MAY 2007  NO. 436  (VOLUME LI, NUMBER 5)

EDITOR
P.P. McGuinness
ppmcg@ozemail.com.au

LITERARY EDITOR
Les Murray

DEPUTY EDITOR
George Thomas

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
Paul Comrie-Thomson

OFFICE MANAGER
Jean King

CHAIRMAN OF
MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
Elizabeth Prior Jonson

Quadrant (ISSN 0033-5002) is published ten times a year by Quadrant Magazine Co. Inc., 437 Darling Street, Balmain NSW 2041. (ABN 26 463 650 465.) Phone (02) 9818 1155. Fax: (02) 9818 1422. E-mail address: quadrantmonthly@ozemail.com.au. Postal correspondence: Quadrant, PO Box 82, Balmain NSW 2041. Subscriptions: $70 for one year (students $65) including GST. Advertising rates on request.

Minimum payments to contributors: $120 articles, stories and reviews, $50 poetry. Unsolicited manuscripts cannot be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed envelope with sufficient postage. Quadrant cannot accept responsibility for lost or damaged manuscripts.

Printed by F.L. Press, 1–9 Glebe Point Road, Glebe NSW 2037; phone (02) 9660 2033.

The views expressed in Quadrant are those of individual contributors and are not necessarily shared by the editors or editorial advisers.

www.quadrant.org.au

EDITORIAL  2 Unions and Industrial Relations in the New Era

LETTERS  5 Greg Melleuish, George Parsons, Margaret Rodgers, Sandy Grant, Paul Hartigan, Carlos d’Abrera, M.J.A. Moloney, Brian Langevad, Frank Pulsford, Michael Kile, Stephen Armstrong

HISTORY  11 The True Genesis of Amnesty International Claudio Véliz

FOREIGN AFFAIRS  26 Was David Hicks Indoctrinated? Tom Frame

TRAVEL  30 Voyeurismo Roger Sandall

DEFENCE  33 Why is Australia Anti-War? Michael O’Connor

RELIGION  38 Dawkins and the Morality of the Bible David Hodgson

DEVINE  48 Bradman the Orthodox Frank Devine

LITERATURE  52 André Malraux’s Great Adventure Patricia Anderson

FIRST PERSON  70 Schweik in New Guinea Max Teichmann

STORIES  73 The Quest for the Male Lesbian Patrick McCauley

BOOKS  86 I Thought of Archimedes Peter Coleman

P.O.  88 Life Class by Brenda Niall Peter Ryan

RYAN  90 Arndt’s Story by Peter Coleman, Selwyn Cornish & Peter Drake Ross Garnaut

POETRY  92 Weighing Up Australian Values by Brian Howe Tom Frame

94 Meeting George Orwell Peter Ryan

36: Alang—The Graveyard of Ships J.R. McRae

37: Mother and Son Peter Skrzynecki

51: Tyburn Peter Kocan

69: Anchor Walk E.M. Test

85: Five haiku Gary Hotham

93: Out of our depth Anna Buck

96: Bat Trang Road Leon Trainor
What is happening to trade unions and the workforce? Certainly we know that union membership is continuing to decline—that is hard evidence derived from the Australian Bureau of Statistics labour force survey. But it also seems on the less reliable evidence (since they need further interpretation) of opinion surveys that there is considerable unhappiness in the workforce about the government’s workplace legislation. What is the connection between the two?

It is clear that Sharan Burrow, the president of the ACTU, hasn’t a clue as to what is really going on. Twelve months ago she confidently asserted that an increase in union membership much less significant than the more recent decrease showed that “working Australians are voting with their feet and turning to unions to help them protect their job security, wages, and basic entitlements in the face of the Howard Government’s industrial relations changes” (SMH, March 29, 2006). If she were consistent—which of course is unlikely—she would now be admitting that there is no connection at all between union membership and attitudes to the legislation, or even that the more worried about their jobs they are the less people care about union membership.

This last is perhaps the most suggestive piece of information we have had about unionism for quite some time. That is, people clearly believe that unions have no useful role at all in protecting their working conditions and so on, but rather see the government as the guarantor of their security—and many now seem to feel that the federal government has done the wrong thing by encouraging a greater variety of possibilities in the workplace. The unions are irrelevant, except to the extent that they are generating a great deal of misinformation about the meaning of the new legislation and trying to spread fear and loathing in the community. In a word, they are conducting a dishonest campaign in the hope that people can be persuaded to confuse the utility of unionism with their own welfare.

The fact that union membership is in long-term decline, especially in the private sector, is very worrying to the unions. It would seem that they have no real future as far as the workforce and social policy are concerned. The only segment of the workforce where they have any substantial membership is now the public sector, still the most secure avenue of employment, and where the unions can exercise a considerable degree of coercion through their political arm, the Labor Party. Unfortunately this means that for the private sector there is increasing divergence between the interests of unions and many potential Labor voters—a fact which has been fully understood by John Howard, who has won an increasing vote in once Labor electorates. Since the unions are now most dependent on the public sector, and a substantial proportion of these employees are antagonistic to the traditional Labor voters, who are (again as Howard has realised) interested in upward mobility and economic independence, unions can now for the most part be regarded as antagonistic to the traditions of Labor. (Ms Burrow is of course a school teacher, an occupation traditionally devoted to extracting privileges from government and peddling ideology.)

It is clear that the government has been pretty unsuccessful in conveying its message about the benefits of the new legislation to the workforce, which is definitely fearful about the new system. Part of this can be attributed to the barrage of propaganda from the unions and their sympathisers in the media, the education system and in public sector employment. A large part is the government’s own fault in making the legislation so complex that few people have had the opportunity to familiarise themselves with it in detail, even to the extent of building in an excessive degree of regulation of business which the unions have not cared to understand and business has not yet fully grasped. Indeed, one of the many faults of the legislation is that it has introduced more rather than less regulation.

But what the unions have grasped is that by dimin-
lishing the power of the institutions like the Industrial Relations Commission which they long ago gained effective control of and which bolstered their own role, the legislation has cut short their future as coercive associations. It is incidentally interesting that the New South Wales Industrial Relations Commission has, unlike its federal equivalent which was deprived of the power by High Court decision, continued to believe that it can punish its critics for contempt—that is, for criticising it. Such a threat was made to the Workplace Relations Minister, Joe Hockey, quite recently. The issue which elicited his criticism was its conduct of an inquiry into an industrial matter which was none of its business, and which it was subsequently told to abandon by the Federal Court. Perhaps it is a pity that the commission did not proceed against Hockey, since there is considerable doubt as to whether the original absence of a separation between judicial and arbitral power in New South Wales remains; the High Court would be likely to overrule the New South Wales commission’s pretensions to exercise the power of punishment for contempt without resort to a real court.

If the Labor Party should win the next federal election its leader, Kevin Rudd, has promised that it will get rid of the Australian Workplace Agreements which are a central feature of the new system. It is hard to make much sense of such a pledge when the unions are continuing to decline in power and membership—although of course the unions do retain considerable power in the Labor Party if not in the community. It is of the nature of a last throw, since another term of office for the Coalition would entrench the new system to the extent of being irreversible. But no matter what Mr Rudd promises, unless he manages to reintroduce some form of compulsory unionism there is no reason why the decline in union membership should not continue. The workforce may not trust the new legislation, but neither does it trust the unions.

Inevitably, Labor will ultimately have to subordinate the unions to its structure rather than vice versa. This means that it would need to depend on some aspects of the new legislation to re-regulate the labour market to its own preferences. The High Court has now made it clear that the corporations power is virtually limitless (and the Constitution meaningless, as discussed in our editorial of January-February 2007); the old conciliation and arbitration structure is as dead as the dodo.

In their desperation to hang on to the remains of their power, the unions will be virtually exhausting their resources in the campaign against the new system at the next election. It will be a last throw of the dice. If the Howard government retains power the unions will be at the end of their tether—with membership in continual decline, and their treasuries empty. But it will make no difference whatever to the workforce, which will be guaranteed security to a much greater degree than the critics of the legislation will admit, and with no interest in union membership.

What the unions dislike most about the new legislation is that by destroying most of their beloved structure of complex award conditions, with their favourite tactic of pattern bargaining, and encouraging direct discussion between employees and employers about wages and working conditions, it undermines the key role they established under the old arbitration system. It is obvious that it makes sense for the two parties to agree amongst themselves as to the mix of working hours, and whether hourly wage rates can be arranged to incorporate holiday and other allowances or these defined separately. The argument traditionally has been that the two parties are of such unequal power that first the unions and then the state had to intervene. But this is not always the case. It is clear that there are some skills which are in such demand as a result of the expansion of particular industries that workers are in a privileged position to demand higher wages and better conditions, and there are large segments of the labour market in which there is considerable mobility and in which wage levels (however they are defined) act to adjust available labour supply to demand.

But as is often pointed out as if it were a fundamental discovery, workers are human beings and are not always able to bargain from a secure position. This is why unions traditionally resist downsizing of workforces and indeed reduction of real wages when labour market conditions deteriorate. But it is well known to economists that frequently the main role of unions has been to increase unemployment by resisting adjustment of real wages, and to maintain employment for their own members at the expense of the rest of the labour force.

The more they decline as a proportion of the workforce, the more union power is devoted to depriving other sections of the labour force of employment to the benefit of their own members. When unionism was more general and the determination to maintain money wages as in the great Depression was more naive, the workers lucky enough to keep their jobs experienced substantial rises in real wages as prices fell—lower real wages would have more equitably spread income and allowed a more rapid recovery in profits and hence employment.

What unions cannot do is underwrite both wages for their members and total employment (as well as the wages of non-unionists). Nor can government achieve this through old-fashioned Keynesian policies—the best they can hope for is inflation which will lower the level of real wages and temporarily facilitate increasing employment. What government can do, however, more effectively than unions, is to underwrite and legislate for wages and conditions, and share out the burden which its
policies impose on the community as a whole. There is a strong case for some government underwriting of living standards (within the limits of available product) by taxation and social benefits. Government can do this far more efficiently than unions, as well as more equitably. Milton Friedman’s old proposal for a guaranteed minimum income, to be achieved through negative taxation (benefits) to those below a certain income has much to be said for it. However there are many complexities in any such system, not least the problem of the minority who will always bludge on any welfare system.

However, there has been little serious debate in Australia about the working of the new workplace relations system. The unions do not care for debate, and prefer scare-mongering. This presents a very great difficulty for the Howard government, since a large proportion of the workforce has become accustomed to the structure of wage plus award-style conditions, including standard overtime and penalty rates, and either cannot conceive of trade-offs between elements in this structure or combine their fears with a belief that somehow the old structures in some way guarantee security of employment. Of course the truth is that there have been huge changes in the structure of the labour force as a result of economic change over even the last twenty years.

These basic fears are part of the system of folk-beliefs about the economic system of which adherence to manufacturing protectionism on the old model is part. It is all too common to hear fears being expressed that our manufacturing sector is dwindling away with the loss of jobs to evil competitors like China and other developing countries. (It is surprising how common this nonsense is amongst those who claim to be interested in the welfare and development of poor countries; these countries can only escape poverty by following the path of industrialisation and low-cost manufacturing.) Unions are closely involved in this line, which is essentially about freezing the obsolescent industrial structures whence they drew their strength originally—the great contribution of the Hawke government in the 1980s and early 1990s was to move away from low-growth protectionism towards genuine economic development appropriate for a high-income country like Australia. Despite the doom-mongers of the era, our present prosperity (and our ability to deal with environmental issues) is based on precisely the decline of traditional manufacturing industry and the growth of both mining and high-tech industries, as well as services. Sophisticated manufacturing still thrives.

The great challenge to the Howard government, which it may not have fully understood, is that it has presented the community with changes to the industrial relations system which relate to their most basic fears and insecurity. It is not true that unions and the award system have been the mainstay of employment security as well as wages and related benefits, rather they have actively harmed employment and real income growth, but probably most people in employment in Australia believe hazily that there is a connection. And while the great success of the Howard government’s economic policies has been precisely falling unemployment and rising real wages, this has really given the beneficiaries more reason to fear the loss of what they have. Unionism has little if anything to do with it. Few people have any real understanding of risk, let alone risk/benefit trade-offs.

In the great period of Hawke’s prime ministership (when Paul Keating thrived by merely doing what his Treasury advisers told him to do—it is frequently forgotten that Keating never wanted to be Treasurer and had to be forced into the shadow portfolio by Bill Hayden) the electorate did not really understand what Hawke, with the support of a strong front bench and a supportive public service, was really doing. But they did remember the high unemployment of the 1970s and early 1980s, as well as the inflation and high interest rates which were the legacy of the Whitlam government, and they did not want to go there again. The middle-class ideologues in the universities were constantly denouncing the Hawke government for acting rationally and effectively. Rational economic policy, under the name “economic rationalism”, became a term of abuse amongst the Left and the unions, and their ignorant cheer squads, which had done so much harm to the Australian economy in previous years.

Fortunately for the Australian people and economy Hawke was able to sell his agenda to them; and even after the destruction of Labor’s most successful prime minister in history not too much harm could be done by Keating.

The great problem for John Howard is to find a way, not to sell his industrial relations policy to the electorate—this is probably impossible, as with the GST—but to persuade it that he should be re-elected despite the Workplace Relations Act. That will be his greatest test. It will also be a necessary learning experience for Kevin Rudd, who if he can last the distance and not “do a Latham” might well make an acceptable prime minister after the election of 2010.
THE HISTORY SUMMIT

SIR: I was interested to read John Hirst’s response (April 2007) to Keith Windschuttle’s Latham Lecture (January-February 2007). As a good historian Dr Hirst would want me to correct some significant errors in his letter. These are as follows.

In his list of three questions from the Summit’s list of questions he cites one of them as follows: “Why were the Australian colonies so prosperous?” Now Dr Hirst would know that in the report of the Summit sub-committee the actual question was, “What was the basis of Australia’s prosperity? How was the prosperity distributed?” What was a rather innocuous question has become a rather leading question designed to allow teachers to go on about the evils of capitalism.

Dr Hirst says that the questions are designed to remedy “the partial treatment of subjects now so common”. He quotes the war question as an example. The sub-committee recommended that there be fourteen questions and that only eight of them needed to be treated. In fact it would be possible for a teacher to exclude Australia at war from what he or she taught. It would be possible for a teacher to exclude any political or economic history and to concentrate exclusively on questions regarding identity, race and gender.

Dr Hirst claims that his plan was introduced from the chair by him “without any prior consultation with anyone”. However, on the night before the Summit, Dr Hirst approached me and told me that he had discussed my paper with a number of people and that they had told him that they believed that it contained too much material, a criticism that was subsequently raised in the session that Dr Hirst chaired. Dr Hirst had, on his own admission, certainly “consulted” a number of people prior to the Summit.

Dr Hirst makes some interesting comments regarding the “left” orientation of both the Summit sub-committee and the questions and the milestones that it has produced. He states “it will be a very difficult job to find in it either a left-wing or right-wing bias”. Again the question cited above on prosperity indicates its left-leaning bias. Moreover its milestones contain not only well-known left-wing obsessions such as the Moratorium, the Whitlam dismissal and Mabo, but also exclude important events such as the floating of the dollar by the Hawke government.

It is interesting that the document produced by the Summit sub-committee was sent to Summit participants with a request that they treat it as confidential. As no participant signed a confidentiality agreement they are under no obligation to do so. Given that so much of the detail regarding the questions was already in the public domain, one can only wonder what the motivation was behind this request. The Australian History Summit has already produced a fair bit of mythology. It is good that Keith Windschuttle is on the case as he has a well-deserved record of “keeping the historian bastards honest”.

George Parsons,
Department of Modern History,
Macquarie University, NSW.

THE SYDNEY ANGLICANS

SIR: Quadrant is highly valued and admired by its readership. It is a journal with a sound record of insightful comment that can usually be relied upon to avoid the biases of the left-wing commentariat. Each issue of your journal finds its way into our office, where there is competition to read it unless it is immediately snaffled by the person at the top of our organisation, which is what usually happens.

Imagine our surprise, then, and our disappointment, when we read the article in your March edition, “The Puritan Anglicans of Sydney”. Every organisation should be ready to receive and consider the criticism of others. But such critique is most effective, and valuable, when it is accurate and based on solid fact.

The errors in this article, apparently accepted so readily by your editorial staff, are what is so surprising from a journal of such integrity.

HISTORIANS AND SLAVERY

SIR: I enjoyed reading Keith Windschuttle’s “Abolition of the Slave Trade: The Australian Connection” (April 2007), but I do wish Mr Windschuttle would conserve some of his ammunition for more serious targets. The article reminds me of the late Professor Pigou’s review of Keynes: “What is true is not new and what is new is not true.”

It is not true that historians no longer mention Phillip’s anti-slavery declaration. I have taught it to students at Sydney, Melbourne and Macquarie for over thirty years and a few e-mails confirm that most of my colleagues who teach early Australia also deal with the issue. Mr Windschuttle mentions historians who either ignore the subject or belittle its importance but they are clearly in a minority. Similarly, convicts were not slaves and Mr Windschuttle is correct to attack those who advance such nonsense. However, a few minutes in a library reveal clearly that this is a discredited minority view which was attacked and destroyed in the 1980s and 1990s. If there is any consensus it is closer to Mr Windschuttle than he might like.

Greg Melleuish,
Figtree, NSW.
There is no space to mention everything. Here are three examples.

The writer makes much of Cardinal George Pell sharing Christmas lunch with Archbishop Peter Jensen and his family. It is true that there is respect and friendship between those two gentlemen. It is also true the Cardinal has dined with Archbishop and Mrs Jensen and their family. But how is it that your writer turned it into a Christmas meal? For effect? Or because he doesn’t really know much at all about his subject matter?

The charge that “communion at St Andrew’s is now distributed from a moveable trolley” is a slur on the expertise and fine taste of the former Dean of Sydney and the heritage architect who worked with him in the restoration of the Cathedral and chose the contemporary-styled communion table.

As a member of the Chapter of St Andrew’s I long for the day when we don’t have to spend so much of our Chapter meeting time talking about the preservation of our beautiful Edmund Blackett-designed Cathedral. It is simply not true that “the current diocesan leadership has no apparent interest in such things”.

The article at hand could be disputed paragraph-by-paragraph, though to do so would be interminable. I conclude with a question: Who is “John Russell”? Why on this article has Quadrant departed from its usual editorial practice of supplying some C.V. comment on its writers? That is not the case in other articles in this issue. Perhaps “John Russell” is determined to ensure that his errors bolster the anti-Jensenite ideology of his critique rather than being committed to accuracy, which may get in the way of his charges. In future, Mr Editor, at least seek a reader who will verify your articles for their accuracy.

Margaret Rodgers,
Archbishop of Sydney’s Media Officer,
Sydney, NSW.

SIR: Sydney Anglicans are well-used now to the epithet “fundamentalist”. However, I found it hard to learn from John Russell’s article, littered as it was with such terms of abuse as “ultra-radical clique”, “blank and intolerant Calvinism”, “quirky separatist”, and my personal favourite, “quasi-Leninist tactics”. I guess I’d better go and brief our secret Anglican hit-squad! His intemperate language made me wonder about his accusation of intolerance from others. Something about pots and kettles!

I also discovered a number of disturbing errors in his article. For example, the “prominent diocesan ideologue” Rev. Gordon Cheng was ordained in Melbourne, has never been a rector of a Sydney Anglican church, nor has he served on any Sydney diocesan or synodical committee whatsoever. He has had the grand total of one article and one book review published in our diocesan newspaper, and posts on the diocesan website discussion forums, where people often express disagreement with him. He’s still my friend though!

Second, despite the alleged hostility to buildings, where we suggest “rain-shelters” should come in second place behind caring for people, St Andrew’s Cathedral has recently been beautifully restored at enormous cost. Locally, our own pro-Cathedral of St Michael’s in Wollongong has recently concluded a positive agreement with the New South Wales Heritage Office to ensure the long-term care of the historic buildings here.

Third, Mr Russell’s comment that Cranmer was “deeply influenced by John Calvin” is rebutted by Diarmaid MacCulloch (in Thomas Cranmer), whom Russell himself cites. Speaking of Cranmer, MacCulloch says:

Too often the description of “Calvinist” is lazily applied to the Edwardian Church and its formularies in the Forty-Two Articles of 1553, ignoring the fact that throughout the reign, Calvin was a middle-ranking theologian far away, who was consistently ill-informed about what was going on in England. He was respected by his English counterparts, but not in any sense central to their thinking.

Fourth, we have no idea if Henry Thornton’s reply to Wilberforce suggesting the lottery as the next target for abolition after the slave trade was “grave”, or jovial as the histories I have read suggest. Certainly the context was celebration at the evangelical-led victory against the slave trade. It’s also true that many commentators—secular as well as religious—now think that gambling—Russell’s “simple pleasure of ordinary people”—has become a miserable blight on our society.

Fifth, Russell erroneously claims that the “Australian link with the Evangelical movement starts with the Reverend Samuel Marsden”. However any decent amateur historian would know what the Australian Dictionary of Biography confirms that the first chaplain to the Colony, Rev. Richard Johnson, was an evangelical here before Marsden.

Sixth, Russell claims that except for Armidale, “Most other Australian Anglicans have erected ‘no trespassing’ signs against their ‘Sydney’ cousins” and that in reply, “young Sydney-sponsored enthusiasts set up ‘Bible-based’ churches” in these other places, funded by a “lot of money (presumably from diocesan slush funds)”. Does Mr Russell have any shred of evidence of this latter monetary slander? And is he aware, as I am, of multiple evangelical clergy who have come from Sydney and are now serving, for example, in the dioceses of Adelaide, Canberra-Goulburn, Melbourne, Northern Territory,
Perth, and Tasmania?

Seventh, Russell claims that the Sydney diocese’s “relationship with the rest of the Anglican communion is on a knife edge”. He then slyly tries to narrow this by saying that the promotion of openly gay clergy and bishops and so on “in most Anglo-Saxon areas of the church is resolutely opposed by Sydney”. Perhaps he is unaware of the racism implicit in this statement, which disregards non-Anglos, who comprise the majority of Anglicans worldwide. They reside in nations in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and most of them join with Sydney Anglicans in this opposition.

Eighth, Russell’s claim of anti-Catholic sectarianism from Sydney Anglicans is rebutted by his own examples of the personal friendliness between Archbishops Pell and Jensen, despite their openly acknowledged and significant differences in matters of theology.

Any student of journalism knows it is easy to quote someone out of context. So I also took the trouble to look up the context of the selective quotes provided by Mr Russell.

For example, he rubbished Gordon Cheng for saying of Cranmer, Ridley and Latimer, that “these men believed exactly what we believe” and he implied this meant we must support Cranmer’s sad involvement in the state-sponsored repression and execution of religious opponents at the time. However, in his very next sentence, Mr Cheng detailed the particular beliefs we share with Cranmer:

They believed that the authority of the church must come under the authority of Scripture. That is, that we are to be governed in our faith by the Bible alone. They denied the authority of the Pope, or any human ... to give divinely binding interpretation. They believed ... that we are freely made right with God only though faith in the death of Jesus. Accordingly, they denied any contribution to our own standing before God from our own good works, or from religious observance of the Mass, rituals, or any other church ceremony.

I hasten to add that despite our “quasi-Leninist” tendencies, I know of no Sydney Anglican clergyman who believes we should torture those with whom we disagree, indeed our Synod has been active in unanimously calling for a juster treatment of a Muslim like David Hicks.

Mr Russell also quotes Phillip Jensen as saying Catholics are “lost in a sea of good work and popery and needed to be evangelised and converted”. It took me some research to discover this un-footnoted reference among a work of 175 pages. When I did, I wondered if Mr Russell had actually bothered to read the whole book for himself, or was just relying on sensational extracts sourced from elsewhere. For I discovered that his quote referred directly to how Protestants thought thirty years earlier, when he also noted that Roman Catholics thought Protestants were outside the true church.

Mr Russell’s other quote from Jensen occurs later in his book. There in full context, Mr Jensen notes many “welcome changes” in Roman Catholicism, but also says, “As an organisation, Roman Catholicism continues to be sub-Christian in its doctrine and practice”. Later in conclusion, Mr Jensen says, “It is always hard to distinguish between the person and the ideology ... Roman Catholics can certainly be Christian—Roman Catholicism is not.” Mr Russell may not like this conclusion. And certainly Mr Jensen asks evangelicals to speak the truth somewhat directly. But he also calls us to live in peace and harmony in our personal relationships.

At a personal level, I was amused as a local to discover that the Illawarra scraped in as part of Mr Russell’s putative Bible Belt heartland for Sydney, full of “aspirational Puritan families”. Really!? Yet one thing Mr Russell did get right was the evangelical focus on the damaging effects of sin and the atoning death of Christ. So I would welcome it, at Easter, if aspirational Puritans (or bored hedonists or overworked materialists or shocked Catholics) down here cared to visit us to check this out.

In conclusion, I am tempted to re-apply to Mr Russell your Quadrant editorial comment about Richard Dawkins, that, “Unfortunately, he has allowed his hatred of religion [in Russell’s case, of the Sydney Anglicans] to lead him into excessive one-sidedness, and a demonstration of his own ignorance of many relevant issues”.

Sandy Grant,
Senior Minister,
St Michael’s Cathedral,
Wollongong, NSW.

SCIENCE AND RELIGION

SIR: In your March editorial you say, “Those who like to speculate that there are avenues to knowledge other than those offered by science are having themselves on ... [though] this does not stop the many prattlers on the ABC who talk about the ‘search for meaning’, the numinous or the spiritual.”

Your reverence for science as the path to knowledge is not shared by the scientists themselves. In The Human Touch, Michael Frayn points out that scientists are:

deply divided about what science and its laws are. In the course of the last hundred years, since the beginnings of relativity and quantum theory, some of the scientists most closely involved, and some of the most observant philosophers of science, have taken the view that the laws of
nature were: invented by man (Einstein, Bohr, Popper); not invented by man (Planck); expressions of a real underlying order in the world (Einstein); working models justified only by their utility (von Neumann, Feynman); potentially deterministic (Einstein); inherently probabilistic (Heisenberg, Prigogine); a dialogue between man and the world (Prigogine); a dialogue between the possible and the actual (Medawar); steps on the road towards complete understanding (Feynman, Deutsch); steps on a road that has no end (Born, Popper, Kuhn); forced upon us by the world (Planck); forced by us upon the world (Popper); potentially all-embracing (Feynman, Deutsch); inherently piecemeal (Cartwright); likely in the end to be not only comprehensive but simple (Feynman); accounting for less the simpler they are (Cartwright).

Science’s domain is in fact a narrow one: it enjoys pre-eminence as an explanation of the world where it can measure and generalise. It can measure and generalise. If you want to know how to make a cake, or whether the defendant did it, or whether you husband is telling you when to pass the ball in football, or want to know how to make a cake, or whether you husband is telling you when to pass the ball in football, or whether the defendant did it, or merely whether or not some phenomenon is a scientific fact, and may very well be explained by atheist scientists and we’ve just got to go on not believing until that time comes. Religiosity generally, and Christianity especially, is defendable on rational and scientific grounds. Persuasive philosophical arguments for the existence of a Christian, monotheistic God exist. For example, Thomas Aquinas’s five proofs of the existence of God are convincing, consistent and quite possibly correct.

The proposed existence of irreducibility in nature appears to be a scientific fact, and may very well indicate there is a creator. Likewise, the watchmaker idea that the existence of the earth corroborates the existence of a creator cannot be easily dismissed. This is compelling evidence that may indicate the existence of a creator god.

It is true that compelling arguments contradicting these ideas exist. However, like the initial thesis themselves the arguments against are not watertight and not indisputable. Commentators on both

SIR: I am sure that many of your readers have read Dawkins’ The God Delusion and have already come across more thoughtful and better argued variations of his arguments in other places. For example, sceptic and believer alike will be more satisfied by Does God Exist? by Kai Nielsen and J.P. Moreland. I suspect that the notoriety and sales success of Dawkins’ latest effort can be best attributed to a combination of clever marketing, a hugely polarising subject material, some entertaining writing and, most importantly, an appeal to the worst aspects of ill-informed popularism.

By failing to convincing disprove theism, Dawkins succeeds in undermining the often less hysterical contributions made by more circumspect colleagues. Those readers undecided about such important matters may be put off by the dogmatic intolerance that jumps off the pages. Astute thinkers will quickly see through the straw-man arguments and the gratuitous ad hominem attacks. No one denies Dawkins’ right to use these devices; it is his book after all. But caveat emptor. His casual dismissal of Aquinas (and hence Aristotle), and his uncritical, at times ecstatic adoration of Darwin leave him sounding less like Darwin’s rottweiler and more like an evangelical missionary spreading the gospel.

Any discussion of “origins” that automatically excludes consideration of metaphysics should be treated with due caution. Similarly, any assertions that science can act as a precise telescope that can see 400 million years into the past demands to be treated with due scepticism. Speculation is nothing more than just that.

Carlos d’Abrera
Brighton, Vic.
sides confuse the meaning of the words *compelling* and *irrefutable*. An idea or theory can be compelling and probable, but that does not make it irrefutable fact.

