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disorder
dysfunction

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Right and below: *'REFUGEE ISLAND' streetsign-alteration-kit* by Mickie Quick

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editorial / **KATHERINE WILSON** & **NATHAN HOLLIER**

DISORDER/DYSFUNCTION

A RECENT STUDY by a team of psychologists in the US has reportedly concluded that political conservatism can be explained psychologically as a set of neuroses rooted "in fear and aggression, dogmatism and intolerance of ambiguity" (*Age*, 14 July 2003). The study's authors claim a need for certainty can lead people to "impose simplistic cliches and stereotypes" and "preach a return to an idealised past and condoned inequality". An attractive idea: it's tempting and perhaps comforting to explain John Howard's reactionary disposition towards war, corporal punishment, imprisonment of refugees and outlawing of homosexual marriage as something rooted in his troubled psyche, and therefore understandable, forgivable, even curable.

But could Howard's character instead be entrenched in his genetic make-up? Neurologists, genealogists and behavioural biologists have accrued powerful (and frightening) evidence that many of our character traits are encrypted in our DNA; that much of our behaviour is determined by biological fate. There is strong evidence of genetic and neurochemical bases of such tendencies as religious fanaticism, impulsive lying, *Star Trek* nerdism, computer geekdom and con artistry.

Either idea—the psychological or the biological—is dangerous ground to tread. For all its secular posturing, science, as Stephen Fleischfresser and Meryl Dorey note in this issue, can be firmly rooted in ideology and prejudice. The current diagnostic fads described by Fleischfresser are reminiscent of a time when science discriminated against people of a certain race or gender because they were considered biologically (and therefore irredeemably) inferior. This isn't to argue against the virtues of clinical diagnosis: bright people were often thought stupid before medicine recognised dyslexia or short-sightedness or ADD. But an increasingly reductionist tendency to pathologise traits opens up great moral questions about where responsibility lies. Could it be Howard's genes that make him lie so unashamedly? Is a certain set of neuroses responsible for him demonising people he doesn't understand? Or are social causes to blame?

Many articles in this issue focus on 'difference', and the ways Australians' perspectives of 'different people' (John Howard's "people like that") remain intransigent or ethnocentric. It seems ironic that now, in peacetime (for us, anyway), we are discussing the prospect of genetic preselection of humans, when even in the horrors of Nazi eugenics the benefits of diversity in a population were recognised, and sterilisation of the mentally ill was recommended against to preserve creative genestock. "If we could extinguish the sufferers of manic-depressive psychosis from the world," wrote Luxenberger in 1933, "we would deprive ourselves of an immeasurable amount of accomplishment and good, colour and warmth, of spirit and freshness." Schizophrenics, viewed as 'damaged' in our culture, are the shamans in some societies; they are honoured and coveted—offering insights and wisdom through their 'visions'. It has been argued that schizophrenic hallucinations formed the basis of many religious narratives (including Jesus walking on water); and their tendencies toward metamagical thought has brought us some of our greatest works of art, literature and cultural mythology.

As Fleischfresser's article and Katherine Gallagher's correspondence suggest, the big question is: can a species as flawed as ours be trusted to encode its own sins into the great genetic experiment?

DOUBTS ABOUT THE desirability of scientific advancement are less frequently aired in the corporate media than articles of the 'gee whiz' variety, where we all marvel at the benefits, or potential benefits, of scientific breakthroughs (especially by scientists 'right here in Melbourne'). What a contrast this marks with portrayals of social issues. As discussed here by Linda Jaivin, Margaret Simons and Philip Mendes, reportage and commentary in this sphere is characterised by a fearful, outraged gathering of skirts.

Fear is the great friend of the political conservative because it is the only popular basis for social inequity and repression. Conservative politicians, intellectuals and activists have always found, have often helped to create, 'frightening' people, either within our midst or, like some cosmic night prowler, waiting offshore to pounce at the opportune time. These ogres then make necessary, nay, imperative, that demands for social justice be deferred, that people shut up and do as they're told. Right now. This instant. From Catholics, communists and Keynesians to protesters, poor people and poststructuralists, there are always new objects of fear, new bases of insecurity and aggression, just waiting to be portrayed in an appropriately sinister light.

Fear is most easily mobilised in times of insecurity and when the object of fear is most obviously, most visibly different. These are, accordingly, heady days for our conservatives. How times have changed from when

they were just pimply, churchgoing campus nerds trying to enforce teenage curfews or ban public breast feeding. Not only are most people harder working and more economically insecure then ever, following twenty years of free-market forces placing downward pressure on wages and upward pressure on corporate profits, but a new object of hatred and loathing has appeared, more 'different' than Aboriginal land thieves, totalitarian unionists, Nazi feminists, dole bludgers, public toilet-lurking homosexuals and university thought police, an enemy so vile it both sets off bombs overseas and tries to worm its way onto our shores, a despicable alien even willing to drown itself just to embarrass us or to try to take advantage of our good nature, our laconic egalitarianism, our moral rectitude.

The enemies of fear are knowledge, experience and empathy. Under our present dispensation the long-term running down of the university sector, and particularly those parts of it concerned with understanding rather than making money from society, continues. Moreover, there is constant federal-government whingeing about the supposed bias of the ABC. The National Museum has had to be made politically correct. The Office of Film and Literature Classification is more openly censorious than in recent memory. Charities are threatened with losing their tax exemption status if they overtly criticise government policy. Even the corporate media is told who it can and can't call 'asylum seekers' and 'refugees'. Just filming the conditions in which asylum seekers are housed is for the most part illegal.

In addition to these attacks on the free obtaining and circulation of knowledge, long-term trends toward the destruction or tighter regulation of public and communal spaces and actions have also been heightened in recent years. What is lost is the capacity to meet and experience 'different' people. As Chris Vedelago and others make clear in this issue, a new, Americanised, paramilitary approach is being taken toward public expressions of dissent and even celebration. Protesters themselves increasingly become objects of fear and revulsion in a public space-free society of overworked suburban home-bodies.

While most people are stopped from witnessing the misery of those on whom conservative policy agendas are based, or experiencing the everyday normality of these people, the politics of fear remain effective. As Jaivin notes, government-enforced portrayals of asylum seekers, as parts of an undifferentiated Islamic mass, have contributed to a relative absence of human empathy toward these people, and thus to the success of a more widely operating conservative political agenda. Increased powers for the Australian secret police, notes Ian Syson, is just one of the manifestations of this campaign.

Jaivin writes of the capacity of literature and art to offer, via the imagination, new forms of understanding and human compassion; she discusses the need, in the present climate, for Australian authors to try to achieve this; and demonstrates, in sections from her own recent creative work, the artistic rewards of doing so.

John McLaren's latest study, *Free Radicals*, takes its title from those groups of atoms which exist independently but change the world around them. *Overland* founders Stephen Murray-Smith, Ian Turner and Ken Gott are McLaren's main subjects. As 2004 is the magazine's fiftieth year, we would like to encourage readers and friends of *Overland* to add their own stories and interpretations of this history, for publication in a special anniversary issue. That is, if we haven't all been wiped out by bomb-toting boat people.

CORRESPONDENCE

The vaccination industry

KATHERINE WILSON ('On the safe side', *Overland* 168, 2002) describes her impressive efforts to inform herself about both sides of the vaccination issue, once her son, was born. She is lucky in that, as an educated and computer-literate person, she was able to access information which for most Australians is still out of reach. That she even had to do this research speaks volumes about the lack of information about this and all other health issues provided by those upon whom most Australians depend for advice and information—our doctors.

The Australian High Court decision of *Rogers vs Whitaker* reaffirmed the credo that doctors are required by law to enable their patients to provide truly informed consent before agreeing to any medical procedure. Patients are entitled to be informed of any risks of a material nature, even if those risks are rare. They must also be informed about common risks which are not material in nature.

According to the experience of most Australians, doctors do not provide unbiased or complete information about vaccines. If anything, they offer only the candy-coated booklets produced by vaccine manufacturers, alone or in conjunction with the gov-

ernment, which greatly exaggerate the benefits of vaccination while downplaying the associated risks.

FINANCIAL INTERESTS

In many cases, there is no sinister motive for this paucity of information. Most doctors are woefully uninformed about the risks and lack of effectiveness of vaccinations. In fact, the *Australian Doctor Weekly* surveyed its readers in 1989 and found that 89 per cent relied on drug company salesmen for their information on drugs and vaccines.

The lack of arm's-length involvement in this issue by GPs also calls into question the advice given by doctors. Due to the introduction several years ago of the General Practice Immunisation Initiative (GPII), doctors are now virtually paid salesmen for pharmaceutical companies. Each vaccination they report to the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register (ACIR) earns them $6 ($3 in Queensland). When they vaccinate a child on time, an additional payment of $18.50 on top of the $21.50 they already receive from Medicare is forthcoming. As a further 'bribe', at the end of each year, they receive a bulk payment based upon the percentage of their patients' children who are fully vaccinated for age. The combination of these payments can add up to many tens of thousands of dollars, and when you figure that doctors get nothing at all for children who are not vaccinated, this scheme appears to represent a gross conflict of interest. It has also caused some less than ethical medicos to drop from their practice less profitable patients who do not vaccinate.

LACK OF STUDY

The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) does not test vaccines here before they are added to our schedule. They rely instead upon testing that is conducted in the USA and the UK—where most research is funded either partly or in whole by the pharmaceutical company which profits from the drugs' distribution and where committees set up by the FDA and the NIH are composed of scientists who, in many cases, hold shares in the companies whose products they are meant to examine fairly.

The government says it has no money to test vaccines, yet it somehow finds $41 million to fund a meningococcal campaign with a vaccine admitted by its manufacturer to have had no effectiveness-testing at all and which was involved with more than 16,000 serious reactions and twelve deaths in the first ten months after its release in the UK—more reactions than had been reported in 37 years with the triple-antigen vaccine! To make matters worse, this is not even the right vaccine for Australian conditions since it only targets Group C meningococcal and at least 75 per cent of our infections are caused by Group B.

VALID QUESTIONS

Unfortunately, as Katherine discovered, the decision to ask questions about the safety and effectiveness of this procedure is no way to win friends and influence people. The government plays upon people's fears by implying that those of us who choose not to vaccinate place those who do at risk. The lack of logic in this claim should be evident to any thinking person.

If vaccines protect in the way we have been told they do, then a vaccinated child should be safe. If vaccines do not protect, why are we still using them?

When it comes to this issue, however, we are told that there is no question. Vaccines are safe, effective and the most important medical procedure of the past two hundred years—end of story! This is so much a given that vaccines are not even subjected to the same test required for other drugs—the double-blind, crossover placebo study. This is the 'gold standard' of medical science and yet, in over two hundred years of vaccine history, no vaccination has ever been tested in this way. The reason for this outrageous omission is that vaccines are assumed to be safe and effective and that it would therefore be unethical to leave one group 'unprotected' in order to test them!

Without this basic science however, all claims about vaccination are no more than conjecture.

ADVERSE REACTIONS

Vaccines are not benign products. Indeed, the history of serious adverse reactions and deaths goes back to the time of Edward Jenner, more than two hundred years ago, when the modern vaccination age began. As long as there have been vaccines, there have been those who raised their voices to warn of the dangers. And for as long as those voices were raised, those with vested interests in the acceptance of this lucrative industry have tried their best to quash any opposition.

Vaccines have been linked with a huge range of autoimmune conditions, most of which were rare just twenty years ago, but are now approaching epidemic proportions. These include asthma, eczema, insulin-dependent diabetes, autism, ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder), ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) and cancer. They have also been implicated in infant and toddler deaths wrongly diagnosed as SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome), SBS (Shaken Baby Syndrome) and SUDS (Sudden Unexplained Death Syndrome).

When it comes to SIDS, we have been told to lay our children on their backs in order to keep their body

temperature regulated (high temperatures are thought to be associated with SIDS). This much-touted theory ignores the fact that one of the most common reactions to vaccinations is a high temperature.

In addition to other reactions, peer-reviewed studies going back to the late 1930s have demonstrated the link between vaccines and permanent brain damage. Vaccines contain many highly toxic substances such as mercury, formaldehyde, aluminium and carbolic acid. They are contaminated with bacteria and viruses from the animal tissues in which many of them are cultured.

Only a few of these have actually been studied and there has been some cause to fear that they could be associated with the development of cancers and immune-system problems. Vaccines may sometimes contain aborted human foetal tissue—a concern for some. They can also be genetically engineered with all of the related issues involved with GE products.

Dr John McEwan, head of ADRAC (Adverse Drug Reactions Advisory Committee), concedes that fewer than 10 per cent of all reactions are ever reported—meaning that safety figures are admitted to be at least 90 per cent incorrect.

Representatives of the Australian Vaccination Network (AVN) met with ADRAC in August 2001 and for the first time were given permission to provide them with reaction reports from our organisation. Since that time, we have sent ADRAC more than eight hundred reports. Strangely enough, since this arrangement, the *CDI Bulletin* (published by the Commonwealth Department of Health) has ceased to print reaction data—something which had been issued on a regular basis previously. Correspondence with the CDI indicates that a computer problem is to blame, but the timing seems incredible considering the fact that this problem occurred right after the great bulk of reaction reports was provided to them.

INDEPENDENT INFORMATION

It is due to the dearth of referenced and independent medical information on this procedure that the AVN came into being. There is a real need in the community for data which would allow parents to make educated choices when it comes to vaccinating their children and themselves. This is our legal right!

The media is also partly responsible for the paucity of independent information. I was contacted by the producer of George Negus's *New Dimensions* program on the ABC and invited to appear on the show and comment on a previously aired piece on vaccinations. All arrangements had been made to fly to Melbourne where the show is filmed. A few days before this was to take place the producer called and left a message saying that the program had been pulled because the "powers that be" were nervous about covering the AVN's side of the story.

Megan James, a well-respected journalist with ABC's *Quantum* program, filmed a two-part series: 'Vaccination: Protection at what Price?' The repeat of this program was pulled due to pressure from the AMA—the first time in over sixteen years of *Quantum*'s existence that industry influence had made them censor what they air. Megan James lost her job with the ABC and was never again able to find work in Australia. She was literally blacklisted due to her effrontery at reporting on both sides of this contentious issue.

So with this sort of censorship, pity the poor parent who relies upon doctors and the newspapers for unbiased facts when it comes to making a decision about vaccinating their children.

HOW DO WE DECIDE?

Vaccination, like all science, must never be above question. Australians rely on their government and medical profession to ensure that the products we use are the safest and most effective ones possible. As the more than nineteen thousand Australian deaths every year from preventable medical error indicate, they have failed us dreadfully. We ask that doctors have no financial interests in medical products and that they recommend procedures because they are good for *us* rather than for the doctor's own pocket. We ask that our government ensures that vaccines and drugs are safe before releasing or recommending them.

For Australians to feel they have 'played it safe' by using vaccines, they need to be told the truth. We require the unbiased, independent studies that have never yet been performed and we need to know that our families will be placed at less risk by the vaccines than they are by the diseases they are meant to prevent. Objectivity, ethics and morality cannot exist when sanctimonious anti-choice zealots forge unholy alliances with government, industry and a sycophantic media. Until such time as free debate is allowed on this issue, Australians will continue to exercise their legal right to abstain from any medical procedures which may harm and to oppose legislation or government pressure which may abridge those rights.

Meryl Dorey's interest in vaccination arose when her eldest son reacted to vaccines. Her research led to the formation of the Australian Vaccination Network, a national non-profit organisation. The Katherine Wilson article to which this correspondence refers can be found at <www.overlandexpresss.org>.

Letter from London

POLITICAL SCANDALS: accusations about politicians interfering with the BBC, a long-running debate about the reasons for going to war against Iraq; deviations and evasions; an apparent scapegoat committing suicide, a public inquiry under a senior judge to get to what really happened in this tragedy, and the once-popular prime minister under fire. All that and the arguments for and against GM foods. That's London at the end of this July. The Menzies Centre continues to present a range of readings, lectures, seminars and conferences, some in conjunction with other universities such as Monash. One of these took place on 26–27 June with twenty speakers from the US, Canada, Australia, Scotland and England examining 'The Politics of Friendship: Friendship, Gender & Nation in Australia, Britain and the Empire'. Highly successful, with papers covering many angles. There have been poetry readings and book launches. *Meanjin* poetry editor Peter Minter and Kate Fagan read their poetry recently, and looking ahead, Chris Wallace-Crabbe is giving a lecture and reading in October, there's a launch of John Kinsella's latest collection of poetry also in October, while on 8–9 January, 2004, there'll be an international conference to explore the poetry of Peter Porter. Convened by Dr Anne Pender (anne.pender@kcl.ac.uk) and Professor Warwick Gould (wgould@ sas.ac.uk), this promises to be quite an occasion.

As it happens, Anne Pender is leaving shortly to take up a post at the University of New England and her flair and energy will be very much missed at the Menzies Centre.

THE ISSUE OF GM technology has become an increasingly controversial topic in the UK. Trial crops were set up, members of the public were invited to discuss the GM issue and in parallel, the government set up a GM Science review panel. It is sobering and worrying that Professor Carlo Leifert, an expert in organic farming at the University of Newcastle, resigned from the scientific review panel just before its report was released (21 July), due to its not doing "a detailed risk assessment" and what he called the "pro-GM" bias from some scientists and biotechnology representatives on the panel. In an article (*Guardian*, 24 July), he said:

> this report is not carefully enough researched to give the green light to GM and doesn't identify the uncertainties well enough. The report mentions that Americans have eaten GM food for about seven years now and they haven't suffered. But nobody has actually investigated the effect of GM consumption on public health in the US. The argument doesn't make sense and to have it coming from a scientific panel is really quite sad.

Indeed. And on 26 July, the Department of the Environment is reported as warning farmers who have grown genetically modified oil-seed rape [canola] on their land, as part of the government's trials, not to grow conventional oil-seed on the same land this autumn, for fear of contaminating it. Apparently, research has shown that seeds persisted in the soil in greater quantities than previously thought.

Not surprisingly, the confusion around GM food technology has resulted in the increased popularity of organic foods and a corresponding antipathy towards GM products. As in Australia, Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth have helped provide some information for a doubting public. But Professor Leifert reminds: "One of the conclusions of the report is that we have to look at GM crops on a case-by-case basis. I wouldn't agree with that. Right now we still have to check that there isn't some inherent problem with the technology."

One can perhaps guess what the great Victorian William Morris would have said about GM. Visitors to London may be interested to visit his Red House, Bexleyheath, Kent, recently restored and opened by the National Trust. The Trust is also now working towards the restoration of Morris's garden. His biographer, Fiona MacCarthy, in the *Guardian* (26 July) points to how, in so many of our current environmental issues, Morris was there first. "Such is his vitality that you can project him forward and ask what would he have thought about food adulteration, over-fishing, destruction of forests, global warming. Imagine William Morris fulminating on the subject of genetically modified foods." Certainly his philosophy of life, love and 'art for the people' is one we especially need now.

Katherine Gallagher is Overland's correspondent in London.

For more *Overland* correspondence, please go to our website www.overlandexpress.org

lecture / **LINDA JAIVIN**

TRUTH ON THE BORDER

Telling stories about asylum seekers

MAKING IT REAL

A computer-games creator called Kipper woke a few people up when she and her crew snared a $25,000 grant from the Australia Council earlier this year to develop a virtual reality game called *Escape from Woomera*. The game will replicate the precise conditions within four Australian detention centres, down to mealtimes and incidents of "episodic violence". The player takes on the role of an asylum seeker. The goal is escape by any means possible: scaling the razor-wire topped fences, tunnelling under them or getting help from refugee action groups or sympathetic lawyers. Kipper (a 'gaming name') admitted to the press: "We expect people to be upset."[1]

Kipper was not wrong, at least so far as the Right was concerned. The *Herald Sun*'s Andrew Bolt let off all the sound and fury he could muster in a column called 'Art of Irrelevance'. Bolt claimed such work was "out of touch with the concerns of most Australians".[2] It was always my understanding that right-wing commentators were supposed to rail against 'relevance' in art, not its opposite. I'm confused. I suspect he is too.

He's probably also correct. By all accounts, most Australians' response to the plight of detained asylum seekers falls somewhere on the spectrum from apathy to antipathy.

That's exactly why the game is so potentially subversive. The computer-games writer for New York's *Village Voice*, Nick Catucci, understood this perfectly. Referring to the way that computer games allow us to become superfighters, hit men or space cowboys at the touch of a joystick, Catucci mused, "Who hasn't yearned to be a detained refugee? Finally, the game's creators promise, players will live the fantasy."[3]

It's noteworthy that Philip Ruddock chose to criticise the Australia Council's decision to fund *Escape from Woomera* in terms of its "promotion of unlawful behaviour".[4] Unlawful behaviour, after all, is a great feature of Australian folk mythology, art and culture. You could easily level such a charge against all those books and movies concerning our dearly beloved Kelly gang. A number of these would have had a hand in one government pocket or another; I can't recall any minister complaining about that. Besides, in the world of computer games, Vice City has long been the place to be. I suspect that the real reason *Escape from Woomera* cranks Ruddock's motor is that it promotes not 'unlawful behaviour' so much as that infinitely more dangerous condition—empathy.

Catucci nailed it when he observed that by playing the game we may 'live the fantasy' and become a detained refugee. We become them. The border is crossed.

LANGUAGE BARRIER

That's a small miracle in itself, for the border between us and them is well-defended. Its self-appointed guardians in government and the media try to exile the truth about asylum seekers, and what this country is doing to them, to the desert. They guard it with intellectual thuggery and coils of razor-sharp language. 'Queue jumpers'. 'Illegals'. 'Those kinds of people'. Even, from time to time and most outrageously, 'terrorists'. These are

A screen grab from the Australia Council-funded video game, Kipper's Escape from Woomera

phrases which caution us to keep our distance while wounding those they encircle.

The language cuts as well in the direction of those who would advocate for, or help, asylum seekers. Within the private prison management company which runs the detention centres, ACM, employees who sympathise with the plight of asylum seekers, including nurses, are derided as (and sometimes fired for being) 'care bears'.[5] One of the most common invectives aimed at refugee advocates is that they are a 'compassion industry' staffed by 'do-gooders'. Proponents of mandatory detention have managed to invest in the phrase 'do-gooders' the full dose of contempt normally reserved for social marginalia who like their coffee Italian, their wine white, and their trees unchopped. Clearly, 'do-gooders' do not know what they do when they do good. It is do-badders who are to be praised and emulated.

So long as the proponents of mandatory detention can keep the country sufficiently befuddled about who asylum seekers are and, just as crucially, our legal and moral obligations toward them, then they win. Consider the implications of this comment, made by John Howard in response to the *Tampa* crisis: "I mean, there is a point in some of these things where people, in a way, seek to intimidate us with our own decency and that creates a very awkward position for a Prime Minister of this country and for the Government of this country."[6]

Thus, according to Howard, we are not in moral and political strife because what we are doing is indecent. We are in trouble because we are *too* decent—even, especially, when using intimidation and force to keep from our shores a few boatloads of desperate refugees who, given half a chance, might call on that decency and ask for our help. How dare they! It is by such logic that a teenager's hunger strike or child's attempt to hang herself is portrayed as but a cynical attempt at manipulating and abusing the good will of the honest Australian taxpayer. It must never be taken as an expression of genuine hopelessness or a heartfelt cry for help. It is mere 'attention-seeking behaviour', pathetic at best, despicable at worst.

Big Brother—Orwell's, not Channel 10's—could take lessons.

COMPLIANCE TESTS

Among those who have described and condemned the punitive and degrading conditions within our

David Penberthy has admitted that he wrote the 'Five-Star Asylums' piece from a DIMIA-generated document, and that he had not checked any of the claims in it against other sources, nor had he ever stepped foot inside a detention centre.

detention centres are UNHCR advisor Justice P.N. Baghwati, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Australian medical and legal professionals, released detainees and even former ACM officers. The retired cricketer Ian Chappell is just one of the prominent Australians who've added their voice to the rising rumble of concern about mandatory detention. There are books, reports, articles and websites detailing the consequences of such abuses as the detention of children for years behind razor wire, the endless 'musters', the woeful standard of medical care, and the infamous 'one per cent'—the ACM slang for the proportion of their time spent using force against detainees. Many are the sources which document random acts of cruelty against these people who came to Australia hoping for protection, if not kindness.[7]

Still, the more compliant media, some of whom have rarely been off their back in years, blithely follow the government line: there's no trouble in paradise except for troublemakers. The *Daily Telegraph* ran a page-1 story on 'Five-Star Asylums' alleging that asylum seekers in Woomera and Villawood had it better than some Australians in their homes. I was surprised the article failed to rename the Department of Immigration the Ministry of Love.

Not long ago I had to fly out of Sydney. All flights were delayed. The lounge was packed. I got a beer and ended up squashed in at one of the high tables chatting to some of the other passengers, men and women in their late twenties, early thirties. The conversation was light and innocuous until I experimentally raised the subject of asylum seekers. Immediately, one of the women spat, "Fuck the refugees!" and all the others echoed her sentiment, in just those words and with her same vehemence.

"Uh, actually, I came straight to the airport from Villawood Detention Centre, where I was visiting asylum seekers." My statement brought about a brief, awkward silence. Then the woman recovered. "I hate politics," she said. A man said, "They've got it good inside. They get fed and housed and clothed. Better than their own countries." Another man repeated the war cry of "fuck the refugees!", adding, "They just want what we've got." One man had the decency to look half sheepish and admit, "Actually, I don't have any first-hand experience," before changing the subject, but his friend persisted. "Fuck them," he said, as if he hadn't made himself perfectly clear before.

What did asylum seekers do to us that we hate them so much? The answer lies not in what they did to us, but what we are doing to ourselves. Unsure how to deal with world events outside our control, we adopt a paranoid, fortress mentality. We excuse our prejudices on the basis that they are 'honest'. We are suspicious of any urge to question them, for that might lead to political correctness, a sin worse than racism or cruelty.

David Penberthy was the journalist responsible for 'Five-Star Asylums', probably the most notorious and emblematic of all such pieces of journalism. The article contained numerous untruths. To cite just two simple examples, detainees do not, contrary to Penberthy's claim, have access to the Internet or email, and in instances where they have personal television sets, video players or stereos, these are gifts from visitors, not extractions from the public purse.

The reaction to his article from those with knowledge of the actual situation in the detention centres was massive, outraged and rightly scornful. On 20 December, Penberthy published a wounded-bull defence of his original piece. In 'Reason . . . it's a matter of balance', he argued that his article had been necessary to counter the criticism of mandatory detention which, in his estimation has "had an inordinately generous and uncritical run from much of the media".[8] The fact that a few critics have been foolish enough to liken the detention centres to Hitler's concentration camps gave him ammunition to shoot down all those who would call mandatory detention unjust. But ultimately he was shooting blanks.

Penberthy may be stroppy, but his journalism

Asylum-seekers who speak to journalists may be interrogated, threatened and punished, sometimes with room searches in which their possessions are 'accidentally' damaged. Any ACM employee who knowingly spoke to the press could forfeit his or her job.

was sloppy. He has admitted that he wrote the piece from a DIMIA-generated document. He told my friend, cartoonist Fiona Katauskas, a regular visitor to Villawood, that he had not checked any of the claims in it against other sources, nor had he ever stepped foot inside a detention centre. Though this was screamingly obvious to anyone with any experience or knowledge of the situation, it was somehow gratifying to have it confirmed.

For every Penberthy, content to add a few more bricks to the wall, there are many other journalists who want nothing more than to scale it. It's not easy. Journalists are officially banned from visiting the detention centres without special permission. Those who get permission are not given free access to asylum seekers, and the tour is inevitably that of a Potemkin Village. Heather Tyler's book *Asylum: Voices behind the Razor Wire* claims that when Channel 9 wanted to visit the notorious Curtin Detention Centre in 2001:

> seventeen new recreational activities were organised, and ACM staff went around asking detainees to register their names so they could prove there was interest. A couple of pottery classes were held and the results were taken off to Derby to be fired and glazed just so the Department of Immigration had something to show off. From over one hundred children, only a handful were ever taken swimming.[9]

Such is the drill for any important official visits, not just reporters. Just before the UN delegation visited last year, the buildings at Villawood were given a new paint job, picnic tables imported into the visiting yard and fresh vegetation hastily planted around the place. No effort was directed at improving the slow and frequently faulty process that has so many genuine refugees interned for years before they are finally released.

Reporters keen to do real journalism on the subject have little choice but to enter the centres as ordinary visitors, without announcing their profession or purpose. They are unable to take video or audio recording equipment or cameras of any kind in with them; anyone attempting to photograph a detention centre even from the outside of the razor wire may have their film confiscated. Their asylum-seeker sources, if discovered, may be interrogated, threatened and punished, sometimes with room searches in which their possessions are 'accidentally' damaged. The reporters don't even have ready access to Department of Immigration or ACM staff at the centres; any employee who knowingly spoke to the press without authorisation could forfeit his or her job.

I used to work as a foreign correspondent in China. The combination of smoke-and-mirrors for journalists who cooperate with the regime and intimidation for those who don't (not to mention their sources) is scarily familiar. I ended up resigning from my job because the Chinese Communist Party and its security organs systematically harassed and persecuted my friends until one verged on suicide.

I used to feel hugely thankful that I lived in a democracy where such underhanded machinations were inconceivable, or at least so rare that they were considered aberrations which, exposed, should result in scandal. I'm not sure if I was over-idealistic about this society or if I simply had never had the occasion to learn otherwise.

CANDID CAMERA

The Chinese friend who suffered most for his association with me, Ah Xian, came to Australia after the Tiananmen protests and the Beijing massacre of 1989. He applied for refugee status and eventually got it; I submitted testimony about what had happened to him and his family on account of knowing me. Ah Xian is an artist. When he first came here he was painting houses to support his family and his art. Several years ago he won the first annual national sculpture prize. His work is now collected by the National Gallery, Queensland Art Gallery, and Powerhouse Museum among others—the Powerhouse

even dedicated an entire, long-running exhibit to his work, and the Asia Society of New York recently invited him to show his art in their gallery.

The asylum seekers I know in detention also include some uniquely intelligent, talented and resourceful individuals. When I take friends with me into Villawood Detention Centre, they are usually knocked out by the experience and not only in the expected way, by the prison-like atmosphere, the razor wire and the hopelessness. They're deeply impressed by the asylum seekers themselves: their conversation, their courage, their generosity—the asylum seekers have so little and share it so readily. If you so much as shiver on a cool evening out there, before you know what's happening you have half a dozen jackets draped over your shoulders.

They meet such people as the moody teenage Iraqi with an uncanny talent for artistic portraiture; the coquettish Iranian woman who never neglected her make-up; the shy Afghani Hazara man with the big brave smile that almost, but not quite, masked his welling sorrow; the flirt; the prankster; the kvetcher; the sophisticate—all terribly, profoundly disconcerting in their sheer, undeniable normality.

It's impossible not to fall in like, if not in love. There have been several marriages between Australians and asylum seekers in detention. This is despite the fact that this does not get the asylum seeker a visa. Normally, the only hope for these couples is to find a third country to take them both. It's amazing, considering the hardship involved, that so many relationships like this have blossomed.

If for much of Australia, who may never have or take the opportunity to meet asylum seekers face to face, the border between us and them appears impenetrable or opaque, it's perhaps because we have not tried hard enough to see through it. In this way the border becomes a one-way mirror. In it, we see only the reflection of our own collective prejudices, fears, and ignorance. At times it is such a vision of ugliness that it's no wonder so many people, who are not themselves bad, flinch and look away. The asylum seekers, on the other hand, see us from the other side, at times with stunning clarity.

Among their windows on Australia is television. TV acts in some ways like a meta-*Big Brother*, monitoring us as a nation as we go about our daily lives. The news, Parliamentary debates, *Kath & Kim*, *Four Corners*, *Backyard Blitz*, *The Block*—the cameras are rolling 24/7 and you sometimes have to wonder if the whole shebang, from the perspective of this literally captive audience, doesn't often add up to a kind of dumbest home videos show punctuated by an occasional non-commercial break for self-reflection.

Some asylum seekers, especially those interned in the remote detention centres, have only ever met Australians in the form of guards or immigration officials. While some guards perform their duties as humanely as possible and some immigration officials carry out theirs decently and proficiently, well, it's a safe guess that certificates of compassion are not yet a prerequisite for working in our detention centres.

Visitors make a big difference in the asylum seekers' perception of us. It's not easy for people to visit the remote centres. Some require written requests for visits days beforehand, and permission is not always granted. But those people who have somehow persisted and either visit or write and call detainees in centres like Port Hedland and Baxter make a very positive impression. And in places like Villawood, where visitors are an abundant and daily occurrence, asylum seekers will easily make a distinction between good people and the government we had to have.

One asylum seeker, Wahab, a survivor of Saddam Hussein's torture chambers, spent three and a half years in detention trying to get a fair hearing for his case. Wahab, who was in Port Hedland for three years and Villawood after that, was popular with visitors. He spoke good English, attempted always to put on a cheerful face, and was an irrepressible teller of jokes. Wahab decided to take voluntary deportation to Syria on the eve of the coalition's invasion of Iraq. His family was over there. He couldn't leave them to fend for themselves when war broke out, whatever the personal consequences. When we said our tearful goodbyes, he told me:

> My biggest regret is that I have never been able to live among Australians and repay some of the kindness that's been shown to me. I know the Australian people are at heart a good people. If the ones who support the government line on us knew the true story they'd change.

Wahab's parting gift to me was the Dalai Lama's *Book of Transformation.*

It's impossible not to fall in like, if not in love. There have been several marriages between Australians and asylum seekers in detention, despite the fact that this does not get the asylum seeker a visa. Normally the only hope for these couples is to find a third country to take them both.

CH . . . CH . . . CH . . . CH . . . CHANGES

When I first drafted the earlier passage about the reporter David 'Five-Star' Penberthy, I concluded by observing that it would be interesting to see what his reaction would be were he to actually visit a detention centre and see with his own eyes just how wrong he had been. I was still working on this essay a week or so later when I took a break to go out to Villawood on one of my twice-weekly visits. I saw a pleasant-looking man there sitting with another visitor and an Iraqi asylum seeker I know. When I walked over to say hi, they introduced me to the man: it was David Penberthy.

After scooping my jaw up off the ground, I told him I was writing this lecture, explained what I'd said about him and asked if he was happy to talk. He gave me his number. On the phone the following day, he told me that he used to do volunteer work and translation for refugees fleeing from the US-backed death squads in places like El Salvador and Chile, working for a group called Committee in Solidarity with Central America and the Caribbean. He explained that he wasn't trying to boast or establish some sort of left-wing credentials; he simply wanted to demonstrate that he wasn't a raving right-wing lunatic with an anti-refugee agenda.

He also pointed out, in his own and the *Daily Telegraph*'s defence, that he had challenged the government's 'children overboard' story at the time with a bold, page-1 article. He further professes himself "appalled" at the "inordinate" length of time it takes to process the asylum seekers' claims and believes "that the Howard government is deliberately indifferent" to the problem "because it is popular politics".

Penberthy has made a valid point in insisting that wild statements such as those drawing comparisons to Nazi death camps have only led to mainstream Australia 'switching off' from the debate. (The Bob Ellis school of hysterical denunciation of all that is Howard and Ruddock does not in general advance the cause. And lest we forget, it was Labor who introduced the policy of mandatory detention in the first place.) All that aside, Penberthy told me that "the thing that struck me most was how much trouble the government has gone to in order to prevent the public from having genuine human contact with the people who are in there". He is committed now to making such contact, and to writing about it. Watch this space.[10]

NOT ALL LIES ARE FICTION

In the *Book of Transformation*, the Dalai Lama speaks of the stage of enlightenment:

> where we develop the understanding that we and others are fundamentally equal. The next stage involves reflecting on the shortcomings of excessively self-cherishing thoughts, and their negative consequences, as well as reflecting on the merits of developing thoughts that cherish the well-being of others.[11]

If there's hope for the tabloid media there's hope for us all.

Generally speaking, Australia's own Book of Transformation tends to be written a little differently. The first English to settle here transformed a land which was already occupied and civilised into *terra nullius*. That empty land was transformed, officially, into White Australia. Later, White Australia was transformed, officially, after several waves of immigration and the much belated recognition of Indigenous Australians as citizens with the right to vote and be counted, into Multicultural Australia. This transformation, in which we more or less arrived at the "understanding that we and others are fundamentally equal", was followed by a backlash consisting of "excessively self-cherishing thoughts" by those who didn't really go along with all that equality hoo-ha in the first place. We didn't reflect on the "negative consequences" of this, we just lived them. As for "developing thoughts that cherish the well-being of others", we've pretty much canned Recon-

ciliation, bludgeoned the dole, told charities to shut up if they want us to put up, caged children in the desert, and turned in the other direction when a boatload of refugees was waving *and* drowning. If anyone among us is so rude as to point any of this out, he or she is accused of having a Black Armband view of history and the baying, howling Right immediately tries to use that same armband for a gag.

Somewhere along the way, we have transformed the nature of public discourse. According to the New Australian Order, it's still not okay to lie, exactly, but it's alright to avoid speaking the truth. Sometimes this is a patriotic duty. Commander Norman Banks of the frigate HMAS *Adelaide* had been proud of his ship's rescue of the asylum seekers from the doomed Indonesian fishing vessel *Olong* in October 2001 after the attempt to turn the boat back failed. He took a call from Channel 10's Elizabeth Bowdler, describing the "joy" of holding the hands of the children and seeing them smile after their terrible ordeal.

Banks's interview was in breach of the Defence Minister's ban on military officers speaking to the media without clearance. The 'children overboard' story—a furphy based on this very incident—was blowing up into an electoral storm. The Twin Towers were still collapsing in an infinity loop on our television screens. Howard deftly exploited the panic around terrorism as well as that panic's evil offshoot—rising racism against Muslims—to score points against the asylum seekers who had so offended him during the *Tampa* crisis just months earlier. Smiling children were not the image the government was looking for.

Banks apologised to his commander: "I am now fully aware of the political ramifications/sensitivities of this operation and will ensure that no further media questions are answered." As David Marr and Marian Wilkinson write in *Dark Victory*, "Back came an arch reproach from Northern Command, '[D]on't use the term "political" or "politics" to describe our current predicament as it is politically incorrect to do so. You should have said something like "awaiting policy guidance" and everyone still [sic] knows what you mean'."[12]

Interesting use of 'politically correct'—I thought that this government was against political correctness. No matter. The term obviously acquires elasticity when the truth is being stretched. The point is, as Commander Banks well knew, no asylum seekers threw their children overboard; no people are "people like that".[12] The question we need to focus on now is what 'kind of people' have we become? Time was when we would have been absolutely outraged by a politician caught telling such a big lie to the public, and especially for electoral advantage—whatever the spin. Yet opinion polls seem to indicate that we don't really care any more if our leaders are lying to us.

In one of his satirical newspaper columns, Richard Glover wrote, "Truth is, we expect people to lie. Imagine the chaos if everyone told all the truth, all the time." Women would have to tell men that size did matter, men would have to tell women that their bum did look big in those pants, and, Glover says, both Liberal and Labor politicians would have to admit, "It would be different if the refugees were white." He concludes, "Honesty is overrated. By all means, let the Prime Minister tell the occasional truth. But not too many, or we all might realise how thoroughly we've been had".[14]

It would be unfair to lay the blame for this solely at the feet of our Prime Minister. As George Bernard Shaw wrote, "Truth telling is not compatible with the defence of the realm." All the leaders of the free-ish world are walking around with Pinnochio-like nose growths. On the moral minefield of missing WMDs and present deceptions, democracy itself is in danger of turning into pink mist.

FICTION IS NOT A LIE

I had attempted with my co-flyers that day to put the asylum seekers' situation into context, to tell them about the kind of lives they'd led and which led them into exile, and ultimately detention. They asked, how do you know they're not lying to you? How do you know they didn't make that up? I could have gone on to them about scars, about conversations in which detail piles upon horrific detail, about the sheer terror with which they greet news of forced deportations. Still they would have been skeptical.

On the other hand, if you tell people a story, on the terms of it being just a story, and ask them to suspend disbelief on the usual terms, you might just catch them unawares. You might just crawl under their defences and perhaps even trick them into a position of empathy. Think of the power of such novels, plays, and films as *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, *Kiss of the Spiderwoman*, *Rabbit Proof Fence*, Bernard Schlink's *The Reader*, anything by Primo Levi . . .

I went to Villawood Detention Centre with trepidation in my heart and the name of an Iraqi asylum seeker on a piece of paper in my pocket. I intended to visit maybe two, three times. Nearly two years later I still have a serious detention-centre habit.

the list is long. No-one can blame storytellers for making things up—that's their job.

David Marr gave one interpretation of some of that job's duties when he asserted in the 2003 Colin Simpson Lecture:

> We journalists will do what we can but novelists, playwrights, even poets might work on this project too: to dismantle the new philistinism of John Howard's Australia by exploring it to its depths through our writing and find [sic] absolutely unexpected ways of doing this. The role of the writer is always to surprise.[15]

There are so many surprises, so many ways to tell this story, so many stories in this story to tell. In Tom Keneally's new book, *The Tyrant's Novel*, he tells the story of an asylum seeker locked in detention in Australia. The asylum seeker, Alan Sheriff, comes from an unnamed oil-rich country run by a brutal tyrant with a moustache who likes to be called Great Uncle. By giving his characters Anglo-Celtic names (Sarah Manners, Hope Garner, etc.), Keneally pulls off a neat trick. It takes no great leap of imagination, no hurdling over cultural obstacles to identify with these characters; Iraqis-R-Us.

Tampa, 'children overboard' and other events of late 2001 inspired me to write my first full-length play, *Seeking Djira*.[16] In it, an asylum seeker who has escaped from a detention centre throws himself on the mercy of a pack of self-obsessed Australian writers at a writers' retreat. They're at the retreat because they wanted to get away from the world and focus on their work. The arrival of the asylum seeker and the need to decide whether or not to help him and if so how, a problem with both ethical and practical dimensions, throws them into chaos.

When I conceived of the idea for the play, I had no experience of asylum seekers, and little contact with the cultures from which they hailed. The play was really about us. I saw this situation both as providing wonderful theatrical fun in the style of a classic farce and an apt metaphor for Australia. We just want to get on with our lives. We don't want to have to deal with the world's problems. And fair enough, to some extent. But the truth is, the world's problems have arrived on our doorstep in the shape of the people fleeing from them. We may be surprised, we may be scared, we may be horrified. But we need to work out whether we are capable of dealing with them in a manner both reasonable and humane.

The title of the play comes from the ancient Arabic word '*djira*'. It refers to an almost sacred obligation to look after your neighbours, which in Arabic are called '*djiran*'. At one point, the asylum-seeker escapee is trying to explain '*djira*' to the writers:

> NABIL: In Iraq, we have a word called '*djiran*'. It means 'neighbours'.
> ALISON: Yeah, we've got a TV show.

The process of researching and writing this play led to the personal transformation and subsequent obsession that informs this whole essay. I went to Villawood Detention Centre in Sydney with trepidation in my heart and the name of an Iraqi asylum seeker on a piece of paper in my pocket. He'd agreed on the phone to help me 'workshop' Nabil's character and history. I intended to visit maybe two, three times. Instead, I met other asylum seekers, became involved, tentatively at first and then deeply, and, well, nearly two years later I still have a serious detention-centre habit. My creative focus naturally shifted to the asylum seekers themselves. While working on *Seeking Djira*, I wrote another, shorter play called *Halal el Mashakel*, which takes place entirely inside detention, in which the only Australian is a guard, and which concerns two young asylum seekers who have been waiting for years to hear the results of their appeals. One plays guitar, the other drums. They hate each other's taste in music. They have no-one else to play with. The inspiration came from two teenagers I know from Villawood, one of whom had a guitar and the

other a drum kit, and who really did dislike each other's musical tastes. It also came from the fact I'd noticed that asylum seekers seemed to adopt one of two opposing philosophies of survival.

