or eases the pain of poverty, or gives meaning to lives that might be otherwise dominated by rampant consumerism, is largely irrelevant to the issue of the role it invariably plays in politics. That role will vary from country to country and even from electorate to electorate. But religion and religious motivation are, and probably always will be, facts of political life. In Latin America, for example, it is impossible to perceive that socially progressive movements, reformist or revolutionary, will advance without the participation of progressive Christians.

In the end the most that can be said is that it should be possible for atheists and agnostics to work with 'believers' who share common goals. This must be distinguished from pandering to the values espoused by the emergent right-wing churches or allowing them to become the primary beneficiaries of attempts by government to empower communities or decentralise services. And while it may be politically unwise for leftie parliamentarians to publicly mock religion, the same tolerance that a pluralist society extends to religion means that having a good chuckle at John Safran v. God, at least in the privacy of one's own home, is well and truly allowed.

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2. Gerard Henderson, 'Mock Christians at your Peril', *Age*, 19 October 2004.
3. Sean Carney, 'Relaxed, Comfortable and Ready for Destiny', *Age*, 20 November 2004, p.10.
4. Henderson, 'Mock Christians at your Peril'.
5. Bob Boston, 'When in Rome: How Cooperation between Religion and Government in Italy is Slowly Strangling Faith', <blog.au.org/2004/12/when_in_rome_ho.html>, accessed 2 December 2004.
6. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'Religious Affiliation and Activity', *Australian Social Trends*, 4102.0, 2004.
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8. Tim Berra, *Evolution and the Myth of Creationism*, Stanford University Press, 1990. Chapter 5 onwards is at <www.positiveatheism.org/writ/berra.htm>.
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10. Jim Ife, 'The Place of Human Rights in Community', PPP2 Conference Keynote Address, 28–29 April 2003. See <www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au/building_stronger/place/p25.html>.
11. See <theocracywatch.org/faith_base.htm>.
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13. Farah Farouque, 'Evangelicals Back Pro-choice: Survey', *Age*, 16 December 2004, p.11.
14. Barney Zwartz, 'Historic Win for Muslims in Religious Hatred Case', *Age*, 18 December 2004, p.3.
15. Ehrenreich, 'The Faith Factor'.

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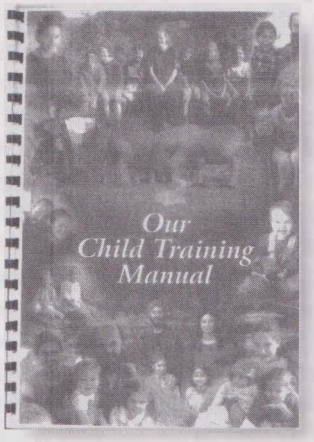
CULT BUSTING

Inside a Media Beat-up



AT A RECENT dinner party, someone brought it up again. The Roy Morgan poll of least-trusted professionals. Year after year, journalists are lumped with used-car salesmen and politicians as the least honest members of society.

Of course, it was left to me to defend the media, because if I hadn't, then the table would have been unanimous: the media are scum. We suck 'em up, bleed 'em dry and spit 'em out, apparently. Richard, wearing his standard black turtleneck sweater, even had the chutzpah to wag a finger—"and on top of all of that," he said, "you guys get it wrong all the time".

Then Sally, smug as usual after a few wines, ticked off a long list. She began with Jayson Blair at the *New York Times*, and finished, tilting her head back in laughter, with the dirty home-movie of Mark Latham's bucks night, which of course, never existed.

In the past, I'd done my best gibbering on about the Fourth Estate and the public sphere, and whatever tendril of university semiotics I was able to summon in the heat of the moment. But I had been left wondering.

Is the media derided because this is part of a new, trendy critique? Is it because headlines have become too scandalous? Or is it because we're putting stories to air that are just plain wrong?

Because if it's just the odd banner turning people's heads, well, that's easily defended. And if it's a debate about the dominance of the media, then so be it, and let's all join the fray. But if journalists are misprinting facts, misappropriating comments, twisting testimonies, and if they're doing it on a regular basis, then I may as well buy a gaudy tie and get into car sales.

This time however, I had a tale at the ready to silence the lot of them, and prove once and for all, journalism still had scruples. At this dinner party, and to my chagrin, I had a first-hand account of a ripper, front-page yarn, scuttled because it was a beat-up—the one that never made it to print. In fact, make it downright embarrassment, because the scandalous and recriminatory piece in question was my own. Here, I emptied my wine glass, and cleared my throat.

IT WAS A Sunday morning and my girlfriend and I were walking down a Sydney cafe strip looking for somewhere for breakfast. I was surly because I had to work that afternoon, and had just finished a week of late nights and before-dawn starts. I was a television current-affairs producer, and after two years I was senior enough to be given the responsibility of overnight shifts, but was still junior enough that I couldn't complain about it.

And, as I had confessed to my girlfriend moments before, I was sick of the whole thing. Television journalism, at least that I had seen, was cutting and pasting. With a daily timeslot the demand was relentless, and content was churned out with what felt like a decreasing regard for its quality. Between pandering to press secretaries and booking live crosses at the launch of the world's biggest cupcake, I was quickly becoming a bitter and cynical humanoid. The program, at first a phoenix of possibility, now just looked like chunks of dead air to fill.

My girlfriend suggested a new cafe and I just nodded silently. We stepped through the sliding door, and sat down at a free table. I looked up and noticed

there was something strange about the cafe. There were more wait-staff than any business could afford to employ, but it was more than that. They were all identical. The men were bearded, their long hair tied into matching ponytails. The women also had long hair, and wore handmade ankle-length dresses. There were rustic antiques scattered around the barn-like building, and a bunch of pamphlets at the counter. I stood up and grabbed a pile.

"See?" My girlfriend smiled. "I knew this place would cheer you up."

I leaned down to her ear. "*This is a cult*," I said. "*Look around you*."

"Mmm." She rolled her eyes. "Great food too."

We argued the whole way back to the apartment. She insisted it was just an innocent business that happened to be run by neo-Christian hippies. I claimed it was too slickly merchandised. "And don't tell me", I waved the brightly-coloured pamphlets in front of her, "eggs Benedict with a side of spiritual redemption isn't just a little weird." She fumed, and I insisted that someone was making money while the staff were not being paid.

"Besides," I said as we arrived home and switched on the computer, "didn't they seem, I don't know, *spooky*?"

Google turned up a few hundred hits. The cafe, according to the web, was run by a well-known cult of dubious reputation. I scanned dozens of web pages. Sites for recovering members, US, Canadian newspapers, Council noticeboards---even the group's own website—had reference to the same allegations I saw over and over again: ritualised beating of children, violence, manipulation, even sexual abuse. My girlfriend was subdued. I was jubilant.

This was it—my big story. This was the exclusive I'd been waiting for—the ticket out of TV, the parachute into serious journalism. Finally, I was going to break a big story, an important story—and I was going to do it in print.

Here was my first mistake, so pay attention. The evidence required to win an argument with a spouse, housemate or squash partner is one thing. But it is not enough, no matter how juicy the internet titbit, to publish a five-thousand-word investigative report, and put it on the cover of Australia's leading news magazine.

But—and here I think Sally refilled my glass, smirking—that is exactly what I set out to do.

Now remember, I was desperate to earn my way out of anonymity. Google promised mass-scale child abuse, abductions and weird initiations—and here was their new cafe in the heart of cosmopolitan Sydney. I couldn't believe no-one had written the story yet. I had survived at the TV program long enough to know it was a winner.

Practically tripping over myself, I gathered up the meagre facts I had and fired off an email to the *Good Weekend*. The pitch I wrote—SHOCK CULT RUNNING SYDNEY CAFE—was promising enough that a week or so later, I received this in response: *Am looking forward to receiving the copy.*

But *Good Weekend* made it very clear they expected a bona fide investigation.

OF COURSE, I had somehow imagined I might get away with the whole affair sitting in front of my laptop, making a few calls, and organising a spot on the mantle for the Gold Walkley. Apart from anything else, I was disinclined to visit the farm compound where the sect was based. I had been warned by one ex-member who saw a TV crew assaulted on the property five years earlier. His dark little anecdote, together with some overseas newspaper clippings, had me a little scared.

For as long as I could, I called everyone else—exit counsellors, journalists, police, neighbours, and ex-members. But eventually I couldn't put it off any longer, and I drove to the farm one Friday night.

A short drive from Sydney, the farm sits enveloped in hilly countryside on the city's outskirts. The group invites the public to their strange pseudo-Sabbath ritual on Friday nights. And on my first visit, I decided to present myself as a naïve young man interested in higher things. During the evening they asked me what I did for a living, and I told a version of the truth. Wide-eyed, I told them I was a young, aspiring writer. The irony is obvious.

I got home late that night, opened my notebook, and gushed everything I could remember onto the page. The surroundings:

> *A-frame building, mezzanine loft where a family sleeps. Downstairs, large room, polished wooden floor. Three factory prints on the walls: mother lifting her baby from the bath, robed man lighting a candle, child in field of flowers. White curtains, soft lighting. Pot-belly stove burning red at front of room. Ringed by chairs and couches. 6:30pm—the room is full, mostly women and children. Cosy and warm.*

A fellow visitor:

> *Michael—lost, looked stoned. Responded when he heard I was Jewish. Asked me if I recognised different elements of the evening etc. Repeated verbatim phrases he'd been told: "You really need a whole week here to know what it's like." He was hooked. Had stopped shaving. Kept trying to pat me on the knee.*

The invite to stay:

> *Tall bearded man: about how nice and soft their doonas were. "We have nice beds made up." "Change your mind, stay the night." He gives me awkward hug as I leave. Everybody asks me at least once to come again, to stay the night next time, to spend a few days on the farm. Some ask many times.*

The elder who later agreed to be interviewed for the article:

> *One of the elders quietly instructed woman to cover her hair. Did not turn everything into discussion about God. Or brotherhood. Intellectually superior. Comfortable in secular conversation. Blanched when I said I knew he was an elder. Talked about people's 'giftings'. Asked him if that meant he was talented at being responsible for others. Just returned from five-week holiday in California with family. Three children, ages 5, 3 and 1. Didn't see wife or children. He complained about length of flight, traffic snarl in Los Angeles. Uncanny resemblance to Charlton Heston in* Ten Commandments.

And the children:

> *Children happy and involved during ceremony. Remained seated on chairs, well-behaved. Didn't speak up, cry out, run around. Spoke softly to parents. Parents seemed genuinely affectionate.*

OVER THE NEXT few weeks, doing more reading, I milled it over in my mind. What exactly was the story? So far, I didn't have much evidence to accuse the sect of wrongdoing. Was it possible, as my partner had insisted, this was a group of somewhat misguided, but otherwise innocent individuals? During my first visit, they were hospitable, interested, and seemed nominally happy. Maybe they really did love each other as brothers and sisters, and maybe they really did love God. And maybe I should have just left them the hell alone.

But on the other hand, I was sure something wasn't right. Those who had spent time in the organisation, in Australia and overseas, told stories of emotional and financial manipulation. They said they saw children being hit with a cane for merely wriggling while their nappy was being changed. I got my hands on a copy of the 'child training manual' they give to parents. A two-hundred-page tirade stipulating corporal punishment of all children over six months old. Parents were instructed that appropriately 'disciplining' their children would ensure they'd be saved when the end came.

So which was it? As the days passed and the deadline drew nearer my predicament became increasingly maddening. In hindsight I wish I had rethought the possibility of a compromise. Could the article discuss and not condemn? Did it have to be a bust?

But perhaps I was too caught up in the desk-thumping of my TV colleagues. Because in the end, I decided I had devoted too much time to the project already. I was determined to deliver the 'shock cult' I'd thought I'd find, and had my heart set on.

I called the farm and asked for the elder I had met that Friday night. "You wouldn't believe what happened last week," I said. I embarked on a lie about bumping into a magazine editor at a dinner party, and telling her about my visit to the farm. She was so impressed, I told him, "she pulled me aside and offered me space in the magazine to write it up".

"This could be my big chance," I said, and asked him for a formal interview.

Part of me marvelled at the dilemma he might have found himself in. By granting an interview, which the group had never before done, he'd be closer to a new convert---or so I imagined him thinking. Yet he risked the wrath of the press. As I hung up I told him I might bring along a photographer to the interview. "Just a friend of mine," I said.

THE INTERVIEW was scheduled for eleven o'clock in the morning, at the farm. I had come off an overnight shift at the TV studios, had slept very little and only eaten what the vending machines spat out.

I had arranged to meet the photographer beforehand. If the whole thing wasn't nerve-wracking enough, the photographer Fairfax supplied was a photojournalist of some twenty years' experience, and a former pictures editor at the *Australian*, Marco Delgrande. We drank a coffee while I tried to fill him in on the details. He was wonderfully nonchalant. I started to develop a tick in one eye.

"I don't know how they'll react when I start asking the more difficult questions," I said to Marco who nodded. I sat back a touch. "Yep. The last couple of journos that visited the farm were run off pretty quick."

"Shall we go then?" he suggested politely. I tried to stand up and swill down my coffee at the same time, and ended up spilling it down the front of me and burning the roof of my mouth.

"I'll get the bill," I said.

The elder, Jonathon (not his real name), was waiting by the gate to greet us. When he saw Marco unloading a small fortune in camera equipment from his car, he frowned. "I thought you were just bringing a friend down here," he said.

"Ah, he couldn't come, and the magazine rang up Marco to see if he could spare the time." I tried to catch Marco's eye.

The charade continued for the rest of the day. Jonathon took us out to a picnic table and chairs and we drank more coffee and ate home-made biscuits in the sun. It was already midday, and I was drenched in sweat. I hadn't eaten since four in the morning except three espressos and the cookie. I was decidedly light-headed.

Marco and Jonathon bantered away for two hours. They talked about country values, hobby farms, and the price of karri timber. I remained mostly silent and tried to concentrate on anything but the pounding migraine I had suddenly developed. Eventually I leaned forward. "Well, should we get started?"

Jonathon had by then explained the rules. He described at length the spirit in which he invited us to document their lives. In turn, Marco said he needed people in the photos. "We are not animals in the zoo," he reminded us, but he finally waved over his family.

The next four hours were spent wandering around the farm, through the vegetable gardens and alongside the work sheds while Marco snapped a few hundred photos and I gradually wilted. I almost forgot I had to sit down and ask Jonathon outright if he, and the others, practiced ritualised child abuse.

But when Marco made it clear he was winding up with the last shot, my heart almost leapt out of my mouth and onto the platter of banana bread that had been silently laid on the table in front of us. Jonathon sat back, chewed on a piece and smiled benevolently at me. It was almost six o'clock.

I pulled out a list of questions and a tape recorder.

BY THE TIME the interview was over, I now had a critical problem. The story I had promised . . . was not the story I had.

What I had was some pretty convincing testimony, the handbook, and some old family photos. And Jonathon did admit they beat children with a cane. But then again, so too did the principal of the primary school I had attended. It was true that followers handed over their assets in order to belong, that they let others decide how they should live their life, and it was true that they swore fealty to a flawed belief system.

But if I tried to indict the sect for that, I'd have to indict millions around the world, including myself, and my friends who work for large companies, who belong to established religions, and who sometimes make their decisions under the influence of others.

Maybe the story I *actually* had was more layered, more authentic, more balanced. A story about what lay behind the innuendo and allegations, or about discovering a religious enclave in the heart of the metropolis. But it was not the exposé I had promised. No shock photos, no hand up to the lens, no shadowy reconstructions. And if I had even pitched a story like that at my day job, I'd be laughed right out of the building and into a queue at Centrelink.

In the end, I surrendered to my desire to land the story, the only way I knew how. I pretended it was impossible to write the story any other way. I banged it out in three days, kept myself blind to every unsubstantiated accusation, and emailed it off. Marco dropped a CD of 180 photographs on the editor's desk. I waited an agonising three weeks for a response.

WHEN THE EDITOR rang late one Friday afternoon, I already knew the story was dead. It was crushing. She eviscerated the piece and my ego in under four minutes. Five thousand words down the drain, and I was left naked with my few crumbs of fact. The Gold Walkley fantasies turned and bolted for the door.

At least I had the dinner party enraptured. "There it is," I said, by now thoroughly inebriated, "proof none of you can repudiate." In particular I nodded at Sally and Thomas. Here is the evidence, I concluded, that a firewall does exist in the media, and that truth and accuracy are, at least in some places, still important. And this little anecdote might also

explain—and really this was the only defence I had left—why young journalists are most often the ones to overstep the mark and fudge the details.

The exercise was deeply humiliating, but with some perspective, it was also reassuring. While my career did not take the stellar turn you read in a newspaper obituary, at least I was taught a good lesson. You see, it turns out members of the media can have scruples; and at last, I have the last say at the dinner table.

"The only remaining problem," I say sitting back down, "is Jonathon keeps calling and asking where he might buy a copy."

Linton Besser is a journalist currently based in regional NSW.

three poems | ZOLTAN KOVACS

Turner in Venice

This room that swallows light
Is sick of all possessions;
Here—have this picture, that chair!
I am only interested in essentials:
Warmth, water and air. Life.

Darwin at the Galapagos Islands

You are me, and you are me.
And you. Except I am your end.

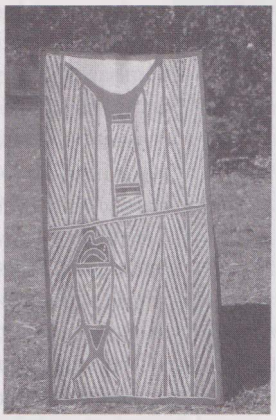
The *Beagle* makes me ill.
Small finches that drink blood.

I am you, and you, and I am
The result of your beginning.

Iguanas graze below the sea.
Ideas are flightless wings.

Van Gogh's Sketchbook

Here is a line, this is another
Showing what wheat-*shushing* zephyrs said.
This is hatching, this is smudge
Showing the mind how eye exulted.



SPIRIT STILL HERE

Understanding the Spiritual Identity of an Aboriginal Microculture

THERE IS STILL very little known about the worldview of people in remote Aboriginal microcultures.[1] Possibly the best work to date is by lay healthcare worker Richard Trudgen in his book on health issues, *Why Warriors Lie Down to Die*. This book builds into an explication that is based on years of practical and direct experience working with remote Aboriginal people. In contrast, much of the official academic research seems informed fleeting visits, driven by theory and limited by Western ontological traditions. One such limiting ontology is the rigid distinction between subjective and objective dimensions of reality and so between selfhood and otherness. As will be explained here, with partial reference to the literary and philosophical work of Proust, Bergson and Deleuze, this Western ontology is far removed from the way of being of the Burarra people in central Arnhem Land.

The Burarra people number about six hundred and their clan estates lie along the eastern shores of the Blyth River and over to the shoreline facing Milingimbi and the Crocodile Islands. Their country stretches from the shallow waters of the Arafura Sea across the coastline, coastal dunes, delta floodplains and up into an expanse of open eucalyptus woodlands with waterholes, paperbark swamps and gently rising hillocks. The Burarra country is totally isolated by monsoonal flooding during the wet season and during the dry season, the Burarra regularly travel to and from Maningrida and sometimes as far as Darwin.

Burarra elder, Peter Danaja, has invested much of his life in articulating Burarra concepts to a broader audience. I was very lucky to have known him. Between 1995 and 2000 we spent a lot of time together fitting English words to the Burarra worldview. I was in the top end researching a never-completed doctoral thesis on Aboriginal art and I spent the first thirteen months living with some of Peter's family on an outstation in remote central Arnhem Land. Hooked by the people, I then moved between Darwin and Arnhem Land working with Aboriginal art and artists at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory and at Injalak Arts and Crafts.

Peter and I worked on the idea of spiritual identity. It seemed to me that Burarra spirituality was on the one hand undergoing changes that seemed manifold and absolute and yet on the other hand was structured in such a way as to absorb change and in fact be strengthened by it. For the first time ever, their collective histories were being concretised in writing and photographs at a local museum, or keeping place. And after fending off the missionary influence for quite some time a number of mission habits, including kava abuse, were taking hold. Nonetheless, the Burarra look set to fluidly absorb such impacts just as they've been absorbing Macassan influences over the past eight hundred years or so.

When we spoke about it, Peter had no hesitation in describing his own spiritual identity. It was something with which he was absolutely familiar, and while his spiritual identity was in a sense fixed, it was at the same time layered, multiple and resonating with subtle shifts. To me, it seemed comparable to Marcel's identity in Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*, in that it was a self-referential identity that had at its core a system of internal metamorphoses. The same spir-

itual reality was perceived as a sequence of unfolding layers that had different meanings at different times.

Peter listed the primary layers of his spiritual identity absolutely and without any hesitation. First and foremost, he is Garrchambarl the Red Kangaroo. After that, he is the Bunduri clan.

