



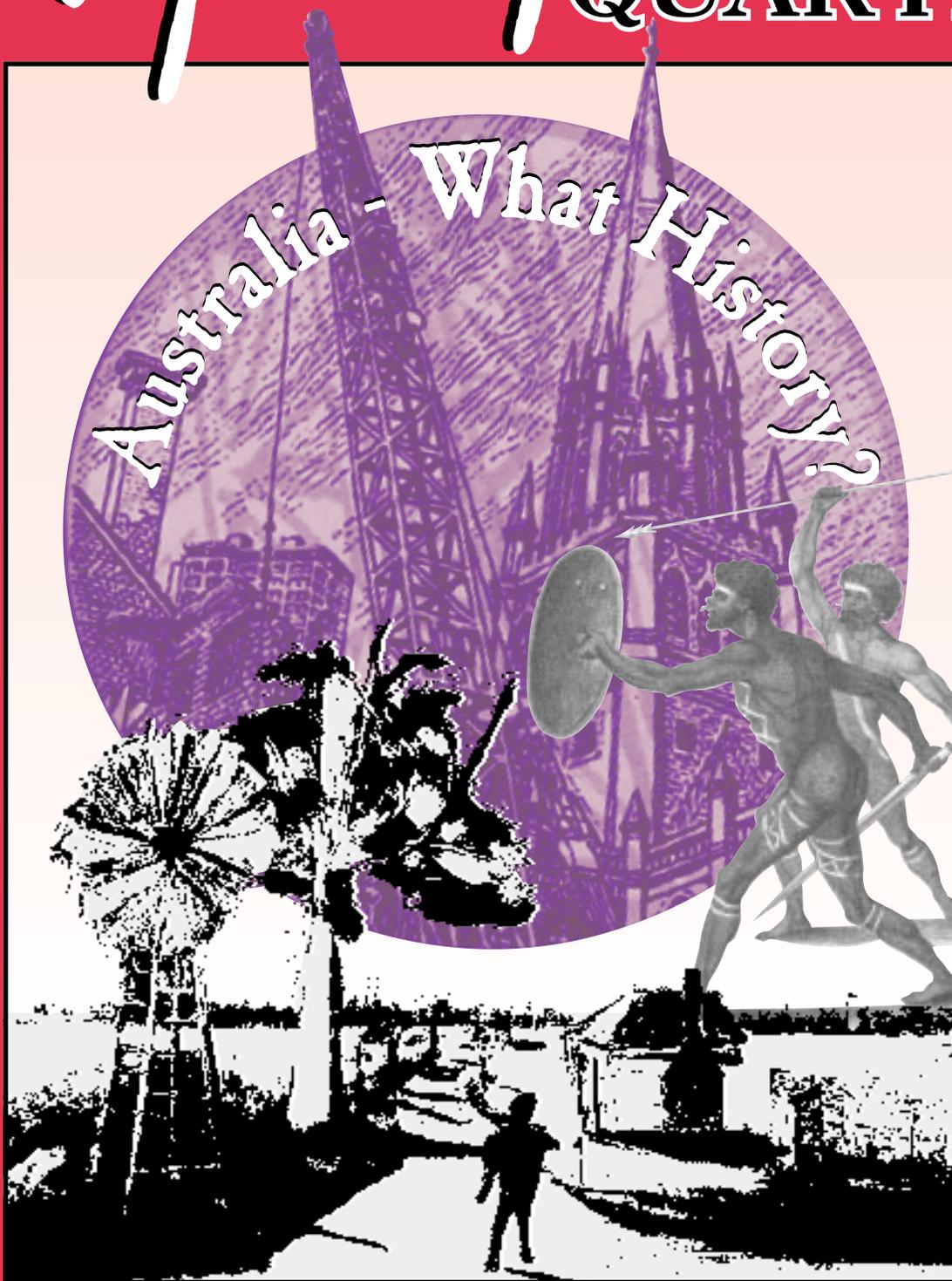
THE

# Sydney Institute

## QUARTERLY

VOLUME 4 NO 2  
AUGUST 2000

Australia - What History?



**STEPHEN MATCHETT**  
on the demise of  
Australian historians

**MARK TREDINNICK**  
explores nature, art  
and architecture

**ANNE HENDERSON**  
on dysfunctional  
workplaces and  
family life

**JOHN MCCONNELL**  
reveals Donald  
Horne's editing  
secrets

**MEDIA WATCH**  
on Robert (hyperbolic)  
Hughes, Bob Ellis  
(yet again), Miranda  
Devine's garbage  
and Ken Minogue  
(no relation to Kylie)

*Published by  
The Sydney Institute  
41 Phillip St.  
Sydney 2000*

*Ph: (02) 9252 3366  
Fax: (02) 9252 3360*

*with Gerard Henderson's*

# MEDIA WATCH

## CONTENTS

Editorial	2
<b>Families, Work and Gender</b> - Anne Henderson	3
<b>The Ecological Imagination</b> - Mark Tredinnick	7
<b>Book Reviews</b> - John McConnell	10
<b>Review of the Reviewers</b> - Stephen Matchett	13
<b>Baby Talk</b> - Stephen Matchett	22
<b>Gerard Henderson's Media Watch</b>	25

Cover Design by D T Graphics

*The Sydney Institute Quarterly* is edited by Anne Henderson and Gerard Henderson. Editorial Assistants are Lalita Mathias and Astrid Riley.

Editorial Office : 41 Phillip Street, Sydney 2000

Tel: (02) 9252 3366 Fax: (02) 9252 3360

Email: mail@sydneyins.org.au

Website: www.sydneyins.org.au

Layout and typesetting by DT Graphics Pty Ltd, Suite 1/214 Lyons Road, Five Dock 2046.  
Tel: (02) 9713 5554 Fax: (02) 9713 5553

The views expressed in *The Sydney Institute Quarterly* are those of the designated authors. They do not necessarily reflect the views of The Sydney Institute or of its governors.

Registered Print Post No : PP255003/02934

**For a complete list of our forthcoming functions, visit our Website:-  
www.sydneyins.org.au**

## JUDGES AND THE MEDIA

Justice Michael Kirby speaks in public a lot; Chief Justice Murray Gleeson on occasions; Justice Mary Gaudron never - well, hardly ever. They happen to be the three best known members of the High Court of Australia, with quite different styles of communication. Once upon a time, appeal court judges were rarely seen or heard. It always seemed unlikely that the ethos would last. It didn't. These days the media reports the actions and views of virtually all opinion leaders - in business, the church, education, medicine, politics, science and the trade union movement, to name but a few areas. In such an environment it seems unrealistic to expect that High Court judges would remain silent.

Sir Anthony Mason was the first Chief Justice to speak in public on a fairly regular basis - explaining the role of the court and, on occasions, discussing judicial principles. The tradition has been continued, perhaps in a slightly scaled down sense, by Sir Gerard Brennan and Murray Gleeson. Chief Justice Gleeson used the occasion of an address to the Australian Bar Association Conference in New York on 2 July 2000 to spell out his views on judicial legitimacy. In an important address, Murray Gleeson argued that judges have discretion. Up to a point. However, "in the administration of any law there comes a point beyond which discretion cannot travel". At this point, "if a judge is unable in good conscience to implement the law, he or she may resign". The Chief Justice also used his New York talk to suggest some boundaries for public comment by members of the judiciary: "Judges, as citizens, have a right of free speech, and there may be circumstances in which they have a duty to speak out against what they regard as injustice. But to deploy judicial authority in support of a cause risks undermining the foundation upon which such authority exists". He went on to dismiss the view that judges who speak out on issues are somehow brave.

Two days later, on 4 July 2000, Michael Kirby delivered the R G Menzies Lecture at King's College, London. Prior to taking up his appointment to the High Court, Justice Kirby was known as a monarchist. He has spoken widely since joining the court. However, until now, he has avoided public comments on whether Australia should become a republic. Michael Kirby made up for this in his London address. His talk stands up well as a piece of political comment - an analysis by a committed monarchist of why the "Yes" case failed in the November 1999 republican referendum.

And then there is Mary Gaudron. She was understood to hold the view that she could not say something worth saying which did not impinge on an issue which might come before the High Court. Until Friday 14 July 2000. Then launching Juliet Bourke's report *Corporate Women, Children, Careers and Workplace Culture*, Justice Gaudron spoke out. So much so that her comments became a lead story in *The Weekend Australian*. Mary Gaudron was reported as declaring that "there are men in positions of power and influence who simply pay lip-service to the notions of equality and equity but in truth do not believe in them". She supported the view that only lawyers of merit should be appointed judges. But made the significant point that such requirement should apply to males as well as females. Good point. It was a lively and, at times, amusing speech. However it is difficult to see how none of the gender analysis points made by Mary Gaudron on 14 July 2000 would never ever impinge on an issue which might come before the High Court.

Obviously there are limits on what High Court judges should say. However there is a genuine public interest in hearing the views and attitudes of judges on at least some issues. It's good to see the media giving judges the attention they deserve.

# FAMILIES, WORK AND GENDER

Anne Henderson

The tragedy of Labor MP Greg Wilton who committed suicide in June after being found late in May in a distressed state in his car with his two children, has focussed attention on the pressures of political life for families and MPs.

Opposition leader Kim Beazley has asked Labor MPs to counsel colleagues who show signs of stress. Political life, says Beazley, "puts a premium on stress and a premium on distance." Prime Minister John Howard, in response, opined that in politics men, especially, should open up more about the emotional impact of their careers. And Jeff Kennett, recently appointed inaugural head of the national depression initiative, agreed with Kim Beazley that politicians were more likely to suffer depression, anxiety and family breakdowns.

Yet many argue, John Howard included, that a political career is just one among many where professionals are forced to be absent from families for extended periods and where the job dominates family and personal life. In other words, no special treatment for politicians. If you can't stand the heat than leave - there are plenty who would like to fill your place.

The argument has validity. But it also begs the question - how many such stressed professions can a society sustain, a society still built around the family unit? Particularly, when there is mounting evidence that family life itself is fracturing under increasing pressures.

And particularly when party policies, on both sides of the political divide, profess such an interest in assisting families as important units for the development and education of future citizens, for the comfort and support of individuals - in particular the very young and the old - and for the contribution the family makes to our understanding of relationships.

The institution of parliament is a central focus of life in a democratic nation. Yet, as it seeks to take the lead, and direct all other institutions its citizens adhere to, the parliamentary lifestyle, sadly, reflects out of date work practices. There are its boys' club sitting hours and unrealistic expectations of

members to conduct exemplary and normal family life while living in the artificial surrounds of parliament well beyond reach of spouse or children for months of the year. As if to emphasise that separate life, club style divisions within the parliament buildings separate off the "elected" (as opposed to the elect) from "strangers", in dining rooms, whatever. Strangers are more often than not the families of MPs.

Well beyond parliament the story isn't so different. Many professionals find that the work atmospheres of financial institutions, legal firms and many newly growing private company bureaucracies discourage family friendly routines. In top end of town companies, a professional doesn't seem to be quite up to the mark if he/she can't stay on into the early evening and beyond, regardless of whether there is pressing work. It takes temerity to head home to the family.

For decades it has been left to the women's movement to sound government out on the needs of women entering the workforce, childcare, aged care and family assistance. Such petitioning has often been seen as "sectional" or special pleading - feminists against the mainstream. But this is changing.

Dual income families and single parenting have become common features of family life. A decreasing birth rate nationally and growing numbers of childless couples are causing demographic and budget planning jitters. Australia has one of the lowest fertility rates in the world and is second only to Japan for the longevity of its citizens. It's a volatile cocktail in the making without an increase in immigration levels well beyond what Australians currently are used too.

What happens to women now affects all of us. After all, the GST and other retail/services taxes have a lot to do with governments realising that an aging population (the outcome of a decreasing birth rate and increasing longevity) means income tax is an unfair burden on those who work since it no longer provides sufficient revenue for the increased spending on health, education and infrastructures citizens have grown to expect.

As younger generations study longer, marry later and die later, life is becoming divided roughly into three, equally long phases - education, work and retirement. The phase devoted to paid work is a now a tight squeeze. Working couples have a narrow window of opportunity - those years devoted to productive output or the capacity to earn income which will provide for retirement and/or support a family.

Defending his view that politicians deserve no special treatment when stressed, John Howard spoke of young couples managing children, jobs and

# GLOBALISATION AND THE PROBLEM OF FAMILY

Not only must families change to negotiate the new realities, but cultural norms, public policy, the legal system and other institutions must also adapt to the new family patterns. Today's policy-makers face two central dilemmas.

First, how can the needs of families and communities for security and stability be reconciled with a fast changing, unfettered global market economy? Second, how can enduring human needs for care and nurturance be reconciled with the passing of caste-like gender distinctions?

It is ironic that, although the new economy undermines the conditions that enable families to thrive, the psychological and social functions of the family (which used to be women's special task) are more critical than ever. To produce a workforce for a new economy that values brains and interpersonal skills over brawn, parents much invest high levels of emotion, attention, time and money in their children. And in a fast-paced and uncertain post-industrial world, the intimacy and connectedness of home and family become even more precious to adults. The functions of the family remains a vital necessity, even though family forms may vary.

(Arlene Skolnick, "A Time of Transition" in *A Family Business* - ed. Helen Wilkinson)

mortgages. "I admire the juggling act that so many young parents are involved in," he said. A stoical reply from the prime minister.

But studies show there is a limit to stoicism and that pressures on young couples are taking a toll on the national good. Even by economic standards. Apart from the cost to personal health, physical and mental, the pressures imposed on the family unit of working parents and the costs of rearing children deter others from taking on parenthood.

Britain's policy group Demos has just released an in-depth study of gender, work and family change over more than a decade. Edited by Helen Wilkinson, *Family Business* offers 28 scenarios from leading social commentators and opens with the proposition that "the family is our most precious business: the foundation of social cohesion and economic growth". Linda Tarr-Whelan, one of the contributors from the USA, notes that the causes once led by women such as how to encourage "family friendly corporations" are now "highlighted by the White House and appear on the front cover of *Business Week*, not simply in the columns of *Working Mother*".

It is clear from the study that notions of family and work developed in the post-industrial age (father at work/mother the homemaker) are being reshaped. Communities at work and home must tackle new allegiances - whether extended family/friends networks, publicly funded networks or a combination of both. Without that, both the workplace and the family unit suffer.