GUITARIST: I might be released today. They told my family we should hear any day now. Yes, they could release me today.

DRUMMER: Don't kid yourself. They wouldn't let in sunshine, they wouldn't release a fart. If the minister accidentally locked himself up in here he wouldn't give himself a visa to get out.

GUITARIST: Why can't I hope?

DRUMMER: Hope is useless. No. It's more than useless. It's cruel.

GUITARIST: Hope is life.

DRUMMER: What kind of life?

GUITARIST: Hope lifts you up.

DRUMMER: So it can slam you down.

GUITARIST: Without hope, this life is unsupportable.

DRUMMER: Face the facts. It *is* unsupportable.

I've also since written the libretto for an opera which follows the story of one asylum seeker from his home in the Middle East to Australia, detention and finally, an ambiguous sort of freedom. Ed Kuepper is composing the music. In *A Better Life*, Australia is perceived mainly through the noise of talkback radio, in which a shock jock leads a chorus of outraged citizens in singing:

They throw their children in the sea!
They are not like you and me!
Children overboard!
Children overboard!
We can ill afford
To accept people of that ilk
Take in one, becomes a horde.

The words are taken largely from real life. Truth, to quote George Bernard Shaw once more, is "the funniest joke in the world". For the writer, humour can be a sly weapon in the war to topple barriers between 'us' and 'them'. I'm not the only one who thinks so: Jon Williams and Stephen Klinder have written a very funny play, *Purgatory Down Under*, in which Dante is a refugee in an offshore detention centre trying to negotiate his way out of hell. I've heard of but not seen another play called *Jumping the Q* in which asylum seekers enter a *Pop Star* like competition, singing and dancing their way to a visa.

In my short story, 'The Promised Land', first published in the *Bulletin*, I borrow and play with the language of the Bible to tell the story of Moses, a people smuggler leading the children of Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and other contemporary 'houses of bondage' to the Promised Land:

> "Uncle Moses." Morteza spoke shyly. "Are you sure that when this journey is done we will be welcome in the promised land?"
>
> Moses laughed and slung an arm around the younger man's shoulders. "Of course," he reassured him. "The promised land is a liberal democracy which respects human rights and international conventions as set out by the United Nations." He urged upon him a cigarette, but Morteza didn't smoke. "Anyway, remember thee what the Lord told Aaron and myself the other day? 'One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you.'"
>
> "What does that mean?" Morteza shook his head.
>
> "It means," said Moses, "where there is one humanity there can be no two laws. They'll treat us like we were one of their own."
>
> Unfortunately, Moses had been so caught up in negotiations with Pharaohs, the visiting of plagues, organising Passover and so on, that he hadn't read the papers for a while.

I borrowed something else in addition to biblical language for the story. My friend Morteza, a 21-year-old Iranian who's been in detention since he was 16, was keen to lend his name to a character. Other asylum seekers have freely shared with me their stories and experiences for my plays, and spent hours advising me on cultural issues. Some have read drafts, covering them with red ink. I see the consultation with them as another means of breaching borders; I wish to draw the asylum seekers into the process. But it's not always a smooth passage: as the character Nabil in *Seeking Djira* is an escapee from Villawood, I asked an asylum seeker for the details of a break-out from there a few years back. He told me detainees dug a tunnel from the camp mosque to the outside: "This is an advantage of our religion," he said with a grin, "we can pray and dig at the same time." Later, when this line made it into Nabil's mouth, my friend balked. "He can't say that," he averred. "It's not very respectful."

"But you did," I protested. "You said exactly

that." After much agonising, I made the decision to use the line, even though I was aware I might have stepped over another kind of line. But it was witty and humanising and perfect for my character. Besides, in the end, I was the author. I'd take responsibility for it. Shortly after the play opened, the asylum seeker, who's since been recognised as a refugee and is living in the broader Australian community, dropped by my place in Sydney. A little nervously, I confessed that I'd kept the line in the play. He laughed. "It is very funny," he acknowledged. He said he was much more relaxed about it now.

As a writer of fiction or theatre, you have to traverse some rather intimate borders. You have to enter your creations, inhabit their skin. Whatever your motivation in creating a character, you quickly come to understand they are animated by their flaws as much as, if not more than, by their virtues.

The truth is, asylum seekers are ordinary humans, with good moods and bad, and traits both endearing and annoying. Some are prone to mildly paranoid fantasies about their neighbours, jealousies, and temperamental outbursts. There are those who, as though their situation wasn't already bad enough, are always shooting themselves in the foot. While such details may be irrelevant to the journalist, they are, I believe, crucial and compelling to the storyteller. Characters like Madame Bovary and Peter Carey's Ned Kelly, to name two of the most obvious examples, inhabit us so fully because they have been so fully inhabited themselves; not because they're paragons. Anyway, we don't believe much in angels.

BREAKING OUT

Asylum seekers, like computer games, are interactive. More and more, they are breaking down the wall from the other side. They speak to us through publications such as *From Nothing to Zero*, a collection of letters from detained asylum seekers,[17] through the poems of Mohsen Soltani-Zand, who spent four years at Villawood before his case finally got a fair hearing, and such performances as the one-man show *Refugitive* by Iranian playwright and actor Shahin Shafaei, who spent twenty-two months in Curtin before getting his Temporary Protection Visa. An Iraqi detainee at Villawood is a regular letter writer to the newspapers, commenting on both refugee issues and the situation in his home country. Another detainee had a weekly slot on community radio talking about life inside detention.

I have no illusions that art or writing of any kind will change the world. But it does help breach that wall, it cuts through the razor wire and creates a kind of border crossing. Unlike the asylum seekers themselves, the truth has wings, and no-one has yet built the perfect cage for it.

1. Sean Nicholls, 'Ruddock fury over Woomera computer game', *Age*, 30 April 2003.
2. Andrew Bolt, 'Art of irrelevance', *Herald Sun*, 5 May 2003.
3. Nick Catucci, 'Pissed Poor', *Village Voice* (NY), 2 May 2003. Catucci suggests that if anyone actually knew where they're keeping America's Muslim detainees, they might do a version for over there.
4. Nicholls, 'Ruddock fury'. To which Kipper responded, in an interview with the *Green Left Weekly* (14 May 2003): "I would have thought that locking people up in breach of international law is the real crime."
5. Heather Tyler, *Asylum: Voices behind the Razor Wire*, Lothian Books, South Melbourne, 2003, p.15.
6. John Howard, 3AW radio interview with Neil Mitchell, 28 August 2001, <www.pm.gov.au/news/interviews/2001/interview1189.htm>.
7. There are too many sources to list in one footnote: see for a start Tyler's *Asylum* (the reference to the 'one per cent' comes on p.18); Peter Mares's *Borderline: Australia's Treatment of Refugees and Asylum Seekers* (UNSW Press, 2002 edition); as well as Human Rights Watch, '"By Invitation Only": Australian Asylum Policy', <hrw.org/reports/2002/australia/>.
8. David Penberthy, 'Reason . . . it's a matter of balance', <www.dailytelegraph.news.com.au/printpage/0,5942,5709068,00.html>.
9. Tyler, *Asylum*.
10. From a phone interview with David Penberthy on 1 August 2003.
11. His Holiness the Dalai Lama, *The Dalai Lama's Book of Transformation*, Thorsons, London, 2000, p.69.
12. See David Marr and Marian Wilkinson, *Dark Victory*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 2003, pp.181–199.
13. "I don't want people like that in Australia. Genuine refugees don't do that . . . They hang onto their children." John Howard to the *Herald Sun*, quoted in Marr and Wilkinson, *Dark Victory*, p.189.
14. Richard Glover, 'The truth is out there . . . and it's probably best if we leave it there', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 July 2003.
15. David Marr, 'Out of Apathy', The Colin Simpson Lecture 2003, *Australian Author* 35:1, 2003, p.23.
16. The play premiered with Essential Theatre at fortyfivedownstairs in Melbourne on 7 August 2003.
17. Available from ninotchka@bigpond.com (send an email with the title in the subject) for $24.10 including postage.

Linda Jaivin is author of four novels including Eat Me *as well as the non-fiction* Confessions of an S&M Virgin *and* The Monkey and the Dragon (all published by Text). *Her play,* Seeking Djira, *was produced in Melbourne and is expected to tour nationally.*

Required
Caring Individual (Full-time, Class 1)
For *Give a Shit International*

Due to global demand, Give a Shit International has recently opened an arm in Australia. Our head office, located from street to beach to workplace to public park, requires another Caring Individual to join our failing business.

This is an often boring and deceptively simple position working with the Give a Shit Programs Team. You will contribute to the enhancement of other people's lives through the provision of basic items such as smiles and helping people get through doorways carrying heavy packages. There is no chance of promotion and no one will evaluate you at any time.

You will have a complete lack of customer focus with highly developed communication skills, but most likely utterly hopeless organisation and time management skills. You will enjoy liaising with a wide variety of people—who may not enjoy liaising with you—and you will have no technological skills whatsoever.

As a Caring Individual you will have behind you an entire lifetime's experience—from changing your sibling's nappies, right up to today, where you may be caring for a dying partner. You will be fully aware of all the changes that have affected Give a Shit International, including government and other service rationalisation. You will be appalled by this and despite the dim prospect of anything changing, you will be continuing to give a shit, anyway.

Caring Individuals at Give a Shit International require some critical skills. You will have a proven capacity to ignore deadlines and you will not only work well in a team, you will *only* be able to work in a team. You will have no understanding of budget imperatives and will be experienced in ensuring projects blow out their stated financial parameters. You will be a hopeless self-starter and completely inflexible when it comes to those who say *Why do you bother giving a shit?*

Salary: Pro-rata absolutely nothing (Class 1), without superannuation contributions or any salary packaging options, staff development or training opportunities. This position commences as soon as possible and will not end until you die—with the possibility of an *extension beyond the initial contract.*

PAUL MITCHELL

"Australians don't know anything about asylum seekers; there's no-one to tell them about us. They should go inside the detention centre and see the truth . . ."

"STRANGE WORDS"

Refugee perspectives on government and media stereotyping

AS THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT has debated its various critics over the issues of refugee and mandatory detention policies, one set of voices has rarely been heard. The effective silencing of refugees and asylum seekers in this country has been one of the more disturbing aspects of the debate as a whole.[1] Even academic studies have tended to impose their own intellectual agenda on the refugee debate,[2] with only a small number of these being conceived and constructed by the refugees themselves. In the study reported in this article, we interviewed a number of temporary protection visa (TPV) holders living in Melbourne, as part of a larger project documenting the personal narratives, experiences and journeys of TPV holders in Australia, who as asylum seekers experienced prolonged mandatory detention first hand. The primary objective of the project is to provide a forum for TPV holders to have their stories and experiences heard, in order to document and record their personal journeys. This collection will, we hope, facilitate a greater understanding of the experiences that led these TPV holders to seek political asylum in Australia. This essay focuses specifically on the emotional responses of TPV holders to the government-inspired stereotypes which represent them as 'illegals', 'queue-jumpers', 'cashed-up immigrants' and other dehumanising labels.

DEHUMANISATION

For several years now, the primary public labels employed to describe onshore asylum seekers have been those of 'queue-jumpers' and 'illegals'.[3] The term 'queue-jumper' has been particularly prominent in public discourse; a term designed to suggest that onshore arrivals are undeserving—having taken a resettlement position from a more worthy (and certainly more grateful and compliant) 'offshore' refugee. Playing upon notions of fairness and orderliness, Minister for Immigration Philip Ruddock has even likened onshore asylum seekers to "thieves" who "steal" places from genuine refugees. Despite the absence of any real 'queue' in receiving countries such as Pakistan, Iran and Indonesia,[4] this language has been effective in depicting asylum seekers as a deviant group unworthy of protection.

These discourses of exclusion and denigration were reinforced throughout 2001–2, when a systematic pattern of government misrepresentation sought to portray asylum seekers as serial child-abusers.[5] This was not limited to the most well-known and notorious case of the 'children overboard' incident. Other episodes include the claim made by Liberal senator George Brandis that "a potential illegal immigrant [had] attempted to strangle a child". A subsequent Senate inquiry found that navy witness statements reportedly relating this alleged episode did not exist.[6] In the case of the lip-sewing protests of Afghan hunger strikers, Government responses also involved unfounded accusations of child abuse.[7] It was alleged that adult detainees had forcibly sewed the lips of children. Separate investigations by the South Australian Government and the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, with the cooperation of Australian Correctional Management, found no evidence of parents encouraging children to engage in acts of self-harm.[8] This too was found to be an

unsubstantiated allegation, but a pattern or regime of misrepresentation was now apparent. Under pressure, or to gain electoral mileage out of their tough stance, the government appeared quite willing to portray asylum seekers as an irresponsible and aberrant group, hostile to Australian standards of decency and parental responsibility, with little regard for their children's wellbeing or safety.[9]

Meanwhile, Australia continues to be the only regime in the world with a mandatory detention policy applied to children, and continues to lock up young children in defiance of international treaty commitments on the rights of the child. Government rhetoric implicitly shifts the blame to the parents for putting their children in this situation. Despite a letter from Afghan detainees expressing their great offence at the baseless accusations of child abuse, and urging the Prime Minister to set the record straight,[10] the government has refused to apologise.[11]

'ILLEGAL'

At the heart of the 1951 Refugee Convention lies something of a legal paradox. While an asylum seeker with a well-founded fear of persecution landing in a signatory nation is legally entitled to protection, the convention places no obligation on nations to actually admit them, so that such a claim can be made.[12] In practice, signatory governments have had to manage this tension through immigration and asylum policy. Happily, most signatory nations have managed to do so, humanely, without turning these legal complexities into a populist wedge for political gain. Until recently, this was also true of Australia. But political choices have been made about onshore asylum seekers arriving by boat. Though their entry is by definition 'unauthorised', the political decision to label them 'illegal' is a disingenuous simplification, amounting to deliberate distortion of the issue. Making a claim for asylum in a signatory nation remains a lawful act. It should also be noted that Australia's punitive temporary protection policy for 'unauthorised' arrivals found to be refugees does not so easily slip between the cracks. The Convention specifically states that genuine refugees should not be penalised for their method of entry.[13]

'Hamid' made this point from the perspective of a refugee, now living in Melbourne:

> I've heard about the legality issue since I was in the camp. What makes someone legal? Is it the international law or Australian law? I'm a legal asylum seeker according to the UN. According to their definition of asylum seeker, I'm a legal asylum seeker. Australia is trying to change that for other purposes.

For most refugees, these labels are hurtful and destabilising—especially while they are making the difficult cultural transitions that accompany resettlement in a new country. As 'Leila', an Iraqi refugee, puts it:

> The Australian government looks at us as if we are criminals. We didn't commit any crimes; we came to Australia looking for freedom and peace . . . so why do they call us these names? When we were in the camp, the officers used to look at us like we were criminals . . . We left because of the criminal president [of Iraq]. We come to Australia and they call us criminals . . . is it possible for a child who is two, five or ten to be a criminal?

Along these lines, 'Hasan' goes one step further to suggest that:

> These expressions that we hear from radio stations, newspapers, and other media increase the depression that we suffer . . . we came here to save our lives . . . all these expressions really hurt us. Every once in a while, a minister comes up and says we're illegal. Why illegal? Did we steal anything or commit any crime? We came here for protection, why did we leave our country? Our country is not poor, maybe richer than Australia. We came here because of what we suffered.

He goes on to express his perception of the media's coverage of asylum-seeker issues, and its responsibility in the ensuing public debate:

> The media has a significant effect on the people . . . in radio stations and newspapers, they make us sound like we're killers, criminals, illegal, and disrespectful of others. By that, the Australian people are scared of us, because the word 'illegal' has a big effect on settled and safe societies. Australians don't know anything about asylum seekers, there's no-one to tell them about us. They should go inside the detention centre and see the truth; I never saw a journalist in there, or a camera.

"We're not migrants, we are asylum seekers. There is a big difference between the two."

Many interviewees spoke of the impossibility of obtaining valid travel documents as a political refugee fleeing an authoritarian regime. 'Ali' is one:

> If someone lived in Iraq obeying Saddam's rules, they'd be able to get a passport and apply to migrate legally. However, those who are prosecuted with death for a crime that they haven't committed, how could they get a passport? An ordinary person, who was not involved in the Ba'ath party didn't have the right to get a passport. Without that, then how can they apply for anything?

'Habib', an Afghan on a TPV, makes a similar point:

> I believe what they are saying is very unfair and not justified. We are neither 'illegals' nor 'queue jumpers'; we are people seeking refuge from life-threatening situations. Someone who risks his or her life does not do it for fun, but for pure necessity, in desperation. In Afghanistan under the Taliban the Tajik people's lives as a whole, and my life in particular, were in danger. I was accused of being a Northern Alliance sympathiser. For such accusations, other innocent people were publicly executed, and I was lucky to have the opportunity to escape a certain death. I had no choice but to come to Australia by boat. We did not have the right to get passports from the Taliban government.

'Ali' went on to comment on what he perceives as a double standard on Iraqi refugees:

> The media and the government say that we came to Australia illegally. This is not true and they know all the circumstances that made asylum seekers to come this way, not only to Australia, but all over the world . . . every time anything happens in Iraq, the American president makes a speech asking for the Iraqi people's rights, same with the Australian prime minister. We are these Iraqi people, and we ran away from our country. They know the reason why we ran away, how do they ask us to come the 'legal' way? . . . we didn't come here for a holiday.

'Abdallah' finds the whole debate difficult to understand:

> I don't know what they mean by it. If I came legally and with a formal passport, how would I be an asylum seeker? What's the point of seeking asylum if I could legally leave my country with my passport? I think that asylum seekers have to be illegal because they have to cross the border of their country illegally.

To make matters worse, 'Salem' points out that interpreters and translators have often mistakenly used the Arabic term for 'illegitimate' when attempting to explain the so-called 'illegal' status of asylum seekers in detention. In effect, refugees have been called 'bastards' in official situations, causing them great offence:

> The Arabic translation of [the] word 'illegal' is not the word that they used . . . the word that they used meant 'illegitimate' not illegal, and this offends our religion and values. In the case of children . . . it means that they have no father, unknown parents, or that their parents aren't legally married . . . this expression is very aggravating since it has a strong effect on our mental and social state, as well as our values.

QUEUE JUMPERS

The Australian government has argued that the host of legislative measures against onshore arrivals is designed to protect humanitarian resettlement places for 'offshore' refugees applying from other countries. Indeed, to support this policy, the present government has combined the previously separate categories into one humanitarian quota—thus en-

suring that onshore arrivals do in fact deny a resettlement place to an offshore refugee—a situation that did not apply under the previous government. Even so, Australia has not filled its resettlement quota of twelve thousand places in recent years, belying the rhetoric of 'genuine' refugees missing out. More critically, there are numerous logical problems with the idea of an orderly 'queue', owing to the nature of refugee determination processes in 'receiving' countries like Pakistan and Indonesia. Many receiving countries, including Indonesia, are not signatories to the United Nations Refugee Convention, and therefore it falls to chronically under-resourced UNHCR offices alone to make a determination of refugee claims. As such, these UNHCR offices end up with enormous numbers of claims. In Pakistan this situation means that the UNHCR office does not individually determine the refugee status of Afghan asylum seekers. Yet if an applicant wishes to come to Australia under the humanitarian component of our migration program, the Australian High Commissioner will insist that his or her claim cannot be considered until they are registered with the UNHCR.[14]

Equally, the resettlement capacity of transit countries is often limited. For example, even if the UNHCR Jakarta office finds a refugee-status claim to be successful, the refugee is unlikely to be found a resettlement country in the immediate future. From January 2000 to December 2001, the UNHCR in Jakarta found five hundred successful refugee claims but could only offer resettlement places for sixty-five of them. In the whole of 2001, Australia agreed to resettle only two refugees identified in Indonesia—one of whom was a child survivor of the SIEV X disaster and the other a child whose father was already in Australia.[15] As Crock and Saul argue, "this statistic weakens somewhat Australia's claim that it is committed to protecting refugees as long as they join the queue and follow proper procedures".[16]

On the 'queue' issue, 'Hamid' provides the following testament:

> I looked for that queue when I was in north Iraq and they told me that I couldn't apply for asylum in my country. I also looked for it in Iran, Malaysia and Indonesia. I didn't have a place to stay and believe me, if I could find a safe way to come, I would have waited, but the truth is, there aren't any queues.

The realities of accessing UN refugee determination processes are far from the picture of orderly, safe offshore queuing used to justify recent Australian deterrence measures. 'Sami' reflected on his experience of forced migration:

> Where would we get the UN acceptance? In Jordan? It was too dangerous because it's close to Iraq and the UN didn't provide us with a formal document that would allow us to stay in the country where it's situated. In Jordan, we could have been arrested at any time and sent back to Iraq. So we had to get as far as possible from the danger. This is what Australia called queue jumping.

'Fatima' was one of many asylum seekers rejected by overloaded UNHCR offices that had inadequate resources to review her case. She speaks of the difficulties facing refugees who are forced to rely on people smugglers in a foreign country:

> We had a two-week visa for Malaysia and if they caught us after that, we'd be arrested. The two weeks passed and we didn't get the Indonesian visa, so we had to pay three hundred American dollars to have another two-week extension to our visa. We got tired since we were told different things everyday. Some people recommended applying through the UN, which we did, and we were rejected.

Lack of adequate information for asylum seekers is also part of the problem. Peter Mares argues that "even if there were such a thing as a functional 'queue' for refugees to get to Australia, many people coming on boats would probably not know about it, or know how to join it". Many asylum seekers are unaware of the existence of the UNHCR in countries through which they passed.[17]

Iraqi refugees who first fled to Iran find the idea of a 'queue' does not reflect the realities in many 'transit' countries. 'Hasan' is one:

> I don't know what they mean by queue. Do they mean the queue for applying for a visa in the Australian embassy? I don't think they were allowing asylum seeking in Baghdad or Tehran. And even if they were allowing it, no-one could apply through

Interpreters and translators have often mistakenly used the Arabic term for 'illegitimate' when attempting to explain the so-called 'illegal' status of asylum seekers in detention. In effect, refugees have been called 'bastards' in official situations, causing them great offence.

> the embassy because the government would know about it. Also, I haven't heard that Australia was allowing asylum seeking in Iraq or Iran.

Others emphasise the difficulties of the short time frames for those fleeing persecution. This is the case for 'Sharif' who says:

> Even if there was a queue, someone in my situation can't wait, my life was in danger, I felt danger everywhere I went and I wasn't safe with my family in order to wait.

Once again, others point to the distinctive use of these demeaning labels in Australia. These voices are reminders of the political choices made in this country, which have not been made in countries receiving far more asylum seekers. 'Abdallah' comments:

> In other countries, such as Europe, people run away to another country and they're given asylum and never hear of the expression queue jumper . . . The number of people that came to Australia and have the TPV isn't that big . . . Honestly the expression 'queue jumpers' is meaningless and it comes from the immigration minister. Besides, if someone had to leave the country, he didn't have the chance to wait and queue because he'd be killed. Queuing can mean death.

'ECONOMIC MIGRANTS'

As Mares notes, Australian media coverage seems to be fixated upon ideas of Australia's 'pull' factors—suggesting a phenomenon of economic migration, rather than the 'push' factors that force refugees to leave their homes in the first place.[18] The federal government has reinforced these misconceptions with official statements about refugees "seeking migration outcomes".[19] Sharon Pickering, in her survey of the treatment of refugee and asylum-seeker issues in the Australian media, draws a similar conclusion to Mares:

> With few exceptions, reports on asylum seekers and refugees have not been interested in listening to the voices of asylum seekers, nor of home country conditions or conditions of flight. When alternative views are offered, they are usually presented as 'human interest' stories rather than 'hard' news.[20]

'Salem', an Iraqi TPV holder, finds the use of the term 'migrants' a strange one in the context of his personal experience as a refugee:

> We're not migrants, we are asylum seekers. There is a big difference between the two. Distorting the truth about boat people, and hiding the real reasons we sought asylum in Australia, the Australian government launched a huge media campaign for political reasons, calling us 'immigrants' when we are not immigrants, but asylum seekers.

While there will always be a minority of cases in which an asylum claim has been made fraudulently, the processes of refugee-status determination in Australia are rigorous and lengthy. Moreover, as many refugees point out, the very idea of someone risking their lives in unseaworthy boats when they are not in danger is difficult to sustain. The phenomenon of onshore asylum seekers arriving by boat can only be truly understood as one of forced migration. Indeed, the high success rates of asylum claims made by onshore asylum seekers in Australia testify to an official acknowledgement of this fact. 'Ahmed' puts it succinctly:

> These are strange words. If I didn't have to come this way, I wouldn't have risked my life and crossed the sea. I had no other choice. It was a big risk and a life threat. Do you think I'd risk my life for no reason? Crossing the sea in a small boat for no reason?

The distinction between asylum seekers and 'migrants' is cogently articulated by 'Mohammed':

> We're asylum seekers, not migrants so they can't call us queue jumpers . . . a migrant is someone who comes to work and change the circumstances of his life. However, an asylum seeker is in danger and he goes to another country to find peace. This person fears death and wants to run away from it, could he wait and stand in the queue in the Australian embassy? This is impossible . . . because if someone is worried about their life, how could he wait for his turn . . . we're asylum seekers, not migrants. They should go back to the UN and see the definitions of an asylum seeker and migrant. A migrant comes to work, or study, a migrant hands in his degree . . . that's not the case for us, we had to leave our country, we didn't have a choice.

Although aware of the unorthodox route taken to reach Australia, 'Omar' nevertheless rejects the notion that the mode of seeking asylum somehow renders one less deserving:

> I escaped the Taliban regime and worked my way down to the seaport where I paid my fare to shipping smugglers to embark to Australia in 'rust-buckets'. I am thoroughly distressed at being labelled a 'queue jumper' or 'illegal immigrant', as I was a genuine asylum seeker. It was an assumption there were queue jumpers; it was quite false. It was not possible for me to migrate to Australia as I had no family members residing in Australia, other than as an asylum seeker.

While much of recent Australian refugee policy and rhetoric about desired 'migration outcomes' has suggested that refugees come here for 'lifestyle reasons', interviews with refugees suggest a different picture. Many refugees stress the desire simply to get to a country of relative peace and security, and the relative expense of Europe or North America over Australia. For 'Sami', Australia was chosen simply because it was the only affordable option:

> If we could have gone to Europe, we would have, but we couldn't afford it. The asylum programs there are ten times better than in Australia. Over there, you can get a passport after seven months which allows you to travel freely. They also don't arrest asylum seekers. We didn't target Australia. We felt like we were in prison in Australia. Financial problems, as well as all the security issues prevented us seeking asylum in Europe. We couldn't afford to go.

EXPERIENCES OF AUSTRALIAN PEOPLE

Many interviewees spoke of the warm welcome they received from ordinary Australians. In detention centres, many had been led to believe that they would face a hostile reception in the community. As 'Aisha' comments, this was far from the case. They clearly identify the government as the agent of their stigmatisation:

> At first, I thought that asylum seekers were not welcome by the Australian people. Now, after a year of interacting with them, I feel that Australians welcome us, help us, and want to show their support to the federal government. This government is very cruel and doesn't want us in Australia.

The contradictory public messages and mixed feelings expressed towards asylum seekers are perplexing for the refugees themselves, as 'Leila' notes:

> In the camp, they always used to say that the Australians don't want us and don't want to deal with us or interact with us. We felt that it was the opposite. We saw people doing protests for us. I also saw people on TV standing in front of the camp crying for us. They were so hurt for us; they even broke the cables and released people. Why do government people call us criminals and make us look like criminals? We feel that the people are with us, only the government is against us. We love the Australians and we feel that we get along with them. We have Australian friends, and we feel that they want us to live here all together.

'Leila' went on to make a special plea to the Australian government:

> We ask the Australian government not to make us look bad in front of the Australian people. We love Australia and we now feel that we are in our country. We feel comfortable despite everything, more than in our own country. We ask the government to stop saying things about us, such as throwing our children off boats; this is not true. I always try

"I looked for that queue when I was in north Iraq. I also looked for it in Iran, Malaysia and Indonesia. I didn't have a place to stay and believe me, if I could find a safe way to come, I would have waited, but the truth is, there aren't any queues."

> to provide my children with love, attention, safety and settling down until their father is permitted to come from Iran to Australia. I'm trying my best to provide comfort to them and I just hope that they'll get everything they need.

MEDIA

Responses to the media are mixed among TPV holders. Many are appreciative of the perceived role television played in highlighting the conditions they endured when in detention. 'Saha' is one:

> [We felt] the media was on our side in the camp. They used to talk about us on the news and we used to see it on Channel 7. They used to explain our situation, so we felt that they were on our side. However, we felt that the government was against us. They gave us a temporary visa for three years. The government now has stopped boats from getting into Australia; we were on the last one. Why don't they give us the permanent visa? How many are we?

Others have a less flattering view of the Australian media. 'Rania' is a survivor of the SIEV X tragedy, in which 353 asylum seekers drowned en route to Australia:

> In regards to the media, they just wanted to get the news: how did the accident happen? And about how we saw the other ships and they didn't help us . . . They didn't ask us whether we were comfortable, or happy with the Australian government. Until now, nobody has talked to us about these issues. Only one organisation helped us and this was the Victorian Arabic Social Services, it's the only place where I felt that they were on our side and defended us.

Australia's political leadership has actively promoted these discourses of exclusion and divisiveness that now permeate the mainstream media. Indeed, Prime Minister Howard's electoral platform in 1996 spoke of the need to 'liberate' Australia from a form of political correctness putatively associated with left-wing academics and commentators.[21] Perversely, political correctness has been replaced by a systematic discourse of exclusion in which negative representations of 'others'—particularly Arabs, Muslims and Indigenous people—have come to be regarded as symbols of a 'liberated' society, not a racially paranoid one.[22]

CONCLUSION

As Pickering argues, media stereotypes portraying asylum seekers as a threat to the nation seek to validate a host of increasingly repressive state responses.[23] Recently, the systematic attempt to depict unauthorised arrivals as undeserving has been paralleled by new Temporary Protection Visa regulations in Australia. Under the TPV policy, some of the most vulnerable people in the Australian community live with the ongoing fear of being refused a visa extension after three years, and are deemed ineligible for English classes, housing assistance and a range of settlement assistance measures available to refugees on permanent protection visas. Of particular concern, TPVs have no right to family reunion programs and no right of return if they leave the country. As such, many TPVs are permanently isolated from their spouses and children. This policy of open discrimination against TPV holders has resulted in considerable levels of anguish and hardship for already traumatised asylum seekers, and placed severe strain on community-sector agencies and services.[24] As at 1 August 2002, official DIMIA figures put the number of TPVs in the Australian community at 7957.[25] Australia, and more recently Denmark, remain the only countries in the world to provide 'temporary' sanctuary, in its punitive form, to those who have been recognised as conventional refugees.[26]

These same people have been stigmatised by

what Mungo MacCallum calls Ruddock's "verbal master stroke" of the "unlawful" tag.[27] This view of "illegal intruders" committing premeditated acts of self-harm[28] or harm to their own children has been reinforced by politicians, with little serious media scrutiny or debate. The deliberate manipulation of language to exclude asylum seekers from any category of people with whom one might feel human solidarity demonstrates the power of language to demonise and dehumanise the most vulnerable of human beings: those in desperate need of protection and care.

1. As the former Human Rights Commissioner Chris Sidoti noted, "no other western country permits incommunicado detention of asylum-seekers". See Chris Sidoti, *For those who come across the seas: The detention of unauthorised arrivals in Australia*, HREOC, Canberra, 1998, p.224.
2. A point made by Mueen Al-Breihi, 'A Personal Experience of the TPV Policy', in M. Leach and F. Mansouri (eds), *Critical Perspectives on Refugee Policy in Australia*, Deakin University, Geelong, 2003, pp.165–74.
3. See for example Sharon Pickering, 'Common Sense and Original Deviancy: News Discourses and Asylum Seekers in Australia', *Journal of Refugee Studies* 14:2, 2001, pp.169–186.
4. For example, Australia has accepted only two UNHCR-processed asylum seekers directly from Indonesia in recent years.
5. See Michael Leach, 'Disturbing Practices: Dehumanising Asylum Seekers in the Refugee "Crisis" in Australia 2001–2', *Refuge* 21:3, 2003, pp.25–33.
6. Matt Price, 'Strangling claims unsupported', *Australian*, 6 April 2002.
7. See for example 'Woomera hunger strike continues as talks fail', *ABC Online News*, 25 January 2002, <www.abc.net.au/news/2002/01/item20020125080108_1.htm>.
8. See 'Media Statement by President Professor Alice Tay AM and Dr Sev Ozdowski, Human Rights Commissioner', *Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission*, 6 February 2002, <www.hreoc.gov.au/media_releases/2002/05_02.html>.
9. Leach, 'Disturbing Practices', p.29.
10. "Might we take this opportunity to assure you that no adult person in this Centre sewed the lips of any child. We hope you will have the opportunity to set right the record on this matter which has offended our dignity very greatly." Afghan Delegates' Letter to Prime Minister, 20 February 2002.
11. Andrew West, 'This isn't a camp, its [sic] an oven and we are burning', *Sun-Herald*, 17 February 2002. The United Nations Association of Australia argued that the government should apologise to asylum seekers wrongly accused of child neglect. See United Nations Association of Australia, *Unity* 288, 22 February 2002, <www.unaa.org.au/news288>.
12. Peter Mares, 'What next for Australia's refugee policy?', in Leach and Mansouri (eds.), *Critical Perspectives*, 2003, pp.1–21, at 2.
13. *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, 1951, s.31.
14. Peter Mares, *Borderline: Australia's Treatment of Refugees and Asylum Seekers* (second edition), UNSW Press, Sydney, 2002, pp.21–23.
15. Mares, 2002, pp.208, 243–4.
16. Mary Crock and Ben Saul, *Future Seekers: Refugees and the Law in Australia*, Federation Press, Sydney, 2002, p.35.
17. Mares, 2002, pp.208, 221–3.
18. Mares, 2002, pp.30–31.
19. See for example Philip Ruddock, transcript of 6PR interview with John McNamara, <www.liberal.org.au/MEDIA/campaign/RUDDOCK/ruddocktrmcnamara23oct.htm>, 23 October 2001.
20. Sharon Pickering, 'The Hard Press of Asylum', *Forced Migration Review* 8, 2000, p.33.
21. Michael Clyne, 'When the discourse of hatred becomes respectable: does the linguist have a responsibility?', *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics* 26:1, 2003, pp.1–5.
22. Ghassan Hage, *Against Paranoid Nationalism*, Pluto Press, Australia, 2002.
23. Pickering, 'The Hard Press', p.173.
24. See Fethi Mansouri and Melek Bagdas, *Politics of Social Exclusion: Refugees on Temporary Protection Visas*, Deakin University, Geelong, 2002, pp.6–7.
25. DIMIA Fact Sheet 74a, 'Boat Arrival Details', <www.immi.gov.au/facts/74a_boatarrivals.htm>, 1 August 2002.
26. Fethi Mansouri and Michael Leach, 'Temporary Protection of Refugees: Australian Policy and International Comparisons', in Leach and Mansouri, *Critical Perspectives*, pp.103–122.
27. M. MacCallum, 'Girt by sea', *Quarterly Essay* 5, Black Inc., Melbourne, 2002.
28. Clyne, 'When the Discourse', p.4.

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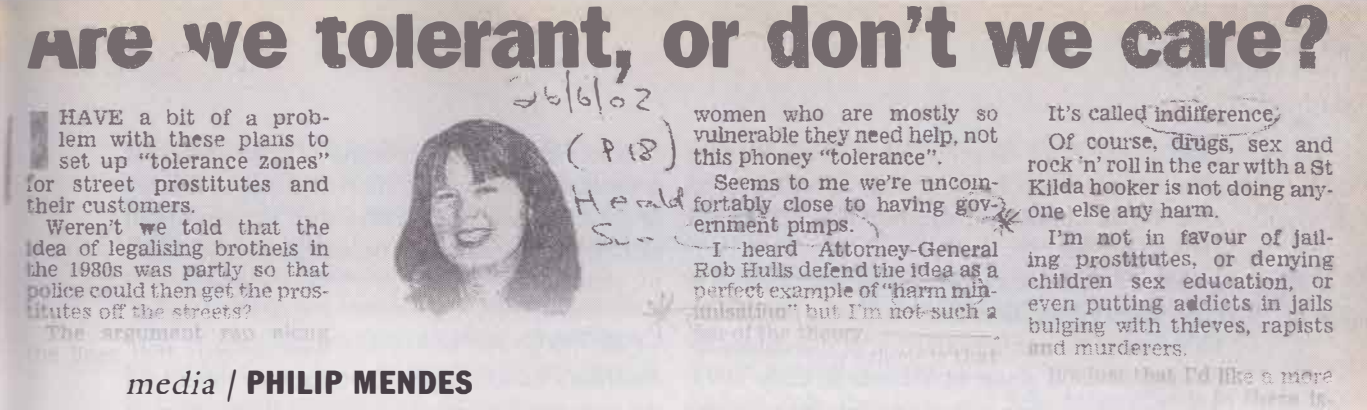
Are we tolerant, or don't we care?

I HAVE a bit of a problem with these plans to set up "tolerance zones" for street prostitutes and their customers.

Weren't we told that the idea of legalising brothels in the 1980s was partly so that police could then get the prostitutes off the streets?

The argument was along

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women who are mostly so vulnerable they need help, not this phoney "tolerance".

Seems to me we're uncomfortably close to having government pimps.

I heard Attorney-General Rob Hulls defend the idea as a perfect example of "harm minimisation" but I'm not such a

It's called indifference.

Of course, drugs, sex and rock 'n' roll in the car with a St Kilda hooker is not doing anyone else any harm.

I'm not in favour of jailing prostitutes, or denying children sex education, or even putting addicts in jails bulging with thieves, rapists and murderers.

Instead I'd like a more

media / **PHILIP MENDES**

DUMBING IT DOWN

The *Herald Sun*'s influence on social policy: four case studies

MELBOURNE'S DAILY TABLOID, the Murdoch-owned *Herald Sun*, is particularly noteworthy for its sensationalist, slanted and simplistic reporting and commentary on social issues. It has played a key role in reinforcing punitive and conservative approaches to poor and disadvantaged people. Over the past decade, the newspaper has run campaigns on child abuse, illicit drugs, chroming, street prostitution, homelessness, and welfare fraud. Many of these campaigns have directly influenced government policy and public opinion.[1]

Herald Sun campaigns have at least five major characteristics. Firstly, they promote simplistic law-and-order solutions to social problems, including zero tolerance for drug users and street prostitutes, and the banning of sales of spray cans to minors.

Secondly, they are furiously critical of the welfare state and welfare professionals. Social workers are presented as a symbol of the failings of the public sector, and characterised as inefficient and bureaucratically authoritarian in their interventions.[2] This distaste for state welfare is particularly reflected in the *Herald Sun*'s opposition to government-controlled harm minimisation schemes for drug users and street prostitutes.

Thirdly, the newspaper explicitly rejects structural explanations of social problems. With little interest in investigating complex systemic factors (poverty, unemployment, family violence, childhood abuse, mental illness), the emphasis is on simplistic definitions which lead comfortably to legal 'solutions'.

Similarly, there is little attempt to attain the views of welfare consumers on their understanding of, and preferred solutions to, these problems. The *Herald Sun* has rarely spoken to groups such as the Prostitutes' Collective (now known as Resourcing Health and Education in the Sex Industry), or the Victorian Drug Users' Support Group, or the Create Foundation which represents young people in state care. Instead it features a consistent paternalistic emphasis on imposing solutions on socially excluded groups.

Finally, much of the tabloid's reportage fits the pattern of 'moral panic', or the stereotyping and representation of groups as posing an exaggerated threat to traditional social values and interests. This threat is then managed by isolating and censuring those individuals or groups judged to have transgressed.[3] Perhaps the best known example of moral panic was the 1996 attack on the Paxton family—three unemployed teenagers from Melbourne's disadvantaged western suburbs—by *A Current Affair*.[4]

CASE ONE: CHILD ABUSE

The *Herald Sun*'s sensationalist coverage of child abuse has advocated simplistic solutions to complex and long-term problems, diverting attention from the overall child-abuse problem to a few individual and not necessarily representative cases, and identifying scapegoats. The paper has pursued a conservative political agenda based on defending traditional institutions and values, such as the nu-

clear family, from allegedly subversive or deviant groups such as incompetent and/or authoritarian state social workers or, alternatively, individually abusive parents.[5]

The *Herald Sun*'s most notable intervention in child abuse/protection issues involved its successful campaign for the introduction of mandatory reporting of child abuse in Victoria in early 1993. Mandatory reporting refers to the legal requirement for certain professional groups to report suspected child abuse or neglect to the appropriate state authorities.

This campaign exploited public outrage concerning the murder of toddler Daniel Valerio by his stepfather Paul Aiton, and utilised various emotive strategies including photographs of the abused child, headlines such as 'Save Our Children', a public meeting chaired by Victoria's best-known talkback radio host, and daily publication of a pro-forma letter demanding mandatory reporting.[6]

However, mandatory reporting in isolation was never going to prevent a repeat of the Daniel Valerio episode. Mandatory reporting would probably not have saved Daniel's life, since all the authorities responsible for child protection already knew of the case. In addition, the introduction of mandatory reporting at a time of extensive cuts to support and prevention services by the Kennett State Government arguably increased rather than lessened the possibility of further such deaths occurring.[7]

A further study of the *Herald Sun*'s reporting of high-profile child abuse cases during 1996–97 found a similar pattern. Five characteristics were prevalent: sensationalist headlines accompanied by either poignant photos of dead children or, alternatively, photos of children removed from their families; advocacy of simplistic and immediate solutions to complex child protection problems; attacks on individual child protection workers, who were portrayed either as 'bungling and incompetent wimps', or alternatively as bullies; a consistent reaffirmation of family values by means of contrasting grieving extended family members (and never questioning their past contribution to or, alternatively, lack of involvement in the child's life) with the state professionals who deserved to be blamed for the child's death; and a failure to consider broader structural issues such as the limited availability of resources to support carers with intellectual or psychiatric disabilities in the community.[8]

The *Herald Sun*'s reporting of child abuse has consistently reflected a conservative bias in defence of the traditional family, rather than a concern with identifying the real causes of, and possible solutions to, child abuse.