At the core of Peter's spiritual identity is his absolute identification with the ancestor figure Garrchambarl the Red Kangaroo. However, the concept of Garrchambarl does not merely denote a single being or a single identification. In using the word, Peter is referring to a whole sequence of events related to Garrchambarl in particular but also to other elements in the various Dreaming cosmologies that are woven across the whole of Arnhem Land. Furthermore, ancestral beings are rarely singular figures and one 'power' word, such as Garrchambarl, can be used to refer to any number of highly nuanced sub-characters. The term Garrchambarl, then, is a kind of shorthand which signifies a complex spiritual identity comprising temporal events and internal multiplicities that are at the same time sequential and parallel. And when Peter says that he *is* Garrchambarl, he is being literal and not metaphoric: he is an element in all of the multiplicities and events contained in the one power word.

Peter's next level of spiritual identity follows from the concept of Garrchambarl. Peter is Bunduri *bapurru*. The Burarra word *bapurru* refers to a patriline—a clan, if you like, in which belonging is handed down through the fathers. Peter is Bunduri clan, just like his father and all his father's fathers before him. Each *bapurru* traces back to a particular ancestor or ancestral event and the Bunduri *bapurru* trace back to Garrchambarl. This means that all Bunduri are descended from the Red Kangaroo. But the term *bapurru* has other, related, meanings. It is also used by the Burarra to denote a mortuary ceremony. This double meaning is important. In a sense, a clan equates with its mortuary ceremonies in which the ancestor figure is invoked into the presence of the surviving clan and through which the deceased is subsumed into the Dreamtime and reunited with all his ancestors.

This means that Peter's spiritual identity as Bunduri *bapurru* relates to all of his ancestors through his father-line; it relates to his ultimate ancestor Garrchambarl the Red Kangaroo; and it simultaneously relates to the mortuary ceremonies in which the Bunduri are conjoined with Garrchambarl and all their ancestors. So when describing his spiritual identity as Bunduri *bapurru*, Peter is affirming himself as the direct manifestation of Garrchambarl his ancestral totem as well as the direct manifestation of all his ancestors.

The Burarra concept of ancestors is at once direct and abstract. It is direct in the sense that each person's spiritual identity directly embodies the manifestation of his or her ancestors as described above. However, the idea of ancestral forebears is somewhat abstract. When describing their fathers and their father's fathers, the Burarra men are limited to euphemism because of strict taboos on speaking about the deceased. When a person dies, all reference to that person is expunged and their name is totally removed from the Burarra vocabulary. If another person has the same name, or even a similar sounding name, they must assume a new name so that the name of the deceased is never invoked again. So the conscious memory of a deceased individual is expunged from the collective memory of the clan. This act of erasing the conscious memory of the deceased is reinforced by the natural deterioration of all physical traces of the dead body.

Traditionally, the body of a dead person is dealt with in a sequence of activities over a number of years (which I will not describe here). After about seven years or so, the bones of the deceased are interred in hollow logs that have been stood upright. These 'bone poles', or *lorrkon*, are simple wooden monuments with no decoration and after seasons of wet and dry, the poles and their contents topple and rot away. The physical monument and physical remains of the deceased are subsumed back into the anonymity of the earth just as the memory of the deceased, the conscious monument, is negated by taboo and subsumed into the anonymity of the Ancestral collective.

The negation of all physical and conscious monuments to the deceased means that the Burarra have no sustained history and no communal memory that extends beyond two or three or four generations. Everything that has passed is subsumed into the Dreamtime. This is a very important point. It means that the Dreamtime is at once timeless and immediate. It is the period of creation, the period in which the ancestor totems moved across the earth shaping the world and its events. But the Dreamtime also encompasses relatively recent figures and activities. It hovers just beyond the reach of any one man's life, as near as yesterday—and just as far.

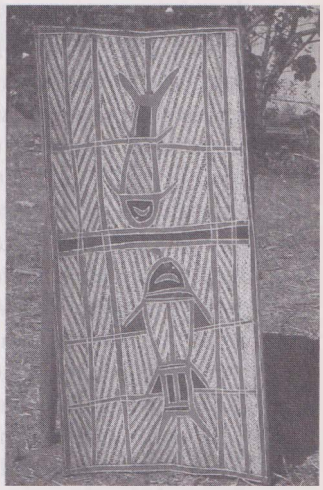
The Dreamtime, then, is a multiplicity of ancestors and time-events. It is infinitely remote and timeless yet simultaneously tangible and accessible. It is at once the ancestral totems of the Burarra as well as their *bapurru* and all of their ancestors. In defining their own spiritual identity in terms of their ancestor totems, their ceremonies and their clans, the Burarra are defining their spiritual identity in terms of the Dreamtime and all of its creation and metamorphic events. They are defining their spiritual identity through parallel layers of events and characters that are both internally generated and heterogenous.

George Ganyjibala is a Burarra artist who explained his Dreamtime to me in his words and through his paintings. George described his Dreaming, and his spiritual identity, as parallel sequences of metamorphoses concerning the figure of Nguykal the Trevally. And like the trevally, George's story travels in a school along the currents and tides: expanding and contracting, always changing shape and darting off into different directions, sometimes breaking off into multiple schools, sometimes combining into a single mass. At its very core, the Nguykal story—George's story, his spiritual identity—is heterogenous and fluid. It describes a model of heterogenous identity which is comparable to models discussed by Gilles Deleuze and it has an internally generated mechanisim of self-realisation comparable to Henri Bergson's description of *élan vital*.[2] Peter Danaja described George's identity and his story to me like this:

> When the tide comes in, that brings in the story. Like the fish. It's like a story line.

George's story is the story of his ancestor Nguykal the Trevally. The story I provide here is drawn from my discussions with George and from notes provided by Maningrida Arts and Culture:

> Nguykal the Trevally travelled from way east, from Matamata on Manggalili clan land near Yirrkala in eastern Arnhem Land. He travelled along the coast as two fish and as he travelled he named a number of clans including Gamarl, Madarrpa, Rirratjingu, Gumatj, Dhalwangu, Wanggurri, Warramirri and Manggalili. Nguykal was accompanied on this journey by his assistants, the Plover and the Curlew.
>
> Nguykal the double fish travelled westward along the coast and when he reached Gumugumuk he leaped from the sea and landed at a place called Gamurra Guyurra on Warrawarra clan lands. This created a sacred site called Baltha which stands as a forked tree.
>
> The Trevally ancestor then returned to the sea and kept travelling around Yinangarnduwa (Cape Stewart). Nguykal swam as far as Bunbuwa, a hole in the floor of Boucaut Bay which is filled with all sorts of fish. Here at Bunbuwa, Nguykal became frightened by the appearance of the Ancestral Monsoon, Lunggurrma, which rose up from beneath the sea. At this point Nguykal the double fish split into separate components. One of the fish went into the ground under the sea at Bunbuwa and remains there. His bones are now an offshore reef which is only exposed once or twice a year during the very lowest of tides. The other Nguykal went back to the east and stayed there.



In George's paintings, Nguykal the double fish is represented as a multiplicity. Each Trevally is drawn with slightly different markings and shown swimming in different directions. This refers to the multiple meanings of Nguykal as he appears to the various clans with which he is associated and the sectioning of the background composition refers to the different clan estates. Similarly, signal design elements have multiple referents. At one level, the vertical forked shape represents the forked tail of the Trevally, and at another level it represents Baltha, the forked tree near Gamurra Guyurra. The forked tail design also represents Lunggurrma the Monsoon Dreaming which can be seen in the sky as a particular cloud formation meteorologically associated with monsoonal systems.

Like the design elements, the colours that George uses also have a multiplicity of meanings. At one level, the colours refer to ancestral activities and metamorphoses which are made manifest in the landscape. Black is the low tide, white is the high tide, and red and yellow are the tides in between. At another level, the ochres are the tangible metamorphoses of the ancestors themselves. White clay is the fossilised semen of the ancestors, red ochre is fossil-

ised blood, and yellow ochre is fossilised flesh. Black is made from charcoal and the fire of the ancestors. And even the bark painting itself, the physical matter, is a metamorphosis of the most fundamental nature. The ochres are mined and transformed from rock, clay and wood into paint. The bark is stripped from the forest and transformed from a living skin into a canvas and indeed *derrka*, the Burarra word for a bark painting, is the same word for 'stringybark tree' (*Eucalyptus tetradonta*).

So the story of Nguykal the Trevally is multiple and heterogenous at its core. It describes internally generated metamorphoses that occur across the plane of time. And reinforcing this concept, this self-realising and metamorphic ontology, the story of Nguykal also changes over time. The Nguykal story is layered and different versions exist for different occasions. The version above is the 'outside' one but there also exist any number of deeper versions. I reproduce another layer of the Nguykal story in George's words:

> Wangarri, Gumatj and Gamarl are all Nguykal, Trevally people. One day, Wangarri and Gumatj swam here for business. First Gamarl say 'Yes, you can come'. This man he said 'Yes'. He told boss Gamarl that they were here. But this boss man said 'No, they are not welcome'. The boss he said 'No'. He don't give 'em something Mardayin. So first Gamarl went to Gumatj and Wangarri and told them 'No' and they swam back to the sunrise. Gumatj and Wangarri went back to sunrise. Boss Gamarl later went long way east of Yilan. Someone speared him in the side, below the ribs. And died. Gumatj and Wangurri brought body back to Yilan for funeral. They helped this time with Mardayin.

The self-realisation of the Nguykal story is determined by all of the differing versions of the 'same' story. They are fluid versions told on different occasions to different people. Mutable and ever-changing descriptions of ancestors, people and events are generated from within the stories themselves and are at the very core of the spiritual self. In this sense, the self-realisation of George's Nguykal story is comparable to Marcel's self-realisation as described by Proust. Identity is built up across time according to internally generated and differing realisations of the 'same' story. There is a common Aboriginal-English term which describes this ontology: *The same; but different*. Together, the same but different manifestations of the Nguykal story provide the spiritual identity to which George ascribes himself.

Spiritual identity for the Burarra is built from a succession of self-realisations and internally generated metamorphoses. It is marked by heterogeneity and fluidity and, as with Proust, Bergson and Deleuze, the Burarra concept of spiritual identity and beingness is marked by a non-dialectical ontology of immanent presence. Being and identity are determined by an absolutely positive movement of internal causality rather than by what they are 'not'. In the Burarra world, spiritual identity is made manifest in the landscape, in ceremony and in story. In the words of George Ganyjibala: "Spirit still here. In the wind. In the dancing. In the song."

1. By the term 'microculture' I mean an independent and distinctive culture that is/was kept alive and meaningful within a small and self-identifying group of people.
2. See Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, Zone Books, New York, 1988; Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton, Columbia University Press, New York, 1994; and Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution* (1911) trans. Arthur Mitchell, Macmillan, New York, 1994.

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Artwork, untitled, by George Ganyjibala. Photos courtesy of Paul Magin.

PINJARRA FUNERAL

THE OCCASION for our visit to Pinjarra—my archaeologist friends Bruce and Fiona, their infant son Conall and myself—was a funeral. The person concerned was a Noongar bloke called Richard Walley, the sort of fellow you never hear about in the way you do other Noongars such as Robert Bropho[1] or kids in stolen cars being chased at high speed by police in Perth, because Richard was a quiet sort of man who never sought the limelight. Perhaps that's why he caught the local Roman Catholic authorities by surprise—Saint Augustine's church in Pinjarra where his funeral Mass took place was full to overflowing, and the hundred or so people milling about outside couldn't hear what was happening during the service because no-one had thought to provide loudspeakers. Obviously they weren't expecting such a crowd, although the Pinjarra council was better prepared. It had signs in place along the main street, warning passers-by that a funeral was taking place, and to be accordingly considerate. The police also had a fair idea of what was happening—they were on hand to direct traffic, and their numbers included a few Indigenous people in uniform.

Around the cemetery, amid the graves of earlier generations of Walleys, it was obvious that Richard Walley had been a man of some substance, and not just among Indigenous people. The crowd of at least three hundred had arrived there in vehicles bearing number plates from throughout the south-west and Perth, and a few from further afield. Immediately in front of us was an old farming type, in shirtsleeves and wearing a hat of the type commonly adopted by Australian men until the 1970s. There were white people present throughout the crowd, in fact, well-dressed women and other older men, obviously local, quite apart from the contingent from Alcoa, the biggest regional employer. The old bloke in the hat caught my eye as a flock of birds flew overhead in formation during the graveside orations. Being quite a bit senior to me, he may well have been reflecting as I was that man hath indeed but a short time to live. Inherent heart disease, I was told, had ended Richard Walley's life prematurely.

It was of course predominantly an Indigenous occasion, but as one speaker at the graveside remarked, Richard had broken down barriers, not sought to build or maintain them. The white people obviously realised that as well; this was a quiet, dignified man who had been held in respect throughout the community. I had only met him once; I knew his brother Joe a bit better, having briefly worked with him on an abortive history project a few years ago. Joe, poor fellow, was in tears in a chair at the graveside, and had been a pitiful sight—this once big, strong man—as he hobbled with back bent in the cortege after the coffin as it approached its final resting place. Ivan, Joe's nephew and Richard's adopted son, was coping rather better. He was smiling among a group of friends when after paying our respects to Joe, Fiona, Bruce and I approached him.

Ivan is one of a number of Aboriginal kids who were adopted by Richard. He did it without fanfare, just because it was the right thing to do. Ivan too is one of those Aboriginal people you never hear about. He has a wife and little kids, a job and a mortgage—he's in most respects a youngish Australian bloke just getting on with his life and looking after his family. I met him briefly too, as part of the same project I was attempting to set up with Joe. It was to be an Aboriginal history of the country now used by Alcoa

to obtain and refine the bauxite which first attracted the company to the hills south of Perth in the boom years after the Second World War.

Geoffrey Blainey has written the company history, *White Gold*, in his usual singular fashion—if you care for history, really care for it, then you recognise that Blainey, whatever his perceived shortcomings, is nonetheless a great historian. He would I think be the first to recognise that *White Gold* contains nothing in terms of the Aboriginal relationship with Alcoa in Western Australia, for the simple reason that until recently there was no such relationship. Sir Charles Court, eager to attract industry and investment to Western Australia in the same way that other premiers such as Sir Thomas Playford in South Australia had already done, had let Alcoa in on very advantageous terms.

Native title of course was not a concept which had any legal status in those days, and royalties may have been payable for mining rights in places where treaties and the like existed, but there was nothing such in Australia—and in particular not in Western Australia, home of much of the nation's mining wealth. So the Walleys and other Noongars of the Pinjarra area were never consulted by Charlie Court or anyone else over the future of what had once been their land. The fact that they were descendants in some cases of people who had been shot and killed at Pinjarra by Governor Stirling and his posse in a land-related dispute in 1834—battle or massacre according to your point of view—was likewise irrelevant.

In Joe's case he, Ivan and possibly Richard were to have been involved in helping me research and write the history which Blainey had left out. I had put it to Alcoa that there was not only a question of justice involved here but something from which they could earn themselves points in terms of public relations, good corporate citizenship and so forth. While the Noongars could not make any retrospective native title or similar claim for compensation involving the use of their land for mining and refining the bauxite it contained, Alcoa could at least recognise their existence positively by sponsoring the researching and writing of the Aboriginal history of the area in their—Aboriginal—terms. There was some initial interest, partly at least because Alcoa has with some justification presented itself for years as a corporate leader in terms of rehabilitating the land it uses for mining. But the history idea foundered over the question of payments to those involved.

Put simply, Alcoa's people could not see that they should pay people such as Ivan to compensate them for earnings lost through taking part in fieldwork with Joe and myself. Alcoa was happy to pay the going rate of about three hundred dollars per day to Indigenous people who assisted in archaeological survey work aimed at preventing or at least limiting damage to Aboriginal sites of significance on the Alcoa mining leases in the Darling scarp above Pinjarra. But the Alcoa people could not see that the same rates of payment should apply to Indigenous people taking part in the history project fieldwork.

Ivan could not afford to take part in the fieldwork without some form of reimbursement. And so the proposal went to the wall. That Alcoa people were present at Richard's funeral was thus, for me at least, a little incongruous. But then Richard was the sort of fellow apparently who would rather sort out a fight than pick one, and even Joe didn't seem too fussed, grief-stricken as he was, when the head Alcoa public relations man stood in line to pay his respects at the graveside. And so eventually departed the captains of industry (or were they the privates?), and Richard was left in peace.

To be fair I have no doubt the Alcoa people genuinely thought they were playing their part in maintaining a good relationship with the local Indigenous community. And to some extent that is true.

I had occasion earlier this year to drive to the Kimberley region through other mining areas, including Mount Magnet, Cue and Meekatharra, which have significant Indigenous populations. The situation in Meekatharra in terms of racial hostility, while not openly violent, was otherwise as bad as I have seen anywhere in nearly twenty years of living in Western Australia. The local Woolworths supermarket and liquor outlet is a large corrugated iron shed with no windows. On the day I passed through, its front entrance was flanked by Indigenous people and their mood was not benevolent. Not seeking a confrontation, I went instead to the other supermarket, locally owned and understocked, and there the attitude of the white woman behind the counter was one of unconcealed animosity to her Aboriginal customers. It was the same in the Pilbara when I stopped at Newman, a former BHP Billiton company town, for petrol—cold hostility by the woman behind the cash register, even though the Aboriginal people buying food and fuel were sober and had money.

The mood at Richard Walley's funeral was so different. He was popular with the Alcoa people in general, as are Joe and Ivan. Alcoa to my knowledge has always paid them promptly whenever they have worked with archaeologists. But while basically well meaning, the Alcoa people lack cultural sensitivity, political consciousness and a sense of history. Their chief public relations man is from the wheatbelt region of WA and grew up with Noongar people, and their environmental scientists are genuinely good at re-afforesting jarrah and other trees in areas devastated by mining. The PR man would certainly not regard himself as racist, nor would the environmental scientists, but they do not see any correlation between, for example, the killings at Pinjarra in 1834 and the relative powerlessness of those Indigenous people living in the area today.

Good corporate citizenship to Alcoa's WA people consists of planting trees, protecting a few Aboriginal sites and turning up to the odd Aboriginal funeral. For the Indigenous people of the area there remains a feeling of having been thoroughly cheated, without hope of any real form of redress. A history sponsored by Alcoa—to the tune of a few thousand dollars that would have been written off by tax—and written by a *wadjella* (white man) in terms sympathetic to the Noongar sense of identification with the land, and reflecting their aspirations for their future, might have gone a little way toward establishing some genuine rapport between the mining giant and those whose traditional land Alcoa occupies.

1. Noongar is a generic term for Aboriginal people from the south-west of Western Australia, as with Koori in NSW and Victoria. Robert Bropho is a prominent Noongar elder recently before the WA courts charged with raping a girl aged 13. He was acquitted after a District Court judge found that the DNA evidence presented at the trial did not prove conclusively that he raped the teenager and fathered a child by her in the 1970s.

Peter Gifford is an historian and former journalist. His book, Black and White and in between: Arthur Dimer and the Nullarbor *was published by Hesperian Press in 2002.*

Sacred Space

"Come in and see our mosque!" the students beamed,
shook bare their feet, and ushered me inside.
The walls of concrete blocks were unadorned;
a simple trough for feet and head and hands;
some mats were heaped against one wall, and strewn
towards the north-west corner that served as *qibla.*

And when it happened, Jesus was not hurt,
nor yet his Dad, and neither their beloved Muhammad.
For such are slow to anger; but sad they were,
and heavy hearted for their friends.

The odour bit them hard, those lads; it struck
them in the face. They stared in disbelief;
for in those empty hours between the prayer times
someone dropped upon the floor,
centred in that sacred space, a human turd.

MURRAY ALFREDSON

BOLD TYPE

THERE WERE no old hands at Type like there were on newspapers, those old curmudgeons who mumbled to each other in the elevator and could never manage to look you directly in the eye, particularly if you were young and enthusiastic. They were always too wretched and hung-over and exasperated with the incompetence of those around them to speak. At Type, everyone was young. Everything was new. The furniture was new, the magazines were new. The Apple Macs all new. And everyone kept talking about new concepts in publishing and new and fresh ideas. It wasn't even 'out with the old'. Old wasn't allowed in the front door. No old people, no old technology, no old ideas.

And yet it seemed to Nadia that everyone was a bit burnt out and jaded just the same. Even more jaded than the fearsome old subeditors who saw the same stories year in year out and were surprised and shocked by nothing at all. Being shocked and surprised was for other people. Readers. The public. That irksome bunch. And those insufferable cub reporters who were always so eager to please.