**"A high stressed job which offers little independence or social support is more damaging to health than smoking, alcohol or lack of exercise."**

Fiona McAllister, writing in *Family Business*, demonstrates that childlessness is growing in spite of government packages for families. Aversion to poverty, desire for egalitarian partnerships, the freedom to retreat from the workforce as much as (for others) putting a career first, all influence that choice. It is not only the opportunities presented by freedom from parental responsibilities deterring individuals from taking on having children; there are many constraints in work and social environments pushing this also.

Women's lives have been transformed and many women now insist on their own careers. But this, says McAllister, is not enough to explain the lack of interest in childbearing in countries like Italy which has some of the lowest fertility rates in Europe but also relatively low rates of female employment. From

studies of those remaining childless, attitudes to having children varied over time. Moreover, many women often didn't realise that leaving conception till later in life could in fact make it harder for them to conceive.

For others single parenthood was not a viable option, while other women believed foremost in egalitarian partnerships which they could see would change, whatever the good intentions of their partners, with the addition of a child. As McAllister puts it, "That there were few positive perceptions of parents balancing work and family life reflects both how difficult it is in practice for men and women to combine employment and childcare, and the low status of parenthood as an activity in its own right."

Brad Googins, in the same collection, argues that "companies and organisations need to include intimate relationship issues in business analyses of work and life initiatives – to consider the possible impact on productivity and employee retention". This is challenged by Peter Moss who points out that assistance to parents in work conditions can often make women's status worse while there is no genuine gender equity:

**Without having gender equity in the first place, parental leave can very easily be ineffective or actually make things worse - because women are far more likely to take leave than men are, and this can reinforce traditional gender roles in the home and weaken women's position in the labour market ... the same is true of other family-friendly measures - that if used, they are overwhelmingly used by women, and so may impede rather than promote gender equality.**

At one end there are blended families, women at work, single parenting; at the other significant numbers of aged. Consequently, more and more employees combine work with caring responsibilities. Once happily left to a woman at home, who minded children and occasionally grandparents, the carer's role is now shared between individuals – male and female – and the state. And all happening when work hours are more demanding.

Brad Googins, in *Family Business*, argues that "the interests of families and communities have been swept along with the prevailing tides of economic growth, and few effective voices or vehicles have been organised to represent their interests." So much so that the extended family is making a comeback.

In the USA there has been a steady rise in the numbers of children living with grandparents – two thirds of these grandparents are women. Grandparents caring for grandchildren in their homes are both black and white but the

# CHILDCARE AS PUBLIC GOOD

The truth is that the provision of childcare is more than a private benefit for high income individuals and a social benefit for the poor. It is also a social and public good, increasingly critical to a society in transition. Changes in family structures, growth of one parent families and the lack of wider family resources make childcare an important factor in keeping our children safe and under reasonable social supervision. In deprived areas it links to strategies for tackling crime. For deprived children it is critical to developing early learning skills. Where business requires a flexible workforce it is a critical factor in making this work for both employers and employees. Increasingly, the need for good quality childcare runs through wide ranges of economic, social and employment policy as an indispensable thread. It is increasingly important in our socially divergent and atomised society to regard all children as our children – but this does not mean they become a sole responsibility of the state. ...A step in the right direction would be for government to stop treating employer-provided childcare benefits the same as company cars.

*(Sue Slipman, "Childcare as public good" in A Family Business - ed. Helen Wilkinson)*

## THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT - WHAT'S THE FUTURE FOR WAR CRIMINALS?

Helen Brady is a young Australian lawyer who helped write the statute for the last major institution of the 20th Century – the International Criminal Court.

She holds a Master of Laws from Cambridge University in international criminal law and international humanitarian law and works as a lawyer in the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions in Sydney. Just what might the International Criminal Court achieve and who are its first targets? Will it put an end to impunity for war criminals?.

**SPEAKER** : HELEN BRADY  
**DATE** : Tuesday 5 September 2000  
**TIME** : 5.30 for 6.00pm  
**VENUE** : 41 Phillip St, Sydney  
Light Refreshments

FREE TO ASSOCIATES/ASSOCIATES' PARTNERS  
STUDENTS \$5 - OTHERS \$10

RSVP: PH: (02) 9252 3366 FAX: (02) 9252 3360  
OR mail@sdneyins.org.au

WEBSITE: www.sdneyins.org.au



overwhelming number of single grandmothers caring for grandchildren are black. In the USA, when families break down and foster parents are needed, kin placements are becoming increasingly common.

In 1999, a report from a survey by David Pitcher, *When Grandparents Care*, gave a most positive picture of the care being given to children fostered by their grand-parents, in spite of it being not always easy going. Michael Young & Jean Stogdon writing in *Family Business*, point out that one of the best ways governments can support grandparent co-parenting within needy families is by making it easier for extended families to live nearer each other. They also advocate some sort of supportive allowance for grandparent carers as good social policy.

In a 1997 MORI survey of Britain's full time workers, nine out of ten respondents said that the ability to balance work and their personal life was a key factor in determining their commitment to their employer. A Harvard University study of 21,000 nurses (*British Medical Journal*, May 2000) has concluded that a high stressed job which offers little independence or social support is more damaging to health than smoking, alcohol or lack of exercise. And so it goes.

But working parents are here to stay – that is if younger generations are to go on producing children. For many the current debate over the working mother is missing the real issue. As Ellen Galinsky argues in *Family Business*:

**Studies find that it is who the mother is as a person - what her values and ethics are, how she practises those ethics and how she connects to her children - that matters most. Thus the public debate that sets mothers-at-home and mothers who work against each other is the wrong debate.**

The real debate is about how society can remain cohesive and productive alongside a revolution in family roles and childrearing norms. For many it starts with a happier coalescing of work and family life; a happier acceptance that both mothers and fathers will both take paid work *and* care for their children, with appropriate outside help.

Australians are swamped daily with news of the doings of their political representatives. But our Westminster system of government, developed out of nineteenth century Oxford Union debating rules, is male in its perspectives and rigid in the face of community change. Not much sensitivity there about how to sustain a happy relationship between family and work norms.

Sadly though, in the story of one federal MP, there may be a message for us all.

- Anne Henderson is the editor of The Sydney Papers



# THE ECOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

Mark Tredinnick

On the last Friday of June - the tail end of the old days before the GST- I spoke at an international conference hosted by the Royal Australian Institute of Architects at Darling Harbour. I was on a panel with Australian artists whose work responds to the natural world. We were there to talk about environmentally sustainable design, although the program was mysteriously named the "Poetic Responses to Science", or something like it.

Except for Professor Ian Lowe, who opened the session, we were all artists of one sort or another, and we were there to speak about a shared ecological aesthetic, a land ethic that shapes and finds expression in our work: hence the mystical title. We were there to wonder what kind of literatures - sculptures, music, writing, building - we might make and leave, what kind of contribution we might make to husbanding and sustaining the body of the world. Instead of taking the materials the earth provides and using them to celebrate our cleverness, to express our transcendence of nature, we might rediscover the logic, the grammar, the lore embodied in the natural order - to which we, for all our cleverness, still belong.

At the end, in the face of all the evidence except for the animation of a small audience, I expressed the hope to Ian Lowe that ecology would become the central discipline of our times, of the future. He agreed, and added, "if it doesn't, we will have no future."

Janet Laurence spoke of the living trees, red gums, once endemic to the site, that grow within her installation on the tongue of land that ends with Mrs Macquarie's Chair in the Royal Botanical Gardens. She also touched on her work at the Olympic site, sculpture which acknowledges the pollutants that inhabit the waterways there.

Richard Goodwin talked of compost toilets, soon to line the RTA's highways, and other more ambitious projects - few of them adopted - to recycle water, to reuse waste, to give back to a site as much energy as the structures on it make use of. His bridges, sculptures and spaces articulate the unavoidable connection we carry on with the earth. He revels in the mundane, celebrates it. Looked at one way, he

remarked, architecture is just a set of elaborate connections to the sewer.

John Dahlsen makes works of quiet loveliness - landscapes, totems, obelisks - from waste he finds left, washed in by storms, on the beaches near his home at Byron Bay. His search for material to work with takes him outside and keeps him fit; it cleans the beach and reincarnates rubbish, giving it new life as art that engages fearlessly with the ugly excesses, the effluence, of life as we live it. He spoke shyly about all this.

The composer Michael Atherton played music that seemed to voice the landscape and its ancient history, many of its moods and geographies discernible within the music's notes and gestures. And he spoke of a time with other musicians at Arthur and Evonne Boyd's property on the Shoalhaven, when the river's motion, the rain's voice on a metal roof, the wind's sound shaped a whole CD they composed and recorded there.

While Michael played, I projected words onto the screens, and read others out.

From John Haines in *Living off the Country* - "An environmental ethic, believed in, practiced and enforced, is not just an alternative, it is the only one, though another name for it may be self-restraint ... a sane kind of plenitude, a fullness of spirit and being."

From Barry Lopez in *Arctic Dreams*: "To keep landscapes intact and the memory of them, our history within them, alive, seems as imperative a task in modern time as finding the extent to which individual expression can be accommodated, before it threatens to destroy the fabric of society."

We were all there to say something like that.

Art and architecture informed by an ecological aesthetic will practise just the kind of careful attention to the moods, rhythms and histories of individual places that we are going to need this millennium. In our relations with each other, other species and the earth itself. Such an art transcribes the life of the land - and of ourselves within it. It builds and paints and writes in a manner that comprehends and harmonises with the pattern of language of each place. It will defend us against the encroaching sameness of everything, hastened by the spread of cyberspace.

Art informed by an ecological imagination does not employ landforms as metaphors for human concerns, although it may from time to time see human experiences as metaphors for the life of the land. Nor does it feel constrained merely to interpret and analyse or reduce place - it attempts to allow them to speak through its devices. At its root lies a

# SENATOR RICHARD ALSTON AT THE SYDNEY INSTITUTE

The Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, Senator Richard Alston, will address The Sydney Institute in October. Here's your chance to find out where Australia is heading along the information, communications highway. Bring your questions - datacasting, free to air, the ABC, whatever.

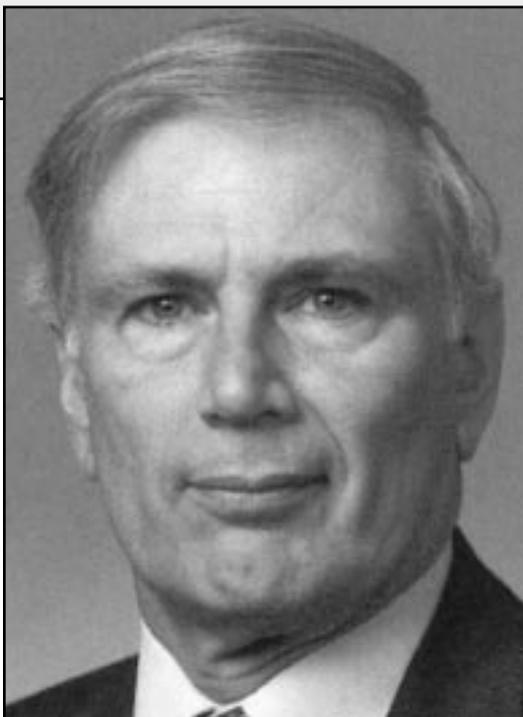
DATE : Monday 23 October 2000  
TIME : 5.30 for 6.00pm  
VENUE : Mallesons Conference Room,  
Governor Phillip Tower (Lvl 60),  
1 Farrer Place, Sydney

FREE TO ASSOCIATES/ASSOCIATES' PARTNERS  
STUDENTS \$5/OTHERS \$10

RSVP: PH: (02) 9252 3366 FAX: (02) 9252 3360

OR mail@sydneyins.org.au

WEBSITE: www.sydneyins.org.au



renewed attentiveness to the life of the world beyond the merely human, interesting though that domain is. All of our history on earth should remind us that as long as we privilege the human we will pollute, we will squander, we will deplete and diminish the earth.

Art informed by an ethic of care for the land practises the self-restraint of which Haines speaks. It seeks to speak for the needs and nature of particular places. It tries to serve the places it arises in and preserve them through its attention. It doesn't plunder places, or ignore them or cover them over or destroy them. It approaches landscapes with uncalculating regard, as Lopez puts it, with wonder and humility.

The more we use technology, the more we depend on it. We are inventive, and we will keep developing it. But we need to remember it will always fail the elaborate trust we put in it much as our projectors and powerpoints failed us that day. When it works, it helps communication prosper, but it also stands between us and distances us from authentic, full-bodied encounter with the world and all its inhabitants. We come to inhabit our technology rather than our bodies, our home, our families, our places. We must remember to let it serve us, not lead or consume us. We must remember not to give its images the same kind of authority we give to the living world.

**“What we need to know may emerge from the sharing of wise and shapely words, the practice of stillness, the telling of stories, and the slow passage of a river.”**

All of us that day were advocating art that helps return us to the world, bring us back to earth. We are losing the culture - once part of our human inheritance - of "reciprocity with the natural environment", as Lawrence Buell puts it in his book *The Environmental Imagination* (Harvard, 1995). We have the impression that we have somehow slipped outside the reach of our environments. Partly this has happened because we, in the West anyway, have had such success in regulating nature's impact on us.

Urban culture imagines itself outside nature, and grows out of touch with it. Nature is a place we go back to now and then, when we can afford the time. So, regarding it, we lose respect for it, we insulate against it, we tame and exploit it for our comfort. But, as the psalmist once said of the Hebrew God, wherever I go, you are there. So it is with nature. Within our social and our economic spaces, we continue to live inside local ecologies, participating in nature, affecting the places we inhabit and being affected by them. An ecocentric art might restore our reciprocity with earth.

Ian Lowe has supplied the context within which it becomes clear why such a nature-literate, rich and modest art is needed. Lowe is Emeritus Professor of Environmental Studies at Griffith University. His work has just won him an environmental award from the Prime Minister. During the years when ecological awareness has deepened and environmental sustainability has entered the language, Australian cities, with what Lowe calls their high metabolic flows, have grown and spread.

In 1990, Sydney consumed twice as much food per head as in 1970; its population rose in the same period from 3 to 4 million; its use of energy and water and its production of sewage and other waste products including carbon dioxide all significantly increased in absolute and per capita terms. City towers and private homes stand as emblems of unsustainable energy use. Eighty per cent of the increasing pollution in the air comes from cars. Habitat loss has attended the spread of suburbs and the continuation of rural land clearance. There is degradation of soils and rivers all over the country, the result of two hundred years of agricultural practices profoundly out of character with the land - whose needs few Europeans stopped for long to contemplate.