CASE TWO: SUPERVISED INJECTING

Australia's tabloid papers have strongly influenced the opposition to proposals for the liberalisation of illicit drug laws. The 1997 campaign by 2UE talkback radio hosts and the Sydney tabloid, the *Daily Telegraph*, was influential in destroying Federal Government support for the ACT's proposed heroin trial.[9] Similarly, Sydney's *Sun-Herald* inspired the closure of a Redfern needle exchange by claiming—wrongly—that it had been providing injecting equipment to adolescent users.[10]

The *Herald Sun* has also been a consistent supporter of prohibitionist policies, and was prominent in the successful 1996 campaign against the Victorian Government's proposed decriminalisation of marijuana.[11] Four years later, the newly elected Victorian ALP Government proposed the establishment of supervised injecting facilities for heroin users in five Melbourne municipalities known for their high rates of heroin overdose. Following a tumultuous six-month debate, the proposal was defeated by the conservative Liberal/National Party majority in the Victorian Upper House.[12]

The Chairman of the Victorian Drug Policy Expert Committee, Dr David Penington, attributed the defeat of the proposal to a campaign by talkback radio hosts, and tabloid newspapers.[13] He referred specifically to the *Herald Sun*'s position, arguing that it had manipulated its mainly blue-collar readership into opposing necessary drug law reforms.[14]

The *Herald Sun*'s campaign against injecting facilities was led by hardline conservative columnist, Andrew Bolt, and comprised a number of themes: sensationalist headlines which constructed injecting facilities as a surrender to the demon drug, rather than as a pragmatic public health response to the large increase in heroin-related deaths;[15] a denial (despite significant overseas evidence to the contrary)[16] that injecting facilities would save lives;[17] an argument that injecting facilities would send the 'wrong message' to young people, and imply that the state supported illicit drug use;[18] a highlighting of local community groups opposed to injecting facilities without commensurate coverage of those in

support;[19] a simple law-and-order solution to heroin use involving the prohibition of dangerous drugs, a police crackdown on known hotspots, longer jail terms for drug dealers, and compulsory detoxification and rehabilitation for existing users.[20]

In summary, the *Herald Sun*'s reporting of illicit drug debates has reflected a continued preference for prohibitionist/zero tolerance solutions over alternative harm minimisation measures.

CASE THREE: CHROMING

In January 2002, the Victorian Parliamentary Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee released a discussion paper on volatile substance abuse by young Victorians. The paper included a reference to harm minimisation practices used with young chromers, by a Victorian non-government welfare agency, Berry Street, including on occasions the monitoring of chroming on the agency premises.[21]

Following the publication of the DCPC Report, the *Herald Sun* accused Berry Street of operating 'safe sniffing houses' for young chromers akin to supervised injecting facilities for heroin users.[22] This accusation prompted an immediate directive by the Victorian Government that Berry Street cease its practice of supervising young people engaged in chroming. Later, the responsible Minister, Christine Campbell, would be demoted from her Community Services portfolio, apparently as a result of the 'chroming affair'.[23]

The ongoing *Herald Sun* campaign sought to promote a moral panic around the chroming issue, publishing more than thirty articles during the three-week period from late January to mid February 2002. The reports were distinguished by: the use of emotive terms such as 'parents will be shocked', 'disturbing revelation', and 'appalling message'; the advocacy of simplistic and immediate solutions to this complex social problem such as the resignation or sacking of the Minister, and the banning of the sale of glues and paints to children; the search for individual scapegoats such as Berry Street, the Minister for Community Services, Health Minister John Thwaites, and later, academics who had dared to question the *Herald Sun*'s mishandling of the affair; the use of evidence from highly contentious sources whose bona fides and motivations were never questioned; and the reaffirmation of the primacy and privacy of the family sphere, by contrasting the views of distraught parents opposed to chroming with the apparent tolerance of welfare professionals. Yet no probing questions were asked about any past actions of these parents which may have contributed to their child's entry into substitute care, and their associated self-harming behaviour.

Overall, the *Herald Sun* attempted to use the chroming affair to discredit harm minimisation policies in general. Conservative columnists such as Andrew Bolt, Paul Gray, and Sally Morrell argued for a prohibitionist approach, and depicted chroming as a matter of morality and responsibility which required a return to traditional social values such as the setting of tighter boundaries for young people. No consideration was given to substance abuse as a public health issue influenced by broader social factors and conditions.[24] Subsequently, the final report of the DCPC implicitly criticised the *Herald Sun*'s campaign by calling for more sensitive and responsible media reporting of volatile substance abuse.[25]

CASE FOUR: STREET PROSTITUTION

In February 2001, the Victorian Government established a consultative, bipartisan reference group known as the Attorney-General's Street Prostitution Advisory Group (AGSPAG) to address resident and community concerns around street prostitution in the inner-city suburb of St Kilda.

The final AGSPAG report recommended the establishment of streetworker centres and a two-year trial of tolerance areas in defined geographic zones.[26] The zones were not to be located close to schools, childcare centres, hospitals, places of worship, or residential and retail centres. However, following a concerted local campaign against the proposed tolerance zone sites, the government decided to withdraw the legislation.

Throughout the debate, the *Herald Sun* strongly opposed any liberalisation of street prostitution laws, and favoured a narrow law-and-order solution. The newspaper's reporting reflected the following themes: the state has no right to use taxpayers' money (allegedly $600,000 a year) to fund brothels; prostitution is an immoral activity which undermines traditional family values, and should not be sanctioned by government;[27] there are no suitable areas for street sex in St Kilda; tolerance zones will only lower property values, threaten the safety of children, and undermine local businesses;[28] tolerance zones are based on the same misplaced harm minimisation philosophy advocated by naive wel-

fare workers and bureaucrats and that has led to the endorsement of supervised injecting facilities for drug users and supervised chroming for young people in care;[29] tolerance zones and streetworker centres mean the legalisation of street prostitution which will not help existing streetworkers, but only lead to an increase in the number of prostitutes;[30] the policy solution is tougher policing. Street workers should be prosecuted, and male guttercrawlers publicly named and shamed.[31]

EXPLAINING THE *HERALD SUN*'S SOCIAL CONSERVATISM

There are a number of possible explanations for the *Herald Sun*'s conservatising of social problems, and its particular opposition to harm minimisation ideas.

One is that the *Herald Sun* reflects the interests of ruling groups, including media proprietors, in reinforcing the socioeconomic status quo. This explanation interprets the *Herald Sun*'s attacks on deviant groups in society—illicit drug users, chromers, the unemployed, the homeless, and street prostitutes—as being about the imposition of social control. Those groups which challenge mainstream social values need to be exposed and disciplined in order to restore the accepted social order.[32]

The difficulty with this explanation is that the harm minimisation alternative can also be construed as involving extended state control of deviant groups, and failing to address structural inequities. For example, plans for supervised injecting facilities emphasise continued professional support for and intervention with drug users, and their reintegration with mainstream values and the market economy. Harm minimisation policies appear to reflect a variety of professional, political and community interests and agendas that go well beyond the needs of service users. In contrast, the overt legalisation of illicit drugs or street prostitution would arguably allow for a more explicit focus on the social and economic empowerment of excluded groups.[33]

A second possible explanation is simply that sensationalist headlines sell newspapers, and equally that the populist or 'commonsense' view offered by the *Herald Sun* appeals to its mainly blue-collar readership.[34] The continued popularity of the *Herald Sun*—reflected in its average daily circulation of 555,000—appears to provide some support for this view. However, in the absence of substantial research, it is not obviously apparent that most *Herald Sun* readers favour zero tolerance solutions over harm minimisation or legalisation or structural alternatives. If the *Herald Sun* were to run regular front-page headlines decrying the level of poverty and inequality in Australia and demanding increased payments for low-income workers and income security recipients, it is conceivable that these solutions would also win reader support.

Perhaps the most likely explanation is that the *Herald Sun* remains politically aligned with the state Liberal Party, and views the use of 'wedge politics' around divisive social issues[35] as the most effective, subtle means of aiding conservative forces in Victoria. Given that the Victorian ALP Government remains wedded to economic rationalist agendas not dissimilar to those of the Liberal Party, it is perhaps only on social issues such as illicit drugs and prostitution that the *Herald Sun* can credibly paint the ALP as pursuing a relatively radical or socially threatening agenda.

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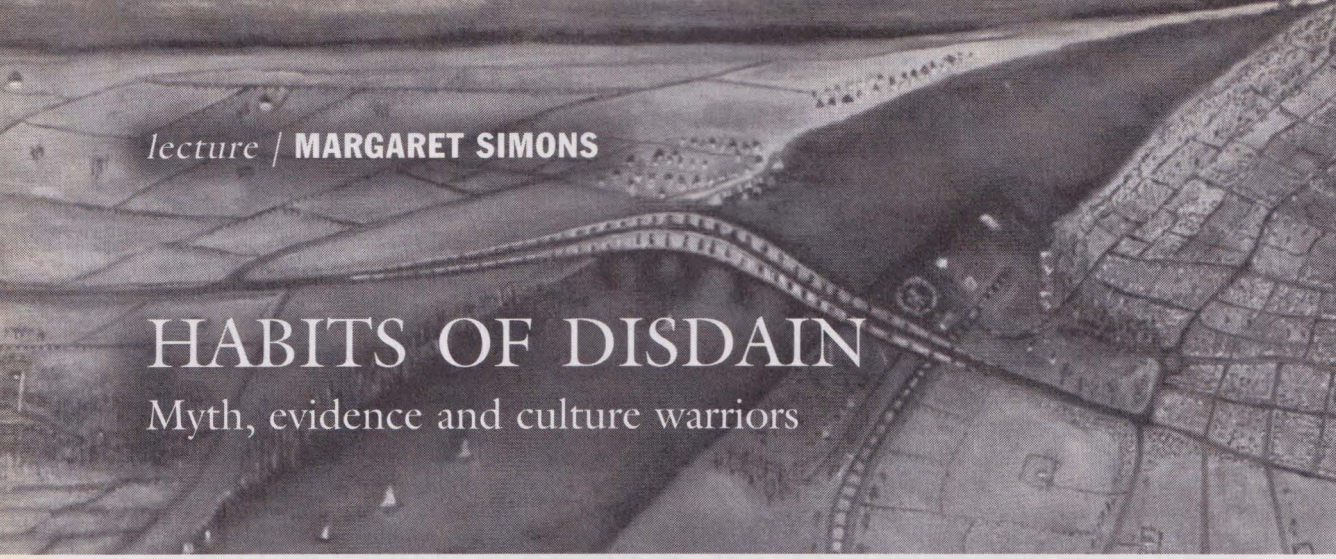

lecture / **MARGARET SIMONS**

HABITS OF DISDAIN

Myth, evidence and culture warriors

Sandra Saunders, detail from Creation 2003, *oil on canvas, 2003*

THE TITLE OF MY LECTURE alludes to one of the most striking paradoxes of public debate in this country at present.

I am referring to the gap between rhetoric and reality in the pronouncements of some prominent newspaper columnists and commentators—the people who have become known as the culture warriors of the Right. These commentators and columnists have made their mark by urging a retreat from political correctness. They condemn sentimentality and ideology. They attack others for sloppy research. But even as the culture warriors cheer on those who analyse footnotes, even as they insist on documentary evidence and hard-headed rationalism, they depart from their own principles. They fall alarmingly often into perpetuating myth.

I hope to illustrate this by talking about the response to my recent book about the Hindmarsh Island bridge affair, *The Meeting of the Waters*.

About halfway through my book, I wrote:

> Perhaps the story of Hindmarsh Island is not so much opera as Dreaming story—not an Aboriginal Dreaming story, or not only that, but a story for all of us. Like a Dreaming story, it tells us something about who we are. It tells us something about our culture.
>
> What are the highest achievements of white culture—western European culture? Most of us would think of the rule of law, judicial process, parliamentary democracy, the ideal of scholarship and also of freedom of speech, including the freedom of the media. If the Hindmarsh Island affair is a Dreaming story, then it is about these things. It is not only a story of what has been done to the Ngarrindjeri. It is also a story of what we have done to ourselves.

I think the Hindmarsh Island bridge affair remains one of the most important episodes of recent Australian history. But I also believe that until very recently, the publicly available narrative of what happened at Hindmarsh Island has been not evidence-based history, but myth. In fact to use some words that are resonant in the culture wars at present, Hindmarsh Island has been about the fabrication of history.

The details of the Hindmarsh Island affair will be dim in the minds of many, despite its importance. It was a turning point in our history, and I am not the only one who thinks this.

The anthropologist Dr Ron Brunton, until recently employed by the Institute of Public Affairs and now the Howard Government's most recent appointment to the ABC Board, has been one of the main barrackers for the view that Hindmarsh Island was about Aboriginal people lying.

In 1996, he wrote that the Howard Government's handling of the affair would "set the stage for its approach to Aboriginal affairs, and its attitude to probity in public life". He wrote that the affair was a metaphor for the Keating Government's approach to Aboriginal politics and Aboriginal heritage.[1] I agree with him on both points, although we differ hugely in our attitudes to the rights and wrongs of what happened on this little island at the mouth of the Murray.

Hindmarsh Island did indeed set the stage for all that has come since in Aboriginal affairs including, among other things, the prevailing attitude of scep-

ticism to oral history—the things Aboriginal people say about themselves.

The Hindmarsh Island bridge affair was in many ways the beginning of today's culture wars. Some might claim different dates. The Coronation Hill dispute in the mid 1980s was an overture, but there is no doubt that Hindmarsh Island was the Grand Opera.

Many of those who remain at the centre of the wars had their first walk in the sun, and came to national prominence, through the Hindmarsh Island affair.

Christopher Pearson, now a columnist for the *Australian*, made the leap from the Adelaide pond, and became a moderately sized fish in larger waters. Pearson is on the record as saying that it was his role in helping to precipitate the Hindmarsh Island Royal Commission that chiefly influenced John Howard to appoint Pearson as his speechwriter.[2] Since then, Pearson has been appointed to a range of key cultural institutions, including the council of the National Museum of Australia. The Museum has been under attack from Keith Windschuttle and others for its approach to Aboriginal history.

Another key player in the Hindmarsh Island affair, Dr Philip Jones, was a key member of the panel appointed to review displays at the National Museum and investigate allegations of political bias. Jones is, or was, a close friend of Pearson's. And so it goes on. Hindmarsh Island is one of the cornerstones of the culture wars, and indeed of recent Australian history.

But I am leaping too far ahead for those of you who have forgotten what it was all about. Let me take a step back.

The Hindmarsh Island affair is today best remembered as the episode that popularised the phrase 'secret women's business', now nearly always used mockingly and ironically. I have even seen it in an advertisement for chocolate biscuits.

So what was secret women's business all about? In the early 1990s there was a plan to build a bridge from the little South Australian town of Goolwa to Hindmarsh Island, which sits at the mouth of the Murray River—a place that might be loosely described as a sacred site for all Australians. I ask you to remember the name 'Goolwa', because I will return to it later.

At the last minute, in early 1994 and after planning approval had been granted, Aboriginal women of the Ngarrindjeri people claimed the island was special to them for reasons that could not be revealed. They applied to the then Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Robert Tickner, for a heritage order prohibiting the bridge.

As part of this process some of their secrets were written down and sealed in two envelopes marked 'Confidential: to be read by women only'. The women were successful. The Keating government banned the bridge. This was controversial, but would have long since disappeared from all but legal history books were it not for what happened next.

In early 1995—almost a year after the bridge was banned—another group of Aboriginal women came forward and said the claim of what had become known as 'secret women's business' was a hoax. They said the original Ngarrindjeri women had made up the stories.

A Royal Commission was called. In December 1995 it found that the secret women's business was a fabrication. 'Lies, lies, lies' was the headline in the *Adelaide Advertiser*.

There is nothing more corrosive to a relationship than the belief that you have been lied to. The finding of the Hindmarsh Island Royal Commission has echoed through Australian life since, to the point where it is now difficult to imagine how different things might have been had the Hindmarsh Island bridge affair never happened.

It has become entirely accepted that secret women's business was a lie. The conventional wisdom has been that the Hindmarsh Island bridge affair, and the willingness of white people to believe the Ngarrindjeri lies, marked the high-water mark of politically correct soft-headedness and sentimentality. Scepticism, even cynicism, has become the intellectually respectable way to approach the things Aboriginal people say about themselves.

In 2001, the Hindmarsh Island bridge was in the headlines again. The Federal Court had made a judgement that was interpreted by the media as overturning the findings of the Royal Commission. But the judgement was ridiculed in the popular press, most forcefully in the writings of those culture warriors who had supported the Royal Commission and indeed helped to bring it about.

Many people, by this time, had wearied of the story. This included the Labor Party, which has long since seemed to regard the entire affair as a slight embarrassment—part of the Keating legacy from which it wishes to distance itself.

I think this lack of interest is a shame, because Hindmarsh Island is one of the iconic cultural events of our time. I think we will be dealing with what happened at the mouth of the Murray in the 1990s, and what it means, for a long time yet. This is one of those big, almost archetypal stories, that we get in Australian history from time to time. Ludwig Leichhardt, Azaria Chamberlain, the NSW Rum Rebellion. Hindmarsh Island.

It is a story with mythic elements, and it is about myths—both those of Aboriginal Australia and perhaps more interestingly, those of white Australia.

In an article in the *Courier Mail* a few weeks ago, the publisher and columnist Michael Duffy claimed that the Right had pretty much won Australia's culture wars. He too put the argument in terms of myths and their debunking. He said that there were many "myths" that had once been central to our view of society that were now exposed because the "hegemony of the Left" was no more. Among the things he listed as discredited myths were the following assertions:

> that Aborigines are frequently killed in police stations; that economic reform will impoverish Australia; that genocide was committed against the Tasmanian Aborigines; that divorce and separation do not harm children; that one in three Australian wives is beaten up by her husband; that sea levels will rise by several centimetres by the year 2003 due to global warming; and that there was women's business at Hindmarsh Island.

Duffy said:

> At various times to disagree with any of these assertions meant attracting bitter and often vicious criticism in certain circles, particularly down south. This is no longer the case: the beliefs are still widespread, but debate is now tolerated. It is a dramatic change to the public culture of this country.[3]

These remarks are very telling. But let me make one thing clear. If he is correct, and political correctness is effectively dead, then I am glad. I am no champion of suppressing debate.

To the extent that the Left had fallen into habits of disdain, of closing down debate, of exercising a kind of soft censorship necessitating extraordinary acts of individual courage to combat, then political correctness was destructive.

Political correctness at its worst constituted a refusal to countenance evidence and points of view that were uncomfortable. When our minds close to evidence, when we insist on only thinking along certain well-defined tracks, then we betray the values of the enlightenment. We betray our own culture. We become dangerous.

The other thing that interests me about what Duffy wrote is, of course, that he placed Hindmarsh Island at the centre of the culture wars. And he talked about the "bitter and vicious" attacks the Right used to attract in the bad old days when debate, allegedly, wasn't tolerated.

But I'd like to ask Duffy what he thinks of the reception I have had over the past few weeks from some quarters. I would suggest that the "bitter and often vicious criticism" now comes most noticeably from those who are supposedly the victors. From the culture warriors of the Right.

I am talking about habits of disdain. This, I think, is what I have come up against. On both sides of the political divide, there is a sneering that takes the place of reasonable debate. People seem to have got used to disdaining certain points of view. They have fallen into comfortable habits. They sneer on cue. When something pops up that looks like what they are used to disdaining, they respond with a reflex sneer, and without considering the argument on its merits. And in all this, evidence gets lost.

A few years ago, Frank Moorhouse—once one of the main critics of political correctness—made an interesting pronouncement. He said there was a new threat to public life, a "curious and infuriating phenomenon even more mindless than political correctness and perhaps more vicious—the posture of anti-Political Correctness." Moorhouse said:

> I have observed a veritable appetite, say among some columnists, to oppose anything which sounds humanistic or what they consider to be held as politically correct by liberal-humanists—and Political Correctness it has to be remembered contains within its list many genuine virtues (it is the social implication that these virtues are beyond discussion which is the problem). It is a sure sign of political mindlessness to oppose all of the agenda of one's opponent. I think anti-Political Correctness is now the greater bane. A compulsive need to ridicule every humane or 'softhearted' impulse in areas of the indigenous people, illegal immigrants, feminism and so on.[4]

I was always a little sceptical about the censorship claims, given that they were being made by people with tenured academic posts and lots of space on the opinion pages of the nation's newspapers. For censored people, they certainly made a lot of noise.

I am with Moorhouse here. I think that in seeking to combat political correctness the warriors of the Right have fallen into something at least as silly and dangerous, and at least as ideologically blind to evidence. I sometimes think they have not advanced public and political discourse, but rather have given us the mirror image of what they opposed.

Duffy is correct. It is now permissible to say there was no women's business at Hindmarsh Island. In fact, I think my experience suggests that the more impermissible thing to say is that perhaps there *was* secret women's business at Hindmarsh Island.

I remember not so many years ago when people advancing right-wing points of view complained of soft censorship, of being subjected to abuse, name calling, and assaults on their professional reputations, rather than their ideas being properly considered. I was always a little sceptical about the censorship claims, given that they were being made by people with tenured academic posts and lots of space on the opinion pages of the nation's newspapers. For censored people, they certainly made a lot of noise.

But I think it is true that the Left was guilty of habits of disdain. That those on the Left threw names and labels around—racist, right winger and so on—rather than mounting arguments. And I think the Left has paid the price for that. If the Right has won the culture wars, part of the reason is that those on the Left have failed to articulate their case.

Particularly in areas such as Aboriginal disadvantage, the Left has failed to face up to the evidence of appalling policy failure. I agree with much of what Dr Marcia Langton said in last year's *Overland* lecture on these matters. But others are much better qualified than me to speak on Aboriginal disadvantage.

Let me return to Hindmarsh Island. Since Christopher Pearson was one of the main participants in the Hindmarsh Island affair, it isn't surprising that he was one of the first to respond to my book. Did he attack the evidence? No. Did he show where I had erred, giving too much weight to this or not enough to that? No. He resorted to misrepresentation and ad hominem attack. In one column, he referred to me as a "Gaia new age spiritualist" gardening columnist. When I responded correcting his errors and urging a consideration of the evidence, he attacked again, this time portraying me as a ruthlessly unethical journalist. He made the quite astonishing claim—one of a number of inventions directed at my credibility—that in an interview with him I had asked whether he had slept with any of the people involved in the Hindmarsh Island affair.

As if I would.

Pearson's response to this book has been not evidence-based argument, but misrepresentation and an assault on my professional reputation.

Paul Sheehan wrote a column attacking my book in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 19 May. The tenor of his column was that the Hindmarsh Island affair was a "crapulous saga", not worthy of further consideration. It was, he said, "amazing" that my book had caused the affair to surface again. My book, he said "tries to give credibility to the incredible".

Big statements, and one would expect the rest of the column to substantiate the attack. Nothing of the kind. His column was a recycling of old myths—white-man myths—about the Hindmarsh Island bridge affair, all of which had been addressed and debunked in the book. Sheehan attacked my book without naming it, and indeed it seemed to me without reading it. I wrote a letter to the editor, which the paper ran, accusing Sheehan of not having read the book. I haven't heard any rebuttal.

So much for intellectual rigour. So much for careful assessment of evidence. So much, indeed, for rationality.

Look at the language the cultural warriors use. Ron Brunton's language has been some of the most belligerent.

Brunton has, in various places, suggested that those who questioned or failed to support the find-

ings of the Royal Commission could do more harm to reconciliation than the worst racists. He has said that anthropologists who argued for the possibility of secret women's business were guilty of "creative anthropology" and "behaving badly".

Other commentators have adopted similar language. Piers Akerman who, as my book reveals, also was a player in the events that led to the calling of the Royal Commission, used terms such as "weasel words from self-interested academics" to describe the argument for secret women's business. He saw the Hindmarsh Island affair as an example of the "totalitarian attitude of radical feminists and the politically correct".

And so, if one disagrees with the culture warriors, one is not just wrong, but morally bad. Despicable. Totalitarian. Soft headed. Unprofessional. More damaging than a racist.

You can see the language everywhere in the culture wars. One is not accused of mistake, one is accused of fabrication. One does not just take an incorrect or questionable point of view, one is actively misleading. It is a bullying, hectoring sort of language. It is not the language of debate. It is the language of those who wish to dismiss, rather than engage with, alternative points of view.

It is not the language of conversation, or of free and rational debate. It is the language of propaganda.[5]

If I believed in soft censorship, then this surely is it. But I don't believe in it. People who are truly censored don't get to publish books, or give lectures such as this. Nevertheless, it is true that it takes some courage to tangle with the cultural warriors. One risks the vicious assaults that Michael Duffy claims were once the preserve of the Left. I am uncomfortably aware that by giving this lecture, I invite more attacks not necessarily on my work, but on myself and my reputation. Watch this space, I say with some trepidation. I am not complaining. Heat, kitchens, all that. But I do think the standard of public debate suffers when participants face such vitriol.

And my central message tonight is: look at the evidence on Hindmarsh Island. Argue, attack and undermine that if you can. The evidence shows that the Royal Commission miscarried. Whenever such processes miscarry, it is surely important for us to understand how and why. In the face of this urgent duty, ad hominem attacks are painful, but beside the point.

It is both a great shame and not at all surprising that many potentially worthwhile contributors never take part in media debates, and are confined largely to academia.

A great deal of good work goes unnoticed as a result. One of the most striking examples is surely the thorough and detailed research of the historian Anna Haebich, whose book *Broken Circles*, about the stolen generation, picked up a swag of literary and academic prizes yet failed to inform or visibly affect the then virulent public debate about Aboriginal children being taken from their parents.

This was despite the Right lamenting the lack of solid historical research on the issue. Haebich had done that research, yet they ignored her.

I asked Haebich recently whether she had considered making forays into the opinion pages of the nation's newspapers. Unfortunately, nobody asked her to do so, and she lacked the contacts one apparently needs in the media world. But in any case she didn't see the point. She would have had to risk personal attack. And, she said, what was the point of trying to debate the culture warriors, when they weren't really prepared to listen or engage? She said, "It's rather like trying to argue with a drunk at a party."

Back to Hindmarsh Island. Despite the responses I have described, the book is published. The Federal Court made its findings. The evidence on Hindmarsh Island is now out there, and there is no denying it. Any fair-minded consideration of that evidence can only lead to one conclusion: there never was a solid reason to think that Aboriginal women lied about secret women's business, and there are many reasons to think they were telling the truth. The Royal Commission was a miscarriage of justice.

How this miscarriage of justice came about is a story about secrets and power, and how they work not only in Ngarrindjeri society, but most tellingly in our own. Quite simply, the cultural warriors have been wrong about Hindmarsh Island. Several of them helped precipitate the Royal Commission. Then, victorious, they wrote the history.

I wouldn't have needed to write such a long book if the evidence for these statements could be briefly laid out, but I will detail just two pieces of documentary evidence—not dependant on Aboriginal oral history or on my ethics or otherwise as an interviewer—that support this conclusion.

From early 1994, the Ngarrindjeri were claim-

It is not at all surprising that many potentially worthwhile contributors never take part in media debates, and are confined largely to academia. Anna Haebich has said that trying to debate the culture warriors was "rather like trying to argue with a drunk at a party."

ing that part of the significance of the site of the bridge—the channel of water between Hindmarsh Island and the town of Goolwa—was that it was known as 'The Meeting of the Waters'—the place where salt and fresh water met. This was seen as a place of great fertility and life.

The Royal Commission dismissed this aspect of the claim out of hand. It made no sense, the Commission said, because the barrages across the mouth of the Murray, which were built in the 1930s and forties, already stopped the water from mixing, so how could a bridge be a problem?

As well, the Royal Commission said, there was no reason why the site of the bridge should be particularly identified as the Meeting of the Waters, since before the barrages fresh and salt water would have met throughout the lake system, depending on tides and the amount of flow in the river. All this seemed logical enough—although some did point out that matters of religious belief do not normally yield to logic.

But all this time, only a few blocks from the Royal Commission hearing room, there was a documentary record that would have forced a different conclusion. In the reading room of the Mortlock section of the State Library of South Australia is a book containing an extract from the diaries of Charles Harding, an early settler in the Goolwa/Hindmarsh Island area.

Harding had recorded that the name "goolwa" had been explained to him by a native as meaning "sometimes fresh, and sometimes of mixed water" to distinguish it from the nearby Coorong, which meant "very salty water".[6]

So there was an independent documentary record to support the Ngarrindjeri oral claims.

Let me deal with another piece of documentary evidence. At the Royal Commission, the only proponent Ngarrindjeri woman to give evidence was Veronica Brodie, who said that the heart of the secret women's business was to do with the Pleiades, or Seven Sisters constellation of stars.

The Royal Commission dismissed Brodie out of hand. It concluded, extraordinarily, that the Seven Sisters had never been part of Ngarrindjeri mythology.

There was evidence before the Royal Commission that should have led to a different conclusion. It was apparently overlooked. But since then work by the eminent anthropologist Peter Sutton has established that the Ngarrindjeri did indeed have Seven Sisters mythology. Among the many strands of evidence is a book about the Ngarrindjeri by the anthropologists Ron and Catherine Berndt. This is a volume the culture warriors point to as an infallible source in other contexts. It contains a star chart that clearly shows the Pleiades identified as *yatooka*, or young women. The documentary record makes it clear the constellation was associated with seasonal change, initiation and fertility.

And yet, the response to this new documentary evidence, which supports what the Ngarrindjeri had said all along, has been not serious minded consideration but a recounting of the white man's myths about this affair. Pearson stated once again in his recent column responding to my book that there was no Seven Sisters mythology. He is simply wrong.

And as well Paul Sheehan's column was full of white-man myths. First, Sheehan said that the so-called 'dissident women'—the Ngarrindjeri women who denied the existence of secret women's business—had been ignored by the media. But as my book shows, when the dissident women chose to go public, they were 'media managed'. Their story was leaked to journalists carefully selected by Liberal Party figures, including Ian McLachlan, who was actively trying to bring about a Royal Commission.

Let me make another point about the dissident women. Support and respect for them has been one of the touchstones of this debate. Ron Brunton has said that support for the dissident women is the only intellectually and morally tenable position to take.[7]

I agree with Brunton that the main dissidents were women of courage and integrity. But if Dr

Brunton had interviewed the proponent women—which he did not—he would have found exactly the same was true of them. On both sides of this debate are strong-minded, outspoken Aboriginal women of great conviction and courage, all very sure that their world view is the correct one.

So how are we to choose between them? The rationalists of the Right should know the answer. We should look at the independent evidence, including the documentary evidence.

The fact is that the force of the dissident women's evidence is very limited. All they can say—all that many of them have said—is that they weren't *told* secret women's business.

When the dissident women were cross-examined before the Federal Court in 2001, it became clear that there were many other well-established Ngarrindjeri Dreamings that they also were not aware of. It is therefore hardly surprising that they didn't know secret women's business.

Justice von Doussa of the Federal Court said of the dissident women:

> I consider they were credible sincere people who now firmly hold the views which they express . . . It is clear from the evidence of a number of the dissident women who gave evidence before this Court that they consider traditional Ngarrindjeri culture and practices as historical curiosities that are no longer a part of, or appropriate to, their current lifestyles as Christian members of a wider urban community . . . I do not think their evidence denies the possibility, indeed probability, that important pockets of traditional knowledge remain possessed by some Ngarrindjeri members of the community.[8]

Having interviewed several of the dissident women, I agree with Justice von Doussa's view. The truth is that the evidence of the dissident women proves very little, despite their integrity and worth as individuals.

So what about the documentary evidence? Which way does this lie? In his column Sheehan recycled the myth that the book written by anthropologists Ron and Catherine Berndt made it impossible that secret women's business existed.

It is true that the foreword to the Berndts' book remarks on the apparent absence of separate realms of secret sacred knowledge on gender lines among the Ngarrindjeri. Ngarrindjeri culture was thought to be exceptional in this regard. But the Berndts' text contains much that apparently contradicts or at least modifies the claim. For example, the Berndts' chronicle that women were excluded during menstruation. They were kept in separate camps and attended by senior women. There were songs and rituals associated with this, and with female initiation, which the Berndts' informant said she had forgotten.

So the second white-man's myth of Hindmarsh Island is that the documentary record rules out the existence of secret women's business. It does not. It is open to different readings, but tends on balance to support the proponent Ngarrindjeri claims.

Myth number three, recycled by both Sheehan and Pearson in their response to my book is that only one woman, the custodian Doreen Kartinyeri, claimed to know the secret women's business in 1994. This is simply not so. It is a claim that has long been discredited, and yet is continually recycled.

When the respected academic lawyer, Professor Cheryl Saunders, investigated the Ngarrindjeri claim in 1994 on behalf of Robert Tickner, it was clear to her that a number of women regarded themselves as custodians of the knowledge. Saunders' work has stood up to intensive Federal Court scrutiny on two occasions.

The claim that Kartinyeri was the only one who knew the business is based solely on the evidence of one of the dissident women, Dorothy Wilson. The Royal Commission accepted her recollection of what was said at key meetings, although she was contradicted by other witnesses. The Federal Court came to a different view. Justice von Doussa said Dorothy Wilson's evidence should not be relied upon. He found that the 'only one woman knew' claim was not true.

My book details Wilson's central part in factional battles which pre-existed the Hindmarsh Island dispute, and which I believe may have coloured her recollection.

I mentioned Christopher Pearson's response earlier, which was largely an attack on me and my reputation. He at least had clearly read the book. However, his habits of disdain were strong.

As well as recycling the 'only one woman knew' myth, he also rested some of his case on the claim that the oldest Ngarrindjeri woman alive at the time had categorically denied secret women's business. The woman to whom he was referring was Laura Kartinyeri, or Nanna Laura as she was more affectionately known.

The myth that Nanna Laura denied secret wom-

en's business is one of the most persistent of the affair. One of the things that precipitated the Royal Commission was the tabling in the South Australian Parliament of a letter supposedly from Nanna Laura, then very elderly and in poor health, in which she denied any knowledge of secret women's business at Hindmarsh Island. It was a devastating blow to the anti-bridge case. Such was Nanna Laura's background and seniority that everyone knew that she must know secret women's business, if anyone did.

But as my book shows, Nanna Laura later signed a statutory declaration, in the presence of her granddaughter, in which she stated that the letter that had been tabled in parliament had never been read by her. It had been taken to her by two Ngarrindjeri men who were, at this time, cooperating with Ian McLachlan and the bridge developers. Nanna Laura said she signed the letter in the belief that it was opposing the bridge.

Nanna Laura's later statutory declaration was never presented to the Royal Commission. The contents are laid out in my book. Yet still the myth persists that Nanna Laura denied the existence of women's business. The truth is she never expressed a clear view either way, but stated that one should not speak about such things to white people, and made her opposition to the bridge clear.

So much for the columnists. Although it doesn't behove authors to respond to reviews, I nevertheless want to say a few words about the one which appeared in the *Australian*, by Stephen Matchett.

Matchett didn't like my book, and he is entitled to his opinion. But he is not entitled to misrepresent me. He stated that my book had at its heart a view that settler Australia has no indisputable right to place its laws above those of Indigenous Australia. The book takes no such view, nor do I hold the opinion Matchett attributed to me. I am all for the rule of law. Nor do I see my book as being primarily about Ngarrindjeri culture and beliefs. Rather it is about my culture, and the highest ideals of my culture, one of which is the rule of law.

The Royal Commission was not bad because it was the enforcement of white law on black. It was bad because it was a perversion of judicial process. A betrayal, if you like, of the rule of law.

It is often said these days that the opinion pages of the nation's newspapers have become dominated by the Right wing. Maybe so, although I am not too sure what those terms Left and Right mean any more, other than as labels generally used to dismiss—parts of the habit of disdain practiced by both sides.

Leaving aside the labels, I would have thought that minimum qualifications for newspaper and other public commentators should be the ability to fairly assess evidence, and to carry an argument. On these criteria, I suggest that some of the people I have come up against have fallen a long way short.

Hindmarsh Island distresses me for what was done to Aboriginal people, but perhaps more intensely because of what was done to my own culture—mainstream, western European culture. The values I would like to think I share with the warriors of the Right—independent scholarship, freedom of speech and respect for evidence.

All these things were perverted in the Hindmarsh Island affair.

To the extent that the cultural warriors refuse to tackle the evidence now on the public record, they are perpetuating the myths of Hindmarsh Island. They are perpetuating, in fact, their own kind of fabrication. It does them, and the other battles in which they have become involved in the years since the Hindmarsh Island bridge affair, no credit.

1. Ron Brunton, 'The False Culture Syndrome', *IPA Backgrounder* 8:2, 1996, cover quote.
2. Christopher Pearson, George Munster Journalism forums, September 1998, <acij.uts.edu.au/old_acij/munsterf4/pearson.html>.
3. Michael Duffy, *Courier-Mail*, 7 June 2003.
4. Frank Moorhouse, 2001 Stephen Murray-Smith Memorial Lecture, <www.statelibrary.vic.gov.au/slv/events/sms2001/#transcript>.
5. I am in part indebted for these insights to Ray Cassin.
6. Elva Morison, *Recollections of the South Coast Area of South Australia 1853–1978: A History of the Harding family Beginning in England in the mid 1700s*, Lutheran Publishing House, Adelaide, 1978.
7. Brunton, 'Correcting the False Scholarship Syndrome', Institute of Public Affairs website, <www.ipa.org.au/reply/falsescholar.html>.
8. Federal Court of Australia No. SG 33 of 1997, Chapman v Luminus and others. Available at <www.fedcourt.gov.au>.

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memoir / **CAROLINE PETIT**

NEIL ARMSTRONG AND THE NAVAJO

THE MOON LANDING occurred when I was living at the edge of the world, Bread Springs, New Mexico, where the mountains reached the sky and the air was thin. The picture on Mr Campbell's television was fuzzy. There was a lot of crackling and the vertical hold control didn't work well. The hushed voice of the announcer was clear, but Neil Armstrong, bouncing on the moon, the dust spraying around his knees, was difficult to see. We heard the words beamed to earth: "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind", then Mrs Campbell passed around the pretzels and her large bottom obscured the screen.

I don't think any of the Navajos watched with us—only the Campbells, their little girl Lucy and we teachers, all new to the West. There was potato-huge Barbara with her soft baby curls; Lily, a fat southern belle; and me who had answered an ad seeking graduates, teacher training to be provided, and been interviewed in Washington DC by Mr Horse, a Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) representative.

School hadn't started yet so I expect that was why there weren't any Navajo children or staff around. Or, perhaps they were content to walk out into the wide land and stare into the night sky to see if the moon had somehow changed. Or because there wasn't electricity where they lived, they had gone to town and watched with friends. Maybe they noted the similarities of their land with the moon's. It was rumoured that the US space agency NASA had trained men and machines in this remote, spiky country full of yucca plants, tumbleweed and sagebrush.

It was their land, ceded by the US Government to the Navajo Nation in the 1860s after long struggle and bitter negotiation. The reservation covered 25,000 square miles and encompassed large parts of Arizona, Utah and New Mexico.

The word Navajo means The People (Dineh), everyone else were not The People—other tribes, Mexicans or Anglos. The Dineh were proud of who they were. They had a rich community life despite years of depressing missionaries who wore hand-me-down clothes and pale indoor skins in defiance of the fierce summer sun, and education experts who had taken their young children away to be taught at distant boarding schools.

In many respects, Bread Springs was a traditional society. Most still lived in hogans (round white-thatched mud houses); women wove rugs on handmade looms; children herded sheep and everyone participated in the healing ceremonies, the weddings and the rodeos. Here, English was a second language.

I made little progress in learning Navajo. It is one of the most complex languages on earth. Nouns are conjugated with verbs according to whether the noun is hard or soft and how it is used, thrown or held. I taught with the help of Naomi, my bilingual Navajo aide, a year younger than me, mission-educated.

I met Naomi the morning after the BIA Regional Manager, Mrs Thorndike, had driven me up the ten-mile dirt road to the deserted five-house settlement and tiny school. Her bony, veined hands went white-knuckled as she clutched the steering wheel, while we jolted and slipped on the makeshift road. We pulled up to one of the deserted cinderblock houses, built big to withstand the underground nuclear testing. I trailed behind her with my suitcase and a two-week supply of groceries. In the distant valley I saw a cluster of hogans and sheep, but no-one moved in the landscape. She left me standing on my porch. I watched the red dust, kicked up by the tyres, spiral after her.

Rambling around the three-bedroom house like a bewildered Goldilocks, I sat in the two fake leather chairs and matching couch and bounced on the beds. The aluminium windows were tiny and all the rooms gloomy, notwithstanding the bright sun. In the kitchen a public service notice stated how to light the gas stove and hot water service, that the tank water was drinkable and the toilet flushed.

I fiddled with the knobs of an antique radio and out came a country lament, then a twangy voice declared it was 5 p.m. and the station was signing off. The strains of 'Goodnight Irene' filled the still light evening. Afterwards in the beating-heart quiet, I sat on the edge of the porch and swung my legs as the sky changed to black.

There were pinpricks of light from the distant hogans, families going about the business of living. It was all so different from the required ethnographic reading. So many studies, so many interpretations, where were the individuals? Question: Who makes up a Navajo family? Answer: a Navajo family plus an anthropologist.

Later I turned on all the lights in the house and made dinner. As I ate, I wrote funny letters about my training in Tuba City, Oklahoma and the tortuous time-consuming flight check-in to Gallup, New Mexico—the nearest town to the reservation—because all the men had rifles and were protective about how the attendant stowed them.

After a bad night's sleep, quaking from hearing wild dogs or coyotes howl, I was grateful when Naomi knocked on my door so early. Smiling broadly, she stood in the doorway in a white blouse and knee-covering dark skirt and studied me through black harlequin glasses. Over coffee she explained we had to find the 4 and 5-year-old children to teach, speak to their parents and convince them to make their mark or sign their names on the enrolment forms.

She drove the school's bruised ute almost standing on the clutch and ground the ancient gears as we followed rutted, washed-out tracks to the scattered hogans.

Our days became a ritual: me bilious from the ride, climbing out of the truck and Naomi respectful, waiting by the door of the hogan for a mother to appear in a long velvet skirt, cotton shirt and silver and turquoise jewellery. While the woman shaded her eyes, Naomi launched into a torrent of Navajo, her tongue making serious adjustments from English to her own language, and pointed at me. My role was to smile, nod and look pleased then a small child might appear and stare at me for a long time. Sometimes we were invited into the hogan, offered a seat on a long plank that ran around the spherical room with its hardened dirt floor and the woman made her X on the paper or signed her name. Other times we used the truck as a table, the paper blistering on the bonnet.

During the long hot drives Naomi giggled and told me about her life. She was engaged to a Navajo boy soon to return from fighting in Vietnam. He had sent her the ears of a Viet Cong in a small box tied up with twine. The ears were wizened like little brown nuts, the token of a warrior. She didn't know whether to be pleased with her gift or appalled.

All the young men here wanted to fight. They were bristling proud of their military heritage. Navajo had been used during the Second World War for all the code transmissions against the Japanese. It had never been cracked.

In a way I could understand it. There wasn't

much here for young men to do. Work was scarce. The BIA could only provide ten-week work projects like road mending or some other public works construction. Most welcomed the draft, a chance to travel, to prove themselves.

All the young men I knew spent their days plotting how to avoid the draft—one had even shot off a toe—or protesting. I had been active at university in the anti-war movement, felt very strongly about it, even here, where all the Anglo pickups had American flag decals and 'Support our Troops' bumper stickers. I had participated in all the marches, the teach-ins, shouted all the slogans, encircled the Pentagon in protest and now kept up with the world through the Sunday edition of the *Washington Post*, which arrived weeks late.

In Bread Springs and the rest of New Mexico, US involvement in Vietnam was not a debate. It just was. I was the subversive, like the Navajo extras who willingly participated in cowboy movies but who during their 'authentic' Indian dialogue scenes spent their time slagging the film or telling jokes in Navajo. Many went to these Westerns just to hear what their friends had so slyly inserted.

I supported the one-day moratorium strike against the war. I wore a white armband and didn't go to school for the entire day. I think Naomi told the children I was sick. Mr Campbell never spoke about my absence.