At Type, however, everyone seemed weary despite their youth. The exception was the production manager, Parko, who always appeared to Nadia not just twitchy and gaunt but a little immature. He got more excited than was reasonable about small things—typefaces and technical shortcuts. The kind of excitement teenage boys displayed when playing Dungeons and Dragons. A sense of thrill that seemed incongruous with the material at hand. She suspected amphetamines, but couldn't be sure. He was so conservative looking. He wore corduroy trousers and checked, button-down shirts and a beard. And it wasn't a goatee like most of the other men—or boys—in the office, it was one of those English Professor beards. His hair was a porridge-bowl cut with a fringe that sat flat and straight as palm fronds. He wore the kind of glasses that went dark in the sunlight. He walked around in leather brogues, while everyone else wore trainers and big jeans and fabrics so synthetic they created their own little symphony and set off sparks of electricity when people shook hands. In winter Parko, or Perko as she liked to call him, wore a fair-isle jumper which he claimed his mother had knitted for him. And it certainly looked that way.

Sartorially, he just didn't fit in. But there was a defiance about his outdated dress sense that she admired despite his overarching manner.

Nadia noticed the women at Type were into hipsters, layers, piercings, little tattoos and crazy hair—the designers at least. The editors, who had to deal directly with clients, wore black, as if they were somehow seeking to emphasise the dignity of their function. Designers were about colour and style while editors were more utilitarian and sombre, interested in grammar and correct spellings.

Parko always arrived before everyone else and was still there, she assumed, after everyone left. He knew the ins and outs of the computer system like

no-one else. He fossicked around in files that looked like hieroglyphics to her for what seemed like hours on end. He spoke to the screen as if it were human, "Ah, there you go, you were toying with me weren't you, my little lovely?". He appeared not so much to enjoy his work as to be afflicted by it. If he wasn't drinking coffee he was drinking wine from his coffee cup. He was one of the ones they let smoke at his desk because he'd made himself indispensable and they would rather have him there polluting the room than not there and outside smoking on their time, since he was virtually a chain smoker. And hence he had his own office. Nadia suspected him of creating technical glitches and quirks to keep himself necessary. The rest of them knew on some level that they could be easily replaced and most were well past trying to prove otherwise. But Parko wasn't, he was determined to outlast everyone, to be necessary while the rest of them wilted slowly under the pressure of living up to the expectations of youthful enthusiasm.

As it happened their youthful enthusiasm had all but drained out of them. They all complained a lot. Every time Nadia passed a group talking in the kitchen or one of the many nooks or stair landings, she'd hear the same thing. She'd see the same guarded but weary facial expressions. The sound of tiny, microscopic straws were snapping camels' backs and could be heard beneath the murmur of dissatisfaction. Machines bore the brunt of this frustration. The temperamental laser printer was always having paper jams. People would slap it, creating a sharp plastic echo. Every month someone would quit, usually after one paper jam too many.

At the interview they had told her that the woman she was replacing lacked the right temperament for the work.

"But of course, your job will be slightly modified. You won't have as many titles as she did," said one of the publishers, a woman with a narrow slit of a mouth and small, rodent eyes.

On her first day Nadia was immediately taken with the plunger coffee and endless supply of Arnott's Assorted. At the last newspaper she'd worked the best they could do was a caterer's blend of instant coffee with the spoon attached by a chain to the can, and dry Sao biscuits. Eventually they had even cut those out. But she soon realised that the others regarded these goodies as feeble compensation for their efforts. In fact many preferred to go to a nearby cafe than accept the company's largesse. One of the editors had told her she'd happily swap the bikkies for decent hours any day.

Nadia told her about the newspaper proprietor who distributed all-day suckers to his staff at the end of the year.

"I rest my case," said the editor. "Give them enough rope and they'll hang you."

When people gathered in the courtyard early in the mornings to smoke, someone would usually make mention of the union. Linda, frizzy haired and always trembling slightly, was in regular contact with them, but it seemed there was little they could do aside from perhaps make a claim for overtime. Or refuse to work it.

"But then the product would suffer and our professional reputations would be down the sink-hole," she told them.

They all looked at the ground.

"It gives me the pip," she said, "They must laugh at us until they just about choke."

Andrew, one of the senior editors, had been talking to lawyers regarding a civil suit over the many unpaid hours of work, which, he claimed, had precipitated the destruction of his marriage and which gave his quest an added tone of riotousness.

Since the start-up a lot of them had simply left, like Nadia's predecessor, Annie, to no job at all. Happy to drift and maybe do some freelance work for Type. But payment took so long that many of them gave it up as a bad joke.

Andrew preferred to act as the enemy within where sabotage was an option if all else failed. In the meantime he could collect as much evidence as necessary to, as he liked to say, "take them to the fucking cleaners".

"But we've all just rolled over, haven't we," said Chloe as she shuffled from one foot to the other in the morning chill, "I mean none of us have ever piped up and said it's not acceptable to work twelve-hour days as a matter of course, have we?"

She looked around her at the small group. "Have we ever threatened to strike, or work to rule?"

"Oh, please!" said Andrew. "You just have to look at the state of people to see that it's gone beyond that. Look at Parko. He's become like Patty Hearst. Too much of that fucking Lavazza and not enough sleep has made him one of them now. I've heard some nights he doesn't even go home."

"Not to mention his little drinking problem," said Chloe.

"Doesn't he live with his mother, anyway?" said Linda lighting up a second Stuyvesant after the first.

"They hire people with a specific pathology," said Andrew, "people who will work and work until they have to be carted off in a straightjacket."

"Speak for yourself," said Chloe.

They all went quiet when the receptionist, Venetia, came to join them in the courtyard. Venetia had pink hair and a ring through her nose and today was wearing a top that appeared to have been put through the shredder. She liked to play around with different accents.

"Hi y'all," she said in her Texan voice.

Linda ground out her cigarette and went inside.

Andrew smiled darkly and started to burn something on the wall with his cigarette end.

From the front desk, Venetia made the company seem especially youthful and cutting edge although she was there to conceal management's bland, accounting focus. She was related to one of the company directors and Andrew had convinced everyone that she was a management spy. It was also Venetia's job to put together the company newsletter which was full of 'You don't have to be mad to work here but it helps' type humour. People were putting it straight in the bin.

"Anyway," Andrew said, "the union's a waste of time."

The graphic designers in their terry towelling tops and overlarge jeans nodded blankly as Venetia chirped, "Y'all havin' a good day?"

They were minimalist in personality as well as in design style. One of them wore thick, black-rimmed glasses. That was Jock. The other one, Jamie, had a shaved head and black goatee. They were never apart. The rest of them used to joke that if Jock sneezed, Jamie would blow his nose. They might have been gay but it was more likely they were asexual. Jock was into typography that was impossible to read and column widths that went across the full page.

"Those two are very anti word," said Julia, one of the subeditors, as if she suspected a secret cult. Jamie always presented his layouts a little sheepishly, as if he was ashamed of the artistic compromises he was forced to make.

At the Christmas party Nadia had just gotten into an interesting conversation with a blonde-haired freelancer called Damian, when someone tinkled a glass and called for quiet. It was time. The CEO, Tim Flannery, had arrived and was about to say a few words.

People cleared their throats and Tim, in his pale blue shirt, red tie and red-framed owl glasses thanked everyone for coming in the same wooden, robotic manner as he did the previous year when Nadia had started.

"Of course we're here, the company's paying for once," she heard Andrew stage whisper between clenched teeth. "Fucking moron."

She exchanged an embarrassed smile with Damian and felt herself slump down a little and hide behind her glass. She was supposed to be a positive force, lift the mood that had been created by the Andrews and others who had moved on. But it was hard to do without seeming a little like a fool or slightly crazy. Cynicism was solid and impenetrable. People wore it like armour. It only made her seem naive to defend the company and spout its catchphrases. She had been having a hard time selling ideas to these people since they all put on a display of eye-rolling and moaning whenever she uttered words like 'totally new concept in publishing' and 'fresh, cutting edge'.

"It's an attitude thing," Tim Flannery had told her in the job interview. "We're not interested in people who are afraid of hard work, simple as that, Nadia. This is a small team here and everyone has to do their bit. We're trying to do something new and different so we want self-starters, people who have initiative. We're not about top-heavy management structures in this place. Everyone makes their own coffee here."

He leaned back and pushed his large, red-rimmed glasses up his small upturned nose.

"You know what I mean, Nadia?"

She sat on the edge of her seat, like a self-starter, ready to start. Like a Golden Retriever ready to chase the ball, tongue flapping, eyes bright. Showing her initiative and youthful enthusiasm.

Andrew later referred to Tim as Hymie and said that all he had to do was open the door on his chest and turn up the humanity dial on his settings and everyone would be a lot happier.

Tim told the gathering that 2001 looked like being a good year and there were some new clients on board thanks to the work of Nadia and the contract publications team.

"Onya Nadia," said Andrew and clapped a bit too loudly. A sarcastic, ear-popping clap.

Nadia and Damian exchanged nervous smiles. They had only dealt with each other by phone and email until today. She'd been taken with his deep voice and throaty chuckle and now she liked his physical presence too; his perkiness, his cheerfulness, especially in this environment with Jock and Jamie ignoring the speech and playing some kind of game on one of the layout computers, and Andrew lurking around making sarcastic asides at every opportunity and the others standing with forced smiles as Tim told them how exciting the following year would be and how he had a lot of new ideas.

"Don't know about you," she heard Andrew saying to Linda, "but I've had about as much excitement as I can stand."

"Shhhh," said Linda.

"Ouch!" said Andrew, "What was that for?"

"And I'd just like to say that for going that extra mile this year, a very special thanks to Parko. Is he here?"

There was silence and people turned their heads and looked around the room for the production manager.

"Parko? You here mate?" said Tim. "Well, look, knowing him he's probably upstairs still beavering away. So anyway troops, I'd just like to toast the fact that we've made it to our second year. Phew. I know it's been hard yakka, but you've all come through with flying colours, so cheers everyone."

People raised their glasses and mumbled "cheers" and Nadia caught Damian's eye again.

"I should thank you, actually. You virtually wrote the whole of Display Home yourself."

"It was nothing," said Damian, who was financing his first novel with two-thousand-word features about display villages on the sides of freeways, in areas with names like Mayfield Springs and Devon Lakes. In many ways these tasks had been a greater challenge to his creativity than fiction could ever be. Two thousand words was a lot of words to come up with about houses that all looked the same. His friends mocked him but he doubted any of them had the discipline to handle that kind of thing. They thought it was more dignified to work in some cafe.

Damien and Nadia were still standing close to each other long after the speech ended.

Nadia had drunk too quickly during the speech, out of anxiety mainly, and she was starting to feel garrulous. She didn't usually drink and so the effect of a few glasses of champagne was brisk.

"So, tell me about your novel," she said to Damian, aware that she was wearing a rather moronic grin and leaning a bit too close to him. It was a champagne smile that had been the source of past troubles. But it was too late to stop now.

"Oh, well, you know," he said "it's kind of a bit autobiographical. But in a good way, you know. I mean it's not exactly about me, just slightly. Like there is stuff in it that's sort of like my life but sort of not too, if you know what I mean?"

"Sort of," she said and struggled to recall what they had been talking about before Tim's speech had begun.

"It's not finished but in a nutshell I'd have to say that it's about failure," he said.

"Hmmm," she said, looking at his earnest blue eyes.

"Not that it's about me failing though," he added quickly.

"No," she said.

The smile popped up again.

"Have you seen the view from the top floor?" she said. "Where the boardroom and Parko's office are?"

"I've never met Parko, actually. But everyone seems to talk about him a lot."

"He's a nutcase. But very bright. You know, one of those nerdy genius types. Total dag."

As she walked up the creaking, old wooden stairs she wondered if Damian would be looking at her buttocks. She added a little extra swing just in case.

Sometimes she would add the swing if she was taking clients up to the boardroom. At those times she felt just a tiny bit like a prostitute but much cleaner because in the boardroom she would discuss print runs and schedules and editorial ideas.

There was one client, who the others called 'Sibyl' for his range of varying personalities, whom she sometimes feared would make a grab, if he was in that kind of mood. Sibyl was either in a furious caffeinated rage, insulting everyone in sight as dandruff gathered on his shoulders, or else he was excessively friendly, like some lush, and a little too tactile for her liking. She was careful to read his mood and if he was in one of his loving states she would let him lead the way up the stairs.

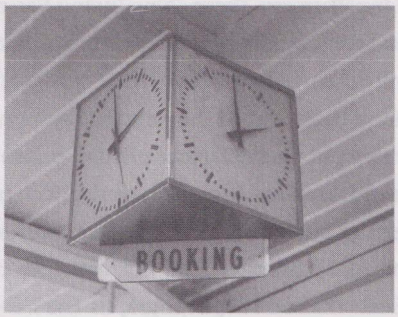
The proofing stage was always a nightmare with Sibyl. They tried to stick to a house style but he thought he knew better, as they all did in the end. Proofs would come back littered with red ink, when Sibyl would have changed back the changes he had made in one of the earlier stages of production, back when he was in a different phase of his personality cycle, and generally he would make sentences longer and more convoluted.

"That's the trouble with this job," said Andrew. "The clients are fuckwits and the boss is an arsehole. Other than that, it's great."

When Nadia got to the top of the stairs it was just coming on dusk. A perfect December blush in the sky, the city offices twinkling like Christmas lights.

She looked behind her, but Damian was nowhere to be seen. All that self-conscious buttock swinging had been for nothing. She was about to turn around and head back down the stairs when she saw something out of the corner of her eye. It was a large, dark figure in the boardroom, something hanging from the beams. In the reflected city lights she recognised immediately the leather pattern of a pair of English brogues. She knew she should run, her body told her to sprint. There was a clogged, dry sensation in her throat which she quickly realised was her own horrified, blood-chilling scream. Parko thought, as he swung from the rafters of the boardroom, the straps from the harness digging into his armpits, that he couldn't have stage managed a better reaction if he'd directed it himself. Nadia had the kind of shrill scream that made people run from miles away. He'd either get a payrise or the sack, but he didn't really care which. The statement was the thing and he knew none of the others had the guts to make one like this; certainly not one as bold. He'd heard those whingers, their grumblings rising up the brick wall and through his window. Little powder-puff fashion victims. They had no idea. They were all in the business of communication but none of them could express their dissatisfaction to anyone who mattered. But this would get the message across, he felt. It was in a rich text format—a heavy bold serif. It was high and wide and impossible to ignore.

THE STATION



THE STATION WAS barely awake. Loners had spread themselves among the rows of blue vinyl benches, camped at a reasonable distance from each other. Christmas decorations hung limply from the ceiling, while the loudspeaker had already archived the season's carols and replaced them with country and western numbers.

Fenn stood in the doorway of the station entrance, clutching a plastic garbage bag, oblivious to the sliding doors erratically opening and slamming behind her. Her eyes scanned the cavernous hall bathed in a dull light clinging to a line of windows along one wall of the station.

The 'Arrivals and Departures' information screen ticked over at the far end of the hall. Fenn lifted the bag to her body, nursing it like a newborn baby. She looked down at the bag as if attempting to look through it. She took a slight, deliberate breath and walked across the hall, ignored by those who had already returned to their knitting, crossword puzzles or general idleness.

She stopped in front of the electronic board and scanned the list of arrivals, reading it twice before she accepted her error.

"Shit."

Fenn placed the plastic bag on the floor between her legs and began anxiously searching her pockets. She found the piece of paper screwed into a tight ball in her back pocket. Fenn unfolded it and read the brief final sentence.

"Arrival from Albury, 9.50 train."

She looked up at the clock above the noticeboard. She was early, way too early.

Fenn had a history of lateness. Late for the bus. Late for school. She had even been late for her mother's funeral. But at least that was done with purpose. She planned that. Most of the time though she didn't plan for anything. She wandered. She hesitated. And changed her mind without really knowing that she had, seeing as she didn't plan anything.

When she was a small girl she had made plans for herself. She would write them in her diary, the date and even the time that she would achieve certain things. But something always went wrong and the details on the page looked like a mess the next time she opened her book.

Fenn had given up and now found it easier to let things happen to her.

She looked around at the benches and knew she wouldn't want to sit there for the next hour or more so picked up her bag and began to walk back toward the sliding doors, thinking of the opposite attractions of fresh air and cigarettes. She stopped in front of the ramp leading down to the arcade that served as the entrance to the platforms drawing trains away from the city.

She walked down the ramp into the musty fluorolit arcade. The shops were closed except for a newsstand selling lines of glossy, expensive magazines. A boy who looked about the same age as Fenn sat behind the counter preoccupied with a hand-held computer game.

Fenn walked the length of the arcade, looking up at the small electronic information boards as she ambled by: Platform Three (Not Taking Passengers), Platform Five (Awaiting Stationmaster's Advice), and Platform Seven (Albury 9.50).

Walking back toward the ramp she stopped again outside the 'put yourself in the picture' photo booth. Fenn stood looking at an enlarged photograph of two teenage girls, about her own age, arms hanging around each other, smiling into the camera. The booth offered '3 photographs for $3—delivered in 3 minutes!'

She began to walk away but returned to the booth. Digging her hand into her pocket she pulled out a $5 note and looked across to the newsstand.

Fenn coughed several times before the boy looked up. He had a long fringe of hair shielding his eyes. Along with a thin-lipped unsmiling mouth it gave him the blank appearance of a mannequin. Fenn waved the note in her hand.

"Can I have change for the machine?" She indicated over her shoulder in the general direction of the photo booth.

"What? The drink machine?" He began a new game and didn't bother to look up through his curtain of hair.

"No . . . no," Fenn tried to explain herself.

"No. I want change for the photo thing, the photo machine." She didn't know what to call it.

She began walking away in frustration before it registered with him.

"Hey! Here! A two and a one! You need a $2 and a $1 coin."

He held the coins in his outstretched hand. "There's a mirror inside if you want to do your hair or something."

Fenn sat on the stool and pulled the curtain shut while reading the instructions. She looked into her reflection in the mirror to the side of her. Her hair was all over the place and she had no brush or comb in her bag. She licked the fingertips of both hands and ran them through her dark brown hair, creating a part in the centre and pushing clumps of curls behind both ears.

She swivelled her chair around toward the camera lens and put the money in the slot before enduring its stark flash of light.

When the photographs fell from the machine it was not possible to distinguish one image from another, except maybe there was a smile somewhere in the corner of the mouth of Fenn number 3.

As she walked back to the ramp, looking down at the photographs, the boy called to her.

"How'd you look? How'd you look?"

Fenn ignored him and walked back up the ramp and out into the street.

SHE PACED up and down nervously in front of the station as she smoked. The garbage bag swayed back and forth, knocking against her legs before swinging away from her.

After two cigarettes and doubts about going through with it Fenn went back inside. To avoid the newsstand she walked the length of the station to a second ramp. It took her down to a poorly lit subway covered in graffiti and reeking of piss. She listened to her footsteps echo both behind her and ahead to a line of dimly lit platform entrances.

Platform Seven, like the rest of the station, was more or less empty except for the porter who had driven a baggage trolley to the end of the platform where he sat reading the Sunday paper and smoking a cigarette. Fenn lit yet another cigarette of her own as she sat looking down at the photographs of three Fenns.

People said she looked like her mother. But Fenn could never see it, not in the mirror at night and not in the photograph in her hand. She opened her plastic bag and searched among her things until she found the small wallet of images. The red plastic cardboard cover was marked and dirty and worn at the edges. The pocket album was always with her. She held it close to her each time she went to a new foster home or hostel when her mother went to hospital or simply went missing.

Fenn held her $3 photographs alongside one of

her mother, taken with her "new dad" of the time, a tractor mechanic who lived with her mother in the months before she started injecting. Fenn could see no resemblance. Her mum smiled too widely to look much like her daughter.

She looked through earlier photographs in the album. There was one of him, blurred and out of focus. That is, except for his hand resting against Fenn's shoulder as he held her tiny body in his tattooed arms. Fenn had often looked closely at that hand against her skin. She pressed the album against her face and looked into it as the whistle of the arriving train called in the distance.

THE PASSENGERS began filing off the train, led by old ladies and teenagers. Fenn stood clutching her bag with one hand while running the other nervously through her hair. She wasn't sure who she was looking for but presumed she would know her father when she saw him.

A tall, mousy-haired man stepped down from the carriage, helping an elderly woman as he did. He was dressed not dissimilar to Fenn, in jeans and matching denim jacket.

"He looks like a cowboy," Fenn thought to herself, "one of those rodeo riders."

The cowboy walked purposefully toward Fenn, with his boots clomping hard against the bitumen. She ran her hand through her hair several times, until the cowboy walked on, toward a tall, black-haired woman in a tight leather suit. As Fenn looked at them the couple put their arms around each other and kissed.

The few remaining pensioners either trickled away with relatives carrying their baggage or filed behind the porter's trolley. Fenn looked along the length of the train and back down to her feet as she shuffled back and forward.

She saw the full length of his shadow spread before her. She knew it was him without looking up. When she did she saw a slightly built man, not much taller than herself. That surprised her, as did his bald head. Well, not bald really. He had the head of a man who had shaved his receding hair before he started to look foolish.