To say there is no rational basis for arguing the existence of any sort of god implies that science, or more specifically atheist science, has provided conclusive, irrefutable explanations not just for life on this planet, but for the existence of the universe. This is not the case. That is why the scientific explanations for the existence of the universe and life on earth are called theories, and why intelligent and well-informed people remain theists. Atheist science has raised some possible and even probable explanations for how the universe and life came into existence and became so complex, but they are not indisputable facts.

To further confuse the issue, there are enough inconsistencies in atheist explanations to raise a reasonable doubt in the mind of an intelligent, impartial person. Gaps in knowledge may not completely disprove, but they do raise reasonable doubt. It is a mistake to label an idea a fact if reasonable doubt can be raised as to its certainty. Many atheists do not believe in God, not because of positive arguments that there is no god, but because of doubts raised by gaps in knowledge and inconsistencies in theist arguments. If it is okay to cut a break to the atheist evolutionists, turn a blind eye to some of the holes in their arguments, and engage in the leaps of faith that being an atheist requires, then surely it must be okay for theist scientists too. The sword must cut both ways.

Impartial seekers of the truth, which is what scientists purport to be, should not completely discount the existence of a creator God as a possible explanation for the existence of the universe. Discussing the probability of existence of a creator and strength of evidence of both sides is rational, reasonable and scientific, but a complete dismissal of either position, including the theist one, is not. Both sides need to admit they have not proved their case beyond reasonable doubt. Admitting you don’t know everything about anything and that your argument isn’t perfect is not intellectual surrender.

Atheist science most probably never will provide conclusive answers. Even if atheistic science does answer the *how*, it can never explain if the *how* demonstrates that the universe and life have meaning, consequence or point, and if so, what that meaning, consequence and point might be. Explaining *how* does not mean there is no *why*, or what that *why* might be.

It should also be acknowledged that the Christian God has a particular disadvantage as he is caught in a catch-22 of enormous proportions. Free will is a pillar of Christian faith. The Christian God wants to be recognised, loved and worshipped freely. If clear, indisputable evidence that God exists were discovered, it would destroy the freedom that, if the scriptures are true, God gifted to mankind and Christ died for. Were it scientifically proved beyond a reasonable doubt that a creator God exists, then only cretins and the delusional could and would reject God. Many who claim to be atheists today are not true atheists in that they do not believe in the existence of a creator god; they say they are atheists to indicate their dislike of God, and their disapproval of the way things are structured. Even they would be forced to believe in and worship him out of fear.

For human free will to truly exist there must be reasonable doubt that God exists at all. This is something that is lost on both sides of the argument. It is understandable that atheist scientists should miss this. However, considering that Christian thinkers are supposed to be constantly thinking of not just how God created the universe and us, but why, the oversight is less forgivable.

Reasonable doubt of the existence of God is a prerequisite of free will. That should be glaringly obvious to Christians, and any other religion that holds the existence of human free will as evidence of the existence of a creator God.

*M.J.A. Moloney, Whitfield, Qld.*

**SIR:** Science and religion are the preoccupations of many minds. But we are still unsure of what or where our minds are. Our emotive minds feel close to our hearts. Our calculating minds seem to involve the organs of perception and brain. Our fearsome minds seem to centre in the pit of our stomachs. The mind appears to be the free spirit of the human condition. Mixing the mind with or making it a simulacrum of the brain organ appears to be a misnomer or even a limitation. The mind seems to be a user of all our organs.

We live within two mysteries. We have no real physical sensation of our birth except what our mothers have told us, and our departure is always awaited. We are in a holding pattern, to borrow an airline term, in which our minds roam freely. Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* describes this elegantly.

Our minds then search for a beginning and an end or the surety of no ending. We make magnificent music, paintings, architecture, theatre and many other art forms and these forms do have a beginning and an end. They have the timelessness we appear to crave and hopefully an elegance that engages and pleases our minds. These things are special.

We inhabit a small planet teeming with life. Our planet is about two-thirds out from the centre on an arm of a large spiral galaxy. We have optical and radio telescopes on the Earth and on our satellites circling above us. We have looked and listened thousands of miles out into space and so far we have not found
a single bug nor any intelligent life anyways akin to us.

In cosmic terms the mathematical probability of our existence is infinitesimally minute. Yet, here we are. Our minds’ search for completeness has caused us to invent another “religion” which could be called space science fiction. We populate the cosmos with imaginary human explorers and wondrous creatures all rocketing around at speeds which defy Einstein’s maxim about light speed and mass. As I understand it, if we humans could find a way to travel close to the speed of light we would fail as we would become too massive.

So we are doubly trapped: first in our human condition of mind and second in the physicality of our planet’s science and that of the cosmos. Possibly the embrace of a religion, any religion, is then our minds searching for a belief system that overcomes our human conditions and offers us the warm comforting feeling of resurrection or reincarnation.

To the analytical mind this is plausible and all very well; however religion demands more of us. It requires that giant leap of faith in the gospels, the resurrection and the love of God and one’s fellow creatures if one is a Christian. This faith is so very dear and enjoyed by so many. Other religions have similar bottom lines.

Phillip Blond, a senior lecturer in religion and philosophy in the UK, and Adrian Pabst, a research fellow in European and International Studies in Luxembourg, wrote in the Anglican Advocate of February 2007:

If there are universals out there, we need to explain why they care about us, or indeed how we can know them at all. And if human beings do not make these truths, then it seems that an account of the relationship between ultimate truths and human life can only be religious.

Finally, from scientist Sir Arthur Eddington, commenting on Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle: “Something unknown is doing we don’t know what.”

Brian Langevad, Jamieson, Vic.

SIR: It has taken the derring-do of Richard Dawkins to embolden less stout hearts to cock a snook at religion, more specifically, Christianity and, most particularly, Catholicism.

In the March Quadrant, Neville Buch has lined up with the “sneering atheists” mentioned by Peter Coleman in the same issue.

When any dissenting philosopher resorts to quoting Nietzsche to support an attack on God and religion, we know we are in for a bumpy ride. Watching an intellectual attempt to pull himself up by his own boot straps is always entertaining and Dr Buch’s contribution is no exception.

Dr Buch gives us not one but three of Nietzsche’s “aphorisms” in an exercise of overkill. He follows that barrage with an opening sentence of startling opacity: “Secularity is not a canvas for an impressive civic display of religion; it is a substantive value, the freedom to choose beyond the limitations of religious loyalties.”

Such a combination is designed to deter the honest browser so that the author’s pearls are saved for those in the know. There are so many good things in the March issue that I don’t feel I have missed a thing in failing to persevere to the end to see how Nietzsche gives Dr Buch the answer to the meaning of life.

Frank Pulsford, Aspley, Qld.

ORWELL AND THE INTELLIGENTSIA

SIR: Thank you for locating the source of George Orwell’s observation that: “One has to belong to the intelligentsia to believe things like that: no ordinary man could be such a fool” (letters, March 2007). It resembles Cicero’s comment: “There is nothing so absurd as not to have been said by a philosopher.” (Nihil tam absurdum, quod non dictum sit ab aliquo.) Perhaps Orwell was echoing Cicero when he wrote it?

Michael Kile, Crawley, WA.

GALTON ON STAGE

SIR: For those tantalised by Roger Sandall’s reference to Brian Lipson’s performance as Sir Francis Galton in A Large Attendance in the Antechamber (March 2007), Malthouse Theatre will be re-presenting the production this November. Details can be found on our website, malthousetheatre.com.au.

Stephen Armstrong, Executive Producer, Malthouse Theatre, Southbank, Vic.

This project has been assisted by the Commonwealth Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.
The true genesis of Amnesty International

The high tide of the Cold War concealed vastly more than fanciful antics by KGB agents, and it is unlikely that we will ever know how many quiet initiatives originally designed to divide, influence, distract or, ultimately, to overcome resistance to the communist onslaught escaped detection at the time and will remain hidden forever. Some probably failed ingloriously, and most of those that succeeded at first were later crushed under the rubble of the Berlin Wall, but a few survived the Soviet debacle and went on to prosper in its aftermath, and of these, Amnesty International must be counted among those that most convincingly went on to flourish after managing the difficult transition with suitable adroitness. Only three years have passed since 2004 when the fiftieth birthday of its governing idea should have been celebrated and it is meet and just, albeit belatedly, to throw light on its true origins and rescue from obscurity the name of its real begetter.

Three centuries ago Giambattista Vico pointed out that the controlling methodological postulate of his Scienza nuova was that:

The nature of institutions is nothing but their coming into being [nascimento] at certain times and in certain guises. Whenever the time and guise are thus and so, and not otherwise are the institutions that come into being ... The inseparable properties of institutions must be due to the modifications or guise with which they are born ... By these properties we may therefore verify that the nature or birth [natura or nascimento] was thus and not otherwise.

Three centuries later, Isaiah Berlin remarked on the importance of Vico’s understanding that “The nature of men, as of everything, can be discovered by asking the question, ‘What comes into being, at what time, in what fashion?’”¹ This may or may not be applicable as a constituent sine qua non of all created things, but it does appear to obtain in self-governing entities such as Amnesty International, distant from external scrutiny and possibly disinclined to stray far from an original intent consistent with the urgencies of the Cold War.

It is gently amusing to note that when marking what purported to be its fortieth anniversary in 2001, there was no reluctance to describe the official version of the inception of Amnesty, included even in Peter Benenson’s obituary, as a “creation myth”.² “According to Amnesty International’s ‘creation myth’”, it reads:

One day in late 1960, a British lawyer named Peter Benenson was reading the Daily Telegraph in the London tube, when he saw a brief article about two Portuguese students who had been arrested for making a toast to freedom in a Lisbon bar. He decided to start an organization to rescue political prisoners and other victims of government repression around the world.³

To call this a myth was as apposite and truthful in 2001 as it is now timely and appropriate to place it reverently on the same shelf with Athena, Romulus and Remus, and proceed to describe the individuals and circumstances really responsible for creating this very visible and influential organisation.

This story begins not in 1960 or 1954, but in the early hours of September 3, 1939, when almost simultaneously with the declaration of war in Europe, and only a few days after the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, the Winnipeg, an old, rusty and scarcely seaworthy French freighter carrying over two thousand republican Spanish refugees from the Civil War, docked in Valparaiso. This vessel had been chartered by Pablo Neruda, the Chilean poet who later became the country’s second Nobel laureate, then in France as a special Consul for Spanish Immigration.

CLAUDIO VÉLIZ

THE TRUE GENESIS OF AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

QUADRANT MAY 2007
Neruda had earlier served as Consul in Barcelona and Madrid until 1937 when his robust republican partisans-ship earned him a swift dismissal. Back in Chile in time to help in the 1938 election that brought the Popular Front to power, he returned to France with the blessing of the newly elected President Pedro Aguirre Cerda with instructions to select from among the republican refugees detained in concentration camps in the south of France a suitable number of skilled workers and their families for resettlement in Chile.4

The voyage of the Winnipeg received ample local publicity detailing the skills that the refugees were bringing to their new country, and among these my father’s eye picked up “experienced mechanics”. At the time he owned the Expreso Universal, a transport company that used heavy Mack and Henschel lorries requiring skilled mechanical attention. Within a fortnight, he had secured the services of half a dozen refugees as drivers and mechanics, including two who had helped General Pavlov’s Russian T-26 tanks rout the Italians in the battle of Guadalajara.

An impressionable nine-year-old vastly more interested in skiing than in politics, I knew nothing about the Spanish Civil War, but this was soon remedied through endless entertaining conversations with the battle-scared veterans who made themselves memorably useful performing all manner of tasks both as mechanics in the firm and handymen in the household. Their version of the conflict accorded with that of the Chilean Popular Front government and its Radical Party hegemony sequel that continued without interruption for another decade. It was reinforced, at least until the onset of the Cold War, by the notable achievements of a number of exceptionally talented Winnipeg refugees who exerted a definitive influence on Chilean intellectual life ranging widely and brilliantly from choral and symphonic music to architecture, book design, politics, the theatre, history and the visual arts.

A dozen years later, in 1952, I reached the London School of Economics and Political Science in search of a doctorate and bearing such clear and distinct ideas about the civil war that no vacillation was possible when invited by fellow students to lend a hand with translations on behalf of the International Brigade Association. Since the republican collapse in 1939, this organisation had been engaged in supplying relief to republican refugees held in camps in Spain, France and North Africa. After 1945, it moved on to persuade the Spanish authorities to bring to trial political prisoners, especially some who had been in Spanish jails since the end of the civil war.5 This seemed to me then, and now, an eminently decent, worthwhile and spiritually rewarding extra-curricular activity, and I took to it with the kind of enthusiasm readily at hand at twenty-two.

The task was made additionally attractive by the character of the man in charge. Alec Digges was then the only taciturn Irishman on earth, tenacious, clever, good-humoured and a delight to work with. He was born in London in 1914, but grew up in Ireland, a fully-fledged member of both the British Labour Party and the Communist Party of Ireland, he volunteered to fight for the republic, arrived in Spain in 1938, was posted to the 57th Battalion of the XV International Brigade, pushed through a machine-gunners crash course and sent to the front just in time to experience the ferocity of the battle of the Ebro. Sick and wounded, he was sent to a field hospital and repatriated with other members of the British battalion. Made of stern stuff, on the outbreak of the Second World War he volunteered for the army, joined the Grenadiers, landed on a Normandy beachhead, fought his way into Holland and was again repatriated, this time minus a leg. In England, Alec became an indefatigable prime mover of the International Brigade Association, especially of its campaign on behalf of the political prisoners in Spanish jails.
hitch-hiking and walking through Andorra and then making my way down the Valley of the Segre to La Seu d’Urgell and Igualada and on to Barcelona and Albacete where I delivered into friendly hands the packages placed in my care, and then to Madrid to meet with people, including foreign journalists, who provided otherwise unobtainable detailed and critical information. My first entries into the Spain of General Franco were in 1953, a year of much positive activity by the Brigade Association that ended nonetheless on a discouraging note.

On April 19, 1953, the Association convened a Conference on “Aid to Spanish Youth” at London’s Holborn Hall, under the joint chairmanship of Peter Benenson and Alec Digges. The main item on the agenda was a report by Benenson on the March 1953 Sendros and Arago trials in Barcelona and Vitoria which he attended as an observer jointly sponsored by the Brigade Association, the Trades Union Council and the Society of Labour Lawyers. The accused were thirty-eight young men arrested in 1949 and charged with illegal—communist—political activities under the cover of youth clubs and sporting societies. The sentences demanded by the prosecution included fifteen years in prison for three of the accused; twelve years for another three; ten years for six; eight years for four; six years for seven; four years for four; two years for nine; and one year for two.

The final sentences were relatively lenient, ranging from a maximum of four years downwards, apparently confirming Alec Digges’ faith in the efficacy of international pressure and the presence at the trials of individuals of consequence able subsequently to impress international public opinion. He was additionally pleased because it had been at his insistence that Peter Benenson as well as Maurice Orbach and Captain Mark Hewitson, both Labour members of parliament, had agreed to travel to Spain when required to represent the Brigade at the trials.

The problem, readily perceived by Alec at the time, was that Orbach was visibly and enthusiastically associated with the extreme left wing of the Labour Party and had also acquired an alarming reputation as a loose cannon, while Hewitson was amiable, easy-going and unimpressive, and their well-publicised involvement with the Brigade Association was unlikely to facilitate the recruitment of other more authoritative public figures. Alec’s approaches to the prominent Labour parliamentarian F. Elwyn Jones QC, and to David Widdicombe, member of the Society of Labour Lawyers and prospective Labour parliamentary candidate, received refusals as clear as they were polite, from Elwyn Jones on the grounds of “unavailability” and from Widdicombe, because:

it would not be consistent with my membership of the Labour Party to do what you ask ... You know you have my full sympathy and support in trying to help political prisoners in Spain, but this particular proposal is not one I am prepared to subscribe to.

The proposal was to draft a report to be submitted to the International Association of Democratic Lawyers which it was hoped would “help to stimulate further action on behalf of victims of the Franco regime in a number of [other] countries”. Widdicombe’s refusal was in line with the Labour Party’s policy of non-co-operation with communist front organisations.

These responses did not dampen Alec’s enthusiasm, quite the contrary; undoubtedly aware that publicity can be the ambrosia of politics, he concentrated the Brigade’s limited resources on a steady bombardment of the press, members of parliament, trade unions and government officials with reports on the case of Gregorio López Raimundo, a popular young leader of the Barcelona strikes of 1951, still in prison although his original sentence had expired. He chose this case because it had a better chance of attracting the kind of journalistic interest and public attention likely to tempt hesitant members of parliament and other important personages either to support the campaign or, ideally, to take the plunge and agree to stand up and be counted by travelling to Spain on behalf of the Brigade Association.

This was combined with a well-organised “pyramid” campaign whereby a small group of reliable sympathisers, mostly identified with the Communist Party and its supporters, was asked to find two friends prepared to send letters either to the Spanish Ambassador, the Spanish Minister of Justice, or Gregorio López Raimundo himself, and to recruit two other friends each to repeat the process. Even when it stalled not far from its origins, this simple ploy produced a flood of letters the psychological effect of which before and after the 1953 pact between Spain and the United States could not be over-estimated.

One of the letters that reached López Raimundo in prison, obviously after the intended perusal by the
Spanish authorities, came from the respected historian Christopher Hill, handwritten and signed on Balliol College stationery, and it read in part:

I am horrified to learn that your release from prison, now due, has been vetoed by the Spanish Minister of Justice and that you are no longer even allowed to receive visits ... I shall certainly do my best to make [these infringements] ... known to the widest possible circle of my acquaintances in this University and elsewhere, so that they may understand the undesirability of our country having friendly relations with a government capable of such tyrannical injustice ... 9

It should be explained that a principal difficulty in sending observers to Spain was that the dates of the trials were normally announced only one or two days in advance with a scarcely visible posting on the bulletin board of the local court. Relatives or friends of the prisoners took turns to check these announcements and when the date was posted rushed to drop a note in the mailbox of the British embassy where a friendly official informed the Foreign Office, which alerted a member of parliament—Maurice Orbach or Captain Hewitson—already prepared to fly to Spain at short notice.

In the autumn of 1953, encouraged by the result of Peter Benenson’s attendance at the Barcelona and Vitoria trials, Alec took the offensive and without waiting for announcements of trials or court appearances asked Maurice Orbach to go to Spain specifically to call on Antonio Iturmendi, the Spanish Minister of Justice, to make representations about the continuing arrest of López Raimundo, on behalf not only of the Brigade Association, but also of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. The Minister, not surprisingly, declined to oblige. Reporting on this visit, Sam Wild, the President of the Brigade Association noted, perhaps disingenuously:

Mr Orbach stressed, as did Mr Benenson and Mr Widdicombe of the Society of Labour Lawyers sent by our Association to attend previous trials, that the Franco regime is extremely sensitive to the presence of observers at trials and the expression of working-class opinion from abroad ... 10

These assessments appeared later to be confirmed by the widely publicised release from prison of López Raimundo, who was allowed to exile himself to Mexico in June 1954, where he predictably resumed his campaigning against the Spanish government. Buoyed by this outcome, Alec thought the time propitious to enlist the support of Barbara Castle and Sidney Silverman, two of the most influential left-wing members of parliament who, he assumed, once properly informed, would help to secure the needed official endorsement of the Labour Party.

Although my experience was obviously limited, at the time I was the only person within striking distance who had actually met with our friends in Spain and gained at least a sketchy knowledge of the practical measures for organising and financing the intricate process of bringing the prisoners to trial, including, most importantly, the unofficial and decisive co-operation of some prominent journalists and at least one strategically placed person in the British embassy. Alec also considered that only a few weeks before I had been elected President of the London School of Economics’ Research Students Association, which added to my unusual Presbyterian ancestry and my friendship with Ted Castle, Barbara’s journalist husband, who arranged the meeting, gave my contribution a bit of weight and at least a veneer of expertise and objectivity. There was also, of course, the fact that I was the only non-party and non-aligned member of the team working in the campaign. For these reasons Alec thought it prudent to stress that the visit was to be treated as absolutely confidential to avoid misunderstandings if it were known that only the two of us had gone to the House of Commons to report on these matters to Barbara Castle and Sidney Silverman.

The meeting was not a success. Other than expressing continuing moral support and reminding us that their signatures and those of ninety-six other Labour members of parliament had already been affixed to petitions addressed to the Spanish Minister of Justice, the parliamentarians appeared mainly interested in the political affiliation of the prisoners hitherto defended by the Association. Alec was visibly disconcerted when pressed on this matter and of course found it impossible not to agree that almost without exception they were either communists or their activities were consistent with the claims and program of the Spanish Communist Party. 11 Both Barbara Castle and Sidney Silverman stressed that in the current political climate and regardless of the merits of the campaign waged by the Brigade Association, it was unrealistic to expect that the Labour Party would grant the formal endorsement that Alec was requesting.

Although certainly not hysterically anticommunist, the Labour Party was sensitive about its relations with communists, an attitude influenced perhaps decisively by the well-publicised crisis of the Australian Labor Party in the aftermath of the April 1954 defection to the West of Vladimir Petrov, the senior Soviet spy and his wife. It was an open secret that the antipodean Labor Party was not of one mind in the matter of relations with the communists, and moves were already under way in
October 1954 that led to the foundation of the strongly anticommunist Democratic Labour Party, a division that kept Labor out of power for many years. Our interlocutors emphasised that they did not want a British rehearsal of the occurrences that by the end of 1954 already threatened to bring the Australian Labor Party to its knees. They reaffirmed their support for the Brigade Association but also reiterated the emphatic non-communist stance of the British Labour Party. More, while asserting that this was undoubtedly true, Silverman stressed that it was important that it should be seen to be true, and public opinion should have no reason to suspect that any sector of the party was “cuddling communists”. Alec interjected, “Cuddling prisoners”, to which Mrs Castle immediately responded, “Only communist prisoners”.

The advice of the two Labour leaders was clear: endorsement by the Labour Party was out of the question as long as the conflict continued. The idea of extending this help to freemasons who may have remained uncommitted or even fought with the nationalists, was initially abhorrent to him. However, after some reflection and consultations with his colleagues he decided to give it a try and, as it happens, an early opportunity to proceed came our way with the sobering news that the thirty-eight men whose sentences had earlier been reduced or who had been released after the Barcelona and Vitoria trials of March 1953, had been re-arrested and the sentences re-imposed that had originally been demanded by the prosecution.

This alone justified my return to Spain, but also enabled me to find out more about the plight of freemasons under the terms of the 1939 Special Law. The most recent and best documented case was that of nineteen freemasons arrested in November 1952, mostly in Barcelona, accused of attempting to re-establish a Masonic Lodge in that city. Some of them had already been convicted of a similar offence in 1942 and had served a term of imprisonment. By the time I arrived in Spain, in October 1954, they had all been transferred to the Carabanchel penitentiary, south of Madrid.

Using our informal contacts, I was able to reach a young lawyer, Sr José Méndez Mayorga, retained by masonic organisations in Mexico and the United States, to organise the defence of the prisoners. Posing as the Chilean brother-in-law of Professor Nicolás Bayona Zaragoza’s sister and accompanied by Mrs Bayona Zaragoza, I was allowed to enter the penitentiary to visit Professor Bayona Zaragoza, my distant “relative”, and obtain valuable first-hand information about the circumstances of their arrest and treatment in prison. It was clear that their defence was well-funded and in good hands. Sr Méndez Mayorga was very helpful and there was little that we could do to assist him either financially or otherwise, but bearing in mind the meeting with Sidney Silverman and Barbara Castle, there was also a sufficiency of assurances, some in writing, making clear both our moral support and sponsorship, if required.

The same openness that delights democrats can be hemlock to autocrats. It seemed like a good idea at the
time, but the Brigade Association’s well-orchestrated publicity, the protest meetings, the plugs from friendly journalists and the avalanche of letters to Spanish officials demanding the freedom of López Raimundo produced disconcerting results, certainly beginning with the swift release and exile of the popular leader. Not surprisingly, Alec attributed this, as well as the lenient sentences handed down a year earlier to José María Sendrós and his thirty-seven comrades, to Peter Benenson’s presence at the trial and the ensuing publicity campaign. However, according to three of our most reliable and authoritative contacts in Spain, the view from inside was radically different. In previous visits I had met Camille Cianfarra, the Reuters man in Madrid who introduced me to Bernard Malley, a delightful, witty, unassuming and extremely well-informed man who knew everybody worth knowing in Madrid, maintained excellent relations with diplomats and government officials and, most important, held a responsible position in the British embassy.

Buckley informed me that he had discussed the early release of López Raimundo with Malley and Cianfarra, and the Brigade Association’s publicity campaign had not even been mentioned; that the release owed nothing to the push from London—about which Bernard Malley was well aware—and everything to Spain’s renewed efforts to regain international respectability, assisted at the time by the worsening confrontation between the two world powers brought about by the Korean War.

The defence of Western Europe from a possible Soviet invasion by conventional forces that could overwhelm Germany and France in a few days made it mandatory for the United States to establish military bases behind the Pyrenees. Formal negotiations started early in 1952, but proceeded slowly, partly because of White House concerns about approaching such a conspicuous former friend of the Axis powers, and also because too hasty a military agreement with Spain could be construed as an admission that Western Europe was virtually indefensible against a Soviet attack. Of course, Franco’s nationalist reluctance to surrender even a sliver of sovereignty to foreign military bases did not help to expedite matters. The discussions concluded with the Pact of Madrid, of September 26, 1953, granting to the United States the use and development of the naval and air base of Rota, near Cadiz, and the air bases in Torrejón, near Madrid, Zaragoza, in north-east Spain, and Morón, near Seville. In return the United States made available to Spain $226 million in economic and military aid.

From the vantage point of the Spanish authorities, the protracted negotiations that preceded the signing of the pact also held the promise of a return to normal international relations, and their leniency at the Barcelona trials was consistent with efforts to advance this process. Their disappointment was understandable when they were not only denied plaudits for what they regarded as a generous gesture, but worse, they were faced with even more hostile publicity and agitation organised by their sworn enemies. With the pact with the United States safely signed, their response was to undo what had so clearly failed to earn them the recognition they thought they deserved, and the thirty-eight young communists and socialists were once again arrested on the legalistic excuse that their sentences had not been submitted for approval to the Supreme Military Tribunal as required by the law of 1939.

Earlier in 1953 there were surprisingly offensive and well-attended anti-British street demonstrations in Madrid to protest against Queen Elizabeth’s visit to Gibraltar. Later that same year Spain closed its consulate on the Rock, possibly reflecting a well-founded confidence in the strength of the new “special relationship” with the United States that, as we now know, prospered over time with the world power remaining Spain’s most important and loyal military partner and a key agent in securing its re-admission to international entities such as the United Nations, the Food and Agriculture Organisation and, eventually, in 1982, the quiet opposition of the United Kingdom and France notwithstanding, to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

To say that Alec was disappointed with these developments is grossly to understake his anger with what he regarded as an abject betrayal by the friendly and trustworthy nation he had conjured with more than a little help from Hollywood, as a composite of Henry Fonda in The Grapes of Wrath, Paul Robeson’s “Old Man River”, Humphrey Bogart in Casablanca, Frank Capra’s Mr. Smith Goes to Washington and, most importantly, the comradeship with fellow fighters of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, especially in the sanguinary battle of the Ebro.

The comparison could not be avoided with what he felt in August 1939, when only a few months after being strafed and bombed by the German Condor Legion in Spain, he had to accept in silence the wrenching expediency of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. On that occasion his unwavering loyalty to the party left him with no option but to obey. Now it was different; no such disciplined acquiescence was expected of him and he simply redefined matters in the light of the new circumstance. Until the pact with the United States, his friends were the same who had fought shoulder to shoulder with him against Franco and Hitler, but now the hated Spanish regime had wormed its way into an arrangement whereby the American government was showering
Franco with political comfort and economic aid.

Alec saw the battle lines redrawn with stark clarity, with the victims of capitalist and imperialist oppression all over the world on one side, and the United States and its allies, including Spain, on the other. Given such a contest, he realised that to undertake the defence of the Spanish freemasons had been timely as well as symbolically correct because it opened the door for victims of injustice everywhere, but especially in countries friendly to the United States, to join his former comrades-in-arms in Spanish prisons in a grand international coalition of the oppressed whose plight, when efficiently publicised, would bring embarrassment and opprobrium to the adversaries of the Soviet Union. The conclusion appeared to him inescapable that the International Brigade Association should put its experience at the service of the greater cause.

Alec briefed me before each of my trips to Spain and I reported to him on my return. These meetings afforded ample opportunity to discuss matters such as these, but never before and never again did he express himself on this issue with greater clarity and vehemence than on one particular evening in 1954, late in November, when Peter Benenson and I found ourselves by chance at 2 Parton Street WC1, the Brigade Association’s headquarters, an address that merits a commemorative plaque as the foundation site of Amnesty International.

It was there, over an awful lot of coffee and cigarettes, some Irish whiskey and a surfeit of spirited discussion, that for the very first time, as far as I can remember, Alec explained in some detail his plan for a new initiative that under the name “Amnesty International” would bring together the call for a general amnesty for prisoners in Spain originally adopted at the Brigade’s 1952 Annual General Meeting, the appeal for amnesty made by López Raimundo in his first public declaration issued from Mexico, the definitive internationalism rousingly proclaimed in the communist battle-hymn, the Internationale, and, most significantly, what he sincerely believed to be the robust and continuing international commitment both of the old Comintern and of the new Cominform.18

He realised that to undertake the defence of the Spanish freemasons had been timely as well as symbolically correct because it opened the door for victims of injustice everywhere.