AFTER A WHILE I couldn't see why we needed a principal. There wasn't much administration in a school of thirty-five children. Besides, he had a difficult time writing a simple declarative sentence and often asked one of us to fill in his reports. I taught kindergarten, Barbara a composite class of children aged roughly 6 to 9 and Lily the other children up to about 13, before they were sent off sadly to board at high school.

Jim Lincoln, a big solid Navajo with a gentle manner, did all the heavy work around the school. He had taught himself to read from a fourth-grade textbook. You often saw him standing shyly just outside Lily's door listening to her lessons. His wife Mary was the cook and really ran the school. She knew all the children's families and what they were going through: who had been given another short work contract with the BIA; whose teenage daughter or son was hanging around Gallup bars, drinking whisky from the bottle; and who was sick and required a healing ceremony. At *Yei Bei Chei*, the curing ceremony, people sat around a bonfire, the Medicine Man sang, made a sand painting while the rest of the community danced in a slow rhythmic circle and chanted until dawn.

Mr Campbell was the school's new principal. The old principal—let's say Winston—and his teacher wife had embezzled over a number of years the charitable funds intended for the children. They had fled after the snows had melted in the preceding spring.

Also gone was the young teacher Susan who had taught during the Winston years. She had lived in my house. Her name was spoken in hushed tones of outrage. She had 'crossed over', had a Navajo boyfriend, Johnny, who showered at the school, pomaded his hair, drenched himself in aftershave and walked with a swagger on his high-heeled cowboy boots. Susan had moved to Gallup, where Barbara and Lily assured me Susan was still seeing Johnny. They wobbled their fat arms in horror. I wondered who would have them and what Susan had found in her perfumed Johnny.

There was such a gulf between the young Navajos and me. Naomi believed in her mission god and respected the old ways. In Gallup, I stared at the young women in their tightassed jeans, long jet-black hair and cowboy boots, laughing amongst themselves and the men, reserved and aloof, eyeing the women who were always their distant cousins. Their idea of a good time was to drink a quart of whisky, stare at the stars then drive back to the reservation following the solid white line in the middle of the road which some ironic bastard had dubbed Blood Alley. The white line was something to focus on in the dark night.

My kindergarten children were clever, alert and loving. We communicated through hand gestures, my terrible Navajo, their improvised English and Naomi. The children were the shepherds for their families' sheep and could wander anywhere and not get lost. It was their country.

When I took my solitary walks, I was always on the lookout for rattlesnakes, wore thick shoes and carried a big stick. What could I teach them?

The education specialist told me Indian children have low self-esteem. "You can see it in their drawings, a tiny figure in a large landscape," she said. But I thought it was a dead accurate representation of the way things were. There wasn't anything here but the sky, more mountains, twisted trees, tumbleweed and sagebrush.

The children were not much interested in the idea of the spacewalk or far-away places. When I talked to them about Neil Armstrong, they listened politely. When I asked them to draw pictures about a trip—any trip—most drew pictures of the freight trains that dragged endless boxcars at walking speed through the single Gallup rail crossing.

I described how Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin explored the moon's surface, floating up and down from lack of gravity, and how they could actually see they were standing on a sphere because the moon's horizon was only less than two miles away. The astronauts came back to Earth with more than ten pounds of moon rocks for further study. I sent my students outdoors with brown paper bags to collect. They returned with pineta nuts, leaves and small plants and spent hours classifying and making up stories.

Once Naomi and I took the children into town. They vomited from the drive and cried in fright at the circus, fighting to sit in our laps and hiding their eyes from the clowns, animals and noise.

There were taboos. Pictures of owls and stories about them were forbidden. If I cut the children's hair, I had to burn it—witchcraft. Naomi told me what to do. "The children don't like to be singled out," she said. "They prefer to work as a group." It gave our days a certain harmony.

After the moon flight, Neil Armstrong maintained he resented being hailed as the hero, the first man on the moon, that the honour should have been collectively shared with the other astronauts and the thousands of scientists and technicians who worked behind the scenes.

Hozho is the Navajo word for maintaining balance and harmony.

In our white community, *hozho* was difficult to achieve. Mr Campbell became obsessed with the project to buy the children new clothes using the restored charitable donations. Once a week we met in the Campbells' living room to discuss how many underpants, undershirts, dresses, shirts and jeans were required and what sizes to buy. And, every week the tally changed as Mr Campbell agonised over the relative merits of woollen versus cotton undershirts and jeans versus dresses for the girls. Neither the children nor their parents were consulted.

Mr Campbell was only mildly concerned about the missing $10,000 for teaching materials allocated to my new kindergarten. Someone in the BIA he supposed had bought a new car with the money. Instead he was very upset about the shortness of my skirts, mentioning it prominently in my assessment reports.

As the school year progressed, my contact with the outside world dried up: friends stopped writing, the radio telephone was for emergency use only and I had read almost every book in the Gallup library. My contact with my new world was limited. When needing to talk to me after hours, Mr Campbell had taken to knocking at my door then retreating backwards down my porch steps to call to me from the relative safety of his front garden as his face changed from pink to scarlet. Meanwhile, Lily had become absorbed in a rigorous program of weight loss and viewed my ability to never gain weight with suspicion. Barbara simply wanted to stay in her cinderblock house by herself.

Naomi tried to keep me. She invited me to her traditional wedding where the Shaman shook the

sacred corn around their circular house and blessed the couple in a variety of chants. Then the newly married couple moved in next door to me, bringing with them an endless succession of small nieces and nephews whom, she knew, I wouldn't mind babysitting as she and Tully had other plans for the evening. They would keep me company.

But it was the coming snow that concerned me the most. Once the snows came in late November or early December, most of the children would not come to school. Jim couldn't use the bus in the snow and the parents wouldn't risk having their 5-year-old children slog through heavy drifts or fall into an unseen hole. During the bad winter months, Naomi estimated that we might have four children to teach some of the time. If it was a hard winter, we could all look forward to being snowbound and having to depend on food packages dropped from airplanes. I could not face two months of solid companionship with the same seven people. I resigned.

Neil Armstrong spent a total of two hours and thirty-one minutes on the surface of the moon. I spent six months in Bread Springs. Armstrong's footprints will stay on the moon for millions of years. When the night air is calm and the light is right, a telescope can zoom in and peer down on the last place he walked.

When I think of my time with The People, I know I stepped so lightly, I left no impression at all.

Caroline Petit is a Melbourne writer who has lived in Australia for twenty years.

A Mackerel Green Sea

To make such poems—*
With pipes and ladders you can see,
A public flame leaping, jetting
Licking and turning inside out
From the cracker called speech
(a refinery itself
distilling the crude
the non-degradable, the ephemeral)
—to put these things *out*
has a kind of steam-power ease to it.

In fact, to write corporately
Is pleasant
And has its own aesthetic
Like eating icecream at the wheel of a fast car
Or in front of a B & O TV
Which is to say
it is as manufactured
as Blake's naming of mills
His petroleum-jelly Satan
And brood of fields
A landscape his terms
As much as anything
Rolled out like a bowling green.

If I could say, contra culture,
That leftisms swim well
In a mackerel green sea
I might retire
But they do not
Anymore than I can just
Call up Mayakovsky or hire
A revolver or imagine
Angels over Manhattan.

Still, the sea, there before me
Has a sheen, scales that knit,
Shimmer in gill and wind-fin
A heave of quick truth in it
That sings and steels vision
And which seems, well . . . right.

Think of Walt's late dictum
That if he could he would trade
The greatest poets and their works
For one wave upon the shore.

He said that not meaning to
Shut himself and so didn't
His lines rolled on
Over plains, mountains, down the rivers
Just as the Left rolls on, after a fashion.
I can't tell as I speak
If I'm buffed in its wake
Its sound-system or both,
or, somehow, air-born—
Emitted from the rackety tower
We built to process History
When History can become
Polystyrene.

So light, these words
If you can keep them light
Hardy, if you crack them the right way
They won't break if you don't
They keep on—opaque
With their pop and thin crackle
Of bubble-wrap like
"The living eyes of secrecy".
(Khlebnikov).

Could, I wonder, Marcel Marceau play Lenin?
(And what would he do with Isaiah Berlin?)
The tide is running in with I don't know what.
Can ventriloquists swim?

BARRY HILL

* refers to the poem, 'From the Railway Canteen' in *Overland 167—Ruling Class, Ruling Culture*, winter 2002.

I Know a Poet With a Gun

A Luger
In a cigar case
In a cabinet
Smelling of Cologne.

It's a beauty
As Munroe and Brando were
And Dietrich
With her holder.

The poet
Does not want the gun
For culture wars,
We have none to speak of
The Americans have won
As they did in Berlin,
Hiroshima, Santiago.

It's horrific
The thought that I
Separate the revolver
From those smoking chimneys
But I do.

In Stalingrad
I hope the gun
Was buried in snow.
Sad that it's here but true
And forcing some questions.

What does the poet want?
Love, and money.
When does he want it?
Now. For his power
Has gone without saying.

Its magazine is oiled
With that sexy click
To it. Weight in
The hand a hammer has.

It's not often you
Want to kill someone
But if you do here's a fine thing
To talk with, commune with
And attune.

But no
O no.
There's always the telephone.
Mayakovsky where are you?

The poet knows that
In the beginning was the deed.
He must combat this
and remain useless.

BARRY HILL

Urban Landscape

Around 11:30 am he stirs
pushes off carpet and hessian covers

where he has slept under a dry end
of the overpass bridge
beside the Yarra River Trail
between Loy's Paddock and Burnley Wharf.

Across the water Wesley College Boatshed
blocks the views of Toorak mansions.

This has been his spot for over a year.

He removes pajama pants
pushes them into a sack.
Over on the cement wall he pees.
Then he slips on denim jeans,
lumberjack coat, engine driver's cap . . .

The bedding he wedges
under the bridge struts so it's hardly visible.

To organize possessions onto his bicycle
takes a few minutes.

Finally he turns the bike toward the city,
gets on and pedals off along the bitumen path

past the litter traps
cormorants frequent,
and Herring Island,
soon turning right through the short tunnel
up into Mary Street and Richmond.

Three odd socks remain at the site,
a Redhead matchbox,
a Marlboro Lights pack
coppery gold . . .

and an accumulation of small woodchips
—his mattress

ROD CORRY

Going Home

It was a street like all the others.
When he was coming home
that first evening
he could not find his own house.
The houses were all the same
with mean little lawns
and dusty hedges.
Even the dinners cooking
smelled the same.
It was only when he recognised
Peter's battered tricycle
upended on the path
he knew this was where he lived.

He wondered if perhaps,
like the street, he was the same
as the others who lived in it.
Not quite young, always hard-up,
with a boring job and a wife
he wondered why he'd married.
But he loved his boy,
no doubt of that.

Walking home from the bus stop
he often thought this way,
bracing himself as he put his key
in the front door.

BARBARA FISHER

PROTEST AND PROPAGANDA

Anti-WTO protests and the crackdown on dissent

THE SYDNEY ANTI-WTO PROTESTS of 14–15 November 2002, or 'N14', were the first large-scale 'anti-globalisation' demonstrations since the 'S11' blockade of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Melbourne from September 11–13, 2000.[1] What did these Sydney protests accomplish, and what is their significance within the context of increasing government control over the means and expression of personal and social dissent?[2] In the wake of the war in Iraq and new legislation expanding the powers of ASIO, the experience of the Sydney WTO protesters appears indicative of a still-developing, comprehensive governmental attack on civil liberties.

THE LEAD-UP

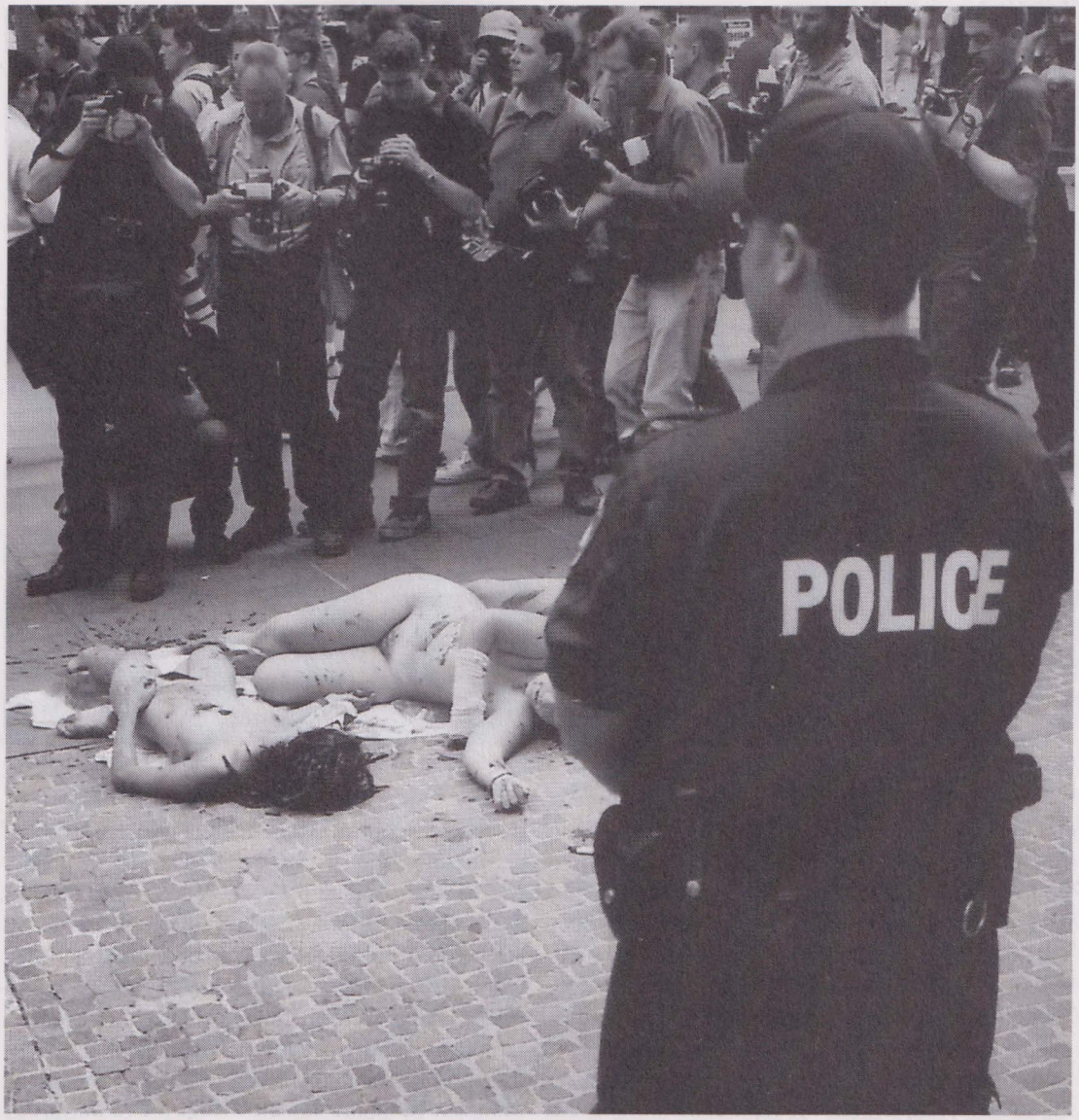
The N14 demonstrations did not occur in a vacuum. Like S11, they were organised in the midst of intense media interest, public apprehension, and massive security preparations. The same grossly inaccurate characterisations of the S11 demonstrators and their intentions, by police, politicians, and media commentators, were made again. New South Wales Police Minister Michael Costa denounced protesters as "rabble" and "ratbags".[3] The *Daily Telegraph* described participants as "misfits", part of "a coalition of professional protesters".[4] Premier Bob Carr preferred "misguided radicals with no respect for the community".[5]

Police officials repeatedly stressed that extremist groups bent on violence and destruction would be present in the streets. Minister Costa announced that activists were "arming for violent confrontation" to "take control of our streets".[6] He further stated: "Let me be clear: people are coming here to have a violent confrontation with the police. Let me say to you: the police will be prepared and I will back the police in what they do".[7]

In early September 2002, *Herald Sun* columnist Andrew Bolt wrote an article 'commemorating' the two-year anniversary of the "outrageous" and "violent" anti-WEF protests in Melbourne.[8] The Indymedia website, "run by far-Left anarchists, many veterans of S11", was instructing activists to come to Sydney in November 2002 "armed with baseball bats, shields, flares, eggs, gas masks, marbles, paint, slingshots, smoke bombs and pepper".[9] These accusations were based on anonymous and unattributed comments posted on open Internet message boards.

The same 'evidence' was employed by Minister Costa to condemn N14 organisers and participants. The messages were used to seek an order banning or restricting access to three websites on the basis they provided information "to incite violence against NSW police" and "aid the violent disruption" of the meeting.[10] Communications Minister Richard Alston agreed, describing the sites as "insidious, anti-democratic, and interested in causing violence, mayhem and anarchy".[11] The request was denied by the Australian Communications Authority.

The anticipated presence of an unidentified violent and extremist element was used by the NSW police and government to justify the special legal and security restrictions implemented during the WTO meeting. The original site of the WTO conference was the Stamford Hotel in the exclusive suburb of Double Bay. The location was moved to



Sydney anti-WTO protest. Photo: Chris Vedelago

the Novotel Hotel at Sydney Olympic Park in Homebush Bay on the recommendation of the police.[12] The decision to move the conference site was tactical. The physical geography and unique legal status of Olympic Park allowed event organisers and security forces to create what police officials and the *Sydney Morning Herald* called "a virtual exclusion zone".[13] The Sydney Olympic Park legislation, passed to prevent embarrassing demonstrations during the 2000 Games, gave police unusually strong powers of search and seizure, increased penalties for offences, and even prohibited the use of PA systems, megaphones, banners, signs and the distribution of leaflets in the park.[14]

Sydney Olympic Park is in a relatively isolated area, away from any major commercial or residential developments. The police halted the regular bus service and ordered the closure of the on-site train station. Security checkpoints, three kilometres of fencing, and police escorts were used to corral and contain demonstrators in two designated "passive protest areas" within sight of the Novotel.[15] These areas—a stretch of road and an adjacent parking lot—had no toilet facilities, shade or water supply.

Sydney anti-WTO protest. Photo: Chris Vedelago

The massive perimeter was guarded by more than four hundred police officers, a unit of mounted police, the dog squad, and two helicopters.[16]

For the planned marches through the Sydney CBD, the NSW police imposed special legal restrictions and a substantial police presence. Citing the aforementioned security "threat", the police issued a five-day ban on public protest in the city.[17] Simon Butler of the socialist youth organisation Resistance commented: "It represents nothing less than a grievous assault on the right of free speech. There are marches through the city every second day. This ban is just another example of the illegitimacy of police action and the policies of the WTO".[18]

THE EVENT

A colourful and noisy crowd of around one thousand defied police and brought traffic to a standstill for the march through Sydney on 14 November. In a series of demonstrations outside offices and the US consulate, activists protested against corporate-led globalisation, American foreign policy and Australia's policy on asylum-seekers. Acts of civil disobedience included the temporary occupation of a Citibank lobby and a brief blockade of a busy McDonald's outlet.

Scuffles with police occurred when the crowd attepted to prevent the arrest of a man who had climbed onto the roof of a bus.[19] Several subsequent arrests were made as protesters resisted attempts to remove them from the area. A journalist for the *Australian* was rushed to hospital after being trampled by police horses.[20] Police Commissioner Michael Costa said the incident, which lasted only minutes, proved the security precautions were justified: "The atrocious behaviour of this ratbag element who tried to seize Sydney's streets shows clearly these people came here to cause trouble, not to protest".[21] The *Daily Telegraph* agreed, labelling the incident "The battle of Clarence St".[22] Conversely, organisers maintained the protest was a success and characterised police actions as "excessive and unlawful".[23] What the *Sydney Morning Herald* described as "largely peaceful protests",[24] the *Daily Telegraph* called "a bloody disgrace".[25] The three-hour march ended with a rally attended by about two thousand people in a downtown park.

Sydney anti-WTO protest. Photo: Chris Vedelago

The following morning, when a thousand people marched to Sydney Olympic Park from the nearest train station, confrontations between some protesters and police began. The majority of the crowd stood peacefully waving signs, chanting, and singing. Some direct-action activists repeatedly attempted to breach the perimeter fence at different points, engaging in what the *Sydney Morning Herald* called "running battles" with police.[26] Damien Lawson of the refugee group 'No One Is Illegal' called the security restrictions "outrageous" and suggested the "challenge of the fence was highlighting that limit".[27] The police eventually formed a human wall, dividing the protest area and creating a ten-metre buffer zone in front of the perimeter.[28] Squads of officers repeatedly charged the crowd in a "rugby-style maul"[29] or flying wedge formation, snatching protest organisers and those suspected of challenging the fence.[30] Flags, banners, and musical instruments were also seized.[31] Assistant Police Commissioner Dick Adams maintained the police had used minimum force: "Our tactics were quite clear. The actions of many of the protesters here was [sic] quite irresponsible".[32]

After nearly two hours of clashes, the police tore down the 'passive protest area' signs and threatened to arrest those who remained.[33] The cohesiveness of the protest broke down. Numbers dwindled through police actions and the resulting confusion among demonstrators.[34] A hastily assembled protest spokescouncil chose to withdraw and return to the city. The demonstration was cut short, but protest organisers considered the action a success. The two-day security operation cost an estimated $5 million and resulted in more than fifty arrests.

"WHO WON? WE WON!"

Despite the bans, security precautions, and a relatively small turnout, the eclectic group of activists and demonstrators maintain their message still got out. According to Damien Lawson, the protest was "a fantastic, colourful, active and diverse display of resistance to the policies of the WTO. We have put the global movement against neo-liberalism on the map again in Australia".[35] Although such protest actions have been unable to generate a far-reaching public debate about the issues of globalisation, they have been instrumental in demonstrating that acceptance of the current status quo is far from universal. In this respect, the Sydney anti-WTO protest illustrates the anti-globalisation movement has not

died despite the geopolitical events since the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The focus may be elsewhere, but the movement has survived.

In fact, the movement has in some ways evolved and enlarged in scope. The Sydney anti-WTO protests were attended by environmentalists, human rights activists, consumer advocates, anti-capitalists, socialists, students, religious figures, the Greens, the Democrats, poverty activists, and labour/union representatives (although union participation was minor). However, there were also significant numbers who had come to express opposition to Australia's mandatory detention policy for asylum seekers and US foreign policy in the Middle East—two issues not normally associated with the anti-globalisation movement. As centres of influence and power, international organisations like the WTO continue to be symbolic targets for the problems facing the globe.

THE LARGER CONTEXT

According to NSW Police Minister Michael Costa: "If [demonstrators] wanted a peaceful protest they would go to the ones that have been permitted by the police".[36] The experience of the N14 protest reveals that police forces are unilaterally defining the boundaries of 'acceptable' or 'permissible' dissent. In the streets and public spaces, this has translated into outright bans, higher fences, and arbitrary arrests. In this environment, exercising the right to free speech or assembly becomes an act of civil disobedience. This should be remembered in light of the number of large-scale anti-war demonstrations sweeping the nation and the world. The assault on fundamental freedoms has been far more extensive and ominous when conducted from the legislature. The Sydney Olympic Park legislation was only one in a series of restrictive Bills passed before the 2000 Games that are still applicable today. Those who predicted the legislation would be used to restrain opposition in the future have been proven correct.

That the authorities have been so successful indicates the degree to which the obsession for security and order has affected the ability of the government and public to differentiate between a genuine violent threat and an unconventional social-political movement. These definitions have become far more blurred since 9/11 and the Bali bombings. Confronted by this attitude towards dissent and its practical application, demonstrations become as much about ensuring and practising free speech as opposing the policies of the WTO, the incarceration of refugees or oil wars.

1. The term, 'anti-globalisation' is used frequently to describe the movement opposed to corporate-led globalisation and neo-liberalism. Although it is considered inaccurate by many, it has become the most recognised term of identification for this movement. I use it cautiously. The letter/number codes 'N14' and 'S11' are the abbreviated month and date of the two protests, a common method for identifying these events.
2. This article is based on the structure and format of 'Contesting the Inevitable: Notes on S11', by Kurt Iveson & Sean Scalmer, *Overland* 161, 2000, pp.4–12.
3. *Sydney Morning Herald* (online), 14 November 2002. Hereafter, all dates refer to 2002 unless otherwise noted.
4. *Daily Telegraph*, 15 November, p.1.
5. *DT*, 15 November, p.4.
6. *SMH* (online), 14 November.
7. *SMH*, 14 November.
8. *Herald Sun*, 16 September, p.19.
9. *HS*, 16 September, p.19.
10. *Australian*, 12 November.
11. *Australian*, 12 November.
12. *SMH* (online), 18 October.
13. *SMH* (online) 13 November, and NSW Police news release (online), 14 November.
14. NSW Police news release (online), 14 November, and Environmental Defender's Office 'Fact Sheet: The Sydney Olympics and Protest', August 2000.
15. *Age* (online), 15 November.
16. *Australian* (online), 14 November, and *SMH*, 13 November, p.2.
17. *Age* (online), 13 November.
18. Interview with Simon Butler (Resistance), 14 November.
19. *Age* (online), 14 November.
20. *Australian* (online), 14 November.
21. *DT* (online), 15 November.
22. *DT*, 15 November, pp.4–5.
23. *SMH* (online), 15 November.
24. *SMH*, 15 November, p.6.
25. *DT*, 15 November, p.1.
26. *SMH* (online), 15 November.
27. *SMH* (online), 16 November.
28. *Australian* (online), 15 November.
29. *SMH* (online), 16 November.
30. *SMH* (online), 15 November.
31. *Age* (online), 15 November.
32. *Australian* (online), 15 November.
33. *Australian* (online), 15 November.
34. *Age*, 15 November.
35. Interview with Damien Lawson ('No One Is Illegal'), 15 November.
36. *SMH*, 14 November.

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IMPOSING NORMALITY

Covert eugenics in diagnosis and treatment of disorder

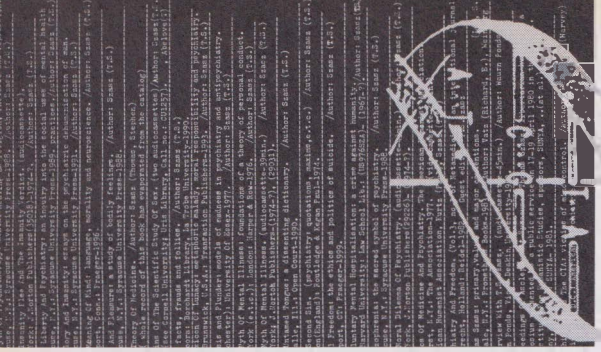
THE EXPLOSION OF RESEARCH in molecular genetics over the past few decades has increasingly led scientists to search for genetic bases of a wide variety of physical and psychological conditions. Among these are exhibitionism, job success, arson, homosexuality, stress, risk taking, shyness, social potency, traditionalism, zest for life,[1] alcoholism, schizophrenia, manic depression, attention deficit disorder, PMS, and perhaps even homelessness.[2]

As research continues, the list expands. The recently completed Human Genome Project (HGP) has led to the identification of genes relating to various pathological conditions and to methods of testing if individuals carry such genes. The benefits from identifying people with a genetic susceptibility to cystic fibrosis (CF), the most common single gene disorder among Caucasians, and other serious diseases, such as phenylketonuria (PKU), are immense.[3] These disorders can then be treated in a way that significantly extends the span and improves the quality of the lives of these sufferers. But an eager and indiscriminate attribution of genetic bases to personal and social phenomena represents a worrying trend within Australian and Western culture.

SOME PITFALLS OF GENETIC TESTING

Even within the realm of single-gene disorders (the simplest of genetic disorders) there are a number of serious issues to be addressed. Genetic tests are unable to predict just when a condition will afflict a particular carrier and, in some cases, *if* it will appear at all. No genetic test is 100 per cent accurate, leading to constant false diagnoses. The test for CF, for example, has an 85 per cent accuracy rate. Huntington's chorea is a particularly nasty single-gene disorder which results in the degeneration of the central nervous system, and certain death. It is also a late-onset disease, commonly manifesting when carriers are in the 35 to 40 age range (and occurring in some cases even later). Often this means that the Huntington sufferers have already produced children, each of which has a 50-50 chance of having the disease. There is of course a genetic test for this disorder but, unlike CF or PKU, there is no treatment available; it is incurable. Many advocates of genetic screening have urged biomedical practitioners to make such testing routine, but this raises an obvious question: what good will such knowledge do? There is much evidence to suggest that genetic testing for Huntington's disease leads to depression in those being tested. Suicide is four to five times more often the cause of death among those who test positively for the disease, than among others.[4]

There is also continuing concern over issues of privacy, racism, employment, and the role that insurance companies might play should genetic testing be routinely implemented. The dystopian fears surrounding such issues have been impressively highlighted in the film *Gattaca*, which explores the stratification of society along genetic lines. This film questions the negative assessment made of a 'genetic underclass' identified through testing. Depressingly though, real-life examples of job applicants and employees being genetically tested at the request of an employer are all too readily at hand. In the late 1970s for example, the US Air Force expelled a number of African-American employees



Often social prejudices are medicalised, giving them the veneer of epistemological or scientific respectability and closing them off from scrutiny and debate.

on the basis of tests for sickle-cell trait, which has a higher rate of incidence in people from Africa than among Caucasians.[5] Testing for sickle-cell trait, in the name of occupational health and safety, has frequently been conducted, despite the fact that these tests lack scientific rigour and discriminate against people of African descent.[6]

Mandatory employment screening may also provide information regarding potentially incurable conditions. An employee should have the right to determine whether or not they are exposed to such information since, as in the case of Huntington's chorea, it might lead to serious psychological issues. Such testing procedures inevitably violate this right and perhaps those of the employee's family. If it were deemed legal, it is likely that insurance companies would wish to conduct genetic testing on potential policy holders, or to at least access such information as is available. This is a two-edged sword, since employees "need to be protected against unfair discrimination by insurance companies, while at the same time these companies will need to be protected against adverse selection".[7] Clearly, the implementation of genetic testing must not be uncritically thought of as routine medical and social practice.

THE SOCIALITY OF PATHOLOGY

In mid-2000 it came to light that a suicidal mother had requested the abortion of a foetus diagnosed with dwarfism in the thirty-second week of her pregnancy. Her request was granted. Subsequently, three senior doctors at Melbourne's Royal Women's Hospital were suspended, and a flurry of debate ensued both in the media and in State Parliament. In the aftermath the results of a survey conducted by the Murdoch Children's Research Institute at the Royal Children's Hospital in 1999 were released, which found that the overwhelming majority of Australian obstetricians and clinical geneticists supported the termination of foetuses found to exhibit dwarfism. Julian Savulescu, now Uehiro Professor of Applied Ethics at the University of Oxford, was Director of the Ethics of Genetics Unit at the Murdoch Children's Research Institute at the time. He said on the ABC's *7:30 Report* in 2000: "As we showed, up to over 70 per cent of specialists in obstetric and ultrasonic clinics support termination of pregnancy even at 24 weeks for dwarfism".[8]

Dwarfism is itself not a fatal disorder. Melbourne University ethicist, Nicholas Tonti-Filippini, has noted that people with dwarfism lead meaningful lives and are often very intelligent, and argued that to discriminate on the basis of stature alone is bizarre.[9] Modern societies have placed a social premium on 'tallness', seeing it as a desirable trait. People with dwarfism are obviously perceived to be a 'substandard' type of human being in Australian clinical biomedicine, purely because they are not tall, *not* because the disorder poses any serious health risk. People with achondroplasia (dwarfism) are themselves not particularly worried about their offspring having the disorder.[10] It is 'normals' and biomedical practitioners in particular, defining what should be regarded as 'normal' on behalf of the rest of the population, who see it as something to be eliminated. Often, then, social prejudices are medicalised, giving them the veneer of epistemological or scientific respectability and closing them off from scrutiny and debate.

DEFINING MENTAL ILLNESS

As mentioned above, a number of mental illnesses are now thought to be caused by certain deleterious genes, among them schizophrenia and depression. Mental illness, however, is not easily defined. Up until 1973, for example, homosexuality was thought to be a form of mental illness, and only in that year was it removed from the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*.[11] There is an inherent problem with the identification and definition of mental illness. As Thomas Szasz wrote in *The Myth of Mental Illness*: "The concept of illness, whether bodily or mental, implies devia-

There is a clear pathway by which social bias against certain forms of behaviour can become transposed from the realm of the social into the world of scientific fact.

tion from some clearly defined norm".[12] Often the norms against which behaviour is judged to be aberrant are social in origin, and in that sense culturally specific. Unfortunately it seems George Orwell got it wrong: sanity *is* statistical. This is not to say that those things we label as 'mental illness' have no neurophysiological basis; in many instances this is indisputably the case. But there is a clear pathway by which social bias against certain forms of behaviour can become medicalised, transposed from the realm of the social into the world of scientific fact. One can expect that as research continues on the genetic bases of mental illness, the development of genetic testing methods to identify such genes will not be far behind.

MENTAL ILLNESS AND ITS FLIP-SIDE

In instances where the single gene disorder sickle-cell anaemia appears in the homozygous form (where two copies of the gene are present), it is fatal, resulting in death at an early age. In the heterozygous form (where only one copy of the gene is present), the person is designated as a carrier. The sickle-cell carrier state, it turns out, is an adaptive response to the prevalence of malaria in tropical regions. Carriers of sickle-cell anaemia are considerably less likely to contract malaria than non-carriers, evidence that the heterozygous form has been 'selected for' in the evolutionary process, because it increases Darwinian fitness.

Increasingly we have become aware that certain conditions or disorders have a range of positive benefits. The burgeoning field of Darwinian epidemiology is beginning to explore this realm. Indeed, a number of fields of research are beginning to show that some so-called 'disorders' may in fact be functional responses to particular stimuli. The evolutionary psychologist Ed Hagen, formerly of the Centre for Evolutionary Psychology at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and currently at the Institute for Theoretical Biology in Berlin, has argued on the basis of research conducted on post-partum depression (PPD), that this condition alerts new mothers to reductions in their Darwinian fitness levels, prompting them in certain situations to withdraw parental investment in offspring who are the cause of their reduced fitness.[13] He argues that a Darwinian model might be useful for understanding depression in general.

A number of studies have revealed significant links between mental illness of one variety or another, and creativity. Katherine Wilson has reported the findings of a number of studies with regard to the link between writers and mental illness: almost 80 per cent of high-profile writers, in a study conducted by Professor Nancy C. Andreasen at the University of Iowa in the 1970s, had received treatment for various mental problems, as opposed to 30 per cent of people in a control group; findings consistent with the disorder having a genetic basis.[14] Also, it is scientifically documented that bipolar depressives are generally creative, while people with bipolar II and III display creative skills in particular artistic fields.[15] A 1987 study found that first-degree relatives of writers also suffered more frequently from mental illness, and were more often creative than 'average' citizens.[16] Consistent with these various observations are the results of a more recent study which found a direct relation between psychopathology and creativity among female writers.[17] Suicide is considerably more probable among creative individuals.[18] Anecdotal evidence from psychiatrists points to a direct link between mood disorders, such as dysthymia, and the quality of art produced by sufferers.[19]

The link between mental illness and creativity is found in the sciences as well. A recent article in *New Scientist* reported the possibility that both Sir Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein suffered from Asperger's Syndrome (a form of high-functioning autism). According to this article, Einstein's genius *resulted* from this 'disorder'.[20] *Wired* magazine has dubbed Asperger's 'the geek syndrome' because the rate of increase in the number of cases in Cali-

fornia's Silicon Valley is staggeringly high.[21] It is widely thought that people with the syndrome, or at least with Aspergic tendencies, are disproportionately represented among software engineers and programmers. Temple Grandin, now Professor of animal science at Colorado State University and one whose experiences with autism were made famous by Oliver Sacks, has also noted the link between Asperger's Syndrome and computers.[22] Dan Geschwind, director of the neurogenetics lab at University of California, Los Angeles, stated:

> Autism gets to fundamental issues of how we view talents and disabilities . . . The flip side of dyslexia is enhanced abilities in math and architecture. There may be an aspect of this going on with autism and assortative mating in places like Silicon Valley. In the parents, who carry a few of the genes, they're a good thing. In the kids, who carry too many, it's very bad.[23]

NORMALISATION AND COVERT EUGENICS

As biomedicine can uncover genetic factors that predispose people to various forms of mental illness, one can easily imagine the following scenario: a couple receive the results of an amniocentesis test from a genetic counsellor[24] which indicates that their unborn child carries genes that may ultimately lead to the development of schizophrenia or mood disorders. Would, or should, the parents willingly give birth to a child that has a chance of being mentally ill? I suspect that the number of parents who would go ahead with the pregnancy in these circumstances would be quite low. Some bioethicists would agree with our imaginary parents to be (or not to be). Notably, Peter Singer has advocated the termination of pregnancies in which the child may be handicapped in some way, so long as it makes way for the birth of a child without handicap.[25] He has suggested further that it may be ethical to euthanase handicapped children *after* birth: "killing a disabled infant is not morally equivalent to killing a person. Very often it is not wrong at all".[26] Professor Grant Sutherland of the Department of Cytogenetics and Molecular Genetics at the Women's and Children's Hospital in Adelaide, and the only Australian contributor to the Human Genome Project, has said "if we can prevent the birth of handicapped individuals, then I think that society will be better off".[27]

The pitfalls of this situation will be more complicated than the simple scenarios outlined here suggest, partly because the genetics underlying neurophysiology are staggeringly complex, and partly because we know almost nothing about how neural structure translates in cognition.[28] Also, mental illness has a significant stigma associated with it and occupies a near mystical, emotionally-charged place in the public imagination and may therefore induce pervasive discrimination in postnatal situations.[29] If genetic tests for psychopathologies are developed, their systematic use will lead to an artificial selection pressure on the genetic factors responsible. This is known as 'negative eugenics', and in the nineteenth century was an openly espoused sociopolitical doctrine. In its modern form it is more subtle, more covert, and has been referred to as the 'backdoor to eugenics'.[30]

Covert, backdoor eugenics is a prime example of the "disciplinary power" explored by the philosopher Michel Foucault.[31] This eugenics operates on the 'deviant' (in this case the mentally ill) to prevent their birth, thus making the population cluster more tightly around the socio-statistically constructed median of normality. Furthermore, it does so in a way that purports to help the parents, by sparing them the burden and the misery of caring for an ill child; and the child, by sparing it from an existence dogged by madness.

Nothing should blind us to the fact that many disorders, both physical and mental, *are* truly horrifying in the pain, confusion, and suffering they produce. However, we should not be so eager to designate people with such disorders as unworthy of life.[32] As we have seen, many 'disorders' are socially defined or have hidden positive aspects. As neurologist Kirk Wilhelmsen has stated: "If we could eliminate the genes for things like autism, I think it would be disastrous . . . The healthiest state for a gene pool is maximum diversity of things that might be good".[33] The same could be said for a number of the disorders I have mentioned here, not least of which are those within the spectrum of mental illness. We may need to rethink the notion of 'disorder' itself. In many cases 'disorders' confer abilities that 'normal' people regard highly and perhaps desire themselves. In light of this, we must consider the repercussions of any foreseeable ability to selectively weed out the genetic factors responsible for such 'disorders'.

Covert eugenics may well eradicate, or at least lessen the incidence of mental illness in modern societies, but in doing so may threaten our cultural vitality and diversity, as well as the diversity of our own gene pool, and deprive the world of valuable and even great minds.

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2. E. Fox Keller, 'Master Molecules' in C.F. Cranor (ed), *Are Genes Us?: The Social Consequences of The New Genetics*, Rutgers University Press, 1994, p.97.
3. Treatment for CF now allows about 50 per cent of sufferers to live to 30 and beyond, where previously 85 per cent of sufferers died within a year. See Bennington and Propert, *Cystic Fibrosis Handbook*, Cystic Fibrosis Association of Victoria Inc., Windsor, 1997, p.1. If left untreated PKU can lead to mental retardation and early death. However, a diet extremely low in phenylalanine effectively stops these symptoms from manifesting. See T. Wilkie, *Perilous Knowledge*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1993, p.105.
4. T.D. Bird, 'Outrageous fortune: the risk of suicide in genetic testing for Huntington's disease', *American Journal of Human Genetics* 64:5, 1999, p.1289.
5. There was some concern about whether or not the transformed red blood cell's ability to carry oxygen might lead to injury during training. D. Nelkin and L. Tancredi, *Dangerous Diagnostics: The Social Power of Biological Information*, Basic Books, New York, 1989, p.99.
6. Nelkin and Tancredi, p.98.
7. A.M. Capron, 'Hedging Their Bets', *Hastings Center Report* 3:3, 1993, p.31.
8. <www.abc.net.au/7.30/s148304.htm>
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10. H.C. Gooding, B. Wilfond, K. Boehm, and B. Bowles Biesecker, 'Unintended Messages: the Ethics of Teaching Genetic Dilemmas,' *The Hastings Center Report* 32:2, 2002, p.37.
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12. T. Szasz, *The Myth of Mental Illness: Foundations of a Theory of Personal Conduct* (Harper & Row, New York, 1974), quoted in T.J. Scheff, *Mental Illness and Social Processes*, Harper & Row, New York, 1967, p.245.
13. E. Hagen, 'The Functions of Postpartum Depression', *Evolution and Human Behaviour* 20, 1999, pp.325–359.
14. K. Wilson, 'Writers and Madness', *Imago* 13:1, 2001, pp.45–49. See also K.R. Jamison, 'Suicide and manic-depressive illness in artists and writers', *National Forum* 73:1, 1993, pp.28–30.
15. A.M. Ghadirian, P. Gregoire and H. Kosmidis, 'Creativity and the Evolution of Psychopathologies', *Creativity Research Journal* 13:2, 2000–2001, p.145.
16. Ghadirian, Gregoire and Kosmidis, p.145.
17. A.M. Ludwig, 'Mental illness and creative activity in female writers', *American Journal of Psychiatry* 151, 1994, pp.1650–1656.
18. Jamison, 'Suicide and manic-depressive illness', p.28.
19. R. Friedman, 'Connecting Depression and Artistry', *New York Times*, 4 June 2002.
20. Sir Isaac, apparently, would proceed with lectures in the absence of students. See H. Muir, 'Did Einstein and Newton have autism?', *New Scientist* 178:2393, p.10.
21. S. Silberman, 'The Geek Syndrome', *Wired* 9:12, 2001, <www.wired.com/wired/archive/9.12/aspergers.html>.
22. M.J. Zuckerman, 'What fuels the mind of a computer hacker?', *USA Today*, 29 March 2001, p.8.
23. Silbermann, 'The Geek Syndrome'.
24. It is well documented that genetic counsellors, contrary to law, do often influence the choices made by prospective parents. See for example M. Day, 'Gene counsellors say what's "best"', *New Scientist* 172:2068, 8 February 1997.
25. In this he includes haemophiliacs and foetuses with Down's syndrome. P. Singer, *Practical Ethics* (second edition), CUP, 1997, p.187.
26. Singer, *Practical Ethics*, p.191.
27. <www.abc.net.au/7.30/s249214.htm>
28. J. Fodor, *The Mind Doesn't Work That Way: The Scope and Limits of Computational Psychology*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2000, p.90.
29. See M. Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, Vintage Books, New York, 1988.
30. T. Duster, *Backdoor to Eugenics*, New York, London, Routledge, 1990.
31. See for example *The History of Sexuality Vol. I*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1976 and *Discipline and Punish*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1975.
32. I am *not* advocating a 'pro-life' argument here. Rather I am questioning the systematic practice of genetic testing and abortion to reduce human diversity.
33. Silbermann, 'The Geek Syndrome'.