Fenn had always imagined her father as having thick dark hair. And she was sure that he would be tall. But he wasn't. No cowboy boots either. Or denim jacket.

Her father was wearing a pair of black pants and a white shirt. He had a small backpack slung from one hand and carried a book in the other. They looked briefly at each other, before quickly moving their eyes away nervously and then back again, with both of them barely able to hide an expression of unfamiliarity and nervousness.

They stood about a metre apart in a nervous standoff. He pushed his book into a back pocket.

He spoke first, hesitantly.

"Fiona?"

Was that a question? She wasn't sure. Fiona? It put an immediate distance between them. Few people called her Fiona. The police, doctors, case workers. To everyone else she was Fenn, just Fenn.

"Fiona?" he questioned again while awkwardly putting his hand forward.

Fenn looked down at his hand and saw it as it was in the photograph, familiar. But still, she wasn't about to shake it.

She looked at his brown eyes. Brown like hers. Her mum had blue eyes, beautiful blue eyes. Her's were a dirty brown as were his, she thought to herself as she answered with formality:

"Fiona, Fiona Fennessy."

He looked down at his open, unwelcomed hand before dropping it to his side. They stood motionless as the diesel engine idled with a deep rumble.

"Um . . . I could do with a sandwich, a cup of tea," he gestured toward the ramp. "Maybe we can get something to eat?"

She wasn't about to make it easy for him.

"Nothin's open."

He took a deep breath.

"Well, let's walk and have a look anyway. Maybe we'll find something."

They did find something. When they walked back

through the arcade and up to the entrance hall they found the kiosk was open.

He bought himself a wholemeal salad sandwich and a black tea in a styrene cup. Fenn said she wasn't hungry but let him buy her a milkshake and Cherry Ripe after only mild prompting. She was starving.

They walked up a flight of stairs to a balcony of tables and chairs looking out through a wall of glass to the river and the dockyards. The water was wide and flat, slipping by just beyond stillness.

The small talk was easy. Fenn could respond to that with one- or two-word responses, "yep . . . nup . . . dunno . . . suppose so", while looking out absently to the water.

When he asked about her mother it came to her unexpectedly, a violent jab to her stomach. She felt a familiar and fearful heat move up through her body, beyond her hips, into her chest, her mouth, and down to her tingling fingertips. She tried in vain to feign disinterest.

"I wouldn't know. Wasn't there when it happened."

"I know, I know. I mean before that . . . before . . . before . . . Where were you two living, love?"

Love? Love? Who was he talking to? She exploded.

"I said I wouldn't fuckin' know. I was locked up! So how would I know!"

Fenn sensed his disapproval. She went on, having found a weakness.

"I don't know where she was or who she was fuckin' with!"

Fenn delighted in the look of dismay on his face.

"Is that what you want to know? Who she was fucking? Don't ask me! I hadn't seen her for months! I'd stopped thinking about her, forgotten her! Didn't even want to go to her fuckin' funeral! Hid from the nuns but they found me!"

"Don't talk like that. Keep your voice down. You don't have to swear like that."

Fenn could only laugh.

"Swear! Fuckin' swear! What about you! You're the big-time bank robber . . ."

He looked at her in surprise.

"Yeah. Mum told me all about you. Robbing people, gaol. I know all about you."

He fell back in his chair.

Good, Fenn thought to herself, good.

She sat back in her own chair, contented, sucking at her milkshake and grinning widely with a piece of chocolate sticking out of her mouth.

He looked out through the glass. A single rower eased by, gliding gracefully through the water as her oars quietly dipped under the surface. He turned back to Fenn.

"Why did you come to meet me? Why did you come?"

Fenn shifted uneasily. She was lost for a reply. She did not really know why she had turned up in the first place.

He asked again.

"Why did you come to the station this morning, to meet me?"

She lied, nervously. "I was going to ask you for money. I've got no money and nowhere to live. You got any money? Robbed any banks lately?"

He knew that she was lying but decided to go along. At least her voice was a little calmer.

"Banks? No, no banks, not lately. I was away for a long time. And since then, well, I work in a library. Nothing to rob there. No money. We don't even enforce late fines."

He laughed quietly at his joke in an attempt to mask his own nervousness.

Fenn tried to ignore him. Didn't want to talk to him. Didn't want to let him off the hook. But she was curious. Was he lying? He had to be lying.

"Library? What library?"

"Did a degree in Librarianship in Tamma, by correspondence. Wanted to do Physical Education, but the exercise yard was no bigger than a monkey cage so I did a library degree. And I got a job at the state library as soon as I got out. Been there since, worked there for two years."

He puffed his chest out, almost with pride. He was obviously used to presenting himself as a diligent success story. He did not impress Fenn.

"Two years! Two years! Why didn't you get in touch with us!" She had tears in her eyes.

He could not look at her. He stood up from his chair and turned his back on Fenn, looking out the window. She started to rifle through her plastic bag again, looking for nothing in particular among the few possessions of clothing, a diary that she wrote in each night and the photo album.

He turned around.

"I . . . I did think to get in touch, but . . ."

He sat in his chair again, leaning toward her.

"But I knew she was using . . . had been for too long. Word came through to me, in Tamma. I came out different than I went in, Fiona. I couldn't risk it. I was scared I'd start using again myself."

"Risk it! Well, don't fucking risk anything now, not with me. You can get back on that train now, before it leaves. What did you write to me for? Why did you risk that? Fuck off, dad!"

She spat the words at him.

"Fuck off and leave me alone!"

Fenn ran from the table as her chair crashed to the ground. The entire station turned to look at her as she ran down the stairs and out through the sliding doors into the street.

HE WAS IN THE SAME chair reading his book an hour later when she walked to the top of the stairs. She stood back from the table watching him as they both listened to the rhythm of her breathing.

"What you reading?"

He looked up wearily with red, watery eyes. He held up his book.

"The Bible actually," he said with genuine embarrassment.

Fenn shrugged her shoulders knowingly.

"Bible-basher, hey? Figures. Hostels, foster homes, full of bible-bashers and born-agains. You a born-again?"

"I don't know. Not really, no."

He looked down at the book and palmed the cover.

"No, I shared a cell with this lovely fella, Big Bill Johnston. In for DSS fraud. Should never have been in gaol. Got sick and died there. Left this behind. The first book I read since being bounced out of high school."

Fenn picked up her chair and sat opposite her father. They sat quietly until Fenn coughed to get his attention.

"I got nowhere to go. Took off from St Mary's two days ago. Slept in the Parliament Gardens. Lucky its been warm at night, hey?"

He appeared not to hear her.

He put the Bible in his backpack and stood up, straightening his clothes before running his hands across his shaven head.

"You going?" she asked, suddenly wanting him to stay.

He looked out at the water, perfectly still now in that moment before the current shifts.

"No. No, I'm not. I've got a week's holiday so I'm going to stay here, in the city for a few days. Why don't we go for a walk around town? Have a talk. Maybe some lunch?" He offered his hand across the table.

Fenn stood up and looked down at her plastic bag and then further to the floor, at her own reflection in the polished tiles. She was buying herself precious seconds to think.

Eventually she looked back to her father. His hand remained outstretched. She looked at his worried face.

"Okay then, okay. I've got a bit of stuff here, in this bag, and it's falling apart. Do you reckon I could put it in your backpack? I could carry it for you."

"Yeah, sure. But I'll carry it. It's fine."

They made their way down the stairs, through the near silence of the station. They walked out through the sliding doors and into the street.

THE SKIPPER BUTTERFLY

ON THE FREEWAY the smell of Vegemite from the Kraft factory fades as we climb the Westgate Bridge. There is a sense of real elevation and there is affluence and postcards in the rear-view mirror and smoke and pipes in the sky ahead above the flat west. The young man in the passenger seat is gazing through the window at the roofs of refineries and the different greens of cricket grounds in between. There is a Southern Cross of cigarette burns on his inner wrist and it takes me from the road for a good few seconds, where I imagine his immense tolerance for pain. He is only a young bloke, out of the lock-up, and we are heading to the You Yangs, volunteering, to weed the bush there.

I found him the other morning in a squat. I imagined everyone in the world at work somewhere, and here I was rubbing my hands together keeping warm and tiptoeing through this old war service home. I had been looking for him a good few hours. Pornography, star signs, celebrities, all together on the floor amidst the debris of the homeless. Swords of winter light came through the holey wood covering window frames, illuminating bludgeoned holes in the floor. I found him under his blanket in the stained bath.

In the car, he reads the road signs aloud. It is hard to know what is going on in his mind, impossible to picture the things that have made his life the way it is, a different normal. When I ask, he tells me his family is in Adelaide. He reminds me that we could keep driving along this road all night and see them, but he is joking of course. He hates his family, and the members that are still alive hate him, he says. He will not tell his life story to another worker, too many workers have come and gone with his secrets, a hallmark of the industry. Tens of honeymoon periods with new workers who are green with ethics. New workers extend gifts and friendly understanding tones as they require rapport in order to work heroics. Non-stop junk food and football and gifts and warm feelings.

He reads the sign to Altona and tells me of the Skipper Butterfly and how it is found only in Altona, and nowhere else in the world.

I ask him where he gets his information.

He says he reads newspapers from bins and on trains and rolling in the wind.

Cockatoos, white and new, sit on freeway signs. Crows are pepper in the sky and give an authenticity to the day as new housing estates creep either side of us, just beyond the overgrown residential buffer zones where developers are realising golf courses. The few gum trees are thin and bend easily in the wind that has kept the land flat here. Our community work fills in our days together. I am his worker and he is my client.

I tell him that Matthew Flinders strode this ground, and that we are in Wathaurong territory as we cross the Werribee River. He looks at me confused. He only knows one Matthew, who is in the lock-up. Soon he is frozen with admiration looking at a Commodore that sits alongside us.

When we turn off for Little River the boy squirms in his seat. We shrink as the You Yangs become real, and the boy is scared of being recognised by other volunteers until he sees the group of older people under the barbecue shelter, which is the designated meeting place. There are people in sunhats waiting for the volunteer coordinator. A white-moustached man who smells of sunblock offers sandwiches from a large container, telling us he made them himself. He says the thing he likes most about native flora is that, if it looks dead, it's probably alive. Without warning or relevance he starts a war story. We all listen in hopeless captivity, waiting for the volunteer coordinator to arrive. The boy knows something of the art of war. He is infatuated with the wrinkled and smudged tattoos on the forearms of the storyteller. The boy is concerned as he listens to stories of silent bare feet on the jungle floor, and machine-gun fire at trees full of monkeys who fall to the ground confused. The man with the white moustache puts his hand on the young bloke's shoulder to emphasise something, like he knows pain or demons. I look at the boy who is alive with attention and surprised by the stranger's honesty. The bad things in his life are gone. I check my watch to see how long it lasts.

But All I Did was Shout

Violent you called me,
irresponsible and cruel.
One moment sipping Earl Grey
and idling by the river.
The next a whirling dervish
from whom you prayed deliverance.
And yet I saw your anger,
hiding underneath,
longing to come out.
You say it's my fault
but all I did was shout.
And you want to be so quiet
sitting in the sun
but I feel the pulse
of fifty horses desperate to run.
I need to talk out my frustration.
You prefer meditation
and want me in a tight fit dress.
But now I want to destroy
and leave a mess.

ANGELA QUARRINGTON

Questionnaire: Volognat, 1790

In 1790 the French National Assembly, dreaming of a France without beggars, asked every municipality in France to supply details of citizens in want. Not only the cities, but thousands of small, semi-literate rural communities like Volognat (administratively subject to district capitals like Nantua) filled in the forms with agonised care. A clumsy Volognat pen has scrawled a final comment across their page.

Jacques. Here is another packet from Nantua.
Not the taxes again?
No. It seems to be questions
about who is poor in this commune.
Jacques . . . ,
Oh very well. But the rest of you
must check me as we go.

Write: such are our numbers, and such our households.
How many too poor to be taxed?
Too poor to pay taxes? That's a feeble joke
even from Nantua.
We all pay taxes and none of them are light ones.

How many too old to work?
Why, none,
Imagine our daughters-in-law, if we sat idle . . .

Invalids?
Well, there's Jean-Baptiste, he's blind
And Etienne with his hunchback—

Write down, two.
Pauper children?
What a question,
they must think this is Paris.

In need of help?
Well, Jean-Baptiste and Etienne,
of course they get help, what else would you expect?

Sick poor?
The odd half-dozen
fall sick and need a hand.

Endowments? hospitals? beggars and vagabonds?
Do they really think this is Paris?

There are spaces here for Remarks.
Write: There are no paupers in this commune.

But life is hard—
fathers have little,
so Jean-Baptiste and Etienne have little.
The slopes are steep, the soil is carried off,
the crops aren't much.
Sometimes the cattle die.
People scratch up a crop as they can
and so we share the winters.
We have no beggars in this commune.

It says: what do you think can be done?
Not much. Life is as it is
but could we pay fewer taxes?

Jacques,
write here, at the bottom: Rocks on every side.

ALISON PATRICK

Budget Week

What has it got this year for me?
See this man on the floor, stripped bare,
You beaut! Tax cuts!
a leash around his neck.
Hang on . . . but only if I'm earning more than fifty thou'.
The man's a dog, his soldier-handler bored.
Super . . . might get something out of that . . .
There's another quivering on a box,
The largest package of measures ever
hooded, arms extended, wired for 'softening up';
to help young couples juggling work and kids.
'Fall off, you asshole, and you're dead!'
That's definitely not me; no kids.
The next one is
Uh-oh! Danger that the housing bubble's going to burst . . .
pressed naked up against the bars,
Lots of bucks for fighting terrorism.
hands raised, knees tight together,
Good. And millions more to schools
trying to preserve his dignity,
for teaching values:
gabbling useless pleas for mercy.
'tolerance, trust, mutual respect',
A guard points, dogs rush in,
'compassion, honesty and courtesy'.
and down he goes.
Votes secured and barbecues stopped dead
The last shot shows his bleeding legs.
across the nation's marginal seats.
"Stupid kid things—pranks",
the soldier's mother said.

BOB MORROW

Prosthetic Relatives

He has lost all his limbs
and thirteen of his relatives

How it happened was this

He left his arm
on the bus, a leg fell off when
he was running after the bus
The other leg wandered off by itself
in the night, the last arm felt put upon
and disappeared after breakfast

No sorry, that was a lie
They were blown off
by an American bomb
that cost 27 US dollars
Ripped, shredded into a lurid
stew of detritus
combining with the essential organs of
the thirteen exploded relatives

Thirteen relatives

I think of my two children,
one husband, one sister,
three brothers, one mother, one father
not enough,
I go to my eldest nephew,
my youngest niece, my favourite aunt
my cousin, three months younger than
me, at seven and eight we were a double of
sorts, same weight, height, gait
great for three legged races

In a gesture of generosity and reparation
the British have provided
him with prosthetic arms and legs,
brand new prosthetic hands
that open and close,

They are working on prosthetic
relatives

CAROL JENKINS

The Birth of Shopping

Outside the supermarket
where the check-out chicks and boys
grab a quick smoke,
a very thin very old man patiently sits—
long boney hands
resting one over the other
on his dog's-head walking stick,
he is tidily dressed, shoes polished,
hair neatly combed; yet resigned.
He shows no interest in other customers
exiting with half-full trolleys,
perhaps just concentrating
on keeping his spine upright,
breathing . . .

At last, a sixtyish large-hipped woman
in faded print dress and comfortable Reeboks,
also with a stick, unornamented,
pushes her own trolley through automatic doors,
and calls out kindly: *Da-ad!* . . .

Slowly, dignified, he walks to their small car
while his daughter's bulging capability
heaves white plastic bags into the boot.
Opening the passenger door,
(bushie still at heart),
he winds the window down,
then climbs awkwardly in
as she continues heaving
with the memoried tenderness
of his own hands
holding his baby daughter
in her christening robes.

FRANCES ROUSE

Dragged

I might have dragged
my pants on like you and walked
in sensible shoes through the world alone
but never conscious of it, without
referring to my own reflection
not even to straighten my tie.
I might have been dependant but
never known it. I might have found
a dumb wife to settle on my breast
pocket like a mote and she might have
kept my nose clean and consoled me
for a time. I might never have been
told that in spite of love,
dogs, children, cars, & all fortitudinous
attempts to furnish solitude, that
all meetings must end in parting.

LIBBY ANGEL

The Elect

the devils have claimed heaven
winged gnats of narrow minds
(dumber than holy-wood)
desperate for vicious certainty

a smothering swarm
a mouth full of flies

PETER HOMFRAY

North not West

fine feather dirt flies past
ridges carved red and rectangular
the road cuts a swerve
we travel in plastic stillness
radio thin music plays
Kuminjay Cash escapes and bounds
off the dash into the spinifex
down echoing canyons and back
casting the landscape into
regular metre and rhyme
stories of lost loves and lonesome dogs
all in Australian strine.

CHRISTINE OWEN

The price of faith is religion;
The price of constant war
Is a warrior society.

We should not look for faith,
Conversion, or even new faith—
But look at faith's cruel hands.

We are forced into war
To ransom hidden guilt—
But we are not warriors.

If we trust, it should be
To faith's forgetfulness, faith's
Faithlessness, the interstices;

Instead of war and rapine,
Think of enabling, trust,
Embracing new friends.

We have no faith in faith,
No courage for war—let us
Give ourselves to neither.

JOHN LEONARD

the bigness (wyperfeld)

nothing
(though not nothingness)
no thoughts
(but not no thought)
worlding all around
The warm sigh of far off country,
with spinifex on its breath.
Clouds, wisps
form and unform
(feel sadly the disappearance of wisps)
search for their reemergence across the blue
there?
Tiny birds chattering in a dustbath
the mark of brownclaws across sand,
saurian tail trail between.
A sleeper behind me inhales
a bloodsoaked absence
and then, low, moans out.
Grass, pale green,
leans this way awhile,
then that
as if under the influence of fluctuating light,
rather than wind.
Sun
(turbulent sphere)
feels like we're riding the country around it
its eye turns to follow us,
swinging round on unseeable sinew
we're a bullroarer
spinning and twirling with a fearful hum
flung
here we come
the bigness

TERRY EYSSENS

Waiting on Fat Bottoms

I am waiting on weight: sit long enough in a single chair
and collect a fat behind.
Someone daubs an Australian flag on my cheek:
I do not mind. I am waiting on age, to be useless and benign.

I am waiting on weight to slow the movement of my thighs,
to diminish the element of surprise
to slow things, as I close on them slowly.

I am waiting on age to contain my hunger,
as I mouth a softened spoon.
I am waiting to be dull and not expected to speak,
an object of Sunday respect.

Behind the counter a shop boy
lulls me with baby syllables
and hands me a receipt.

I am waiting on weight
as a mark of what I have eaten,
to sit in loud circles of gurgling stomachs,
to press a paste rich in iron from my small intestine.

On television, a diffident man
explains mobilised soldiers, dull as camouflage.
He saws holes in makeshift rafts,
erects barbed wire fences.

I am waiting for age, a slow drift to the median strip.
I am waiting to be dull,
for my talk to enumerate body complaints, visits to the doctor.

Nothing will be so important as my personal comfort,
justified by a mere accumulation of years.
I will guard a personal fortune. It will make me right.

JOHN GASCOIGNE

L'Eclatante victoire de Sarrebrück
(The Resounding Victory of Sarrebrück)

won to cries of Long live the Emperor!
(Brilliantly coloured Belgian engraving
which sells at Charleroi for 35 centimes)

In the middle, in a blue and yellow apotheosis
The Emperor rides off, rigid, on his glitzy
Horsie; very jolly,—everything looks like roses,
Ferocious as Zeus and gentle as a daddy.

Below, the good footsoldiers who were having a lie-down
Near the red cannons and the gilded drums,
Stand up politely. Pitou dons his jacket again
And turning back toward the Chief, is dazzled by great names.

On the right, Dumanet, leaning on the stock
Of his Chassepot rifle, senses the short hair bristle on his neck,
And shrieks: "Long live the Emperor!!" His neighbour remains silent . . .

A plumed dress-helmet rises, like a black sun . . . In the centre,
Boquillon, red and blue, guileless, on his belly, rears
Up, and,—presenting his rump—asks; "On what?"

ARTHUR RIMBAUD TRANS. JOHN KINSELLA

Domestic Situation

(Najaf/Fallujah)

You have this guy that's beating up his wife
so in you go to see what you can do
—next thing you know despite their long-term strife
both of them start beating up on you
and (miracle of miracles!) the two
are howling for your blood and when you call
for back-up, then (surprise, surprise) there's no
great rush to help you out, so it seems that all
you've managed to accomplish is to show
that the cop who buys into this kind of brawl
is going to be the one who, blow for blow,
is likely to be the first to take a fall . . .
And, as they cart you off, both him and her
will be united as they never *ever* were.