But how can words and images, songs and buildings help us here? The arts are where the public imagination is schooled, stirred, excited, where the language and habits of profound change are fostered. A new relationship with the land calls for practices of awareness, habits of intimacy, modes of discourse and patterns of language that artists - perhaps only artists, and certainly only artists who remember where all our arts and words arise from - can foster.

This last week, I sat, one morning, with my son and daughter on rocks by the Hunter River. Black ducks swam upstream; restless flycatchers staked out territory among the reeds; a blue heron flew west high above. The river moved slowly, and now and then a fish rose. I noticed markings in the rock - three long, deep scrapings and a rounded out hole - almost certainly made by Wonnarua people fishing at this spot long ages ago. Reading *Lord of The Rings* to my son, I recognised in Tolkien's book, a work of deep ecological awareness and imagination. Patrick Curry writes elegantly of this in *Defending Middle Earth* (HarperCollins 1998). In that place, I found some assurance that what we need to know may emerge from the sharing of wise and shapely words, the practice of stillness, the telling of stories, and the slow passage of a river.

Mark Tredinnick is an essayist, reviewer and teacher.



# THE MEKONG AND ITS HISTORY WITH MILTON OSBORNE

Milton Osborne is an internationally recognised authority on the history and politics of Southeast Asia, particularly the countries of Indochina. The Mekong river rises in Tibet and flows for 4,800 kilometres through China, Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam before it meets the South China Sea. In *The Mekong*, Osborne describes the long and turbulent history of the river, as well as the personal stories of those who have lived their lives linked to the Mekong.

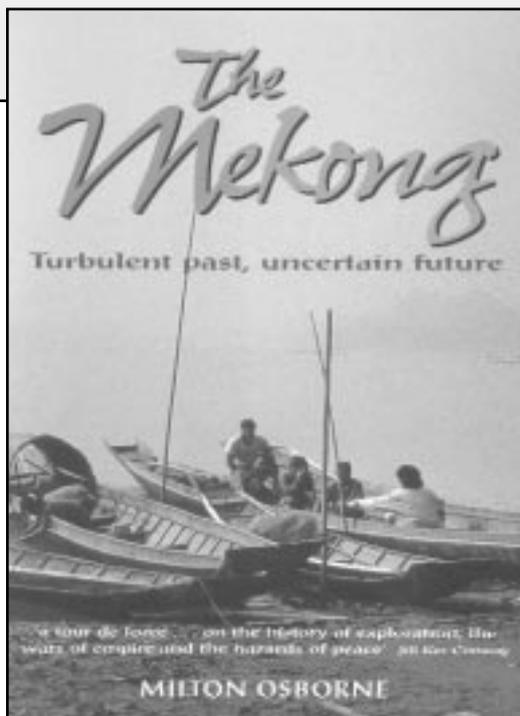
**DATE** : Tuesday 22 August 2000  
**TIME** : 5.30 for 6.00pm  
**VENUE** : 41 Phillip Street, Sydney  
Light refreshments

FREE TO ASSOCIATES/ASSOCIATES' PARTNERS  
STUDENTS \$5/OTHERS \$10

RSVP: PH: (02) 9252 3366 FAX: (02) 9252 3360

OR mail@sdneyins.org.au

WEBSITE: www.sdneyins.org.au



# BOOK REVIEWS

John McConnell

## INTO THE OPEN

By Donald Horne

HarperCollins Publishers pb 2000

rrp \$29.95 (ARP?)

ISBN O 7322 5862 6

Donald Horne has lived with a lifelong addiction. Editorialising. Now, this may not exactly be a revelation. Even as a young man, Donald composed editorials. In his head. Picture young Donald walking along the street. See him arranging his viewpoint on the appeasement of Munich into a beginning, middle and conclusion. Later on, of course, Donald Horne was to invest much time and energy in formulating editorials, in addition to expressing his point of view in various other forms. It is his way of keeping the conversation going.

Donald Horne's role has been to insert a point of view into public discourse, something he has done confidently and often very well. Reticence is not part of the Donald Horne story. *Into the Open* represents Donald Horne's memoirs.

Here is Donald Horne as journalist, author, university teacher, professor, chancellor, "public intellectual", and editor of *The Observer* and *The Bulletin*. It is Donald Horne's chosen conversational path through the years, and includes mention of individuals with whom he was associated such as Peter Coleman, Michael Baume, Robert Hughes, Bob Raymond, Henry Mayer, Dick Hughes, Bruce Beresford, Les Tanner, Peter Hastings, Desmond O'Grady, Denis Warner, James McAuley and Douglas McCallum.

There is also mention of an unnamed art critic who reviewed an exhibition he did not attend. And there is mention of Gwen Harwood's unusual and unwelcome farewell to *The Bulletin* - and indeed to all editors. Donald Horne manages to reproduce a range of headlines and statements that he penned over the years.

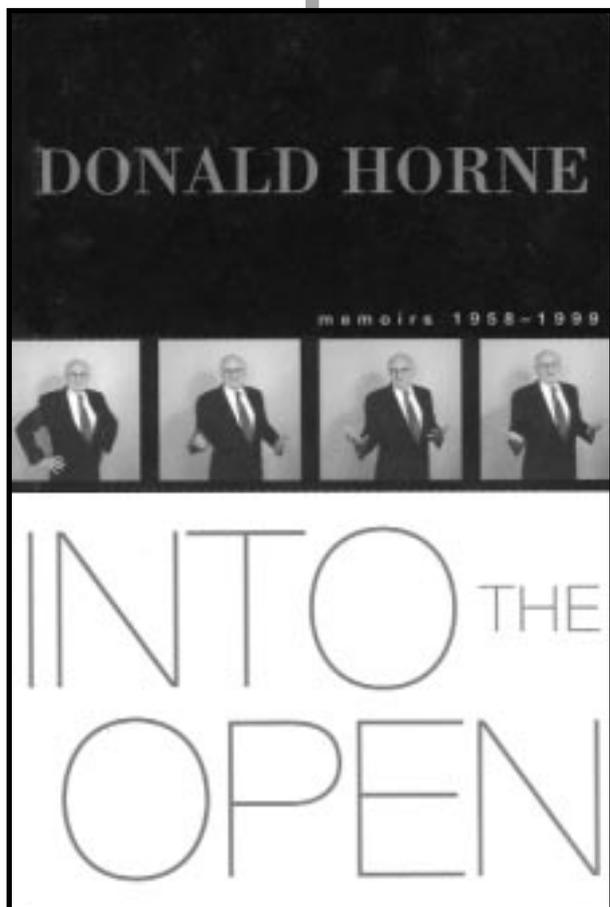
His relationship with Sir Frank Packer is there too. The nature of this may surprise many readers. From the outside, it may have seemed to have been a comfortable relationship. Donald Horne's analysis of Sir Frank Packer and his court makes it clear this was not an easy-going one. An uneasy and imminent feeling seems to have haunted Donald Horne that "The boss" was about to intervene and overrule some move or other. The portrait is of a boss ready to kill.

Horne refers to Packer as "this cantankerous, bullying master of surprise and dominance" with a "dictator-sized desk". Sir Frank Packer hears just two voices - "his own, and its echoes". He casts a significant shadow over Horne. Indeed, many of the latter's subsequent expositions on the theme of "the great man" appear to have been projections of his personal experiences with Sir Frank Packer and courtiers.

Donald Horne deliberately chose the book's title to convey a two-fold meaning: expounding and publicising ideas, as well as transmitting ideas from inner circles to the outside world. *Into the Open* is divided into two parts. Part one focuses on the court of Sir Frank Packer and journalism days, life in an advertising agency, on being an anti-communist and on writing *The Lucky Country*'. Part two ranges across Donald Horne's university career (without a degree), his role in the Arts along with some observations on Pauline Hanson and the republican preference.

Reviewing his time in an advertising agency, Donald

Horne remarks on the pretences and sophistry present in the world of advertising. He struggled with "the silliness" of many of the products about



which he was required to weave words. Too many flimsy contrivances, he concluded.

Donald Horne wrote *The Lucky Country* while in advertising. More than 260,000 copies have been sold. *The Lucky Country* was about an Australia run mainly by incompetent or mediocre leaders, but many who refer to the book seem not be aware of the intended irony.

Another irony emerges in the pages of *Into the Open*. At the very time Donald Horne was writing in *The Lucky Country* on how the Tariff Board was protecting incompetence, he was devising ads for the Dairy Industry on the desirability of quotas and tariffs. No wonder that advertising agency work disheartened him.

*Into the Open* contains an interesting discussion of the Australian Republican Movement. Here was a movement desiring to change the Australian Constitution. And there was not much room here, it seems, for Donald Horne to launch a personal editorial or two. Never before, Donald Horne records, had he served on a committee in which he so failed to attract attention. Yes, he does say attention.

Donald Horne includes interesting observations on Ted Mack, Clem Jones, Phil Cleary and Malcolm Turnbull. Malcolm Turnbull, he says, could have secured his place in the history books. He could have gathered all sympathetic republicans in front of the television cameras and then refused to play the John Howard game. He could have demanded a simple republic or monarchy question. Instead, Malcolm Turnbull operated within the crafty confines of the question destined to divide republicans and allow monarchists to say no to a politicians' republic.

Donald Horne also makes a personal admission. He now believes that he failed to grasp the opportunity to contribute to a new Constitution and an appropriate process for spreading support for it. A great opportunity lost, he laments. Towards the final pages of *Into the Open* we encounter Donald Horne still walking, still constructing editorials. Try for example the decline of history teaching in schools. The conversation proceeds but understandably at a slower pace these days.

## THE GATEKEEPERS: THE GLOBAL MEDIA BATTLE TO CONTROL AUSTRALIA'S PAY TV

By Mark Westfield  
Pluto Press, pb 2000 rrp. \$29.95  
ISBN I 86403 102 6

Read all about it.

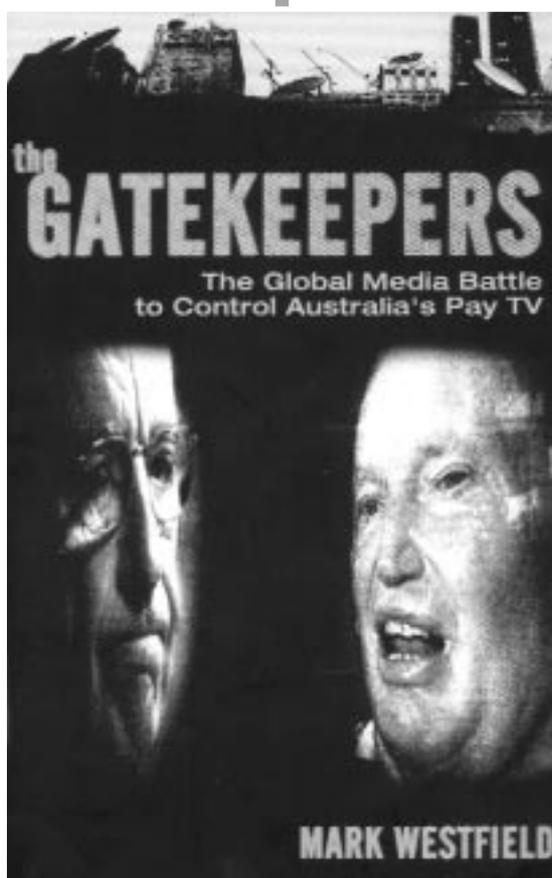
How Pay TV came to Australia. Why its arrival was delayed. How Rupert Murdoch and Kerry Packer wrestled to gain control of Pay TV. How the media moguls and their executives did deals. How they lobbied government ministers including prime ministers. How sports programming in general and the rugby codes in particular became enmeshed in the media contest.

All this and more can be found in *The Gatekeepers: The Global Media Battle to Control Australia's Pay TV*. Mark Westfield presents the story of "the gatekeepers" to our homes for a world of entertainment and business products. He writes the insider business column for *The Australian*. Deals and their associated details pack the book's pages. So do names and (dollar) numbers.

There is a large cast of actors. An information list extends to seven pages at the front of the book. It may be a struggle, initially, to cope with the range of names popping up in print, but it is a difficulty that diminishes with progress through the pages.

There is also an eight-page chronology before the story gets underway. It reaches back to 1972. Why 1972? That's when John Elliott, Peter Scanlon, Richard Wiesener and Bob Cowper bought jam maker Henry Jones (IXL). They were to discover that they had gained a television and radio station, whose manager (Ray Gamble) was very keen to start a cable TV business in Australia.

Mark Westfield assembles the cast, their discussions and contests, and presents it all to the reader in the form of a novel. We become a party to how someone reflects as he walks towards a security desk. How he quickly checks the names in the firm's visitors book, while signing his name. How someone nervously



picks up the phone. Or walks quickly. Or would have exploded had they realised that A was in B's office. How someone emerges from a plane and blinks in the bright summer light. That an executive thinks how confident two competitors look. How Kim Beazley was impressed by the strength of an executive's handshake. Communications Minister Graham Richardson - studio executives realise that Richo is no routine visitor to the lot.

Has the author assumed a licence to do some brushstrokes here and there? To fill in some gaps in order to produce the story in novel style? Or is all this detail the product of painstaking research, interviews and cross-checking? The flavour of the story is apparent from the following extract:

**Richardson and his entourage checked into the Grand Hyatt Central Station, with Richardson occupying the presidential suite, thanks to an arrangement he had with the Hyatt group. Early the next morning, Richardson and party waited in the lift foyer for the Time Warner party to arrive. As the lift doors opened, the Australians took a collective step back. Six men in long black overcoats walked from the lift, led by an Al Pacino lookalike, Michael Fuchs. His black hair was slicked back, and he had a long white silk scarf and a long scar down the left-hand side of his face. Fuchs was president of Home Box Office, Time Warner's specialist movie channel, and was regarded at the time as the fast-rising star of the organisation. He was accompanied by Stephen Rosenberg, a senior vice president of HBO International; Lee de Boer, vice president, new business, of Time Warner Cable; Peter Frame; and two heavily-built bodyguards. The only thing missing, the Australians thought, were the violin cases. Richo was impressed.**

This approach makes for lively writing albeit with a large cast chasing complicated deals. Along the way, the reader accumulates pen pictures of Rupert Murdoch, Kerry Packer, Graham Richardson, Paul Keating et al. There is Kerry Packer, for example with the legendary skill of shaking out a good deal at the expense of business associates and rivals alike. The "corporate miser" who gambles millions of dollars in casinos.