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memoir / **VIVIEN ACHIA**

LSD AT NEWHAVEN PSYCHIATRIC

NEWHAVEN PRIVATE Psychiatric Hospital in Kew, an affluent eastern Melbourne suburb, was notorious in the 1950s, sixties and seventies for its use of controversial therapies. These included deep-sleep therapy, which may have caused a death there in 1973, and the use of LSD in so-called 'narcotherapy'. An unknown number of people who were not psychiatric patients were treated with LSD, and a high rate of shock therapy prompted concerned friends and relatives to demonstrate outside the hospital in 1986 calling for a government inquiry.

One Saturday in June 1968 my husband and I parked our Volkswagen Beetle outside Newhaven. Jack strode inside, talking loudly and erratically to everyone in sight. I followed slowly, reluctant to commit myself to the gloom of the interior.

I did not have a psychiatric illness. Distressed by the state of my marriage, I had sought marital counselling, and was referred to a psychiatrist practising at Newhaven. The psychiatrist recommended 'narcotherapy', using LSD, as "a very direct way to get into your subconscious". I was advised that the treatment could "cut out a couple of years of talk and find out quickly what's driving you". Immersed in my private hopes and fears, I was unaware that I was about to become part of a medical and social experiment.

Throughout history people have attempted to achieve visionary states or deal with personal problems through a process of suggestion, assisted by various substances such as herbs, cacti, mushrooms, cocaine, opium, hashish, and more recently, LSD. When LSD was discovered in 1943 it was hailed as an exciting new tool in psychotherapy.

H.A. Abrahamson, who, in 1967, edited the highly regarded *The Use of LSD in Psychotherapy and Alcoholism*, states that in responsible hands LSD could be a valuable tool in "hastening successful results of psychotherapy".[1] E.F.W. Baker stated that "If LSD does temporarily change the balance between present and past experience then there is obviously a good opportunity for insight formation".[2] LSD was thought to work through a process of 'disinhibition' and 'integration', provoking an emotional storm resembling a psychotic state but resulting in a complete re-evaluation of self-image.

In Victoria hallucinogenic drugs had been used since 1960. Prior to 1967 there was virtually no control over the use of these drugs in Australia, leaving individual doctors with discretion as to how to administer them. Some doctors were administering them to unsuitable patients in questionable circumstances and doses.

The *Hallucinogenic Drug Regulations 1967* provided government control, and laid down conditions for the use of these drugs by properly qualified and experienced people. By 1969 hallucinogenic drugs were supplied to nineteen Victorian psychiatrists holding warrants from the Chief Health Of-

ficer, eighteen of these in private practice. A questionnaire sent to these practitioners in Victoria received responses indicating that the total number of patients treated prior to 1969 was estimated to be about four thousand. Thousands more may have been involved between 1970 and 1975 when distribution of the drug ceased. Thirteen hospitals, including St Vincent's, the Alfred, St John of God in Brighton, Caulfield Rehabilitation Centre, Coonil Hospital in Elsternwick, the Epworth in Richmond and Newhaven in Kew were using LSD.

Two of the eleven psychiatrists who responded to the questionnaire reported an increase in marriage breakdown, three said they had used LSD with a small number of patients who had since committed suicide, two said some of their patients had become aggressive and three reported a total of ten recurrent 'flashbacks' from a combined total of 2700 patients.[3]

According to the questionnaire, the average number of treatments per patient was 4.2, a figure disputed by some patients who claimed to have been given a higher number of doses. These drugs were always considered an *adjunct* to psychotherapy. Abrahamson wrote that "the stresses of modern living and the lengthy procedures of psychoanalysis have made us all aware of the need for less time-consuming techniques to give the patient the confidence and ability to face his own problems".[4]

In the 1960s Newhaven described itself as "a modern progressive short term psychiatric hospital consisting of thirty-five beds" providing "a warm informal atmosphere enabling people to gain a greater understanding of themselves and their environment". Treatments included "individual, group, occupational and recreational therapy".

Psychiatrists at Newhaven were given unlimited access to LSD by the Victorian Health Department for use in psychiatric treatment during an era of experimentation with hallucinogenic drugs by governments worldwide. During the fifties the US government was administering LSD to defence force personnel to assess the effect on their behaviour. In the Cold War years a paranoid CIA tried to keep up with the Russians, whom they suspected were using drugs to turn people into 'super-soldiers'. Drugs were thought to have value as a 'truth serum' in the interrogation of enemy soldiers. The British government admits to having tested soldiers with LSD without their knowledge in the sixties, but is still reluctant to admit to previous experiments. By 1970 Sandoz, the Swiss manufacturer which supplied the drug free to the Commonwealth Health Department, had passed all responsibility for use of the drug to various government agencies.

WHEN I ARRIVED at Newhaven I was 23, attractive, bright, with a gorgeous baby daughter, Alice. Charismatic and charming, my husband was welcome everywhere. And that's where he was. Everywhere but with me.

This was 1968. Girls got married early and lived happily ever after. During our honeymoon on Lord Howe Island Jack all but disappeared. While other couples laughed and loved in their cabins, I was stricken with swollen joints and a terrible throat, spending the days congealed into various painful positions as my joints seized up. Jack went spearfishing. He went sailing, climbing, and diving, not returning until nightfall. I passed the time alone, reading Patrick White. Six months later, when the condition flared up again, it was diagnosed as rheumatic fever.

Jack worked for a drug company visiting doctors and pharmacists in northern Victoria. He had a frightening collection of guns and knives which he took on his country trips. He could be fishing for cod in the Murray River at night, or pig hunting in the Barmah forest with his brother Bruce. He loved killing things, and called it "the Lord's work".

By the time I arrived at Newhaven I was convinced there was something wrong with me, as Jack was never around. I had become unstable, moody, volatile. The marriage needed improving, and Alice deserved happier parents, so friends had recommended I see a psychiatrist. Jack would collect me

from the hospital the next morning. I was scared. Still, this was the sixties, and this new drug therapy promised to be the answer to my marital problems.

Newhaven was gloomy and dark. As I climbed the stairs my heart raced. I was put to bed in a single room with barred windows. My pink shortie pyjamas were the only patch of colour. A nurse gave me an injection. She tied a black silk scarf around my eyes.

Here I go! There's a struggle going on behind my forehead—different parts of my mind tug backwards and forwards, my conscious mind trying not to lose control. The drug wins. I have no sense of time or distance. When I look for my watch the bottom of my handbag swims away from me and I can't reach it with my frantic hands. I need help to go to the toilet; the counsellor holds my arm. How humiliating. I have no fear, I feel I can fly or dive effortlessly. I fall, my balance lost. My mind is a rectangle, bordered by lights in brilliant colours, framed by dragons. I see mountains in the distance, dark and sharply outlined against a flat plain. It is late in the day, the sun setting. Two Chinese are walking towards each other to discuss something vitally important. Time passes. I sleep, and Sunday I go home to my child.

Two weeks later I discuss my first experience with the psychiatrist. Nothing is learned.

I'm swinging gently in the bed, mellow, sensual and hungry. "What's for afternoon tea? Can I have something?" I'm red, bony and distorted, like a fairytale goblin. I'm shouting, "Look at me, I'm ugly, I'm grotesque." I'm very angry now, calling for the psychiatrist to come to my room. I will castrate him—he will never use his penis on a woman again! Where is he? He puts his head in. Puffs of smoke drift upwards from his grey hair. The knobs on his bony forehead are small horns. I scream at him: "You make your money from other people's misery—come in here and I'll fix you up."

The nurses attempt to sedate me; I struggle, they hold me down, but can't get the needle into a vein. They push me down, I struggle and shout, they try the other arm. Their eyes are spinning, their ears are pointed like demons, their bottom lips are whirling like cylinders. Before I succumb, I can smell my tears and feel the roots of my teeth deep in my jaws. My body is wired, strung with fine piano wires. I have lost control. My arms are black and bruised. I am hoarse from shouting.

On Sundays following a treatment, I wrote down my memories of the previous day. These formed the basis of talk sessions with the psychiatrist. After five sessions I became terribly afraid. My head was filled with images of dragons and plains, of a grotesque self who wanted to emasculate the psychiatrist, of demonic nurses with needles and whirling lips, of tears that smell, teeth that pierce my jaw, of wires that hold me taut, of fear and knowledge of the drug, of my courage.

During the sixth session, as the drug began to affect me, I panicked and called the staff: The session was aborted early.

The psychiatrist asked to see Jack. Always a risk taker and eager for the next thrill, Jack agreed to admit himself for a treatment. I left him at the hospital, ringing the following morning to see whether he was ready to go home. He'd disappeared at dawn.

In the evening he came home after a day spearfishing. Jack enjoyed his session, during which he came up with an explanation for the story of Christianity. Hell was the passage through the birth canal. Heaven was being put to the breast after surviving birth. The crown of thorns was the mother's pubic hair, spiked with blood.

During my final consultation with the psychiatrist he seemed exasperated. "You're alright Mrs Jenner, but we want your husband to come in for full-time psychiatric treatment. *You're married to a psychopath.*"

IN THE LATE 1960s it was reported in the *Australian and NZ Journal of Psychiatry* that long-lasting adverse reactions to LSD and recurrence of hallucinatory episodes rarely occurred. Short-term dis-

tress, possibly caused by excessively high dosage, was treated by an injection of sodium amytal.

Dr L. Howard Whitaker, consultant psychiatrist, Royal Women's Hospital, Melbourne, also practised at Newhaven during the 1960s. He reported that in a study of one hundred patients given LSD in therapy, "in no case was there any suggestion of precipitation of psychosis, and no patient developed additional symptoms although several refused further treatment because they found the experience too distressing".[5] At the same time doctors were warned not to give the drug to pregnant women because there was a suspicion that it may cause chromosomal damage to the developing child. The *Age* reported in 1991 that Dr David Barnes, who used the drug under controlled conditions in Melbourne hospitals, called LSD "the light that went out" because its earlier promises were not fulfilled.

Adverse reactions included panic, confusion, paranoia, depression, and aggression. Although frightening and disturbing, these were only temporary. Under the Hallucinogenic Drug Regulations it was mandatory for LSD to be used only on in-patients, in a hospital with specially trained staff. The drug was not to be administered unless the prescribing psychiatrist was present. He was to ensure that the appropriate antidotes were given to terminate the session, and to ensure that the patient did not leave the hospital prematurely, or drive until completely recovered.

I believe, from personal experience of the drug, and supported by research, that the inability to separate fact from fantasy posed a serious problem for the patient and the psychiatrist. The person undergoing 'therapy' experienced as *real* whatever physical and emotional sensations arose. It was not explained to me that some of these may have been expressions of infantile or childhood wishes and frustrations. Incidents of false 'recovered memory' could damage family relationships and forever cast doubt on the truth or otherwise of incidents in the past. There would no longer be any way to separate truth from fantasy once LSD had let the genie out of the bottle. Nightmares, a sense of impending doom, and memory loss have been part of my life since my experiences at Newhaven, probably exacerbated, if not caused, by exposure to LSD.

Only ten years ago, *Progress Press* ran a story quoting Ronald Conroy, a former psychologist practising at Newhaven hospital, in which he defended the use of hallucinogenic drugs in psychiatric treatment, arguing that LSD was a valuable therapeutic tool and should be available for professional use under strict government control. He went on to say that the use of LSD was "often a last resort treatment for people with obsessive-compulsive behaviours, character disorders and for sex offenders who had not responded to other treatments and for homosexuality brought on by life circumstances".[6]

An unknown number of people who, like me, suffered from none of these conditions were treated at the hospital with narcotherapy using LSD.

Apart from its prodigious use of LSD, Newhaven was suspected with other private hospitals of administering an unacceptably high rate of shock therapy. An inquest into the death in 1975 at Newhaven of Kevin Joseph Story was told by a nurse attending him at the time that he had received shock treatment and intravenous injections of sodium amytal, which she described as "deep-sleep treatment", before he died. In 1986 protesters demonstrated outside Newhaven demanding a government inquiry.

Modified deep-sleep therapy was once widely practised by Victorian psychiatrists. The Victorian Health Services Commissioner received at least two hundred complaints regarding the use of deep-sleep therapy in Victoria, during an enquiry which began in 1989. In 1991 Paul Conroy wrote:

> the interim report has concluded that the use of forms of deep-sleep treatment by psychiatrists in Victoria has been widespread but in no way on the same scale as the Chelmsford Hospital experience in New South Wales. A NSW Royal Commission subsequently confirmed that at least twenty-four peo-

ple had died as a result of deep-sleep therapy. Another twenty-four patients survived the treatment but later took their own lives, nineteen of them within a year of leaving Chelmsford.[7]

Newhaven Hospital's reputation was further damaged by the activities of Anne Hamilton-Byrne who worked there as a psychiatric nurse during the sixties and seventies. She, with several members of staff, recruited vulnerable patients for her sect, The Family.

In 1975 the production and administration of LSD—for medical and other purposes—was banned, but as recently as 1991 the Newhaven Hospital Victims Action Group (NHVAG) continued to pressure the Victorian Government, writing to every MP, calling for a Royal Commission into the Newhaven Hospital. Maureen Lyster, then Health Minister, replied that the use of hallucinogenic drugs at the time in question was strictly monitored and that there was insufficient evidence in the letter from NHVAG to require further action by the Health Department.

There was a report produced by the Victorian Health Commissioner in 1991, which was referred to in the press, but it seems that it was either not completed or not officially published. Despite an extensive search, I have been unable to locate a copy. I can find no record of compensation being paid to patients who were wrongfully treated with LSD.

NEWHAVEN was not built as a hospital, but as a family home by John Griffiths, who came to Australia in 1877 to work with his brother James, founder of the Griffiths Tea business. Originally named 'Goldthorns' it was completed in December 1891, described as 'a beautiful and substantial residence' situated in splendid grounds, one of many grand homes built in Melbourne during this era by prosperous merchants. The house was extended twice to house the family of seven children. The residence was sold about 1940, beginning the tumultuous and troubled era for the house-as-hospital, which was to last until 1987.

In 1986 the Newhaven Hospital Foundation Limited held a Certificate of Registration approving twenty-six beds for medical and psychiatric services. In 1987 the Certificate of Registration approved no beds. Registration was not to be granted until work was completed to upgrade the premises to satisfy the requirements of the Department of Health and Human Services. Newhaven ceased to exist as a hospital from this date.

Shortly after the Newhaven hospital closed, a family arrived at 'Goldthorns' to take possession of their new home. To exorcise the ghosts of the past they held a party with jukeboxes and dancing. Then the hard work began. Exterior paint was stripped back to reveal warm brickwork. Ugly extensions were removed. The house was richly decorated and furnished. Today it is once again a stylish family home, glowing with light, reflecting the impeccable taste, and generous means, of its owners.

Despite 'therapy' at Newhaven, my marriage did not survive. Soon Alice and I found ourselves completely alone. Sometimes I could feel the wires holding me taut. Feel the roots of my teeth. Smell my tears.

1. H.A. Abrahamson, 'Introduction', to H.A. Abrahamson (ed.), *The Use of LSD in Psychotherapy and Alcoholism*, Bobbs Merrill, Indianapolis, 1967.
2. E.F.W. Baker, 'LSD Psychotherapy; LSD Psycho-Exploration: Three Reports', in Abrahamson, *The Use of Psychotherapy*, p.191.
3. Paul Daley and Anne Crawford, 'How Melbourne became country's LSD capital', *Age* (Sunday Insight), July 1991, p.5.
4. Abrahamson, 'Introduction', p.ix.
5. L. Howard Whitaker, 'Lysergic acid diethylamide in Psychotherapy. Part 1: Clinical Aspects', *Medical Journal of Australia* 1, 1964, p.8.
6. Ronald Conroy, quoted in Kate Wilson, 'Former Psychologist defends treatments', *Progress Press* (Kew), 13 February 1991, p.4.
7. Paul Conroy, 'Inquiry sent 200 sleep-therapy complaints', *Age*, 4 September 1991, p.3.

memoir / **ALLAN JOSEPH THORPE**

GOING TO MORISSET, 1951

For it is better to travel hopefully than to arrive.
Robert Louis Stevenson

THE 7.59 TRAIN (Sundays only) that left Newcastle station bound for Sydney was not what one would call a happy train. It stopped at every station, unattended siding, milk stage and fettlers' camp, until it reached the outskirts of the metropolis, from whence it roared, raged and rattled through the suburbs, stopping but briefly at Strathfield to speed on through the remaining seven miles of its journey, leaving electric trains for dead, as if it was ashamed of the extreme slowness of the greater part of its trip.

The carriages usually comprised a high-roofed type of rolling stock that had been discarded for express and mail use years before, and although reasonably comfortable for short journeys were somewhat shabby and tattered. Reversible indicators showing 'reserved' or 'not reserved' were still retained above the seat numbers, which gave a 'long distance' glamour to the old carriages. The hitherto comfortable seats 'bottomed' on to the wooden frames on account of slack or broken upholstery springs. The tiny fixed tables topped with green linoleum were stained by spilt tea and the aluminium beading around the tables pitted and scarred by the crown seals of innumerable beer bottles. Some of the windows were partly stuck open, and some were immovably wedged shut.

The exterior of the carriages was dingy and it was difficult to distinguish between first and second class. The train was shunted into Newcastle station about 7.15 a.m. after the perfunctory overnight attention of the cleaners. There it remained an inert and lifeless thing until jolted into life by the rough kiss of the locomotive as it was being coupled about ten minutes before starting time.

The 7.59 a.m. (Sundays only) was seldom crowded when it left Newcastle station. A large proportion of the passengers carried picnic hampers, cardboard cartons, heavy suitcases, thermos flasks, baskets of fruit and brown paper parcels. In spite of these goods suggesting a happy day picnicking in the bush, or at the lakeside, most of the passengers appeared in no way joyous. As has been stated, the 7.59 (Sundays only) was not what one would call a happy train.

With little ceremony it would start at the advertised time and make its leisurely way out of Newcastle, stopping at Wickham, Broadmeadow, Kotara, Cockle Creek, Teralba and every other stop, picking up many passengers and setting down but few. By the time it reached Dora Creek it was more than comfortably full, passengers sitting on suitcases in corridors and standing in the little entrance porches at the ends of the carriages.

When the train began to move away from the wooden platforms of Dora Creek station and to clang on the girders of Dora Creek bridge, there developed a general restlessness among the bulk of the passengers and preparations were made to detrain

at the next station. As the locomotive panted up the grade from Dora Creek there would be a general movement among passengers to collect belongings, pull suitcases down from racks and call out to children who may have wandered away and scold children who suddenly discovered they wanted to urinate at that moment and tell them they "would have to wait".

Topping the grade, the train would run smoothly through a cutting of conglomerate sandstone and slow down to stop at Morisset station. Passengers would swarm out and in a short minute or two the train would proceed on its journey to Sydney-town practically empty. The 7.59 a.m. (Sundays only) was, in fact, the one and only train that ran from Newcastle to enable friends and relatives to visit patients in the Morisset hospital; that is, persons who did not own a motor car.

For many weeks my son and I caught the 7.59 and it was to me a chastening and humbling experience. In my own case, when I knew with certitude that Stella would be discharged from Morisset within a known period, I could be sympathetic with other travellers who did not have this assurance. Some visitors on the train, particularly men, were morose and despondent, even, ashamed, that their son or daughter was a patient at Morisset. Often I could not help hearing snatches of conversation that gave vent to their feelings:

"I'd sooner see Marge dead than in that place."

"Why couldn't Stan have been treated in an ordinary hospital?"

"He's been there long enough, I'll have to see that big bitch of a doctor today."

"It's a long way to come. Why do they put these hospitals out in such godforsaken places?"

To these men it must have been a bitter pill to have to board the 7.59 at all. As it ran through Newcastle and out into the countryside they could not but help see people astir, people who did *not* have relatives in a mental hospital, commencing the day, the leisurely Australian Sunday.

They would see men still abed on stretcher beds on back verandahs, reading the Sunday papers; men exercising greyhounds; men still in their pyjamas scratching their tousled heads; men working on or washing their cars; men idling in their backyards waiting to be called to breakfast; men riding bicycles with fishing rods on their shoulders.

They would see smoke curling from chimneys as the 7.59 ran deeper into the country—and no doubt envy the men who would be sitting down to a wholesome breakfast cooked on a wood stove: oatmeal porridge with milk and brown sugar, eggs, bacon and toast, followed by two cups of tea; whilst *their* breakfast would have been eaten in the dingy refreshment room on Newcastle station: toast seemingly made from week-old bread and spread with linseed oil and tea apparently brewed in a rusty kerosene tin.

The women passengers, like all women, knew less but understood more than men, were more cheerful. Many had boarded the 7.59 (Sundays only) for months and even years and would continue to do so while they were able. They knew that the allowed weekly visit to mental patients was of vital importance, not only for the mental wellbeing of their loved one, for their physical wellbeing (to bring clothing and delicacies to make up for the hospital's deficiencies). But to have their name recorded regularly each week in the hospital's books was a valuable asset, if, and when, the time came for the patient to be allowed out on leave or discharged. This would make manifest to Dr Beck, or Dr Yeend, that there was a person, full of love and understanding, who could be relied on to care for an ex-patient during the difficult period of adjustment to the outside world.

One lonely bus, a small affair, hopelessly inadequate to cope with the passengers that streamed out of the 7.59, usually stood waiting in Morisset station yard. The fleet of foot would race up the railway station steps and crowd into the hospital bus. Those hampered by children, heavy packages, or advancing years would have to wait until the bus returned for a second trip, a period of up to forty-

five minutes. The Eccles family, who owned the only garage in Morisset, also owned the bus that ran to the hospital and the only taxi cabs in Morisset, all three of them.

When the bus ran down the dusty road from the station and disappeared out of sight round a bend, by some sort of legerdemain, the battered Plymouths would appear, one driven by a middle-aged male Eccles, another by a young woman of 25, Nancy Eccles, and the third by a sawney youth with incredible buckteeth, Andy Eccles. These motor cars, plying for hire, were quickly snapped up, and visitors were transported to the hospital for fares thrice those charged in the bus.

On some Sundays, my son and I were able to board the bus on its first trip. It had, no doubt, been parked in the station yard since dawn, baking in the sun. The temperature inside the bus would have sent the mercury in a household thermometer soaring above its highest gradation, before it was crammed with sweaty human beings. There they would patiently sit, stewing in their own juice until another member of the Eccles family arrived. Usually it was jolly fat Eccles, a young man in a grey dustcoat with frayed collar and cuffs. He had a leather money satchel slung over his shoulders and he would leisurely collect the fares, still chewing a match with which he had been picking his teeth as he strolled across the dusty station yard.

The fares collected, he would settle his ample buttocks into the driver's seat. Before the simple ritual of starting the motor, he would dredge around in his pockets for cigarettes and matches and follow what most of the males had already done, light up a cigarette, making the atmosphere close to nausea. The motor started, he would engage the clutch and the vehicle would leap forward. At this moment I would think of a passage in the second Book of Kings. Chapter IX, verse 20 declares:

> He cometh even unto them, and cometh not again, and the driving is like the driving of Jehu the son of Nimshi: for he driveth furiously.

The bus would roar out of the station yard and fly down the dusty road into a steep declivity, a bow wave of powdery dust flying out from its front wheels. The impetus thus gained would enable it to zoom up the hill on the other side of the gully effortlessly in top gear. This heart-in-mouth progress continued down the long dusty gravelly grade to the bridge over the creek from whence the road was tar sealed. Gnarled old eucalypts, smooth saplings, grass trees, banksia men, thickets of ti-tree, odd exotic conifers, silver grey ringbarked skeletons, all flew past in a wild arboreal corroboree. This urgent progress at least brought cool air to the vehicle, and the stink of tobacco smoke was largely replaced by the clean air of the bushland.

There was always a long pause after the bus crossed the cattle trap and entered the precincts of the hospital proper. Jolly fat Eccles would have to hold a long conversation with his mate who would be stacking stores or noisily rearranging milk cans on the unloading stage. Jolly fat Eccles would usually have to shout at the top of his voice to bridge the space between the bus and the stage. This would be within the full hearing of all the passengers, who, listening to the sound of their hearts breaking, would also have to listen to an inane dialogue:

"'ow wood jer be?"
"Not bad."
"Ooze yer mate?"
"New bloke."
"Is he comin'?"
"Naw, he's on dooty."
"Is Redge comin'?"
"Yair."
"Goodo."
"Orright."
"See ya."

The well of conversation drying up, jolly fat Eccles would engage the clutch and the bus would leap forward to make its first stop at the male wards. Distributing its passengers to various wards, one

passenger, a woman, remained in the bus until all the other visitors alighted. She always alighted at the top of a low hill, from whence a path led to the criminally insane ward. I often wondered what her thoughts were as she walked alone along the gravel path, through a sea of yellow callaeopsis flowers, past colonies of gentle wallabies and kangaroos resting in the shade of trees, who would watch her in their timeless, curious, Australian way until she became a black dot and was swallowed up behind the high brick walls surrounding the ward.

This is a chapter from Allan Joseph Thorpe's unpublished memoir. The manuscript can be found in the Auchmuty Library, University of Newcastle.

Johnny's Gone For A Soldier (to the tune of that name)

When Johnny comes marching home again hooray, hooray,
We'll wait on the quay as the brass bands play hooray, hooray.
With his rifle slung in his muscular hand, and his desert boots all covered in sand
And we'll shake our heads when Johnny comes marching home.

He'll pose at the head of returning troops hooray, hooray.
He'll talk about Anzacs old and new hooray, hooray.
With a hat with the brim turned up at the side and a cheesy grin of oafish pride
And we'll shake our heads when Johnny comes marching home.

We'll hang our heads as the victors pass hooray, hooray.
Ashamed of the pacifist parts we played hooray, hooray.
The armchair warriors clap and cheer, the result of the war that they never got near
And they'll vote for him when Johnny comes marching home.

He'll tell us he won the war for us hooray, hooray.
Forgetting about the bills there'll be to pay, to pay.
The blood on his hands so red, so red, the children maimed and the children dead
And we'll weep for them when Johnny comes marching home.

MAURICE FAIRFIELD

fiction / **MATT SULLIVAN**

ENGULFING RAHL

AT FIRST IT WAS measured by Fahrenheit then Celsius. Then inches and 'the-hair-on-a-cat's-bum'. Then Fridays, then birthdays, miles and months until after a while Rahl's temperance was never known to be anything different to what people expected from him. Everyone at the Woolpackers agreed on 'a while' because no-one could really pinpoint where or when things started to change. 'A while' seemed indeterminate, undeniable, and non-committal enough to reach general consensus status. It was, at the same time, speculatory enough to still raise a fluttering of murmur amongst the bar-stools. However general the consensus seemed, it became a yardstick of fortune really and Rahl slipped obviously into its pattern.

"Hasn't rained since Rahl's 'turn'," they started saying after the first week.

"Those kids have been restless since Rahl started on this . . . you know." Four weeks without change.

"That river's dropped since Rahl went cloudy on us." Months now.

"Haven't seen Rahl for a while." They knew that 'a while' had passed.

Rahl was unaware of the townspeople's yardstick hinging upon his developing mood. He was unaware of the imperial or metric significance of 'a while'. He knew the dry contours of his sagging farm and that the length between rains could be somehow equated with his strange dreams. He was not disturbed by them. He was not taking drugs, as he knew some of the people in town would think of a single, mid-twenties farmer arriving too late to be above suspicion in the incestuous generational confines of pastoralism. It was merely that Rahl was drifting. Ghostlike he moved in the same circles he had been negotiating for the past four years, but for the past year at least he had done so silently. Not concertedly so, but effortlessly mute; senses still operational, but dulled by this strangeness that had anonymously descended upon him. And as he drifted and the townsfolk talked and theorised about drought and rain and Rahl, the land grew silent and cracked and somehow older. With the lethargy of morning snakes the land sighed.

HE HAD THOUGHT it might rain when he woke to dark sky and the wet smell of storm in the air. A humid breeze pushed through windows opened overnight to cool the house. A light sheet of rain had fallen at dusk, but had soon halted, only to increase the humidity. It had been a night of roaming dreams and jagged sleep; bare legs sticky against the mattress; and the house a stifling pot of thick, soupy air and longing. He had thought it might rain, but the gods had other ideas.

Rahl had slept very little. When he did find sleep, sleep found him twisting and turning with the angst of unexplainable dreaming. He had woken at one

stage and looked out at the sky, staring at a moon shrouded with bulbous clouds, saddened by the cumulonimbus blanket of promise that silently teased itself across the horizon. He wondered at the dark-skinned boy in his dreams, at his weary brown eyes and shiny black hair. He wondered at this boy so much younger than he was, so much younger than he felt, and yet seemingly so silently similar to Rahl and his cloudiness. He wondered at the pregnant sky and whether once the rains had come his own heaviness would be lessened.

The dark-skinned boy thought not. He never spoke to Rahl, but Rahl knew his mind, as if perhaps the boy had caused the words to appear in Rahl's head. The boy's lips never moved, but he spoke to Rahl and Rahl knew his mind. Rahl didn't know the boy's name, but was acutely aware of everything about him and in him.

When the old ute had appeared centre-stage in his sleep-driven parody, rambling laboriously down the stony road and snaking a trail of sandy dust behind it, the boy had run. Not quickly, but quickly enough to remain unseen by the driver, away from Rahl's window and behind the fat jacaranda tree round the back of the house. Rahl hadn't seen the driver, he watched the boy run away, brown skin just slightly darker than the earth. It was then that he had woken up and looked out at the sky and the moon and wondered about the boy. Why had he chosen to visit Rahl in his sleep so many months ago? How was it that he spoke to Rahl and knew his thoughts and feelings? Why was it that Rahl's comprehension of the boy and his purpose remained just beyond the edge of Rahl's understanding, in the dark corner of a dimly lit room? He was resigned to the fact that it had been 'a while' now, and as he lay back down to sleep he prepared for more humid restlessness, the continuation of 'a while' and the rains not to come.

DAILY HE STILL WENT through the routine of living, but silently now; mumbling occasionally when checking the price of the asparagus he was buying or nodding to the shadowy verandah of the Woolpacker's from where he heard his name called, but ultimately he was silent. It was as if inside, the boy of his dreams, tanned and nameless, had taken over. Like the thunderless skies that the town longed for, he had lost something of his voice.

In his quiet, Rahl wandered and he wondered. He remembered the vivacious hand-waving conversations he used to have with the greengrocer, Mrs Ly, about the best way to ripen tomatoes. He remembered raising an arm to those sad pictures of happiness that permanently adorned the Woolpacker's verandah, even remembered joining them once or twice to contribute his thoughts on oat crops or farming ostrich. It was only that he was unable to reach again that junction where he could join in as he once had. As he watched the boy nightly, quietly reading his mind, he watched himself daily unable to shift from the stationary solitude that enveloped him. Rahl would try, but would find himself hesitant, shiftless from his dreaming.

As he stood underneath the teasing shale-coloured sky in the humidity of his own body-smell he staked broad beans, hoping hard against drought. Even as his own barrenness of the past year continued, he knew that a dry summer meant a hard winter. He wondered at the omen of his dreams, at the way the rain worked, at the gods and their obvious displeasure with him. He considered for an instant moving everything, the whole space of his world, but dismissed the thought, knowing that somewhere in his thoughts of escape the boy was watching, and though Rahl had all his life been a sceptic about religion of dreams, he was aware enough of the boy's significance to respect the trappings of his unconscious. He tied up the last of the rough stalks and headed inside to eat cold meats and bread, hoping for a night void of thinking and brimming with rain.

NEXT HE WAS 12. Then 6. Then 22. Then he was himself. Then he was an old man looking at the sun. The wind was harsh and he stood to face it.

The dry dust blew into his mouth and nostrils and squinted eyes, he breathed in short bursts to stave the smothering gusts. He looked at the sun and it was like a glowing orb of cotton wool, blurred by wind and amber cloud. He looked harder and saw the shack, dark wood panels shuddering with the wind and his single-sheet curtains blowing south through the open windows. The warmth of the wind soaked his shirt and he took it off, still facing the thick spray of air. He looked again and saw his garden, beans turned to thin old fingers shaking themselves angrily at Rahl, maddened by the dry storm. He saw the jacaranda swaying excitedly, either waving hello or goodbye. Rahl looked at its thick trunk and saw the boy buffeted by the gust and holding grimly to a lower limb, swaying and reverberating with every pulse of human breath. He opened his dry mouth to shout out to the boy, but no sound came. He shouted again and felt rather than heard the muffled squeak of his parched throat. He stepped against the wind feeling it strongarming him back. He stepped again, ducking his head as if charging its mighty force. His hair was a willow branch whipping snakily grey over his shoulders and he squinted harder against the particles blown from the needy soil. The boy clung dearly to the tree and Rahl saw the strain on his face; saw him willing the wind to stop, but failing. He pushed himself now, his old man's legs faltering and his chest wheezing with the effort of keeping himself grounded. He gained small shelter from the shack, seeing kitchen contents thrust through windows and into the tree and the body of the boy. As the boy willed the wind, Rahl willed himself knowing that minutes had elapsed and become insignificant; knowing that an old man's life was held in the balance of a boy floating next to a tree branch. Rahl was only feet away now, the strain aching in his thighs as he reached out a weathered hand to the boy, shouting his invitation. The boy moved to grip his wrist and briefly touched Rahl's dirty nails when kite-like he ballooned heavenwards with the forceful click of a swallow's wings. Rahl looked upwards for a moment, squinting against the now luminous sun and sensing the screams of the brown boy, who had plagued his dreams, slowly evaporate, before he collapsed.

AT 3 O'CLOCK Rahl woke to the sound of rain. Hard nails driving themselves into the ground and thundering through his sleep. He heard the honking of horns from the town and the firing of .22s into the constellations. He suffered his own trepidation lightly as he looked out the window. In the vertical streaks of moonlight he saw sheets of water laying and collecting themselves on the plastic of the earth. He saw the lightning cracking its pointed swords against the gaping ground and he smiled. He heard the burps of frogs mingling with the rattling peels of thunder and listened to the wanton chorus hammering its rhythm into his head, a reminder of the changing of seasons. He looked out into the night and saw the jacaranda tree, leaves spattered and spattered, dripping puddles into the concrete dirt. He looked closer at the lower limb and followed its line down the tree's big-footed trunk. In the gnarls of its lineage he saw, faintly scratched, the words *Hold me* and could not for the life of him remember seeing them before.

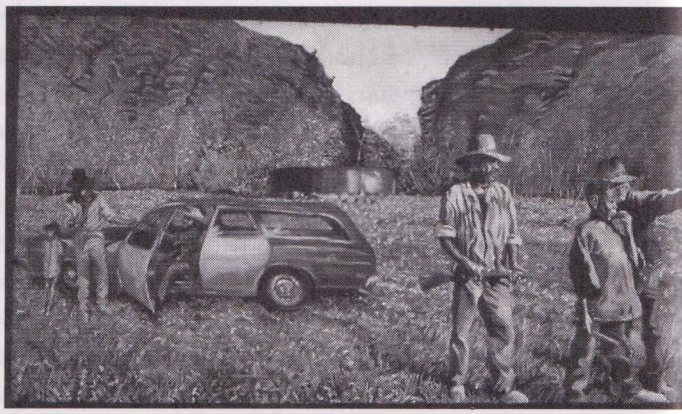
floating fund

Once again we would like to thank our friends and supporters for generously giving to keep *Overland* afloat. Thanks this quarter are due to:

$2000 anon; $458 Z.N.; $200 M.D.; $100 J.S.; $50 E.A.W.; $28 F.L.W, M.H.; $26 F.S.; $24 R.G.; $20 E.I.; $18 J.F., J.B., D.R., N.G.; $16 D.L; $14 V.B.; $10 R.O., G.P.; $8 R.H.G., R.B., M.J.L., J.J.R., W.K., A.J.D.McG., D.J.O'S., D.D., G.J.H.; $4 K.F.; $3 R.F., J.L.; $2 J.R.; Totalling: $3140.

fiction / **ROD MOSS**

HUNTING ON THE SABBATH



Rod Moss, Hunting at Emily, 1994, synthetic polymers and graphite on stonehenge paper

I'M NOT GUN-CRAZY in any sense. I think the only time I was into guns was around age 15 when I did a bit of rabbiting. But any time I told the men at Whitegate, an Aboriginal fringe camp on Alice Springs' eastern perimeter, that I'd driven out of town, they invariably asked if I'd taken a gun and had I shot anything? Why travel so far and waste an opportunity? Though in nearly twenty years in the Centre I've yet to fire a shot, I still like to go hunting with the men on foot after kangaroos.

THE FIRST TIME I took a carload, back in 1986, was a hoot. We drove out towards Emily Soak, my little Subaru station wagon packed to the gunwales with adults and kids. Xavier Nanyenke Neal indicated to me to slow down. I tensed up. He got out and cocked the magnum .22. His brother, Eric, said it was an anthill. Anyone can make mistakes. But we hadn't gone a hundred metres when Xavier again asked me to stop. He crept over the trough of the steeply cambered track. This time, even I could see it was a horse.

"That *nanthe* Xavier," chided Jennifer Johnson, "not *kere aherre*."

David Kwemen Johnson quietly relieved him of the rifle.

Hunting euro and kangaroo sharpened our senses. Tracking, assessing scats, movements and particular birdcalls all informed us as we hunted. While we hunted our talk was minimal and replaced by gestures. I was told that day to remove my red-checked shirt as it would be easily seen by kangaroos. David and Xavier made elaborate hand movements to indicate the location of animals. We stooped and walked slowly over the low ridges, keeping in the cover of rocks and trees, and upwind of the quarry while retaining as straight a line as possible. The crusts of quartz, David had told me, were the shit of the mythological witchetty grubs as they made their procession towards Emily Gap. I followed his steps, soundless in the soft sand. He'd slipped his clacking thongs up over his ankles. Once or twice there was a snorting and a thump on the ground as we surprised our quarry and ourselves. The 'roo would dash off. Maybe two or three of them.

David saw what I could not see until my vision followed the barrel of his gun. He crouched on one knee on a ridge of quartz and cranked a bullet into the chamber, paused, then stood and walked closer. My tension mounted as we closed in. It seemed we were getting too close. Surely it would sense us from thirty metres. A misplaced step on a twig. A shirt catching on a bramble. Any twitch from us would give us away. My entire body felt like an eye. The 'roo turned in our direction and stopped munching. It seemed to know we were there. David crouched again and squeezed the trigger. The crack of the gun seemed incommensurate with death, inconsequential to the expanse of the surrounding plain. The shot separated off and was swallowed by the scrub. But the bullet was not lost. It collided with the buck's cranium, splitting and removing a sizeable chunk of jaw. As if ignorant of the connection between the crack and the fizzing trajectory of the .22, it had leaped at the sound but towards the

bullet, tumbling mid-flight to the gravel. A clean kill with no damage to the edible choice cuts.

It was large enough to butcher on the spot, each of us lugging a quarter of the load to the car. When we got back to camp the meat was divvied up systematically. It was so succulent. And the hunt was mentioned on many occasions and each feature of it discussed. Giving meat was a big factor in the camp's reciprocal dealings. David, Xavier and Eric Neal proved their worth through meat provision and sharing. The places we walked over were remembered for the food they have provided.

It was easier to make sightings of 'roos on cloudy days. There was no reflective glare from the quartz-riddled hills, or oily leaf glint. Nor gashes of dark shadows struck by the trees in which to wallow.

ONE HOT SUNDAY late in October, we planned a day trip, primarily for me to be shown an important rain-making site for the families, but which, inevitably, became another chance to hunt.

A brute wind whirled upon the crosscut saw of the eastern MacDonnell Ranges. Mount Undoolya's great rump shimmered. Its pink gravel veiled down the plain on which our track wended east towards the Todd River flood-out in the Simpson Desert.

It was 40°C plus. We needed ice, bullets, and drinks. There were ten people in the tray and two older men, Davey Hayes and Arranye Johnson, up front with my 3-year-old daughter, Ronja, who sat cramped over the transmission.

The driving was on an easy dirt track until we left through a gate of some old cattle yards and headed up the dry Wyeecha Creek. Rocks in the lower creek were the height of the hubs. Further up the gully they were the size of the Toyota. Adrian got out to engage the four-wheel. No-one said the creek bed wasn't the track, especially since it issued from the spring. If I was willing to drive, then I could do so.

The incubating heat enfolded us in the stubble of our bodies. Ronja got jumpy. I was trying not to panic in front of her and the calm old men. Once when we got stuck, she got out and walked with Gwenda Namitjira and Lizzie. I was left with Arranye, and Dominic's advice to back up and charge the sandbank at a variety of speeds and angles. Old Davey machettied a trail another twenty metres, but soon a wall of roof-high boulders defeated us. It had taken two hours to do less than a kilometre. It was too hot for the old men to proceed.

The women and black kids were not permitted to see the site. So, while the fires were lit for tea, I lugged Ronja behind Dominic and Adrian, half an hour up the trail. We followed the corridor of ants, the only sign of busy life. The rocks flanking us were stained like latrines; lichens and calcites leant them a skin of rust and talc. The fig pods had split and were heavy with ants.

The site was blessedly cooler, in shade and water-fronted. Pardalotes fed here. Honeyeaters of three types. And crested pigeons cooed and curtsied recklessly close to us. The overhanging gallery was loaded with paintings of bush tomato. Repeated concentric circles were linked with parallel lines of red ochre. Their magnitude was impressive, their code patiently re-fingered over the centuries on the ceiling. There were few such galleries in Arrernte country. Designated custodians had the responsibility of speaking for sites and for protecting them. Though the basic story might be communal property, only these people could transmit at the level they deemed appropriate.

Adrian threw a stone into the water and muttered some words of gratitude. Then we cooled off in the spring, which was filled with a green caul of algae. Martins, all air and grace, ducked in and out of mud nests daubed in the overhang. They scrolled against the sky, pursuing insects which hummed in ascending gyres above the water. The surrounding trees bent towards the pool as if in prayer.

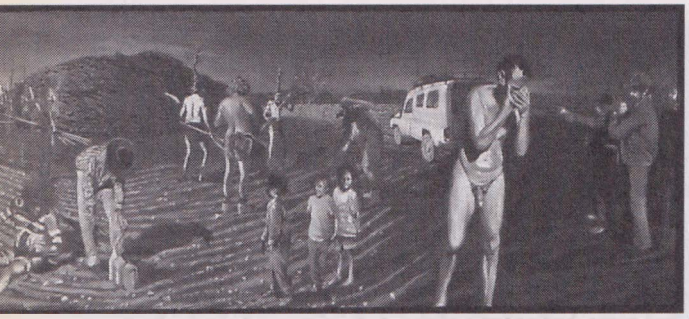
We ambled back to camp. Arranye spoke of the rain-making ceremonies that had occurred there as we tugged at our damper and scraped tinned meat onto it. As if by theatrical appointment in the blasting blue sky, two cumuli drifted over the mountain shoulder to amplify the old man's story.

"Adrian, is it going to rain?"

"I don't know," he shrugged. "Clouds don't talk to me."

OUR DESCENT WAS easier. At the old yards Adrian yelled something from the tray and Arranye pointed east, just when I felt relieved that the day's activities were concluding.

"Not that way. Young men want meat. Might gettim on grass after sleepy time."