BRUCE DAWE

CONVENTIONAL PUFFERY

Robert Dessaix (ed.): *Best Australian Essays 2004* (Black Inc., $24.95)

Many will remember 2004 for the bitterly fought election campaigns, for the destruction of Fallujah, for Abu Ghraib, for the High Court's acquiescence to the indefinite detention of asylum seekers and for a host of other (equally dismal) events. Robert Dessaix remembers it for the noise. The year, complains the new editor of *Best Australian Essays*, was "uncommonly loud". The world, like a selfish neighbour, refused to turn down its misery and thus "the gentle voice of the traditional essay [was] almost drowned out".

But it's not just the essay that had a bad year. According to Dessaix, 2004 sent many Australian writers themselves a bit gaga. "In the face of cataclysmic events", he explains, the literati "beat drums", they "fulminat[ed]" and "angrily thump[ed] pulpits, trying to shout evil down."

As fond of a good fulmination as the next man, I opened my copy of *Best Australian Essays* with some anticipation, keen to see these drum-beating tub-thumpers in angry action. But though Dessaix acknowledges that "panic and seriously inflamed passion" encouraged the socially engaged rather than the ruminative, his selection includes only one full-blooded polemic—Richard Flanagan's blistering denunciation of the deforestation of Tasmania.

Most of the other pieces are, in fact, examples of gentle, traditional essays. Thus we have Marion Halligan writing on cookbooks, Peter Conrad on Tintin, Kerryn Goldsworthy on choral singing, Chris Wallace-Crabbe on illness and Donald Horne on ageing. Many of these are, in themselves, accomplished and successful pieces of writing. George Seddon manages to make the trees of north-western Australia interesting to those of us who wouldn't know a baobab from a basilisk, Nicholas Shakespeare's nuanced essay on Somerset Maugham possesses the kick of a good whisky and soda, while Cassandra Pybus offers a fascinating historical detective story, tracking the life of the black American slave John Moseley, who was transported to Botany Bay:

> [b]y a series of remarkable escapes, he finally found freedom and modest prosperity at the end of the world, where with consummate irony, he could describe himself as a tobacco planter from America, his ultimate escape from a dehumanising economy that categorised him as property.

Though Peter Mares contributes a more-in-sorrow-than-anger account of the death of Viliami Tangionoa in an Australian detention centre and Bruce Grant looks at Balinese culture in the context of the Sari Club bombing, there's a glaring absence of writers intervening in the issues that dominated 2004. It's a lack that makes *Best Australian Essays* a curiously timeless read, akin to flicking through old magazines in a dentist's waiting room. Since Dessaix dismisses the long and noble tradition of polemical writing as "haranguing and hectoring", he guts the book of interventions around the events that made the year distinctive. The 'war on terror' might cow gentle voices but it has inspired best-selling essay collections by Gore Vidal, Arundhati Roy, Naomi Klein and (God spare us!) Christopher Hitchens. Where are their Australian counterparts?

While Dessaix might prefer what he calls "intimate disclosures" to the "faceless assertions of public virtue", he could have given his own hobbyhorse a fair ride without barring all other gallopers from the race. As it stands, the traditionalist, middle-brow aesthetic of his introduction (the personal over the public, the ruminative over the argumentative, the reflective over the angry, etc.) excludes most of Australia's journals of dissent. *Best Australian Essays* includes pieces from *Quadrant*, *Meanjin* and *Griffith Review*, and selections from the *Bulletin*, the *Age*,

Weekend Australian, *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Australian Financial Review*. But there's no *Overland*, no *Arena*, and nothing from the smaller publications that sprang up in the last year or so (*White Ant*, *Spinach7*, *Seeing Red*, etc.). Such journals are by their nature strident, and stridency is *verboten*.

There are other strange exclusions, too. If the elevation of Salaam Pax, the 'Baghdad Blogger', into an international celebrity during the Iraq war, drew attention to the growing clout of internet essayists, 2004 was the year blogging came in from the cold, with the Democratic National Convention actually issuing press accreditation to political bloggers. According to a recent survey, some eight million Americans now maintain their own blogs, while blog readership stands at 27 per cent of internet users. These are staggering statistics, and one suspects comparable numbers would emerge from an Australian study. Why then does *Best Australian Essays* show no interest whatsoever in local explorers of Blogastan?

Again, it seems a matter of the editor acting as gatekeeper rather than curator. You can see why online essayists might offend Dessaix's MOR sensibilities: bloggers tend to be crass, aggressive and—often—political. Nonetheless, the rise of a new medium that has more people reading and writing essays than at any time in memory would seem a development worthy of at least a cursory mention.

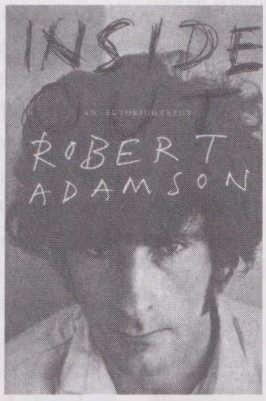
When we buy 400 grams of 'Best Australian Butter', we accept the superlative on the packaging as conventional puffery of the supplier's own wares, rather than an assessment of the relative merits of dairies throughout the country. Unless Black Inc. opens its essay collection to a broader range of voices, literary consumers will—with some justification—reach a similar conclusion.

Jeff Sparrow is Overland's reviews editor and author, with sister Jill, of Radical Melbourne 2 *(Vulgar Press, 2004).*

The Prison-House of Poetry

MARTIN DUWELL

Robert Adamson: *Inside Out: An Autobiography* (Text, $45)



Robert Adamson's *Inside Out* is subtitled 'An Autobiography' but it is really a portrait of the artist as a young man. This is probably the best kind of writer's autobiography anyway, detailing the early life, earliest impressions and experiences and taking the narrative through to the publication of the first book—the point at which the true author breaks into the air.

It is a beautifully written poet's memoir which begins in paradise (Adamson's word)—the north shore of Sydney in the late 1940s. It is a world full of examples of the things that will construct the coordinates of his life: nets, traps and cages, the entrapment and freedom of animals, an instinctive search for empathy with animals, family routines and discipline. As it progresses Adamson runs into various difficulties with the law—initially by stealing a rifle-bird from Taronga Park and then, while under a suspended sentence, by stealing a Roneo machine from his school (in order to begin publishing a paper). This introduces the second part of the narrative, an extended set of visits to various places of imprisonment in New South Wales, including Mt Penang Training School for Boys, Long Bay, Grafton, Bathurst, Goulburn and Maitland.

These are institutions run in buildings and along disciplinary lines that are, in the fifties and sixties, clearly outdated. Adamson uses the word 'Dickensian' to describe them but Mt Penang is run on a system that derives from the First Fleet. One of the punishments is 'holystoning', a practice that involves scrubbing the decking of a ship with a stone, and the boys are also placed in a work detail that involves manually building a road into the forest. Adamson generally manages to educate himself in a way that answers to the needs of his imagination (The Long Bay Debating Society asks *Encyclopedia Britannica* to donate a

Great Books of the Western World series and Adamson is soon reading Plato and St Augustine). As Adamson moves into more serious institutions the dangers become more apparent and culminate in a rape in Bathurst. Transferred to Maitland (through pretending to be hysterically homosexual) he meets up with an older crim (later immortalised as the dedicatee of 'Action Would Kill It / A Gamble') who introduces him to the poetry of, amongst others, Rimbaud. He also, intriguingly, finds a copy of Murray and Lehmann's *The Ilex Tree*, and this provides him with evidence that the publishing of contemporary poetry is something that does go on in the world.

The memoir describes the first poems written in prison, but before that we have met Adamson's tendency to confess at length. These confessions (the police have to take turns to get them all down) resonate with the later poems—they are a chance to make something formal and public out of personal experience. Later on, once he has begun writing, there is a lot of helpful detail for the serious reader. Some of the earliest poems, not included in *Canticles on the Skin*, were written in Maitland after reading extensively about Sappho:

> I'd stare into the ellipses dotting the scholarly translations, dredging up from between the remnant words an imagined version of her, a fantasised poet I could inhabit while writing.

An interesting kind of ventriloquism. We are also told that 'Jerusalem Bay' was the first poem of *Canticles* written, and that 'The Imitator' came rather later. It certainly helps to know that the densities of 'Jerusalem Bay' were a result of its being written under the influence of Hopkins and Shelley.

After leaving Maitland, Adamson meets David Rankin and Michael Driscoll and gradually emerges into the world of the young poets of the day in Sydney: Tranter, Dransfield, Gray et al. The last section of the memoir deals with this world and culminates in the publication of *Canticles on the Skin*. The central dispute is over *Poetry Magazine*, which Adamson manages to take over, and the resulting quarrel with Roland Robinson. It would be exaggerating to say that this puts the barbarities of the NSW prison system to shame but there is some very heavy aggro involved. It seems to have shocked even hardened poets. Adamson's account, while no doubt different to that of each of the other protagonists, rings reasonably true. It is not self-exculpating nor is it a long, Adamsonian confession, emphasising his guilt. I was surprised to see that the break with Robinson was not over mismanagement of the magazine or financial irregularities so much as over the American poets that the new order wanted reviewed. As Robinson was the last of the Jindyworobaks and thus a nationalist, this seems more than likely.

Though the book ends with the launch of his first book, it contains a final paragraph which, skipping to the 1982 launch of *The Law at Heart's Desire*, has Adamson's mother saying to Brett Whitely, "I don't know what Robert's told people . . . but I'd take it with a grain of salt if I were you. He's very loose with the truth." It is a wonderful way to finish but it makes a reader nervous. Is it a warning that, to use Caxton's phrase, "To believe all that is written herein ye be at your leisure"? Is it a conventional contemporary emphasis on the inevitable lies of any narrative, no matter how truthful it sets out to be? Or is it a realisation that things in our lives which our inner selves tell us are true often fail when matched against researchable realities?

Whatever the case, it is important to realise that the book works poetically. It rarely analyses and so we never really understand why the young Robert gets into so much trouble. It seems a matter of wanting something (usually for perfectly good reasons—to release a bird, to start a paper, to have a car to take a girl out and about in) and not really appreciating the boundaries of property. The idea is that the imagination in league with desire will triumph no matter what the law does. It is not a matter of triumphing over the law or against the machinations of the law. You feel that the creative impulses and the law simply occupy different universes. No negotiation is possible between them.

Perhaps the lack of analysis is an author's privilege—after all what do poets know about the various analytical regimes that an expert can bring to bear on their behaviour? What is clear is that the processes of the writing of this memoir are ones that register the symbolic significances of reality (the birds and their cages for example) and allow these images to resonate. As a result it is a far more luminous book than we might have expected.

At any rate, it is probably wrong to see *Inside Out* as the straightforward, unproblematic documenting of an early life which has been mined in a haphazard way in the poetry. Rather it should be read as

another recounting of Adamson's life in yet another mode, something to be read alongside the autobiographical poems of *Canticles on the Skin* and *The Rumour*, *Where I Come From*, *Wards of the State*, and *Zimmer's Essay*. If we are lucky, there will be a second instalment dealing with Adamson's life editing *New Poetry* during the poetry wars of the seventies and eighties. Given that the material is probably as lurid as the prison environment of the fifties and sixties, it should be worth waiting for.

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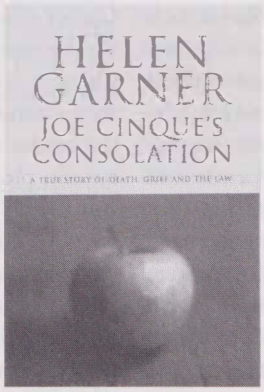
Helen Garner's Consolation

KATHERINE WILSON

Helen Garner: *Joe Cinque's Consolation* (Picador, $30)



So much has been published about *Joe Cinque's Consolation* that there's little need to recap its content. It has been hailed as a formidable example of literary journalism, one that "proves [Garner] is unrivalled in Australia as our best narrative journalist" (*Australian*) and that "takes journalism to places that others either do not dare or don't have the imagination or intellectual doggedness to reach" (*Bulletin*). Helen Garner is a skilful prose stylist and storyteller, and her account of the abhorrent killing of Joe Cinque by his girlfriend Anu Singh, and the dehumanising alienation of the judicial process that followed, invokes empathy and outrage. But while the book may live up to its publisher's claim of being "a masterwork", that "probes", "examines" and "explores", the accompanying claim that it's "a true story" is a slippery one.

Like Garner's fictional *Cosmo Cosmolino*, *Joe Cinque's Consolation* depicts young people who could have—but didn't—prevent the death of another. Echoing *The First Stone*, the villains are female university students depicted as abusing the legal system, and the victims are a hapless male and his respectable family. In characterisations too neat for fiction, Anu Singh is introduced as "a keen recreational drug user" whose "student career had been chequered", against Joe Cinque, "a stable fellow with a good job". He's portrayed as flawless, while the beautiful, narcissistic and "floridly glamorous" killer has a manner and dress that raises Garner's "girl hackles in a bristle". Garner acknowledges that "the parallels between this story and [*The First Stone*] were like a bad joke".

Is the joke of her own making? Many of the book's narrative strategies would suggest so. Garner slips seamlessly from reconstructed dialogue into reportage, hearsay, polemic, speculation and sensual literary description. She shapes the narrative largely through repetition and emotive appeals to the reader to share her commonsense perspective:

> Every woman I asked about this knew immediately what I meant and could provide examples.
>
> Any woman who has left home for university could fill in the gaps.
>
> If I had been Singh's defence counsel, I too would have seized any opportunity to get rid of the jury, particularly if it had contained women.
>
> She was the figure of what a woman most fears in herself—the damaged infant, vain, frantic, destructive, out of control.
>
> In the lobby at lunchtime I stood about with the two [female] journalists. They giggled and glanced this way and that, comparing notes in whispers on how many of [expert witness psychiatrist] Dr Byrne's categories and symptoms seemed to apply to them . . . No-one said it but we were all thinking, *Call that mental illness? She's exactly like me.*

Garner's Singh isn't mentally ill at all: she's just like all (manipulative) women, but more so, and she's trying it on. Disguised in the cloaks of common sense and decency, Garner's prejudices are revealed early on in an account of a man she encounters outside the court. He's "a bearded man in his late 30s with

a hard face, square and mean, and a thin, ratty little plait hanging down the nape of his neck". He jumps into a "car with a panel beater's logo" and smokes, curses and laughs "coarsely" with his friends, while his mother explains to Garner that he is innocent of a domestic assault charge. Having never before met this woman or her son, Garner ponders: "[D]id she really believe this sleek, muscular thug with his nasty little pigtail?" Similarly, Singh indulges in inappropriate clothes and gestures: in court she puts her hair up in "an almost indecently intimate and histrionic display". We recognise this *kind of woman*. With forensic observations and emotive strategies, Garner seduces the reader into viewing Singh as a Hecatean *femme fatale* who committed a senseless crime in an almost archetypal cautionary tale against drugs, reckless youth, moral decay and moral relativism. Garner gestures at the big philosophical questions of where personal responsibility ends and 'diminished responsibility' begins, the line between madness and 'evil', but then abandons her stated ideal: "to enlarge my imagination to the point where it can encompass truths as widely separated" as opposing versions of events. "My fantasy of journalistic even-handedness, long buckling under the strain", she writes,

> gave way completely . . . Anything I wrote would be too unbalanced . . . How could I have thought that when I couldn't bend the story to my will I could just lay it down, apologise and walk away? Her son's murder was not an opportunity for me to speculate on [journalistic] images of disharmony and disintegration . . . it was not even 'a story'. It was real . . . I longed to write a lament for Joe Cinque.

While the book's delivery is high-minded and literary, its messages are tabloid: judges are out of touch; sentences are too light (Singh was convicted only of manslaughter and released in four years); the courts are politically correct and the law favours criminals over decent folk. Of course there's value in examining these ideas (as Phil Cleary did in *Overland* 176). Garner describes a vast chasm between the law and community expectations of justice. She describes the boundless emotional wreckage left for victims and the brutal bureaucratic dehumanising that leaves them voiceless, alienated and traumatised. She gives a voice to some underdogs. But she makes no sense of the crime; nor does she attempt to. Engaging with the popular belief that the legal process should somehow equate with vengeance or healing, the book reinforces populist fears of 'senseless' crime, demonic criminals and institutions that buttress the moral relativism of today's youth. (And fear, of course, is a powerful barrier to understanding.) In another parallel with *The First Stone*, Garner is unable to obtain interviews with the women involved. This asymmetry could have been redressed had the book scrutinised a society that encourages the self-absorbed, destructive and beauty-obsessed killer to indulge in her pathology. (Singh's parents, acknowledging she is "frighteningly thin", put a down-payment on liposuction; Joe, the victim, buys her purging drugs.) Garner offers a pre-emptive riposte for this criticism: the domineering Singh starred in all her life dramas—it's time to shine the spotlight on her victim(s). It seems natural to sympathise with this, particularly as the reader witnesses the grief-stricken mother's harrowing pleas to Garner to pay homage to her son. But there's much to suggest limited self-scrutiny and an unwillingness to discard prejudices and see the wider picture.

Singh's father implores Garner to write a book on the failings of the system to help his daughter, describing the attempts he made to have her admitted into psychiatric care. His dialogue is subtly ridiculed and given little authority or investigation. Nor is the possibility entertained that psychiatric evidence could be plausible. In the spirit of tabloid sensationalism, Garner focuses squarely on individual agency: the killer, the failure of individual 'friends' to intervene; when literary journalism offers an opportunity to expand beyond this. While she offers an impassioned insight into the suffering of the victims, she adds little to our understanding of society or humanity. Nowhere does the book attempt to gain insight into the forces that contributed to Singh's pathological demise. "I was not interested in hearing the details of her psychiatric condition . . . *I wanted to ask her about her soul*" [my emphasis].

As this suggests, *Joe Cinque's Consolation* is in many ways a record of Garner's own journey from secular libertarian to conservative moralist:

> *Tout compredre, c'est tout pardonner.* When I came upon this maxim . . . in the 1960s I extravagantly admired it and took it as a guide. Only a few years later, though, I read Thomas Manne's *Death in Venice*, and found that his character Aschenbach scorns what he calls the 'flabby humanitarianism' of the say-

> ing. I hated seeing my treasure of wisdom scorched by his offhand contempt. Now, though, I wondered if I ought to be wary of allowing oneself to 'understand' so readily . . .

One of the values of the book is the way it sensitively documents how grief can strip us of our highest ideals, as it does to Garner. (The grieving Mrs Cinque becomes hostile—against her reasoned judgement—towards Indians. Garner writes that grief has estranged Mrs Cinque "from her own beliefs, her intelligence, her generosity, her decency—from her own best self".) And towards the end Garner, interviewing the murder trial judge, feels "the self-righteous anger seeping out of me". Still, the bulk and sway of the book seduces the reader away from ideals of reason and understanding and towards impulsive judgement:

> What is 'simple wickedness'? . . . Was there ever such a thing, or did it die with the arrival of psychiatry?
>
> Popularly, being 'judgemental' is ill thought of and resented . . . I was hanging out for a judgement to be pronounced on such a woman.
>
> In another country or a different era, she would have been hanged for this.

So would Garner for writing a book. There's a zero-tolerance, anti-intellectual zeal implicit in some of this book's sleight-of-hand 'reasoning'. Slipping without caveat between reportage and commentary, it spins one case and hearsay into an implied 'trend' and then mounts an emotive case against that (alleged) trend. This *Canberra Times* editorial is a typical response:

> Garner's perfectly logical opinion of the young people is shared by most parents I know and one of the most valuable aspects of her book. The tue [sic] life of young people in Canberra, especially the student fraternity, is exposed in this book . . . the only rationale behind this killing was the rationale of a narcissistic personality living in an amoral universe. Only in the amoral universe inhabited by Singh can the perpetrator become the victim . . . This dovetails nicely with extreme feminist rhetoric which is also fixed on victimhood. Deep down, most of us still think that the truth can be found in terms of good and evil . . . Singh and many of her contemporaries just don't get this, living in their amoral infantile world . . .

The *Herald Sun*'s Andrew Bolt has also used *Joe Cinque's Consolation* to claim that "cultural elites" are engaging in a "whitewashing of evil and blackguarding of those who fight it". A search of media items on the book throws up fifty-one relevant pieces, with only four critical items, including a *Courier-Mail* review whose essential criticism was that the book was "unmoving", and a thoughtful but limited critique by a student in the *Canberra Times*. Yet the latter was characterised by a later *Canberra Times* editorial as an "attack", a "bizarre anti-Garner diatribe" with "the most outrageous hyperbole" from a member of the "legion of the gullible waiting in the wings to attack Garner". As I write, this legion is still waiting.