Alec’s deeply held internationalist vocation was forcefully demonstrated when he volunteered to take arms in two wars neither of which directly affected his adopted Irish homeland. Stalin did not have such a vocation; he never spent time outside the regions that later became the Soviet Union and he had an earthy and robust suspicion of foreigners and foreign places which was exacerbated when such untrustworthy outsiders—“fellow travellers”?—were allowed to shoulder tasks of importance to the Soviet motherland. He would also have agreed with Tip O’Neill in thinking all politics to be local, hence his tenacious disinclination to permit international issues to distract him from domestic matters.

His own historical duty, Stalin firmly believed, was to ensure the survival of the only true revolutionary government on earth before even thinking of venturing elsewhere, a conviction famously encapsulated in the slogan, “socialism in one country”. This approach to international matters was strengthened between 1919 and 1923 by the revolutionary fiascos in Bavaria, Hungary, Austria, Saxony, Thuringia and Hamburg, which not only confirmed his lethal detestation of what he regarded as Trotsky’s romantic “permanent revolution” nonsense, but worse, placed the Soviet Union at risk by leaving matters in the hands of inept foreign revolutionary hotheads.

Such were the antecedents of Stalin’s reluctance in 1936, when Spain was plunged into civil war, to involve the Soviet Union in the formation of International Brigades to fight in a country about which he knew next to nothing and for a cause questionably related to the Soviet national interest. The original idea of enlisting volunteers all over the world to fight for the Spanish republic came from the French communist leader Maurice Thorez, who secured the endorsement of Willi Münzenberg, then the influential propaganda chief of the Comintern. Unable to overcome Stalin’s objections from a distance, they travelled to Moscow to state their case and, after much discussion and procrastination, thought that they had succeeded by proposing to channel the volunteers and the much-needed military aid directly through the Comintern without involving Soviet troops or the Soviet government.

The wily Georgian still demurred and demanded cash over the counter—from the Spanish Republic’s gold reserve then being shipped to Odessa—to pay for the arms sent to Spain. It is even possible that Stalin’s unenthusiastic acquiescence was ultimately forthcoming partly because of the certainty of cash payments, but mainly because of fear of being outflanked by an increasingly influential Spanish Trotskyite left.19

Never before had the Comintern so visibly occupied centre stage as during those heady months when it recruited, armed and led into battle the many thousands of volunteers from countries all around the world who flocked to its offices to join the Brigades.20
Inside Spain, Münzenberg cunningly side-stepped Stalin’s reservations and recycled the creaking revolutionary rhetoric of the Comintern by giving it a good dose of equivocation, more than a pinch of PR rebranding and popular-front sloganeering and marching it into battle under an ocean of red banners and impassioned choral renderings of the Internationale. It was this over-romanticised and rhetorically revolutionary Comintern world fabricated by Münzenberg’s propaganda machine that greeted the twenty-four-year-old Irish volunteer Alec Digges. Not surprisingly, it made such a profound impression on him that it not only survived the defeat that Stalin correctly anticipated would be added to the collection of Comintern fiascos, but more important, it emerged undaunted by the ignoble demands of the Nazi-Soviet Pact and bridged the Second World War and its aftermath untouched by the surge of Stalinist nationalism that in 1943 and 1944 abolished both the failure-prone Comintern and the hitherto hallowed anthem of the USSR, the Internationale, deemed to be flawed, theoretically and symbolically.

A new anthem was forged in a few days of “white-hot frenzy of musical Stakhanovism” with, among others, Molotov and Voroshilov contributing to the lyrics, and Shostakovich and Prokofiev to the music. Neither the word *international* nor the concept of world revolution were to be found in the new lyrics, mainly devoted to a patriotic glorification of Soviet Russia and her ancient land. The demise of the Comintern and the dropping of its Leninist calls for world revolution were presented as gestures of goodwill towards his wartime allies, but probably the main reason was Stalin’s wish to eliminate a forum for the opinions of foreigners not absolutely subservient to Moscow as well as a potential source for costly and unpredictable international adventurism.22

The problem was that while it was not possible to disguise the domestic participation of communists in the Spanish conflict, public opinion outside Spain had to be brought on side to support the republican cause and respond generously to appeals for funds, guns and men, goals unlikely to be achieved if sponsored mainly by zealous revolutionaries. At first, Münzenberg did use the Communist Party’s “Workers International Relief” and its subordinate agencies, but their influence on international public opinion was worse than disappointing so he came up with a couple of ideas that truly revolutionised politics for the rest of the century and beyond. As Hugh Thomas has pointed out, “he really invented the fellow traveller”,23 and more, he also invented the “front” organisations.

Münzenberg perceived, almost intuitively, that societies experiencing the warm secular embrace of industrial modernity were afflicted by a critical depletion of that moral justification which is “one of our deepest needs, one of our most powerful and essential human drives, ignored at our cost and peril”.24 Lacking any formal knowledge of theology, history or sociology, he understood in practice the importance of “righteousness” in human life. Correctly perceiving the dearth of this definitive ingredient among the middle and upper strata of Western European society, he deployed his formidable propaganda machine to the task of producing a sufficiency of convincing, immaculate and soul-enhancing righteous causes to fill the vacuum.

Münzenberg correctly guessed that once a suitable cause had been hammered onto the public consciousness, it would not be difficult to lure his “innocents”—earlier and more brutally dubbed “useful idiots” by Lenin—to contribute their names, prestige and funds to well-organised “innocents’ clubs” manipulated into delivering the desired result by strategically placed activists, preferably not members of the Communist Party. Those invited to join and ostensibly to lead these organisations were invariably well-intentioned, socially respectable personages eager to play a constructive role in the struggle for social justice while satisfying their need for personal moral justification and “who had no idea that their consciences were being orchestrated by operatives of Stalin’s government.”

Although probably making old-fashioned communists squirm with the placing of non-party members in the vanguard of policy, this approach proved very successful for raising funds and marshalling international support for the Spanish republic. Münzenberg’s propaganda machine portrayed the war as a Manichaean confrontation between the forces of good and evil; between Franco’s obscurantist fascist terror supported by Moorish, German and Italian mercenaries and levies and an enlightened, virtuous and democratic republic defended by idealistic young heroes from every corner of the globe. He convinced the rest of the world that the republic was a social democratic paradise where torture, arbitrary arrests and executions had been banned forever and which was now struggling to defend freedom, democracy, common decency and justice for the people of Spain.
The international campaign succeeded—Stalin’s reservations notwithstanding—mainly because it was carried forward on the shoulders of large numbers of non-party “fellow travellers” and “opinion makers”, journalists, artists, commentators, priests, ministers, academics and actors glad to be invited to stand up and be counted on the side of the Spanish republic.

With hindsight one can now see that the case with which Alec Digges, an experienced and disciplined member of the Communist Party, was prepared in 1954 to discuss with us the possible creation of Amnesty International, meant either that the idea was very much his own, or that he was simply adding “prisoners of conscience” to Münzenberg’s pre-war repertoire of deserving causes. Did Alec and Willi ever meet? As far as it is known Münzenberg did not go to Spain during the civil war. I did not ask about this because I only learned about Münzenberg’s existence recently, twenty years after Alec’s death. It is not possible to rule out a meeting in 1938, when Alec travelled to Spain via the Brigade’s recruiting office in Paris, but it does seem unlikely that Münzenberg would have discussed such policy matters with the young volunteer.

If it was Alec’s own idea and he had not canvassed it with his party colleagues, it would be reasonable to assume that both the Spanish-American Pact and the death of Stalin were present at its inception. Before March 1953, party loyalties and obedience to the Kremlin would have prevented any unauthorised tinkering with possible international extensions of the work of the Brigade. Even in 1954 Alec was unwittingly ahead of his time with such an imaginative proposal for tapping the reserves of humanitarian decency in the countries of the American alliance in order to undermine its moral authority. However, his idea was certainly well attuned to the changes that came in the wake of Khrushchev’s 1956 “secret speech” at the Twentieth Congress, especially the Cold War resurrection of the spirit of the defunct Comintern and Cominform, but this time soaring on rhetorical wings that ignored world revolution, but called on the faithful “to take the lead in resisting the plans of American imperialist expansion and aggression in all spheres”.

It is also possible that by shouldering this simple non-revolutionary and anti-American latter-day task, Alec inadvertently kept alive the original intent of the Cominform and provided a practical goal for one of Münzenberg’s inspired propaganda initiatives. Like the Cheshire cat, the Cominform was gone, but its anti-American smirk remained very much with us and, for example, it is not impossible to suspect that an unintended and distant consequence of Münzenberg’s seminal initiative has been to enable the post-Cominform enthusiasts to respond to the anti-American directive by extending the repertoire of “righteousness” and organise worthy campaigns in favour of peace, freedom, trees, polar bears, democracy, the ozone layer and the compassionate treatment of illegal immigrants and against racial discrimination, obesity, globalisation, capital punishment, forced labour and torture. The Cold War experience would also have confirmed Münzenberg’s conviction that waged urbi et orbi, such campaigns would be ignored inside a communist world undisturbed by a free press and public opinion, but would undermine the moral status of policies advanced by the United States and its allies.

Alec Digges’ advocacy could be persuasive, but as the unusually frank discussion proceeded into the 1954 November night and more practical objections emerged, he hesitated and appeared to have second thoughts about his original suggestion. It was difficult for example to overlook that his initiative would divert scarce human and financial resources away from representing prisoners in Spain as well as risk dissipating the international goodwill accumulated during and after the civil war. The sobering fact could also not be ignored that, the Brigade Association’s best efforts notwithstanding, great successes had not been achieved, even with the current limited objective. It seemed unrealistic therefore, if not quixotic, to embark at this time on such a hugely more demanding international campaign. At least as important was our unforgettable encounter with Barbara Castle and Sidney Silverman, which made it mandatory that neither Alec nor any of his colleagues in the Communist Party could possibly lead the new organisation if it was to secure the widespread non-partisan and morally immaculate public support and influence necessary for its success.

Thinking aloud about this and reminding us of the staffing difficulties, Alec suggested that Peter Benenson was the person best able to lead the new entity and recruit an executive committee of prestigious and friendly British and overseas lawyers and intellectuals. Not amused, Peter asked whether he was being sized up for re-branding as a useful idiot and rose as if ready to leave, saying that this was unfunny and unfair and that he was not prepared to be used in this way. To this, Alec responded, memorably, that he was only joking and that in any case Peter was wrong to think that he could possibly be treated in this way because he always knew very well what he was doing while innocents and useful idiots, by definition, never did. Peter Benenson was an intelligent, cultivated and selfless man who certainly did not impress as a Münzenberg innocent or a Lenin useful idiot.

Peace restored, it was then suggested that Captain
Hewitson would be more than happy to preside as long as Alec did the work, but this trivialised matters and the discussion became increasingly light-hearted. The evening ended with Alec’s new international initiative drowned under a barrage of Irish, Spanish and Chilean jokes and a half-hearted acceptance on his part of the wisdom of doing nothing, at least for the time being.

As for myself, I saw Alec a few days later and reminded him that my active contribution owed everything to my youthful encounter with the republican refugees who worked driving and repairing my father’s heavy lorries. While more than willing to continue collaborating with the Brigade’s original campaign on behalf of prisoners, I did not agree that this should extend to helping to overthrow the Spanish government, which I thought unrealistic and not necessarily desirable. During those years I had many opportunities of meeting with survivors of the civil war, and gained some understanding of the complexity of the tragic conflict, which differed decisively from Münzenberg’s propaganda depiction as a simple clash between good and evil. Logic 101 seemed very distant from Igualada when a former communist trooper plunged into an hypothesis contrary to a fact and asked me what would have been the course of the war after 1939, when Hitler and Stalin fell into each others’ arms, if a communist regime had emerged victorious in Spain. Some problem.

What became very clear to me was that the appalling atrocities committed by both sides had bequeathed a legacy of hatred that has not vanished even today. In the 1950s it was at least arguable that the anticipated restoration of the monarchy would offer a realistic solution for an otherwise intractable and deadly confrontation. More, I also had to explain to my good friend Alec that I shared neither his newly minted post-Cominform anti-Americanism nor his Cold War zealotry and asked him not to count on my help with his new initiative if it ever came to fruition. He took all this with equanimity and we agreed both to disagree and to continue working together as we had done in the past.

Between 1954 and 1956 I returned a couple or three times to Spain, but on two occasions I was unable to go, and given the urgencies of the moment, there was no alternative but to recruit my sister Carmen, then a student at the Central School of Speech and Drama, to step into the breach, which she did with characteristic goodwill, charm and efficiency, acting as interpreter for Peter Benenson and completing the necessary discreet local tasks in Barcelona and Madrid. My failure twice to turn up was unrelated to my reservations about the Amnesty proposal. In March 1954, months before the Parton Street meeting, I landed in the Middlesex Hospital after lifting a trunk full of books when moving into digs in Nassau Street; the second time, in August 1955, I was in the United States.

In 1956, I returned to Chile and for a few years lost touch with Alec, but my work at the University of Chile brought me in contact with former Winnipeg refugees who had remained in the country and brought new insights into the complexities of the Spanish Civil War.

Names must be mentioned and I start with Mauricio Amster, a communist sculptor, scholar and craftsman who fought with the Dombrowsky Battalion in the II Brigade, was invalided, survived the war and reached Chile where he soon acquired a well-founded reputation as a brilliant book designer. I was lucky to have my first book designed by him for the University of Chile Press. We became friends and I learned of his disillusionment with Marxism and with the murderous record of the communists, particularly during the Barcelona “May Days” when many hundreds of anarchists and other non-communists were systematically slaughtered.27

He was not the only one. The historian Leopoldo Castedo travelled a similar road, from following the red flags in Spain to grieving for the betrayal of his youthful idealism when Russian tanks persuaded Hungarians to behave, and ultimately becoming a thoughtful and scholarly critic of the Soviet Cold War alternative. The same was true of the playwright José Ricardo Morales, whose latter-day reluctance to follow the path into a red future was rooted in his experience with the sanguinary behaviour of communists when in positions of effective power. There is no doubt that their thoughtful reflections and friendship further distanced me from Münzenberg’s version of the sombre conflict.

In the early 1960s I was back in London and spoke with Alec a few months after the mythical 1961 birth of Amnesty, soon to become Amnesty International. In the intervening years, Tito had refused to buckle, France was at war in Algeria, Perón was deposed, the Cominform was scuttled, Poles and Hungarians took to the streets, China was difficult, Castro was proclaimed in Cuba, the Vietnam War was on its way and all things evidently having been considered, Peter Benenson accepted Alec’s suggestion and took the helm of Amnesty International.

Notes

2. Peter Benenson (1921–2005), born Peter Solomon, in Erfurt, took his mother’s name as a tribute to his Russian maternal grandfather; educated at Eton and Balliol College, Oxford, worked in intelligence at Bletchley Park during the Second World War, practised as a barrister after 1946, joined the Labour Party and became a prominent member of the Labour Lawyers Association, stood unsuccessfully for parliament on four occasions, converted to Catholicism in 1958 and became the first Director of Amnesty International in 1961.


5. In August 1942, the IBA Executive Committee declared “Relief and Release the main task of the [organisation]”. The National Archives (UK), “Communists, suspected communists and communist organizations”, “The International Brigade Association”, KV 5/46–58, serial 570a, 3. The entry reads in part, “The records of liaison with the Secret Intelligence Service show that in the post-war years most of the correspondence passed through Kim Philby’s hands.”


8. “... the first thing was to get plenty of publicity on the Spanish situation, and to get the Labour Party interested ...” See National Archives, “Communists ...”, “The IBA” KV 5/46–58, Serial 552z, 15.11. A Police Report on the IBA and Friends of Republican Spain Conference of February 28, 1954, notes that among those arrested in Spain was “A man whose name was to become famous, Gregorio López Raimundo. In the course of the campaign on his behalf the association was able to register support from all sections of the trade union and the labour movement.” National Archives, “Communists ...”, “The IBA”, KV 5/46–58, series 567C, M.I.5, Metropolitan Police, O.F.104/1, March 4, 1954, p. 3.

9. April 24, 1953, IBMA, MML, Box 42 B/18.

10. IBIA Circular letter signed by Sam Wild, President, Alan Gilchrist, Vice President and Alec Digges, Secretary, September-October 1953, IBMA, MML, Catalogue 1986, File B, 1953, B/62.

11. The IBA and Friends of Republican Spain Conference of February 28, 1954, only listed “Communists, anarchists, socialists and trade unionists ...” among the groups that could be relied upon to oppose the Franco regime, but as Hugh Thomas has explained in some detail, the gestation of the Spanish Communist Party was bound up inextricably with socialists and anarchists who on occasions even considered applying for entry into the Comintern. The National Archives, UK, “Communists...”, “The IBA”, KV 5/46-58, Serial 567c, Metropolitan Police, M.I.5, March 4, 1954, O.F. 104/1, p. 5. See Hugh Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, 3rd edition, 1977, chapter 8, pp. 116–17.

12. A crisis that elicited a memorable intervention by Prime Minister Robert Menzies during the parliamentary debate on Soviet espionage: “I cannot help wondering how many of the great army of labour supporters in Australia, who fear and dislike communism, and who are its pledged enemies, have enjoyed the spectacle of their leader, in his dual capacity, playing the Communist game on a public platform, and therefore with public influence, to a degree that the Communists, by their unaided efforts could not have reached in 100 years.” Royal Commission on Espionage, Parliamentary Debates (Hansard), 3 Eliz II, House of Representatives, October 28, 1954, p. 2481.

13. IBMA, MML, Box 42, File C: 1954, C/45, C/46 and C/49.

14. Gregorio López Raimundo was released on June 4, 1954, and immediately went to Mexico. The Brigade Association had already sent Mr David Widdicombe as an observer to his trial in July 1952. Letter from López Raimundo to Alec Digges, July 10, 1954, IBMA, MML, Catalogue 1986, Box 42/C/35; also Box 42/C/32 and 43. Camille Cianfarra was for many years the Bureau Chief for Spain for the New York Times, he also wrote a number of important books including The Vatican and the War, 1944, and The Vatican and the Kremlin, 1950. He was killed, with another 45 passengers, in the collision between the Andrea Doria and the Stockholm off Nantucket on July 25, 1956. Henry Buckley covered the Spanish Civil War for Reuters and the Times and when the conflict was over wrote a book, The Death of the Spanish Republic, in which his support for the defeated government found robust expression. He met his Catalan wife during the battle of the Ebro and their honeymoon was spent retracing with the republican forces over the Pyrenees into France. After covering the Second World War, always for Reuters, he and his wife returned to live in Spain. See also Buckley’s entry in Hugh Thomas’s Civil War.

15. Malley’s interest in Spanish affairs transcended the narrow demands of his latter-day profession. Before joining the diplomatic corps he translated Victor Pradera’s The New State, published in London in 1939 with a foreword by HRH the Prince of Asturias. He remained in Spain through the war and became good friends with the British Ambassador, Sir Samuel Hoare (later 1st Viscount Templeton) who served from 1940 to 1944 and succeeded notably in encouraging Franco to keep Spain out of the war. His later correspondence with Malley is illuminating.
and candid. I am not alone in regarding Malley as an exceptionally well-informed observer of contemporary Spanish affairs; Hugh Thomas, the distinguished historian, also met him in the 1950s and we recently exchanged impressions on this amiable matter and found ourselves in complete agreement.

17. In a letter to Lord Templeton, Malley reported that he witnessed how approximately 20,000 angry nationalist demonstrators marched on the British embassy to protest against the Queen’s visit to Gibraltar. They were restrained with difficulty by mounted police armed with sabres from which he himself “had to run for [his] life”, as he had been mixing with the crowd the better to report on the protests. Letter from Bernard Malley to Lord Templeton, Madrid, May 9, 1954, MS Templewood XIII (26): 50–55, Dept. of Manuscripts & University Archives, University of Cambridge Library.

18. A few days after arriving in Mexico, on July 1, 1954, López Raimundo addressed a rally organised by the United Organisations in Aid of Republican Spain, in which he stated that “the idea of an amnesty for political prisoners is welcomed by people of all walks of life ... the criminals who govern [Spain] cannot, in the long run, fail to take heed of the worldwide pressure for such a genuinely Spanish demand”. Text published in España Popular, Mexico, July 9, 1954. IBMA, MML, Catalogue 1986, Box 42/c/33. In 1919 Lenin founded the Third International, committed to world revolution and best known as the Comintern, dissolved by Stalin in 1943. Its non-revolutionary Cold War successor was the Cominform, founded in 1947 and eventually dissolved by Khrushchev in 1956.


20. “Each communist party was instructed to raise a given number of volunteers. Most of the ablest leaders of the Comintern were employed in this way. The future Marshal Tito, Josip Broz, for example, was in Paris organising, from a small left-bank hotel, the flow of recruits through his so-called ‘secret railway’, which provided passports and funds for East European volunteers.” Thomas, Civil War, p. 454.


22. According to Milovan Djilas, Stalin dissolved the Comintern because “it had become a nuisance as well as an anachronism, with its émigré members attempting to promote policies that were out of line with [Stalin’s]”. Bullock, Hitler and Stalin, pp. 792–93. Largely the same applies to the 1947 decision to create the Cominform, not as a resurrected revolutionary Comintern, but as a carefully designed instrument to “mount a joint propaganda offensive against acceptance of the Marshall [Plan]” and ensure tighter Soviet control over its Eastern European satellites; pp. 925–26.

23. Thomas, Civil War, p. 341 n3; an opinion shared by Münzenberg’s wife, the legendary Babette Gross, who described him as “the Patron Saint of Fellow Travellers”, Andrew Campbell, “Double Lives: Three Australia Fellow Travellers in the Cold War”, National Observer, Summer 2007, No. 71, pp. 44–45.


Claudio Véliz now lives on the Great Ocean Road in Victoria. His most recent contribution to Quadrant was “The Enduring Deception of Francisco Goya” in the October issue.
W HEN THE NATIVE AMERICANS (Indians) first came into contact with the English in Puritan New England in the seventeenth century they were “awed and amazed by the things the Europeans had brought with them”. Whether it was an iron plough, a musket or a windmill, they ascribed such strange inventions to a spiritual power. Gravel mining in 1913 uncovered an Indian burial ground of the time, and the dead were found to have been buried, along with Indian artefacts, with wine bottles, muskets, spoons, iron axes, kettles, bells, wool blankets, combs, scissors, hammers, horseshoes, locks, keys, hinges, knives, pewter bowls, swords, leather shoes and a jew’s harp.

Thus the awesome change that set in for the local Indians when the outside world broke in on their way of life and especially when the Pilgrim Fathers, in their high black hats and white ruffles the first of the Puritan wave, arrived on the Mayflower in 1620. Nathaniel Philbrick (in Mayflower: A Voyage to War) has traced the early decades of white–Indian contact in one area in this sort of close detail, which often provides more understanding—and respect for both sides—than “big picture” history.

The new society of course soon overwhelmed the indigenous, bringing its share of disaster. Nevertheless the local Indians have survived as a cohesive group—long enough to be acknowledged as helping with this book, which arose out of a local history Native American symposium.

While the events described were nearly 200 years earlier than comparable events at the dawn of white Australian society, and there were big differences, I found much that was intriguingly similar and often instructive. The Indian fascination with white possessions tells us something about how similar goods might have awed the Aborigines at Sydney Cove and elsewhere, an awe that is sometimes hinted at in records of the time but has not been substantiated. The Indians also craved the pork the newcomers brought, just as the Aborigines seemed to crave mutton and beef.

We also find rapid change in Indian society, which might have been echoed here. In a pattern sometimes indicated in Australian records, age-old cohesion began to weaken in the small Indian groups, which were more tightly organised than in the looser Aboriginal system.

Trade in furs with the whites became a way of life, as it did for Indian groups generally along the east coast of North America. As time went on some converted to Christianity—the “praying Indians”—learned English, took English names or adopted other European ways, while others became something like modern Muslim fundamentalists sticking to the old ways. With this fission, the authority of the sachem, or chief, weakened and he had to work harder to exert it.

The comparison that comes to mind here is Bennelong at Sydney Cove leading the forces of accommodation with the British while Pemulwuy led what might romantically be called a resistance group based on the Botany Bay clan immediately to the south, which appears to have included runaway convicts too. Comparable indigenous splits have been noted elsewhere in Australia from time to time.

The big difference was that Indian society was much more developed. In New England they had long been farmers, a development made practical by the existence of natural maize (or corn) and beans. The communities lived in semi-permanent villages of skin-walled wigwams over earth floors, but also moved with the seasons. Game and fish were abundant—the waterways “seethed” with fish when the whites arrived.

The population was much bigger than here. Philbrick gives a mid-seventeenth-century Indian population of 20,000 for southern New England, an area about the size of Tasmania. Peak Aboriginal populations in comparable areas of Australia are unlikely ever to have been more than about 10,000 to 20,000 with about 4000 (estimates vary greatly) for Tasmania in 1803. That estimated for the Sydney region in 1788 was about 5000, probably halved by the 1789 smallpox epidemic.
Disease had also devastated the indigenous New England population before the Mayflower arrived, so a few years earlier it would have been much bigger. Though some have said it was smallpox, Philbrick names the killer disease as probably bubonic plague, spread by crews from the European fishing, trading and exploration ships which had been visiting the area for some time.

There is another intriguing comparison here with the smallpox which probably killed half the Aborigines of Australia in the 1780s, reaching Sydney the year after the First Fleet. Again, it was a disease brought by visiting seamen—in this case, probably fishermen from Indonesia—devastating a population isolated from the outside world for aeons and with no natural immunity.

A further big difference was that the Puritans generally bought their land from the Indians. There was little thought of this in Australia, where the Aborigines were more nomadic and did not farm, and were very light users of very large tracts of land, held in common and none of it cultivated. The indigenous inner-Sydney people lived mainly from the sea.

Cultivation was essential to how most of the world’s people historically have viewed land until recently. If it was cultivated, it was owned; if not, others could move in and use it more productively. In the early Australian colonies, as a general rule governments commandeered enough land to feed the newcomers and granted it for farming, small lots for ex-convicts and much bigger ones for officials and immigrants with capital. But only a tiny proportion of the continent was alienated to private ownership before the 1860s; much more went into pastoral leases, in theory to be shared with the Aboriginal traditional owners.

Many a fairy tale has been spun over the centuries about the Mayflower and the Indians, tending towards goodies and baddies in both directions. It is not surprising that many American historians so dislike “triumphal” stories. Philbrick sympathises with the Indian side, but finds good will and the desire to integrate and work together on both sides.

National and religious rivalry with the Spain of the day and lessons learned from the Spanish colonies in what became Latin America, as well as common sense, encouraged the Pilgrims towards a policy of amity. Their Indian neighbours would not be enslaved, as many were in the Latin colonies, although this high ideal did not apply later to captured rebels despatched to distant colonies.

With some exceptions, substantial peace lasted for fifty-five years, when the good intentions collapsed in the disastrous “King Philip’s War” of 1675-76. About 5000 people were killed, three-quarters of them Indians, while another 1000 Indians, rounded up as rebels, were shipped off to slavery in the West Indies. A detailed analysis of this conflict takes up the second half of the book.

It reminded me more of today’s Middle East than Hollywood, and Philbrick quietly notes the lesson. Historically, the Indians were divided into a mosaic of jealous, quarrelsome tribal groups, under sachems or “kings” as the whites sometimes called them. The Puritans were not so different, with by the 1670s half a dozen separate colonies, some such as Baptist and Quaker Rhode Island separated by heretic religion. Plymouth, which the Mayflower immigrants founded, remained a small but proud independent colony squeezed between Rhode Island and the much bigger and newer Massachusetts, centred on Boston to the north. Each town enjoyed a measure of independence within this colonial patchwork and London’s rule remained light and distant. Local militias provided the defence force.

French colonies to the north and Dutch to the south in modern New York added a further layer of complexity. Intrigues and rivalries within and between the tribes and colonies and with the French and Dutch were endemic.

The New England colonies combined in the New England Union, though it was in the 1670s still fairly ineffectual. Philbrick says it was a forerunner of the eventual American Constitution—and thus a grandfather of the Australian Constitution.

Land hunger was the main underlying tension, but Philbrick seems to be saying that war was not inevitable and resulted and worsened mainly from bad judgment. In the absence of a restraining governmental hand on either side, militant “hawks” got their way, though most on both sides wished to avoid war, or at least settle it early. A local squabble in the Plymouth colony touched off, after decades of peace. Like a bushfire, it then blew up and burned on until it ran out of fuel, in the form of the will to fight.

The Indians were already outnumbered more than two to one in a combined population of 70,000 and eventually ran out of ammunition and other supplies, while the whites continued to buy more in England.

Philip, seen by some as a machiavellian leader behind the scenes and others as a Robin Hood or Ned Kelly, was more a hapless figure, pushed by events into a war in which he had limited influence and no great talent. He was sachem of the Pokanoket tribe, traditional occupiers of the Plymouth area and son of Massasoit, the sachem with whom the Pilgrims had long agreed to live in harmony. One of his native names was Metacomet, Philip his alternative English name. The English later added the “king” prefix somewhat mockingly and it stuck.
His rival was the Plymouth Governor, Josiah Winslow, son of *Mayflower* passengers, a defence hawk inviting modern comparisons, and possibly the chief culprit, if there was one.