Rod Moss, detail from Once Upon A Time In The Centre, *1999, mixed media on stonehenge paper*

Kangaroos would be moving from the shade of the trees out on the plain now. The temperature had slackened, but it remained hot. An hallucinatory heat. The wind dropped. We left the old men, women and kids under a stand of gidgees by a creek and struck out across the scrubby plains in search of kangaroos.

The vindictive light lasered the stones and sands that shivered before the Toyota. Having spotted 'roo, I had to avoid ditches, ruts and trees, and ensure that guns were kept on the quarry side of the cabin. My left knee, unused to so much clutch work, burnt with pain.

The power pact of the bullet on the open plain. Its ping caromed against the distant ridges. The oil in the bore scorched. In the rear-vision mirror I could see the young men coated in dust, Dominic, Adrian and Malcolm; Malcolm in talcum.

As we approached within a kilometre of the bore the road became slippery with cow shit. The surrounds were bereft of vegetation. The dust thickened where it had been churned over by the cattle. Close to the water where their many approaches concurred, it became a great circle of manured mud, darkened by the mire of mating flies. We passed the bore and turned north. Fifty or so cows lapped at the brimming troughs filled by the uncapped flow from the vast artesian basin.

We got three female adults, who tossed their progeny from their pouches as they fled. Their deaths weren't easy, clean shots. Several were hit more than once. They teetered, jerked and swayed on their legs, hopping off with the burden of a few pellets and loss of blood, to die beyond the Toyota's reach in heavy scrub. Unless hit in the head or debilitated by a leg fracture, the .22 proved inept. The three females with leg wounds were easily chased and bashed. Malcolm gathered the joeys and befriended them. At least the furry one. A pink embryo parched to death was kept for the dogs. Ronja made a vegetarian pledge after our day on the plains.

HOW WAS ANYTHING taken with these guns, I wondered. Both took two or three squeezes to release a round. The bolt kept falling off the ancient gun. And the other one was heavily bandaged with insulation tape to hold the barrel to the butt. Guns were sung over and empowered. Dilapidated, customised, they were valued for their stains, scratches and the collective mental notches of numerous killings.

Cooking was more elaborate than I had understood. Gidgee was the premium coal, slow-burning and retaining heat. Edward adjusted the pit-oven's heat throughout the two-hour cook. He initially singed the fur and pan-fried the entrails as entree, of which everyone partook. The tails were rubbed with the half-digested, worm-riddled belly grass for luck. And the warm blood broth from the groin cut was passed around amongst the group. The butchery was incisive. The meat was laid on a bed of gidgee leaves to avoid sand contamination. Each activity was undertaken with the wordless dignity that accompanies sensible habits.

"Big daddy be drink, marla Ronja. You be drink it too. Make it healthy and strong girl," said Gwenda.

It was dark by the time we'd eaten and got back into the Toyota. We drove home on the rim of sleep, bodies slumped against each other's, aching from the bone-hard heat that had polished us all day. At home, my left leg was painful to straighten and just as painful bent.

Ronja rattled through the highlights of the day for her mother.

"Daddy got lost and broken on a bumpy road. I cried because mummy and baby was home, and because little kangaroo is dead. We drank blood which make us healthy and wrong. And, when daddy get bigger, he'll have a gun in the back of the car too."

I doubted that.

Rod Moss is a painter and writer based in Alice Springs.

fiction / **FOTIS KAPETOPOULOS**

I DON'T KNOW WHAT DAY THIS IS

I DON'T KNOW what day this is. It has been days since my old man's funeral. All I know is that he died at 12:10 a.m., 29 March 1993. Time is evaporating; it has become surreal, almost festive. Our house is full of people, friends and relatives, coming and going. They bring food, comfort my mother and tell stories about my father.

My sister wanted him to be cremated. "I don't want him in the ground . . . in the darkness." Father Marinakis was sympathetic but pointed out that "the Orthodox Church does not allow cremation". The Orthodox Church is not about Christianity. It is about being Greek. My sister understood that burial was the only option for our father who was first and foremost a Greek.

Father Marinakis asked: "What should I read from the book?" I pointed out that "my father read Kazantzakis, Mirivilis . . . Kafka . . . not the Bible". I was embarrassed expressing my father's lack of belief to such a nice priest. "Ah! A man of letters," the priest responded, "I will search for something." He seemed pleased not to have to read from the Bible.

He read from Kazantzakis's *Christ Recrucified*. He read about Manolios, the pauper who was selected by the village leaders to be crucified in the annual passion play. Manolios, forced to attend confession, asks the priest: "I have never believed in god . . . why did they choose me?" The priest replied: "You love people and believe in them."

Sam Savvas, the president of the Greek Community, gave an account of my father's "contribution to the Hellenic community". Death seems to transcend all divisions; these *archon* of the community once thought of my old man as a dangerous communist. All our relatives and his friends from the coffee house were also at the service.

Only 10 when the Nazis occupied Greece and 18 by the time the fratricide of the Civil War ended in 1949, my father migrated to Australia in 1956. He often said: "I have seen too many young corpses to believe in god." Yet, he touched wood whenever he heard the word cancer. I even caught him praying once.

My mother cries at regular intervals, repeating like a mantra: "I met Tasso at the Grecian Ball in 1960. He wore a silk blue suit and was unshaven. My parents didn't want him. But I loved him!"

My father kept a journal of the last three months of his life. My sister is now attempting to transcribe it from Greek to English. The old man seemed amused with the fact that while he was a heavy smoker, his lungs were not the ones to go from cancer.

I don't know how I feel. I think we are merely waiting for him to come back from the coffee house. I keep thinking of his attempt to do all he could in his last months. We even went to a movie as a family, something we hadn't done since I was 10. We saw Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. They cried when Dracula expressed his love for his wife.

My father loved reading. "Books, not god, not money, books!" he would say to me. I tried to read his journal. In one passage he wrote: "My son is an optimist. He is looking for a cure. He pushes me to fight, but I am tired. I want to tell him to stop, but don't want to hurt him."

I had come in from Melbourne and was about to go back when my sister stopped me. "Don't go," she said, "he won't last . . . any day now . . ." I the 'optimist' could not conceive of his dying, so I avoided it where I could. Work was my escape. Even on his last day he asked me in breathless whispers, "How . . . how . . . is work? Should . . . you be here? You need to focus on . . . career . . ."

My father's lungs collapsed and he began to gasp for air at about 4 p.m. His swollen legs were the colour of eggplants. His eyes looked large set in his skeletal face. We called an ambulance. In hospital I met an old friend, Phil Capp, who was now a doctor. He kept asking, "Do you think he needs more morphine?" It was code for euthanasia. I kept requesting morphine for him.

My father kept looking at my mother, sister and me. His eyes rolled back in pain. His mouth and nose were covered by a plastic oxygen mask. He could not speak. But understood he was dying. At one point, he clutched at the air, thinking he was holding his pipe. He even asked me for a cigarette. The morphine was bringing on hallucinations.

Aunt Mary, Aunt Georgia and my uncle Nick came to see him. Even in his final agony, he greeted them. At one point he motioned for mum to come closer and began counting: "7 . . . 9, 10, and 11 . . . 12" I followed with "13, Dad . . ." He shook his head and repeated "12 . . . 12 . . ."

I took my sister home, against her will. I thought it inappropriate for her to see him die; now I wish I had not done that. At 12 midnight, as my tea was cooling off, I received a call from the hospital informing me that he was "deteriorating dramatically". By the time I drove back and made it to the sixth floor of the east wing, my father was dead.

Mum was weeping over his body. "Tasso my little heart . . . who am I going to watch videos with?" The woman who loved him for thirty-two years was completely alone. I cried alone with dad, when mum was out of the room.

I don't know what day it is. I know my father died on 29 March at 12.10 a.m.

Fotis Kapetopoulos is an actor and arts administrator who initiated the text and sound performance ensemble Compresso Elastico.

Danube

I remember only my Grandmother's hand,
The stone Parliament, grey history of streets,
The lions (as lions should be!)
Of magnificent size, of carved white stone and

The giant bridge spanning, levitating giantly,
The stream of cars above the massive river
Seemingly indulging banks over
Which its flood could effortlessly

Drown the city when it so chose.
'Can it do that?' I asked in my then native tongue.
'Whenever it wants to' and she sang
A small Magyar tune . . . and memories close.

ZOLTAN KOVACS

Dope, Whiskey & Cigarettes

cabbies used to talk
barbers used to talk
men & women used to
talk on trains
buses
& at work

but only back yards
& kitchen tables
mull things over now

there's always a quiet
minority
that run things
mostly rich cunts
but catholics
are the worst
they're fucken old
cold & ruthless
nicky reckons

never trust a wog
barry says
they're insidious bastards
—it's in their history

dave chimes in
yer can't trust midgets either
—they're subterfuge itself

now don't get me
wrong
dwarves are o.k.
they've got nothing
to hide . . .

but yer can see it in dogs
i mean alsatians
never attack any one
—unless they're trained to
or told to
but man, just walk past a poodle
and it will always be fucken
yappen at yer

an then there's those chihuahuas
they don't stop fucken shaking
an yer can pat em
an feed em
an whisper in their fucken ear
and they'll still bite yer
an fucken yap at yer

as if yer the fucken devil
incarnate

it's th same with mental heads
mark says
i don't mind th bi-polar
or those with anxiety disorders
—even lunatics need friends

it's th ones with
a major underlying
depression
i can't stand
they're on lithium or prozac
& they're invariably
of small stature
—they're two-faced bastards
(not to be mistaken for
schizophrenic or a
multiple personality)
these creatures are aware . . .

they never commit suicide
they don't even drink
much
but still
their only true friend
is insanity

& fucken faggots . . .
Jamie said
they swallow flattery
quicker then they'd
suck down a private
schoolboy
in a public toilet

i don't give a fuck if
someone wants to
bite the pillow but
they're like having
born again christians
at the fucken door
they're fucken yuppies
not just ordinary yuppies
but 1000% fucken yuppies

we knew what we meant
& we talked
until we slept.

MICK SEARLES

Have You Won?

Yes you've just won a completely free all expenses
paid round the world once in a lifetime opportunity
so call us on our 24 hour hotline and book now avoid
the rush only 36 weeks till xmas join our installment
plan and let us do the worrying first prize is a one
size fits all set of his 'n' hers reversible lightweight
glow in the dark autographed collectables that come
with a satisfaction or you get your money back
guarantee that is not available in stores that's right
prices have been slashed and new stock is arriving
all the time you've tried the rest now try the best
join now act now or come on down to our showroom
there's no money down and no payment until July
and it's all yours while supplies last free credit free
delivery all our lines are open no stamps required
and a free t-shirt for our first one hundred callers
never before have such wonderful bargains been
available at such low costs so don't settle for cheap
imitations or second best because everyone is a
winner with our new improved formulas so don't
delay send away buy now pay later ask about our
EZ credit plan and choose from a wide variety of
colours and styles supplies are limited so be the first
on your block to buy to own to have this very very
special offer where no customer walks away unsatisfied
no muss no fuss no salesmen will call yes it's that easy
simply send in the entry forms and we'll do the rest
for you call now our operators are ready and waiting
so have that credit card at hand all expenses paid free
service charges order soon and we'll pay the tax what
could be simpler this sale will not be repeated so tell all
your friends and family layaway plans and financing
available allow twenty-eight days for delivery while
stock lasts note subject to availability.

BRUCE McRAE

days of rain

The heat is gone
from the sky
now.

The sausage sizzles
and the soft drinks
done with.

The sun umbrella
closed and
in the cupboard housed.

The inflatable raft
has been re-boxed,
with it the children's floaties.

No more the fragrances
of honeysuckle, jasmine,
of small cream wild freesias.

There swells a darkness
horizon-deep and close-standing,
a grey oppressive.

There is a stillness
to the wet sidewalks,
parks and people.

It is time
to invoke
an orange-white fire.

It is time
to bring out
the wood.

No longer taking
for granted
that which warms us.

It is an ash time
of feather-light
remains.

We must work harder
now in stone-cold
grates.

We must build,
stoke and watch over
the flame bed.

This air is chilled
these days
are days of rain.

MELISSA PETRAKIS

Song for a Journey Together

we walk together every day and
he sings beside me as we walk

but we will never know each other
better than we do now
in years to come he'll likely
not even remember me

when he is at last my age
he'll still be four years old
forever needing to be watched
and guided and reminded

he knows his name and for a while
mine too but i will never know
the country of his daydreams
when he chuckles at some joke

neither of us has told and always
as we are walking together
he hums some wordless melody
its intervals alien but consistent

its matter as unfathomable
as that of the whales who cavort
deep beyond our expertise

he sings beside me as we walk

(for Chris Graham)

ROSS CLARK

morning, afternoon

a rolling march
of swinging school bags
along the avenue of same

RORY HARRIS

Current History

Our might is temporary but complete;
We have the armour and formations,
To build bridges we have engineers,
To subjugate—our generals and legations.

We are building a bridge to span the Rhine
As I write, though it is night now,
Only camp fire silence (murmur and shifting
Of soldiers encamped) harmonising with the flow

Of the great river. The oil lamp's smudgy
Animal-fat smoke lights my parchment,
And small moths flicker like a conscience
Above the neat ink of my judgements.

Palpably the breadth of our possessions
Feels tenuously linked by only men and will;
A beautiful creation (something like Etruscan
Pottery wolves Romans sometimes find in wells)

Delicate but too robust in primal drives,
Primitive but too cultured for longevity,
Democratically tyrannical, poetically legal,
But worst of all: vicious in its levity.

We are history *now*, which makes this letter
Instant evidence, bypassing my intent at discourse.
We will be famous only for our Circus, lust,
Arrogant power and skill in waging complete wars,

Not for being the first moderns—builders,
Planners, technologists—not for our arts
Or our sciences, or our key invention: diplomacy.s
Hemlock and the corpse-piled carts

Of arena detritus 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.

ZOLTAN KOVACS

Workplace Incident

I made my boss laugh,
beetroot.
(I was blushing too.)
"Oh, you *are* cynical!"
she told me, in high praise.
"Not cynical.
Just Ruined-Idealistic.
Jokes are the only protest I've got left."

She froze.
I guess she feared,
in one long roll
from brow to chin,
I'd peel away the social fabric.
Strange how so many
bosses hold the view
our masks screen hostile selves
that are more 'real' or 'true'.

Should I tell her
I'm like the clichéd onion
that peels right down to nothing?
(But every little bit
has the same smell
and every little bit
might make you cry.)

Suspicious, still
hunched, she eyed me
. . . nervously . . .
until I cracked her up again.
Gave her back her
comic mask.

As was the Ruined-
Idealistic thing to do.

SUSAN STANFORD

obituary / **JOHN McLAREN**

CLEMENT BYRNE CHRISTESEN

OBE, FAHA, founder & editor of *Meanjin*, 28 October 1911–28 June 2003

National Library of Australia

THE CURRENT EDITOR OF *Meanjin*, Ian Britain, recently defended his magazine's concentration on culture at a time of great political turmoil by arguing that it is precisely at such times that we most need to think of the deeper questions that are raised by artists and literary writers. The founder of *Meanjin*, Clem Christesen, would have thoroughly agreed, although no doubt he would have disagreed with some of Britain's particular choices of writers or artists to be discussed. These were his two marks as an editor: a concern for values and a vigorous debate about how they are embodied in actual work.

The first issue of his journal, then entitled *Meanjin Papers*, appeared in 1940, just as Australia was mobilising all its resources to fight a war. It comprised eight pages of poetry. While Christesen accepted the necessity of the war against fascism, he believed there was no point in fighting it if we lost touch with the culture that gave people and society their value. He agreed with Matthew Arnold's view of culture, and through the years in wartime Brisbane, and after the war in Melbourne, filled his magazine with the best that had been thought or written in Australia, as well as a judicious selection of overseas writing. Although the University of Melbourne provided a home for *Meanjin* after 1947, and Monash University conferred an honorary Doctorate of Letters on Clem in 1975, he always felt on the margin of the universities. Despite this, he made his journal into a university of its own. At a time when Australian literature was unfashionable in the academy, he published an array of new writing by Australians, and at a time when ideas were suspect to the Australian community he introduced his readers to such movements as modernism in the arts and French existentialism in philosophy.

Clem was ambivalent about the foundation of *Overland* in 1954. On the one hand he wrote to its editor welcoming its appearance "with real pleasure". It was, he continued, "no small achievement to be able to launch a literary magazine today—one, moreover, which proposes to adopt a nonconformist approach to literature and society, and to stand foursquare behind genuinely democratic Australian values". On the other, he was aware of the scant support available to literary magazines of any kind, and feared that *Overland* might divert support from his own journal. In the event, this did not happen. The two journals found their own places, with friction largely confined to the annual cricket match between teams led by the two editors.

Despite Clem's belief that Melbourne University had not lived up to his expectations of it, he did receive great support from many of its academics and administrators, particularly Macmahon Ball, Ian Maxwell and Geoff Serle. Ray Marginson was eventually able to arrange for him to receive a salary from the Lockie Bequest, and later for the university to buy his papers for the Baillieu Library ensuring him some comfort in his retirement.

Since Clem retired from *Meanjin* in 1974, it has had six editors, and has necessarily changed with the times, although not in its central function of interpreting Australia's place in the world. Under Clem's direction, the Meanjin Press furthered this function by publishing such books as *With a Hawk's Quill*, by the nearly forgotten James Picot, one of Clem's collaborators in founding *Meanjin*, who died as a prisoner of war on the Burma railway. The press also published Judith Wright's first collection, *The Moving Image*, and several collections of Clem's own poetry and short stories.

Clem and Nina settled near Eltham in 'Stanhope', a sprawling house filled with books and paintings. Here they entertained generously, with large parties for Melbourne's literary community, and smaller gatherings of writers who had become close friends. John Morrison to the end of his life recalled with affection the many times he had had "a good crack" around the fire with Clem and Nina.

At the height of Australia's anti-Communist scare, Clem was attacked as a 'hidden Communist' or a 'fellow traveller', and he and Nina were both mentioned before the Petrov Commission. Clem was a friend of Russia, and travelled there several times, partly because he admired Russia's heroic resistance to the Nazis, partly because he loved Russian literature, and partly because in Russia he found a genuine respect for writers. He was, however, never a Communist, and if anything was politically naïve. He was kept busy enough with literature and its intrigues, and with the hard work of maintaining a literary magazine; the intrigues of politics were just outside his interest.

During the 1950s, Melbourne University decided to demolish the building where Clem had his office. They did not offer him alternative accommodation to his satisfaction, and he refused to accept the inevitability of moving. According to legend, he continued to work at his editing even as the builders started to demolish the walls around him. It is an apt image of the determination then needed to edit a literary magazine, and of the invincibility of the man who did it.

John McLaren is a consulting editor of Overland.

obituary / **VANE LINDESAY**

BILL WANNAN

(1915–2003) Fragments recalled

DURING THE 1950s, that fearful period we called the Cold War, a wonderful stirring was taking place here. Thanks to responsible groups and individuals, Australia was being rediscovered—or, put another way, aspects of our culture were being examined seriously and for the first time.

Among the pioneers, Nancy Keesing and Douglas Stewart were assembling their collection to be published as *Australian Bush Ballads*; Dick Diamond's musical stage play *Reedy River* was a sensational triumph and continued to be for many years, being further distinguished when the folk songs from a performance were recorded and released commercially; Hugh Anderson and others were collecting, preserving and publishing bush verse, songs and stories; organisations like the Brisbane Bush Music Group were among the many interested in researching Australian lore and legend in every state of Australia; and during this period Alan Marshall's anecdotes, yarns and tall stories based on his travels around the bush tracks and country townships were appearing in the popular magazine the *Australasian Post*, under the title 'Let's sit on a sliprail', a reference most Australians, although never having done so, understood very well.

Emerging from this remarkable movement, a significant pioneer, who was to become known nationwide, was an ex-fruitpicker, road mender, failed wool company accountant, drink waiter and education officer in the second AIF, Bill Wannan.

William Fielding Fearn-Wannan's interest in Australiana fell into place through his father's influence. Wannan senior, at the time a teacher at Bairnsdale High School (he taught Hal Porter, among others) was contributing book reviews to the *Bairnsdale Advertiser*. Among the publications he received were those wonderful old paperback 'Cornstalk Series' which aroused young Bill Wannan's interest in Australian fiction, lore and history. His enthusiasm was further fulfilled during the Great Depression years of the 1930s by his meeting and working with men of that unfortunate generation who were roaming the Australian states seeking any sort of work.

But it is indeed an ill wind that blows nobody any good, for from this experience Bill contributed feature articles to the *Sydney Morning Herald* and later to the Melbourne *Argus, Age* and *Herald* newspapers. This was the genesis of a writing career and the publication of between fifty and sixty titles, many of which were reprinted; his first folklore book, *The Australian,* published in 1954, has never been out of print. Alan Marshall, in his introduction to this book, felt that most of it reflected an Australia that was passing, a time when amusements were confined to an annual race meeting and an occasional dance:

> The teller-of-tales and sayings is disappearing, and were it not for the enthusiast who collects and preserves this lore, it would be lost to us. In the compilation of this book Bill Wannan has rendered valuable service to Australia. Here is a unique record of Australian folklore gathered by a man who, over the years, has listened, questioned, and written down the result of these sayings and tales that reflect the spirit of the Australian people.

In total, Bill Wannan's book sales have reached a million, a remarkable contribution to the national achievement of identity that was recognised in 1991 when he was awarded membership of the Order of Australia.

IT WAS DURING 1955 when the ill wind this time blew my way. Alan Marshall decided again to concentrate on travelling and writing his novels and short stories, relinquishing his *Australasian Post* feature which I had the distinction of illustrating every week.

I was of course saddened. But the editor of this national magazine, the affectionately regarded Jack Hughes, seemingly aware of Bill's folklore reputation, promptly engaged him to produce weekly an Australian feature. This consisted of bush yarns, ballads, lore, legends, and tall stories that featured bushrangers, river paddleboats, outback characters like 'Muldoon the glutton', 'Hungry Tyson', and those from the title of a published collection, *Bullockies, Beauts and Bandicoots*. To my enormous delight I was chosen as Bill's illustrator; thus not only did he become a loyal mate but an important influence in my development both as an artist and a disciple. Further, this was the start of what is, in all likelihood, a record in Australian journalism for a writer-artist collaboration: an unbroken twenty-five years.

I must admit that my first meeting with Bill surprised me. His reputation had preceded him when we were introduced to each other at the *Australasian Post* editorial office in the old Melbourne *Argus* building.

In my mind's eye I had imagined a rangy, Chips Rafferty sort of bloke, rolling his own between nicotine- and work-scarred hands, elastic-sided boots perhaps, a faint odour of horses, a fish-out-of-water figure awed by a big city. Nothing of the sort! Bill, suave in a neat three-piece suit, a Returned from Active Service badge in the lapel, sober necktie, small-brimmed fur felt hat and a leather briefcase, stood smooth shaven and smiling un-awed. For a moment or two I thought Bill was about to urge me to repent and find the saviour. Hallelujah! Then sell me a copy of the *Watch Tower!*

I enjoyed being 'at work' with Bill when, during those long-past winters, together we would follow our beloved football team 'the Bloods'. Bill, ever the alert collector of our vernacular, shared my enthusiasm for the spontaneous wit of the 'outer' football crowds. I had related to Bill the occasion when I witnessed one supporter, anxious, frustrated and impatient with his team's low scoring, and sensing the chance of a certain goal, screaming at the centre half forward who was in possession of the ball, "Quick! Quick! Hurry! Ya wasting time! Kick the bloody thing quick! Get rid of it!" Of course the player missed the goalposts, the ball went out into the crowd—no score. This was the end for our bellowing supporter: "Ya stupid bastard Heriot, why didn't ya take ya time ya mug!"

We observed the cruel and the funny side, the expressions of apprehension, frustration and even elation. Bill delighted in recording it all. One Bloods player, P.C. Cooke, was a member of the Victoria Police when not playing football. Cooke charged down the field to gather the ball during a match, the umpire blew his whistle, evidently for some misdemeanour spectators couldn't see, and presented the ball to an opposing player. Strident advice from an outraged supporter rose above the roar of the Bloods' barrackers: "Hey Cookey! You're a copper! Why don't you arrest the mongrel for impersonating an umpire?"

They are fondly remembered afternoons with Bill and I am grateful for those twenty-five exhilarating chapters of my life.

Vane Lindesay is a Melbourne designer and writer.

review essay / **JOHN LEONARD**

READING LES MURRAY'S *COLLECTED POEMS*

> As nearly as possible, no nationalist ever thinks, talks, or writes about anything except the superiority of his own power unit. It is difficult if not impossible for any nationalist to conceal his allegiance. The smallest slur upon his own unit, or any implied praise of a rival organisation, fills him with uneasiness which he can only relieve by making some sharp retort.
>
> George Orwell, 'Notes on Nationalism'

> *No-one is the homeland,*
> *Nor are the symbols.*
>
> Jorge Luis Borges

LES MURRAY has been described by some as Australia's leading poet, even Australia's National Poet, and Duffy and Snellgrove have clearly gone to a lot of trouble to produce his *Collected Poems* (not his first publication so titled, by the way). Granted that there is this kind of expectation surrounding Murray's *Collected Poems* I have, in reading this volume for review, asked myself what the general reader of poetry would expect to find here, compared with the collected poems of other poets, and how this volume measures up to those expectations.

I guess firstly that the formidable bulk of the volume—six hundred pages—is to be expected, although this volume is not by any means a complete poems (it is more like an author's selected poems). Terrifying as the thought is, there is yet more poetry by Les Murray lurking beyond the covers of this book, for example his substantial verse novel *Fredy Neptune* (1996), which is not represented here at all.

Perhaps another expectation that the reader might have of this work is variety. The collected poems of other considerable poets usually have a great variety, whether of subject matter, or form, or both. Murray's *Collected Poems* certainly shows a variety of form, but the intense focus on his favourite subject matter is something very marked. Like Orwell's nationalist—in Orwell's terminology a nationalist is anyone who has an irrational attachment to any particular 'power-unit'—Murray can't help dealing again and again with his power-unit, which is of course what he has described *ad nauseam* in his public pronouncements as 'the Bush', and what he describes with unintentional bathos in one poem as "the frequent image of farms". Murray is famously the poet of the Bush, but the early poems in this volume (the first hundred pages or so) actually detail experiences of Murray's own childhood, adolescence and early adulthood in the setting of the Bunyah area of central-coast NSW. (Whether Murray's experience of this particular area can be usefully scaled up to apply to *all* parts of rural Australia is, of course, a moot point.) Some of these poems are written with a delicacy and restraint that is not typical of the later Murray and, crucially, indicate that Murray himself was something of an outsider in this his 'own' world. The poem 'Blood', for example, shows that Murray's contemporaries had little time for his bookishness, and it is moments like this in the early poems that stand apart from the posturing of other poems written in the role of Poet of the Bush, like the anthology piece 'Noonday Axeman', or the poetry celebrating Murray's Scots forebears.

In the later five-sixths of the book even such qualifications as these disappear and Murray the

Voice of the Bush stands out boldly, his 'power-unit' taken for granted. The Bush is now validated by Murray's poetry, rather than the Bush being the element of the poetry which grants it its authority, as in the earlier poems.

Thus it is that another legitimate expectation of these *Collected Poems*, a development within the poetry, is thwarted. There are merely these two types of poetry in the book, the young Murray, the poetic voice of McEwenism, and the later Murray, the self-styled victim of political correctness. There is no doubt of the change that comes over Murray's poetry in the early 1970s, after what Murray sees as the terrible fall into political correctness, which has, in his view, emasculated Australian writing and thought subsequently. It is for the reader to decide what the cause of this hardening of the writing actually is, of course, but I would date this 'fall' to 1971, when Murray decided to become a full-time poet. Since that date Murray has vastly expanded his poetic output, to the detriment of its quality, while not producing any large body of other kinds of literary work. Many poets in the twentieth century have argued the need for poets to be independent of the daily grind, however many others have argued the opposite, and speaking for myself I find that my experience of working in the non-literary world does not dull my poetic interests or activity. Certainly I think one could argue that being a full-time writer has not been good for Murray, as witness the over-prolific later poetry, where there is less delicacy and less feeling, and a great deal more rhetoric and muffled anger. Gerard Henderson, himself hardly a warrior of the left, recently pointed out in the *Sydney Morning Herald* that Murray seems not to have done badly at all in terms of arts funding from the post-1972 regime of correctness, which makes this anger and bitterness all the stranger. It should also be pointed out that Murray can be as politically correct as anyone when it suits him, as in the poem 'Immigrant Voyage', a fine piece of writing which says absolutely nothing. (I had a friend once with a very wicked sense of humour and one of his tricks was to listen politely to a poem being read and when it was finished ask innocently '. . . and?'. I find myself adding '. . . and?' to a good many of Murray's poems.)

In this later part of the book we find Murray's poetry becoming more and more vatic and more and more bereft of any humanity. Many of the poems contain nasty, sly asides, subtle digs at Murray's pet hates. And in many places this nastiness is hardly disguised, even in the earlier poems—the poem 'Thinking About Aboriginal Land Rights, I Visit the Farm I Will Not Inherit' can only mean that in Murray's view Land Rights are wishful thinking, motivated by simple envy. (Incidentally, Murray must take the record for some of the lamest poem titles ever devised, as in this example, which makes the poem superfluous.)

A later poem, 'The Rollover', from the collection *Subhuman Redneck Poems* (1996) (well, he said it), imagines a group of farmers watching bankers being evicted from their houses. Just about everything is wrong with this poem: if you object to part of your power-unit being badly treated by another power-unit, the dumbest thing is to desire simple revenge. If it is your power-unit which is suffering, then obviously your power-unit is weaker, and it's time to think about some more strategic alliances. If 'the Bush' (= the National Party) has been allied with the bankers (= the Labor and Liberal Parties) for a long time and sections of 'the Bush' are still being treated badly by bankers in the eyes of many who live there, then why not think about a political realignment, instead of sentimentalising the suffering?

From a point of view of humanity this poem is obviously flawed too: if being evicted suddenly from one's home is a bad thing, why wish it on someone else? I have even less time for bankers than Murray does, but I wouldn't want to see a banker and family evicted at short notice from their home.

One of the symptoms of the lack of humanity in Murray's poetry is the lack of a sense of humour. Or rather there is humour, it is just that it is so lumbering and elephantine that it takes a while to spot. There is no cosmic sense of humour in Murray's poetry, one that laughs with things, only the very much lesser sort which laughs *at* things—'things' in this case not including the author himself. I only realised that some of the poems in this volume were meant to be funny about halfway through, and I wish I hadn't. Those poems which are meant to be funny are mostly cruel (e.g. 'The Rollover', or the sadistic little number, 'Kiss of the Whip'), and those that aren't are lame to a degree, as for example, 'The Dream of Wearing Shorts Forever', which spends eighty lines dilating upon the semiotics of shorts (the item of clothing). No

Murray is no Tusser or Hesiod, he doesn't describe what actually happens in the paddock or in the yards with any great conviction, and one would like to know how his poetry is really received, if at all, in rural Australia.

doubt the intention is that the reader will be rolling on the floor by the end of the poem, but I doubt that many will. And Murray, like many another writer who graduated in the 1960s, finds magic realism as a mode irresistible, though doubtless many of his younger readers will find it extremely easy to resist.

One of the causes of the lack of humanity, or intellectual depth, in Murray's poetry, is his Catholicism. Throughout the poems there are scattered references which, like Masonic signs, indicate that Murray is a member of a privileged group. Being a devout Catholic is of course a major problem for a poet, as the Catholic Church does not need poetry from the believer, but only obedience and faith. The practice of poetry can at best only earn the faithful Catholic a pat on the back from the priest as a work of supererogation. Undoubtedly one of the frustrations that Murray labours under is that of only being able to discuss in his poetry the works of Man, rather than the works of God, and this is probably the cause of what I, and presumably other readers, see as the appalling lack of interest in most of his work—it is as though the poet is merely showing us his trifles, instead of his real work. On the other hand this may well be a fortunate thing.

The most obvious thing that might be expected from a collected poems of someone who is supposed to be a great poet is a conspicuous display of poetic skill. There can be no doubt that Murray has considerable poetic talent, indeed he is the master of a grey, gloomy rhetoric, which may impress, but always leaves more questions than it answers. In the poem 'Cycling in the Lake Country', for example the stanza:

Going south all day
I think about the Republic.
I will improve my silence and listen to lives.
Those who would listen
have always been the Republic

if heard read aloud might be given the benefit of doubt, but when read the capital 'R' of the second 'Republic' gives the game away.

However throughout much of his poetry Murray struggles to put his talent to good use, and in the last pages of this volume he seems to have given up trying. The most obvious sign of this struggle is almost all of his poems are far too long for the material in them; apart from the most recent poems, and a few inaccurate epigrams, much of Murray's poetry strives for length, but the length it achieves is by padding and repetition. This is the poet who can waste eighty lines talking about shorts, after all. Another irritating habit of Murray's is digging up obscure words to pepper his poetry with. Of course there are some words which died undeservedly and ask to be resurrected, but, like the later Auden, Murray often brings in these candidates for resurrection several at a time, instead of making them a feature, one per poem. The reader could of course chase these words through the *Australian National Dictionary*, the *English Dialect Dictionary* or the *Scottish National Dictionary*, but you have to wonder how many will, especially as the suspicion is that these words are simply synonyms for perfectly ordinary and adequately expressive words, rather than lost concepts.

Perhaps one of the notable features of Murray's poetry, and one that many casual readers will take away, is its descriptive power. Here I am not the best person to comment, for I believe that description has currently a very limited role to play in poetry, and that it properly belongs to the spoon-feeding world of prose. I find that description in Murray's poetry is often compromised by its very exuberance, or once again, by length and dilution. Another lamely titled poem, 'Driving to the Adelaide Festival 1976 Via the Murray Valley Highway' (it's quite permissible to drive down the Murray Valley Highway without going to the Adelaide Festival) is quite effective in the way that the little descriptive insights serve to illustrate the motorist's

fitful attention to the surroundings at his stopping places. But in the next poem, 'The Buladelah-Taree Holiday Song-Cycle', and much of the rest of the poetry, the description takes over, and frustrates any desire of the reader to have the poem brought to some kind of conclusion.

Further to this point we might also note that although Murray is supposed to be the poet of the Bush, and the list of actual flora and fauna one can retrieve from the poems is quite impressive, the fauna and flora that Murray seems most at home with are the most obvious and conspicuous: foxes, fruit-bats, rosellas, currawongs, ibises and magpies seem to be the most-often treated fauna, and various timber-trees the flora. Murray's collection *Translations from the Natural World* (1992), extensively excerpted in this volume, was widely criticised on this point. Moreover I cannot find in the poems about farming life much of a sense of Murray's actual involvement in what he describes. I get a feeling that what we have in the poems of bush-life is the record of an observer, rather than a participant. The language in them is 'bush', of course, but this can be picked up from listening to bush-folk, Murray's neighbours and relatives, and, dare we say, reading. And Murray is no Tusser or Hesiod, he doesn't describe what actually happens in the paddock or in the yards with any great conviction, and one would like to know how his poetry is really received, if at all, in rural Australia.

Finally, another area where Murray's poetry disappoints is in its forms. Time after time one comes across a poem where the form was obviously conceived before the subject-matter, and this is made to fit it, rather than the content dictating the form. Poems which are titled after the forms they are written in, such as 'Senryu', are a real giveaway—as though how many syllables there were in the poem mattered more than what it said. Occasionally the failing is dramatic, as in 'A Spiral of Sonnets', where Murray writes a series of fourteen-line poems rhyming aabbcc &c, and therefore not sonnets—could it be that the idea of a spiral of sonnets came first and the exigencies of true sonnet form proved too difficult?

Throughout his public pronouncements Murray has insisted that politics should be kept separate from poetry. I, in reading his *Collected Poems*, and writing this review, have tried not to judge his poetry by his political views. The holding of certain political views cannot in itself make a bad poet (or a good one, as witness the large number of terrible poets with impeccably left-wing views). Indeed it is an intriguing thought that a left-leaning Murray is a perfectly possible outcome of his life-circumstances. There are plenty of aspects, especially of his earlier poetry, which could have turned Murray into a centrist liberal, rather than a social conservative. If Murray had decided to take his Modern Languages and travel more extensively around Europe in the dangerous 1960s, who knows what might have happened? In fact we can guess, because probably the best poem in this volume is 'Ultima Ratio', translated from the German of F.G. Jünger. A Les 'Eurotrash' Murray, translator of the best in German and French contemporary poetry, is a poignant possibility that never happened.

What we can say on the evidence of this *Collected Poems* is that Les Murray is not a bad poet because he holds right-wing views. He is a talented poet, who, for whatever reasons in his life, has failed to make use of his poetic talents in a way that would produce a strong and lasting body of work, and who happens to hold right-wing political views. The choice of the particular power-unit that he has made has necessarily limited his poetry and it is also to be noted that he enjoys the reputation he has largely because the political Right in Australia has exerted itself to puff his poetry. The Right is always in rather desperate search for poets to add to its cultural arsenal, and it is notable that it usually lights on a poet in the singular to fulfil its need, as witness the reputation of Larkin in Britain and Frost in the US. Bearing this in mind it is clearly nonsense to claim that Murray is Australia's leading poet, and clearly Murray cannot be Australia's 'National Poet' as he has chosen to champion one power-unit within the nation to the deliberate exclusion of others, and has never even tried to write any kind of consensus poetry.

A final thought to add is that this overlong book of overlong poems will not serve Murray's poetic reputation very well in the long term. His publishers should be told that what would serve his reputation better would be a much shorter *Selected Poems*, selected by someone other than the author, based largely on his early poems. What such a volume would show is a poet of great powers, who by his own choice speaks only to a particular constituency.

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Antidotes to heavy weather: new poetry

KERRY LEVES

Stephen Oliver: *Night of Warehouses: Poems 1978–2000* (Headworx, $22)

Nicholas Zurbrugg, in his book on postmodernism (*The Parameters of Postmodernism*, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale, 1993), identified two streams of thinking about the postmodern condition. Zurbrugg named a B-effect and a C-effect. He argued that B-effect writers tend to characterise present conditions by "deceleration, indifference and stupefaction" (Baudrillard); whereas C-effect artists (e.g. the American composer John Cage) develop more positive theories and creative practices. Zurbrugg's framework comes to mind in relation to this major selection of poems by a considerable and under-noticed poet. A reading of Stephen Oliver's poetry gains excitement when the poetry is considered in both B-effect and C-effect terms. The B-effect side is evident in what I can only describe as mimesis-of-entropy; the world depicted (Oliver's writing is very visual) is running down; it's not yet static, but the drift is towards inertia and the repetitiveness of systems. On the other hand, Oliver's language in itself constitutes a C-effect—it is a flexible precision instrument, a powerful and exquisite technology. One effect (definitely a 'C') is of being haunted—by this I don't mean a reviewer's cliche, e.g. 'it's haunting'—but rather that the poetry reads as a haunted space. The ghostly presences of many poets of the past—from Dryden to James K. Baxter—animate its lines, as active valences. This effect goes beyond notions of 'influence'; it's more a technology of the uncanny. But the C-effect doesn't stop there. While Oliver is, obviously, committed to the written word, his poetry is based in sound—yet to call it 'oral' would seem to undercut its sophistication, the rather cold brilliance of its knowing and doing. There's an idiom used in Siberia to describe the sound of a branch cracking and falling from a forest tree in extreme frost; it translates in English as 'the whisper of stars'. Stephen Oliver's poetry makes many equivalents to it, in both sense and sound. The early poems clarify the direction: these are poems of solitude and circumspection, buffed, maybe, with a kind of Ezra Pound machismo, but delicate: many noticings of the world are ventured, but the inferred imagination returns to its own concerns, its fabling in/of language. Oliver's most easily-identified talent is for elegy—e.g. 'Bruno Lawrence', 'Emblem for Dead Youth', 'Words to Lure a Ghost', 'Aunty Eve'—but *Night of Warehouses* is best read in its entirety. Despite the demanding lexis, the fissured syntax and the formidable poetic literacy, the poems presume little; they meet a reader halfway. That meeting, in the liminal space between reader and writer, is, in this case, quite a journey. (Should you require further convincing, see Will Roby's fine review at www.wordriot.org).

MTC Cronin: *My Lover's Back* (UQP, $19.95)

At the Newtown launch on St Valentine's Day 2002, it rained, but the muggy Sydney drizzle couldn't dampen the cool edginess or the pacy high spirits of these poems. Several were performed by stylish and gutsy actors, including Belinda Giblin, Nadine Garner (the standout interpretation, in my opinion) and Jeannette Cronin. (The actors made their own selections.) The PR deserved to work. *My Lover's Back* combines sensuousness and delicacy of thought, on a series of rhythmic power-lines. The book is in three sections. The first, 'Lovers', is high-energy. The breathless, exclamatory tone of the poems here is also finely controlled: desire uncovers itself as wakeful flesh, a vivid world fragmenting into images that make comedy of the desiring state while reassuring of its ubiquity: "I love as much/ as two girls talking/ as clumsy as it is/ the fatness of a dairy cow/ as the measure of difficulty/ in making sense of a sentence". The second section, 'Survival', addresses difficulty; separations where two who (maybe) love 'as one' are definitely two separate 'ones'. When you're (still) in love, that separateness can take many forms and not all of these place the lover/ sufferer/ reflector and implied poet in the victim position: "I like thinking of Joe/ while I'm fucking Jim/ I don't want to fuck Joe though/ I just like thinking of him/ . . . Joe saying I imagine/ your breasts wearing hats/ and Jim's voice I don't doubt/ your innocence/ I doubt/ your guilt". The tone is very contemporary; Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* it ain't. "And the dynamics of our relationship/ Were complicated/ and ordinary . . . / But what good's a description?" The final section, 'Liberty and Pain', goes deeper into what the word 'love' may contain as landscape, cityscape, bodyscape,

mindscape. Some very tender and thoughtful poems address a death in the context of love; they show us how little finality we seem able to live with: "it is not the people you love/ but that you *can* love". *My Lover's Back* is a game and salutary collection about love; anyone who's ever been there is likely to recognise, respond, and seek a re-run.

John Foulcher: *The Learning Curve* (Brandl & Schlesinger, $22.95)

The first twenty or so poems are a total reading pleasure —for anybody who's ever been to high school; especially for anyone who's ever worked, in any capacity, at a high school. The (fictional) setting is St Joseph's College; the text is a string of engrossing monologues by students and by staff members (including nuns and brothers); the fun is contagious, the humour can be biting, and the crafting is super-subtle. Schools are theatrical spaces; everyone (not only teachers) learns to play roles. And a book of poems dedicated to exploring the dynamics of high-school-as-theatre would have been unusual, maybe brilliant. But life turns out to be real and earnest. A teaching brother drowns, perhaps suicidally; a homosexual teacher is murdered; a boy dies after a football match; a girl nearly carks it on a mismanaged excursion; meanwhile, hot (illicit) sex spreads like pumpkin vines. Paradoxically, the non-stop drama (all this, in one school year) tends to flatten things. Once the sex-and-death-driven narrative structure kicks in, the characters spend most of their time reacting and/or having epiphanies. Readers may feel they know this road, from TV soapies. But any of the first twenty poems—or a suite of them—would highlight a 'School Days'-type (or any type) poetry anthology; future editors, please note.