Garner might argue that subjective and 'instinctive' perspectives are valid for what she calls 'reportage'. It's tricky to suggest that a work of non-fiction (or its reception) should be 'regulated' in the same ways as newspaper journalism. Codes of ethics for literary journalism have been devised in the US, though in Australia publishers are not obliged to adhere to them. But recent books—Simons's *The Meeting of the Waters* and Marr and Wilkinson's *Dark Victory*—show that it is possible for literary journalism to advance a strong position without losing the moorings of fairness and balance, reason and empirical validation—that problematic notion, 'objectivity'.

Katherine Wilson is a former co-editor of Overland.

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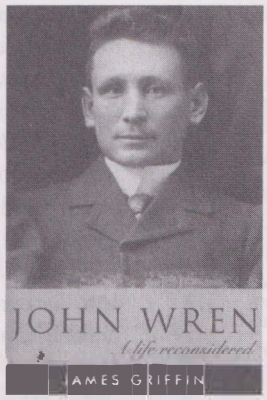
A Legend Rehashed

PAUL ADAMS

James Griffin: *John Wren: A life reconsidered* (Scribe, $60)



In this biography James Griffin revisits the legend of gambler millionaire and local Melbourne identity John Wren. Wren was a public figure about whom little was known, but much was rumoured. He came from poor Irish Catholic origins, rising through his various sporting and gambling enterprises to become a self-made millionaire and behind-the-scenes Labor Party 'fixer'. Griffin sees Wren as a victim of anti-Catholic sectarianism, both from communist and protestant sources, and at the beginning of his book thoughtfully quotes E.G. Theodore's warning about the 'propagandist' effects of sectarianism and its roots in ignorance, prejudice and ill-will.

Given Griffin's concerns about sectarianism one might expect that he would see his task as allowing a more generous post-Cold War John Wren to emerge, on his own terms, reconsidering both Wren's foibles and achievements. In defending Wren, however, Griffin appears to spend most of his time on what amounts to a search and destroy mission against Frank Hardy and in particular against the 'calumnies' of his book *Power Without Glory*, based fictionally on the Wren legend. Griffin proceeds to write an extended critique of Hardy's book, clinically, if not obsessively following its narrative, nitpicking and bickering with Hardy over the misdemeanours of the central character John West, who Griffin believes directly equates with John Wren.

It becomes obvious from the outset that by treating *Power Without Glory* as a work of non-fiction rather than fiction, Griffin has largely missed the point. It seems somewhat disingenuous to hound Hardy for supposed lies about Wren when Hardy went to considerable pains on the publication of the book, during the trial that followed and for most of his life to assert that the book was a work of 'composite fictionality' with considerable portions simply made up.

Hardy was arrested in 1950 by the police for writing *Power Without Glory* and brought before the Third City Court and denied bail. The prosecution alleged that John Wren's wife, Ellen Wren, was portrayed in the book as Nellie West, a composite fictional character, who had an illicit affair with Bill Evans, a bricklayer, and a child born to him out of wedlock. However in the public mind if the charge of criminal libel which was brought against Hardy concerned Ellen Wren, the trial was always a confrontation between Hardy and John Wren, since it was Wren, if the close identification between Ellen Wren and Nellie West was true in the book, who was seen as the more defamed. Doubtlessly, Wren's failure to prosecute Hardy in his own right severely weakened his case and the defence argued successfully that he was "hiding behind his wife's skirts", unwilling to put his reputation to the test of legal argument.

Hardy's trial would have lasting effects on Wren's public image and how he would later be received in the ways that Griffin finds noxious and wants to rebuff. There is no doubt that there is much of importance to reveal about Wren before the writing of *Power Without Glory*, but Wren gained national prominence during the trial and it is for this reason that the trial remains critical in any historical appraisal of Wren. It would lead the public and the media increasingly to make the identification between the real John Wren and the evil capitalist John West of *Power Without Glory*. Newspaper reports before the trial were characteristically non-committal and ambivalent about this identification. This would change after the trial with Hardy's successful defence of the charge and with the media and the public increasingly making the identification.

In a time of Cold War the charge of criminal libel had an overt political character, emphasised by the fact that it was the State rather than the Wren family that prosecuted Hardy. Not surprisingly, this only added fuel to the view that the trial was less about defending the honour of a good Catholic woman and more about the prosecution of Cold War politics against communism in the State of Victoria. By 1950 the law was an anachronism: criminal libel had not been used in the state of Victoria for thirty-five years. The law dated back to 1295 where it had been applied by the Stuarts to suppress writing which might cause sedition or "great peril and mischief" to come

to the realm. It had been used to imprison Daniel Defoe, the author of *Robinson Crusoe*, and John Wycliffe, the translator of the Bible into English, who had advocated the redistribution of church lands to peasants. Under civil libel, Wren could only claim for financial compensation and place injunctions on further publication of the book, but criminal libel allowed the prosecution to seek imprisonment and a lengthy jail sentence. Truth could not be used as a defence. Even if Hardy could show that Ellen Wren had slept with a married man, this would have no bearing at all on the outcome. Hardy needed to demonstrate that his book had not "breached the public peace", a difficult task for a Communist at the start of the Cold War. He could reasonably expect the legal system to deal harshly with a Communist agitator. Before the publication of the book, a string of Communists had been jailed on sedition charges, including the Secretary of the Communist Party, Lance Sharkey.

However, if the risks for Hardy were considerable, there were also significant risks for Wren. If the prosecution failed, Wren risked that his reputation would be tied to the conduct of the trial, and in particular, to the anti-democratic character of the charge of criminal libel, as well as the 'logical' conclusion in the popular imagination that if Hardy was innocent, then Wren must be guilty. Wren could have achieved more by using the mechanisms of free speech available to him: by using the substantial political support and means he already had as a wealthy businessman, through the newspapers and sympathetic parliamentarians who might be prepared to speak on his behalf. Instead he chose to use barbaric anti-civil-libertarian laws, threats of incarceration, and what amounted to a legal sledgehammer to squash a gnat. This would not endear him to the public or the jury presiding over the criminal libel case. Ironically, if he sought to distance himself from the fictional John West of *Power Without Glory*, a bully boy who got his own way by either removing or silencing his political enemies, his actions and those of his allies showed he could behave in a manner similar to the fictional John West. And if he could do so in the court case, then perhaps the rest of what was implied in *Power Without Glory* might also be true. Wren lacked insight into how to best defend himself, but he must also take responsibility for his own sectarianism. Griffin's defence of Wren is that he proceeded with the prosecution because Hardy's book was a "subversive Communist plot". The rather lame excuse that "there would have been little satisfaction in a civil suit" because Hardy was a man of straw without money is revealing of the blinkered mindset occupied by Wren, which led to this public disaster. It also reveals Griffin's inability to distance himself from the arguments of his subject, no matter how flawed.

Griffin's own particular brand of sectarianism warps his narrative in various ways. He is so intent on getting Hardy, he declares unilaterally at one point that Hardy is worthless as a "source" of information. This is a stunning declaration and, if this is indeed so, why does Griffin then use Hardy as an authoritative source against Manning Clark and communist Ted Hill? It seems it depends on how the evidence is being used and whom it is being used against. Griffin further embarks on what appears to be a serial exercise of misquoting of various left-wing notables in order to establish easy knock-down targets, including Manning Clark, Ian Turner, Leonie Sandercock and Ian Syson. Clark's observation that Wren "preyed on his comrades in the boot factory by opening a betting book on horse races", in Griffin becomes Wren was "a preyer on humanity". Turner and Sandercock in *Up Where Cazaly?*, far from asserting unreservedly that Wren was responsible "for initiating illegal player payments and thus the professionalisation of football" make it clear that these 'rumours' were only 'suspicions' and 'allegations' of the day. Ian Syson's publication of a list of real and fictional identities in *Power Without Glory* is construed to mean that he must accept that *Power Without Glory* is "basically historical fact", although nowhere does he make this statement. Griffin also deals differently with pro-Wren and anti-Wren evidence, particularly when it does not fit his cleanskin view of Wren. While Montague Grover's *Lone Hand* article on 'Wren and his Ruffians' and *Power Without Glory* are castigated, Hugh Buggy's *The Real John Wren*, comprising 269 pages of unreferenced material which John Frow has observed is "even more novelistic than *Power Without Glory*", is accepted as uncontested 'research'. Labor MLA Tunnecliffe, it seems, is not making a point when he is reported saying Wren had completely corrupted him and caused him to lose all his ideals but had rather, according to Griffin, become "maudlin in old age" and "pathetic". Griffin can't even get Hardy's place of death right, which he records as occurring in the "bayside suburb of Elwood" rather than in rented accommodation in the inner suburb of Carlton.

There is no doubt that John Wren will continue to fascinate researchers. Clearly any serious history of Wren would need to pay close attention to the criminal libel trial, the reasons for its instigation and the way this trial would be a pivotal event in shaping Wren's later historical reception as a biographical figure. But whatever the case, the uncovering of a more robust picture of Wren will require a greater reach than can be offered by a sectarian history.

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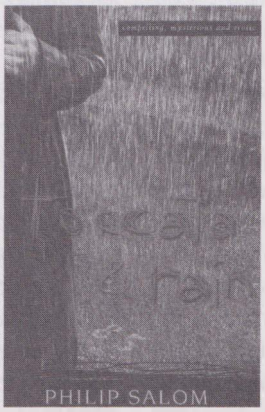
Stumbling Towards Tentative Triumphs

DEBRA DUDEK

Philip Salom: *Toccata and Rain* (FACP, $24.95)

Craig Silvey: *Rhubarb* (FACP, $24.95)



Toccata and Rain and *Rhubarb*, two novels published mid-2004 by Fremantle Arts Centre Press, are mysteries, insofar as they rely on the discovery of a secret which explains the protagonists' actions and defences. Both of these novels examine the ways in which the body protects the self against trauma, and it is the tension of uncovering these traumas that propels the narratives. If you enjoy a story that investigates the workings of memory, if you are not afraid to bear witness to a world in which humans are both intensely generous and frighteningly cruel, and if you don't mind a little poetry mixed in with your prose, then pick up these novels. Both novels open with the unknown, crescendo towards revelation, and—like their protagonists—stumble towards tentative triumphs.

In *Toccata and Rain*, Philip Salom's second novel, Simon—who was/is Brian, builder of towers, lover of Sarah and Carol, husband of Margaret—is the reluctant and recalcitrant hero, who exists in a fugue state, in which he cannot remember his life as Brian until he undergoes hypnosis. If Brian is an advertising executive who yearns to be, and indeed is, an artist, then *Toccata and Rain* may well be a novel that longs to be, and perhaps is, an extended sonnet sequence. This book, however, is not one that suggests an either/or ontology. Instead, it investigates divided subjectivity and postmodern play, which includes unravelling etymological layers of words even as they explicate the complexity of the protagonist's identity. For example, a fugue is a polyphonic composition that relies on harmony. In psychiatry, fugue picks up its Latin root *fuga*, which means 'flight' or 'to flee', and which is a flight from one's own identity, often involving travel, all of which explain aspects of Brian's character.

It is the sonnet, however, that is the most overtly used device. The prose is peppered with poetry, and while the prose narrative is written in the third person, the poetry is written in the first person, from Brian/Simon's point of view, as though the poems should reveal an inner life or yet another side of him. More than two-thirds of the way through the book, the reader receives a partial explanation for this technique:

> amnesia equals loss of story. It is not story he needs to replace but poetry . . . Prose is the episodic 'and then' of narrative . . . Poetry is finding feeling and even the unsayable. These meanings. He needs the poetry to be whole again.

Unfortunately, this explanation is less than satisfactory because Brian/Simon neither reverts wholly to poetry nor seems to become whole. The sonnet is a historically loaded poetic form that many writers have tried to put to work in ways that resist its origins as a love poem, and in *Toccata and Rain* it operates as both the voice of a beloved recalling his lovers and the voice of the beloved analysing himself; in this novel, however, I am not convinced by the structured fourteen-line poem as a device that either finds feeling or says the unsayable.

Craig Silvey's first novel *Rhubarb* tells the story of Eleanor Rigby, a woman who moves through the world with Warren, her farting, seagull-hating, delinquent guide dog. The narrative flow of the novel

relies in part on the uncovering of a trauma that has caused Eleanor's sister to run away from home, Eleanor's mother to lose herself in the television, and Eleanor herself to go blind. The reader watches as Eleanor moves through her neighbourhood as though it was an extension of herself, but she does not reach towards intimacy with another person until she finds herself drawn to music via the male protagonist, Ewan Dempsey. The notes that Ewan caresses out of his cello urge Eleanor to his front door, and in turn, she bullies Ewan out of his hermit life. Before Eleanor arrives in his life, Ewan is a man who like Eleanor has metaphorically and literally created barriers to keep the outside world at bay. Neither character succeeds, but the process of becoming vulnerable, of allowing the body and the self to open to another is painful and frightening. Indeed, the turning point in the relationship between Eleanor and Ewan, the point at which Ewan gives Eleanor the gift of a song, is one of the most moving scenes in the novel. Silvey astutely portrays the relationship between Eleanor and Ewan as both healing and painful, a delicate balance that is, at times, beautifully unbearable to read.

He is less successful, however, at utilising experimental devices to play with prose and to move the novel towards poetry. The unnecessary capitalisation and the run-on words are a bit clunky, and they stop the narrative flow instead of creating the emphasis and movement he is trying to portray:

> And look, Eleanor, look: you've done it again. It's History repeating; the stuff your dreams are made of. You've runaway, for Distance. Before that, music could seep in and open you, gut you, uncover you. Before it had you held and spilling. And so you turned for a wayout, anywayout; for safety, sanctuary, somewhere.

This passage demonstrates some of Silvey's stylistic techniques, and examples of Eleanor's tendency to think of herself in third and second person but rarely in the subject position of 'I'. Silvey plays with the sound of the words 'I/eye' and represents Eleanor as literally blind as another layer of protection against a world that she no longer wills herself to see. While I enjoy the way the novel resists simplicity, I lament the ending, which defaults to a language of salvation that betrays the tension and complexity of the rest of the novel.

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The Stanzas Flow On

JOHN LEONARD

| Zoltan Kovacs: *Haymaking* (Homosapien Books, $14.95)

Zoltan Kovacs is a poet living in Canberra who has already achieved quite wide journal publication (including in *Overland*). The poems in this, his first, collection are atypical of much poetry published at the moment in that they are usually in stanzas, and often rhyme; this collection even features an impressive sestina, 'What we know of Hungary'. One particularly fascinating feature of the poems is the way that as a rule the sentences flow from stanza to stanza; such syntactical devices are rather neglected by poets at present.

These poems are also unusual in their strong interest in history, and what it means, rather than what we are told it means, which is what 'history' usually signifies. There are also interesting poems about love, relationships, old age and the natural world.

This is a very thoughtful collection and augurs well for Kovac's future work. Here are some samples:

The happy know that nothing else
Exists except to live,
The not-so always give
Themselves to something less.

—'Door to Door'

The old man and old woman kiss
In the park, on the path, openly.
A fullness of touch, a coupling
Of comforts and fearlessness.

—'Skin'

Below us the landscape spreads broken
By our farms, our redirections that open
New fields, reimbursing us for those tilled away.
The rain speaks softer than we have spoken.
Below us the landscape spreads: broken.

—'The Rain and the Hills at Wee Jasper'

Of arena detrius are our legacy, the black
To our purest white completely wrought.
We'll all disappear together and reconstitute
(After millennia) as a field of cautionary thought.

—'Current History'—about the Romans

John Leonard is the poetry editor of Overland *and not the anthologist.*

"THE COLOURED STONES/ OF MEMORY"

Colleen Z. Burke & Vincent Woods: *The Turning Wave: Poems and Songs of Irish Australia* (Kardoorair, $30)

This big anthology may seem to valorise a nineteenth-century Anglo-Irish style—romantic, idealistic, playful, and political—as a shaping force in Australian poetry. The inclusion of songs is important. There are many anonymous ballads that testify to an era before 'universal literacy' was legislated into a norm via the school system. *The Turning Wave* holds to an image of the poet as troubadour, news-bringer, socio-political witness, and kisser-of-the-Blarney-Stone. Poetry, in these pages, is an oral art that sings up a stormy history out of crisp black print. The unusual range of poets includes Brennan, Kendall, Lawson, Paterson, 'John O'Brien' (P.J. Hartigan) of 'Said Hanrahan' fame, Zora Cross, Buckley, McAuley, Roland Robinson, and, among contemporaries, Louis de Paor, Denis Kevans, John Kinsella, Jennifer Martiniello, Robyn Rowland. The inclusiveness is testimony to the vast tangled complex of Irishness that underwrites Anglo-Australian culture. Where else might the harrowing ballads of the atrociously treated Frank MacNamara ('Frank the Poet'), a convict of the 1830s, be readable in the same volume with an elliptical postmodern lyric by MTC Cronin? Where else might Lucy Dougan's rather exquisite contemporary subtleties be read hot-on-the-heels of Mary Gilmore's professional-populist chants from the early twentieth century; or Marie E.J. Pitt's less-known but affecting political ballad 'The Keening'? Such differences might be used to point to the different expectations readers have of poetry, not only in different historical periods, but across divergent social classes. The mix here should prove refreshing to any open-minded reader. The wide, deep research is admirable; the introduction is informative; the endnotes are detailed; and the editing is more than skilful, it's a strong patterning—perhaps the deliberate opening of a vein of melodious black-Irish lament.

Judith Beveridge: *Wolf Notes* (Giramondo, $22)

Much-praised (it's on four reviewers' best-of-2004 lists in last December's *ABR*) and prized (*Age* C.J. Dennis award; the Josephine Ulrick award) Judith Beveridge's third collection is about work. It's a modulated set of variations on the theme of hard graft. *Wolf Notes*, which offers many poems set in contemporary and historical India, begins with 'Bahadour', in which a young Nepali pedlar, who sells his (unspecified) wares from a bicycle, takes time out, at sunset, to fly a kite. "He does not think about the failing light,/ nor of how his legs must mint so many steel/ suns from a bicycle's wheels each day." His high-flying kite enables the boy to engage in personal sentiment, in nostalgia for a less-demanding time in his life—"some acre of sky within a hard-fisted/ budget." The poems of *Wolf Notes* take trouble to suggest what goes on in people's heads in moments of pause, in the midst of work. The writing has an old-world patina, a meditative and fanciful (and at times rather static) richness that goes with the kinds of working lives invoked, e.g. a crewman on a fishing boat, a carpenter's apprentice, a professional gambler, a saffron picker, a fabulously silken courtesan (no computer engineers, piece workers, telemarketers, or workplace trainers). The book's centrepiece, 'Between the Palace and the Bodhi Tree', is about the period in the life of Siddharta Gautama (a.k.a. The Buddha), sometime in the sixth century BCE, when the protagonist stepped out of the cocoon of his aristocratic existence and took to the roads in order to teach himself something. Despite two-thousand-plus years of doctrine and dogma, the poems of this sequence create Gautama's journey as if it were happening right now. They read as living acts of meditation and have a glinting latent humour. "To find the layers you must live in the litter,/ live like the flea, the louse, the botfly;/ don't live by the flower, live by the fetor." Beveridge's Gautama slaves away at his own salvation and *Wolf Notes* gives his hard slog 'fetor' and fertility: the intricate tropes and tempered cadences show us the high end of poetic crafting, but make it

seem easy—we know it's not. The book's title poem traces a moody journey from the condition of a chained dog to that of a less securely tethered lone wolf.

| Kevin Gillam: *Other Gravities* (Sunline, $25)

This is the fourth book published by Sunline, a West Australian press specialising in poetry; the editor is Roland Leach. It's well-designed; an easy-to-handle modestly sized hardback, with the poems laid out on heavy paper in type that is dark, clear, reader-friendly; and an elegantly plain, blurb-free dustjacket, with a good painting by Andrew Gilchrist that illustrates one of the book's keynote poems. As an object, this book has dignity without pomposity, and it's game: no-one has been conscripted to tell you how to read it. The poems are game and dignified also, and more besides. They evince a commitment to plain language, yet work to connect a reader's imagination with a kind of concretised dream-life in the Perth suburbs. That life, as evoked in the poetry, is kicked-back, summer-hazed, affective and sensuous: "even scissors in the right hands are sensual" is a line from a poem about hair, which is a topic here because "hair is so defining". The life, which is both familial and solitary, both sensate and reflective, coasts on feeling, sinks into rolling troughs of recall, and is on moody speaking terms with the surreal: "birds, sex like tox/ ic bloom, us two/ lying axo/ lotl style on/ the coloured stones/ of memory". Kevin Gillam, a freelance cellist (he also conducts, and teaches music in a high school) has worked his poetic form with the listening ear in mind. The poems read as if they'd been scored for baritone (a bit like those of Melbourne poet Ian McBryde); they sound their delicate concertos of embodied life with a gravity like that of a cello. These effects are—obviously—hard-won. *Other Gravities* has an emotional texture and a light, glancing wit, street-smart but neither crass nor predictable (the implied poet is its principal target). The minimalist style, whose ancestors might include William Carlos Williams and Raymond Carver, is shaded here for entranced reveries that are remindful of Henri Magritte's paintings, but seem new to this poetic genre.