Although the Indians willingly sold their land in order to buy English goods, grievances had built up. Philbrick says the Indians got the worse of the land deals, though not outrageously so. They despaired at the rate of forest clearing, the decline in game and fish numbers and furs for trading, the crumbling of their culture, various real or imagined slights and deceptions. Extravagant rumours flew on both sides as tensions built up. The hotter the war became, the more the mistrust.

Philbrick says the Indians got the worse of the land deals, though not outrageously so. They despaired at the rate of forest clearing, the decline in game and fish numbers and furs for trading, the crumbling of their culture, various real or imagined slights and deceptions. Extravagant rumours flew on both sides as tensions built up. The hotter the war became, the more the mistrust, hate and resort to racial feelings.

The pattern of collapsing race relations after half a century of harmony can only very loosely be applied here. The Sydney colony was usually fairly harmonious, except for brief skirmishing on the Hawkesbury-Nepean frontier, the main area of land competition. After fifty years, however, the main race question was not Aboriginal resurgence but rather a calamitous plummeting of numbers, after two smallpox epidemics and the ravages of venereal disease, tuberculosis and other diseases. By that time, as with second-generation New Englanders, the British had come to see Australia as theirs, whereas in 1800 they perceived themselves much more as guests.

Out on the south-eastern pastoral frontier, however, sufficiently systematic skirmishing broke out in the five years or so after 1838 to suggest a possibly co-ordinated Aboriginal effort, directed more at regaining control rather than outright opposition to the squatting wave. Some elements of Philip’s war can be read into this— with caution. The area was vastly larger, almost unpoliced, the warring less and the numbers involved on both sides much smaller.

Unlike the New England Indians, Australian Aborigines rarely had access to guns, and where they did they used them for tribal disputes. In the musket era, however, guns were of limited value in guerrilla-style warfare and the early colonists in both New England and Australia had no clear advantage in arms. By King Philip’s time the Indians were experienced with guns, which the whites freely sold to them as more efficient hunting weapons for the fur trade.

The Indian practice of scalping victims was inflammatory, as was the Aboriginal one of mashing in the heads of victims. But Philbrick says Indian atrocities were less savage than those of European armies of the time, especially as they did not rape women captives.

He says the war achieved the opposite of its “war to end war” aim of subduing the Indians to bring lasting peace. Instead the next century brought a series of frontier wars, even in New England. A big factor was the removal of the former buffer of friendly Indians. The destruction and heavy taxation required set the economy back for decades.

An unspoken theme running through Philbrick’s book is what might be called the “normalisation” of New England. This word has often been applied to early New South Wales, as a convict colony, an open air jail, turned quite rapidly into a fairly conventional Western society. While the settlers of New England were, at least in theory, from the opposite end of the behaviour spectrum, Philbrick describes a normal share of rogues, incompetents, blowhards, bullies and hardliners also present. The second generation were more acquisitive and American-minded, with a softening religious edge.

There were also a lot more of them, most wanting land—the average New England family of the time had seven to eight children. The *Mayflower* descendants alone were such hearty breeders that today perhaps one in ten Americans (including the progeny of former President F.D. Roosevelt) carries *Mayflower* genes, much as the early fleets have spread progeny disproportionately into the Australian population.

Soon after the *Mayflower* arrived, its financial backers in London, the Merchant Adventurers, sent a shipload of slackly Anglican “young ruffians” who established a township just to the north of the Pilgrims. They proved lazy, inept and seemingly in shock from the strangeness and challenge. Another less saintly addition to the Puritan population were semi-reformed ex-pirates who moved in, their toughness more hindrance than help in the Indian troubles.

The *Mayflower* colony had originally been intended for what became the site of New York, which England claimed as part of Virginia, though the Dutch saw it differently and settled their own fur trading colony there four years later to strengthen their rival claim. Faulty navigation famously landed the *Mayflower* far to the north, in land nearer the border of the French claims in Canada. By the 1630s another 20,000 Puritans followed the Pilgrims, mostly settling around Boston. And the rest is history.

Philbrick is director of a maritime studies centre in the region and it shows in the strength of his attention to the detail of the voyage and the pioneering rather than the religion.

What impressed me most was the dogged courage of the Pilgrims, a small band of at one point fewer than a hundred, establishing a home in the wilderness and what they, rightly or wrongly for posterity, saw as a divinely guided future light for the world.

After more than five years of public interest in the David Hicks case, we are still unsure about his reasons for leaving the comforts of suburban Adelaide and travelling to war-ravaged Afghanistan, joining the anti-Western Taliban and receiving military training, taking up arms on behalf of Muslim extremists and fighting against the United States and its allies. It seems such an unlikely thing for an unremarkable young Australian to do.

There is nothing in his early life to suggest such a trajectory. After finishing school, Hicks worked in the Northern Territory and in the rural areas of South Australia before deciding at twenty-three to seek adventure abroad. Leaving behind two small children from a failed relationship, Hicks went to Japan, where he trained horses for three months. On returning to Adelaide, Hicks toyed with the idea of riding a horse along the old Silk Route in the Middle East. But these plans were set aside when he went to the Balkans and joined the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), a UN-backed militia which was opposing Serbian forces determined to crush the Kosovars. After two months with the KLA and the fighting virtually over, Hicks came back to Adelaide where he thought again of travelling to the Middle East. By this time he had become intrigued by Islam. He visited a mosque and eventually became a Muslim.

The new convert headed to Pakistan, where he joined Lashkar e Tayyiba (LET), a paramilitary group later designated a terrorist organisation. After twelve unfulfilling months on the Pakistan–India border, Hicks apparently severed his ties with LET in order to study Arabic as a religious discipline. But he left Pakistan in early 2001 for neighbouring Afghanistan where he undertook an eight-week basic training course at an al Qaeda camp in al Farouq. According to the charge sheet prepared by the US Department of Defense, the course included “weapons familiarisation and firing, land mines, tactics, topography, field movements, basic explosives and other areas”.

Hicks returned to al Farouq in April 2001 and completed al Qaeda’s “guerrilla warfare and mountain tactics training course”. He reportedly received training in “marksmanship; small team tactics; ambush; camouflage; rendezvous techniques; and techniques to pass intelligence to al-Qa’ida operatives”. During his second stint in al Farouq, Hicks apparently expressed personal concern to Osama bin Laden that al Qaeda’s training materials were not available in English. He was later interviewed by Muhammad Atif, al Qaeda’s military commander, and asked about “his ability to travel around the world”, including to Israel, and “his willingness to go on a martyr mission”. Hicks conducted surveillance of the American and British embassies at Kabul in August 2001.

By this time Hicks had assumed an entirely Islamic persona and was known as Muhammad Dawood. Personal letters to his family in Adelaide around this time feature proclamations of Islam’s superiority and assertions of its sublime truthfulness. It would appear that religion had given Hicks the purpose and meaning that had eluded him over the previous five years. He wrote that it was God’s will that he “go directly to the front”, and that, should he meet his fate, the highest position in heaven was reserved for those who “go fighting in the way of God against the forces of Satan”. It is at this point that Hicks’s account of his motivations and actions begins to strain credibility.

David Hicks saw television coverage of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon when he was in Pakistan. Apparently appalled by the indiscriminate nature of the 9/11 mission, Hicks went immediately to Afghanistan, where he intended to recover his personal belongings before returning to Australia. The USA alleged that he returned to Afghanistan the next day and, rather than collecting his bag, reported to al Qaeda’s deputy military commander, Saif al Adel, who was then organising militias for oper-
Hicks said he had not intended to oppose the invasion force or assist those loyal to al Qaeda. He says he was obliged to do so when enveloped by the conflict. This is a curious admission. He received military training from al Qaeda but then allegedly refused to render military service on its behalf.

There is another discordant element in his story. He was willing to gain specialist expertise that would have been particularly useful in defending Afghanistan against a Western invasion, but apparently declined to participate when such an invasion actually occurred. Was he, in fact, a lukewarm convert to the Taliban’s version of Islam, or did he retain some reticence about defending those who had sanctioned the use of indiscriminate violence? If the latter, had he previously been prepared to overlook the al Qaeda-instigated 1998 embassy bombings in Tanzania and Kenya that killed hundreds of innocent people—few of whom were Americans? What made these atrocities different from 9/11? Did their deaths not matter?

Those motivated by intense anti-American feeling justify Hicks’s actions on the basis that he was rightly opposing American imperialism. In effect, he was a dedicated man on a laudable mission. Others excuse his deeds on the grounds that he was disillusioned with life in Australia and was caught up in something well beyond his imagination. In effect, he was an idealist in the wrong place. Another group condemns Hicks for aiding and abetting an odious regime that cared little for the personal freedoms and individual liberties enjoyed in most Western societies. In effect, he was a deluded man participating in a despicable campaign. One suspects that Hicks’s actual motivations will be known when he is ready, willing and able to answer questions publicly about his actions in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

There is, however, one explanation for his actions that has not been canvassed: that he was the subject of indoctrination and not in his right mind when he provided material support to a terrorist organisation—the charge to which he eventually pleaded guilty during proceedings at Guantanamo Bay. Quite apart from whatever Hicks might disclose about his activities in the Middle East, I am surprised that there has not been more discussion of whether he was, in fact, indoctrinated and whether this relieves him of some or all of the responsibility for the crime he committed.

The possibility that indoctrination occurred would, for the advocates of such a position, have had the effect of explaining away Hicks’s actions while his character remained unblemished. The crime he committed was effectively perpetrated by those who had subjected him to processes that deprived him of the capacity for rational decision-making. This is a very handy means of avoiding moral culpability and would have suited the purposes of his more ideological supporters.

This was essentially the defence offered by lawyers for nineteen-year-old Patty Hearst, the wealthy American media heiress, who was kidnapped on February 4, 1974, by a disparate group of violent radicals calling itself the Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA). After holding Hearst for two months, the group released a videotape in which Hearst, holding an automatic weapon in front of the SLA logo, announced that she had decided to join the group voluntarily. As part of the new identity, Hearst changed her name to “Tania”.

Three months after her abduction, Hearst participated in an armed bank robbery alongside SLA members. Surveillance footage showed that Hearst was armed and played an active part in the crime. She was later apprehended and charged with armed robbery.

It would appear that religion had given Hicks the purpose and meaning that had eluded him over the previous five years.
Her attorney argued at trial that Hearst was a victim of brainwashing and mind control—two activities allegedly more sinister and invasive than indoctrination—and could not be held legally responsible for her actions. The jury was not convinced. On March 20, 1976, Hearst was convicted and sentenced to twenty-five years imprisonment. Three years later President Jimmy Carter commuted her sentence to time served although the conviction stood. As he was vacating the Oval Office, President Bill Clinton granted Patty Hearst a full presidential pardon on January 20, 2001. There is much debate about Clinton’s decision. It implied that Hearst had indeed been the victim of brainwashing or mind control and was not accountable for whatever she did while in such a state. The same might have been said for David Hicks.

What would have induced a poorly-educated Australian to throw in his lot with hardline fundamentalist Muslims in a far-off land? What did Hicks think his association with al Qaeda would achieve? Was he concerned simply with the preservation of Afghan sovereignty and the integrity of an Islamic state or did he intend to cause harm to the United States and the Western world as part of global jihad? If it was the former, why defend the legitimacy of the Taliban when the regime had not been recognised by a host of other Islamic countries? If the latter, why did he need to travel to the Middle East to express his disapproval of everything for which the United States represented? He could have attempted to sabotage American interests much nearer to home with potentially greater success. Despite denials, did he privately approve of hijacking commercial aircraft and did he personally endorse the 9/11 terrorist attacks?

Whatever account Hicks might give for his actions, other than mental instability or a mercenary intent they all point to a person who had appropriated some very extreme views. But where did they come from? It is hard to believe they were derived from his father or family. There is nothing in his upbringing or schooling to suggest he would embark upon such a course of action.

At some point, David Hicks acquired a religious and political outlook that was undergirded by certain doctrines and specific causes for which it would appear he was willing to sacrifice everything. These beliefs might have been freely chosen after a period of reflection and discernment. It is more likely, however, that they were acquired under the influence of an individual or individuals that engaged in indoctrination.

Does this mean, then, that we should suspend moral judgment and set aside the question of Hicks’s legal responsibility? It depends, of course, on whether we believe individuals are freed from personal responsibility for their actions if they have been indoctrinated. Such a determination requires a clear definition of what we mean by indoctrination.

When I was commissioned to the directorship of a theological college, a friend remarked that if the Christian church is committed to propagating certain doctrines, didn’t that mean I was in the business of indoctrination? My first reaction was outrage. As someone who respects personal liberty and honours the dictates of conscience, I rejected outright the inference that any of my students were coerced into accepting dogma. But I quietly conceded that I needed to do some thinking. After all, what is indoctrination if it isn’t endeavouring to have people embrace certain doctrines—willingly or otherwise? The presenting issue for me was the nasty connotations attached to the word indoctrination. In the minds of many people, indoctrination is an activity not much different from propagandising, mind control and, worst of all, brainwashing. But comparison is just not possible.

The term brainwashing was first used in 1951 by the British journalist Edward Hunter in his book Brainwashing in Red China. He claimed that the Chinese had developed techniques of thought reform that could:

- change a mind radically so that its owner becomes a living puppet—a human robot—without the atrocity being visible from the outside. The aim is to create a mechanism in flesh and blood, with new beliefs and new thought processes inserted into a captive body.

The notion that individuals could have their entire values system removed and replaced with those approved by a government gained wide currency within a few years when a small number of American POWs during the Korean War became apologists (albeit short-term) for the communist cause.

Robert Lifton described their experiences in Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of Brainwashing in China, which appeared in 1961. Although he used the term brainwashing, Lifton was not convinced that brainwashing was possible. He remarked: “From the standpoint of winning [American POWs] over to a Communist view of the world, the program must be judged a failure.”

This was confirmed by Edgar Schein in Coercive Persuasion: A Socio-Psychological Analysis of the Brainwashing of American Prisoners by the Chinese Communists, which appeared in the same year as Lifton’s study. Schein notes that the fifty POWs who returned from North Korea who reportedly embraced communism did so as an expedient measure they hoped...
would save their lives. The case for brainwashing was not supported by empirical evidence and the ability to brainwash remained a matter of conjecture.

Despite claims of brainwashing being rejected at the trial of Patty Hearst, it was used as a defence for Steven Fishman, who was charged with mail fraud in Florida during 1988. Fishman’s lawyers argued that his criminal behaviour was the outcome of being brainwashed by the Church of Scientology. But the trial judge, D. Lowell Jensen, refused to accept much of what purported to be expert testimony on the basis that “no statistics or effectiveness have been put forth for this position, no formal theory about it has been widely accepted among social, behavioural or medical scientists and little attention has been paid to it, on the whole, in scholarly and scientific writing”.

Despite the dire warnings of novelists Aldous Huxley and George Orwell about tyrannical states being able to “program” their citizens to become compliant subjects, and widely-held assumptions in the community that “brainwashing” is both technically possible and vigorously practised, there is no evidence to support the contention that individuals can be compelled or coerced into completely reorienting their allegiances and espousing views that directly contradict every principle that had previously shaped their lives. What, then, distinguishes indoctrination from brainwashing? Or is indoctrination always and everywhere just as bad?

Indoctrination cannot simply be defined by the involvement of religious doctrines, because political beliefs are equally capable of being the subject of indoctrination. We know that members of political parties and social movements can be indoctrinated. Nor is indoctrination defined simply by the methods employed to impart ideas and information. Some methods of learning bypass a person’s reasoning process, such as the recitation of multiplication tables, but this kind of activity would not be deemed indoctrination. And indoctrination cannot be defined simply by someone’s intention. While a person might try to impose his or her beliefs, their success is determined only by the readiness of others to accept the beliefs being propagated.

It seemed to me that indoctrination is defined chiefly by its consequences. Indoctrination has occurred whenever a person has accepted beliefs that they place beyond public assessment or rational critique. This is not the same as believing something by faith. A person can hold beliefs for which they cannot give a comprehensive explanation without it being said that they have been indoctrinated. An indoctrinated person can, however, give compelling reasons for what he or she believes without being willing to have those reasons questioned or challenged.

The crucial distinction is the holding of beliefs in such a manner that they form a closed circle resistant to any questioning and impervious to all critical assessment. These beliefs can be political or religious. The ranks of the indoctrinated include communists, socialists and fascists, Christians, Jews and Muslims. Although some groups have a greater desire to indoctrinate their members than others, it is people willing to suspend their critical faculties and sometimes their moral discrimination who become indoctrinated.

There is clearly a great deal of difference, then, between a brainwashed person (if such a person actually exists) and an indoctrinated person. The indoctrinated person retains their powers of reason, autonomy and freedom although they are not employed from a perspective that is likely to challenge or disturb strongly held beliefs. The indoctrinated person can also exercise their conscience over whether or not they decide to choose virtue over vice.

W
dether or not David Hicks was indoctrinated—I am inclined to think he probably was indoctrinated because he chose to be so—within my definition of indoctrination he is nonetheless unable to avoid being held legally responsible and morally accountable for his actions. While the Taliban provided the belief system within which he justified resorting to arms, it was Hicks who decided to accept these beliefs and then to hold them in a manner that apparently rationalised terrorism. The Taliban is certainly complicit in Hicks’s actions. But inasmuch as he made a reasoned decision to hold unreasonable views, Hick cannot avoid accepting responsibility for the consequences of his actions.

While the United States government did itself no favours in failing to make Hicks’s legal status clear at the time of his apprehension and lost credibility in taking an inordinately long time in dealing with him, this whole episode has highlighted the illegality and the immorality of private citizens from one nation joining the forces of another to fight yet another. Australians now know that leaving Australia to participate in armed conflict as mercenaries or to travel abroad for the purpose of engaging in hostile activities in a foreign state is an offence under the Foreign Incursions Act. This will probably be Hicks’s only legacy and one for which he is owed no thanks.

To my mind, Hicks is not even entitled to our sympathy. He deserves only pity. He was, at best, reckless and misguided. In time I suspect we will learn whether he was also violent and dangerous.

Associate Professor Tom Frame is Director of St Mark’s National Theological Centre in Canberra.
YOU’VE SPENT 10,000 YEARS getting there. It’s not pretty but it’s yours—the swamp, the forest, the tree house where you live. Bigger and stronger tribes drove you down from the better land higher up the slopes, so you fell back on a godforsaken place full of reptiles, insects and malarial encephalitis. West Papua’s rainforests are hell; but at least you feel safe and alone.

Then Zurück in die Steinzeit comes along—a party of Germans looking for tourism’s outer edge. They have their cameras ready and this is what they’ve come for (Zurück in die Steinzeit means “Back to the Stone Age”) —stark naked little guys with bows and arrows and weird penis sheaths and living in trees. They’re up there on a kind of platform gesticulating: even at $8000 a seat this show is worth a ticket.

IT SEEMS THAT EVERYWHERE today people spend lots of time staring at other people. In some Third World villages they do it because time hangs heavy on their hands. In First World cities they do it because time hangs heavier—the rich, who read less and play more and suffer a surfeit of channels as well as food, are often bored out of their minds. So the bolder of them go on tour to the ends of the earth where “extreme ethno-tourism” can be enjoyed by venturing into the last strongholds of tribal man.

In his book about the tourists now exploring such domains, Lawrence Osborne describes them as “a sophisticated variant of the ecotourist”. He concedes in The Naked Tourist that “they are not anthropologists by any means”, but goes on to claim that “they share the anthropologist’s ethos: subtle, invisible contact with fragile and remote peoples, extreme sensitivity, a light touch”.

Now one doesn’t want to be picky. Mr Osborne writes well, is funny, and is highly informative. For all of this we can be grateful. Besides, he unspares his own motives for joining one of these adventure groups. But in all seriousness, is it possible—is it even imaginable—that a commercial tour operation run by a one-time tennis player from Wisconsin, who inveigles his way into tribal territory, and marches up to the foot of somebody’s tree house in Papua so his customers can meet its occupants, actually represents the “anthropological ethos” with its subtlety, sensitivity, and “light touch”?

Who said they wanted to be touched anyway? And even if the touch was light—and a recent BBC film about the man in question, Kelly Woolford, throws some doubt on this—why on earth do Westerners imagine they have a right to behave in this way? Would you like a prying cameraman to kick in your own front door and walk through the house?

How come the little brown tree-dwellers have come to be considered as suitable objects for staring at as if they were architectural ruins like Greek temples, or geological oddities like Monument Valley? As exotic extras in the theatre of tourist spectacle?

For broken and ruined cultures, increasingly irreparable and sociopathic, as is the case in much of rural Aboriginal Australia, the time may have come to firmly put aside the old-time way of life and move on. But that’s not the case in West Papua. These old-time tribal cultures are in working order. If the Indonesian government is leaving the people alone, if they’re harming no one and are happy enough with their lives, why should they be treated as a legitimate target for overripe, underworked, idle, escapist voyeurs?

For that’s what Lawrence Osborne self-confessedly is. He suffers from ennui—compounded with the slothful disease of the spirit called accidie. Work of some kind might be a cure, but that’s not what he wants. He wants out of New York. He wants to escape. He knows intimately what it is to be distracted from distraction by distraction and he’s had enough. An Englishman of middle age who lives on Manhattan, “It came upon me quite suddenly,” he says, “like a mental disorder
unknown to psychiatry: the desire to stop everything in normal life, to uproot and leave.” And as one of the city’s permanent transients this wasn’t hard.

Osborne recalls Baudelaire observing that “life is a hospital where every patient is possessed with the desire to change beds”, and from this we can see the therapeutic role the faraway Papuans in their tree houses are supposed to play. But Osborne’s main reason for travelling so far from home is that the journey itself is an adventure. That’s what “Back to the Stone Age” offers—exoticism beyond compare, well-organised deals, “touristified and packaged for visitors like myself, the harried escapists of a hemisphere so rich it no longer knows what to do with itself but move”.

Tourism has a long history. The term “Grand Tour” was first used in a book by Richard Lassels called The Voyage of Italy in 1670. It described, writes Osborne, an informal journey through the Continent for young British aristocrats, who were usually accompanied by a tutor called a bear leader as they made their way through a galaxy of cultural attractions in France, Switzerland, and Italy. The Tour, as it came to be known, arose because of the new wealth of the English, which made them Europe’s most affluent tourists, but it also expressed an uneasy inferiority complex, a need to Europeanise the manners of their uncouth progeny—their “raw boys,” as Tobias Smollett called them.

For many years the preferred destination was Italy. But some Grand Tourists were less interested in the Colosseum or the marvels of Florentine painting than in the excitements of Venice and Naples: these cities “were the Bangkok and Manila of the Age of Enlightenment”, writes Osborne, and the entertainment they offered had little to do with ruins. The Tour not only improved the mind, it acquainted the body with the diversions pointed to by Daniel Defoe when he wrote in 1701: “Lust chose the Torrid Zone of Italy, Where Blood ferments in Rapes and Sodomy.”

The author claims that Italy’s development into “the world’s first truly tourist nation” could never have happened without prostitution, or without “the reputation for sexual ease that eventually lured English women as well”. Yet Italy’s two most lasting contributions were more mundane: the infrastructural model for the tourist trade it provided (hotels, restaurants, theatres, brothels), and the experiential possibility of personal growth and development in other cultures and balmier climes. One might like to think that it also helped young men mature, but Boswell’s Italian experiences merely confirmed his rackety ways. In Naples, he wrote, “My passions were violent. I indulged them; my mind had nothing to do with it.”

Historically, perhaps, the author of The Naked Tourist doesn’t go quite as far back as he might. Long before Thomas Nugent wrote a guidebook called The Grand Tour in 1749, and long before Richard Lassels wrote The Voyage of Italy in 1670, Pausanias, some time in the second century AD, wrote a Guidebook to Greece. Mary Beard tells us in her useful little book The Parthenon (2003) how by that date Athens was both a university town and “a notable high spot in the ancient ‘heritage trail’; its monuments were tourist attractions almost as much as they are today”.

Monuments of course can stand anything. Monuments don’t care. Voyeurs may stare rudely at a monument forever without giving offence. But living people are different. Certainly something altogether different is involved in marching onto their turf and staring voyeuristically at the last stone-age populations on the planet. Do the tree-dwellers in West Papua need harried Western escapists? Or would they rather be left alone?

From New York the author skips eastwards port by port—to Dubai, to Calcutta, to the Hedonopolis of Bangkok, to Bali, and finally to Papua itself. In Dubai the resident sheik is building an Arabian folly—several follies in fact—with endless villas on miles of artificial water frontage to house thousands of billionaires. In the contrasting poverty of Calcutta, Claude Levi-Strauss had found only filth and vultures, but Osborne reveals in nostalgie de la boue:

I felt I was inside a nightmare to which I had taken a liking. No relatives, no friends, no phones ringing, no connection to anything: just a city teeming with birds and goats, with millions of strangers sleeping outdoors.

Economy-class visitors to Bangkok find its medical services unignorable (the Thais have “reinvented medicine to make it something it has never been in all its short if illustrious history: a pleasure”). A million patients a year come to Bumrungrad, the biggest pri-
vate hospital in South-East Asia and a complex where along with restaurants, shops and galleries, hundreds of treatments are gathered under one roof. After thirteen cowardly years Osborne decides it’s time for dental repairs, gets work that would have cost $8000 in New York for $383, and notes appreciatively that the female staff were “hand-selected for attributes little associated with the rigors of dentistry”.

And so to Papua’s people in the trees—and to Mr Kelly Woolford, the man whose trekking company Papua Adventures runs First Contact tours. Lawrence Osborne finds him a generally attractive figure and I think he’s right. Though naively boyish, Woolford certainly knows what he’s doing. Long ago Alvin Toffler’s *Future Shock* foresaw an expanding recreational industry in which “the experience-makers will form a basic—if not the basic—sector of the economy”. Identities would be consciously refashioned, and leisure would be redefined in therapeutic and experiential terms.

Transforming experiences for the too-comfortable and the bored are exactly what Woolford sells. He tells Osborne that his last client had been a British investment banker who “thanked him afterward for changing his life”. They’d met the Kombai, and the miracle-working combination of hardship en route, and authentic untouched tribals to stare at on arrival, worked wonders. This, says Woolford talking to Osborne, often happens with the very rich:

\[ W: \text{Because everywhere is like everywhere now.} \]
\[ O: \text{It’s all a bore.} \]
\[ W: \text{Don’t we all?} \]

But is it all a hoax? Just a set-up? Does Kelly Woolford organise the whole thing collusively with the natives in advance? A new documentary by Indus Films for the BBC, *First Contact*, allows those of us who only stare at people vicariously on television to make some sort of judgment for ourselves. It contains video from a 2003 trip with a pretty fierce tribal response which looks very convincing, accompanies the engaging Englishman Mark Anstice into the jungle, and follows Woolford step by step on another venture.

Everyone from Osborne to Mark Anstice finds Woolford sincere and likeable, a romantic nature-boy genuinely in love with the terrain and its people. This comes through strongly in the film. But his naivety is a worry. And when push comes to shove—when in the BBC film he fails to persuade the Papuans to allow him to visit their village—it starts to get ugly.

He speaks with annoyance to his loyal Papuan assistant and claims to have been let down. He looks with irritation at one of his hosts wearing a necklace of plastic beads, then roughly fingers it, making the helpless little man shake with terror merely because his chosen ornament doesn’t fit Woolford’s vision of Uncorrupted Primeval Man.

The plasticised necklace also doesn’t fit what Woolford has told the BBC he will deliver, and he evidently feels it makes him look like a fraud. Yet this is only because what he is offering his clients, a once-only never-to-be-repeated eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation, is essentially absurd. Trade is taking place all the time. Even Papuans who have never eyeballed a “white man” may be using cast-off jeans that have come their way.

The whole “first contact” tourist operation illustrates our insatiable need for theatricalised versions of life to take us out of ourselves, and the commercialisation of exotic “experiences” for harried urban escapists willing to pay for their pleasures at the ends of the earth and beyond. We want the world as spectacle, life as theatre, existence as exhibition—while *voyeurismo* takes over the world.

Roger Sandall is the author of *The Culture Cult*. He has a website at www.culturecult.com. *The Naked Tourist: In Search of Adventure and Beauty in the Age of the Airport Mall*, by Lawrence Osborne (North Point Press) will shortly be available in paperback.
NO ONE IN HIS RIGHT MIND wants to go to war. One does not have to be a combat veteran to know that war is a dirty, bloody and highly stressful affair especially in the contemporary tasks of peace enforcement. Of course, those who don’t have to go to war in Iraq or anywhere else have less reason to be concerned. These conflicts are far away and attract little attention unless the daily media highlight the more bloody occasions and the politicians rush out media releases.

Public opinion polls tell us that a majority, even a large majority, of Australians believe that our troops in Iraq should be withdrawn, whether unconditionally or otherwise being less clear. We can assume that the reasons are many and varied but the pollsters do not seem to ask their respondents to give reasons.