Mark Westfield provides a number of judgments in an epilogue. The commercial networks were "extraordinarily effective" in postponing the introduction of Pay TV. With the backing of the Packer organisation, the Federation of Australian

Commercial Television Stations (FACTS) represents "the most powerful lobby group in Australia". Kerry Packer is the biggest winner in the Pay TV battle - particularly now the Howard Coalition Government has replaced the Keating Cabinet. Among the providers, Foxtel is the winner. However, it has paid a very expensive price for its victory. The main threat now to Foxtel is from within.

Jostling among the partners - Rupert Murdoch, Kerry Packer and Telstra - is to be expected. Current government policy on the use of spectrum for digital TV is "restrictive and prescriptive to the point of farce". Mark Westfield sees the policy as "a complete victory for the commercial networks", one that contrasts with the Howard Government's orientation on deregulation and competition more generally.

- John McConnell is co-author of several senior text books.



**A lot of interesting  
people speak at  
The Sydney Institute.  
For a complete list  
of our forthcoming  
functions, visit our  
website:  
[www.sydneyins.org.au](http://www.sydneyins.org.au)**

# REVIEW OF THE REVIEWERS

Stephen Matchett

For thirty odd years professional historians have chipped away at the monument of the Australian past since the arrival of the Europeans. Some sought to render it gender neutral, replacing heroic statues of ANZACs and bushmen with a monument to women resisting patriarchal capitalism.

Others denied that there was ever a monument at all, and that it was possible for us all to make our own histories to match our values and aspirations. More recently grand narrative statues in the great 19th Century have come back into fashion, some portraying the dispossession of indigenous Australians and others the immigrant struggle.

But over the years most have focused on painstakingly detailed and very small statuettes representing tiny aspects of Australia's past.

Without something grand, or at least recognisable to look at, it is hardly surprising that the community has taken the historical profession at its word and assumed that when it comes to academic history, while there are many monuments to the past, in the main they are small and dull. The community at large has embraced the profession's erosion of its own subject and the origins of Australia's political system is now as relevant as the causes of the War of Jenkin's Ear to the lives of the plurality of Australians.

Australia verges on a post-modern triumph where there is no common Australian past and certainly not one that provides a foundation for the contemporary debate on what it is to be Australian. As historian Marilyn Lake puts it, (*Australian's Review of Books*, 13 October 1999):

**Just as nations are made in history, so it seems, they can be unmade. ... Australian historians could not be accused of ignoring the nation. On the contrary we seem to be obsessed by it, as assiduous in documenting its record of oppression as our predecessors once were in recounting its achievements.**

The problem is that the academics are writing for each other and without authors of popular history, Thomas Keneally, Robert Hughes, Patsy Adam-Smith

for example there would be even less community interest in a common and comprehensible past.

Three new books by professional historians make the point. Graeme Davison, *The Use and Abuse of Australian History* (Allen & Unwin), Miriam Dixon, *The Imaginary Australian: Anglo-Celts and Identity - 1788 to the present* (University of New South Wales Press) and Stuart Macintyre, *A Concise History of Australia* (Cambridge University Press) offer clues both to why history is increasingly irrelevant and to the fate of a profession which has spent years inexorably chipping away at its own connection with the community that supports it.

These are not books that will appeal to the intelligent layperson. Davison's collection of occasional writings is the entertaining musings of a senior historian talking to his peers. His collection of essays covers a range of subjects, ranging from big themes such as the need to reconnect Australians with their nation's past to pieces related to his work in community and public history. As such it is the most intellectually accessible of the three books - the work of an historian exhorting his profession to connect with the community. However it is a work by a professional historian and as such fails to balance the necessity of scholarly convention with the need to engage and entertain general readers.

Dixon's book is not so much inaccessible as at times incomprehensible. The prose is cumbersome and the presentation of her argument theory-ridden. This is something of a tragedy as Dixon is a wise thinker whose book should reach the widest audience. Her thesis, that it is important that Australia does not lose its sense of an Anglo-Celtic past if we are to have a sheet anchor for the development of a national identity, is profound. It is certainly one of the first challenges from the left to the new-class historical orthodoxy that Australia's history is a chronicle of patriarchal and racist oppression of indigenous Australians, women, children and of all migrants other than rich Englishmen.

It's a challenging idea that deserves a wide audience. The problem is that the style of writing is so dense that the intellectual apparatus of academic fashion overwhelms an important argument. At the risk of shooting post modernist fish in the barrel of critical theory consider Dixon's prose:

**The development imperative away from a more fragmented towards a less fragmented mental state represents no unilinear tendency, or one cast in stone. It is open to various degrees of disablement in periods of extreme social stress.**

How sad that this sort of writing engulfs Dixon's subtle argument, one which has a great deal to offer to the debate over Australian identity and, as all good political arguments should, is likely to infuriate ideologues of all

persuasions. Perhaps Dixon decided to use the form of theory to subvert the argument of the theoreticians but if this is so she may have defused their attacks at the price of denying her book the audience it deserves.

Macintyre's is the most conventional of the three, a straight forward chronological history of Australia designed for the student or general reader. For the most part it could have been written 20 or 30 years ago. The standard high points of traditional history are all here - the great strikes of the 1890s, ANZAC, the Depression of the 1930s, the erosion of the Imperial link and so on. What makes the book interesting is the way Macintyre has integrated newer historical concerns into his text, the importance of gender in creating Australian settler society, and most importantly the history of the continent's indigenous peoples.

But Macintyre is in thrall to relativism and he makes it plain that readers cannot assume that his Australian history is necessarily the same as other historians':

**The idea of the historian as an impersonal, unself-conscious narrator is replaced by an appreciation of the historian who is present in the story. (5)**

The presumption that there is no need to subordinate his own opinions as he struggles to interpret the past may not appeal to all readers, particularly those who are uncomfortable with his old-fashioned leftist attitudes to communism and economic reform in the later 20th Century.

There is then much in these books which explains why history is no longer much taught in the schools and why so few historians participate in public debate.

People who have read history all their lives as a pleasure rather than as a profession, and believe that an informed democracy relies on the study of a nation's past helps to make sense of the moral choices of public life in our own time, will think the

decline of the study of history is, ipso facto, a bad thing. For Australians who are readers of American history and who can point to the popular piety which still surrounds Abraham Lincoln or Franklin Delano Roosevelt in the US, the cheerful indifference of Australians to their past is a very bad thing indeed. The recent television advertisement to remind us that the centenary of federation approaches, which associated civic virtue with knowing the name of our first prime minister, makes a sad comparison to the reverence of visitors to the Potomac-side Lincoln and Roosevelt memorials in Washington.

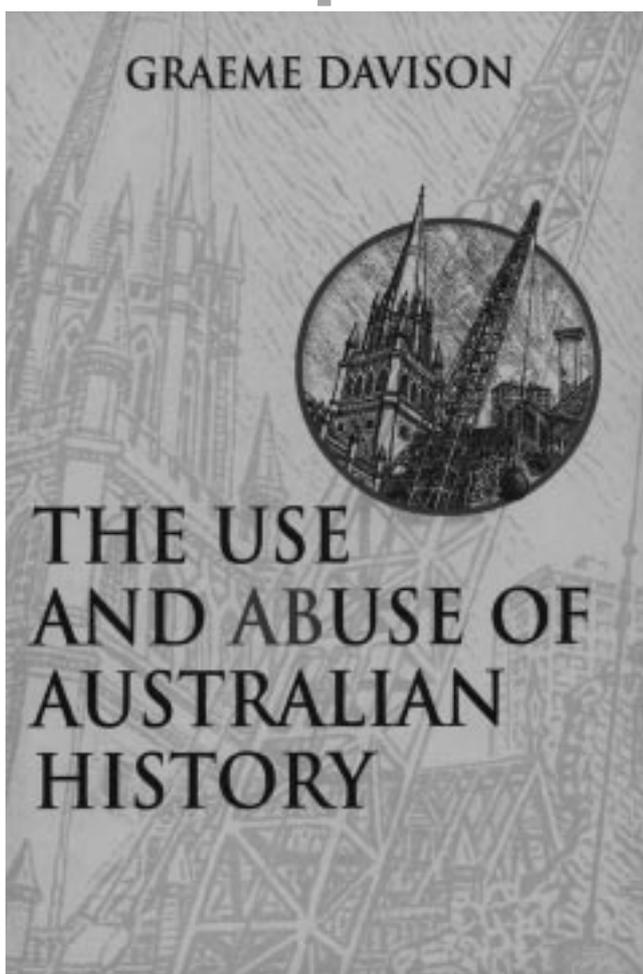
Many of us have no idea where our great grandparents were born, let alone the events and ideas that shaped their lives. For the millions who are migrants, or the children of migrants, Australia before 1945 is a meaningless abstraction. Even ANZAC Day is an affirmation of pride in contemporary Australia rather than a memorial to the men who once were thought to have defined what it was, is and ever shall be Australian-ness.

Few Hispanic or Vietnamese Australians will connect to the elan of the citizen-soldiers defying the wire and the guns of the Turk in 1915. Fewer Sikh or Serb Australians will see much relevance in Phar Lap's fate and while we will not know whether anybody cares

much about Federation until next year, the marketers are unlikely to successfully urge federation memorabilia in the pages of the Arabic press.

Even young Anglo-Celts have little reason to embrace a past that has an ever-weakening resonance for the way they live their lives. The very tolerance of the Anglo-Celts over the generations in welcoming waves of migrants inevitably means that there is less in their own specific ethnic past to celebrate.

Interest in history, even recognition that it is important, diminishes by the decade. The decline in the study of history at senior school and the transmogrification of history departments in the



universities into temples of studies, cultural, Australian post-colonial and whatever, points to a discipline which has lost its once intellectual predominance. The tragedy is that this decline comes at a time when the struggle for the moral high ground in the debate over the rights of indigenous Australians relies on appeals to the nation's past.

The cultural theorist who demands that Australia embrace the truth that indigenous Australians resisted invasion by force of arms and were often massacred in response and who points to the condition of the stolen generations is just as likely to also happily explain to any one who will listen that there is no such thing as historical truth and that there are as many pasts as we want there to be. The fact that so many Australians decline to accept that generations of settlers have worked to dispossess the first inhabitants points to a culture completely disconnected from its past.

If Australians of settler descent have no connection to the lives of their ancestors it is hardly surprising that they cannot connect in any detailed way to the treatment those people meted out to indigenous Australians. And if the history of Australia is lost to Anglo-Celts whose ancestors lived here for a century it can mean even less to people whose connection with Australia is only a couple of generations old.

This is a problem that greatly exercises the three authors, but the very nature of their books demonstrates just how the profession of history has abandoned the community.

It is a problem which is very much of the historians' own making. In part it is the consequence of the massive expansion of the university system from the 1960s. As the profession grew the specialisations narrowed as young historians competed for subjects they could make their own and safely tenured historians, assured of a modest, but regular income, simply turned away from the marketplace of ideas.

The profession simply withdrew into itself and did not engage with the community that supported it. The fact that some of the most popular political historians of our generation, such as Paul Kelly and Gerard Henderson, have day jobs but still write books on history that sell well does no credit to the academics who are paid to solely write and teach.

Of course it does not have to be thus. The extraordinary achievement of Henry Reynolds in resolutely resurrecting the fate of indigenous Australians in defending first their lands, then their cultures and finally their very right to family integrity makes the point. Reynolds uses the skills of the traditional historian; he embraces the primary sources and builds his case not according to the moral fashion of the hour but on the evidence before

him. His books are designed to do what all good history does, meet the scholarly standards of his peers while being accessible to a general audience.

His career demonstrates how an historian can transform public opinion by the practice of his profession. Doubtless the popular Reconciliation movement would have occurred without scholars like Henry Reynolds but his conclusions have filtered from his books into the media and are now understood by hundreds of thousands of Australians who do not know his name.

But they are familiar with his ideas, which is probably not the case with the new books from Dixon, Macintyre and Davison. The tragedy is that these three writers recognise that, in the rush to embrace obscurity, historians have abandoned a popular audience which would happily read Australian history written in language they could understand and on subjects that did not bore them to snores. Which makes the manner in which Ms Dixon makes the point all the more ironic.

**Australian historians in the 1990s are experiencing deep professional uncertainty at a time when old-style narrative history appears to be extending its appeal among non specialists. ... This popular memory and its call for narrative history assumes a sense of time which has not fallen victim to the fragmentation accompanying time's compression: it is one still taken for granted in the wider community.(87)**

How foolish of everybody who still thinks in terms of chronological narratives not to realise that time is now compressed.

Dixon and Davison are both uncomfortable with the way historians have abandoned their responsibilities to the community and all three writers are unhappy with the political and economic direction Australia has taken.

In this sense the intellectual context of all three books is that of a passing generation; they are not the books of young people and are all tinged with regret that things, not least the authority of academic historians, aren't what they used to be. They are tracts, misplaced in time from the 1970s, that are suspicious of the market and hostile to economic reform. All three authors are deeply unhappy that their truths about Australian history, as opposed to the truths of the reactionaries clustering around John Howard and Geoffrey Blainey, (which are not truths at all), are not honoured, as they should be.

Throughout all three books there is a sense that a nation which has lost touch with its history runs the

risk of losing its moral core. Davison in particular exhorts historians to greater efforts

**In 2001 Australians will celebrate their national birthday, whether they feel like celebrating or not, and whether history provides symbols to make those celebrations vivid and memorable. If historians cannot supply them, no doubt, advertising men and television producers will come to the rescue. Nature, and the mass market, abhor a vacuum. The symbolic void at the heart of liberal democracy is an ever-increasing one, and history is not the only force bidding to fill it. (79)**

No wonder Davison is appalled that the sinister marketers and manipulative TV people make their living by engaging with the community, by meeting consumer needs and this will never do. Defining the national identity is the proper preserve of the scholar, or at least the right sort of scholar, which definitely excludes Blainey:

**Blainey's homely metaphors – the pendulum, the balance sheet, the loaded dice – are as telling as his arguments: they place him in the middle ground when, in fact, there is hardly an historian of any substance to the right of him. That he can credibly do so is a measure, not only of his own rhetorical skill, but of the distance which has now opened up between the intellectual milieu of academic history and the lay audience of professional and business people that Blainey now addresses. (17)**

Davison is acutely aware of how this occurred. Historians who sought to critically analyse Australia's past came under the influence of "postmodernism and poststructuralism" and turned instead to the systems of knowledge which allowed racism and patriarchy to control the grand narrative of Australian history. But the real villains in destroying an Australian sense of the national past in which all can share are the economic reformers who do not accept that history is relevant to people's lives. When organisations lose touch with their corporate history the problems begin. Thus he points to Sydney's 1997 water quality crisis as an example of what will occur when organisations are corporatised and become less sensitive to the needs and traditions of their employees.