Zan Ross: *en passant* (FACP, $19.95)

It's less ferocious than her first collection, *B-Grade*, but still pulls stops out. Opening section, 'The Last Trip to Cumberland Island', takes us into a Lacanian imaginary, manifest as an island vegetated with Spanish moss, palmetto, she-oak; populated by "sacrificial boar", along with racoon, squirrel, deer-mouse; and traversed by an implied woman poet and her by turns neglectful, arrogant, impetuous and violent male lover. The terms of this fiction have to be partly inferred by the reader, because of the extreme compression and headlong pace of Zan Ross's style. The flamboyant dismantling of narrative intensifies and fantasticates—recasts *as fantasy*—images that connote violent feeling-states, e.g. "your body found days from now,/ sea worms through the eyes,/ one hand twisted in a stock whip when/ you arrive under the canopy of she oak,/ demand tea, my pen, space at the table./ I butter a famished smile,/ begin to chew your thin lips." Sadism and masochism permeate the overload of desire. In other sections, the text admits more reflective moods, but there's an implicit commitment to disturb, shock, make the reader uneasy. The implied poet's engagement with history (via a Rottnest Island museum) enforces a 360-degree turn in the meditations on aggro-degro. A sequence, 'Blue Mountains Sojourn', offers artful variants, a play of different writing styles, by which the vagaries of a social scene might be represented. *en passant* is a Baroque siren song for full orchestra; the cumulative technique, piling image on image, enables a dramatic, subjective, lyrical and corporeal poetry.

Geoff Goodfellow: *Poems for a Dead Father* (Vulgar Press, $19.95)

Like Sandy Jeffs' *Blood Relations* (reviewed *Overland* 162), *Poems for a Dead Father* evokes a 1950s Australia. Both collections relate a family-based history, and both indicate codes of behaviour that were normative in the period. In *Blood Relations*, a family hides private violence and anguish behind a publicly acceptable demeanour. In *Poems for a Dead Father*, the father defines, even embodies, a code of masculine behaviour. A former boxer, he teaches his sons how to fight—"you said *& this is what you use/* & you held up your fists"—and how to shake hands: "*don't trust anyone/ who'd give you a wet fish/ . . . there's no cows hoofs/ in our mob*". The father's code valorises taciturnity and trenchant summing-up. It's a style of articulation that doesn't allow much space for alternatives to its often reductive coding of experience. Articulating an alternative, a reader may come to feel, is the poet's self-appointed task; if so, the process is careful, guarded—less concerned with producing nostalgia than with suggesting what formed people in their 'formative' years: "ah the good old days/ when you left school at fifteen/ under-educated yet still knowing/ too much . . ." But something else was happening in the "red brick houses"—"the old man drunk again/ & opening up the louvre'd windows/ to run his

clenched fist down/ & take out eight panes at a time"—and in the Technical Colleges "where half your teachers/ wore RSL badges/ & were just as neurotic as most/ of your fathers/ & keen as mustard to punch on/ with you in the classrooms". It's now called post-traumatic stress disorder. Geoff Goodfellow is a master of understatement, and the final lines of this patiently crafted and loving memoir capture a mood of disillusionment that resonates from 1914 to now, and could be crudely summarised: 'Don't sign up to do someone else's dirty work'. *Poems for a Dead Father* pays grim tribute to Australian war-veteran fathers and their keen-to-shape-up yet bewildered sons; to the families who lived in war-service homes where the shells kept on exploding and the deaths recurred, horrifying and pointless, behind aging eyelids. On a more cheerful note, *Poems for a Dead Father* displays some language-use from a time when people crafted spoken utterance as they might a neon sign or an engine-part, with an industrial-age pride in the job: "*listen opium were you born/ in a tent?*" is an oblique but pointed way of saying (or repeating) "*put the wood in the hole*". But you'd have to be a very slow-working dope to shut the door on *Poems for a Dead Father*.

| John Mateer: *loanwords* (FACP, $19.95)

Some poems quite powerfully interrogate the relationship between diacritical text and sound. In Mateer's poems, sound is not only oral, but also mechanical, natural—it's the random agglomeration of noises that can signify a recognisable world, at any moment of any day. Sometimes the poet's sensitivity to sound along with visual and tactile impressions can result in a strong poem, committed to realising a given place, so skilfully that the illusion fights back, from the page. Here are some lines from 'Devil's Gullet', a segment of 'Tasmanian Observations': "In staring down, our sight becomes falling rock,/ those precipice walls the edge of a glacial tongue that/ calves—with rupturing like pistol shots in a courtyard—/ icebergs huge as thirty-storey buildings./ The leaden shockwaves, of ice on ocean water,/ of boulders on valley rock, can't be heard,/ except as distant, raspy gusts." Elsewhere the driven, even obsessive writing on sound as presence-in-the-world, sound as distortion-on-the-page, can sound like (or read like) mere assertion (e.g. 'Azan'). Readers may hear themselves muttering, "Show, don't tell". The problem may inhere in the relationship between the romantically sublime poetic manner and a Foucauldian purpose. The poem 'Looking at a Book' scores because it dramatises the topic—the immediacy of sound and living moment, the drift of representation—through a vignette, rather than attempting to make the written words into an emblem of the idea. Lines like, "As the tsunami of every instant, *I am* collapses into *you were*", catch the drama of quantum-physics living, but may become lost—as ideas—in the welter of busy mimesis. I wish there were fewer similes, but this book is an exciting and stimulating read. Mateer's South African growing-up seems to have enabled sensitivity to Australian "racedness"; evident in a moving and informative sequence dedicated to Yagan, an Indigenous man who resisted European settlement.

| Louis Armand: *Land Partition* (Textbase, $16)

Land Partition resists summary statements. It's philosophical in a way that is analogous to the writings of Jacques Derrida. Some topics that can be followed, "like threads through the text", include alienation of land by white settlement; architectural design as (collapsible) totalitarian project; the 'moment' that isn't . . . These—and more—are made into poems partly through the use of terms that require sufficient knowledge to interpret the interpretation of them that the poem appears to be making. But exaction can also reward: the poems of *Land Partition* unfold as shattered-but-alluring textual objects, verbal sculptures that can be read in diverse ways (try starting to read a poem elsewhere than its top line). The poems mix near-prose exposition, e.g."taking up the notion of being concrete . . . " with loaded mimesis: "greybrown mudflats, sudded/ at water's edge", and passages that evoke, after Mallarme (and Adamson) "not the thing, but the effect of the thing"— "the rumour hanging in the balance like a scenario/ from real life, as antidote to the heavy weather". The mood is frequently dolorous; appropriate to the searching and subtle exploration of what "land partition" has entailed. Yet the poems' effects can perform a shimmering anti-logic: "as though there were always a third person/ to see for us unanswerable questions—/ believing that morning resolves [the] nothing/ of the night before—'as empty/ as a theatre following a performance' or/

curtain, fallen across the sea, grey &/ impenetrable—no longer/ a mirror to forgetting, but the forgotten 'itself'". The opening poem-sequence, 'Notes on incarceration, geography', can be read as homage to D.J. Huppatz's *Sealer's Cove* (reviewed *Overland* 165). *Sealer's Cove* develops a palimpsest of incomplete narratives, thus opening the notion of 'history' to infinite dispute; 'Notes on incarceration . . . ' prepares the ground for an interrogation of Hegelian dialectic. 'Notes' indicates that white settlement happened to land already occupied, and traces the impossibilities of this situation's being accepted, at any later time, as a Hegelian 'synthesis'—both the 'synthesis' and the 'perspective' required to appreciate it are invoked as factitious, but their factitiousness only appears in their negation (see the poem 'Perpetuum Mobile'). Negation operates throughout *Land Partition*, aligning, in 'Circumnavigations' (which has an epigraph from Matthew Flinders), the enlightenment technology of exploration—maps, sextant, theodolite—with "the philosopher's artificial intelligence" (language? jargon? information technology?). Negation is also operated via the overt crossing-out of lines or line-segments, suggesting 'history' as the erasure of formerly-considerable propositions. Bleak, but also intense, concentrated, exhilarating; reading *Land Partition* may enable a re-thinking of connections between Derrida's writings and Mallarme's; along with the extraordinary vigour of Mallarmean negations, which permeate and animate *Land Partition*'s text.

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Dreamlike immortalisation

JASNA NOVAKOVIC

| Dorothy Hewett: *Jarrabin* (NIDA, 2002)

It is night-time on stage and all a theatre audience can see through a scrim is the misty outline of a familiar landscape: a small town in the Australian outback. The evocative setting resembles an old photograph that one goes back to from time to time, with nostalgia. This is how Dorothy Hewett saw the prologue to her *Jarrabin Trilogy* in her mind's eye. Like in *Man from Mukinupin* and *Nowhere*, the opening scene is designed to set the tone of the play and subtly introduce the key in which all that follows is to be read. The narrator's recollections summoning ghostlike characters on stage, their coming to life, the shadows cast by their figures or their silhouettes appearing now and then in the play, all assume a common signifying role.

Ellen Shield's setting for *Jarrabin*, mounted in one of NIDA's theatres in October 2002, made space for both the evocative allusion and realistic enactment of John Clark's adaptation of the original play text. The toy-sized string of facades overlooking (from backstage) the acting space contributed to the poetic effect. The realistic interiors of the buildings figuring in the trilogy dominated the floorboards. But the corrugated iron church was conspicuously absent. And astonishingly, lighting failed to support Claude Rodder's words, the words of the narrator conjuring up images from the past. There were no "misty outlines", no scrim. While Hewett saw the town's people emerging "shadowy as ghosts", in John Clark's production they arrived fully lit and, by inference, in flesh and blood. The transformation from the fantastic into naturalistic characters was gone. The shift (back and forth) from one mode of representation to another, characterising the entire trilogy, was sacrificed altogether.

Poetic as all of Hewett's plays are, they have an intrinsic symbolic dimension, which asks for a full support on all levels of theatrical production. Anything less inevitably jeopardises one of her work's most important features—its aesthetic. For it is through this aesthetic as much as through words that Hewett appeals to her audience's imagination and seeks access to their emotions. She uses her trademark skill meticulously to carve out symbols that will eventually address reason. Reason never came first with Hewett. Like the Romantics and later on Carl Jung, she maintained that the most effective discourse is the one that reaches people's minds through their hearts. Bereft of the original aesthetic, not only the trilogy's impact on the audience but the whole spectrum of signification was changed.

For the work commissioned from her by the

Melbourne Theatre Company and the now defunct Black Swan in Perth in the early 1990s, Hewett chose a theme that had haunted her for decades and was already voiced in several stories, notably the one published in 1964 and a novel manuscript by the same name, 'The Wire Fences of Jarrabin', as well as in *Man from Mukinupin*. The theme revolved around the middle-class ethos that had played a major role in her coming to terms with the Self–Other relationship and, consequently, the moulding of her own personality. No setting could nurture that ethos better than a small-town community replicated, by extension, in the mentality of suburbia pervading the Australian character for the greater part of the twentieth century. And no aesthetic could express it more faithfully than a postmodernism of pastiche and nostalgia. *Man from Mukinupin* was Hewett's first play conceived in that vein and, with *The Jarrabin Trilogy* and her last play *Nowhere* (premiered in October 2001), it indicated that the features identified by Fredric Jameson, "the imitation of a peculiar or unique style, the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language", fitted perfectly the matrix of her mythopoeic imagination with its roots in the past. The mask Hewett chose to borrow for her own artistic needs in *The Jarrabin Trilogy* was, like in *Mukinupin*, reminiscent of Shakespeare and his world of imagination unconstrained by reality and abounding in intertextuality. It enabled her to explore anew the manner in which a nation's perceptual habits are fashioned by its cultural heritage. And the range of discourses she could accommodate in the sociological context of a bush town was hypothetically limitless. Not only could she canvass a whole array of character types, but could point to the inhibitions, deviations and tensions gnawing at the collective psyche of a postcolonial society.

The profound silence between Indigenous and white cultures, Hewett's ongoing concern, was one of the tropes kept on by John Clark. Underpinned by music, it loomed large in his NIDA production. It also made way for the presentation of the multiple forms of abuse featuring in the trilogy. Juxtaposed with them were Hewett's characteristic romance and humour; both designed to alleviate the tension and create an emotional balance in the play. Apart from being one of the most popular sites of mythmaking, courtship and romance also supplied a vast range of behavioural patterns that Hewett could draw on to highlight the polysemous nature of human interaction. But humankind's relationship with nature and the universe, two sites of investigation consistently explored by Hewett, were both lost in the adaptation. And with the leaving out of the metaphor that the trees planted by the returned soldier Jack Brand stand for in the trilogy, along with the play's aesthetic determinant, shadowy images, Hewett's sensitive treatment of the passage of time became largely blurred. Gone also was the discourse on the ambivalent character of Australian people's religiousness. Thus Terence Clarke's music was the only remaining indicator of the multiple layers of metaphysical signification permeating Hewett's original play text.

"The music begins, nostalgic and mysterious, as the scrim rises", wrote the playwright in her manuscript. This was indeed the spirit of the very first song, the trilogy's central signifier, dedicated to Jarrabin and delivered by the Prologue's ghostly apparitions. Its elegiac harmony heightened the grim innuendo with the force of a choir in a Greek tragedy. The initial foreboding was however offset time and again, by 'In the sweet bye and bye' and other Golden Oldies prescribed by Hewett, by the glorifying sentiment of Western Australia's anthem, and other hymnic songs, by an accordion music which underpinned the sentimental note of the romantic discourse surrounding Bernie Cracker. And yet, it was out of a Golden Oldie, that of 'In the sweet bye and bye' appearing early in the Trilogy, that a *leitmotif* evolved which was to become a common thread and the production's unifying formal element. Derived from the four-note motif of the song's theme (an ascending minor second followed by a descending major second), it recurred whenever the Aboriginal woman Ruby Bindi pondered in verse. By staying faithful to Hewett's postmodern aesthetic, Clarke helped highlight the imagery of shifting signification and, most of all, intensify the playwright's poetic outcry against the arrogant treatment of Aborigines. His was a concept calling to mind Hewett's ongoing attempts to win public attention for the idea of theatre she and the like-minded dramatists pursued against the predominant current of naturalism. In a 1976 issue of *Theatre Quarterly*, for instance, Hewett cited Barry Oakley: "Without some kind of vision of the metaphysical dimensions of the individual, documentary theatre, for all its songs and its slides, runs the risk of confin-

ing man rather than enlarging him."

Whenever Hewett wanted to point in the trilogy to the elusive nature of reality and transcendental signification, shadowy images became more frequent. By implication, they suggested the presence of parallel realities for different races, different civilisations, even different character types. Some of them live on under the same roof built by Australia. It is, therefore, her own cultural background that Hewett set about to immortalise in her postmodern plays. In discussing the nature of archetypes and the myths surrounding them, Jung contended that, in dreams, archetypes take the form of images and are inextricably bound with emotion. Jung's autobiography, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, provides another crucial clue for the understanding of Hewett's literary technique. "To the extent that I managed to translate the emotions into images—that is to say, to find the images which were concealed in the emotions—I was inwardly calmed and reassured. Had I left those images hidden in the emotions, I might have been torn to pieces by them," he claimed in an attempt to explain the technique he used to penetrate the causes of personal anxiety. The small town, Dorothy Hewett's Jarrabin, is immortalised likewise in a dream. What John Clark did to that dream is common among European directors to whom a play text is just an initial document upon which they base their own messages inspired by a particular moment in history. The point is, such a creative production stops being a playwright's and becomes the adapter's comment, revealing his own sensibility. Hence arguably the discrepancy between Hewett's postmodern text and the fast-paced change of scene in the production emanating from the realistic aesthetic but strangely at odds with the verbal content.

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I Am in Blood Stepp'd in So Far

RICHARD KING

| Russell Lees: *Nixon's Nixon*

Around 10 p.m. on 7 August 1974, the day before he resigned the Presidency and two days after the press received the tape that forced him to do so, Richard Nixon summoned Henry Kissinger to meet with him at the White House. That this meeting lasted for nearly three hours is a matter of public record. Precisely what was said, however, is a matter for conjecture. Russell Lees's play, *Nixon's Nixon*, is a darkly comic speculation on what transpired that critical evening (His Majesty's Theatre, Perth; The Dunstan Playhouse, Adelaide; The Athenaeum, Melbourne).

Set entirely in the Lincoln Sitting Room—a bust of Honest Abe himself looking on censoriously—the play's (entirely credible) premise is that Nixon's final hours as President were spent in a rage and in his cups—very pissed off and *very* pissed. The machinations ascribed to Kissinger are likewise pretty plausible. Trying to save his own career, he advises Nixon in terms that appeal to his legendary vanity: resign the Presidency; minimise the damage; ensure that your Great Achievements live on in the figure of yours truly. Hardly the type to fall on his sword, Tricky Dicky is half-inclined to stay and fight it out, though it slowly dawns on even him that fighting it out is not an option—the enemy is at the gates and they've read the *Washington Post*. Deflated, he attempts to pump himself up by re-enacting former glories (meetings with Brezhnev and Mao Zedong), with Kissinger ordered to take such roles as his President deems fit. In one of his more philosophical moments, Nixon reflects that a spell in jail has inspired the best political memoirs. Kissinger concurs: Lenin's, he suggests, are a good example. When Nixon replies, in injured tones, that Gandhi's are the more pertinent case, Kissinger loses (fleetingly) his serious demeanour, raising his eyes to heaven in a comic show of exasperation. *Nixon's Nixon*—the title announces it—is a study in self-delusion.

Keith Jochim is excellent as the embattled Nixon. Beetle-browed and with arms tightly folded beneath the appalling slouch (it's almost as if his shoulders had buckled beneath the accretion of chips), Nixon was a sort of walking scowl, and Jochim has captured this aspect perfectly. (Clive James once suggested that the famous posture was the "physical reflection of the recriminative battle being waged in [Nixon's] spirit".) Equally impressive is Timothy

Donoghue as the Machiavellian Kissinger. That voice (a Teutonic basso profundo) is, I imagine, hard to do, and Donoghue does it pretty well. He's also captured Kissinger's guarded, rather lugubrious air. The aesthetic contrast between the two—the ludicrous, fuming figure of Nixon and the upright, cooler Kissinger (in posture and temperament, he's the straight man)—is exploited to great effect.

That the spectacle of power corrupting should make for interesting theatre comes as no surprise: it is, after all, the principal theme in many of Shakespeare's plays. I wonder, indeed, if the current fashion for 're-contextualising' Shakespeare has turned up any productions with a Nixon 'twist' or 'angle'. Richard III as Richard Nixon is, I suppose, the obvious choice (one could retain the traditional hump), though perhaps Macbeth describes more clearly the crux of Nixon's Presidency—the way in which guilt will drive the powerful to ever-greater acts of ruthlessness: "I am in blood / Stepp'd in so far, that, should I wade no more, / Returning were as tedious as go o'er."

'Blood' is indeed the *mot juste*. Towards the end of *Nixon's Nixon*, there's a sad (though very welcome) reminder that the greatest crime of Nixon's Presidency was not the Watergate break-in at all, but the disastrous foreign policy. Down on his knees and penitent, Nixon begins to count the dead, as Kissinger—chillingly self-possessed—provides him with the relevant figures. The final count is 800,000. Nixon is dead himself, of course, but Kissinger is alive and well and could still be indicted for war crimes. The final compliment I will pay *Nixon's Nixon* is to say that it cannot help his case.

Richard King is a Fremantle writer. He regularly reviews poetry for Australian Book Review.

Scabs exposed again

SIGRID BORKE

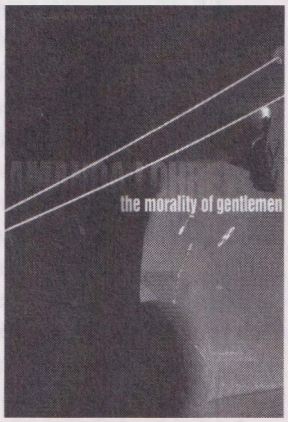
Amanda Lohrey: *Morality of Gentlemen* (Vulgar Press, $24.95)

I first read Amanda Lohrey's book *The Morality of Gentlemen* with great excitement in the late 1980s, on second reading find it just as compelling, and so welcome its reprinting.

The book is set in the late 1950s and revolves around a union struggle on the waterfront in Tasmania, which developed into a protracted battle for the Waterside Workers' Federation (WWF) and an issue of principle for the entire union movement in Australia.

The dispute began with a provocative refusal by Frank and Denis Hursey to pay a union levy. Frank—a virulent anti-communist—vowed to split the union. The incident became notorious as the 'Hursey Case'.

It was a particularly interesting time in Australia. The great Depression had passed, the Second World War was over, and workers had made considerable gains in wages and conditions. A time of rising confidence and militancy in the working class together with outstanding leadership in the unions. Jim Healy, leader of the wharfies, was widely respected and revered (more than ten thousand people lined the streets of Sydney for his funeral) and E.V. Elliott was National Secretary of the Seamen's Union of Australia (SUA). Both Elliott and Healy were communists, dedicated to forging a better society for the working class.



Menzies was in power, anti-communism, the Cold War and general conservatism permeated society and the establishment feared the militancy and growth in union strength.

It was not by accident that a disgruntled and opportunistic unionist like Moseley (i.e. Hursey) was used and set up by the Anti-Communist Labor Party (forerunner of the DLP), the Catholic Church and the right-wing Federated Clerks' Union to attack the WWF and the ALP, when State elections were looming.

The establishment put its weight behind the union bashing campaign through its media outlets and behind the scenes. A Lady Pearl set up a fund for

the Hurseys in the *Tasmanian* daily. The Packer newspaper, the *Daily Telegraph* ran a 'Freedom is not Dead Fund' in Sydney which had a list of top businesses and prominent people as contributors.

In 1998 during the course of the MUA dispute, the same naked class forces were at work, bosses, government, and media in their attacks on unionists. The *Herald Sun* in Melbourne vilified MUA members and even went so far as to organise one of its journalists, Carmel Egan, to join the scab force on Webb Dock and then write a glowing article about her experiences. Dame Nellie Melba had gone down to Melbourne Docks during the 1917 wharfies' strike to sing for the scabs and 'Empire'.

Unionists around Australia swung their support behind the Tasmanian wharfies. Roger Wilson, delegate on the *Warringa* at the time, became very involved and remembers the dispute well. Tas Bull, former WWF secretary, stated: "Throughout the dispute SUA solidarity in a variety of forms was unwavering and in some instances decisive".

With the lightest touch, reference is made to international issues of the time, such as the proposal to send defence forces to fight the communists in Malaya, previous support for Indonesian seamen in their struggle for independence from the Dutch, the death of Stalin and the repercussions in communist parties all contribute to setting the period.

Only a person who has close intimacy with the labour movement and the working class could have written with such authenticity about workers.

There are no stereotypes. Instead we read about real people who have families, differing political views, love affairs, marriage break-ups, the vibrancy, the humour and at times violence.

Among unionists are the hot heads, the cautious, the bump-me-into-parliament types. And contrary to the usual media portrayals of union leaders as villains inciting or threatening reluctant unionists to take actions, a good deal of time in a long dispute is spent by leaders working hard to calm down and reason with hot heads intent on taking more radical action.

Lohrey uses an interesting style throughout the story. An academic researcher sets out to establish the truth of the past dispute by trying to find reliable witnesses, i.e. objective interviewees. It's a difficult task as it generally boils down to 'which side are you on' for the participants. It's a very effective distancing device in the progress of the book.

The *Morality of Gentlemen* is an elegant and terrific read, impossible to put down and a real treasure among Australian literature.

Sigrid Borke is the author of In and Out of Port *(2000).*

Being othered in 'our' land

LYN JACOBS

> Wenche Ommundsen (ed.): *Bastard Moon: Essays on Chinese-Australian Writing* (special edition of *Otherland*, July 2001, $30)
>
> Ouyang Yu: *The Eastern Slope Chronicle* (Brandl & Schlesinger, $29.95)
>
> Ouyang Yu: *Two Hearts, Two Tongues and Rain-Coloured Eyes* (Wild Peony)

These three texts deserve closer attention than this 'collective' appraisal can offer but their complementary focus on the vitality and reflectiveness of Chinese-Australian writing makes them essential reading for anyone interested in new directions in Australian Literature. Reviewing *Otherland* in *Overland* is also apt, given a shared interest in writing about the politics of cultural expression.

The *Bastard Moon* essays are diverse: film, life-writing, autobiography, fiction and poetry, interlaced with interviews with writers whose work documents, or imaginatively represents, Chinese-Australian experience. They vary in style, breadth and intensity, accommodating overviews of Chinese accounts of colonial Australian life (Alison Broinowski), representations of 'Confucians Down Under' (Shen Yuanfang) and visions of 'Australia as Mainland Chinese Writings in Australia' (Anne McLaren). They include discussions of sexuality and identity ('Chinese masculinity in Australia' by Kam Louie, a critique of the 'Chinese sex debate in Sydney' by Yong Zhong) and specific studies of the work of writers like Ee Tiang Hong and Beth Yahp (Kirpal Singh), Clara Law's films (Lili Ma), Lilian Ng's fiction (Shirley Tucker) or Fang Xiangshu and Trevor Hay's Stories of Modern China (Wenche Ommundsen). These are interesting, informative and occasionally elegant essays.

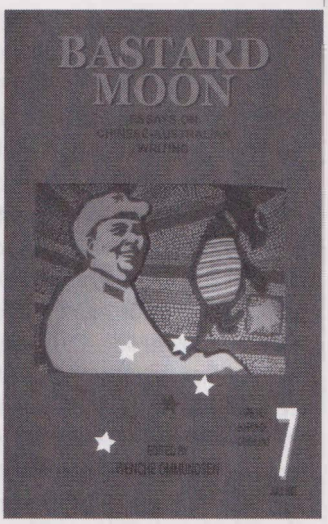
Tseen Khoo's survey of "representations and expressions of the narrator's subjectivities and nationalities and negotiation of social space in resist-

ant and discriminatory environments" focuses on Diana Giese's *Astronauts, Lost Souls and Dragons* and William Yang's *Sadness*, but her analysis of questions of identity and identification in contemporary Australia probes central concerns of the collection. These are all texts about 'crossing boundaries' (geographical and artistic) which investigate language and translation, racial and cultural attitudes, social ambition, ambivalence or alienation and personal stories of transition between homes, countries, nations and cultures. They confirm the urgent need to order lives through art as people face the radical disjunctures of global reorientation and the volatile nature of cross-cultural politics---especially China's relationship with the west. Similarly, while Wenche Ommundsen's essay 'Slipping the Net' celebrates a specific collaboration (Fang Xiangshu and Trevor Hay) it also reveals the innovative melding of genres enlivening contemporary writing, "the carefully crafted balance between fact and fiction, between historical and aesthetic imperatives". The editorial concern for text and context has proved fruitful.

Ouyang Yu also features in *Bastard Moon* as the interviewer of Lillian Ng, Brian Castro and Sang Ye and the final essay by Qian Chaoying (in translation by Ouyang Yu) includes his poetry in its assessment of the prevalence of 'Death in the new Chinese literature of Australia'. This begins with an extract from *Songs of the Last Chinese Poet*, Ouyang Yu's second collection of poems (after *Moon over Melbourne*), which sounds pretty final, but I would argue that this is a point of departure for his new work:

> *the old blind fortune teller has already told him*
> *in becoming something else you become yourself*
> *your lost identity will forever pull you back*
> *towards the centre of chaos*
> *it's better to stay in there*
> *for it's a way of life you have been used to*
> *like if you are used to death*
> *life itself will be a kind of torture for you*
> *it will be worse than death*

Fifty thousand or more 'new' Chinese migrants to Australia have obviously confronted these and other resolutions. However, a percentage of the rest of Australia's diverse immigrant population may well identify with these sentiments and reading *Dark Victory* recently, I better understand why. But since this recommended 'retreat' Ouyang Yu has published a novel and a new book of poems.



The novel *The Eastern Slope Chronicle* juggles several stories as a Chinese immigrant reviews life pre-Tiananmen, revisits his homeland and attempts to promote the writing of a fellow expatriate (once Wang now Warne) graphically demonstrating the disenchantments of diasporic conditions surveyed in the *Bastard Moon* collection. But this is also a discourse on time, a shrewd investigation of identity formation, an extensive examination of the nature and limitations of history-making, exploitation in cross-cultural education or research industries, a discourse on the pitfalls of language systems and an exposé of the vulnerability of little people attempting to keep power-broking bastards honest in either China or Australia. In China, on 'home' territory, the protagonist finds himself only valued because he is now an Australian at a time when he is knee deep in 'ambiguity' (another word for shit), straddling two cultures while rehearsing how to modulate his criticism of his new home in order to present acceptable 'notes on Australians' for a Chinese research project. The novel confronts the reader with unsavoury home truths and it is poignant, painful, provocative, funny and sad. There is sometimes the conveyed sense that, like those in Australian fiction written to counter censorship in the late 1960s, these characters are deliberately perverse (a kind of *Trainspotting* confrontation with seamy sensation) but in the context of a release from repression such portrayals of 'new' life are probably fair game. As a condition of exile (the porn-video voyeurism of people cut off from other kinds of social interactions) is an indicator of hopelessness, inertia, boredom or loss. Brian Castro has called this novel "an important social document and a forceful fiction" and despite my occasional wish for a bit of judicious editing, I think he is spot on.

While I enjoyed the 'Rabelaisian romp' of the novel and the wisdom and wit that informs it, it is the precision and clarity of the poetry to which I'll return. Ouyang Yu's new collection, *Two Hearts, Two Tongues and Rain-Coloured Eyes*, does far more than confirm distances between the expectations and outcomes of translated lives. Having exorcised a sizable dose of anger, angst, regret and thwarted ambition in his first two books of poetry—also remarkable for frank self-analysis and acute linguistic awareness—Ouyang Yu's most recent collection transcends particular community to maturely reassess priorities. These poems trace diurnal, seasonal and life patterns (youth, parenting and aging) evoking a complex "territory of the heart". There are still poems of robust protest like 'Having a Holiday' with its rude parodic repetitions, but other incisive lyric poems haunt when laughter dies away:

in winter
when the last leaf is withered

its green cloth vanished
and golden ornament eroded

the beauty emerges:
the steely skeleton of the burned-down high-rise

the intact bone structure
of an animal eaten clean

and the bone of a tree like a steel fork
that penetrates into a single moon.

('The Bone of a Tree')

Two Hearts, Two Tongues and Rain-Coloured Eyes does chart conditions of exile but with an ironic edge as the poet notes "perhaps it's my will to be exiled/ or i'm in love with my own fetters". While displacement remains a theme and melancholy sometimes prevails, astute observations like these expand horizons:

morning
I am standing in Australia

on my left is a golden white person
and on my right is a beautiful black person
looking through me at each other

morning
I find the sun at the handy cash machine.

In the final poem entitled 'The Worst Moment has Passed' this poet advises another that "it's better not to talk of solitude" and in some ways the new collection explores ways of seeing which avoid doing just that. Poems about rain and sun, landscapes, cities and mornings, poems about lovers, sons, grass and 'ordinary days'. The 'Double man' observer remains, weighing his two worlds and possessing neither, but something new is afoot. There is now room for 'hayfever' 'suspicion' and 'dreams' as well as 'memory' in these contemplative dialogues between self and world.

Nicholas Jose's introduction acknowledges Ouyang Yu's contribution to scholarship (translations, prolific writing and advocacy) and the "struggle for space" that may have daunted a "less determined writer" but most importantly his development of a new idiom, a synthesis of hybrid cultural experiences. Whether it's the familiar 'Great Ocean Road' or 'Three Scenes in a Melbourne Winter' these poems do make you see again, differently, like the best of poetry. While the poet laments being 'Permanently Resident in an Alien Country' his distinctive position has become a resource: most poignantly evident in the final line of 'Otherland' when his travellers (still dreaming) acknowledge that "we remain us and you remain you".

Lyn Jacobs is Associate Professor and research scholar in Australian Studies at Flinders University.

Quintessential generosity

BARRY DICKINS

John Hanrahan: *From Eternity To Here: Memoirs of an angry priest* (Bystander Press, $24.95)

I met John Hanrahan thirty years ago at the Albion Hotel, on the bloodthirsty corner of Lygon and Faraday Street. I realise they are in fact two streets but I always think of them as one indivisible melodrama.

An old Aboriginal rock musician was dry-humping a trombone-playing woman on the staircase. The one good thing about boozing late at The Albion, particularly upon a Friday night, was that it was so packed, if you got king-hit, you couldn't fall over.

I knew after twenty pots John was a drop-out priest and lived in Balwyn, deliberately. He smoked

a bulbous repellent big pipe and shouted bots who should've been shouting him. And he roared with laughter—not at what he was saying, over the shrieks and despairs and punch-sounds at the bar—but at the inebriated witticisms of all the other drongos, including Hal Porter, who was engaged in the act of adding Windex to his pot of white.

John was like Helen Garner, dreadfully kind to a perfect stranger, and they both lent me their typewriters in the early 1970s, that was the most gracious thing you could do, apart from telling you to commit suicide if you were determined to go on with your writing.

I visited him at St Vincent's Hospital once, and he appeared dead. An old snowy-haired Catholic priest woke up at the sound of my runners on the ward lino, and said to me, indicating John Hanrahan with his scone-white big thumb, "Make him laugh. He's chucked it."

So I bent over his crook body in the gloomy room and tweaked some of his toe-hairs and he sat up and laughed like buggery, maybe at just my nose, because it is large and it looms.

And he now reappears thank Christ in his posthumous memoir, very sparkly writing it is indeed, and it is rather like having him back again at The Albion, alive as you or me. I can still hear him speaking to me about things like everything in the world, gossip, pity, sex, death and football, and saying that in all ruckmen there is death, but in all boundary umpires there is only Hell.

> I had almost finished my theological studies before I learnt that Jesus was, again according to the Church, not according to the Gospels, born miraculously as well as conceived immaculately. A manic literalness about intact hymens, about Mary remaining always '*virgo intacta*' and a fear of the reality of female flesh, breasts, womb, vagina, dehumanised the mother of Christ, and made her safe in the act of glorifying her.

He adds that the Church had been in heresy for most of its lifetime. The voltage of his new book is truth. And the poetry is in the pity, not the piety. I can just hear him say to me after holding out a note to the scraggy old barmaid-thing, "Never mind the piety."

As a young bloke studying for the priesthood he always discovered great gifts and good virtues in his fellow sufferers, but he found oafdom and bullying in equal measure among the moronic missionaries and cave-age Christian Brothers who were so stupid they wouldn't know if Christ was up them.

The casual but intense, uncanny but careful way Hanrahan unravels the butter-wrappers off his childhood past is lovely and delicate as a trusting child's goodnight kiss. He's a country boy all his life, with an Einstein IQ.

He adores to imagine and is born to imagine rather than think. Bugger thought. He says this as he so effortlessly writes his way back to his father's face and cousins' faces on a day at the races, or idolising his mum's baked custard, or swimming where you may drown. All things tantalisingly alive, now he is gone, but back again immortalised like a really good joke at the Albion. Whelan the Wrecker can't put the ball through love.

The memoir is an epistle of acute and deadly accurate rage against cant he can't forgive, and superstition he can't pretend is not bullshit or even vaguely amusing because he believed like all good Micks that if you've got a gift or two you ought to use them, otherwise you also are bullshit.

His teenage years are elegantly observed and dug deep for generosity's sake. Because that is what quintessentially he was, generous to his generation, and even kinder to kids like me at the time, who dug crumpled pages of prose or poetry out of empty-otherwise pockets and didn't have to implore him to have a Bo-Peep at them. He never told me I was any good. He treated me as an equal. Then it was my shout. Then we crossed Lygon Street for a sober-up one-with-the-lot.

Drowning in revolting burnt brown cheap fried onions we sung out to Dinny O'Hearn to watch out he didn't get run over by the Kew bus. Dinny grinned at us and blasphemed and John spoke of many things as he wrapped the clackers round burnt bun with his pipe glowing through the greasy bacon. He only ever swore when his pipe went out.

I particularly enjoyed the story of his mother arranging with the New South Wales train bigwigs to get the Sydney to Spencer Street Overnighter to pull up at his home, Douglas Park, an obscure whistle-stop, but she did it because she loved him, and by Christ what a testament to a mother's adoration that is.

The complete innocence of others and the innate friendliness of people long since gone are writ-

ten with elegant insight and deft detail, sharing with the rapt reader a whole zoological garden of eccentric characters that we don't have to live with, and with the Catholic Church being on the nose the way it is, through its adoration of little boys, there are beautiful captured moments contained here where the reader can sense all the reasons to be a Mick—but possibly decline to bow to another paedophile.

It feels like a second since the baking-hot day John Hanrahan's life was celebrated at Montsalvat. I did not like any of the speeches that awful day, but felt vindicated when Helen and John's daughter Brigid burst into a brilliant outburst that was spontaneously great and straight from her heart, which is a considerable size, more like a weir of hurtful sharp tears that her dad was gone, but not quite.

I see the little car studying the tramtracks glistening back to safe Balwyn and I can see an inexhaustible man inside a pipe laughing at life and writing about everything all at once. Always encouraging others is so exhausting, and I used to sometimes wince as I read baleful Hanrahan reviews in the *Age*, perhaps composed when he had the shits.

Bystander Press is to be congratulated for putting together this marvellous compendium of sensations, written by one of this country's most compelling wordsmiths, pipe going or pipe out, and swearing for want of a dry Brymay.

Barry Dickins is a playwright, novelist and columnist.

Worshipping the bladder

BERNARD WHIMPRESS

John Harms: *Loose Men Everywhere* (Text Publishing, $23)

Any Aussie Rules footy supporter who fails to read this book is a bum. *Loose Men Everywhere* offers pleasure and pain, laughter and tears in four quarters. It is for true believers by one who knows what is.

The subject, simply, is the faith of a 40-year-old man (Harms himself) in the Geelong Football Club and the trials and tribulations this faith brings him along the way; the experiences of following a club which yields just one flag (1963, when he is 1) in that time. As he says, by the mid-1980s Geelong had given its supporters three sorts of seasons—the make-the-Five-but-lose-in-the-Preliminary Final model, the finish-one-game-out-of-the-Five model, and the season-written-off-by-round-eight model—although it was working hard on the design of a fourth, the get-flogged-in-the-Grand-Final model which would become popular in the 1990s.

No wonder that in a parallel life he became a mug punter.

The story starts with the author's birth in round nine of the 1962 VFL season in Chinchilla on Queensland's Darling Downs and takes us on a life journey, growing up in the Victorian country towns of Wangaratta and Shepparton, then back to Oakey (Queensland) as each time his father, a Lutheran minister, receives the 'call'. Then on to the University of Queensland, to Adelaide for a year as a graduate student, back to Queensland teaching and so on.

Football is central to this story as a twin religion. Harms's father is a third-generation minister and father, grandfather and great-grandfather have all been Geelong supporters. At Christmas meetings of the Harms clan the greeting would run, "Hark the herald angels sing. Glory to the new born King. Amen. How do you think Polly Farmer will go as coach?"

The first part of the book is a wonderful evocation of a child's response to the game. In Shepparton the scrapbooks begin and Billy Goggin, Ian Nankervis and Doug Wade become heroes to sit alongside the great men from the Bible stories; there's the frustration of ABC radio coverage, "They're moving in at Caulfield" just as Wade is taking a shot at goal; the combination of church and *World of Sport* on Sundays and the hope that Dad's sermon won't go on too long; Bob Davis, Jack Dyer and Lou Richards seen as Old Testament figures; footy candy in club colours; Scanlen's footy cards being highly desirable while the chewing gum they come with is somehow subversive.

"Footies are amazing things," Harms says, alerting us to both a sense of perfection and chaos. The young footballer learns to kick, drop-kick, drop-punt and torp; learns the conventions of end-to-end; signs on as a puny 8-year-old for the Shepparton Under-13s and is selected for one game (as nineteenth man) against Mooroopna. Aw! poor little kid.

But it isn't all bad as he takes in the "trappings of club footy": the quarter-time addresses on the field and the half-time break in the rooms sitting

between two huge blokes making toothless grimaces. In his newspaper column in *The Australian* a few years back he described these men as "looking like Mick Martyn's uncles". Here (with more of a historical focus) they become like Kevin Murray. One can feel the disappointment in his father's acceptance of the 'call' to Queensland. "We were leaving Shepparton; leaving everything we'd worked towards; leaving football."

Rugby league at Oakey is an interruption without sulks. Exiled from the Cats in a 'footy wilderness' he chooses league teams to support—Wynnum Manly (Brisbane) and Wests (Sydney)—plus Doncaster Rovers, bottom of the fourth division of English soccer, battlers all. And he plays Under-12s through to Under-15s in mainly hopeless teams, supports Oakey seniors ('our boys', 'our town'). Mainly there is acceptance of defeat but not always. Losing to Clifton in the Under-13s brings out team gracelessness as the bus is about to depart: "Pack of fuckin' cheats." "You'se can all get fucked." We are reminded of the abandonment of respect for opponents that occasionally crops up in life.

Playing rugby league is put aside, supporting the Oakey Bears maintained, but Geelong is a true love and the scrapbooks remain with cuttings clagged in from the *Australian*, Monday *Sun* and the *Sporting Globe*. It's hard to get a decent radio broadcast on Radio Australia but the VFL's televised footy replay *The Winners* is "like a letter from home". With brothers Peter and David the after school kick-to-kick continues with observations on flight, balance, trajectory, the wonder of things.

A second part of the book covers the author's university years and most of his twenties culminating in the 1989 VFL Grand Final. It begins in 1980 with a dilemma, whether to play footy for the University of Queensland Australian Football Club (Lions) or watch live VFL telecasts. Most of the time the Lions are destroyed but then in the game against Strathpine:

> Mounse gets onto one and thumps the ball out to my wing. I am standing well clear of my opponent who I have realised looks like Henry VIII's fat cousin. We both run at the ball, only he is running at the ball *and* at me. Before I know it my body moves without me telling it to. I prop and my arm stretches out for the Sherrin. Henry's cousin has committed himself to all out violence. As he arrives I find myself in the classic Dick-Reynolds-*Football-the-Australian-Way*-Scanlen's-footy-card-photograph-position—ball about to be dragged in. I sweep it away from him and he pummels the space where me and the ball were going to be. He falls over, hits the puddle and aquaplanes on the apex of his tummy. Water flies everywhere. As I pull the ball in, I spin 360 degrees on my left foot and send a pop pass to the full forward who has led straight out from goal. It hits his chest and he goes back and kicks a goal.

Harms's peak experience reminds him of the poet Peter Goldsworthy's "handful of sweetly fluked dance steps". The dance steps contribute to a two-point win but a twenty-six-goal loss to Mt Gravatt and Geelong's ten wins in a row swing the pendulum in favour of couch footy. The Cats finish top at the end of the minor round but the year ends with the Preliminary Final. Over the next few years Harms thinks about playing for the Lions each season, the Cats never look like competing, author hangs round with philosophy major Spud Murphy tuning in to the cadences of an ex-Collingwood player-turned-coach of the 'fuck this/fuck that' oratory school in the Brisbane local league. A real live ex-VFL player is his closest thing to the big time.

It's 1985, Harms moves to Adelaide, lives at Luther Seminary, drinks at the Welly, eats O'Connell Street greaseburgers with pineapple on top ("for the Queensland Boss") before finally signing up for footy. Come first game, "I was exactly where I wanted to be—on the wing for the Adelaide Lutheran seconds in the Adelaide Amateur Football League A6 reserves. I was playing footy."

Not for long. At the first hit-out the author attempts to take the ball on the half volley, opponent attempts to kick it off the ground, a meeting of boot and hand, microsurgery, thirty-four stitches, totally reconstructed finger, even the club's season report—"John Harms, one game" sounds like an exaggeration.