The most obvious reason is that many, perhaps most, such people regard the conflict in Iraq as unwinnable, but that begs the question of how to define victory. A number of commentators including retired generals who probably should know better want their governments to define an end state, a stage in the conflict when victory can be declared with a reasonable degree of conviction. Given the nature of modern conflict, which is almost always within nations rather than between nations, such a comfortable state is almost impossible to achieve. If nothing else, the Australian experience in East Timor since 1999 should convince people of that reality. Moreover, defining an end state satisfactory to the coalition partners is not binding upon the domestic participants in the conflict and may even encourage the insurgents to hold their fire until the peacekeepers leave. That simply guarantees that the conflict will degenerate further into a bloody civil war for which the coalition would bear some moral responsibility, albeit one glossed over with the help of professional spin doctors.

No doubt, much of the hostility to a continued Australian participation results from an increasingly bitter antagonism towards the Bush administration in the United States and, perhaps, a visceral and traditional anti-Americanism on the part of a segment of the Australian population. That latter facet of Australian political debate has always and will always be with us, as it is in most countries. It has many bases, not the least of which is sheer envy of a large, wealthy and generally confident nation the exercise of whose power is grateful for but not dependent upon token contributions of Australian forces. Of course, the media and legal theatre over David Hicks, unrelated as it is to Iraq, does not help any rational discussion of the conflict itself.

The hostility to George Bush is not so much puzzling as pointless. Whatever his failings as an American president, his administration has no authority over Australia and the level of his popularity is essentially a matter for the American electorate. Of course, he bears primary responsibility for the Iraq venture but that hardly warrants the viciousness of much of the Australian commentary. Possibly he attracts by association the vociferous anti-Howard cheer squads in Australia so that there is a flow over from the Australian domestic debate. Howard attracts often intemperate hostility from the academic and media elites as well as Labor loyalists because, unlike many of his Liberal forebears, he clearly disdains their claims to special expertise.

Certainly, much of the domestic dispute over Iraq is due to the partisanship in Australian politics, with Labor opposed to the Australian commitment in Iraq. On the other hand, the ALP does not articulate a considered opposition to the conflict and appears to be mired in a policy derived from instinct rather than reason. In part, there is and always has been a regrettable tendency for Australian domestic politics to drive international politics regardless of reality.

Surprisingly, there is less domestic hostility to our involvement in Afghanistan. This probably arises from
WHY IS AUSTRALIA ANTI-WAR?

the fact that Labor has yet to abandon its equally
instinctive support for an equally unwinnable conflict
in that country. But it is also true that the Afghan ven-
ture has been less clouded by misleading official justi-
fication for the commitment. Nevertheless that
justification remains questionable but as long as Labor
remains committed, opposition will be muted. Labor’s
policy is governed at least to some degree by the fact of
United Nations support for Afghanistan, forgetting that,
after Saddam’s defeat, the UN also backed the restora-
tion of Iraq until its offices were aggressively targeted
by the insurgents and the world’s persistently timid
peace enforcing organisation ran for cover.

Despite some assertions to the contrary, it surely
cannot be that those hostile to Australia’s role are con-
cerned for the well-being of the token number of
Australian troops deployed there. The only fatalities
that have occurred on all Australian deployments since Vietnam have been
accidental as well as rare, almost certainly fewer than if the troops had
remained in Australia. There have been some relatively minor combat casual-
ties but these attract little attention from
a media obsessed with corpses.

In any case, the footprint of the
Australian military on the community at
large is very small, not more than two
per cent at most. There is not even the
added impact of conscription that
underpinned the anti-war movement in
the Vietnam era. It is hardly the stuff of
mass protests, although the emergence
of these in the USA may well stimulate copycat moves,
complete with Vietnam era slogans, in Australia.

Many opponents of the continued coalition presence
in Iraq claim that they are concerned for the welfare of
the Iraqi people, whose oppressors are exclusively the
Iraqi insurgents and militias. They for their part target
the helpless and innocent rather than the coalition
forces and they will remain when those forces depart.
Removing the troops would likely increase the death
toll in Iraq to an unimaginable degree. The basic coal-
tion objective of stabilising Iraq to the stage where
local security forces can take over is generally modest,
with the only alternative being an unconditional with-
drawal, the result of which would be far worse than the
current situation.

Of course like most peoples, Australians are instinct-
ively averse to war and reluctant to become engaged.
But there are times when going to war is the least evil
of the options available. Every Australian involvement
in war since Federation has been intended to restore
peace in the face of aggression. Some have been suc-
cessful; many, notably Korea, Vietnam and Somalia,

have not, usually in the face of a political reluctance to
do the job thoroughly. Possibly, much of the current
hostility to the Iraq venture arises from a belief that the
allies cannot and ultimately will not win. In this sense,
though, Australians tend to have a short-term strategic
outlook, forgetting that a short-term outlook in interna-
tional affairs can be very misleading.

In my view, that was the end of one war. What we
have seen since is a totally different war, a
civil war in a country which is not and never has
been a real nation.

T
HE HISTORY of the public response to the Iraq
venture is instructive. At the outset, only a
hard core of those who oppose any war under
all circumstances expressed opposition to the
commitment. That opposition expanded as the public
justification for the venture appeared, superficially, to
have been exaggerated. Whether the coalition govern-
ments manipulated intelligence or were victims of its
manipulation by advisers is now fundamentally irrele-
vant. The invasion happened and the bloodstained Ba’athist regime of
Saddam Hussein was overthrown. There was then a widespread sense of
relief, even joy. But such enthusiasms wilt when the going gets tough.

In my view, that was the end of one war. What we have seen since is a
totally different war, a civil war in a country which is not and never has
been a real nation. The Americans can hardly be blamed for that. The blame lies with
the Iraqis themselves, aided and abetted
by a range of outsiders, notably Syria
and Iran, who supply most of the
resources. In this context, the United
States is compelled to stay but for reasons that are
rarely if ever seriously discussed, certainly not in
Australia, where emotion, as so often, overwhelms reality.

As far back as 1991 when Iraq was expelled from
Kuwait, it was in my view desirable to retain a stable
albeit obnoxious regime in Iraq to provide a buffer
between Iran and the Arab states. That was always
Iraq’s role as far back as 1920 when it was first config-
ured by the British. The problem was—and is—that
Iraq is a majority Shi’ite community but Sunni control
had to be established and sustained to keep Shi’ite Iran
out. For its part, Iran was a manageable problem until
the overthrow of the Shah in 1979 by the extreme reli-
gious party. Progressively since that time, Iran has fos-
tered violent Shi’ite activism throughout the Arab
world, especially in Iraq and Lebanon but even in Saudi
Arabia.

There can be little doubt that many Australians see
the conflicts in the Middle East as disconnected from
Australia. As with the ever-present isolationist ele-
ments in the United States, there is always a view in the
WHY IS AUSTRALIA ANTI-WAR?

community that what happens outside our continent is irrelevant to us. This “little Australia” view ignores the reality that for the whole of our existence, Australia has been a world citizen if only because our prosperity depends utterly upon engagement with the world, and the scale of that prosperity will depend upon contributing to peace in the world. In this context, it is little short of scandalous that the major part of our political, academic and media elites have not the slightest knowledge or understanding of Australia’s fundamental strategic interests.

For Australia, the compelling reason for our continued tiny commitment to Iraq is to sustain the American alliance, which is fundamental to Australia’s security. The cost is small and the benefit considerable. At least, too, it is not hurting Iraq in those peaceful places—other than Baghdad—where Australians are operating. Cynical may describe

Australia’s motives but thoughtless could describe those opposed to our involvement. As with Vietnam, we will pull out in concert with the coalition’s senior partner, and debate about the impact upon the Iraqi people will be irrelevant to the decision.

There was a good case for not intervening in Iraq in 2003 but arguing that is pointless. It happened and the deed is done. Certainly the US-led coalition has not covered itself in glory since the fall of Saddam but, given America’s general ineptitude in counter-insurgency, that is hardly surprising. Again, that is history and lessons need to be learned from the experience.

There is a case for withdrawing unconditionally from Iraq but its proponents will not state it because of its brutal cruelty for a people oppressed by their own.

Michael O’Connor wrote on “Australia’s Arc of Instability” in the November 2006 issue.

IPA ad to go here

pdf supplied

please delete this border -->
ALANG—THE GRAVEYARD OF SHIPS

(A port in India where ships are run aground and broken up for scrap metal by native labourers.)

Slowly the great ships slide
don the slip of ice waves,
Cut their path where kelp gardens wave their fronds—to wipe away
The stir of waters—the ships have passed.
Now, like ailing whales they rush the beach
Cutting deep and fast—the sand holds.
Strange fish drove down and begin to nibble.

This last,
the iron warrior, cuts the water
The great dark engines burning in its bowels
The pain of soldiers carried into fire,
Dark wounds that veterans carry to the grave.
The waves lap at its silence,
Seagulls pick at the reflections of its empty eyes.

There begins the slow demobbing,
The giant gaunt as P.O.W.'s
abandoned in the wake of war,
Minion little fish pick round the hull,
Dark forms above move about their myriad tasks.
Nothing is spared the fire of desperate men
Whose children cry far off
the pain of empty guts.

The waters lap around the lines of feet
Carrying careful destruction in their wake.
The wound tears open—
salt sears—
The sweaty surge of men rip down
What rust has barely time to gnaw—
Hungry men break down and down the monster
With bare hands and rough-shod implements.

The living war
breaks down to individual acts of pain.
The ship is burning—piece by piece
the welding and soldering of armies
Is undone by men who cry, “For blood, my child, my blood!”
And suffer the indignity of need, muffling their anger in the sand.

Fire, rust and bloodstains of survivors blend,
Their bleeding is internal and the scars
Won’t show on the embattled shells.  
Heat, that rivers creased up men,  
that simmers on dismissiled decks  
Where uniforms once shimmered and blazed,  
Heat will meld awaited wars and practised tragedies  
Poured into the mould of men with routine needs  
Blood money cannot meet.  
And salt corrodes.

J.R. McRae

Mother and Son

I must be less  
than eighteen months old—  
naked, in my mother’s arms,  
face pressed against hers  
as if danger was nearby.

We’re standing  
in an empty field  
with a hill in the background.  
Thistles and weeds  
grow around us, at our feet.  
The sky’s a total blank.

With my arms wrapped  
around her neck  
she is smiling a smile of pure love.  
You can see it in her eyes.  
Her feet are planted  
firmly on the ground.  
Her floral dress hangs in folds.  
There is something courageous  
about the way she stands.

The setting is a Displaced Persons’ camp  
in northern Germany  
after the end of World War II.  
She has no husband  
and I have no father.  
Does it make a difference  
to how we feel?

Fifty-two years later,  
on the night before she dies,  
my mother will tell me his name  
and the details of our lives.  
(While she spoke  
I asked few questions—  
was content to let her say  
what she wanted to  
and what she didn’t ...)

All that matters to me  
is that smile of pure love;  
all the money in the world  
couldn’t buy it  
and it would never be for sale.

Today, I stare for hours  
at the photograph  
and wonder who took it and why,  
of a mother standing  
with her son in her in arms,  
in a Displaced Persons’ camp—  
in northern Germany  
after there’s been a World War—  
in a field of weeds and thistles,  
under a blank sky.

Peter Skrzynecki
DAVID HODGSON

DAWKINS AND THE MORALITY OF THE BIBLE

MOST OF THE PUBLISHED responses to The God Delusion by Richard Dawkins have focused on his atheism, and have either given general support to his ideas or else dismissed them as extreme and simplistic. They have not given much attention to something I think is significant in the book, namely its clear and forceful criticism of the morality of aspects of major religions, including Christianity and Judaism, criticism that deserves to be taken seriously by reasonable adherents of these religions.

I see this as a notable omission. Many of the central stories of the Bible attribute to God and God's followers actions of grossly immoral violence. I do not believe the immorality in these stories has been adequately recognised by Christians and Jews; and in this article, I argue that this has serious implications and should be remedied.

Another notable omission from responses to the book is any reasoned identification of weaknesses in Dawkins' arguments for atheism; and in this article I also set out what I see as the three main weaknesses of his position. I will start with this, to make it clear that my concern about the morality of the Bible is associated with respect for religion, not opposition to it.

WHERE DAWKINS IS WRONG

DAWKINS (pages 13–14) adopts the following statement of atheistic belief by Julian Baggini: “Although there is only one kind of stuff in the universe and it is physical, out of this stuff comes minds, beauty, emotions, moral values—in short, the full gamut of phenomena that gives richness to human life.” He goes on to assert his belief that “there is nothing beyond the natural physical world”.

Dawkins offers an evolutionary explanation for our moral values in terms of the advantages, for survival and reproduction of genes, of being prepared to adopt and follow moral opinions and attitudes. But as Dawkins himself seems to recognise (270–72), to give an explanation of moral opinions and attitudes does not provide any justification for them. Dawkins passes moral judgments, for example about the God of the Old Testament (227–50), in such a way as to suggest that his moral judgments are not mere opinions but have objective truth or validity; but what he does not see, or does not acknowledge, is that this requires an appeal to something beyond the physical and beyond evolutionary explanations.

The question of whether moral judgments have any objective truth or validity is a controversial philosophical issue; but I firmly believe that at least some conduct is objectively wrong. This is partly because of the universality of appeals to right and wrong, partly because of other reasons I will not go into here, and partly because I cannot accept that my belief that some conduct is wrong is just an opinion with no better foundation than evolutionary selection or culture. To take an extreme example, I believe that, quite apart from what the law may say, it is wrong to torture a child for amusement. I cannot believe this is just an opinion, and that all that could be said against someone who does such a thing and sees nothing wrong in it is that they are breaking the law, and their genes or culture must be different from mine and those of most people I know. In relation to conduct as appalling as that, wrongness is I believe a matter of undeniable truth; and I challenge anyone who disputes this to put their hand on their heart and say, no, its wrongness is only a matter of opinion which can be explained by evolution and culture but has no other justification.

Now I’m not suggesting that conduct is wrong just because God forbids it. It has been said that if there is no God, then everything is permitted. I disagree profoundly with that. If our moral obligations depended on God’s commands, and nothing else, I would see no reason, other than prudential reasons, to obey those commands. It could be said that, because God created
us, we owe God gratitude and obedience; but then either the obligations of gratitude and obedience must themselves depend on God’s command, or they must be based on some moral imperative that does not consist entirely in God’s command. If the former, then it’s a bootstraps exercise; and if the latter, then moral obligation depends on something in addition to God’s command.

What I do suggest is that moral imperatives are binding on us because of reasons underlying them, that the existence of these moral imperatives and reasons means there is something about the universe or our relationship to it that supports these imperatives and reasons, and that this something is beyond physical matter and physical laws.

So Dawkins’ failure to appreciate the need for something beyond the physical to justify his own moral judgments is the first of three major errors I believe he makes.

The second of these errors is his disregard of consciousness. Scientists cannot yet explain what it is about brain processes that gives rise to conscious experiences such as visual and auditory experiences and feelings of pain, or what such experiences contribute to our choices and actions over and above information processing that could occur without them, as it does in computers. Certainly, scientists don’t have the faintest idea how one might construct or program an artificial system such as a computer so as to have conscious experiences, much less to use them; and it would be absurd, even if it were possible, to use pain or any other feelings to motivate a computer to proceed in accordance with its program. Many scientists try to dodge these problems by saying, quite wrongly in my view, either that computers are conscious, or that conscious experiences contribute nothing, that the brain’s information processing could just as well be carried out “in the dark”.

In his book, Dawkins mentions consciousness in just one sentence, as a gap whose bridging might be seen as improbable (140). I believe consciousness is itself beyond the physical matter and physical laws that Dawkins claims are all that exist; and its emergence during the course of evolution requires the existence of something in the early universe that was conducive to its emergence, something which I believe must go beyond physical matter and laws as presently understood. Whether or not that is correct, consciousness is a deep mystery, far, far deeper than the emergence of life; so Dawkins’ disregard of consciousness is a major defect in his argument for atheism.

My own view is that there is something fundamental about the universe that has to do with the potentiality for consciousness and the existence of moral imperatives, and also with the values of good and beautiful and the unfolding beauty of the universe itself. I think it is reasonable to regard all this as indicative of a universe that is in some sense purposefully creative.

From that, it might be thought a small step to personify these features of the universe, so as to arrive at something like a traditional conception of a monotheistic God, as a kind of superperson existing either in the universe or apart from it, who created the universe and exercises some kind of control over it. To take such a step may lead to ways of thinking about these features of the universe that are more inspiring than the vaguer and more abstract ideas I’ve been suggesting. However, it is a step I cannot take, except to the extent of regarding a person-like God as a metaphor for a more subtle and elusive reality.

This leads me to what I say is the third major error made by Dawkins, namely his failure to recognise the inadequacies of language in dealing with matters near the limits of our understanding. Language developed initially in dealing in a commonsense way with everyday matters, and it is in relation to such matters that statements generally have their clearest meaning and may be considered unambiguously true or not true. But language is not limited to dealing in a straightforward way with everyday matters; and when language is applied to other than everyday matters, truth may only be a matter of degree.

I can give a simple example from twentieth-century science. Prior to about 1900, scientists would have confidently asserted:

All waves are periodic processes extended in space.
No particles are periodic processes extended in space.
Therefore nothing can be both a wave and a particle.

However, by 1930 it was clear that photons and electrons displayed wave-like properties under some experimental arrangements and particle-like properties under other experimental arrangements. There was no single concept in our language that adequately expressed what they were; and the best description that could be given of them in ordinary language was that they were in a sense both waves and particles. Apparent inconsistency did not prevent this from being the description in ordinary language that was closest to the truth; and according to the pioneering quantum physicist Niels Bohr’s principle of complementarity, such inconsistent descriptions were acceptable in cases where the incompatible properties could not be displayed simultaneously.

Since our concepts and our language are inadequate for photons and electrons, it would hardly be surprising if they were also inadequate for God. There are deep mysteries about the universe and about our place in it. In relation to these matters, it is unrealistic to expect to be able, with our concepts and language, to express the
realistic in a straightforward way. The best we can hope is to approximate to the truth by metaphor. Because Dawkins fails to recognise that literal truth may be unattainable in relation to religious questions, he is far too ready to reject beliefs on the ground that they cannot be literally true, and to be dismissive of those who think otherwise, including theologians who strive to give adequate expression to religious ideas.

For my part, I believe religious beliefs can exemplify an appropriate attitude to our place in the universe and may qualify as helpful metaphors for what is purposefully creative about the universe. It is sometimes claimed by atheists that it is hubristic for human beings to regard themselves as subjects of interest to an omnipotent God. However, what I think is truly hubristic is to regard human beings (and in particular oneself) as the sole source and determinant of what is right and good, rather than as exercising powers of discovery and creativity in a context of respect for values that have claims upon them and are to some extent independent of them. And religion has inspired many, perhaps most, of the greatest moral, artistic, literary, architectural and musical achievements of humankind.

WHERE DAWKINS IS RIGHT

But Dawkins is certainly right in his assertion that religions should not be immune from rational criticism. We must be rational in making decisions as to what is right and what is wrong; and because beliefs on religious matters can have a strong bearing on these decisions, we must be rational in addressing religious questions, no less than in addressing any other questions that may be relevant to our conduct. It is important that any “leap of faith” to religious belief be consistent with rationally held beliefs about the world and particularly about morality, and that any beliefs contrary to reasonable morality should be rejected.

Dawkins is also right in asserting that there are aspects of the stories and teachings of major religions that are immoral, and have the potential to encourage evil attitudes and actions; and that we should not be deterred by considerations of respect for religious beliefs from pointing this out and urging that it be recognised. And he is right in asserting that it is not reasonable to support such teachings by appealing to the authority of holy books, the authority of prophets, the authority of great religious institutions or the consensus of large numbers of people.

Holy books are said to be authoritative because they are inspired by God, and prophets are said to be authoritative because they are in communication with God. Such arguments are flagrantly circular, seeking to prove the existence of a God that inspires holy books and communicates with prophets, by means of these supposed inspirations and communications. They are also highly implausible.

There is no good reason to think that the authors of holy books or the prophets were other than human beings like us, relying for their beliefs on their own perceptions and reasoning. If people today claim to be authoritative sources of religious truth because they are inspired by God or because they are in communication with God, their claims are rightly regarded with scepticism. I see no reasonable basis for any different view concerning the authorship of holy books or the authority of prophets. The only reasonable course is to assess their credibility in the same way as that of other texts and persons.

As regards the authority of religious institutions and the consensus of large numbers of people, these may have been factors supporting the reasonableness of beliefs in historical times when there was a broad consensus on religious beliefs throughout whole communities, a consensus that was also in accord with the teachings of highly respected religious institutions which had a monopoly on learning and scholarship in those communities, and when there was little if any means of knowing much about other communities and institutions. But today we know there is no consensus, and no good reason for giving particular weight to views promulgated by any particular religious institutions: there are believers and non-believers, and among believers and religious institutions there are different and conflicting belief systems. And what we now know about the history of great religious institutions can only inspire suspicion of their reliability as sources of religious wisdom.

So what about the persuasiveness of the content of religious teachings? Although there is much in the moral teachings of the religion with which I am most familiar, the Christian religion, that I find persuasive, there is also much in its teachings that I find unpersuasive and indeed appalling. And the same is true of other religions, to the extent that I am familiar with them. I will give some examples, commencing with a story that is common to three great religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, namely the story of Abraham and his son.

ABRAHAM AND ISAAC

In the Old Testament story of Abraham and Isaac (Genesis 22, referred to by Dawkins at pages 242–43), God tells Abraham to offer his son for a burnt offering. Abraham builds an altar, prepares wood for a fire, ties Isaac up, lays him on the altar, and takes a knife to kill him. Only then, an angel tells Abraham not to harm Isaac, and Abraham sees a ram caught in a
whereas, as I have argued, there would be good
God's command that makes things right or wrong; wrong if God has commanded it. But that assumes it is
also been suggested that killing an innocent child is not
sacrifice the child he loved is admirable. But that
non was a manifestation of evil, not of good.

About God, it says that God expects obedience to
God's command to kill an innocent child, where there is
no discernable reason for this except that it would
please God (!) to have the child killed and to have obedi-
cence shown in this way; that God expects followers to
respect a God who would be pleased to have an inno-
cent child killed for no better reason than this; and that
God would without good reason subject an innocent
child to a terrifying ordeal.

About Abraham, it says that he had respect for such
a God to the extent that he would, on the basis of such
a capricious order, kill an innocent child. And that is
quite apart from the point that Abraham, as a human
being with no more than our capacities for perception
and reasoning, could not have had any
reasonable basis for believing in the
existence of a God who would have
such expectations or issue such an order,
or for believing that such an order had
actually been issued to him.

Even if Abraham had seen a great
face in the sky speaking to him and had
heard the words spoken, it would have
been more reasonable for him to believe
this was a dream or hallucination than to believe that a God, conceived of as
good, would have such expectations and
would issue such an order. And even if
Abraham was justified in believing that
what he saw and heard was not a dream
or hallucination, the reasonable conclusion for him to
reach would have been that this supernatural phenome-
on was a manifestation of evil, not of good.

It has been suggested that Abraham’s willingness to
sacrifice the child he loved is admirable. But that
assumes Isaac was Abraham’s to sacrifice; whereas in
truth no person belongs to another in that way. It has
also been suggested that killing an innocent child is not
wrong if God has commanded it. But that assumes it is
God’s command that makes things right or wrong;
whereas, as I have argued, there would be good moral
reasons to obey God’s commands only if morality had
force independently of God’s commands. And this sug-
gestion also ignores the point that human beings only
have their perception and their reasoning to ascertain
whether there is a God and if so what its commands are;
and reason is strongly against there being a God who
would issue such commands.

So this story is about a God unworthy of respect, and
an Abraham who was prepared to do something grossly
immoral, to kill an innocent child, for no good reason
that he could have apprehended. And it has the potential
to inspire great evil in its message, apparently accepted
by some people today, that it is all right to kill innocent
people if you believe God has told you to.

**THE PASSOVER**

A nother story in the Old Testament (not

referred to by Dawkins) recounts how God

killed all the firstborn children of a group

whose ruler Pharaoh was oppressing the

Israelites, in order to induce Pharaoh to free them.

In Exodus 11, Moses predicts that God would kill all

the firstborn of Egypt, "from the firstborn of Pharaoh

that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the firstborn of

the maidservant that is behind the mill". Exodus 12 tells

of how God went ahead and did this, avoiding killing

any Israelites by passing over houses where blood had

been placed on the lintel and the two

two side posts. The morality of the God

depicted in this Passover story, who kills

children (including the firstborn of the

maidservant that is behind the mill) to

put pressure on a leader to achieve a

worthy political outcome, seems no dif-

ferent from the morality of suicide

bombers and other Islamist terrorists.

It has been said that what God did

was a last resort, to free good people

from enslavement by bad people, after

the Egyptians had been given every

chance to act on less extreme incentives.

But suicide bombers regard their objec-

tives similarly, and what is most

appalling about them is not their objectives, but their

targeting of innocent and powerless people, people like

the firstborn of the maidservant behind the mill. And

this attempted justification of what God is said to have
done in the Passover story confirms the implication
from the story that Christians and Jews, like the

Israelites, are good, with God on their side and with just

causes against bad people, causes for which it must

surely be right to act as God acted.

It has also been said that God moves in mysterious

ways, and we should not presume to judge God. But

God (accepting this concept) gave us the ability to

reason about moral issues; and as I said earlier, we
cannot assume the Bible is inspired by God. The fact

that the Bible, which is supposed to enlighten us on

moral issues, contains messages so plainly contrary to
reasonable morality, is a powerful reason for thinking its vision of God is in places a flawed one, created by fallible human beings.

**THE PROMISED LAND**

A further story in the Old Testament (referred to by Dawkins at 247–48) recounts how the one true God, who lovingly created all of humankind, favoured one group of human beings over others to the extent of giving the favoured group land, and instructing them to slaughter the people who previously occupied it. Deuteronomy 20 recounts God’s instructions to the Israelites on what to do when they defeat cities. In the case of cities that are not in the land God has given them, they are to kill all the men and take for themselves the women and children; and in the case of cities that are in the land God has given them, they are to kill everyone. Joshua 6:20–21 recounts that when Joshua and his followers took Jericho, they “utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword”, as instructed by God.

The fighting of a war of aggression because of a belief that God authorised it is bad enough; but the subsequent killing of the defeated people is simply appalling. The morality of the God of these passages seems no different from the morality of the Serb “ethnic cleansers” in Srebrenica (in those cases where only the men are to be slaughtered), or the Nazis of the Holocaust (in those cases where everyone is to be slaughtered).

It has been said that the people of Jericho were evil and could not be permitted to corrupt the Israelites; but this is just what Serb ethnic cleansers and Nazis would say. There’s no evidence to suggest the people of Jericho were any worse than any other group of people at the time, much less evidence that could justify the slaughter of every man, woman and child. And again, this attempted justification confirms the implication that we are good and they are evil, so these are things we may do to them but they must not do to us.

**HEAVEN AND HELL**

The New Testament does not contain stories such as these, and it presents Jesus as giving central importance to caring about other human beings, not just one’s friends but also one’s enemies. This seems to me wholly admirable.

But Jesus is presented by the Bible as a continuation of the revelation of the divine contained in the Old Testament, and as so regarding himself, thus associating him with the view of God exemplified by these stories. For example, the Bible presents the Last Supper as a celebration of the Passover, suggesting that Jesus condoned the killing of children to persuade Pharaoh to release the Israelites. And there are other aspects of the Bible’s account of Jesus that seem to me to be morally abhorrent, in particular his endorsement of a stark view of heaven and hell, according to which all humankind would be separated into two groups, the sheep destined for “life eternal” and the goats for “everlasting punishment” (Matthew 25:31–46).

I think it’s obvious that there is a continuous spectrum of human character, from very good to very bad, with most of us somewhere in the middle. The idea that a line would be drawn, so that those just on one side would be destined for eternal bliss, and those just on the other side would be destined for eternal suffering, seems arbitrary, unjust and abhorrent. And if it is said that the criterion is not merit but faith in Jesus, this would be worse, because there are good and honest reasons for not having that faith and many persons won’t have had the slightest opportunity to have that faith. And all this is quite apart from the powerful considerations (1) that where one ends up on any spectrum of merit is enormously influenced by genes and environment, even if, as I do believe, we have some capacity through free will to modify our handicaps in life; and (2) that this stark scheme of heaven and hell has no intelligible place for infants and the mentally ill.

I’m not saying here that it must be unreasonable to believe in the divinity and resurrection of Jesus. What I am saying is that the Bible’s account of Jesus is in places discredited by immoral and unjust ideas from both the Old and New Testaments.

**SO WHAT?**

One response to all this may be to ask: What does it matter? Christians and Jews do not support genocide. They do not demonstrate violently when their religion is said to be violent, they do not advocate terrorism or the slaying of infidels, they do not condone the killing of apostates.

Well, I think it matters very much. I think it’s reasonable to believe that the failure of Christians and Jews to repudiate the morality of these stories can have significant consequences, both in their own conduct and in holding back their challenge to evil beliefs derived from Islam. It is undeniable that moral beliefs influence conduct, and it’s reasonable to think that beliefs that demonise the enemy and justify extreme violence against the enemy contribute to violence in the world.

The truly worrying thing about fundamentalist Christians and Jews is not that they believe things happened that did not happen, like the Flood or the walls of Jericho tumbling down, but that their beliefs must mean they admire the God portrayed in these stories and the
morality of that God. And this worry applies with similar force to those Christians and Jews who do not believe in the literal truth of these stories, but nevertheless believe them to have a kind of truth in telling us about the nature of God and God’s dealings with human beings, and about morality.