Some readers might not be impressed with this as justification for the over-staffing, contempt for customers and rent seeking behaviour of the statutory utilities which used their monopoly status to over-charge and under-service generations of

consumers. Nor will it ring true to those who remember the farce of a public telecommunications monopoly best described by a commentator who said that imagining life under communism was easy, all you have to do was think of Telecom and add tanks.

Davison's case is eccentric at best but no more so than in Davison's identification of the real enemies of historical study:

**Academic historians worry that their neighbours in cultural theory and poststructuralism are killing history, but far more lethal enemies lie just across the campus in the faculties of business and economics (221).**

Davison is confusing cause and effect. The rise of the business faculties in university life is in some part the consequence of the vacuum created when practitioners of disciplines such as history decided they would rather talk among themselves rather than to the community at large. As a very senior historian, there is much for Davison to regret in the decline of his discipline and his conclusion sets out how the profession can rebuild its standing in the community:

**...(historians) retain an overriding obligation to understand the past as far as possible, in its own terms. In standing against the self-interested uses of the past by others, historians may demonstrate their greatest usefulness. That is what historians should require of them. (275)**

It is a challenge Miriam Dixon may well endorse. Her book is a manifesto on why Australia must fashion a cultural identity which balances the reality of our multicultural community against the memory of a lost Anglo-Celtic hegemony.

Dixon has written a brave and radical book. Brave because she challenges not the reality of multiculturalism but the way it is used to denigrate the old Australian identity and because she asserts the need for a core culture to hold the nation together. Radical because she disputes the established orthodoxy that has reduced questions of national identity to the creature of theory by a generation of Australian academics and "new class" professionals who dismiss people who do not have their education or share their values.

**After the 1970s, spearheaded by its intellectuals, the symbolic and ideological kit of the new class homed in on shortcomings of the core culture. In this they were remarkably successful. There is a deeper gulf between mainstream Australia and the intelligentsia than exists in other Western countries, so a certain**

**relish may tinge the onslaught made by the latter on old-identity Australia and its self-belief, That onslaught might still undermine old-identity core cultural confidence at profound levels.(170)**

The implication that by decrying the values that older, generally Anglo-Celt Australians desperately try to hold onto, the new class ideologues created the intellectual jacquerie of Hansonism is obvious. And Dixon, clearly not afraid of a stoush, does more than leave it as an implication:

**Among the causes of Australia's expression of popular and populist feeling after 1996 (the "Pauline Hanson phenomenon") was mainstream Anglo-Celtic anger over immigration issues. It arose in part over what such men and women perceived as denigration by those thought to be elite, and over their long-term exclusion from decision-making on immigration. (158)**

Dixon makes a powerful case for a debate outside the academy on what it is to be Australian, a debate which is necessary to overcome the hatred of the contemporary left with its obsession with ethnicity and gender and its willingness to confuse the patriotism of many ordinary Australians with the ignorant populism of the Hansonites on the other. In a multicultural society, she argues, where ethnic identity cannot unite Australians a sense of commitment to shared values is essential

**Australia is one of the fragment societies spun off from post-sixteenth century Western Europe. What the nation means for these societies cannot be read off what it means for, say, the Lebanese or ex-Yugoslavians. ... In the world we now inhabit and in our particular case, the greater "dangers" are those of potential disintegration. They lie in failing to recognise the nation and its core culture for their role in "holding" us in a still reasonably cohesive and stable way (42)**

It's an argument the academic left will hate but will appeal to people who believe that Australian history can help unite a nation drawn from so many cultures. Australian society has never had a base in ethnic identity. Anglo-Celt used to describe hating tribes rather than a hyphenated one, and lacks the sense of millennial purpose that shapes patriotism in the United States. Given this universal commitment to the old values based in representative democracy, egalitarianism and tolerance are vital.

While Dixon's language makes her case hard to follow she clearly believes that the nation's future

depends on defending the old values of Australian civil society against the threats from both right and left which create the risk of "ragmentation".

Although sadly disguised by thickets of academic jargon, Dixon's is a compelling, commonsense case, for what used to be called patriotism. In contrast to the theorists who call Australia the "most vicious country in the world" (168), she points to the strengths of the nation's traditional civil culture:

**We have inherited many of the best aspects of British and Continental European traditions. This inheritance is reflected in workable government, sophisticated science, reliable legal and industrial frameworks; reflected, too, in an ethos and institutional structure that, comparatively speaking, still retains a remarkable (if fast-shrinking) degree of respect for ordinary people. It is reflected in the fact that we still possess an unusual degree of social cohesiveness. Representative institutions, divisions of powers, free speech and press, women's rights, the egalitarian thrust in society and family – these are all part of Australia's Western and Enlightenment heritage. ... the challenge is not merely to put a stop to the current erosion of those institutions, ideals and values which constitute our strengths, but to radically expand their effectiveness. (13-14)**

Dixon has challenged the cultural left orthodoxy and laid the foundation for a debate about what Australians should take from the nation's past. It's a clarion call for historians to engage with the public, to argue about those aspects of Australia's history that we should variously decry and celebrate and, most importantly, to illuminate the values which have made Australia such a successful pluralist democracy.

Sadly the only people with the time to struggle through Dixon's dense prose are the very academics who have declined in the past to take up the challenge.

Stuart Macintyre in contrast, is less interested in the history we share than in demonstrating that the Australia of settler society is little more than a passing phenomenon. From the beginning of his book he makes it plain that the indigenous Australians dispossessed by the European invasion had developed a culture in harmony with the environment. In comparing the two there is not much doubt which one Macintyre prefers:

**(Aboriginal) society was characterised by a shared and binding tradition. Familial and community restraints imposed order,**

**mutuality and continuity. They were confronted by a new social order in which the autonomy of the individual prevailed and a form of political organisation based on impersonal regularity. Its freedom of choice and capacity for concerted action brought innovation and augmented capacity. Its self-centredness and moral discord generated social conflict, criminality and exile. (35)**

The image of the good collectivist and the bad individual reoccurs throughout the book and at times Macintyre's interest in indigenous Australia seems to offer a metaphor for a distaste for free enterprise. Thus he writes glowingly of the achievements of the Chifley Government in establishing a planned peacetime economy calling it a golden age (p 196). Even the Menzies years were a silver age, if only because the state maintained control of the economy.

The fact that it was this culture of regulation that consigned Australia to economic mediocrity and government by rent seekers for rent seekers does not bother Macintyre. In fact for all the emphasis in the book on the role of women and the failure of settler society to answer for its assault on indigenous Australia, this is a very old fashioned book by a very old-fashioned lefty.

At the end of the 1940s for example, there were,

**...no mandarin agents of the KGB here, no moles burrowing deep into the establishment; just fervent young men and women recruited when the Soviet Union was an Australian ally to provide it with their limited knowledge of Cold War plans. (212).**

What's more, the United States was doing the same sort of thing! Macintyre even manages to emphasise the unquestionably outrageous attempt by Menzies to ban the Communist Party at the expense of a discussion of just why so many Australians were willing dupes of Soviet imperialism.

Macintyre's reactionary views extend beyond justifying the imps of Stalin. In a more contemporary vein he deplores the transformation of the Australian economy over the last two decades. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s the rich have prospered at the expense of the poor and Australia's fate was placed in the hands of the international markets. The result is the end of the traditional relationship of government and people.

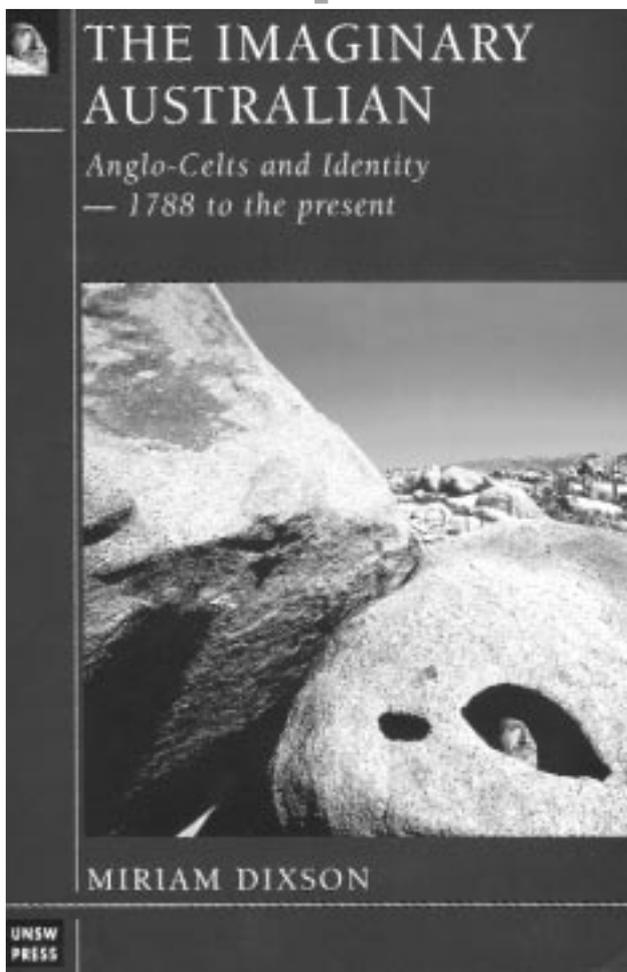
**Deregulation removed not just the institutional frameworks that bond individuals into relations of mutual obligation but the sentiments that sustained social solidarity. ... The weakenings of mutuality, the rampant individualism that spurned the virtues of love, duty and sacrifice, allowed a cult of selfishness to flourish. (247)**

But nobody should worry too much about the collapse of the old Australian egalitarian tradition. After all, according to Macintyre, it was never anything more than the work of the patriarchy. Federation, for example, was solely the work of unredeemable racist men with women conniving at their own oppression. For Macintyre, class is less significant in Australian history than gender and ethnic conflicts. Thus he argues that Australia practises repressive tolerance, with difference from the Anglo-Celtic norm patronisingly

accepted when we should accept all cultures as equals.

There are many such arguments in the book, which in many ways desperately struggle to identify things that are wrong with Australia since 1788. The White Australia policy was wrong, ergo all the values that flowed from it were untrue. "Since racial uniformity was an illusion, the promise of equality was also a lie." (143)

It is when considering the history of indigenous Australians that he works hardest to ensure that his



readers are aware of the chronicle of corruption that is our nation's past. Throughout the book Macintyre hammers away at his point - that the history of settler Australia is not the continent's only past and that readers must understand that Australia was here long before European settlement and that it will continue long after Australia has ceased to be as we know it now.

Thus he makes a heavy-handed comparison with Roman Britain which lasted 400 years and where the original inhabitants took on the conquerors ways, "before waves of new arrivals quickly eroded the Roman civilization. ... Will the British colonisation of Australia be sustained so long?" (275)

As an attempt to suggest that readers should understand that the course of history changes and that what exists now may change in the future, Macintyre has produced a statement of the bleeding obvious in the guise of scholarly insight. Obviously he is right, but so what? In trying to understand the Australian past, or at least the motivations of the peoples who made its history, we cannot attribute motivations that would not have occurred to them. Certainly settler Australia has done its best to ignore its dispossession of Aboriginal Australians and for much of its history feared the attention of Asia.

But this does not make the Anglo-Celts who have shaped the nation's identity either uniformly corrupt or blind. To argue that Australia has changed from what it was and will change again does not morally invalidate everything that has occurred in settler society or make its study only fit for sermons of rejection.

None of these books attracted the attention from the reviewers that their subject matter merits with Davison's, the most readily comprehensible by a lay audience, being the most widely reviewed.

Chris Healy (*Australian's Review of Books*, May 2000) devoted a long essay to Davison positively summarising the substance of the essays which made up his book but overall found it an old fashioned book with its "fuddy-duddy" dismissal of popular culture and its fear of modern scholarship,

**Unattributed postmodernists and deconstructionists seem to exert shadowy and ominous influences across the cultural field.**

In fact Healy was not convinced by Davison's claim that we need historians at all. Healy's example may well convince Davison that his worse fears about the rejection of a sense of, or even concern with the past are all true.

**... historical knowledge has a different value and occupies a different**

## AUSTRALIA'S PACIFIC NEIGHBOURHOOD

Rowan Callick began his journalistic career in the Pacific in Papua New Guinea before moving to Australia in 1986 to work on the *Australian Financial Review*. Since 1996 he has been the *AFR's* East Asia Correspondent based in Hong Kong. Callick's most recent work *Comrades and Capitalists* (UNSW Press) examines the first year of Chinese rule in Hong Kong. Turning his gaze south, Rowan Callick has now returned to his original interest in the Pacific to evaluate Australia and its nearer neighbours – the Solomons, Fiji et al.

**TOPIC** : *Australia's Noisome Neighbours - Never Pacific, Never Paradise, Never Ours*

**DATE** : Tuesday 1 August 2000

**TIME** : 5.30 for 6.00pm

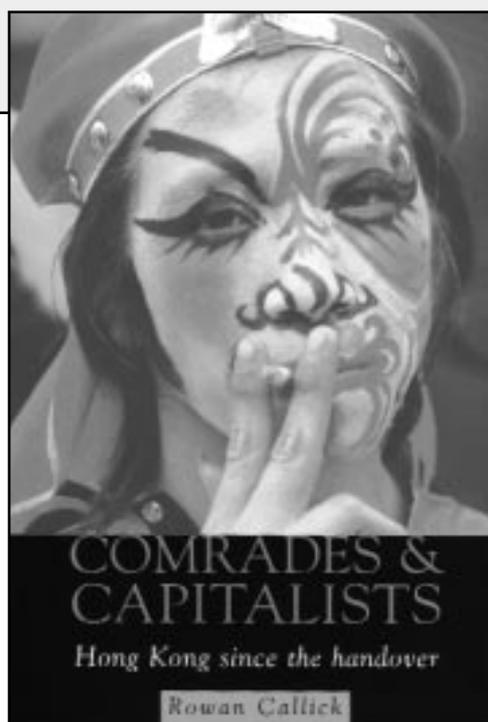
**VENUE** : 41 Phillip Street, Sydney  
Light refreshments

FREE TO ASSOCIATES/ASSOCIATES' PARTNERS  
STUDENTS \$5/OTHERS \$10

RSVP: PH: (02) 9252 3366 FAX: (02) 9252 3360

OR mail@sdneyins.org.au

WEBSITE: www.sdneyins.org.au



communicative landscape than it did in 1870. Take Senator John Herron's profound April contribution to reconciliation. His comments were informed more by push-polling and media analyses than historical thesis and archival evidence. These opinions were circulated by TV, radio, newspapers and on the Internet, they weren't restricted to parliament and the pulpit or circulated in university or historical society. Perhaps this century's intellectual and effective maladies require combination therapies rather than a single antidote of more history.