| Jenni Nixon: *Cafe Boogie* (Interactive Press, $23)

The strongest of these poems tackle urban living—from the lower depths, upwards. Avoiding the money-&-bullshit end of town, they make vivid the cruddy vitality of Sydney's clubs and pubs; squats and public housing; fringe venues where non-commercial plays are staged (receiving mixed responses—see 'Alibi') and where poets perform, sometimes winging it, as do 'Angel & the Butch Balladeer' in the eponymous (very witty) poem. A homage to a grandfather collages evocative detritus—postcards from a First World War digger amidst the accelerating drift of post-Second World War lifeways. History is also shown via the gay scene and Mardi Gras—once a political march, now a tv special featuring "camera smiles/ sparkle for sale". Narrative poems, long and short (e.g. 'urban blight', 'living statues') are the book's best, with crunched-down syntax and some graphic images, plus trouble taken to nuance socio-emotional complexities: 'top sorts' is about a shower tea in a pub, as rowdy and rough as the post-industrial backwater where it's set—yet as poem it's fresh, poignant, memorable. The focus is strongly on women, as in, for example, 'elsewhere in the city', whose sharply drawn protagonists—young, rebellious, seeking poetry and/ or escape—are treated empathically, yet stay in the mind as emblematic good-timers who've partied a shade too long and hard. They're self-betrayers, but the hustling, hyped-up city has also used and abused them. Rue, in these poems, is extended into collective life: the twist-endings clarify the bitterness that comes after energy, money and/ or time have been spent on promises that entice and exploit but don't make good. The poems are equally lively on country matters—'visitor at home' won the 2002 Leonard Teale Performance Prize at the Gulgong (NSW) Henry Lawson Festival. It's a rousing portrait of a man who "understood the way of wars"—ex-RAAF, terminally defensive, unavailable or plain brutal to the wife and kids. *Cafe Boogie* is an emotionally literate trip through some of the small-and-larger-scaled battlegrounds of contemporary life; it's big-hearted enough to laugh at some of the furies driving it—and bounce on.

| miriel lenore: *drums & bonnets* (Wakefield Press, $16.95)

Miriel Lenore's new collection (her fifth) is impressive in its historical range—beginning in contemporary Belfast, these light-footed but incisive poems invite the reader to travel back to mid nineteenth-century Ireland; Ballarat in the 1850s; and the early days of William Booth's Salvation Army. The poems have an unemphatic conversational tone, but they're packed with suggestive phrases, and very tight. It's as if the poet were testing the capacity of a planed-

down lyric form against a question—how much history can be put into poems that practise informality as a craft in its own right? The book's first part, 'the land of macha' (Ireland) introduces its implied poet as a family-history researcher. The poems here involve a reader in the feelings and comparisons that arise from conducting such a project in a zone of ongoing war and in the disorientations of an outsider, ratting away in the Records Office at closing time, knowing it will be shut next day because of a march. The latter will take place under "ceremonial arches with their cannon crowns and bibles", while "army helicopters trap the town under umbrellas of noise". The ancestor, Elizabeth, whose life the researcher pieces together, is introduced gradually, almost as part of the Irish environment. Yet when Lizzie takes a ship to Australia at 17, alone, to work as a servant, the reader can experience it as an emotional wrench, the breaking of a circle that the book does not close (it's quite unromantic). The second part, 'the land of gold', traces Lizzie's goldfields life, and later her conversion to Salvationist. It illustrates the street-abuse that greeted the early Sallies, though not the editorial condemnation, put into orotund verbiage by an uneasy, hostile press. Still, *drums & bonnets* could make some readers grasp how democratic Booth's intentions were. The book shows its poet-historian making decisions about what happened in Lizzie's largely unknown life---decisions based on fragments of documentary evidence. The reflexiveness cuts deep, and is very fine.

| Andrew Peek: *The Calabar Transcript* (fip, $21.95)

The short, stylised, highly wrought poems of the first two sections, 'Beneath Lion Mountain' and 'Zip!' establish a post-colonial theme—the impact of the West on Africa; they indicate the reach of history by juxtaposing long-past and contemporaneous events and practices, including the slave trade, safari business, street-crime at lightning speed, the persistence of racism. A few poems in, the writing begins to evoke the vastness of Africa, land (Nigeria) and river (the Congo), weather and people, with fine expressive economy; poems are built towards spectacular last-line images that bring the distances close to a reader. "He stares past me, tracing banks,/ a few canoes, the huge sky/ beating off the water." Andrew Peek lived three years in Nigeria and *The Calabar Transcript* is his testimony to that country's strong, sun-fired and battle-toughened spirit, and to its long entanglement with the West. The mood is one of deepening sadness as touristic commercialisation (exploited by the few) and generic poverty (experienced by many) are inscribed on the former self-sufficiency of tribes and nations. Even so, a closing poem, 'Flowers in her hair', finds pride, tenderness, even hope in the civility of a young couple, and their children and garden. The third section has the same title as the book. It's a suite of lyrics in the voice of Oba Ovonramwen, a king of Benin in the late nineteenth century. His dealings with England, via "Mr Cyril Cornelius Punch", plus the politics of Oba's relations with local rivals, are potently sketched. The sequence sheds light, for a Western reader, on the role of a king in the historical Nigerian context—no figurehead, he had to be a politico, a diplomat, and also a chief, an embodiment of "the people", a mystical figure, warlord and shaman.

| Liz Winfield: *Too Much Happens* (Cornford Press, $19)

The opening poems, with their seeming casualness, their down-home slang and light touch, don't prepare a reader for how deep and how far this diabolically well-sequenced collection of lyrics goes. Or for its originality, the swiftness and subtlety achieved. 'Suburban Mother; Pubescent Daughter & Holy Ghost: Son' is a vignette of togetherness that makes you feel the fragility of the bonds connecting its family trio; the role-playing that's being attempted—"the mother with her/ university brain/ and grade three education/ has the look/ of cryptic crosswords/ with company"—plus the solitude of the afflicted, gifted son, and the banal self-harm towards which an unseen but palpable social milieu is nudging him. He'd probably be 'managed' by a health service; yet this sinuous, sinewy lyric (thirty-three very short lines) is a holy and unholy psalm to defiance—while recognising the certainty of limitations, it transmutes these emotionally; writes them in a many-coloured light that a reader can experience as impassioned. "We all have dreams/ defined by boundaries/ as simple as sailing/ as far as the edge/ but this is not/ the end"—these lines hint at the arc of the book's journey, and these—"dead mouse on the floor/ the perfectly placed still life/ don't give it a human face"—may hold a nuance of the tell-it-like-it-is directness by which these poems speak to a reader's imagination. The 'I' of lyrical poetry can be occupied by any reader. In these poems, Winfield's 'I' is a well-hinged doorway into realms opened by indi-

vidual words (and by the syntax, in which effective shifts of register and tone are continual events). Yet this 'I' is materially embodied, socially anchored, grounded in the give-and-take of raising kids; being a lover, friend, performer; coping with physical pain; and (barely) getting by financially. Thus, the 'I' of the poems is also ironic, but its irony "is not a game"—that's to say, irony is a strong feeling-tone, one among others, that the poetry cultivates, but doesn't depend on. This Tasmanian woman, who was born in 1964 and has "a genetic auto-immune disease so rare that it doesn't have a name, only a description", knows how to create the inwardness (Hopkins called it the inscape) that makes a lyric poem ignite a spark all its own. That gift, of art or will, is really about as rare as the aforementioned illness. So is the absorbing experience of reading this book. The quotidian life of a former mining town, semi-rural, near mountains, often cold, becomes a corridor in which time slows down—you start to hear its pulse from somewhere inside your own body while you're reading, i.e. listening to this poetic voice—its warming variety of tones; the cool precision of its phrasing.

| Judith Wright: *Birds* (NLA, $24.95)

Salutations to the National Library! This magnificent-looking book reproduces Wright's 1962 collection, *Birds*, in its entirety; illustrates it with full-colour paintings from an historical register of fine artists including Neville Cayley, Lionel Lindsay, Betty Temple Watts and Hardy Wilson; and adds five poems from Wright's later volumes. Wright's daughter, Meredith McKinney, introduces the poems and gives them a provenance: the sunlit breakfast table at Wright's 1950s home in Mt Tamborine, Queensland (she shared it, de facto, with Jack McKinney and their child Meredith), with rainforest and other birds coming down to feed from the window ledges. *Birds* may have helped to popularise Wright's poetry; certainly a respectful, if domestically oriented article in the *Australian Women's Weekly* followed, within two years of *Birds*' publication. The poems read as lightly conceived; highly (even offensively) anthropomorphic; and informed by a rather taken-for-granted Judaeo-Christian ethos—maybe it's the latter that imparts a somewhat heavy spirit. Timeless classics these are not, but there's one excellent poem, 'Extinct Birds', and many solid, striving ones. If popular magazines have changed in forty years, so has poetry, and this early stab at environmentalist writing has, in the light of Wright's national-monument reputation, an admirable, fascinating and irritating compulsiveness. Changes in knowledge about birds, in ways of studying and writing them, mark it as an historical as well as an aesthetic document.

Kerry Leves is a NSW poet.

Antidote to Confusion

DAMIEN KINGSBURY

| John Martinkus: *Indonesia's Secret War in Aceh* (Random House, $32)

The province of Aceh at Indonesia's north-western tip has always been the site of fierce resistance to outside domination, where a culturally cohesive, proud and devout Islamic population has asserted itself in opposition to colonialism since the first Portuguese forays of the sixteenth century. The Dutch discovered this to their chagrin when their invasion of 1873 resulted in thirty years of total war, another nine years of guerrilla war and then sporadic anti-Dutch attacks right up until the Japanese occupation of 1942. The Japanese then felt the wrath of the Acehnese and when they left in 1945 the Dutch, returning to the rest of their colony, did not even attempt to re-occupy that territory.

A series of betrayals about the status of Aceh within the Indonesian state led to rebellion under an Islamic banner for a decade from 1953. The lie of 'special autonomy' and the economic pillage of the province by Jakarta led to the raising of the independent banner again from 1976; a struggle that continues to this day. As locals will tell you, opposing outsiders is a tradition handed down from generation to generation.

John Martinkus is one of the few journalists to have spent much time in Aceh and to immerse himself in its history, which one must understand in order to comprehend recent and current events. Martinkus made his name as a journalist covering

East Timor, in particular the independence ballot of 1999. His first book, *A Dirty Little War*, was the best to come out about that period, and he drew heavily on his extensive personal experience and inside knowledge, placed against a factual background. *Indonesia's Secret War* employs a similar technique and is as successful in this as his first book. In large part, Martinkus relies again on simply being there and being able to convey his raw experiences. He enjoys a gift for clear and simple expression. In particular, Martinkus conveys a very real sense of his own occasional fear, as anyone in such a situation must experience. But he plays this lightly. He does not labour us with the shocked sense that one has of travelling in a dangerous place, without sleep, nerves shot, even though he could have done so; the tone remains measured.

Martinkus also has a sense of detail and it is his talking to the Acehnese who live with the daily experience of conflict, death and fear that creates such a complete picture.

Based on my own experience of Aceh, Martinkus's writing is equal to or more accurate than anything I have read to date. In this, it is a suitable antidote to much of the confusion and apologia that passes for informed commentary on the place.

There is no doubt that Martinkus's persistence reflects a quiet, if steadfast bravery. Going back into Aceh, knowing one is banned and that a similarly adventurous colleague (Billy Nessen) was at that time running for his life in the jungle, requires courage. Martinkus does go back though, in part because he knows it is a good story in conventional media terms, even if it has been little covered in Australia and the West generally. Official Indonesian cover-up, restrictions on the media and Western complicity are importantly all detailed here. Through such parallels, Martinkus invokes the memory of East Timor and the US experience in Vietnam.

More than for just a 'good story', Martinkus goes back because he sees a terrible wrong being committed and, in the best tradition of journalism, believes that only greater public awareness can alter this course of events. Martinkus treads a path that many contemporary journalists, looking back on the work of their lives, will regret they had not followed.

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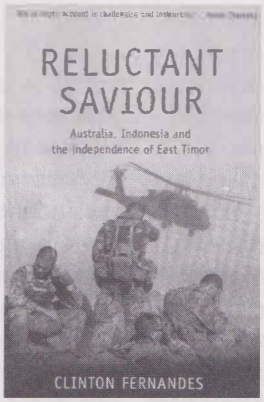
Canberra's Crimes in East Timor: a prosecution from below

MAX LANE

Clinton Fernandes: *Reluctant Saviour: Australia, Indonesia and the independence of East Timor* (Scribe, $22).



Scribe Publications is to be commended for publishing its series of short books which provide the opportunity for a writer to present a complete argument for a point of view in a form where we are all encouraged to read from beginning to end in one go. Clinton Fernandes is to be commended for making use of this opportunity in such an effective way. Fernandes' effectiveness is not just a result of his concise and accessible writing but of his analytic approach to Australian foreign policy in relation to East Timor.

When talking about relations between Australia and Indonesia Fernandes recognises that there are both two Australias and two Indonesias. His brief exposition of Indonesian history, the coming to power of Suharto's dictatorial New Order and its relationship with the Australian government and the Jakarta lobby demythologises the whole idea of 'national interest'. It also demythologises the idea that the Jakarta lobby—officials, academics and journalists who have fought for close relations with the New Order government and its Armed Forces—is some kind of traitorous grouping betraying the 'national interest'. Fernandes argues that this 'lobby' was also defending the 'national interest' but the national interest of their Australia—of big capital and bureaucratic elites—and not the 'national interest' of us.

Fernandes draws out this picture in his first chapter but comes back to this basic framework in Chap-

ters Four and Five when he deals with the role of mobilised public opinion in determining foreign policy. The essence of his argument is that mobilised public opinion in the first weeks of September, 1999, "forced [the Australian government] to turn against an ally [Jakarta] it had supported even after the victory of the independence forces had been announced" in August 1999. Chapter Four, where this history is presented, follows a devastating prosecution of Howard's and Downer's support for its Indonesian ally in Chapter Three.

Fernandes destroys a myth that has been propagated by both the Howard Government and some on the left. This is that the Howard Government had always planned the military intervention in East Timor. Howard and Downer like to claim that they are responsible for the liberation of East Timor. Some on the left argue that the arrival of Australian troops in East Timor was always a part of a planned Australian takeover of East Timor: the same view held by the ultra-right elements in the Indonesian elite.

Fernandes provides a blow by blow account of the activities of Prime Minister Howard and Foreign Minister Downer during 1998 and 1999. This evidence could only result in any jury coming to an unanimous verdict of guilty to charges that the Howard and Downer policy was aimed at supporting and covering up for the Indonesian Armed Forces, even after the East Timorese people had voted for independence. Fernandes backs this up with more data showing what military preparations were actually underway in Australia prior to the 1999 decision to intervene on behalf of East Timor: namely, preparations to evacuate foreign witnesses of the militias' and the Indonesian Armed Forces' violence. Again the analytical key is the recognition of the existence of two Australias and two Indonesias.

In his final chapter, Fernandes discusses how the 'us' in Australia can continue to play a role. Australian activists can initiate in Australia "citizen-initiated arrests, prosecutions [of visiting officials] and civil suits" against Indonesian military officials guilty of war crimes. They can campaign for the cancellation of the foreign debt that cripples the Indonesian economy. Fernandes also calls for an end to all contact with the Indonesian Armed Forces while they remain a tool of repression.

The argument is clear and the evidence presented in this short book is abundant. Everybody should equip themselves with this evidence today and use it to counter the attempts of Howard and Downer to claim responsibility for a policy that they in fact fought to avoid. Their claim to have liberated East Timor is an insult to the long struggle of the East Timorese people, the Indonesian democrats who succeeded in overthrowing Suharto and the Australian people who mobilised in September 1999.

I wait for Fernandes' full study of this history and hope he turns to examine the specific issues of Australia's ongoing relationship with East Timor: Timor Sea oil and gas, economic development aid, war reparations, and visa, travel and work access to Australia.

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The War against Iraq: then and now

CLINTON FERNANDES

Andrew Wilkie: *Axis of Deceit* (Black Inc., $29.95)

John Martinkus: *Travels in American Iraq* (Black Inc., $24.95)

Over the past few years, Andrew Wilkie has been on a steep political learning curve. He has written an informative but highly contradictory book that reflects his political trajectory, itself very much a work in progress.

As most readers of *Overland* will know, Wilkie is a former Lieutenant Colonel in the Royal Australian Infantry Corps who was employed as an intelligence analyst in the Office of National Assessments. He resigned from the ONA on 11 March 2003, days before the start of the ground war against Iraq. The Director-General of ONA and other servants of state power immediately claimed that Wilkie knew very little about Iraq or terrorism, and was therefore not well placed to comment authoritatively on either subject. Accordingly, Wilkie refutes their claims by going into details of centrifugal tubes, radiological

weapons and other arcane matters. He also spends two chapters explaining what the intelligence community looks like from the inside.

Wilkie provides valuable anecdotes throughout the book. In one, Hugh White of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute offers his expert opinion that the US would not go to war with Iraq. (White, incidentally, wrote several strategic assessments during his time as Deputy Secretary of the Department of Defence. The most prominent of them was written just days before the Asian financial crisis of 1997. He never saw that one coming either.) In another, Wilke explains how easy it is to be an intelligence analyst. All he had going for him was bad knees (making infantry work difficult) and a moderate understanding of strategic issues. Readers should take note—intelligence personnel have no special talents compared to the ordinary citizen. All that is required to make sense of the world, as Noam Chomsky has pointed out elsewhere, is Cartesian common sense and good information.

So far, so good. But Wilkie is seriously mistaken in his attitude to the United Nations. He calls it "a special case . . . a body that represents the community of nations. For this reason, the independence of the Secretary-General and his First Report Officers should be inviolable". Could this be the same body which has acted since 1991 as an instrument of US strategic policy? For more than a decade, it gave legal authority to economic sanctions against Iraq, resulting in the deaths of a large number of Iraqi children. Its resolutions were deliberately framed in the negative: inspectors were required to certify that Iraq did *not* possess weapons of mass destruction. The inspections therefore went on indefinitely, because there was no way that Iraq could ever satisfy a negative test. In December 2002, when Iraq was desperately trying to avoid war, it submitted a 12,000-page declaration on its chemical, biological and nuclear activities. The US stepped in and confiscated large portions of the document. The UN's response was to look the other way.

Wilkie is mistaken when he writes that UNSCOM was "abruptly and prematurely withdrawn by the charismatic Australian diplomat Richard Butler because of concerns about Iraqi non-cooperation". In fact, UNSCOM was withdrawn to fit in with the US's bombing timetable in December 1998.

Another problem with *Axis of Deceit* is Wilkie's frequently expressed wish to win the War on Terror. He does not seem to understand that its purpose is to make the public accept material sacrifices while supporting whatever imperial adventure the ruling class deems necessary overseas. Wilkie does not challenge this ideological justification for US power projection.

Turning now to the period after the invasion, John Martinkus writes of his *Travels in American Iraq*. With his new book, he confirms his status as Australia's best foreign correspondent.

The book's explanation of the origins of the violence in Fallujah is wort0h the purchase price alone. In contrast to obscurantist clichés about the 'cycle of violence', it allows us to understand that there are five leading families in Fallujah. The book provides a voice to a member of one of them, Sheikh Raje, described as a well-dressed man with gold-rimmed sunglasses, a tailored overcoat, a satellite phone and a late-model Opel. According to Raje:

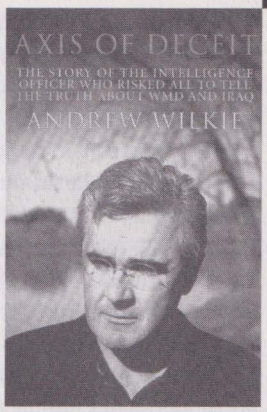
> When Baghdad was falling on April 9, the US asked to come in peacefully without fighting. Most of the sheikhs met the US and gave them their support. They met with them and talked peacefully. Then the US forces entered Fallujah . . . after the agreement they had made to stay out of the town. They entered and took the school as their base . . . The conflict started when one of the US soldiers started looking through his binoculars. They think they are looking at the women. A peaceful demonstration against the presence of the US troops in the town had then turned violent when people began throwing stones at the US soldiers. The US soldiers responded with gunfire.