I was particularly struck by the reference in The God Delusion (255–57) to a study carried out by Israeli psychologist George Tamarin. In this study, reported in 1966, he presented Joshua 6:20–21 to 1066 Israeli school children, aged eight to fourteen, across a broad spectrum of Israeli social and economic classes. He asked them the question, “Do you think Joshua and the Israelites acted rightly or not?”

Their answers were categorised as follows: A means total approval, B means partial approval or disapproval, and C means total disapproval. 66 per cent of responses were A, 8 per cent B, and 26 per cent C. The A group made comments such as, “In my opinion Joshua was right when he did it, one reason being that God commanded him to exterminate the people so that the tribes of Israel will not be able to assimilate amongst them and learn their bad ways.” Even the disapproving groups included comments such as, “I think Joshua did not act well, as they could have spared the animals for themselves.”

This is just one study, carried out four decades ago. But it has strong implications about the beliefs of the adults who influenced these children, and who might not themselves have given such frank expression to their views; and my search of the internet has disclosed no reference suggesting error by Tamarin, or any different results obtained in more recent studies.

It is right for Christians and Jews to condemn genocide and terrorism. But I suggest that to be consistent they should, with no ifs or buts, squarely acknowledge the following eight statements:

1. It would have been wrong for God to order Abraham to kill his son, as the Bible says He did.
2. It would have been wrong for Abraham to set about doing so.
3. It is wrong to kill an innocent person because you believe God has told you to.
4. It would have been wrong for God to kill children to induce Pharaoh to release the Israelites. (It would have been terrorism.)
5. It would have been wrong for God to order the Israelites to kill all occupants of defeated cities. (It would have been to order genocide.)
6. It would have been wrong for Joshua and his followers to kill all occupants of Jericho. (It would have been genocide.)
7. If Jesus believed that God had killed children to induce Pharaoh to release the Israelites, it would have been wrong for him to celebrate the Passover. (It would have been to condone terrorism.)
8. The Bible stories of Abraham and Isaac, the Passover and the battle of Jericho were written by fallible human beings and convey wrong messages about God and morality.

I have very rarely heard even moderate Christians or Jews acknowledge these things. If they are not prepared to do so, then their condemnation of genocide and Islamist terrorism involves double standards, which may affect their conduct in one way or another. But if they would acknowledge them, that could bring closer a time when reasonable adherents of all religions, including Islam, condemn immoral ideas associated with all religions, including those derived from the Koran. And that would leave those Islamists who advocate terrorism, the killing of infidels and the killing of apostates as an exposed and discredited minority.

I appreciate there is a great deal of theological writing on the issues I have raised; but I don’t believe this either satisfies or obviates the need for frank admission, along the lines of my eight statements, of the immorality in what is actually written in the Bible.

The God Delusion has not made me an atheist, as Dawkins may have wished. But it has made me ponder and articulate these ideas; and in my judgment, on balance, Dawkins is on the side of the angels in the quest for a more peaceful world.

SOME WORDS, when used in a certain context, trigger a question mark in consciousness for reasons that are not immediately apparent. Years ago, when working as a hospice chaplain, I heard nurses talk of quality when discussing the end stages of terminal illness, and this experience posted a question mark in my mind that has persisted over the years.

What was so odd about talking about quality of life for the dying? I certainly hope that the doctors who look after me, if I die a slow painful death, are not reticent with the morphine. So why the question mark? It is surely not irrational to want to save oneself from the painful and degrading experience of dying. So what is my problem with the use of the word quality when it is used to describe the final days of human life?

Part of my unease is the easy use of this word that is strongly associated with consumerism and managerialism, in the context of the unimaginable extinction of the self. It seems that the devastation that death brings, the removal of our most loved and precious, is somehow being reduced to the quality of a product that we might buy. In the absence of real comfort in the face of death, the only thing we can resort to is to make our experience of it the best we can.

The word experience is a giveaway to what is going on here. It is increasingly the case that the self is defined exclusively by the present. We are becoming ahistorical persons. As such, the only thing we trust is the infinitely thin segment of time called the present and, obviously, our experience of it. It therefore makes sense that we focus on the experience of dying and are therefore concerned about the quality of that experience as we would be concerned about the quality of a holiday or a dining or a sexual experience. Again we are faced with an enormous disjunction; the immensity of death has been reduced to the everyday even while its power over us increases.

The reduction of the human to experience worries me. The Christian story would give us an understanding of human life as a journey into God and hidden in God in death. It understands a person’s life as being the subject of blessing and as under judgment, as living under the YES and the NO of God and of being an offering to God even in its messiness and faithlessness. The Christian story thus provides a context for death as the end of a journey and a homecoming. The tradition of faith taught us how to die. Euthanasia was a good death, not in that it was free of pain, but in that it entailed a sober leave-taking and thankfulness for the life given.

Our society is in the process of replacing a faith-based approach to death by an exclusively biological narrative glossed only by the assurance of the progress of our genes into the future. While this is obviously a true narrative, it only states the obvious; its thinness threatens all of culture. The insistence of the biological view reduces us to the level of the animal, even if a talking animal, and reduces our response to life and death to that of fate and tragedy. The absence of the Christian story, unremarkably, returns us to the Greeks, not only in their worship of gods of their own making but in the tragic celebration of the fates. The fragility of this view was evident in how little resistance it demonstrated in the face of the new community of Jesus.

TO THE SECULAR MIND death is simply the end of the self, the end of experience. The absence of any narrative other than this stark erasure of the self produces distortions in human living. For example, I am reminded of a friend who suffered from a serious cancer and underwent courageous medical treatment until he finally succumbed. I was surprised when his widow told me that he had not made a will. My friend refused to acknowledge that his life was in danger and left his wife with not only the grief of his loss but also a headache about the settling of his estate.

Similarly, I once attended a young woman in hospital who suffered from breast cancer. By the time I saw her, metastasis had spread throughout her body and the nursing staff knew she did not have long to live.
However, she told me in all seriousness that she would not allow anything to happen to her body that she did not want to happen. She died several days later. Where did the idea come from that our will is powerful enough to stop virulent disease in its tracks? We seem, as a society, to suffer from extreme hubris to the extent that we have lost contact with the most basic human reality—that our dying is largely out of our control.

Perhaps it is this arrogance in the face of death that troubles me when health professionals talk of quality in the end stages of dying. This was brought home to me when I heard a friend describe the death of her mother who, in the final stages, vomited up her own faeces. Where was the quality in that? Despite all of our medical technology our dying is not under our control, indeed it is the final loss of control, and to pretend that it can be managed is nothing less than professional arrogance.

Our attempt to assume control over our health has produced a burgeoning alternative medicine sector and anxiety about diet and exercise. Many people now take numerous pills at breakfast, not because they are sick and these pills have been prescribed to help, but because we believe they will extend our lives. Billions of dollars are spent on alternative medicines because the label on the bottle proclaims a certain health benefit. One suspects that this entire industry is based on the placebo effect. That the CSIRO wellbeing diet book is the number one best-seller indicates a slippery combination of the authority of science and superstition about health and diet!

While the snake-oil aspect of this industry is of great concern, my point is rather our vulnerability to its claims. The reason we are sitting ducks for this industry is that it preys on our fear of death, our inability to even contemplate the time of our taking away. Alternative medicine has taken the place of the talismans of old, those religious objects worn on the person to protect one from harm. It is a plus that these concoctions have not been tested and that we do not know what the active ingredient is, because that leaves room for the imagination. It is our fear of death that makes us irrational, which is ironic since in secular thought it is rationality that does away with God.

Confirmation of this fragile hope by which we live is the common request for donations to a pertinent health foundation in lieu of flowers at funerals, the Cancer Council being the most prominent beneficiary. There is an unwritten exchange here: give us money for research and we will give you hope that you will not die of cancer. A cynic might say that this sort of charity is narcissistic and appeals of this sort are manipulative.

The absence of a context of living and dying has given death enormous power over us to the extent that we fear it most of all. We are left to deal with our death alone with no story that forms our understanding of what our death means. All we are left with is the frantic attempt to postpone it as long as possible, a panic increased by the knowledge that an end must come. We have, by and large, lost any idea of how we should approach our death.

An article about dying would be remiss if it did not address the idea of the afterlife. It is the popular notion, inherited from the medieval church and given a modern spin, that for the believer death is but the transfer to a greater and more glorious room.

**It is our fear of death that makes us irrational, which is ironic since in secular thought it is rationality that does away with God.**
This view is supported by the hymnody of the church. How many of us would have sung the following words at Christmas at the end of “Hark the Herald Angels Sing”:

Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace!  
Hail the Sun of righteousness!  
Light and life to all he brings,  
risen with healing in his wings:  
mild he lays his glory by,  
born that we no more need die,  
born to raise us from the earth,  
born to give us second birth.

While the idea must have comforted many in the face of imminent death it lacks support in biblical texts. Most theologians have realised that the afterlife, as a reward for the good life, is not the central focus of the Bible but a foreign incursion whose source is our (understandable) trouble with dying, which infects most world religions. The central focus of the New Testament is an earthly reality, the kingdom of Heaven/God that is even now breaking in upon us but whose fulfillment lies glimmering on the horizon. The vertical-spatial scheme of the ascent of the soul so dominant in much medieval theology and still prevalent today in popular belief, has been replaced with an earthly (horizontal) and temporal focus. Human history exists in the tension between the now but not yet of the inbreaking of the kingdom. While this reality is to be established in the world, its origin is not from the world, it is not a utopia of our own making but finds its origin in the overcoming of the death-dealing powers of the world on the cross of Christ. The kingdom is grounded in the earth and in human community; it is political, economic and personal and is marked by the healing of the earth including our personal relations, our political institutions and even nature itself.

Under the influence of neo-Platonism in the early church the eschatological orientation of the New Testament was subverted to serve the fear of the individual in the face of death. There is no doubt that the church used the promise of an escape from death to exercise political power, a use that became transparent in the material realm but which treats humans as resources and worships a particular elemental spirit, that of the market. These are the spirits of death that were put to death on the cross because they were the spirits that conspired to judge the one true judge.

The victory over death that Christians proclaim certainly has a bearing on how they approach death but it does not do away with the physical death of the individual. We all die. But how we deal with death depends, not on a manufactured attitude of our own, generated perhaps out of our own sense of spirituality, but on this larger victory over the elemental spirits of the world that are in fact spirits of death because they stunt, maim and distort human life. Hope in life and in death is born out of our knowing that in the resurrection God has vindicated the One who we killed in the name of the spirits of the day. Our individual death is not therefore a double death, the defeat of all hope, the emptying of all things, as well as a defeat of the body; it is only the latter. The hope that is kindled in us by the gospel is not extinguished by our death. This is how death is disarmed, by hope. We may go to our graves in the knowledge that although the self ends it ends in the knowledge that a One has come into the world who has released us from the power of that end even in the midst of life.

The old dualism of mortal body and immortal soul had simplicity going for it. Its schemata fit our intuition about the immateriality of the self and make sense in terms of reward and punishment. On the other hand, try unpacking the above to a patient in palliative care facing his last days! For a start it does not seem to have anything to say about death, it is rather about life and freedom (Jesus: “Let the dead bury their own dead”). The victory over death won on the cross was a victory of death’s power over life in which life is lived under death’s shadow, a situation that has returned in our time. The death that is referred to in the New Testament is usually spiritual death, that walking death of a people enslaved by the powers of the world and without hope, which need to be raised from their graves. This somewhat disarms the chaplain who is called to talk to one who faces imminent death.

But how do you rectify a lifetime’s neglect of spiritual matters? To be able to face death and embrace it when it comes with faith and trust takes some practice. It takes a lifetime of involvement with the faith com-
munity to learn that we do not live to ourselves but to God and that life is freely given and must be freely given up. We must live with the saying that tells us that if we would have our life we will lose it, that grasping after life suffocates it, that freedom consists in living both loosely to life and with deadly earnestness.

On the one hand this may be seen as the old Pelagian temptation that we can do it all on our own, but it is properly a response to the gospel, the good news that taking our sin on himself, actually bearing it in his flesh so that it killed him, Jesus killed something in us, our mindless self-seeking. In the light of this we find that death loses its power to rule our lives even though we know we must meet it in the end.

I do not think there was a golden age of faith in which men and women cheerfully embraced their deaths or were easily consoled upon the death, especially, of children. Martin Luther, on the death of his daughter, wrote to a friend asking him to offer thanks because he “could not”. Even the faith of the great reformer failed him at this juncture. Death must be given its due as the scourge of human life and not normalised as just a part of life. While it may be biologically natural, death is our enemy, even the enemy of the faithful. I like to believe that the martyrs gave their lives because they saw that the faith was something worth dying for rather than discounting the sweetness of life in favour of a life in heaven. That belief may be misplaced. Certainly the agony of Jesus in the garden before his death did not betray a cheapening of life or the desire to escape to a better place.

In earlier ages dying was seen as an art, something that we learned to do with grace if we were given the opportunity. While we desire sudden death, preferably one that we do not experience (dying in our sleep is the ultimate), in ages past a lingering death was preferred so that we could prepare both ourselves and our loved ones for our departure. Thomas More spoke to his children about dying, prompting them to imagine themselves on their death beds with their pulses growing weaker. Imagine the outcry today at such a practice and the accusations of child abuse!

Having done away with “the most high” in our pursuit of freedom to be what we want, we find that the old gods have come to haunt us, particularly the god of death. Is not our kneejerk response to the deaths when the World Trade Center came down a further symptom of the reign of death? In response we inflict more death. Murder must be avenged and we have become caught up in a cycle of violence that defeats us. If death did not have such a power over us then we could have paused after 9/11 and talked of murder and justice rather than war and vengeance. Because death has become unthinkable we cease to think and we act irrationally. The trillions of dollars spent on “defence”, particularly by America, a Christian country that should know better, bears witness to the fact that we are indeed in thrall to death because we think that death is the answer. We have used the wonderful fruits of the Enlightenment to invent more accurate, swifter, more powerful and more controlled episodes of death under the auspices of “the national interest”.

While cultural relativism would insist that all must be accepted, the Christian story insists on discernment, a separation and analysis of human practice and belief. The use of a single word, like our example word quality used in a strange context, is often the thread that unravels the whole construct. This is because Christian theology is systematic in that everything is connected to everything else. Mistake a key dogma, as has often occurred in the history of the church, and you are likely to precipitate unfortunate or even disastrous social consequences. Working the other way, examination of social mores often leads us into an understanding of the theological mistakes behind them. Thus examining how we as a society deal with death leads us to discover that much of our society is now but a thin veneer of nihilism, a fragile bridge over the abyss of human non-existence. Many of our social ills may be traced to the inadequacy of this bridge and its eventual failure.

The Rev. Dr Peter Sellick is an Anglican deacon and Research Fellow Physiology (School of Biomedical, Biomolecular and Chemical Sciences) at the University of Western Australia.
HE CONTRADICTIONS in Sir Donald Bradman’s character contribute both to the continuing fascination with the legend and a certain hesitancy in the popular embrace of him. On the one hand there is the uninhibited, overwhelming, force-of-nature quality of his cricket. On the other there is the reserved, cautious, rather prickly private individual. It defies cultural norms. An Australian who batted like Bradman had to be a swashbuckler, surely, one of the boys, a larrikin. Like the ineffable Warnie.

But the contradictions make Bradman’s successful life an heroic achievement. Its effortfulness and Bradman’s approach to the struggle are to be seen, sharply defined, in the events of the three years between his departure for his momentous tour of England in 1930 and the beginning of the Bodyline series in the Australian summer of 1932-33.

Bradman wanted to announce his engagement to Jessie Menzies before he sailed for England, but Jessie persuaded him to wait until he returned. She loved him and her motives in putting off the announcement were unselfish. An engagement was a binding commitment for couples of their generation and Don, with his rigorous standards, would feel himself more tightly bound than most by a formal agreement. Jessie was sensitive to the transformation of his life this trip to England might bring.

She had never travelled abroad but like many—probably most—of her contemporaries, nursed dazzling visions of England, the motherland and heart of Empire.

To Jessie there seemed every likelihood that Don would meet people at this confluence of power and glory who would open his eyes to possibilities of achievement beyond the most soaring imaginings of a boy from a poor family in a small Australian country town. There might be business opportunities. He might meet—though Jessie did not like to dwell on this—other, irresistibly glamorous women.

She did not want Don, at twenty-one, to be hobbled by a commitment to her before he saw what the world beyond Australia had to offer. More than that she did not want him fulfilling his commitment to her in his punctilious way while his mind was full of thoughts of what might have been, and possibly to remain that way for the rest of their lives.

For his part, Don had no expectation of England’s providing grand opportunities off the cricket field to an under-educated country boy. He was anxious to accomplish the engagement as an anchor in a world grown suddenly complex and unpredictable—“a refuge against the accidents of life”, as Georges Simenon characterised marriage.

Reflecting on his innocence and uncertainty in 1930, Don recalled in a 1993 interview:

I was absolutely unsophisticated. I didn’t go to university. I didn’t learn any trade or profession. Without cricket I would never have travelled anywhere.

Q: But you read a bit?
A: Hardly at all. That came a long way down the track. My father never had a library. I hadn’t frequented the local lending library. I had no special expectations of England, nothing I planned to do except play cricket.

Q: Yet, you know, in the pictures taken of you at the time there is definitely a young man’s strut about you. You looked like somebody eager to see what would happen to you next in life.
A: I was perky. I had lots of energy. But you talk as though I had tickets on myself. That wasn’t so. Any confidence I showed was in relation to my cricket only. I don’t think I have ever been confident in my general life, my general attitude. Never. I think I am—and was then—basically retiring, in fact, basically shy. Where I may have given the impression of confidence away from cricket it was because I had to accept certain situations and face up to them.
I had this conversation (and others) with Bradman while researching a book about him, a book I never finished because I couldn’t get a grip on the true nature of its subject, although I liked and admired Bradman. I should have paid closer attention to this declaration that playing cricket well was the only thing he was sure about.

I’m inclined now to attribute the self-assurance I thought I detected in the old newsreel glimpses of him to the trusting happiness of somebody grown accustomed to the rewards of being a “good” boy, of being valued for his sunny nature, neatness, considerateness, general competence and reliability. Bradman’s young man’s strut at twenty-one probably reflected faith that these good-boy qualities would see him through any circumstances. He was unprepared for the jealousy and hostility his fame and success aroused in some fellow cricketers and uncomfortable in the incessant glare of the spotlight. The security he got from considering himself engaged to Jessie, plus his good-boy qualities, helped see him through the unprecedented challenges of his six months away from her in England.

Bizarre as it may seem in this twenty-first century, I’m pretty certain Bradman remained both sexually and emotionally faithful to Jessie throughout the 1930 tour. Chances to fly abounded for a good-looking young sports superstar, blond-ish to boot. Groupies existed even then. Crowds of girls fluttered around the team hotels, waiting for a glimpse of Don leaving and arriving. One or two of the society women with whom he danced at posh parties must surely have put the hard word on him. You never know. Maybe they all did.

But if Bradman pursued any offers, I think the world—even in its pre-paparazzi days—would have known about it. Fleet Street followed him attentively. A handful of team-mates, disgruntled over being pushed from the limelight by the wonder kid, would not have missed any opportunity to blow the whistle on him.

When Bradman spoke in his later years of Jessie as “the love of my life”, I think he meant it literally, that there had been no other contenders. They were married and lived affectionately together for sixty-five years. You might, by stretching it a bit, say that, in fact, they lived together for sixty-six years. To save her parents a twice-a-day trip from their farm, Jessie, aged twelve to Don’s thirteen, boarded on weekdays at the Bradman house in Bowral during her first year at Bowral High. The small amount of money involved was probably useful to the Bradmans.

Under the strict oversight of his mother, the parent who had greatest influence on him during his growing up, Don learned how to treat a lady while Jessie was in residence, opening doors and gates for her, standing back to let her go first. The Menzies were high enough up the social scale from the Bradmans for it to have made a difference in some countries but the Menzies welcomed their eldest daughter’s friendship with Don—such a good boy and such a young gentleman—and, as it ripened through their teens, both families came to take it for granted that Don and Jessie would marry.

Bradman brought a fairly expensive watch back from England as a present for Jessie. That sewed it up. Young men in those days did not give expensive presents to girls unless their intentions were honourable. Yet Don and Jessie did not get married until April 1932. Why not? Don thought they couldn’t afford it. He had no house, no regular job. He didn’t want to rely on playing cricket for a living. Too uncertain. If he could get a real job with prospects he would give up cricket without a qualm. For eighteen months after his return from England, he and Jessie “saved and saved”. Don put the thousand pounds an admirer had given him for scoring the first Test triple-century into Jessie’s bank account because, as an employee of the bank, she got a slightly higher interest rate than usual. When the Packer organisation gave him a contract to write and broadcast commentary on cricket, well-paid and reasonably steady work, Don decided, at last, that supporting a wife was within his means.

He and Jessie married and set off on an all-expenses-paid honeymoon in America and Canada, a cricket tour organised by the journalist and former Test slow bowler Arthur Mailey. But when they returned home, the autocratic members of Australian cricket’s Board of Control blew away Bradman’s dream of a steady job with prospects. He could not, they ruled, play Test cricket and comment on it, either in print or on radio. He had to give up one or the other. Don said he would give up cricket.

I don’t believe there was an iota of bluff in this. Don’s rigid probity made it unthinkable for him to welsh on his deal with Associated Newspapers.

But far, far greater an influence was his craving for security, something he pursued throughout his life, acquiring it in increments and digging in hard at each staging post.
refuge against the accidents of life”. Associated Newspapers solved the impasse by paying out Don’s contract but freeing him of his obligations to write and broadcast.

When, four years later, at twenty-six, Don was offered training and a job as a stockbroker in Adelaide he must have thought himself accident-proof at last. Without hesitation he abandoned the metropolitan life of Sydney, with all its potential opportunities for advancement, and embraced the then undeniably backwater limitations of Adelaide. He built a house there, square, solid, impregnable—also comfortable and hospitable under Jessie’s management—and lived in it for the rest of his life.

It’s hard to imagine the nightmare it was for Don when, in 1944, his employer, Harry Hodgetts, went broke, and subsequently to prison. There were resonances of panic in Don’s voice and manner when he talked about it fifty years later: “I could have lost our house.” Utmost desperation drove him to keep Hodgetts’ firm going as Bradman and Co. If there is any hint of the casino in stockbroking’s image it didn’t apply to Bradman and Co. Clients may have acted against his counsel of prudence but Don himself never.

He did not become rich from broking but it was a steady living and he established a reputation for shrewdness and solidity that brought him a further and final steady career as a company director. He also flourished, as Sir Donald, knighted for his playing achievements, in cricket administration, a national selector, member of the Board of Control, the great arbiter.

Characteristically, I now realise, Bradman declined an invitation to become president of the MCC, a post of great prestige once occupied by the Duke of Edinburgh. Don believed that the cost of maintaining the appropriate lifestyle in England for a presidential year was more than he could afford. He also rebuffed at least one approach to become governor of South Australia, citing the twin stresses of conflict with the Board of Control and getting married took a toll of his health in the lead-up to the Bodyline series. He had also had all his teeth extracted. I’m not sure exactly when but close to the First Test, I believe. Don was evasive on the subject. He “thought” he had had some teeth out before he went on the tour of America. “You had some out then,” Jessie intervened firmly, “and more out later on.” She added: “You were really off your food before that. You lost a lot of weight.” Feeling crook, as he undoubtedly did, Don forced himself out to confront the head-hunting English fast bowlers.

The story of Don’s career as a company director is too long to recount here but there was another aspect of his entrepreneurial spirit which may explain how he was able to weather what seemed the storms of life.

When, in 1944, his employer, Harry Hodgetts, went broke, and subsequently to prison. There were resonances of panic in Don’s voice and manner when he talked about it fifty years later: “I could have lost our house.” Utmost desperation drove him to keep Hodgetts’ firm going as Bradman and Co. If there is any hint of the casino in stockbroking’s image it didn’t apply to Bradman and Co. Clients may have acted against his counsel of prudence but Don himself never.

He did not become rich from broking but it was a steady living and he established a reputation for shrewdness and solidity that brought him a further and final steady career as a company director. He also flourished, as Sir Donald, knighted for his playing achievements, in cricket administration, a national selector, member of the Board of Control, the great arbiter.

Characteristically, I now realise, Bradman declined an invitation to become president of the MCC, a post of great prestige once occupied by the Duke of Edinburgh. Don believed that the cost of maintaining the appropriate lifestyle in England for a presidential year was more than he could afford. He also rebuffed at least one approach to become governor of South Australia, citing the twin stresses of conflict with the Board of Control and getting married took a toll of his health in the lead-up to the Bodyline series. He had also had all his teeth extracted. I’m not sure exactly when but close to the First Test, I believe. Don was evasive on the subject. He “thought” he had had some teeth out before he went on the tour of America. “You had some out then,” Jessie intervened firmly, “and more out later on.” She added: “You were really off your food before that. You lost a lot of weight.” Feeling crook, as he undoubtedly did, Don forced himself out to confront the head-hunting English fast bowlers.

And yet another factor may have played a role in helping him to weather the storms of life. Don was always in position to hit the ball correctly because he went with amazing speed of foot and complete scorn for convention to where the ball was. Jack White, an English slow bowler noted for his accuracy and deceptive subtlety of flight, reckoned Don could have hit every ball he bowled on the full if he’d chosen to. Don was always in position to hit the ball. It was the stumps and crease markings that were out of position when he batted. He saw these restrictive artefacts as being for the guidance of wise men and the imprisonment of dunderheads.

Bradman’s batting style was, in effect, his ecosystem. Other batsmen batted like the batsmen who had coached them. Bradman had taught himself how to make use of his marvellous natural skills and resisted any attempt to tinker with his methods. Within his ecosystem he exercised total command.

But this was complete humbug. He was always in position to hit the ball correctly because he went with amazing speed of foot and complete scorn for convention to where the ball was. Jack White, an English slow bowler noted for his accuracy and deceptive subtlety of flight, reckoned Don could have hit every ball he bowled on the full if he’d chosen to. Don was always in position to hit the ball. It was the stumps and crease markings that were out of position when he batted. He saw these restrictive artefacts as being for the guidance of wise men and the imprisonment of dunderheads.

Bradman’s batting style was, in effect, his ecosystem. Other batsmen batted like the batsmen who had coached them. Bradman had taught himself how to make use of his marvellous natural skills and resisted any attempt to tinker with his methods. Within his ecosystem he exercised total command.

One wonders what Bradman might have achieved if he had brought this originality and daring to other aspects of his life. Less than he did accomplish, possibly.

Frank Devine’s previous article on Bradman appeared in the May 2005 issue, and was chosen for Black Inc’s Best Australian Essays anthology for that year.
On one side is a bustling city street
And over on the other side the park.
You loiter on the corner and you watch
The afternoon beginning to go dark.

This unassuming spot was the abyss,
The gaping terror of so many hearts,
And here for generations they were brought
On a never-ending convoy of carts.

How grimly in the mind’s eye they pass
As here and there you recollect a name,
A few who have a mention in the books,
The tiny consolation of their fame.

But mostly you are dimly picturing
The sadder multitudes of the unknown,
Whose anguishes were never History
But just a little matter of their own—

Who swung for a petty misadventure,
Some desperate, impulsive little theft,
Some error now too utterly obscure
For any knowledge of it to be left—

Or even were entirely innocent
And who died by some malice or mistake:
The juvenile, the imbecile, the scared,
Who didn’t know the right reply to make.

Remember that there wasn’t any drop.
The dangling figure had to choke to death,
Would go for several minutes treading air
In the mad frenzy of that fight for breath.

Apparently the smallest suffered most
For the lack of sufficient body-weight.
The lucky had a friend who’d cling to them,
To help them throttle at a faster rate.

Eternities before the mind went blank,
Of attempting to scream or plead or curse.
Eternities they had in which to know
The howling horror of the universe...

Think of it happening here for centuries!
And think of all the minutes that were spent!
Imagination quails and pulls away,
Refusing to consider what it meant.

You hurry to rejoin the commuters
Who never want to meditate on that,
Who keep their sanity by going home
To tend the garden and to feed the cat.

Peter Kocan
MEN WHO HAVE BEEN raised in the potentially suffocating atmosphere of an all-female household occasionally rebel in interesting ways. Truman Capote was one, Hemingway was another, and so was André Malraux. But unlike Hemingway, who fashioned himself into a hero eroded by self-loathing, Malraux fashioned himself into one he could love unreservedly. The French loved him too. One has only to recall the bemused comments of Belgian scholar Pierre Ryckmans, who was asked to write a page for a weekly magazine in Paris on what Malraux had meant to him—not much, as it happened—after Malraux died in November 1976: “They were horrified and immediately junked my contribution.” When Malraux’s most recent biographer, Olivier Todd, asked Premier Chirac in 1996 for his opinion of Malraux (one can scarcely imagine any biographer asking our own incumbent his opinion of Patrick White or Christina Stead) he said: “The water of the heart [l’eau du coeur] rises to the eyes.”

Malraux’s mother and father married in March 1900, the year the first Métro line opened in Paris, and rented a five-room apartment in Montmartre. Malraux was born on November 3 the following year.