It may not shock readers to learn that Healy's by-line states that he teaches cultural studies at the University of Melbourne.

James Griffin (*Australian*, 1 April) was far more positive and agreed with Davison that the study of history, "should never be discouraged, if only because it can refute those inventions of the past that are injurious to society". Raymond Evans (*Courier Mail*, 8 April) made the same point but condemned Davison for not denouncing with sufficient vehemence the peddlers of false history, notably Blainey, nor for making his case more strongly:

**In the present climate of "historical backs to the wall", I anticipated a more strongly worded text than this, but Davison has written a much gentler and more cautious book than its name suggests.**

The reviewers unsurprisingly trod carefully in discussing Macintyre. After all it is hard to criticise an historian who points, however tiresome the regularity, to the undoubted and unjustifiable oppression of indigenous Australians and women of all ethnicities. However, some commentators were brave enough to suggest that for all its moral worth, Macintyre's book was not without fault. Debra Adelaide's brief notice (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 4

March 2000) was insignificant, apart from the mixed metaphor of the season:

**Concision can sometimes mean constriction, but Macintyre's new history, aimed at both overseas and local readers, breathes deeply enough with broad brushstrokes as well as details to satisfy pedants.**

Nick Richardson (*Herald Sun*, 5 February) was equally brief and equally complimentary, "a triumph ... another terrific piece of history". Apart of course from what may be faults, but Richardson did not seem sure:

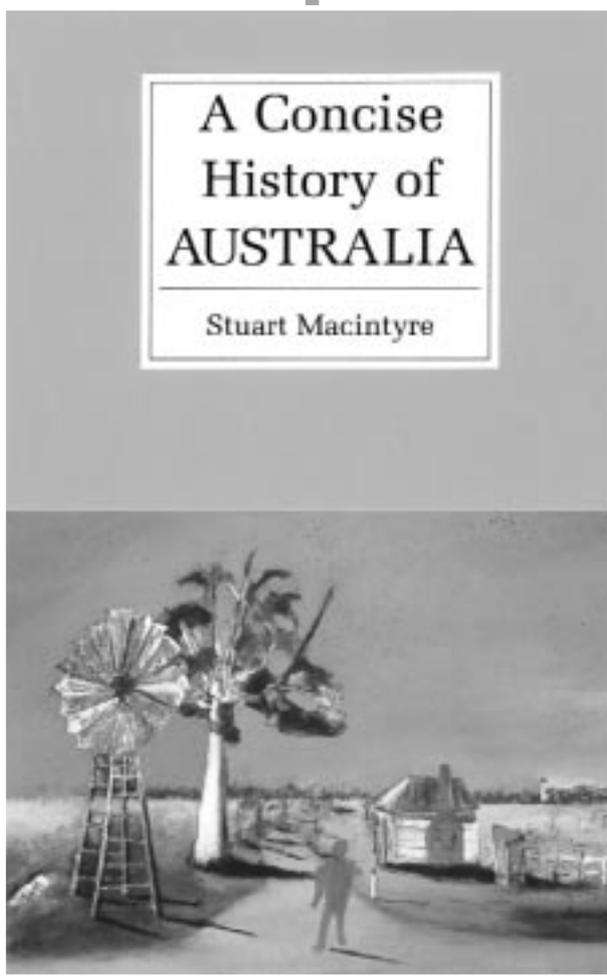
**... occasionally the social history seems to be handled with less sureness than the political history. And recent history seems to be less coherently presented than the events and trends of a century ago. But that, I suspect, is a reflection of the currency and immediacy of events.**

Perhaps Richardson will actually provide a review with a judgement, if he ever makes up his mind.

Alan Atkinson (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 January 2000) was intent on placing Macintyre's "splendid piece of work" in the Australian historiographical tradition. In an anodyne piece that found nothing to fault he also praised Macintyre for covering so much history,

without any appearance of packing in the facts, not an easy achievement for a country like ours, with each colony and State demanding its story be told. The course of South Australia's history being so much more complicated than, say, Europe since the Renaissance.

It was left to Michael Roe, (*Australian Book Review*, December 1999) to really heap on the uncritical praise for a work of "surpassing professional skill" from the "gifted" Macintyre in a review which in the main was a summary of the book's achievements. In fact the only fault was that there was not enough



culture and religion or "ethnic groups" with that "dynamic integration into the narrative so splendidly apparent in the cases of Aboriginals and women"

Among all the praise the critics trod carefully and far more acutely. Geoffrey Blainey (*Age* 22 January) was polite to the point of being courtly and found much to praise in the book's scope and mastery of its subject, suggesting that lay and professional readers alike will find much that is new and interesting. But equally he took issue with Macintyre's consideration of indigenous issues.

**History-writing is still at the stage where a long-overdue sympathy is being given to black achievements and predicaments, but there is a danger of the new corrective going too far. If the Aboriginals' own historic failures are judged leniently or not even mentioned, whereas the failures of European Australians are emphasised frequently, then a new form of racial or cultural bias will replace the old.**

However this is not a debate that Blainey expects to win and the resigned sting is very much in the review's tale:

**... (the book) offers an interpretation of history shared by many other historians, school teachers and students. While I am not really on the book's wavelength, I respect its skills of composition and its high relevance to what might well be, at present, the prevailing academic viewpoint towards Australia's past.**

A case of being praised with faint damns.

James Griffin provided the only substantive criticism of "the sensitive new age professor" (*Australian*, 22 January). He attacked the methodology, "disgruntlement will stem from Macintyre's trendy determination to be present in the story", and suggests that his treatment of religion was inadequate and communism too generous. Alone among the reviewers he criticised Macintyre for being soft on communism:

**Information passed to the Soviet Union is debited to "naive idealism". ... No mention is made of the subversive use to which it was put in the Pacific war.**

The most damning criticism was that Macintyre had ignored crucial aspects of post-war politics in favour of material "which could have been written by a media sociologist". It was a comprehensive bucketing, the more refreshing for its novelty.

Regrettably there were fewer reviews of Dixson's book that, while inaccessible in its prose, had

something far more important to contribute to general readers interested in the history of their country. Marilyn Lake, (*Australian's Review of Books*, 13 October 1999) recognised the political importance of Dixson's work, "a bold new book, which seeks to explain this startling change in our culture and warn of its possible consequence". Lake pointed to Dixson's three decade residence in country NSW as shaping her sense of the past and distaste for fashionable sneering at what was once the orthodox tale of the Anglo-Celtic Australian tribe.

It was left to Nicholas Rothwell, (*The Australian*, 5 June 1999) in a reflective interview rather than a review to put both Dixson's book and its importance to the debate on the role of history in shaping national identity into perspective for the ordinary reader. Rothwell argued that the "social engineering agenda of the 1990s" was losing its intellectual primacy in the face of "a fear that left-liberalism has simply betrayed and abandoned ordinary people; by a dreadful awareness that the core values of national fairness and equality are out of style." According to Rothwell, Dixson is important because she is the first thinker on the left to argue that the old Australian culture must be valued, "if a new one is to be born".

Rothwell provided a valuable service to Dixson and to the hundreds of thousands of readers of *The Australian* who would find her book interesting and important, if they could only follow it.

The scant reviews of three books by academic historians with considerable professional reputations and enormous learning demonstrates the intellectual crisis Australian history faces. Some historians may not want to communicate outside the academy. Others are intent on running lines which general readers will simply not accept. But unless the debate over all of Australia's past since 1788 is accessible to ordinary readers there is an inevitable risk that the populist racism that characterised the brief and phenomenon of Hansonism will reappear.

Or as Graeme Davison puts it:

**Partisanship has a role to play in the conversation about the past we call history, and we often edge closer to the truth through the dialogue of opposing viewpoints. ... But a historian who writes in isolation from others, and heedless of their criticisms, conducts a conversation of the deaf. (266)**



# BABY TALK

**The desire of some journalists to pontificate knows no bounds, particularly when they can write about themselves. Stephen Matchett reports on the great baby debate.**

There is nothing broadsheet journalists like more than a debate on social policy - particularly when it lets them pontificate about their own lives. And there is no better motherhood issue, than, well, motherhood, to let journalists, bang on about how children, in particular their children real or desired, are, or should be, the centre of the universe.

Sally Loane, (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 May) set the scene for the most recent exercise in demonstrating how those of journalists are the only examined lives worth living, or at least reporting. Loane's theme was how the trend to childlessness was turning the nation, or at least the wealthy parts of inner city Sydney which Ms Loane confuses with Australia, into what she quoted a Labor politician as calling "a society without children, one devoid of creativity or hope".

At least that is what she got around to discussing after she spent most of the column talking about how her "tiny blond angel" of a four year old daughter had stacked on a turn in a hairdressers. The outraged Loane was appalled that people did not rally around celebrating the life affirming vitality of a screaming child.

**Nobody looked up, nobody uttered a sound, nobody offered a hand. Not even a bemused flicker of understanding. We'd become non-people. Perhaps they were catatonic with embarrassment. Perhaps they had not seen a child having a tantrum at such close quarters.**

Or perhaps they were minding their own business.

It was this sort of flummery dressed up as social comment which may have impelled Sian Powell to suggest that not everybody found children quite so fascinating as their mothers (*Australian*, 2 June).

**As a mother of none might I just gently point out that we, the silent and childless minority, exist?**

The column went on to make the unremarkable suggestion that some women were not particularly enthusiastic about motherhood and that the declining birthrate demonstrated that more and more women found there was more to life than being mum. She concluded by suggesting that perhaps there were places where children should be neither

seen nor heard, "in smart restaurants, cinemas, at evening parties" and that childlessness should be accepted as "a reasonable choice for some women".

Powell could have produced a column advocating the reinstatement of death duties, or some other heresy against the interests of upper middle class, waiting-to-inherit-the-parental-home-to-pay-for-the-children's-school-fees Sydney, and generated a less aggressive response. As it was the matriarchy got stuck right in, booties and all.

Lucy Sullivan was first in the queue (*Australian*, 7 June) with a column on the mother as martyr. According to Sullivan, motherhood means no holidays or restaurants but a great deal of stress, "from the felt obligation to train a worthy and useful citizen of the future". But revenge will be hers because if everybody stops having children no one will be there to provide for the self-indulgent childless in their old age. So cop that young Sian!

Sullivan also seemed to resent other women having fun while she was doing her grown-up duty: "children engender a fundamental reorientation of one's life perspective that makes one fully adult".

Frank Devine in contrast (*Australian* 8 June) spoke up for all the "miserable, disappointed, lonely old men" there will be, "the more women who choose for reasons of hedonism or career advancement not to have children". He also recommended parenthood for, "the purest kind of love you can experience".

Like Sullivan he was big on the distinctions between the noble parent and the fliberty jibbet childless decadent.

**... there is a gulf between parents and non-parents. Only other parents enjoy - can endure - talk about the logistics of choir auditions or rugby practice, of neck rashes, baby-sitters, nannies, play schools and first communions. Parents, on the other hand, have a limited attention span for even the best-structured and suspenseful accounts of impromptu long weekends in ripper places.**

You pays your money and you takes your choice.

But none of this was anywhere serious enough for Angela Shanahan (*Australian*, 9 June) who appears to be of the view that what this world needs is fewer and better Sians, referring to the "unfortunately puerile tone" of Powell's column. From that moderate start Shanahan proceeded to set us all right on a wide number of issues ranging from the lack of hope in a society which is not child-focused to how the childless really hate not just children but the "family".

There was much, much more of the same, including the suggestion that private industry did not seem to

understand that children are "the real life's work of parents". Now there's a way to generate extra tax revenue to fund the child support payments.

Rosemary Neill had a far more interesting take on the debate in a column (*Australian*, 14 June) which focused on - Rosemary Neill. She began by explaining how all the other commentators had it wrong - "Sian Powell's assertion ... has provoked responses ranging from the extraordinarily defensive to the droopily sentimental" - apart from Frank Devine whose argument was "baloney". Neill then got on with the really interesting issue, which was how she and her pals approached parenthood.

Apparently all Neill's male friends, academics, teachers, "high-flying accountants" and inevitably writers, are caring blokes who pull their weight in bringing up baby. And because it is occurring in Neill's circle of friends it is nothing less than, "a quiet parenting revolution that is liberating many middle-class men and women":

**It is the sort of profound yet under-reported role shift that makes the point-scoring of self-righteous parents over the unapologetically childless seem like so much empty noise.**

At time of writing Angela Shanahan is yet to advise us if Rosemary Neill's column is more or less puerile than Sian Powell's.

Neill was followed the next day (*Australian* 15 June) by yet another staff writer, (perhaps writing about babies is a compulsory clause in the standard News Ltd. contract), Jill Rowbotham who spoke up for women who fear they miss out by not having a baby.

Not that this happened to Jill. She was at pains to tell us that she met her husband at 39 ("and a half"), married twelve months later and is now a parent. The great gush of wind we all felt on that mid-June morning was probably the gasp of relief and delight from hundreds of thousands of Rowbotham's devoted readers responding to this happy news.

But not everybody is as lucky as Rowbotham and her piece focused on the personal unhappiness of women desperate for the baby they would never have. Which presumably was meant to justify a swipe at the happily childless who do not understand the tragedy of women who aspire to motherhood;

**It may also cause resentment in colleagues who can only see the benefits of a footloose and fancy-free lifestyle, especially if it involves a high disposable income.**

The most extraordinary contribution to this parcel of what could possibly pass for a collection of junior school essays in reply to Powell, ("motherhood is a good thing - discuss"), came from Tom Nankivell

## CARMEN LAWRENCE MP ON PARLIAMENT, PARLIAMENTARY BEHAVIOUR AND THE ROLE OF WOMEN MPS

Politicians have never registered so low in public opinion as they do today. Yet they have never worked harder nor been held so easily accountable. So why the public disquiet over MPs and their behaviour in parliament? Is it television? Our new age sensitivities? Or is a question of it all being too blokey for today's tastes? Carmen Lawrence MP takes a look and wonders whether having more women MPs will make a difference.