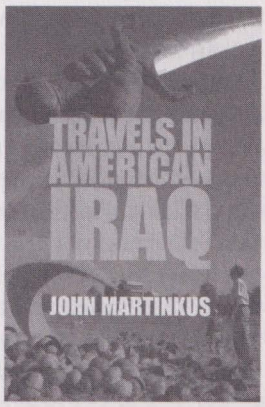
Twenty residents of Fallujah were killed and forty wounded in the US response. Sheikh Raje's father, a leading figure in Fallujah, eventually asked the local US commander, Colonel King, to leave Iraq: "You told us you are not occupiers, but you have to tell us a date. We welcome you, but you have to leave". Of course, as Martinkus notes, by the time the 82nd Airborne Division was preparing to rotate out of Fallujah in March 2004, its soldiers "had arrested and jailed all of the local leaders who had invited them peacefully into town in the first place". Fallujah has since become a symbol of resistance in parts of the Arab world. When one of Martinkus's interlocutors travelled to Jordan and Saudi Arabia he was offered free accommodation, meals and transport by people who heard he was from Fallujah.

Why is Martinkus able to provide such clear descriptions of the US's attempt to recolonise Iraq? There are several reasons, but one is worth stressing: Martinkus does not worship idols. He does not genuflect before a flag or a state. He is therefore able to acknowledge the concerns of Iraqis without first filtering them through the prism of US (or Australian) benevolence. By contrast, we encounter an American journalist named Stefan, who is firmly in the grip of the state religion. When Stefan asks the Iraqis what they want the US to do, they tell him, "We want them to leave today. We don't accept the occupation". Hearing this, a frustrated Stefan feels that their attitude is "blinkered and [does] not take into consideration that the Americans [are] trying to help the country and [want] to leave as soon as possible". How many Stefans do we have in the Australian media?

As Martinkus notes, when Western journalists heard rumours of torture at Abu Ghraib, many were ready to dismiss them as "inventions designed to discredit the Americans. Most journalists considered the sources of the abuse stories to be enemy combatants trafficking in disinformation. There was also the fundamental patriotism of most American journalists, which prevented them seeing what was happening". Instead, they acted as stenographers to the US military's spokesperson, Brigadier General Kimmitt, dutifully copying down his words and reproducing them as 'news'. Martinkus leaves the reader in no doubt that the Iraqis are fighting a war of liberation. In contrast to Kimmitt, who calls them "foreign terrorists", he points out that the resistance fighters are overwhelmingly "ordinary Iraqis who were starting to hate the Coalition".

Travels in American Iraq raises serious questions about the Kurds, who appear to have subordinated themselves to the US imperial project. Kurdish guards in Baghdad, we are told, are "chosen for their loyalty to their US employers". Kurdish fighters are now a trusted component of the occupation forces and Kurdish-majority areas appear to be US-backed enclaves under heavy CIA influence. It remains to be seen how future generations of Arabs will view the Kurds' decision to join the invading army. Small nations that hitch their fortunes to big powers do not have a good track record.





Martinkus has covered occupied peoples in East Timor, West Papua, Aceh and now Iraq. It would be very interesting indeed to see how (or if) he covers the longest-running occupation in the contemporary world—Palestine.

Clinton Fernandes is author of Reluctant Saviour: Australia, Indonesia and the independence of East Timor, *published by Scribe Publications in 2004.*

comment | **DALE ATRENS**

REQUIEM FOR A HEAVYWEIGHT

ON AN ICY April day in New York Dr Robert Atkins fell and hit his head. He died two weeks later without regaining consciousness. The reverberations of his fall are still being felt around the world. Atkins was the most successful diet guru of all time. His books have sold millions and the ancillary businesses, in the words of the immortal Arthur Daley, are "nice little earners" too. It is time the public realised some profit

from the Atkins phenomenon.

Millions believe that Atkins discovered the secret to easy weight loss by reducing carbohydrate intake. Sadly, their faith is badly misplaced. His only discovery was how to use the alchemy of human desperation to turn public fat into private gold. Nor is there anything easy about the Atkins diet. It does not curb appetite any more than any other unpleasant diet. A low-carbohydrate diet is boring and for a while you may eat less, but not for long. There's no magic in that. Low-carbohydrate or low-fat diets are much the same. Eating driven by any of the myriad nutritional ideologies falls flat on its face. It is unpleasant, ineffective in producing weight loss and possibly dangerous as well.

Atkins' low-carbohydrate gospel was not even original. The path to glory on which he strode was initially cleared by William Banting. Atkins built on this foundation by laying down some bitumen, adding six lanes, a median strip and toll booths. Significantly, Banting was a coffin maker by trade. More important, he was very fat. He was said to be so fat that if he fell over, before he could get up he rocked himself to sleep. Watching him negotiate the steep and narrow stairs in his shop provided endless mirth in the days before reality television.

In 1862 Banting, complaining of an earache, went to a distinguished physician named William Harvey. In the absence of any suppuration to be anointed or gangrenous limb to be amputated, Harvey engaged in some lateral thinking. He knew of Claude Bernard's discovery that the symptoms of diabetes may be reduced by cutting down on starchy and sweet food. For want of a rational prescription, he recommended this strange diet to Banting. Whether the earache was cured remains unknown, but Banting lost 46 pounds while eating mutton chops, bacon and other fatty foods. This established the unfortunate precedent that a single case-history appears to be proof enough for most people that a diet works.

Banting established yet another principle of the diet business. It is a distinct advantage if the guru has personally escaped from the death grip of fatness. Science is often seen as a boring footnote in comparison to thrilling anecdotes of the triumph of the human will over the forces of darkness. In 1870, years before Bert Newton and Oprah made tales of redemption a major industry, Banting became the first diet guru with his book *A Letter on Corpulence.* The term 'banting' for dieting persists in a number of languages. In the intervening years there have been many variations on the demon carbohydrate theme. The DuPont Diet, the Scarsdale Diet, Sugar Busters and the Zone are only a few schemes that have fattened the bank balances of entrepreneurs.

Anyone contemplating Atkins' or any other weight-reducing diet is entitled to know whether it works. The answer to this fundamental question, clear though it may be, is not widely publicised. One gets the impression that the weight-loss industry hopes that it will just go away. No industry welcomes information that is bad for business. The truth is that as the industry has thrived the public has become steadily fatter. If this were widely known it would be catastrophic for the diet industry. To fend off this commercial apocalypse the harsh glare of unsympathetic science is gradually being replaced by much more business-friendly marketing. The truth is becoming increasingly negotiable. It's business as usual.

The Atkins bunfight began innocently enough with some offhand comments by the mayor of New York. "I don't believe that bullshit—that he dropped dead slipping on a sidewalk." Mike Bloomberg also said that the ideologically correct food served by Atkins at his residence in the Hamptons was inedible. These rather bitchy remarks may have gone unnoticed had they not been accompanied by the Bloomberg bombshell. The mayor of New York said that Atkins was fat! This was like describing Santa Claus as a paedophile.

Bloomberg's bombshell was supported by a leaked autopsy report. Atkins was six feet tall and weighed 258 pounds. He wasn't just overweight or obese. According to US Government standards he was only a whisker away from morbid obesity, the most dreaded stratosphere of fatness. The autopsy also referred to myocardial infarction, congestive heart failure and hypertension. That Atkins died a wreck at the age of 72 is hardly a testimonial to the health-promoting effects of a low-carbohydrate diet. This awful slug might have been just barely sustainable, but the fact that the eminent diet doctor was also seriously porky was just too much to bear.

The Atkins machine went into full-bore damage control. Robert's wife Veronica demanded an apology from Bloomberg on the grounds that his statement had offended "millions of people who believed in Dr Atkins' work". Bloomberg declined the opportunity to remove the thorn in the side of faith-based medicine. It was not a matter of Bloomberg

having stated an untruth. He was accused of offending the legions of faithful. As the recent elections have shown, such apostasy can be fatal. It's like suggesting Jesus was a Jew.

The attempt of the Atkins industry to diminish the impact of the Medical Examiner's report was entertaining. They suggested that Atkins wasn't fat but that he had gained 60–70 lb while in hospital due to fluid retention. If true, Atkins would make the Guinness Book of Records for fluid retention and the hospital would be festooned with lawsuits. In any case, whether Atkins was really fat or just colossally waterlogged is unimportant. What matters is that many now believe he was fat.

What can we learn from this fool's opera? It is a strange sort of justice where a mighty industry is shaken to its foundations by the demise of one man. The fact that Atkins died rather young is unremarkable. Early death seems to be the fate of health gurus. The celebrated longevity expert Paavo Airola died of a stroke at 64. Another longevity expert, J.I. Rodale died of a heart attack at age 72 immediately after a television interview during which he stated that he would live to be at least 100. Nathan Pritikin, arch enemy of dietary fat, was riddled with cancer when he suicided at 69. George Ohsawa, the father of Macrobiotics, died from lung cancer at 73. Adele Davis, the high-protein activist who drank a quart of whole milk a day because she said that she had never seen an avid milk drinker die of cancer, died of cancer at 70. Stuart Berger, an ardent advocate of vitamins and exercise, died of a heart attack at 40.

The abysmal state of the weight-loss industry is indicated by the fact that nobody talks about scientifically valid results. Science has been replaced by marketing and truth management. For the most part, the effectiveness of diets is either assumed, or supported by testimonials from individuals who claim to have been saved. This shoddy practice remains the norm in this multi-billion dollar industry. There is nothing wrong with testimonials when they accompany valid scientific evidence. However, in the weight-loss business testimonials are a substitute for valid evidence and this has unfortunate consequences. The weight-loss industry is responsible for unprecedented misery and ill health.

The diet industry can only continue to exist by ignoring some obvious facts. Even when testimonials are the unvarnished truth they merely show that at some point in time someone lost weight. But as millions have discovered through hard experience, weight loss has an annoying ephemeral quality. Slender for Chrissy, fat again for Australia Day. For weight loss to be at all meaningful, it must last for a year at the very least. If it persists for two or three years, it may be the real thing. The sad truth is that for each diet success there are scores, even hundreds of failures. Victims are fatter than ever, depressed and out of pocket. Not surprisingly, the millions who are cheated and harmed don't make it into the ads.

It is astonishing that the Atkins diet has *never* been shown to produce long-term weight loss. Its validity is purely commercial, not scientific. The Atkins diet, like thousands of other diet scams, may produce some weight loss in the short term, but it just doesn't last. Study after study has shown that the lost weight returns, often with a vengeance. The vast majority of dieters end up at least as fat as ever, but with a new, undersize wardrobe. The tiny minority of dieters who achieve substantial and lasting weight loss seem to do it by working out a solution for themselves. Those who fall into the clutches of weight-loss merchants are almost certainly doomed to failure. Dieting is a product with a failure rate that in any other business would court a sojourn at Her Majesty's Pleasure.

Does weight loss promote good health? Reams of scientific data show that weight loss produces desirable changes in all sorts of risk factors such as blood pressure, glucose control etc. We are reminded of this daily. However, the bottom line here is very different from what the risk-factor improvements suggest. In a review of a large number of studies, a group of investigators from Harvard and Stanford medical schools showed that weight loss clearly *increased* mortality. The victims may have died with a splendid set of risk factors, but they died sooner than those who did not lose weight. In some cases the death rate among those who lose weight is more than treble that of those who do not. It is an indictment of the medical profession that this extraordinarily important finding is totally ignored by the apostles of salvation through slenderness. Whether most fatness is a health hazard is disputable. However, the alleged benefits of weight loss are chillingly clear. Better health through slenderness is a cruel illusion crafted by a rapacious industry that thrives on cultivating misery and selling bogus cures.

The Atkins debacle illustrates the amazingly shonky state of Public Health/Nutrition. Legions of august experts shriek that fatty foods are clogging our ar-

teries and killing us; worse, they are making us fat. Similar numbers howl with equal fervour that carbohydrates are killing us and fatty foods are our salvation. Opposite views cannot both be right, but they can both be wrong. The Public Health/Nutrition establishment will not admit the obvious. Generations of research has done nothing to define a 'healthy' diet. Nutritional fads change like hemlines. However, in contrast to hemlines, each nutritional change is said to be justified by the latest and greatest science. Nutrition has become a parody of science.

The debasing of science cannot be attributed to any one cause, but the drug industry is certainly a major culprit. Marcia Angell, the former editor of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, has detailed the extent to which academia and governments have been corrupted by drug-industry money. When the outcome of the 2004 presidential election in the US became clear, drug shares soared. The Bush administration has consistently defended the right of the drug industry to exploit the public. The US Food and Drug Administration which ostensibly protects the public interest has been gutted. Increasing numbers of scholars are publicly deploring the extent to which the health sciences are for sale.

Genuine scientific hypotheses can be falsified, but nutritional hypotheses defy this simple logic. There appears to be no evidence that would convince an anti-fat advocate that they are masticating up the wrong tree. Nor is there any evidence that would convince an Atkinite of the error of their ways. We are guinea pigs in monstrous and ill-conceived experiments to prove ideologies, not scientific hypothesis. We are victims of the same truth management that has convinced many that Iraq is on the verge of becoming a democratic Club Med.

The big man fell and he fell mightily, but the shockwaves from his fall may just shake a little sense into this depressing province of the Twilight Zone. If the hosannas and hustle of the weight-loss industry can be replaced by simple scientific analysis and even the most minimal ethics, Robert Atkins will have done us all a favour.

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comment | **ANONYMOUS**

THE POWER OF NONE

RECENTLY AT MY workplace we've been agonising over company 'culture'. So much so that concerned management commissioned a survey. Staff were encouraged to complete a multiple-choice questionnaire about how our culture is, and how we'd like it to be. Well, we did the survey, saw the results, and skated through a series of related meetings. So what did we learn about our workplace culture? In a nutshell: the company wants to be great, thought it was good, turned out to be shit.

Less lateral-thinking management might think that the way to relieve workplace malaise is to make workload commensurate with reward. More pay or less work—hell, a bit of both maybe. But with their raffish penchant for thinking outside the box, management instead held marathon meetings complete with statistics and multicoloured pie charts.

Some people might get cynical about this process. But not me. There's a certain cosiness, I think, to being commodified, formalised, standardised,

mathematicalised, and pie charted—quite frankly, it's nice to know someone cares. And that's the endearing part of the corporate cutting edge: you're a mathematical formula, yet still part of one big, fat, happy family.

I don't know about anyone else, but I'm at my best when rating things on a scale of one to 10, filling out forms, and engaging in feedback. My perfect workday is pie chart by midmorning, one to 10 by lunch, and multiple-choice questionnaire by midafternoon—all topped off by a draft 'vision statement' once a month. (More than once a month and it loses its orgasmic edge.) Strictly speaking, the statement isn't necessary—I could still go home a happy camper without it—but, damn it, it *is* kinda nice. It makes me feel like a contributor. It puts a smile on my dial. It replaces 'malaise' with 'marvelous' in my workplace vocabulary.

Not everyone was happy, though. According to the carpers, this meeting was merely an exercise in corporate doublespeak. This, I felt, was unfair. The meeting wasn't an attempt to obfuscate problems with jargon. It wasn't an attempt to relabel 'underpaid' and 'overworked', nor an attempt to persuade employees that their concerns were being heard, without actually addressing them. This wasn't feedback as the illusion of reciprocity, catharsis without cure.

Exactly what it was, I'm not sure. It just wasn't any of those things.

Predictably, at our ensuing vision-statement meeting some staff members charged into the fray with their kilts over their heads. These colleagues showed an admirable ability to enter into the spirit of it all. Rarely, I'm sure, have abstract issues of uncertain application and nebulous benefit been debated with such fervour.

At first the relevance of the vision statement wasn't apparent to me. But don't get me wrong: I was chuffed I'd been empowered to contribute to it. Indeed, on reflection I have great faith in the transformative power of our vision statement. Now that it's been hammered out, I expect things at work to improve exponentially. OK, it doesn't address pay or workload, but it *does* address other issues. For one thing, we'll have a vision, and what's more, we'll have stated it. The benefits of this are obvious, I think. (I know it'll be one less thing preying on my mind.)

As a whole, the vision meeting was a resounding success. Sure, you could see it as four-and-a-half more hours of your finite—and ever-dwindling—existence that you'll never get back, and some might even weep bitter tears for all the filing they could have done. But me? I'm all for it. When staff *ownership* is at stake . . . Well, you just try and hold me back, mister.

And let's talk about *ownership*, shall we? One of my favourite company words. (Admittedly, it had me flustered at first—I wondered if the company's founders had died and left me legal title to the 'How to Archive Emails' pdf.)

A thought-provoking concept, ownership. My provoked thoughts were as follows: what, in fact, did I own, and what did it mean? Did it mean I could exercise the traditional Australian rights of ownership—install a stereo in it, paint it, build a second storey on it? And if it was my *work* that I owned, well, when would the royalties start pouring in?

Because that's ownership, right? If you own it, you can sell it. And when it's sold, you get the proceeds . . . Don't you? After all, what kind of ownership involves none of the rights and perquisites of ownership? Why, without them it wouldn't *be* ownership.

And then the penny dropped. This was *corporate* ownership. A non-owning form of ownership. You know, the stakeholding you do when you're not a stakeholder.

A metaphor, dummy.

So I didn't actually *own* anything (not even the 'How to Archive Emails' pdf). But that doesn't mean that ownership is some kind of psychobabble buzzword bullshit. Far from it. I FEEL the ownership. It's coursing through my veins. I like to sip from the ownership chalice regularly—and it's just as well, because on what the company pays me, this is the only kind of ownership I'll ever know.

But I wasn't upset—as a metaphor, it was a cracker. Golly it was empowering.

And that's the other thing: I'm glad the company's so concerned with staff empowerment. Because I feel so fucking powerful it's not funny. Indeed, in true company style I've even turned it into an acronym: IFSFPINF.

But despite my X-ray vision and sudden liking for capes and skin-tight lycra, I'm still stumped. What to do with my newfound power? There are so many possibilities; I'm paralysed by choice. Soon I'm gonna start doing some of management's beloved 'rolling out'. And when I've had my fill of rolling out, I'm going to start 'actioning'. In fact, I might just action

my rolling-out-of-ownership implementation strategies. There. Now that's power!

All that roguishly dynamic verbiness has empowered me so much I might just edit another chapter. Phew! All that power has gone to my head. If the style manual didn't say otherwise, I might not italicise that word. Hell, I might not anyway!

Oh God, today italics, tomorrow the world. Fuck. Hold me back before someone gets hurt. Or as we in the world of the acronym like to say: HMBBSGH.

AN ALTERNATIVE VISION STATEMENT

- Don't pretend you're empowering me when you're only giving me the power to decide the tangential and irrelevant.
- Don't conceal unpalatable truths with jargon.
- Don't treat me like a statistic, then pretend we're the Waltons.
- Don't feed me shit, then pretend it's fairy floss.

It is easy from a conservative perspective to be triumphalist and from a progressive perspective to feel cast into the wilderness by the events of the Howard years. Neither view is accurate.

Mary Kalantzis, Australia Fair: Realities and Banalities of Nation in the Howard Era

To use Patrick White's image, (we) cling to the fringes of the self as we cling to the fringes of the continent, devoted to the preoccupation with, if not worship of, affluence. As Felix Wilfred argues, this creates "a weak person and a fragile culture" and tends to absolutise the status quo. I want to argue that, whatever may be said about the past, this is no longer a world view which will serve in the kind of world in which we now find ourselves.

Veronica Brady, The Spirit in Australia: Religion and National Character

An idea of the battle lines might be gleaned from the first case to test the Bracks Government's *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001*. This act prohibits the incitement of religiously based hatred, serious contempt or revulsion. The Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal found that persons associated with the Catch the Fires church had vilified Muslims. The Catholic and Uniting Churches and the Islamic Council have supported the decision and Labor's legislation. Pentecostal and evangelical churches and the Presbyterian Church have called for its repeal on the grounds that it prohibits free speech.

Peter Holding, Howard's Believers: Religion, Culture and the Future of Progressive Politics

There is still very little known about the world-view of people in remote Aboriginal microcultures . . . For the first time ever, (Burarra) collective histories were being concretised in writing and photographs at a local museum, or keeping place.

Paul Magin, Spirit Still Here: Spiritual Identity of an Aboriginal Microculture

The elder, Jonathon (not his real name), was waiting by the gate to greet us. When he saw Marco unloading a small fortune in camera equipment from his car, he frowned. "I thought you were just bringing a friend down here," he said. "Ah, he couldn't come, and the magazine rang up Marco to see if he could spare the time." I tried to catch Marco's eye. The charade continued for the rest of the day.

Linton Besser, Cult Busting: Inside a Media Beat-up

cover photograph by Ben Rushton, Fairfaxphotos

"The pit bull of literary journals"
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"A rewarding mix of ideas, idealism and tough-minded analysis"
| *The Age*

"One of Australia's loopy-Left little magazines"
| Editorial, *The Australian*

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