His father decamped early and would father several more children with two mistresses. Malraux was raised by his mother and a beloved spinster aunt above his grandmother’s confectionery store. His habit—established early—of willing a metamorphosis, may have been a genetic inheritance from his father, who had been by turns a non-commissioned officer, a broker, a part-time inventor, speculator and all-round show-off. He once called himself a major to impress the ladies and wrote “industrialist” on a legal document.

At eighteen, an average student, Malraux was turned down by the Lyceé Condorcet, and thenceforth educated himself outside of traditional academic institutions. He suffered from Tourette’s syndrome, but far from hindering his progress, it seemed to propel him to fierce concentration and action. By eighteen he was making something of a living from sourcing and selling rare books in the hothouse atmosphere of the Left Bank and was writing inflammatory articles for Action—a literary review—which attracted the attention of André Gide, who was some thirty-two years his senior. Malraux’s interest in fashion propelled him to the English tailors around the Opéra neighbourhood, where he treated himself to cravats and pearl pins—“often false” suggests Todd.

Paris was alive with Dadaists, Surrealists and the like, and he found congenial company while haunting the museums and art galleries. He soon tried his hand at buying and selling antiquities, writing art criticism, and some book publishing ventures, which brought him into contact with artists such as Georges Braque, André Derain and Fernand Léger. His contemporaries found him interesting, but thought his writing was strained, portentous and replete with delusions. By the time he met Clara Goldschmidt, an intense, multi-lingual German-Jewish woman who possessed a sturdier morality than he did, he had already begun the process of turning himself into an art work. They married in the teeth of ferocious opposition from both sets of parents, and Malraux, who saw no reason to be conventionally employed, proceeded to invest Clara’s considerable dowry in Mexican shares, with disastrous consequences. Before the money evaporated, they had travelled extensively in Europe and then further afield.

Malraux’s uncanny ability to carry people forward on a wave of his own fervour was demonstrated when at twenty-two he persuaded a committee of the French School of the Far East to support his archaeological expedition to Cambodia. When he detached—rather clumsily—bas-reliefs and fragments from the Banteay Srei temple with a plan to sell them to American buyers, he was arrested, charged and sentenced to three years in jail,
but thanks to the efforts of assorted intellectuals such as writers François Mauriac and Gide back in Paris, he avoided this inconvenience.

He soon returned to French Indochina, with a contract from the publisher Bernard Grasset to come up with a proper narrative, not some “recondite text”. He and Clara immersed themselves in the lives of the locals, and Malraux’s instinct for justice—not yet garbished by any clear ideological position—asserted itself. He established, with Paul Monin, two newspapers, L’Indochine and L’Indochine Enchaînée, which became small thorns in the side of the local French authorities, highlighting as they did the abjectness of the locals under French administration. Their two years in Indochina had left Clara with a greater sense of obligation and unfinished business, but Malraux was ready to move on.

Grasset published Malraux’s La Tentation de l’Occident in 1926. According to Todd it was “the first properly constructed, original and accessible book by Malraux”, but a review in the prestigious Nouvelle Revue Française offered a template for Malraux’s future writing trajectories: “Malraux charms and dazes us” but his poetic imperatives “spoil the clarity of the views he exposes”. Todd suggested that while the book was not a success it was talked about as if it was. It made Malraux something of a spokesman for his generation, but a misguided one who contributed to the Western world’s woolly notion of the Far East as a place of fatalism, detachment and cosmic thought. The notoriety of the book encouraged Malraux to lobby for the position of in-house literary critic for the Revue, which caused other writers such as Louis Aragon and André Breton considerable heartburn.

Then in 1928 Grasset published Malraux’s novel Les Conquérants. The reviews—and there were about 100 of them in six weeks—praised it. The print run sold out and translations followed. Now that everyone was paying attention, Malraux did not try to detach himself from rumours of revolutionary exploits back in Canton. Nonetheless, his focus was now Europe, and he became an early and vocal critic of Hitler’s Germany, while also something of a cultural spokesman for its apparent bulwark, Soviet Russia. His dealings with Russian writers were adventurous yet he seemed mostly oblivious to their prostration before the Soviet cultural machine.

In 1933, possibly with a little oiling of the voting cogs by his other publisher Gaston Gallimard, the thirty-two-year-old Malraux won the Prix Goncourt for his book about the communist uprising in Shanghai: La Condition Humaine—the third of his trilogy about Asia. From this moment his reputation was cemented in France’s literary pantheon and it became harder for Malraux to distinguish between his adventures and what was engineered by his imagination.

When Malraux travelled to Leningrad and Moscow for the Writers’ Conference in 1934, both the Russian Writers’ Union and the Soviet authorities had their eyes open and their ears pricked. Malraux rocketed around with Moscow’s intelligentsia for five weeks, and on homecoming he became one more stooge (not unlike J.B. Priestley), who sang the praises of the new Soviet society.

Todd’s own biographical tic of reporting relentlessly in the first person (a habit apparently shared by a number of contemporary French biographers) can become as maddening as a mosquito’s hum, and sometimes distracts from his strenuous research. Here, for example, is his description of the 1934 Soviet Writers’ Conference:

Maxim Gorky is to open the first session. He appears. A spotlight blinds him. “Get rid of that candle”, protests the venerable writer. The microphones don’t work. No matter. Delighted and unperturbed, Gorky starts on a three-hour speech. Even in Stalin’s USSR, it seems interminable. Participants slip out for refreshments. There are many buffets.

Unlike Hemingway, who fashioned himself into a hero eroded by self-loathing, Malraux fashioned himself into one he could love unreservedly.

The conference was on a promise. Andrei Zhdanov, an uncultured clod, was there to impose Stalin’s directive—that writers were the “engineers of the human soul”. He planned to forge, anneal and rivet its parts—the novelists, the poets, the painters and the composers—into an unlovely and unworkable machine. Thus the main thrust of the conference was at odds with everything Malraux held dear (except the notion of solidarity or brotherhood), that is to say, the unassailability of the individual genius: “Art is not a submission, it is a conquest.”

Malraux remarked (carelessly) that the closer the Soviet intellectual moved towards Stalinist orthodoxy, the less likely he was to appreciate Dostoevsky. He was quite candid—even unbridled—about the dead hand of social realism and the need for art to resist ideologies. Soon, he would be on something of a collision course with the Soviet authorities, who had been stripped of any illusion that this unusual Frenchman might be of
use to them. There was no more talk of La Condition Humaine being turned into a film by Eisenstein. But there were compelling things about Malraux too. Unlike many of his compatriots he was not anti-Semitic. He saw the threat of Nazism earlier and more clearly than many of his contemporaries, but it was unfortunate that it drove him, for a time, into the arms of an engine of equivalent ferocity.

At the beginning of 1934, Malraux’s fascination with the Middle East, or at least T.E. Lawrence’s experience of it, coupled with his understanding of the prestige of pilots such as Charles Lindbergh and Antoine de Saint Exupéry, prompted another adventure: a search for buried treasure under the ruins of the capital of the Queen of Sheba. Towards these twin phantom goals Malraux set out in a borrowed plane with an experienced pilot and a qualified mechanic. The local authorities in Cairo were keeping an eye on him, just as officials had done in Cambodia. Bedouins took pot-shots at their plane, and fuel levels were dangerously low, but on his return Malraux was triumphant and convinced of his discoveries.

Here one can sense the answer to a question posed by Ryckmans: “Malraux was obviously a genius. What he was a genius at, however, is not quite clear.” Perhaps his genius lay in his uncanny ability to create a maelstrom of excitement around every venture he undertook. The public were momentarily transfixed by this dramatic discovery, but the archaeologists were appalled. Malraux had in fact flown over an oasis and some scattered dwellings—all inhabited.

Malraux would next exercise his romantic and swashbuckling notions in the direction of Spain, where in February 1936 the Popular Front achieved some 146,611 more votes than the right-wing national front. Over nine million Spaniards had voted, so the victory was a narrow one. It was a template for immediate unrest and a meeting ground for the subterranean skirmishing of ideologies (both fascist and communist) across its borders and beyond—not to mention the opportunity for that peculiarly Spanish impulse to anarchy. Despite an agreed notion of non-intervention by other countries, Italy, France, Germany and England involved themselves informally, and Stalin would slowly insinuate himself to an alarming degree by stealth.

When Madrid asked France for military assistance, Malraux, with his customary audacity and enthusiasm, once again carried some sensible minds along with his idea of assembling a secret convoy of aeroplanes and recruiting pilots to fly to Spain. His friend André Gide was not impressed and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs was irritated by his air of prescience and authority, but Prime Minister Léon Blum (not the first or the last of a line of wiser, older men who were mesmerised by Malraux’s verbal incandescence) thought highly of him—and his idea. Malraux’s apartment in the Rue du Bac (which was under surveillance) became a meeting place for republicans. Todd makes his assessment of their mettle: some were heroes but there were plenty of the “shifty types who emerge at the frontiers of all countries in times of civil war; a world connected with shifty dealings involving the intelligence service …”

As is often the case with biographies, some characters of genuine and sustaining interest emerge from the scrum of supporting characters. There is Clara, their daughter Florence, Malraux’s beautiful mistress Josette, Madeleine (his second wife) and his two half-brothers Roland and Claude. About Malraux’s intentions and the involvement of Clara, Todd can be tiresomely speculative: “Clara embarrasses Malraux. He does not want her to be seen on the battlefield or the airfields. She might just be clever enough, militant enough, and brave enough to steal one of his roles”, and “Malraux does not speak Spanish but has a feeling for the sonorous, moving, sometimes melodramatic beauty of the language.” Malraux’s grandiose plans are sufficient of themselves, without the additional burden of Todd’s ruminations about motive, psychic makeup and so on, to give us the picture.

Nonetheless, Todd has been excellent and succinct in locating Malraux’s adventures—both real and imagined—in the shifting sands of French, Russian, Spanish and German foreign policy. The Berlin Olympics added to the general confusion, suggests Todd, with Austrians, Bulgarians, French and Italians all raising their right arms in a straight salute: “Is it an Olympic or a Nazi salute?” Because Malraux was more interested in the idea of the aesthete and connoisseur liberating himself from the restraints of any and all regimes as a matter of principle, rather than the compliant foot-soldier or the politically committed, he paid little attention to Stalin’s elimination of Kamenev and Zinovyev in Moscow.

French planes—which straddled the non-intervention deadline—were the first to arrive in Spain for the Republican cause. Malraux, Prix Goncourt winner and private citizen (with an uneven reputation and a trail of shaky business ventures behind him) was greeted warmly by the president and the prime minister in Madrid. The Spanish Minister of Aviation made him a lieutenant-colonel and Todd writes: “Malraux assumes the rank like he might throw a scarf around his coat collar.”

The French and American mercenaries who found their way there in 1936 were paid huge sums. Fifty thousand francs a month was a hundred times the salary
of a Spanish lieutenant, and Todd notes that it was difficult to distinguish the mercenaries from the volunteers. He presents some dazzling cameos of sustained camaraderie. “Malraux, welcoming his men, tells them, ‘Think of revolution as your second job’.” One, called Francois Bourgeois, “a stocky, loudmouthed ex-airmail pilot” had been imprisoned in North Africa, had smuggled Chinese immigrants into Canada, alcohol into the United States and had taken part in the war between Bolivia and Paraguay. When he was asked what kind of plane he knew how to pilot, he answered “any kind with wings and an engine”. Was he kidding? asked one. “Not at all,” said another. “This guy could fly a barn door.”

The word “no-hoper”—which this writer always imagined to be a telling and peculiarly Australian expression—is applied to some members of the squadron, but generally Malraux managed to keep “the bluffers, the daredevils and the kit wreckers” at bay. Malraux did not, however, as Todd points out, enjoy a solid reputation in Parisian aeronautical circles. The celebrated pilot Antoine de Saint-Exupéry was not available, nor were other experienced professionals. Some did not want to take sides in this war, some did not trust Malraux.

Everyone seemed to wash up at the Hotel Florida in Madrid, which offered a meeting ground—or petri-dish if you like—for all manner of organisms to flourish and fester unchecked. It was the haunt for politicians, journalists, writers, trade unionists, freedom fighters, hangers-on and “single, double and triple agents”. Malraux showed off, and indeed there was something compelling about a man who could detail a military operation in one breath and dissect a Velasquez at the Prado in the next.

When Malraux and Hemingway met, the dislike was mutual and more or less immediate. In 1944 there would be a memorable encounter in a room at the Ritz where two of the century’s greatest show-offs would have something of a stand-off—or a showdown. It is recorded with stealthy humour in Curtis Cate’s biography of Malraux as a classic Boy’s Own escapade, where bravado completely eclipses common sense. As Cate put it: “It became one of Ernest’s favourite dinner table stories—that one of his bodyguards beckoned Hemingway into the bathroom and asked, ‘Papa, on peut fusiller ce con?’ (Dad, can we shoot this idiot?).” While in some respects Hemingway was a greater fantasist than Malraux, the latter was never beset by the gnawing jealousies that nagged at Hemingway or the vindictiveness which he visited on almost all of his colleagues.

The scene at the Hotel Florida was suffused with camaraderie and chaos. Secret military plans tended to find their way into everyone’s notebooks. Malraux’s friends overlooked his affectations and effusions because he was resourceful, brave and adventurous, and there was something else which hung in the air like perfume: it was a whiff of a world where marvellous things happen: the world of Lord Byron, or Lafayette, or D’Annunzio.

MALRAUX WAS QUICK TO RECOGNISE that the Spanish Civil War had implications far beyond the battlefields, and he spoke volubly in public. François Mauriac was unimpressed, saying drily: “the literary figure in him takes the wind out of his own sails”, and “Malraux’s weak point is his disregard for man—this idea that one can intone any old rubbish to a biped and he will listen agog”. But Malraux’s dreams of the intellectual—and dandy—as a man of action seemed to be coming to pass. According to Todd, “a naughty rumour says he has had a uniform made for him at Lanvin” (a celebrated French couture house). At this point the biography has run half its course and it is clear that Todd is transfixed by Malraux, yet he is compelled to catalogue the most transient delinquencies, in order to find the man.

When Malraux made plans to visit America to galvanise support for the Spanish republicans, the American State Department, unsurprisingly, assumed he was dangerous and his application for a visa was initially turned down, then granted. American volunteers who heard him speak in New York, Harvard, Princeton, Los Angeles and San Francisco were impressed—irrespective of America’s policy of non-intervention—when Malraux asked for x-ray plates and anaesthetics. As Todd puts it: “he holds the audience’s attention with anecdotes punctuated by ideological remarks”, using “more or less the same ones wherever he goes, as would any itinerant slave to the lecture circuit”.

Some of Malraux’s descriptions of his own physical involvement in Spain—he could not drive a car let alone fly a plane—were fanciful, and he was occasionally given to ill-considered utterances. In New York, at a banquet given by the Nation he suggested: “Just as the Inquisition in no way reduced the fundamental dignity of Christianity, the Moscow trials in no way diminish the fundamental dignity of communism.” Such carelessness spurred Trotsky, exiled in Mexico, and once an ardent admirer and defender of Malraux, to write to the Mexico United Press Agency to complain that Malraux...
was effectively a glove-puppet for Stalin.

Back in Paris, Malraux worked away on his new novel, *L’Espoir*, set in the period from July 1936 and March 1937. Todd suggests: “By writing about it, he keeps the Spanish war at a distance, yet keeps it close”, and points out that Malraux avoided the kind of expressions such as “historical determinism” and “dictatorship of the proletariat” which killed a reader’s attention, and plumped for the more immediate. His characters say things like this:

When a Communist talks in a meeting, he puts his fist on the table. When a Fascist speaks … he puts his feet on the table. When a democrat—American, English or French—speaks … he scratches the back of his neck.

Malraux conscripted some of his friends for characters in *L’Espoir*, and the volunteers assumed greater significance than the mercenaries. But the hero of the novel was Magnin—an alter ego for Malraux and an amalgam of his exploits to date. While Clara was the best judge of his work, Josette, who did the typing, and who lacked Clara’s sharp intelligence, nevertheless observed that he was “more concerned about creating a work of art than saying things that [were] accurate”.

Todd points out that Malraux’s method was to “work on it ten hours a day with his usual technique; going back over passages, drinking Pernod, cutting up sheets, pasting and re-pasting, changing the order of paragraphs” and that this book was “solid wood”, unlike his other novels which “sometimes felt like veneer and plywood”. Yet Jean-Paul Sartre, four years younger than Malraux, and as yet relatively uncelebrated, was critical of *L’Espoir*, saying that the “book is … not good … full of ideas and very boring”. Pierre Ryckmans suggested that its “misty and flatulent speeches … [had] a hollow ring of café eloquence”.

*L’Espoir* went on sale on December 18, 1937. Critics, including Robert Brasillach in *L’Action Française*, scoffed that it lacked veracity because not one Francoist or Fascist made an appearance. For that matter neither did the workers or Spanish peasants, although Malraux felt some solidarity with the latter.

Hemingway, who would also produce a book about this war titled *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, proposed a different kind of character (Robert Jordan) who was burdened neither by illusions nor by political beliefs. Hemingway and Malraux crossed paths again in New York, and there was irritation in both quarters. Perhaps Malraux was being snide when he praised *A Farewell to Arms* as “the best love story written since Stendhal”. Nevertheless, Todd draws some interesting parallels between the two writers; their affection for Spain and their determination to distil the Spanish experience in print, while making it clear that for dry-eyed observation George Orwell, in his book *Homage to Catalonia*, left them both in the shade.

Malraux’s prescience (he understood very early the value of aircraft in Spain) extended to the dissemination of his own offerings. He knew that even in 1937 cinema would reach a wider audience than books—and he hoped to make a movie of *L’Espoir*. Like Jean Cocteau, he viewed cinema as a pliable art form. As Todd mischievously suggests, how complicated can it be to become a movie director for someone who led a squadron without actually being able to fly? Malraux’s publisher, Gallimard, pleased that his Goncourt winner was still in the spotlight—and something of a closet adventurer himself—came up with the money, quite a lot of it, but did not see himself—as Malraux clearly did—as a philanthropic institution.

Malraux set up an office in Barcelona, which was quickly abuzz with cameramen, technicians and actors. However, the tanks which were written into the first screenplay were needed by the Republicans at the front, and so of course were the planes—and the fuel. Malraux and Josette stayed at the Barcelona Ritz. Clara arrived and stayed there too. While the film-making of *Sierra de Teruel* proceeded, so did Franco’s juggernaut, and the roads were seething with people fleeing towards France. American writer Theodore Dreiser, drunk over dinner one night at the Barcelona Ritz, insisted that the Civil War was “a Catholic and Freemasons’ plot”.

Malraux’s film received the first of its private screenings in June 1939, just four months after Paris had—with unseemly haste or diplomatic urgency—recognised Franco’s government. Louis Aragon declared it a masterpiece. Cocteau was dazzled and thought it magnificent—so much better than Malraux’s literary work, such as *La Condition Humaine* which he found “detestable”. Edouard Deladier, head of the radical socialists, prohibited the public screening of the film, which immediately conferred a legendary status on it before it entered a twilight zone. Todd says: “Malraux doesn’t complain. He appears to digest disappointment as easily as success.”

At this juncture Malraux had run up a tab with Gallimard to the tune of 178,491 francs ($3570 US) and was casting about for the subject of a new novel—or a new adventure. In April 1940 he was drafted into the army, but the Phony War meant that life—conducted in a twelve-bed dormitory—was monotonous. Then the Germans arrived and without much in the way of skirmishes he found himself a prisoner, marched with others in a fairly desultory fashion to Sens, where they were locked in the cathedral. Incarceration was equally uneventful and Malraux had plenty of time to mull over
the defeat of Spain, and then France.

Some of his friends had joined the Resistance, as had Clara, and his two half-brothers, Roland and the twenty-year-old Claude, who were both working for the British Secret Service in a network called the Special Operations Executive (SOE). His cousin Felix had been arrested and deported. When the Germans sent Malraux out to work on local farms escape looked very easy indeed. He turned up at a villa at Roquebrune in free France, owned by English friends of Gide, and was served by a butler in white gloves. Josette, who had just given birth to a boy, joined him, and Haas (his American publisher) sent him dollars.

Malraux wrote prodigiously but flatly refused to contribute anything to the Nouvelle Revue Française, which was run by collaborators, and toyed with the idea of writing a biography of T.E. Lawrence, with whom he believed he had much in common—not the least of which was a taste for the exotic gesture and “publicity and mystification”. At the same time, a young unknown Albert Camus was working on a book called L’Étranger and Malraux, who was reading it as a work in progress, suggested it to Gallimard. A steady trickle of intellectuals and writers passed through, including Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir (who was appalled by the butler’s white gloves, the stylish furniture and the “lavishly served grilled chicken”).

Malraux next toyed with the idea of a “magnum opus on the psychology of art” when his biography of T.E. Lawrence faltered, but his premonitory historical sense did not. He noted: “Americanism will triumph … [its] lifestyle is already all over the world”, and he wrote to his American publisher discussing the Lawrence biography as if it were a fait accompli. Malraux had scribbled on his copy of Lowell Thomas’s Lawrence of Arabia: “It is not the man who makes the legend it is the legend that makes the man.”

By 1942 there was no more free France. Malraux withdrew from the Côte d’Azur and rented a portion of a small chateau near Brive. Josette (who regretted that their affair had become tepid, perhaps because it had lost its illicit qualities) and his little son “Bimbo” were with him. While France was on rations, Malraux ate omelettes with fresh truffles and Armagnac. As Judith Thurman noted not long ago in the New Yorker: “Malraux lived high and lay low for most of the Second World War.” Prompted by the imminent arrival of another child to Josette (born in March 1943) he wrote a rare letter to Florence, his daughter by Clara:

My little cat, I would have written to you earlier, had I not been prevented from doing so … I am sending you a money order; it is not such a pretty surprise, but you will turn it into a surprise yourself, like a magician.

He travelled to and fro to Paris, steering clear of collaborators, but as Todd puts it: “The odd quest for potatoes and chickens does not constitute an adventure.” At the beginning of 1944, with the example of his two half-brothers before him, Malraux intuited that General de Gaulle would be the man of the hour (in April that year, de Gaulle became commander-in-chief of the armies of La France Combattante) and having turned down requests to join the Resistance in 1941, 1942 and 1943 he now thought the time was right. He styled himself “Colonel Berger”.

Jacques Poirier (Nestor) a leading light in the Resistance, took a shine to him and thought he could be useful in some sort of co-ordinating—or emollient—role, as various strands of the Resistance were suspicious of each other; the SOE, for example, were distrusted by the Gaullist Free French. The British agents were especially sceptical of Malraux’s value, but once again his world, a weave of action and fantasy, came together in what Todd describes as Malraux’s “staring at invisible points on the horizon of history”. His vision of himself as patriot and swashbuckler seemed to carry others with him, and the great avalanche of historical and political events of the period buried the bluster and bolstered the fantasy.

By the time of the landings (June 5, 1944) Malraux, the self-styled “Colonel Berger”, had wide stripes on his uniform, but no troops and no arms. On his visits to various scattered headquarters of Resistance groups he insisted on his black Citroën taking roads instead of country tracks and was netted, along with two others, in a German road block. He sustained nothing more than a minor leg wound, but his description of his incarceration and interrogation would add another layer to his mythology. He was in fact well treated, and moved about from chateau to villa before arriving in Saint-Michel prison in Toulouse. By August 1944 he was out of prison (his compatriots having prevailed upon German officials to spare him the bullet) and was looking for more action.

With the arrival of de Gaulle in Paris for its liberation in September, “Colonel Berger” found a new role for himself by taking over the cobbled-together Alsace-Lorraine Brigade. Todd describes it as a “combination of circumstances, willpower and luck”. They were a
motley group, ill-equipped and ill-experienced, but did not lack courage. Boys of sixteen and seventeen, led by Malraux, fought bravely against crack German troops, and played a part in defending Strasbourg against a German counter-attack.

Having helped to defend the honour of France, Malraux was ready to turn his attention to politics again. The extent to which certain communist bodies had involved themselves in the Resistance and would now turn their attention to organs of the state alarmed him, and in January 1945, he attended the conference of the Mouvement de Libération in Paris, where he spoke plainly—in so far as Malraux ever spoke plainly. Todd puts it: “For the first time since before the war, Malraux has taken an extreme political position, in public.”

After the Liberation, Malraux assisted in the preparation of his twenty-seven-page military service validation. He began by giving himself a PhD—a fantasy—but he did have the DSO (Distinguished Service Order) which was given to him for his various activities, all of which had been dramatically enhanced in the document: number of men under his aegis, wounds (a bruise becomes a “bullet wound in the arm”) escapes, and so on. His DSO legitimised Malraux’s legendary status, but when he was also awarded the Croix de la Libération and the Croix de Guerre, there were, suggests Todd, equivocations from high-ranking officers. One of these was Colonel de Bélenet. Todd speaks for Malraux: “How dare this flea Bélenet rummage through Malraux’s lion’s mane?”

As civilian life beckoned, several people were planning for Malraux and de Gaulle to meet. One of these was Gaston Palewski, de Gaulle’s unflinchingly loyal and highly organised aide, serial womaniser, and the great love of novelist Nancy Mitford’s life. When they do meet, Malraux senses a hero worthy of a novel. De Gaulle, for his part, offered Malraux the post of minister of information. This to Malraux meant the opportunity for the right kind of cultural propaganda (of the variety at which the Americans would excel in during the postwar years). His thoughts turned to illustrated art books of French masterpieces, but there were severe paper shortages.

When de Gaulle, in a characteristically peremptory act, departed his post on January 20, 1946, Malraux, still prescient, announced that this setback would be “not the end but the beginning of Gaullism”, but when Arthur Koestler asked him over dinner the following year who the general’s supporters were, Malraux replied: “L’entourage du Général, c’est moi.” The post-war atmosphere in Paris was toxic, with scores being settled in the streets, in the courts and on the pages of journals. Malraux defended writers (who he saw, according to Todd, “as a class above the fray”) wherever he could, and recommended some of them to Gallimard.

His personal life suffered some erosions. The beautiful and infinitely patient Josette died in hospital after her legs were crushed under a train, and his two half-brothers had been executed during the occupation. He was still trying to divorce Clara in order to set up house with Roland’s widow Madeleine, a pianist. Because he was living beyond the means of a minister in a duplex which had a valet, a butler and his wife, a cook, two maids, a chauffeur and a cleaning lady, there were some mutterings that money earmarked for the Resistance had found its way into civilian pockets. When de Gaulle visited Malraux in his Boulogne apartment, he was, according to Todd, taken aback by the luxury: the avant-garde paintings, the statuettes and the antiquities.

In 1951 Gide died. He was surrounded by his friends but Malraux was absent. He was distancing himself from others as well, and as the Cold War temperature dropped, Sartre’s and Malraux’s relationship—never warm—became glacial. When Gallimard sought advice about who to keep in the stable and who to relinquish, Malraux demanded that Gallimard ceased publishing Sartre’s review Les Temps Modernes and supported his demand with a veiled threat to reveal Gallimard’s position during the occupation. Another publisher, Julliard—a hundred yards from Gallimard in the Rue de l’Université, took over the publication of Sartre’s magazine.

As Malraux expanded into the role of co-ordinator, adviser, fixer and propaganda man for de Gaulle, his former anti-fascist imperative calcified into an anticommunist one. Although he spent a lot of time making speeches which committed him without qualification to de Gaulle’s vision for a great and united France, the paralysing routine of day-to-day bureaucratic procedure was not for him and he lost patience with an American interviewer who droned on about “the managerial society, organisers, inflation, and the trade gap”, announcing grandly: “Europe is suffering from a break in consciousness that is comparable to that which marked the end of Roman paganism.”

He also found time to write and publish the first volume of Psychologie de l’Art, Le Musée Imaginaire, whose first draft, he suggested (falsely) had been confiscated by the Germans, and which would later be consolidated into a larger volume called Les Voix du Silence (The Voices of Silence). This volume has mystified more than one generation of art students (this reviewer included), but more of that later.

By 1953 de Gaulle was still in the wilderness, and political activism had become less of an urgent activity for Malraux, who became a man of letters again. His private life resembled—in an uncanny fashion—that of his father: one child born to his first wife, two children to his mistress Josette, and then a marriage to a former
sister-in-law. On one occasion Malraux took his daughter Florence to an exhibition where Picasso was present. The child was charmed when he commented on her fine features, but Malraux dismissed Picasso as a "clown".

In 1958 (when Malraux was fifty-seven) Morocco was in turmoil and de Gaulle was ascendant again. French voters hoped he would detach France from the conflict. Malraux was back by de Gaulle’s side as minister in charge of information, but he also saw himself as a minister for “urgent affairs” and paid particular attention to the content of radio and television programs. Not a few journalists and radio technicians found themselves redundant. On December 21 that year, Charles de Gaulle became the first President of the Fifth Republic. He created a ministry for Malraux—the Ministry of Culture, to which he anticipated Malraux would bring “style and grandeur”.

In some respects Malraux would succeed beyond de Gaulle's intentions. His official title was ministre d'etat, and other ministers were delighted and relieved that Malraux was off their patch. Any arena with the remotest cultural resonance or application (architecture, archives, museums, monuments, and a centre for cinematography) was swept into his orbit. All, that is, except television, which some quarters fiercely opposed. Malraux worded a decree which was in effect his mission statement—to make “accessible the major works of mankind, and mainly those of France, to the greatest possible number of French people, to ensure the largest audience for our cultural heritage and to favour the creation of art and the spirit that enriches it”. This apparently passed muster with de Gaulle.