DATE : Thursday 17 August 2000  
TIME : 5.30 for 6.00pm  
VENUE : Clayton Utz Seminar Room,  
Level 34, 1 O'Connell Street,  
Sydney  
Light refreshments

FREE TO ASSOCIATES/ASSOCIATES' PARTNERS  
STUDENTS \$5/OTHERS \$10

RSVP: PH: (02) 9252 3366 FAX: (02) 9252 3360

OR mail@sdneyins.org.au

WEBSITE: www.sdneyins.org.au



# SHARAN BURROW

Sharan Burrow is the new ACTU President and only the second woman to be elected to that position. Born into a family with a long involvement in union struggles, Sharan Burrows became an organiser for the NSW Teachers' Federation and was President of the Bathurst Trades and Labour Council during the 1980s. She was elected Senior Vice-President of the NSW Teachers' Federation and became President of the Australian Education Union in 1992. In 1995 she was elected Vice-President of Educational International - the international organisation representing 24 million members worldwide.

**DATE** : Tuesday 29 August 2000  
**TIME** : 5.30 for 6.00pm  
**VENUE** : Clayton Utz Seminar Room,  
Level 34, 1 O'Connell Street,  
Sydney

FREE TO ASSOCIATES/ASSOCIATES' PARTNERS  
STUDENTS \$5/OTHERS \$10

RSVP: PH: (02) 9252 3366 FAX: (02) 9252 3360

OR mail@sydneyins.org.au

WEBSITE: www.sydneyins.org.au



(*Australian* 20 June). This gentleman's by-line describes him as "a government policy analyst" but his parody of an eccentric cause also demonstrates him to be a comic writer of the highest order. Thus he began by modestly placing militant childlessness in its proper historic context:

**Like the first abolitionists, the first feminists, the first gay activists and even the first Christians, today's early advocates of childless people will be attacked and dismissed as mavericks and extremists.**

As cases go it was not up to much. Parenthood "is simply a personal lifestyle choice" and the childless are being exploited by government to reward people who have children.

**These subsidies are fundamentally illiberal and inequitable because they discriminate against citizens not according to how much money they earn but according to the type of lifestyle they choose.**

There was more of the same, all of it a million miles from Powell's piece that cheerfully expressed her willingness to cough up the taxes to pay her share of society's investment in the next generation.

But for all his optimism that the childless "are growing in number, consciousness and confidence" from "the justness of our case" Nankivell gave the game away when he admitted that the oppression of the childless was not going to end soon, "the tyranny of the majority will see to that".

At least he didn't end with the lyrics of "We Shall Overcome".

But as with so much in the Sydney media in the end it all came back to the pontifications of a life-style columnist with Sally Loane having the last word, for the moment at least, (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 July). Loane reprised her first column and pointed with relief to the pro-children response in the mail it generated. She compared this to the "bleak undertow of inhumanity" in a book and www site she had discovered that includes information on childfree restaurants and hotels.

Perhaps Loane is still offended that all those people waiting to get their haircut refused to rise to their feet to acclaim the joys of motherhood when her four year old decided to scream her lungs out. Which rather makes Sian Powell's point; that some places suit kids and some don't and not all women want to be mums.

Imagine the outrage if Powell wrote something controversial.



# GERARD HENDERSON'S **MEDIA WATCH**

## BOB'S ODD AND ODIUS ODES

It seemed like a bad idea at the time. Nevertheless in early March 2000 the *Sydney Morning Herald* commenced publishing Bob Ellis' monthly odes. It started with an 122 line ode covering the month of February. The first six lines provide a glimpse of the flavour:

A month of tax, and little Aussie bleeders  
Hurling tampons at poor fraught John Howard,  
A rain of blood beneath which, as he cowered,  
He learned, or it was told him by Pru Goward,  
How gender politics oft hurt the man;  
It's best to blame Mike Wooldridge if you can.

With a start like this, you wonder why the *Herald* persisted with such appalling doggerel. But on it went. On and on. There was Ode to March (140 lines), Ode to April (120 lines) and Ode to May (150 lines).

It was the essential, alienated, Ellis. With all the predictable targets so beloved of the Leftie Luvvies. You know, Margaret Thatcher and the like as well as a reference to "one more bloody pointless year of sport" and, of course, the rhyming of John Howard with the word "coward". Yes, as original as that.

There was many a shocker as the Bard of Palm Beach tried valiantly to rhyme one line with another as he blundered on in search of an end. Set out below are a few examples:

- **February**  
A month when Beazley told us that a tax  
He hated, he would also keep, calm down, relax,  
I shan't be moved by anyone's canard  
To commonsense or logic, that's too hard.
- **March**  
It was the month when cuddly, cluey Telstra  
chairman Ziggy  
Said, "Fellow comrade workers, my announce-  
ment is a biggy".  
He paused to burn a hundred note and with  
it lit a ciggy,  
"Because we made time two billion clear last  
year we cut our prices  
And must now sack 10,000, since our profits  
are in crisis".
- **April**  
Sure votes for Bush in little Eilian,  
Another stolen child, like many an Australian,

That most Americans in freedom's name  
would rather  
Never spent another hour with his loved, but  
Cuban, father,  
But choicelessly should dwell for good in a  
country growing horridier  
Among his kooky relatives in mad, gun-  
toting Florida.

- **May**  
A month when Senate hopeful Hillary  
Rodham (No more thought guilty of the sin  
of Sodom),  
Got Clinton-lucky, as she would, of course,  
When cancer overtook her rival Rudi,  
Who then confessed he's shackled up with  
some Judy,  
Cursed, wept, withdrew, and filed for a divorce.

Readers of the *Sydney Morning Herald* awaited the coming of June with dread. However, fortunately, someone at the *Herald* pulled the plug. On 8 June 2000 Amanda Meade (writing in "The diary" column in *The Australian's* Thursday *Media* lift-out) reported that Bob Ellis "was told in a letter last week that his services were no longer required". Thank God. Ms Meade further commented that your man Ellis had hawked his (monthly) poetic verses to *The Australian's* editor Campbell Reid - only to receive another rejection. Thank God, again.

*Media Watch* has not seen the *Herald's* rejection letter which (apparently) was despatched to Ellis - but imagines it went something like this:

Bob Ellis, the Herald's run your odes for eons  
So often now, your name is up in neons.  
The problem's this, it's all a load of crap  
Readers are responding by taking a big nap  
On the Opinion Page, the first day of each  
month;  
You see, they know when bump is really  
bumph.  
So piss off for now, it's all become a farce,  
And as for June's ode, well stick it up your  
arse.

But hark. Word comes that Bob Ellis has found a resting place for his monthly odes in the *Sunday Age*. Commencing with June. Oh, God why has thou forsaken me/us/readers of the *Sunday Age*? We'll keep in touch if the Ellis verse gets any worse.

## H.R.H. STRIKES BACK

From New York comes news that Australian born *Time* art critic - and author of *The Fatal Shore* - Robert Hughes is also into *verse*. Not (sometimes) rhyming couplets as in the style of Bob Ellis. But rather ballads. Big ballads. You know, like Oscar Wilde's *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*. Hence the recent publication by Text Publishing of Robert Hughes: *The Ballad of Alan Bond: With homages to O.W.* The "O.W." is the only reference to Oscar Wilde in Robert Hughes' tome. Readers unfamiliar with "O.W." or, indeed, Oscar Wilde, might get the (false) impression that the style is all Mr Hughes'. The illustrations, however, are original and clever. They are done by *The Australian's* political cartoonist Bill Leak.

The essential problem with *The Ballad of Alan Bond* turns on the fact that it's not particularly funny. Nor is it accomplished satire. It commences noting that Alan Bond has been freed on parole for his serious crime:

**In West Australia's sunniest jail  
There is an empty cell,  
Once the abode of Alan Bond,  
Whom creditors know well;  
In impotence, they grind their teeth  
And damn his soul to hell.**

And the penultimate stanza ends much the same way:

**O, each man steals the thing he loves,  
And loves what he can get:  
Some do it with a ripping-bar,  
Some on the Internet,  
But Bondy did it on his ear,  
And he is laughing yet.**

All up, Robert Hughes only managed some 500 words - or 88 lines - of this. Not enough to sustain many Bill Leak illustrations. So Robert Hughes' "poetry" was run at around six lines a page - which made possible the reproduction of 13 Bill Leak drawings - plus the front cover.

Extracts from Robert Hughes's *The Ballad of Alan Bond* were published in *The Weekend Australian* on April Fool's Day 2000. Just shortly ahead of the outcome of Mr Hughes' very own appearance before the West Australian beak at Broome, in the State's north-west.

On Wednesday 10 May 2000, Robert Hughes was acquitted by a magistrate in the Broome Court - after having faced a charge of dangerous driving following a car accident in May 1999 in which Hughes and three occupants of the second car were seriously injured. The prosecution alleged that Hughes' vehicle was on the incorrect side of the road when the accident took place. Hughes told *Who* magazine (22 May 2000) that he had "no

recollection of what the hell happened" but maintained that he is "as careful a driver as your Aunt Matilda". For the record, *Media Watch* does not have an Aunt Matilda so cannot comment on this.

Since Hughes obviously has no recollection of the accident, he would have been well advised to have departed Broome gracefully. He could have thanked those who helped rescue him from the car wreck, expressed appreciation to police, fire and ambulance crews, acknowledged the efforts of medical staff and headed back to New York.

But that's not our Robert - as in Hyperbolic Robert Hughes. Or HRH. Instead HRH chose the occasion of his acquittal to have a go at all and sundry. He bagged:

- The prosecution - claiming it had regarded the accident as a "heaven-sent opportunity to do a bit of tall-poppy slaying". According to HRH, the prosecution team were "turkeys".
- The occupants of the car with which HRH's rented vehicle had collided - alleging they were "low life" and "dumb scum". According to HRH, "it's amazing what sort of low life you can run into on the road". This was a joke, apparently.
- The media - HRH criticised journalists for creating a media circus and blamed his predicament on the "vindictive conduct of the WA press".
- Fire fighters - it turned out that the first fighters who saved HRH's life had not appreciated the humour of his ((just-joking) allegation, made some months previously, that they had removed a tuna (or was it a trout?) from the back of the wreck. So HRH suggested that they could "shove the tuna up their tuna holes". Funny that.

But the "highlight" of HRH's post-acquittal comments turned on his conversation with an ABC Radio reporter, on 10 May 2000. Let's go to the (audio) tape:

*Robert Hughes: The thing that really surprised me was that the... these turkeys that the Director of Public Prosecution set up to go after me had a year to prepare their case and they did it so badly.*

*Reporter: Well, the Magistrate was very critical of the prosecution.*

*Robert Hughes: Yeah. He really gave him curry at the end of the... and the end of his summing up, which was indeed appropriate since one of them was an Indian gentleman.*

Reporter: In what way, appropriate?

Robert Hughes: Giving him curry.

Reporter: Oh. I see. I'm sorry.

Robert Hughes: You know.

Reporter: I'm sorry.

Apparently the ABC reporter was sorry, so sorry for having failed to pick HRH's "giving him curry" joke. You see, according to HRH, the magistrate gave "curry" to the "Indian gentleman". And wasn't that "appropriate"? Laugh now.

The only problem with this joke - if joke it be - is that the (alleged) Indian gentleman is, in fact, an Australian citizen. So just what is HRH on about? And would he run the same ethnic "joke" in, say, Manhattan? Almost certainly not.

On Saturday 13 May 2000 the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Weekend Australian* carried a lengthy letter-to-the-editor by Hughes. He made certain clarifications concerning his reported comments about the passengers in the other car and about the members of the Broome Volunteer Fire Department. But he did not seek to qualify his comments about the so-called "Indian gentleman" on the prosecution team who (allegedly) was given "curry" by the magistrate.

Now, Lord spare us, Robert Hughes is planning to write a book about his car accident in remote Western Australia. *Media Watch* offers this little ditty as a foreword:

*The Ballad of HRH: Or How Hyperbole Butchers Language: With many apologies to Oscar Wilde*

**From West Australia's north west coast  
There came the Fatal Bore.  
Acquitted now, but still quite keen  
To wage a verbal war:  
"Bring on the 'turkeys' and the 'scum',  
I'll give them plenty jaw."**

**Yes, each bore mauls the words they love  
Of this, there is no doubt.  
Some do it with an ethnic joke  
Some with a stinking trout.  
Our Hughesie did it without grace  
And lotsa verbal gout.**

## **GREAT (JOURNALISTIC) U-TURNS OF OUR TIME - CONTINUED**

And now it's time for Great-U-Turns Of Our Time.

**Paul Kelly**

- Paul Kelly on why Australia's political leaders are really a hopeless lot:

**The Australian people are the victims of a  
conspiracy - a betrayal by the political**

# **MARGARET SCOTT - A LIFE**

Margaret Scott is best known as a television personality from *Good News Week*. However, poetry and writing are her main preoccupation and her greatest achievement. A prominent figure in Tasmanian literary circles, Scott is originally from Bristol, England. Scott has just published both a novel and a work of non-fiction. *Family Album* (Random) is a novel based on Scott's discovery that her father (a member of religious sect called the British Israelites) she believed was an orphan, had actually known his family but told his children nothing. *Changing Countries* (Allen & Unwin) is a collection of stories, short fictions, essays and poems.

**DATE : Monday 7 August 2000**

**TIME : 5.00 for 5.30pm**

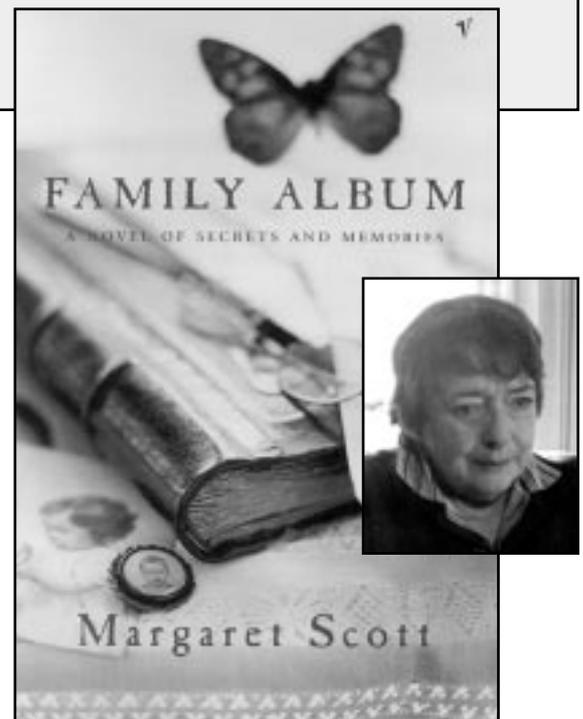
**VENUE : 41 Phillip Street, Sydney  
Light refreshments**

**FREE TO ASSOCIATES/ASSOCIATES' PARTNERS  
STUDENTS \$5/OTHERS \$10**

**RSVP: PH: (02) 9252 3366 FAX: (02) 9252 3360**

**OR mail@sydneyins.org.au**

**WEBSITE: www.sydneyins.org.au**



class against the best interests of the nation. It has been a long time since federal politics saw the combination of such a flawed prime minister as John Howard and such a weak Opposition leader as Kim Beazley. This is the most obvious feature of our politics. The source of the problem is the same in each case, yet there is a national conspiracy to deny the obvious.