Back to Brisbane, back to Geelong (of the mind), a Cats lover and now a Gary Ablett lover culminating in 1989 and that greatest of grand finals where Ablett kicks nine goals and Geelong lose. Harms knows the match like the back of his hand and one can feel him finding consolations in philosophy of the Spud Murphy style. "Hawthorn is the hero, Geelong the villain. Good has triumphed. And the

villain has learnt a moral lesson. I am glad that Hawthorn won." It doesn't convince.

Part three is the maturation of a Geelong obsessive, or is it? Nearing 30 and discovering writers like Manning Clark, Geoffrey Blainey, Brian Matthews, Garrie Hutchinson, Martin Flanagan, Barry Dickins and a host of 'capital-P poets', also believing that footy matters leads the author to wonder "whether it was footy that grabbed me or the meanings it harboured". After all, it is not until 1992 that he sees his first game at Kardinia Park, and the year after applies the dotty logic of travelling overseas because if he is out of the country Geelong is almost certain to win the flag.

But there is also the bigger picture. On the way our author drops in again on Adelaide Lutheran. A plan is hatched along with brother David and mates for a game in the Cs. David marks and passes to the author's lead and he marks in the pocket:

> I put the ball on the ground, pulled up my socks and said to the bloke on the mark, "This is one of my life's great moments." He looked at me quizzically. My high drop punt came down over the top of the goal posts. The umpy ran across. Goal! David ran to me laughing. I punched the air. It was a punch of delight and frustration. This could have been my 350th game. Still I couldn't help smiling, and I left it for people to work out for themselves how serious I was.

That and the line in the twenty-five-year history of the ALFC which reads, "John Harms 1985–93, games–2, goals–1". Completion.

After Harms's two previous books, *Confessions of a Thirteenth Man* and *Memoirs of a Mug Punter*, this is a pearler that gives him a classic hat-trick or the third leg of a trifecta. It is the literary equivalent of a seventy-metre Malcolm Blight screwy that splits the top of the goalposts.

Buy it!

Bernard Whimpress's most recent book is Passport to Nowhere: Aborigines in Australian Cricket 1850–1939.

A sporting chance for Indigenous athletes

TONY SMITH

Mike Colman and Ken Edwards: *Eddie Gilbert: the True Story of an Aboriginal Cricketing Legend* (ABC Books, $29.95)

Cricket is dominated by statistics, scores and records. Against this background of impersonal numbers Mike Colman and Ken Edwards have produced a very readable account of one of the most remarkable figures in Australian cricket history. Between the 1930–31 and 1935–36 seasons Eddie Gilbert played twenty-three 'first-class' matches for Queensland—nineteen Sheffield Shield matches and four matches against touring teams from South Africa, England and the West Indies.

By modern standards, Gilbert's career was brief and his return of 87 wickets at an average cost of 28.98 runs was not sensational bowling. Gilbert did not play for Australia, although the possibility was debated in the press. During the infamous 'Bodyline' series of 1932–33 the English team employed fast bowling aimed at the ribs, and supported by a ring of fieldsmen behind the batsmen. This unfair and dangerous approach led the Australian captain to accuse the English team of not 'playing cricket' and cricket administrators changed the rules to eliminate it.

Some commentators advocated retaliation and suggested that Gilbert, reputedly the fastest bowler in the world, and perhaps the fastest of all time, would be the logical spearhead. While Gilbert had established his credentials in Shield matches, the push for his recruitment to the Test team was based on one famous over in 1931. Don Bradman was so successful touring England in 1930 that he virtually won the Ashes with his own bat. When the national hero went to Brisbane with the New South Wales team in September 1931, however, Gilbert made Bradman look vulnerable. One ball touched Bradman's cap as the batsman overbalanced and fell onto the pitch. The next knocked the bat from his hands and the next claimed his wicket for a rare 'duck'.

'Bodyline' was devised specifically to counter Bradman, and Gilbert was seen as a bowler who could counter England's pace attack. However, Gilbert was not selected, possibly because his speed came with a reputation for unpredictability. Some critics felt that Gilbert tired easily. Others alleged

that Gilbert 'threw' rather than bowling the ball legally. A few weeks after his victory over Bradman, Gilbert was 'no-balled' for throwing in Melbourne.

The raw facts of Eddie Gilbert's career are interesting enough to make this thoroughly researched work by Colman and Edwards valuable. What makes Gilbert's story really compelling is that he was an Aboriginal man from the Barambah 'settlement'. The treatment of Gilbert by the authorities provides a sketch of the racial policies of the day. To play, Gilbert needed the permission of the 'Chief Protector', and his allowance was strictly controlled. The authorities treated Gilbert well enough, but they had an ulterior motive. Gilbert was hailed as an example of a native who could succeed in a white man's world. If other Aboriginal people failed, then Gilbert's success showed that the fault was theirs.

While the Aboriginal people of Gilbert's district regarded him as a hero and an inspiration and followed his exploits keenly, the press treated him as a freak. How else could an Aboriginal cricketer from the bush skittle the Don? Numerous reports mentioned Gilbert's long arms and supple wrist, and attributed his strength to practice with the boomerang. Cricketers are great yarn spinners and those who had not seen Gilbert imagined him to be a giant in stature. There were tales of broken stumps, bails knocked over the boundary and batsmen frightened for their safety. Some Gilbert myths were less trivial. It was widely believed that he would have preferred to bowl barefooted, that when in Brisbane for matches he lived in a tent and that he did a tribal dance after taking wickets.

Despite moments of glory, Gilbert's life was mostly unhappy. So little was known about his origins that when he died his age was estimated at 65—and 74. His parents were Kanju people from far North Queensland, who were 'resettled' away from their country in a program supposedly designed to prevent the exploitation of Aboriginal people. After his playing career, he had problems with alcohol and his marriage ended. Apparently deserted by most friends except for schoolteacher Robert Crawford, Gilbert was admitted to Brisbane Mental Hospital in 1949. When he died in 1978, a postmortem revealed that he was suffering Alzheimer's disease and so years of treatment for syphilis had been useless.

Gilbert's unique achievements were recognised in 1998 when Queensland Cricket and the State Government's Office of Sport and recreation launched the Eddie Gilbert Cricket Program, aiming to provide coaching for Aboriginal youth in remote areas. Colman and Edwards have written a sympathetic biography of Gilbert. Their modern historiographical techniques expose the blatantly racist attitudes that disrupted Indigenous lives until very recently. The book challenges twenty-first century Australians to avoid the stereotypes peddled by some opinion-makers and to ensure that indigenous athletes receive equal opportunity and are treated respectfully whether they become national icons or participate at local level. Gilbert's story is a reminder that a nation whose identity is so heavily imbued with sporting prowess must give all people a sporting chance.

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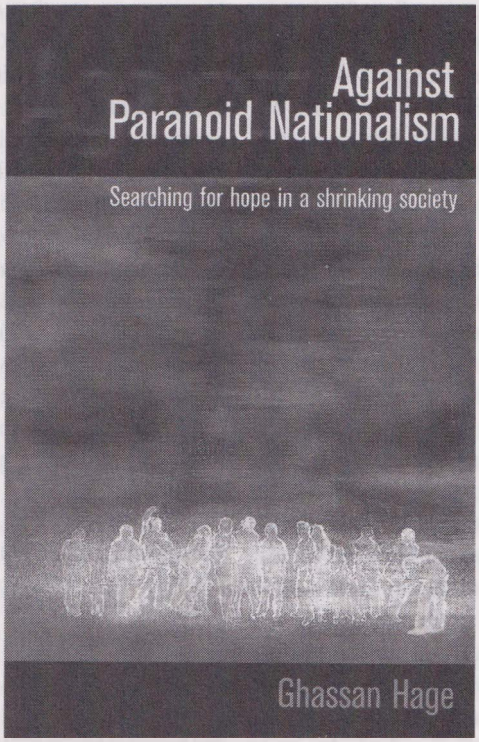
The hopes of political economy

ANGELA MITROPOULOS

Ghassan Hage: *Against Paranoid Nationalism: Searching for Hope in a Shrinking Society* (Pluto Press, $29.95)

World War has returned. To be sure, wars never really ended, in that they continued to lay waste to much of the world since the Second World War was declared over and, ceremonial announcements aside, in that the war in Iraq has been ongoing since 1991. And yet, it is still true to say that war has returned as World War—war as the blunt instrument with which the world is given form and meaning. In the lifeless register of economics, what was staked on this war was not precisely oil but nothing less than the global currency. In other words, granted the global measure of the world market in oil, postwar reconstruction and lives, the proprietorship of the universal medium through which power is reckoned and made real. War is no longer circumscribed by official declarations of beginnings and ends. The so-called War on Terrorism enshrines a permanent state of war as the norm, even while its presentation on the nightly news maintains the conventional narrative rhythms of beginning, spectacular climax and

triumphal finish—with gripping sequels and spin-offs promised. In the execution of such a war there is little distinction between psychic and political economy: global war—that is: total war—presupposes the affective as well as physical mobilisation of populations, the circulation of values as well as valuations. So, thinking seriously about the connections between affective states and the effectivity of particular political-economic formations is more than urgent.



Ghassan Hage's collection of essays, *Against Paranoid Nationalism*, is subtitled a search for "hope in a shrinking society". On topics ranging from Australian 'Border Protection' to suicide bombings to the fundamentalism of the Howard Government, Hage contends that the absence of hope or, rather, the dwindling of a "surplus of hope" has produced an inhospitable, paranoid world—a world in which each "breath of fresh air becomes imagined as the line behind which the enemy (always ready to infiltrate the nation) lurks." Very few writers in Australia come close to unravelling the complex unions of racism, nationalism, terror and capitalism as does Hage, and even fewer are capable of doing so with both intelligence and a delightful grasp of irony. As Hage notes in the Preface, there is nothing more hideously ironic than a world in which reality is so inverted that the denial of racism begins to sound like the only acceptable version of anti-racism; where, for instance, the Prime Minister feels inclined to declare himself more offended at the accusation that he is racist than at the racism of the concentration camps over which he presides.

It is here, I think, in the analysis of the "pervasive paranoid nationalist culture of neo-liberal capitalism", that Hage is at his sharpest. But I am not sure that the correlate aim of the book is as persuasive, even as it establishes an important basis for thinking through the connections between hope, fear and the machinery of twenty-first-century capitalism. Hage's claim that the nation-state is, at its best, a "mechanism for the distribution of [a surplus of] hope" sounds remarkably like Keynesianism. Hage is keenly aware that a portion of the surplus that circulated in national economies such as Australia's was often accrued through a colonial plunder "which undermined the hope of millions of people in what became known as the Third World." But, having recognised this, it seems to me that the additional questions this raises cannot quite be set aside in favour of implicitly assuming that social democracy, or some restatement of it, is in fact the only – or indeed *an* – alternative to misery and paranoia.

This war—and I will come back to this—obliged a rethinking of the extent to which Keynesianism has been internalised in Australia as the dream of a social democracy founded without excessive violence and consolidated without some variant of a global and national apartheid. At the very least, there is something to be said for remembering that it was the Keating Government that legislated for the concentration camps, that exacted the first series of restrictions upon the High Court's repeal of *terra nullius*, and which began the 'neo-liberalisation' of the economy. Nevertheless, more important than any implied argument over electoral options is recalling that the post-1980s austerity emerged not because a surplus was eroded but because any 'redistribution' (or rather, buffering) that did occur since the 1960s was largely financed by debt. That is, the nation-state and the national economy were not machines for the distribution of hope but technologies for the generalisation of indebtedness and the garrisoning of the world market. This debt was reckoned in US dollars since the end of the Second World War, permitted to the extent that it braced the global divisions of the Cold War and the par-

ticular arrangement of nation-states within it. There is also something to be said for recalling that the global financial collapse of 1929 and the destitution that followed was not solved by the application of Keynesian economics so much as resolved in the building of concentration camps and introduction of forced labour, and subsequently 'solved' through the destruction and reconstruction afforded by the mass slaughter of the Second World War.

This is not by way of suggesting that there is no point in hoping for something better. Rather, it is to insist that the nation-state is not a source of hopefulness. The nation-state does not grant gifts; it creates and polices the juridical terms upon which things—and people treated as things—can be exchanged, their value measured and put into circulation. It does so, has always done so, within an international financial, military and political architecture. In this world, hope and fear are indeed measured out by money; but delimiting the horizon of the possible to the calculable is to declare an end to the hope that this world might be otherwise, without measure.

The spoils of war were being reckoned long before Anglo-American troops entered Baghdad, with the only question remaining for nation-states such as Australia being whether the serialised postwar reconstructions furnished by the War on Terror might be calculated in dollars or euros. There have been different renditions of hope proffered at various times: the assembly line defined the dominant, post-Second World War model of hope as an incremental progress; the Judaeo-Christian hope for messianic intercession, order and redemption; the hope shared by fascism and Stalinism that the nation-state would put an end to the traumatic experience of capitalism while maintaining the capital relations of exploitation. And yet, despite all this, there remains a sense in which hope has to exceed such measurable and transcendental variants in order to be meaningful, to offer something more and other than more of the same. Maintaining a hopefulness, then, does not mean offering consoling versions of what exists now; on the contrary, it means knowing that the current shape of the world, including the ideological conjunctions of the familial, biological and national that Hage uncritically reproduces in his fable of motherland-fatherland, are neither natural nor eternal.

Angela Mitropoulos is not alarmed, but antagonistic.

Differing shades of green

CAM WALKER

Amanda Lohrey: *Groundswell, the Rise of the Greens* (Black Inc., $11.95)

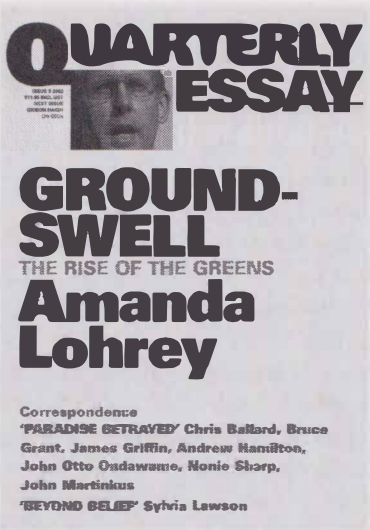
Amanda Lohrey's *Groundswell, the Rise of the Greens* is a timely and readable summary of the history of the Australian Greens. With growing influence and membership, the Greens are coming under greater scrutiny from potential allies, competitors and opponents alike. As many new social activists join the party over issues like its stand on asylum seekers, what had been a fairly comfortable internal dynamic has become increasingly politicised as a growing 'red green' influence comes up against more established traditions of a 'deep' or 'dark' green persuasion. Amanda's sketch of the historical and political origins and influences therefore helps explain why the party is where it currently is and what issues it needs to deal with in order to continue to keep growing.

The 'conflict' (perhaps better described as tension) currently manifesting within the party is often described as being, in the German Greens example, between the 'fundos' and 'realos'. But I believe this is actually about a more complex, and uniquely Australian dynamic, between a series of tendencies. To really understand where the Greens are going, it is necessary to consider these tendencies (I think it would be incorrect to think of them as factions). While the Australian Greens were formed on the four pillars of the German party, given the genesis of the party and the strong influence of wilderness and forest activism in its development, they have been better known until recently for their positions and work on biodiversity and nature conservation issues (this is said with the understanding that there have always been other traditions, including a strong peace and anti-nuclear position in the party).

As an interested outsider, I can see the following tendencies or leanings. The dominant or largest group, sometimes called the 'dark' or 'deep' greens because of their philosophical basis, or 'leafy' greens because of their interest in forests and nature conservation are the ones who have historically influenced the direction of the party. It is this tag that has best characterised how most outsiders have seen the Greens through most of their history.

Then there are the 'Red Greens', those who come

from a consciously left politic, and it is arguably they who will most influence the direction of the party in the future. A third element would be the radical liberals, those who are drawn to the party over a particular social issue. You can trace their entry to the party by the issues it has championed at different times (and, to a degree this is often manifested in who is on a leading ticket or representing the party at any one time: as one example, when Charmaine Clarke, an Aboriginal woman, was running for the senate in Victoria, the party began to appeal to many who had previously dismissed it as being a 'tree-hugger' party). These issues include gay rights, feminism, Indigenous rights and refugees and asylum seekers. Some people also identify another grouping, the 'Blue Greens'—those who combine the radical liberal concerns with concern for the environment, but are not necessarily interested in, or are sometimes even hostile to, the Red Green politics, especially as this relates to trade unions.



Given the debate about where the new support is coming from, Amanda's suggestion that the Greens grew from a rise in 'ecological sensibility' in the 1970s and a later 'moral response' to globalisation, rather than disenfranchised ALP voters, is significant. She traces the development of the inevitable political structure that would coalesce around this new consciousness, from the Lake Pedder campaign of the early 1970s through to the Franklin campaign in the early eighties when environmentalism became mainstream in an unprecedented way. Given the Tasmanian experience of working to protect wild country, she correctly traces the party's origins as being in the tradition of the Romantics rather than blue-collar labour or social justice movements, the other dynamic movements of that time. Despite the broad social platform of the United Tasmania Group, the precursor of the Greens, the earliest manifestations of the Greens were resolutely middle-class and Anglo in nature, mirroring the mainstream environment movement it grew from in world view, concerns and constituency.

By the early 1980s, as 'non political' green organisations such as the ACF, the Wilderness Society and the Democrats grew in power, there was a parallel development of pro-environment sentiment in the ALP. The Wilderness Society galvanised a remarkable campaign around the Franklin that became necessarily involved in electoral intervention, with the Hawke government coming to power on the back of the 'no dams' campaign. Interestingly, Lohrey sees the Franklin as a manifestation of the new Australian nationalism and love of place that was slowly replacing decades of cultural cringe.

The first state-based Green parties were established around this time, and were encouraged to develop a national identity by the then German Greens leader Petra Kelly, although it wasn't until 1992 that previously independent groups came together under the banner of the Australian Greens. International influence from other Greens or social movements is not addressed in detail in the essay, which is a shame.

The developments over the past half decade are perhaps the most telling for Greens-watchers, as the party grew beyond its origins. From the mid-1990s, the Greens continued to build constituency and share of votes. In Tasmania, 2002 marked a great comeback and corresponded with a loss in position by the Democrats. Clearly the new membership includes more than those former ALP voters disillusioned with current policy and direction. While it grew considerably with the *Tampa* crisis, Lohrey suggests that the recent growth is in line with longer term trends which are expected to continue. This most recent stage is perhaps the most international in perspective and practice, with the first Global Greens gathering held in Australia in 2001. A growing sense that a vote for the Greens is no longer a 'wasted' vote also draws new and previously non-aligned supporters.

In many parts of the country, especially in those states without a tradition of having Greens in parliament, the Greens have often been more of an amorphous network than a party. Individual activists, who

see the Greens as their party, coalesce briefly around the Green banner during elections, running for parliament, letterboxing and handing out leaflets, coordinating election campaigns and media, then focusing back on their day-to-day work. This has always been the great strength of the party, but is also what has slowed the creation of a strong party structure. Even this has been changing over recent years. Amanda suggests that the Greens will continue to grow in size and influence in coming years and ends with a glowing assessment of the party's future.

The essay gives a good overview of the historical influences and growth of the Greens and is of course limited in scope because of the size of *Quarterly Essay* (around twenty thousand words). Still, I would have liked to see more attention on the 'leadership issue'. She concentrates strongly on the luminary presence of Bob Brown. Of course, there are many others, elected and behind the scenes, who make up the party and it would have been useful to look at the internal dynamics and issues relating to leadership as the party develops its internal structures and policy. What about the 'dark' green versus social debate, and the influence of original members whose ideological feet are firmly in the wild country of Tasmania? Many younger and newer members come from urban and social justice campaigns rather than just forests activism. The Australian Greens have taken a heartening lead in the global network of Green parties; has this influenced their development in Australia? There is also the more recent showing of the Greens on industrial relations and other traditional blue-collar issues as well as the historical animosity between leadership in the Greens and the Forestry division of the CFMEU—has this coloured the way the party relates to unions in general? It is also clear that there is an as yet unresolved debate between centralism and regionalism, specifically the question of how much power (including over key decisions of preferences in election scenarios) is given to a central structure versus the right of local branches to control these types of decisions. These are simply questions that were stimulated by reading this essay, and hopefully they (and others) can be dealt with in public in later publications. For anyone attempting to 'place' and understand the Greens this is a highly recommended read.

Cam Walker is a national liaison officer for Friends of the Earth Australia.

'Scandals inside the madhouse'

CAMERON DUFF

Catharine Coleborne and Dolly Mackinnon (eds): *'Madness' in Australia: Histories, Heritage and the Asylum* (UQP $35)

This ambitiously diverse collection of essays aims to stake out a new niche in the broad purview of Australian studies. Taking 'madness' as both theme and historical context, the contributors to this collection offer a series of competing accounts of the history of the asylum and the various struggles which have taken place within these "mental and physical" landscapes. While the editors acknowledge the 'reality' of mental illness as lived experience, this collection seeks to establish how madness and mental illness are made and re-made within specific historical contexts. In understanding madness as culturally and historically contingent, as the product of "practices, discourses and struggles", these essays reveal the complex social, political and intellectual contexts which have framed the experience of madness in Australia. This approach suggests that local contexts, problems and histories all shape the way madness is understood and, more importantly, 'contained and controlled'. In this way, madness is as much the product of the institution of the asylum as it is a product of expert discourses such as psychiatry and medical science.

For this reason the contributors focus on the asylum as the most appropriate unit of historical analysis. Many of the contributing authors distinguish this history of the asylum from more conventional studies which chart the history of madness through the emergence of psychiatry, psychology and medical science as distinct scientific disciplines. This traditional approach presents a linear, 'Whig' history of the "slow but steady growth of humane treatment policies for the mentally ill" and, in focusing on the emergence of psychiatry as both profession and medical science, effectively silences the mentally ill themselves. Other contributors note that these traditional accounts serve to obscure the links between the history of mental illness and its broader social context, including issues of policing, social welfare, race relations, medical treatment, incarceration, social space, poverty and gender. Each of these issues is of fundamental importance in the social construction of madness, and yet each has only very

recently been deemed worthy of historical analysis in the study of Australian responses to madness and mental illness. This collection aims to further correct this imbalance in setting out broad 'social histories' of madness in Australia.

Stephen Garton argues that these new histories help "foster a more dynamic picture of surveillance, discipline, struggle and resistance in the asylum". It reveals an enduring pattern of struggle between doctors and asylum staff, parents, carers and patients over the nature of treatment and support for the mentally ill. It also permits more careful analysis of the ways in which notions of mental illness have shifted in Australia in line with broader social, political and economic changes. Indeed, taken as a whole, this collection points to the contingency of madness in Australia's historical experience, and the shifting boundaries distinguishing the mad and the sane. Each chapter reveals a different aspect of the social construction of madness within discrete historical contexts and in relation to specific historical mores and practices. This volume also reveals much about colonial attitudes regarding public morality, appropriate gender roles, sexuality and class relations prior to federation. The asylum is figured in this history as a powerful means of governing and correcting "disorderly subjects, knowledges and practices" across a "widely dispersed population". Those who offend the polite norms of social class, station and gender are sequestered as mad in order to maintain the clear limits of civil, orderly society. This decidedly Foucauldian conception of madness as the product of institutionally enforced desires to control deviant populations, pervades this collection.

The editors have divided the volume into five parts, roughly reflecting the major thematic concerns addressed within contemporary asylum studies. They have largely succeeded in bringing some sense of thematic continuity to the array of approaches presented in the volume. This is an impressive achievement given the heterogeneity of accounts covering archaeology, art history, cultural heritage, gender studies, medical history, ethics and the law, sexuality and museum studies. These essays reveal the significance of contemporaneous values and social anxieties in the framing of responses to madness and treatment.

For example, essays explore the social organisation of gender within the physical space of the asylum. It is suggested that madness is itself gendered according to prevailing social norms and values regarding appropriate gender roles and the most appropriate ways of enacting one's gender. Coleborne and Monk each describe how women were typically assigned indoor tasks such as sewing, cleaning and laundry work, while men were given tasks outside the asylum including gardening labour, maintenance and training in semiskilled trades. MacKinnon, meanwhile, provides a fascinating study of the regulation of the asylum's "soundscape" and the manner in which the "sonic flurries, fluidity, fury and volubility" of the patients' utterances were carefully monitored in order to correct any "inappropriate" gender presentations.

The volume moves on to provide more specific accounts of the administration and organisation of individual asylums within the colonies. These essays provide a range of insights into the day-to-day management of the asylum, and its relations with particular communities. Often these histories set out damning accounts of ineptitude and mistreatment and the general indifference of governments and citizens to the plight of the mentally ill. These essays also serve to locate these developments within the broader sweep of historical events and prevailing social upheaval, with Luckins' account of the experience of grief and loss during the Great War particularly touching. The collection closes in part five with the issue of the "adaptive re-use" of decommissioned asylums, and the problem of how these spaces and their inhabitants are to be remembered. Given the controversies surrounding the contemporary practice of 'deinstitutionalisation' it is perhaps lamentable that these final chapters did not do more to connect these issues of memory and cultural space to more contemporary problems.

Dr Cameron Duff is Coordinator of Research at the Centre for Youth Drug Studies, Australian Drug Foundation.

OPINION / *Humphrey McQueen*

Hitler in history

NOVELISTS ARE CRITICISED for playing god by manipulating their characters as if they were puppets. Historians misuse their hindsight to endow their subjects with foresight. The repetition of this device reduces the historical actor to the author's marionette. Historians do us all a disservice by pretending otherwise.

A faith in foreshadowing afflicts biographers who can rarely resist signalling that the event being mentioned will become significant in the sweet bye-and-bye. For instance, Hitler's introduction to Roehm in 1920 becomes the occasion to announce the 'Night of the Long Knives' in 1934. This habit results in bad history on twin grounds. First, Hitler is stripped of the experiences that lead him up to murdering his comrade. Secondly, the reader is deprived of the pleasure and insights of discovery as the narrative unfolds.

One instance of the fortune-telling error in historical writing is the claim that after 1939, Hitler put into effect aims that he had spelt out in *Mein Kampf* as early as the mid-1920s. That book is indeed replete with anti-Semitism yet it did not specify the final solution.

Hitler had dictated most of *Mein Kampf* from prison at a time when he had scant prospect of becoming his nation's Führer. No one in 1924–25 could have predicted the opportunism that made Hitler Chancellor in 1933. Much of the first half of his autobiography was an attack on other Right-wing Nationalists. Its original title had been 'Four and a Half Years of Struggle against Lies, Stupidity, and Cowardice'. His struggle—*Mein Kampf*—was against these rivals, as much as against the Jews, Hapsburgs, Marxists, or the French. Hitler was engaged in prophecy more than planning, self-justification rather than strategy.

By the early 1920s, Hitler had become obsessed with Jewry as responsible for every blight that threatened him—prostitution and syphilis, abstract art and Bolshevism, democracy and international finance. Yet he was not certain what to do with the Jews, apart from knowing that he had to break their domination of his world by driving them out of Germany.

Hitler's fury at the Jews for infecting "folk-ish" and Christian culture was a seedbed for the Shoah. Nonetheless, hatred and fear do not amount to a program. His priority in 1933 was to "clean out Berlin", contemplating Palestine as a homeland. The outbreak of war in 1939 prevented expulsions beyond Europe. His belief that the fighting would soon be over kept that prospect alive. In 1940, he again toyed with expelling the Jews to Madagascar. The "Final Solution" was that—the last in a line of Hitler's policies for cleansing his world.

The closest Hitler had come to predicting mass murder in *Mein Kampf* was to regret that 12–15, 000 "Hebrew corrupters of the people" had not been gassed in 1914. If that mass murder had happened, he continued, then "the sacrifice of millions at the front would not have been in vain". In a 2000-page biography of Hitler, the basis for the recent television series, Ian Kershaw quoted those words three times, twice within a hundred pages, in support of his thesis that thoughts of war always made Hitler think of killing Jews. Kershaw needed to misrepresent this passage in order to establish Hitler's end in his beginning, despite acknowledging that these "terrible passages are not the beginning of a one-way track to the 'Final Solution'. The road there was 'twisted', not straight."

Contrary to Kershaw's argument, Hitler's remarks in *Mein Kampf* carried an import distinct from racial genocide. The section where the reference to gassing appears is headed 'Failure to settle accounts with Marxism'. The quotation from *Mein Kampf* demonstrates Kershaw's double distortions of Hitler's remarks about gassing anyone:

> If the German working class, in 1914, consisted of real Marxists the War would have ended within three weeks. Germany would have collapsed before the first soldier had put a foot beyond the frontiers. No. The fact that the German people carried on the War proved that the Marxist folly had not yet been able to penetrate deeply. But as the War was prolonged German soldiers and workers gradually fell back into the hands of the Marxist leaders; and the number of those who thus relapsed became lost to their country. At the beginning of the War,

> or even during the War, if twelve or fifteen thousand of these Hebrews who were corrupting the nation had been forced to submit to poison-gas, just as hundreds of thousands of our best German workers from every social stratum and from every trade and calling had to face it in the field, then the millions of sacrifices made at the front would not have been in vain. On the contrary: If twelve thousand of these malefactors had been eliminated in proper time probably the lives of a million decent men, who would be of value to Germany in the future, might have been saved.

Kershaw glosses Hitler's mention of 'Hebrews' as meaning Jews in the racial sense whereas Hitler had been talking about gassing the Social Democrats who had hoped to prevent the outbreak of war by launching a general strike. For Hitler, the Hebrew and the Marxist (like the finance capitalist) became interchangeable because of their cosmopolitanism and Internationalism, respectively. Hence, Marxism was "a Jewish doctrine"; a plausible connection because so many socialist leaders were Jews.

Although Hitler's paragraph is about the Jews as Marxist subverters and corruptors of German working-class patriotism, Kershaw offers this abridgement:

> He (Hitler) later claimed, in a horrific passage of *Mein Kampf*, that a million German lives lost at the front would have been saved if "twelve to fifteen thousand of these Hebrew corrupters of the people had been held under poison gas".

Ninety pages later, Kershaw returned to this:

> The notion of poisoning the poisoners ran through another, notorious, passage of *Mein Kampf*, already cited in Chapter 5, in which Hitler suggested that if 12–15,000 "Hebrew corrupters of the people" had been held under poison gas at the start of the First World War, then "the sacrifice of millions at the front would not have been in vain".

In Kershaw's second volume, he repeated this selective reading in order to position the 1938 *Reichkristallnacht* in a chapter titled 'Marks of a Genocidal Mentality':

> He [Hitler] had commented in the last chapter of *Mein Kampf* that "the sacrifice of millions at the front" would not have been necessary if "twelve or fifteen thousand of these Hebrew corrupters of the people had been held under poison gas".

Kershaw got himself into these difficulties by reading the mass murders of 1941 to 1945 back to a passage in *Mein Kampf*. Throughout, he weaves his hypothesis that Hitler had linked "the power of the Jews and war". Yet, on all three occasions, Kershaw omitted Hitler's reference to his comrades' having been gassed "in the field", and more importantly, that his intended gas victims were Marxists.

By trimming the references to Marxists and the Western Front, Kershaw is able to maintain that the passage's "inherent genocidal thrust is undeniable. However indistinctly, the connection between destruction of the Jews, war, and national salvation had been forged in Hitler's mind". This construction forgets that the thrust was political far more than racial. The targets were Marxists, an aspect which Kershaw elides. On that suppression, he was consistent.

Kershaw could practice his legerdemain confident that no historian is likely to be drummed out of the club for misrepresenting the worst of the bad kings. More significantly, Kershaw erred because he played god, reading the future into the past. The monstrousness of the destruction of European Jewry loomed so large in his mind that Hitler's words from 1924–25 acquired their meaning by how well they pointed towards that horror. The political context of the mid-1920s had to be erased, even though Kershaw's biography is illustrated by a 1926 photograph of Hitler reviewing a Nazi parade bearing the banner '*Tod dem Marxismus*' [Death to Marxism]. Kershaw's handling of evidence is powerful as polemic but hapless as history.

The point is not that yet another empiricist has got a fact wrong, but that Kershaw tripped over his god-structured approach to writing history. In addition, he could do so in good conscience because class has been erased from scholarship in favour of race, Marxism discredited, and politics replaced by ethnicity.

Mussolini might have got some Italian trains to run on time, but Hitler could control the staging of neither domestic nor European politics. Hitler's architect, Albert Speer, admired his Führer's ability "to think in three dimensions". That talent did not extend to reading the fourth dimension of time.

Humphrey McQueen is a freelance historian.

OPINION / *Ian Syson*

ASIO's snooping on McGuinness, Ryan and Windschuttle

"ONE WHO IS NOT a socialist at twenty has no heart, and one who remains a socialist at forty has no head." Many Australian intellectuals, political thinkers and politicians throughout the past century seemed to accept George Bernard Shaw's wisdom: from William Lane and Billy Hughes to Peter Ryan and Keith Windschuttle, a legion made the move from the leftism of the heart to the rightism of the head. Albert Langer was first cab off this century's rank.

As I have documented in *Overland* (155 & 163), ASIO archives reveal that one-time Labour Day flag bearer and latter-day *Quadrant* reargunner Peter Ryan moved in such a dramatic ideological direction that he shifted from being an object of state surveillance to one of its perpetrators. Ryan passed information about his colleagues at Melbourne University to ASIO.

Today we are being asked to trust this organisation, and its track record of occasional stupidity coupled with the capacity to effect grotesque abuses of privacy, with the safekeeping of some of our basic freedoms.

The so-called War on Terror has produced calls for increased surveillance powers for government security agencies. The recently-passed ASIO Bill implements laws that *Age* editor Michael Gawenda has described as "reminiscent of the former East Germany". It permits the kind of detention practices that might be called torture were they to be employed by tyrants like Saddam Hussein.

Yet so far the public response has been minimal, partly because there was little bipartisan opposition to the ASIO Bill among Australian intellectuals and political commentators. Have we reached the point where the politics of the heart have been so roundly defeated by the politics of the head that we are unable to rouse opinion and action on such a straightforward issue?

Set up in 1949 by the then Labor government, ASIO's official function has been to investigate matters pertaining to internal security. Attorney General Darryl Williams claimed in 1999 that it "was recognised in 1949, just as it is today, that a legitimate and credible security service in a democratic society had to be apolitical".

In reality, ASIO's central function has been to spy on elements within the Labor Party and on every Australian public (and not so public) intellectual, body and organisation to the ALP's left. It invaded people's homes, offices and clubrooms to gather information and plant surveillance devices; it placed its agents in political movements and gatherings and in university classrooms in order to keep direct tabs on suspect bodies; it seduced individuals into reporting on the activities of friends and acquaintances. There is no reason to believe that it has ceased these activities.

Fiona Capp's *Writers Defiled*, written a decade ago about the surveillance of Australian writers, revealed a wealth of material in the ASIO archives on writers of the heart like Frank Hardy and Dorothy Hewett. Much of this information is disturbing, erroneous and badly interpreted by the ASIO agents, though for researchers interested in the question of why so many intellectuals have moved progressively to the right, it is intriguing.

Inspired by Capp's work, I have examined the ASIO records of some of the 'defectors', recently acquiring for example the released ASIO files of Paddy McGuinness and Keith Windschuttle. It's exciting to open a parcel from the National Archives, knowing that you are about to read a sometimes incisive, often scurrilous, usually deeply wrong-headed but nonetheless revealing biography of a public figure.

This most recent package was initially a disappointment, with no significant clues as to the future ideological moves of my quarry. But what did occur to me was a creeping sense of disquiet at the way McGuinness and Windschuttle were victims of appalling invasion. Comments on appearance, habits and morals that should have no place in an objective assessment say much about the assumptions of the assessors and the organisation employing them.

The assessments are often ludicrous. In 1971, Windschuttle "gives the impression of being a violent revolutionary" and is "well versed in revolutionary tactics", an opinion with which very few of his peers would concur. In 1972 McGuinness is described nonsensically as "an anarchist by conviction

but a communist in practice". It is calculated that no more, no less than "75 per cent of his unpopularity" with one group of people could be attributed to "his appearance". McGuinness is understood to both loath and admire Castro, depending upon which document you read. In one memo a senior functionary has to remind an underling that 'social' and 'socialist' are not the same things!

But mostly what we get is a series of birth dates, car registration numbers, records of who arrived where with whom, speculations about sexual behaviour and fatuous comments about people, derived from their appearance, race or gender. A "part Maori" is only "there for the sex". Wendy Bacon is reduced to a "loud mouth". Sydney bookseller Bob Gould is disparaged repeatedly. And Windschuttle and McGuinness are turned by ASIO into nasty inhuman caricatures.

Not surprisingly, it's hard to find detailed written accounts of the political 'defections' of people like Windschuttle and McGuinness. When writing their memoirs or autobiographies, such figures focus only briefly on their leftist period or suggest that "really, we haven't moved all that much; it's the left that's changed". After all, it's difficult for them to argue that "we once held beliefs that were particularly stupid", without damaging their present credibility.

And then, some of these thinkers are in denial about ever having been on the left at all. However justly their defection is felt, it is still defection and to some minds a treachery best forgotten.

It is a sobering fact that despite all this denial and silence, the most complete record of their ideological twists and turns exists in the files of ASIO.

In light of the dossiers compiled by ASIO on Windschuttle and McGuinness, I wonder what these neophytes of the right think about the passing of the ASIO Bill. Does their silence on the issue mean they think ASIO was right to keep them and other figures under surveillance? Do they approve of the litany of character assassinations in their and others' files? Are they happy for these records to remain forever in the public domain?

In a recent *Quadrant* editorial McGuinness suggested that the "worst that could ever be said about ASIO, then and now, is that it tends to be politically unsophisticated". ASIO did however observe on 11 October 1972 that McGuinness "is an unreliable character whose ideological views would be swayed by the situation". So far this one claim does appear to have been proven correct. But perhaps the ASIO Bill—which, had it been passed prior to the Whitlam government, might have resulted in a less comical and more egregious attack on the personal freedom of McGuinness and his right-marching cohort—will give this group cause to reconsider.

My heart and my head tell me I needn't hold my breath.

Ian Syson is a consultant editor of Overland.

COMMENT / *Donald Richardson*

The Australia Council and design: a serious lacuna

THE RECENT REPORT of the Contemporary Visual Arts and Craft Inquiry—conducted during 2002—reveals a serious deficiency in the conceptual structure of the visual sector of the Australia Council. In short, this is that there is no board or committee covering *design*.

This deficiency was revealed in many submissions—which spoke of design rather than art or craft—yet the terms of the inquiry specifically excluded design, and the report makes no attempt to discuss or explain this. It merely notes that in nearly every educational institution in the country, craft has been replaced by design. And it states that craft practitioners themselves are increasingly insisting on being recognised as designers.

Clearly there is a problem here. Surely it should have generated a major recommendation to the effect that the Australia Council (whose categorisation and terminology the inquiry used) should redress this serious lacuna in its conceptual structure. And the report is probably protecting the Council by claiming that substantive conceptual issues, such as the connection, confusion or difference between craft and design, are mere matters of "nomenclature".[1]

But this is about more than names. Craft and design—as well as art—are real, existing, discrete

and interconnected entities in the visual world, and the report is letting us down by not recommending the rationalisation of *all three* into the Council's conceptual structure.

Design once had a place in the Australia Council, but it quietly disappeared about a decade ago. This seems to have been at least in part due to confusion—or, perhaps, confrontation—with craft.

When the Australia Council was set up in 1970, design was not included, but this was objected to by some leading architects who insisted that architecture is as much art as painting is. Consequently, the Architecture and Design Committee was formed. This became the Design Arts Board in 1984, alongside the two separate Visual Arts and Crafts Boards. Three years later, art and craft were amalgamated into the Visual Arts and Crafts Board, and the Design Board was established independent of it. In 1988, this board became a committee again, but with the avowed intention "to concentrate on the arts-related aspects of design"—whatever that meant.

However, only one year later, in 1989, all three boards were telescoped into the one: 'Visual Arts/ Craft and Design'. The architects must have been unhappy with this arrangement because they withdrew from the Council entirely and formed their own Design Academy. But this entity also disappeared from the radar screen after a short while.

One can only speculate about the reasons for these changes in nomenclature and *the entire disappearance of design* from the Council's visual sector from about 1989, because none seems to have ever been justified or discussed publicly. Perhaps they are the result of well-meaning bureaucrats rather than practitioners within the Council.

The Department of Communications, IT and the Arts conducted this inquiry into the visual field using Australia Council terminology and conceptualisation and the report clearly shows that this is inadequate and out of date. It is now incumbent on the Council to recognise this and take the initiative to lead the visual sector out of the mess it is currently in. It is far from an impossible task, but it does require dedication, intelligence and integrity.

If it does not tackle it, we will need an inquiry into the Australia Council itself.

1. p.30 (28–29 in the on-line version).

Donald Richardson lives in South Australia. A practising visual artist and writer about art, he is currently writing a book on the art and design of war memorials.

LECTURE

I used to work as a foreign correspondent in China. I ended up resigning because the Chinese Communist Party and its security organs systematically harassed and persecuted my friends until one verged on suicide. I used to feel hugely thankful that, as an Australian, I lived in a democracy where such things were inconceivable. Or at least so rare that they were considered aberrations when exposed. Until now I simply never had the occasion to learn otherwise.

—Linda Jaivin

CURRENT AFFAIRS

Often social prejudices are medicalised, giving them the veneer of scientific respectability and closing them off from scrutiny. Yet in many cases 'disorders' confer abilities that 'normal' people regard highly. A number of studies have revealed significant links between mental illness and creativity. Others have found that the flip side of dyslexia is enhanced abilities in maths and architecture. Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein suffered from Asperger's Syndrome (a form of high functioning autism). Einstein's genius is thought to have *resulted* from his 'disorder'.

—Stephen Fleischfresser

MEDIA

The *Herald Sun* remains politically aligned with the Liberal Party, and views the use of 'wedge politics' around divisive social issues as the most effective and subtle means of aiding conservative forces. Given that the ALP remains wedded to economic rationalist agendas not dissimilar to those of the Liberals, it is perhaps only on social issues that the *Herald Sun* can credibly paint the ALP as pursuing a radical or socially threatening agenda.

—Philip Mendes

You can see the language everywhere in the culture wars. One is not accused of mistake, one is accused of fabrication. One does not just take an incorrect or questionable point of view, one is actively misleading. It is a bullying, hectoring sort of language. It is not the language of free and rational debate. It is the language of propaganda.

—Margaret Simons

CORRESPONDENCE

The Therapeutic Goods Administration does not test vaccines before they are added to our schedule. The government says it has no money to test vaccines, yet it somehow finds $41 million to fund a meningococcal campaign for a vaccine which resulted in more than 16,000 serious reactions and twelve deaths in the ten months after its release in the UK—more reactions than those reported in 37 years of triple antigen vaccine use.

—Meryl Dorey

MEMOIR

I was not a psychiatric patient. I had sought marital counselling, and was referred to a psychiatrist practising at Newhaven. The psychiatrist recommended 'narcotherapy', using LSD, as "a very direct way to get into your subconscious". I was unaware that I was about to become part of a medical and social experiment.

—Vivien Achia

REVIEW

John Hanrahan was like Helen Garner, dreadfully kind to a perfect stranger, and they both lent me their typewriters in the early 1970s. That was the most gracious thing you could do, apart from telling you to commit suicide if you were determined to go on with your writing.

—Barry Dickins

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