Within a few weeks, Howard has managed to spook his own Government. The collapse in its voting support is totally self-inflicted. The Labor Party rarely lands a political punch on Howard. The truth is that Howard is the most knee-jerk, poll reactive, populist prime minister in the past 50 years. He has turned the leadership virtue of listening to community reaction into a desperate over-reaction to transitory opinion inflamed by tabloid headlines and talkback jocks. National Textiles was an accident just waiting to happen; the defect lies in Howard's approach to politics.

His opponent, Beazley, heading towards his fifth year as ALP leader, has failed to tell the Labor Party or the country what his leadership represents and what direction he plans for Australia's future. Labor seems to be locked into a defensive mind-set, so confident it can win the next election on Howard's flaws that it seems incapable, so far, of devising bold new policy. The entire country knows what Labor plans for the historic 2000 year - a relentless negative campaign against the GST, a tax it intends to keep. This is political fraud on a grand scale.

Paul Kelly - *The Weekend Australian*, 19-20 February 2000.

So there you have it - circa February 2000 - according to The Thought of Paul Kelly. John Howard is "the most knee-jerk, poll reactive, populist prime minister in the past 50 years". And Kim Beazley stands for "political fraud on a grand scale". And, yes, "there is a national conspiracy to deny the obvious". EXCEPT WHEN COURAGEOUS PAUL KELLY SPEAKS OUT.

- Paul Kelly on why Australia's political leaders today may be a hopeless lot but, then again, may not be hopeless at all. As told to Michael O'Reagan on ABC Radio National's *The Media Report*, 8 June 2000:

*Paul Kelly:* Well...politicians aren't any more dishonest today than what they used to be. They aren't any more incompetent today than what they used to be. Yet

there's been a massive loss of faith in the political system. The politicians are blamed essentially for virtually everything that happens these days, and one of the reasons this occurs I think is simply because the ratings of the politicians are going down, and the ratings of the talkback radio jockeys are going up, and they are related.

The talkback radio jockeys build up their sense of trust, their relationship with the community, their sense of confidence and credibility, and one of the reasons they do it is by blaming the politicians, attacking the political system, and sheeting home too many evils and ills back to the politicians. I think this is going to be very destructive particularly if this continues to go on during the course of, say, another generation.

Say that again? Fortunately, when talking to Michael O'Reagan, Paul Kelly did precisely that:

*Paul Kelly:* ... I'm suggesting that talkback radio is powerful, but I'm not suggesting that it's all powerful. And clearly, I think that there's got to be strong criticism of politicians and there's got to be strong criticism of political leaders when they don't cut the mustard. My own view is that they're not cutting the mustard much at all these days. I can hardly complain about talkback radio criticising the leaders when I have a pretty big slice about them myself.

Well, yes. Paul Kelly had been complaining about talkback radio hosts bagging political leaders - while he has been bagging them himself. So what is Paul Kelly really on about? You tell me.

#### Helen Darville

- Helen Darville (late of Demidenko fame) on why Deborah Lipstadt, who was sued for defamation by David Irving in the London High Court, should not be listened to:

Although some people would see a Hitler surrogate in this [Irving] arrogance, I don't. I see Churchill instead. Except the enemy isn't Germany any more, it's the USA. Apart from the fact that the enmity between Churchill and Roosevelt was notorious, Lipstadt's emotive book is a little like the out-of-place gilded eagle overlooking the US Embassy on Grosvenor Square. It wears its heart on its sleeve and Irving - like many Englishmen of his class and age - loathes what he considers unnecessary displays of feeling.

It is perhaps as well that Lipstadt has exercised the Defendant's right not to give evidence. *Denying the Holocaust* [i.e. Deborah Lipstadt's book] lacks rigor. She displays the yawning ignorance of Britain, important in any discussion focussed on Irving.

*Australian Style*, March 2000

- Helen Darville (late of Demidenko fame) on why revisionist writer David Irving should not be listened to:

Along with many other people, I gave Irving the benefit of the doubt. I did so in both this newspaper (March 4) and in *Australian Style* magazine.

[Justice Charles] Gray has now delivered his verdict, and, while he found for Irving on a few minor points and praised his work as a military historian, he agreed with Richard Rampton, QC, that - when it came to his writing and speaking about the Jewish fate in Nazi Europe - Irving displays all the characteristics of a Holocaust denier.

As someone who during the course of the [David Irving vs Deborah Lipstadt] trial - and at considerable personal cost - gave Irving a fair hearing, I believe that his views are bunk.

Helen Darville (*Courier Mail*, 20 April 2000) advising readers that her article dumping on David Irving represented "an attempt to sign off on the Holocaust". Well, that's something. And yet it's just half a decade since Dame Leonie Kramer and others presented Ms Demidenko/Darville with the prestigious Miles Franklin literary award and, in the process, praised her historical understanding.

## **P. P. McGUINNESS**

P. P. McGuinness on why a little "solution" of kero in the bath is no bad thing:

Kerosene baths, indeed! I have never been more appalled at deliberate misreporting than in this affair of the Riverside nursing home and the assault on Bronwyn Bishop. Let us be clear. The supposedly scabies-infected residents of the home were given baths in water to which had been added 30 millilitres of kerosene - that is, according to my kitchen measuring spoons, exactly two tablespoons. Whatever the capacity of the average bath, it is certainly more than 30 litres - that is, the kerosene would have amounted to less than one part in a thousand of the resulting mixture.

This is a lot less horrifying than the suggestion, recklessly advanced at every point in this debate, that the old people were bathed in pure kerosene. I doubt that the mixture would be toxic even if swallowed - and swallowing one millilitre (that is a 15th of a tablespoon) of kerosene would require the swallowing of a litre of fluid?

First up, experienced nurses tell me that such a weak solution of kerosene in water is quite a good, as well as cheap, remedy for scabies. And I remember that kero was considered a useful treatment for head lice and pubic crabs - fortunately I never had need of either treatment.

*Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 March 2000.

With all the nonsense, and deliberate misrepresentation of the truth, about the so-called kerosene baths, it is good at least there's renewed concern for the welfare of the aged. It is a scandal that the weak and defenceless in our society are shoved out of sight and forgotten. In some cases, when people are fragile and suffering from Alzheimer's disease - the modern politically correct term for senility - it becomes simply too difficult for families to care for them, and the decay of organised religion and the abandonment of Christian charity in favour of New Age spirituality and prating priests has dried up the supply of voluntary helpers.

On the matter of kerosene a number of people have pointed out to me what I knew already, that, of course, kerosene is not soluble in water, so it was careless of me to have referred to a "solution" of one part in 1,000 of kerosene in water. I began by writing mixture, and slipped into the incorrect term. This is perhaps because I have spent more time in the kitchen than most, and partly as a result of my love of French cuisine have many times made a mayonnaise of a vinaigrette sauce, both of which involve the suspension of tiny droplets of oil in water or vinegar. I should have written "emulsion".

*Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 March 2000.

So there you have it. P.P. made a mistake - but only because he knew more than most (all?) of us. It was much the same in late 1999 when PP received some coverage in Britain for (falsely) alleging that the various Johnsons who write for *The Spectator* are all

related. You know - Paul, Boris, Frank and the like. P.P. corrected this howler - but only after clarifying that the mistake had been caused by his "retentive memory for both facts and ideas". So there.

## WOUNDED KNEE - HEART'S OKAY

Meanwhile in case you're wondering why your man P.P. did not walk across the Sydney Harbour Bridge for reconciliation on Sunday 28 May 2000, here is the word from P.P. himself:

**I shall not be marching, walking, or otherwise participating in tomorrow's walk across the Harbour Bridge. This is not because I disapprove of the event, or wish it ill - it is mainly because as a result of a painful knee condition I cannot. This is not an apology, but I have found that since many of the advocates of reconciliation are prepared to misrepresent the views and actions of those who do not share their emotional outpourings it is probable that my absence, if it were noticed, would be interpreted as insulting to Aborigines.**

*Sydney Morning Herald, 27 May 2000.*

## PIERS A. NAMES UNREPRESENTATIVE AUSTRALIANS

Well, at least P.P. has a crook knee. *Daily Telegraph* columnist Piers Akerman took out the easier option by demanding that no one be allowed to walk across the bridge. Thundered our Piers (DT 4 May 2000).

**NSW Premier Bob Carr gave his permission for these unrepresentative Australians to close the Harbour Bridge so they could monopolise its powerful symbolism. The permit should never have been given and now should be withdrawn.**

According to reports, the allegedly "unrepresentative Australians" who rejected Mr Akerman's advice and walked across the Sydney Harbour Bridge on Sunday 28 May 2000 included Federal Coalition Ministers Philip Ruddock and John Herron - among other Liberal politicians.

## MIRANDA D. SORTS IT OUT

Meanwhile in the lead-up to Reconciliation Day, Piers Akerman's colleague Miranda Devine indicated in her column that she had very much kept her eyes on the ball. On 25 May 2000 Ms Devine came directly to the point:

**Somewhere in Sydney someone is hoarding black recycling bins. Other people's black recycling bins. Mine, to be specific. Twice in as many weeks one of**

**my two bins has disappeared. Always, of course, the pristine one used for newspapers.**

**Now the smashing glass sounds which announce the arrival of the recycling nazis also transmit little stabs of stomach panic. Have to rush out and save the bin before it gets nicked. It's a jungle out there in the 'burbs.**

**According to a straw poll of workmates, recycling bin burglary is all the rage in Sydney. From Canterbury to Kellyville, residents report the losses. The pain varies, depending on council generosity. North Sydney council, one of the most draconian, charges \$10 for replacement bins.**

Gee wiz. With a replacement cost of tops \$10, it's a wonder that Ms Devine doesn't spend the night on the street next to her favourite, pristine black recycling bins. Just to be sure. Then again, if it was not for the activities of bin thieves, your Miranda might struggle to find a suitable-topic-to-write-on every now and then. Ms Devine returned to the scene of the (recyclable) crime two days later with the comment that "Sydney Recycling Bin Burglary Crisis continues". She then reported that "Laura from Canterbury...may have solved the mystery of where her bin has gone". Into an (unnamed) home garage, it seems. Gosh. But, according to Miranda D. the bin situation is a lot better in London. Thanks for that.

## FOLLOWING THE ROYAL WE

ABC TV's *7.30 Report* is another media outlet to have its priorities just right. Take, for example, the program's all but breathless account of Queen Elizabeth II's visit to the town of Bourke on 22 March 2000. This is how intrepid reporter Geoff Hutchinson previewed one (possible) part of the trip:

**Geoff Hutchison: Nothing had been overlooked and on the day when big stories were perhaps hard to find, the 7.30 Report can reveal exclusively that this is where the Queen will stop should the need arise. It's the Deputy Mayor's house.**

**Wayne O'Mally: Part of the protocol is a rest room situated if need be. As to what happens there, I am totally unaware, Geoff. (Laughs).**

And, alas, there was more as the ABC reported just what has taken place at the Deputy Mayor's house:

**Geoff Hutchison: There was one short delay in proceedings - once again, many thanks to the Deputy Mayor for the nice hand**

towels - and then it was off to the Aboriginal community radio station.

How twee.

## NOW A WORD FROM KYLIE'S DAD - OR IS IT?

While on the subject of twee, consider the evident humour of *The Adelaide Review* - edited by Christopher Pearson. Or has our man Christopher been hoaxed by an imposter?

It seems that, unbeknown to the editor, *The Adelaide Review* is the victim of a clever hoax. It involves a certain Kenneth Minogue, the New Zealand born Australian who worked for many years on the staff of the London School of Economics. Those who have had occasion to phone Professor Minogue over the years will recall that, from time to time, his answering machine has carried the message that he is not Kylie Minogue's father.

But who is Ken Minogue? Well, he is a fine, conservative inclined, political philosopher who is known to advocate the cause of lower taxation and to proclaim the belief that government should keep its (regulatory) hands out of as many areas as possible. Fair enough.

Now to the hoax. *The Adelaide Review* printed an article written by a Ken Minogue under the title "London Letter". Here Professor Minogue railed against the way governments raise tax. In passing, he commented that "British politics is now conducted in an arcane jargon designed to fool the people; nothing is quite what it seems". Sure. Right on, etc.

But hang on a minute. KM's article in the April 2000 issue of *The Adelaide Review* contains the following declaration: "Publication of this writing has been assisted by the Commonwealth Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body."

There are two possibilities. Perhaps someone pretending to be Ken Minogue - perhaps even claiming to be Kylie's father - is planting material in *The Adelaide Review*. Alternatively *The Adelaide Review* is having a joke by implying that the London based Ken Minogue is being financially assisted to write "London Letter" per favour of the hard-working Aussie taxpayer.

Stay tuned.

# CHILDREN UNDER OATH

Dr Anne Graffam Walker is an internationally acclaimed forensic linguist who specialises in the evidentiary questioning of children. Once expected to be seen and not heard, children today are listened to by the courts and their causes are taken seriously. But how to interpret the way children respond in a system of interrogatory methods and under the glare of adult attention can be problematic. Whether as witnesses or victims, children now are frequently seen at court.

Dr Walker is a former court reporter who holds an MS and PhD in Sociolinguistics from Georgetown University. She was responsible for the first national convention on language and law (funded by the National Science Foundation) and is the author of Handbook on Questioning Children. Dr Walker's visit to Australia has been sponsored by NAPCAN - the National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect.

**TOPIC** : *Dangerous Assumptions When Questioning Children*

**DATE** : Wednesday 23 August 2000

**TIME** : 5.30 for 6.00pm

**VENUE** : 41 Phillip Street, Sydney  
Light Refreshments

FREE TO ASSOCIATES/ASSOCIATES' PARTNERS  
STUDENTS \$5/OTHERS \$10

RSVP: PH: (02) 9252 3366 FAX: (02) 9252 3360

OR mail@sdneyins.org.au

WEBSITE: www.sdneyins.org.au