The Foreign Office was peeved, and so was the ministry for youth and sport, as Malraux’s political dabblings were accommodated, if not encouraged, by de Gaulle, who had a certain shy fascination with his strange genius minister. Within this ministry, where Malraux reigned supreme, a philosophical air prevailed: “Malraux is mad, but he amuses the General.”

When Malraux travelled to ten South American countries, he took it upon himself to explain France’s policy of self-determination for Algeria. “Does the General know?” asked an aide. “No, but it’s in line with what he wants.” Malraux’s further excursions to Tokyo, Delhi and Teheran, to cement cultural exchanges with rash promises, would cost the Foreign Affairs Department a fortune.

Malraux’s determination that people, especially his French compatriots, be moved by culture in a way that went beyond a passive response, to something which animated their lives, gave rise to plans to establish maisons de la culture. The first of these opened in Le Havre in 1961, and others soon followed in Caen, Bourges, Amiens, Grenoble and Rheims—to name a few. How would their efficacy be judged? “What the maison de la culture will be is not something we know so much as something we will seek out together,” suggested Malraux’s assistant and friend, the writer Gaëton Picon, who had clearly imbibed Malraux’s inscrutable phrase-making.

As Malraux’s appetite for alcohol and various stimulants advanced, so did the code for his uneven performances: “a bout of the old malaria”. None the less, the parliamentary assembly found him an eloquent diversion when he defended the stage production of Jean Genet’s Les Paravents in 1966 with vigour. No, he suggested, it was not an anti-French play, it was “anti-human … anti-everything”.

As the Algerian cancer spread, writers such as Graham Greene and Jean-Paul Sartre (who called it a dirty war) reproached Malraux for his uncharacteristic silence on the rumours of torture. Sartre and others, including Simone de Beauvoir, Marguerite Duras, André Breton and film-maker Alain Resnais signed a petition in support of the young French “draft dodgers”, and Malraux, whose conscience was not clear over Algeria, was embarrassed when he heard his daughter Florence’s signature was on it. In April 1962, Algeria, awash with blood, was granted independence. Georges Pompidou became Prime Minister and Malraux remained at his post.

Malraux and Madeleine had been together for more than fifteen years, and she was accustomed to his vanity, his swings towards mania, and his bouts of grandiosity. He never answered the telephone in person, because his hero de Gaulle didn’t. He occasionally imagined he was de Gaulle’s successor—or alter ego. As Todd puts it: “Years of ardent efficiency are followed by years of lifelessness.” The constant round of feverish activities—some glittering, some routine—conceal his increasing sense of pointlessness. A pasty-faced Malraux drank heavily and smoked incessantly. There were further entries in the catalogue of personal tragedies: his two sons by Josette died in a car accident and his father committed suicide. Again and again, he rejected a seat at the Académie Française because loftier awards, such as the Nobel Prize for Literature (which Hemingway had received in 1952 and Camus in 1957) presumably beckoned.

He never answered the telephone in person, because his hero de Gaulle didn’t. He occasionally imagined he was de Gaulle’s successor—or alter ego.
RELATIONS AT THIS TIME between America and France were civil but cool. America distrusted the General because he refused to be their “client”. There was some ill-defined notion that Malraux could be a bridge between their two capitals. At the invitation of the State Department he arrived in Washington in May 1962, to meet a First Lady who had been making feverish preparations for five weeks, and who, according to Todd: “bewitches, simpers, and bubbles with sophisticated banter”. The White House was transformed into a theatre of culture overflowing with artists, musicians, writers and singers—“Bob Hope for the man in the street, Robert Frost for the one in the ivory tower.” Unlike de Gaulle, who singularly distrusted America, Malraux was prepared to be delighted. He understood that a new “Atlantic culture” was being fomented and that there was a great hunger for it.

According to Todd: “American policy about Vietnam (Indochina) was not yet distinct. Malraux finds the interior policy of the young president disappointing … Jack Kennedy, despite all the noise made by the information (and misinformation) services, is no Roosevelt.” While Malraux was the guest of the Kennedys, he performed any and all of the functions of a designated foreign minister and perhaps with more dexterity and wit than most. But he also ventured to lecture Kennedy that “the war in Vietnam [was] against American tradition”.

Meanwhile in Paris, curators were nervous—and with good reason. Malraux had promised to despatch the fragile Mona Lisa to America. Its impending journey generated a blizzard of correspondence. When the work was safely locked in a chest at the Smithsonian Museum, and guarded by FBI agents, the Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, suggested to Malraux that France’s influence was considerable in “a domain where we are unarmed … that of the intellectual and the mind”. There were 3000 guests at the National Gallery on January 8, 1963, to hear Kennedy (after checking his notes and receiving prompts from his wife) suggest that Malraux was “a writer, a philosoper, a statesman and a soldier”. Malraux responded by complimenting America for having saved the painting—a diplomatic nicety completely overtaken by its essential silliness, but well received by a bemused audience.

Nonetheless, the enigmatic smile of an Italian businessman’s wife was no balm to the disagreements over armaments. France did not want Polaris missiles on French soil. Malraux’s opinions of Kennedy displayed his characteristic prescience; “He will go far, if he doesn’t take a fall. He is sometimes a little reckless.” When he returned to Paris, he commissioned Marc Chagall to paint the ceiling of the Paris Opera and André Masson to decorate the ceiling of the Théâtre de l’Odeon.

Malraux’s bouts of lethargy and frantic activity were punctuated by television appearances where, according to Todd, viewers found him impressive, even mesmerising, but didn’t necessarily follow what he was saying. De Gaulle, and no doubt others, recommended a rest and a voyage. It was 1965 and although it was to be a private trip, Malraux found himself in Singapore at the time President Lyndon Johnson authorised attacks on North Vietnam. He entertained a misguided notion that he could forge a diplomatic solution between Washington and Hanoi if he enlisted a big gun: Mao Tse-Tung.

At the French embassy in Peking, Malraux waited and sulked—even when he was reassured that Mao almost never gave interviews. At last he was received by the Chinese minister of foreign affairs, Marshal Chen Yi, and it was made clear that China had no wish to involve itself in negotiations which could only, in effect, assist the USA. Finally, on August 3, 1965, Malraux was received by Mao at the People’s Palace. The interview, which lasted barely thirty minutes, and was padded with translations going backwards and forwards, was inflated by Malraux to a “three-hour cosmic dialogue”. Malraux suggested to Mao: “I am very moved to find myself sitting today next to the greatest of all revolutionaries since Lenin.” But Mao effectively snubbed Malraux’s voluble excursions just as deftly as he had snubbed Khrushchev’s in 1958, and Malraux missed Mao’s allusions to the possible persecution of intellectuals. The transcript of their dialogue, with portions scratched through in blue ink, is today in the Quai d’Orsay.

His visit to China appeared to have rejuvenated Malraux and he embarked on his memoir *Antimémoires*. He was at his inscrutable best when he suggested: “I call this book *Antimémoires* because it answers a question that memoirs do not ask and doesn’t answer those that it asks.” Todd described the passage on Malraux’s meeting with Mao as “pure fantasy”. “His aim is a beautiful page.” Ryckmans called Malraux’s account of his interview “brazen humbug”, and because Malraux was both lyrical and something of an apologist for the Chinese regime, Todd suggests that Malraux “poses one of the problems of the half century: how could so many minds have gone so far astray and come out with such inanities”.

Of an earlier encounter with Jawaharlal Nehru in New Delhi in November 1958, no transcript exists. This visit also found its way into Malraux’s *Antimémoires*, and Todd ventures: “Who can tell the distracting vacuity of so many exchanges between politicians.” Todd’s description of Malraux’s fascination with Indian spirituality—its inscrutability, its resignation—suggests a scene straight out of E.M. Forster’s *A Passage to India* but he quotes a Sikh writer and journalist, Kushwant
Singh, who had interviewed Malraux and suggested that Malraux’s interest in India was as thin as the “varnish on so many westerners”.

Malraux’s increasingly erratic behaviour (for Le Corbusier’s funeral ceremony he wanted a glass of water from the Ganges to honour the architect of the new capital of the Punjab, Chandigarh) did not overtake his reputation as a writer, and when Gallimard published *Antimémoires* in September 1967 it sold 200,000 copies. The reviews were, as Todd puts it, “laudatory” and “literary”. For some French critics, form, once again, had triumphed over substance.

In the 1960s, Malraux gave more than his share of funeral orations, including one for painter Georges Braque, and one for the hero of the Resistance, Jean Moulin (in which he appeared to insert some of his own efforts by association). This prompted an idea for their publication. His friend Jean Grosjean suggested “Gods, Saints, Heroes”, but Gallimard demurred, and published instead *Les Oraisons Funèbres* in May 1971. By this time Malraux, no longer living with Madeleine, was resuscitating, with some success, an old romance with Louise de Vilmorin—a captivating character, thinly disguised as “Northey” in Nancy Mitford’s 1960 novel *Don’t Tell Alfred*, and paramour of Duff Cooper when he was British ambassador in postwar Paris.

When in February 1968, Mitterrand (who Malraux had humiliated in a public speech in 1965) questioned Malraux’s eviction of Henri Langlois from his post of Director of the National Film Archive, film-makers such as Jean-Luc Godard and Francois Truffaut echoed his criticism. Thus Malraux found himself in a camp defined as “right-wing Gaullist”—while Langlois was claimed by the supporters of “left-wing arts”. Malraux felt there was something in the air—“There’s going to be a squall in this country”—and he was right. By May 1968, meetings, marches, scuffles and barricades would construct a “revolution that could not be found”, although the focal point of the action was the Sorbonne and the Théâtre de France at the Odéon.

This is what Malraux had to say about the events of May and June 1968: “It is a crisis of civilisation, and it concerns all the students in the world … What are the students doing? They write phrases, letters, words on walls. Now, what religions did … was to inscribe things in the hearts of men.” Then in August of that year the Soviet tanks rolled into Czechoslovakia, an event Malraux suggested he had been expecting.

In April 1969, de Gaulle was no longer President and Malraux, loyal to the last, was no longer minister for cultural affairs even though Pompidou suggested he stay on in the role. He turned his energies once again towards his writing. Todd suggests: “Politics was his aphrodisiac; literature remains his best therapy.” His impulse to enlarge and embroider had not deserted him, and when de Gaulle died in November 1970, Malraux published a book the following year: *Les Chênes qu’on Abat* (*The Fallen Oaks*) which was a portrait of de Gaulle—and of Malraux. The precious thirty-five minutes of conversation with de Gaulle which took place before dinner at de Gaulle’s private residence in La Boissière in December 1969 were magically transformed into two hours of dialogue. Todd suggests: “Gide published delightful imaginary interviews in his lifetime; this book is Malraux’s finest contribution to the genre.”

With de Gaulle gone, the seventy-year-old Malraux cast around for the kind of action—or illusion of action—which he missed. When he met Indira Gandhi at the Indian embassy in Paris to offer his assistance to the insurgents looking for independence in East Pakistan (that is, to resuscitate his role of “Colonel Berger”) she quietly dissuaded him. But another chimera bloomed. In February 1972, American President Nixon was planning a visit to China, and prompted by the fiction that Malraux had some intimate connection with Mao, invited “Marrowe” to Washington. Special adviser Henry Kissinger was present at their meeting, and was both “critical and admiring”. It was clear Malraux lacked knowledge of Chinese issues, yet Kissinger responded to Malraux’s curious and ultimately accurate “artist’s perception” of coming events. The most deflating commentary on Malraux was made by another adviser to the President, John Scali, who had been prominent as an intermediary between Kennedy and the Soviets during the Cuban missile crisis. “For my part … I felt I was listening to the insights of a pretentious old man weaving outdated ideas into a particular framework of the world as he would like it to be.” Todd records: “At the end of the evening, Nixon, more polite than Mao, and in better health, sees Malraux to his car.”

Among Malraux’s last loyal companions was Sophie, Louise Vilmorin’s daughter. They travelled a great deal together and she took care of him. There was also something of an erotic fling—some last hormonal
gasp—with a beautiful Hungarian Comtesse, Catherine Polya (Gogo). He talked of his father, but not of his mother, presumably because the world was, according to Malraux, essentially a masculine one. “It is true, women do not feature in my work.”

In Malraux’s defence, does anyone expect heroes to behave heroically in the more prosaic circumstances of, for example, their marriages, their families, their friends? Possibly not. It seems that special allowances are made for them. One of the most sympathetic responses to Malraux is to be found in a review by Carlin Romano called “Andre Malraux: The Last American Frenchman” in the Chronicle of Higher Education in 2005. He rounded out his position with some scepticism of the frequent misapplication of the term “public intellectual”. In a degraded age where “blogging counts as courage” he suggested Malraux was l’homme engagé—the intellectual who was also a man of action. “Todd’s Malraux, no less than Cate’s, behoves some French crier to emulate Wordsworth’s apostrophe to Milton: ‘Thou shouldst be living at this hour. France hath need of thee—she is a fen of stagnant waters.’” Romano concluded: “He shows us the inner American in every French intellectual”—an observation this reviewer failed to grasp.

Something of Malraux’s imperative—his belief that culture, the creation of it, or the pursuit of it, the sustaining of it, was not merely a worthy activity, but the very reason for living (not a noticeably American imperative)—remains embedded in the French psyche. His fascination with the arts caused him to ruminate endlessly on beauty, the mystery of the creative process, and art’s rebellion against the “everyday human condition”. Malraux’s belief that culture was a universal, or if you like, a global achievement, drove him to examine the parallels rather than the differences between vastly different cultures and their offerings.

His book Les Voix du Silence, an enlarged edition of his former volumes on art and artefacts, challenged many readers to describe or place it. To Ernst Gombrich, the Viennese-born British art historian, it appeared to be a “romantic saga”—and an escape from solitude. The French critic Georges Duthuit was more caustic, talking of “ignorance”, “negligence”, “counterfeiting” and “passionate ejaculation”. But he too perceived that Malraux was forging a brotherhood of arts—and this was his means of escaping the universal dilemma of isolation. Some critics were too embarrassed to criticise a “national institution”. In France it sold 61,169 copies.

For a generation or two of art history students who have struggled with this elegant yet mystifying volume, it might be a relief to hear comments which make it clear that the book is almost incomprehensible, except as an act of faith in, or an act of identity with, its writer. It threads together oracular pronouncements occasionally laced with illuminating remarks. With its unselﬁsh, conscious blending of classical sculpture and Courbet’s canvases, of Czechoslovakian folk art and Sepik Valley masks, this book is a harbinger of a certain postmodern outlook where the entire cultural offerings of the world are worked together in a large mixing bowl—like marble cake.

The 1974 re-issue of this volume flushed out some laudatory remarks. The Guardian talked of “cumulative grandeur”, the Times Literary Supplement of “a series of rockets set off one after another”, while Cyril Connolly on the Sunday Times sounded both admiring and dismissive: “Malraux has an original mind and a glowing imagination—he is a novelist philosopher and a poetic revolutionary who happens both to love and to understand art.”

In his incisively researched book Olivier Todd has not only disinterred Malraux’s multitude of imperatives and strangely compelling persona, he has taken the reader, as a series of appetising side dishes, from French colonial aspirations and Franco-American relations all the way to Haiti in 1975 (then run by the petty tyrant “Baby Doc” Duvalier) where Malraux attends a voodoo ceremony. Todd has also, for good measure, included a recipe for “Pigeon André Malraux” in the endnotes, which looks both delicious and complicated.

Malraux also embarked on a book called L’Homme Précaire et la Littérature, a kind of summary examination of the world’s literature—as he had previously done for the “plastic” arts. In June 1976, he received a breathless letter from Gallimard’s son Claude: “You have dizzyingly crossed the world of human creativity … but another reading will be necessary to get closer to the unfathomable.” This is exactly how the reader will feel after reading Todd’s 543-page book. Some reviewers, possibly exhausted by Todd’s relentless and forensic foraging, or being by nature tone-deaf, may have missed Todd’s rueful tone and the fact that Malraux clearly mesmerised him—as he did so many others. A kind of dazed and irritated affection for his subject surfaces in spite of a sustained and acerbic scrutiny.

Patricia Anderson’s recent articles for Quadrant include one on the Dreyfus affair in the July-August 2006 issue. Pierre Ryckmans’ article on Malraux, a response to Curtis Cate’s biography, appeared in the October 1997 issue of Quadrant. Malraux: A Life by Olivier Todd is published by Knopf, $59.95.
ABELAIS REMINDS US, in his prologue to *Gargantua*, that Plato calls the dog, in the second book of *The Republic*, the most philosophical creature. Dogs love to gnaw bones, the cortex of which must be broken open to allow them to savour the perfect nourishment of the marrow—*la substantifique moelle*. As Sir Thomas Urquhart puts it, in his Scots English translation of 1653:

> In imitation of this Dog, it becomes you to be wise, to smell, feel, and have in estimation these faire goodly books, stuffed with high conceptions, which though seeming easie in the pursuit, are in the cope and encounter somewhat difficult; and then like him you must, by a sedulous Lecture, and frequent meditation break the bone, and suck out the marrow … for in the perusal of this Treatise, you shall finde another kind of taste, and a doctrine of a more profound and abstruse consideration, which will disclose unto you the most glorious Sacraments, and dreadful mysteries, as well in what concerneth your Religion, as matters of the publick State, and Life economical.

In dealings between dogs and humans, the human side of the account seems guiltily in debt. Even the ferociously smelly pirate who panhandles at our local market has a mutt with him, and not just to attract the sympathy coin. He needs the dog to overcome our cynicism (in its modern sense) at the theatricality of his self-presentation. No wonder Charlie Chaplin in *A Dog’s Life* has to remember, at various junctures, not to mistake his own for one.

Dogs inhabit an exchange economy in which a caress is as good as a word.

In his short testimony *The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights*, Emanuel Lévinas recounts the story of his internment in a forest POW camp after the rout of his French division in the Ardennes following the German invasion in 1940. His company of seventy men lived as if they “were no longer part of the world”. For a few short weeks, however, they enjoyed the company of a stray dog, Bobby, who somehow managed to survive in a wilder part of the camp. Bobby was in the habit of jumping up in delight and greeting the prisoners with a bark when they lined up in the morning and when they returned from their corvee at dusk. “For him, there was no doubt that we were all men.”

The irony of the situation, in which he and his fellow prisoners had become animals in the eyes of other humans who witnessed their plight but were acknowledged as human only by a destitute animal, was not lost on the philosopher, who dubbed the dog the “last Kantian of Nazi Germany”. Bobby had noticed, without introspecting, that we are a species replicated entire in every individual. What makes us different from dogs, however, is that we do not in all circumstances acknowledge others of our kind as kind.

Flaubert, a close reader of Rabelais, intuited that the latter’s advice to the reader was actually a plea to go into mourning for the mind.

*Perro Enterrado en Arena* (1820–24), one of Goya’s freakish late Black Paintings, derives its potent emotional effect, according to Robert Hughes, from the “collision of the laceratingly rhetorical with the hermetic”. It shows a dog’s head imploringly looking upwards from the bottom of a pit of quicksand. No explanation is given for the dog’s peculiar fate. Cerberus was once called the demon of the pit. Goya’s painting is dominated by volumes of undifferentiated brown, as if the canvas itself had been dressed with mud. What his dog knows is abandonment.

“By the dog”: one of Socrates’ favourite cuss-words. Benjamin Jowett adds, in one of his famous translations of Plato, that nobody knows exactly what it means.

Lévinas might also have added that the dog is the only species that has indubitably and definitely found a god, and devotes the best part of a dog’s life to adoring it. Rilke thought that dogs “approach us in such an
admiring and trusting way that some of them seem to have abandoned their most primal canine traditions and have begun to worship our ways, even our faults”. Living constantly at the limits of their nature, dogs are perpetually on the threshold of transcending it. They are “bêtes de chagrin”—beasts of sorrow who lead us to experience the full pain and severance of loss.

“Lie down with dogs, and get up with fleas.”

In J.M. Coetzee’s scrim-shanked novel Disgrace, the fifty-two-year-old ex-academic hero, a sexual predator, gets thrown out of his university post for an amatory peccadillo, or rather for failing to be publicly contrite about it in the expected manner, and ends up helping a middle-aged woman put stray bush dogs out of their misery. He senses their fear—“the disgrace of dying”—and in what seems his first loving act, tries to dispose of their remains with as much dignity as possible. Dog-sympathy leads him to kenosis, the humbling of his sexual vanity and the question: “Is it enough for God, do you think, that I live my disgrace without term?”

Rousseau’s Dog Visits London. “His very dog, who is no better than a collie, has a name and reputation in the world.”

Dogs have a way of being frank about their feelings, unsophisticated as they may be, that is a balm to those who are dried out. Dogs may even be an alibi for the emotionally arid. In England, wrote Elias Canetti (who wanted to be the “dog of his day”) in his diary for 1954, “no man is praised to his face, that’s why people keep dogs. Praise is permitted for anything one undertakes with them.”

In Hogarth’s famous Self-Portrait with Pug it is the artist’s dog (actually called Pugg) who steals the show. Centuries later, Winston Churchill was caricatured, to good effect, in the same moist-eyed, world-defying, round-shouldered posture.

Britain is still identified on the continent as a nation of dog-lovers, although there are now far more dog-owners in France: according to INSEE half of all French households own a chien de compagnie—Paris alone is thought to have a dog population of 250,000. Martin Monestier, who is an authority in matters of this kind, informs us that every day twenty-five tonnes of excrement is deposited on the streets of Paris, for which the city has equipped itself with a fleet of 200 “motocrottes” or motorbikes fitted with a trailing suction collector. Monestier reckons that the per kilogram cost of collecting dog excrement trundles in at thirty-seven francs.

Dogs are natural conservatives. So what on earth do they make of a world in which everybody is barking up the progress tree?

The centre of St Petersburg’s brilliant literary life in the early years of the twentieth century was called the Stray Dog Café: it was a soundboard for Khlebnikov, Mayakovskiy and the idiosyncratically beautiful Anna Akhmatova who wrote, after the summer recession of 1917: “We returned not to Petersburg, but to Petrograd; from the nineteenth century we suddenly found ourselves transported to the twentieth, everything had changed.” The rest of her life was to teach her the kind of resilience in adverse circumstances only a stray dog could endure. It was the kind of resilience familiar to all Russians, especially those who managed to read Mikhail Bulgakov’s grotesque story of a stray dog who receives a criminal’s transplanted “sweetmeats” and, in a parody of Frankenstein’s monster, ends up expertly spouting Lenin.

In Tarkovsky’s films, which are not short on enigma, the most uncanny cameo roles are reserved for dogs.

Even cat-lovers can be sidetracked by dogs with attitude. Louis de Bernières’ Red Dog tells the story of a kelpie of the same name who is now the object of a pioneer cult in Western Australia. Red Dog went walkabout for his entire adult life (1971–79), hitching lifts in cars, buses and trains, sometimes shacking up with an obliging family or alternatively raiding a barbecue before heading off through the bottlebrush and ghost gums for the spectacular overheated desolation of the place. Henry Lawson once despondingly called “the nurse and tutor of eccentric minds”.

Achilles Mèchant. Diogenes of Sinope, the first person to unleash the animal into philosophy, reserved for himself one right: to bite his fellow humans when he felt like it. It wasn’t that dogs were more moral (or even rational) than humans; it was rather that by becoming a dog-philosopher, he could imprint upon other humans the full nature of his autarky, the goal which all the Greek ethicists strove for; and show by his antinomian scheme for living that he was independent of all externals, which included family ties, political duties, social niceties, ordinary manners and the arts. Jesus says as much too. Does that mean early Christians were cynics? Yes, but with a nice distinction: cynics reduce their needs in order to assert what Christians deny: the self.

Though he was an author whose commitment to writing might seem in any other age heroic, Doctor Johnson considered himself reprehensibly lazy, and thought only Hester Thrale’s mismanned dog Presto was more of a good-for-nothing than he himself.

Gewissesbrisse. Conscience itself bites us, as the German term suggests, a conceptual image that carries a sharp entailment of compunction and scruple. Nietzsche wrote, in his contemptuous way, that such bites were like dogs gnashing stones, and therefore stupid. But when did that
antique English expression the *pangs of remorse* last make anyone hallucinate a canine’s fetid breath?

No doubt about it, wrote Karl Kraus, the Viennese cabaretist and moralist, the dog is an admirably loyal creature. But that is no reason for emulation: the dog is faithful to a human being, not itself.

“I’m speaking of all this as a veterinarian, a racist so to speak …” Louis-Ferdinand Céline, medico turned misanthrope, reserves the most moving section of his novel *Castle to Castle* for the death of his dog Bessy, who accompanied him when he left his open prison in Denmark in 1951 to return to his final home in Meudon, south of Paris. She lay down to die “pointed in the direction of her memory”—the Baltic forests of the north where she had gone on hour-long escapades in pursuit of rabbits and wild birds. But one of the best books about Céline is ostensibly dedicated to his Montmartre “ripper” cat, Bébert, who accompanied the collaborationist writer and his wife as they fled from the Allies across the length of Germany in 1945. Céline, that “virtuoso of feeling”, reserves his tenderest feelings for his cat and dog, which is to say for himself. He had almost no patients in his Meudon practice in the 1950s, but he kept a menagerie in his house next door.

In the ninth-century *Hadith* literature, keeping a dog in the house is considered as disgusting a practice as admiring graven images.

On the other hand, as Khidr, the Muslim guide of souls, suggests to a disconsolate worshipper in Rumi’s poem *Love Dogs*, the unrequited whining of a dog for its master should inspire him to keep rendering praise to Allah: it will draw him towards union because “the whining is the connection”. It took Martin Buber another eight centuries to formulate the crucial dialogical hinge between the self and others: “direction is not meeting but going out to meet”.

Tomi Ungerer, the man from Colmar who has made a name for himself, primarily in the German-speaking world, as a writer of children’s books and who enjoys playing the wise fool, once commented that, as an Alsatian, he was horrified to discover that the English-speaking world had given the name of his region to the race of dogs specifically associated in popular memory in central Europe, certainly in Alsace, with the SS. Dogs love to observe the proprieties, too, which makes them ideal for police work of all kinds—even guarding concentration camps. (Not all dogs are Bobby.) But there is, in fact, an odd appropriateness that the popular and intelligent German shepherd breed was renamed “Alsatian” in the United Kingdom in 1914: the whole new technology for the manufacture of “public opinion” was brought into being in the then German-administered regions of Alsace and Lorraine, as a part of Bismarck’s strategy to win over these regions for the burgeoning welfare state policies of the Second Reich. Public relations were to become a technique for manipulating the home front in the First World War when atrocities were “invented” about the other side *pour encourager les siens*. Some atrocities were, of course, not invented. A certain Adolf Hitler cared for his German shepherds, but they never taught him charity. He even took his favourite dog Blondi into death with him.

According to Mr Bones, the philosophical dog in Paul Auster’s novel, dogs go to Timbuktu when they die.

*He and his fellow prisoners had become animals in the eyes of other humans who witnessed their plight but were acknowledged as human only by a destitute animal.*
eaten dog in the old days, but the pup had a strong doggy smell, and now that she was unwell she couldn’t stand that smell any more. It sickened her, so she sloped off …” I was reminded with a start that my Brethren parents had kept a mongrel dog of the same name until I was about six, and then had it put down for newly interpreted “scriptural” reasons. Patch had a problematic relationship, too, like the dog in Chekhov’s story, with doors.

Too much proximity to humans makes these monsters of affection melancholy: they spend all their waking hours waiting for a sign, the merest call or glance which might indicate what their master has in store for them.

_Suis-je bête_, wondered Rimbaud, but only after exploring all the possibilities of the word _underdog_.

Shakespeare, in _The Tempest_, was the first person to drag the word “watchdog”, howling, into the English language.

It was Elvis’s rendition of “Hound Dog”, a high-octane version of an old Mississippi Delta blues number, that captivated the nascent Fab Four in 1956. Here was the sound of northern British folk culture and Borderer intransigence slung over an African back-beat, after it had disappeared more than two centuries before into the Appalachian backwoods. In its turn, the hybrid guitar sound exported by the four “youngsters from Liverpool” in 1964 became the vehicle for the revenge of the South: a culture of emotionalism, plain speaking, scepticism about constituted authority and piously enthusiastic religion. The Mississippi wail has been washing up the Essex coast ever since.

_Dog-whistle politics_ is, according to OUP’s _Fanboys and Overdogs: The Language Report_ (2005), the political catchphrase of the year: a deliberate ploy of using language to rouse a specific population within the electorate while leaving the rest oblivious, just in the way a dog whistle emits a shriek above the human auditory threshold.

_Dogs allowed in the park_. Roger Grenier, who called his dog Ulysses, not Argos, tells us in his commonplace book _The Difficulty of Being a Dog_ that, following the French habit of naming pedigree dogs after a letter to indicate the year of their birth, he had a choice between Utile, Ulfilas, Ulric, Unique, Uranus, Ursus, Uriel, Ugolin, Uléma, Uhu and Ut (French for the musical note C). A pataphysician friend dissuaded him from giving it Alfred Jarry’s derisive name Ubu. Perhaps he could have settled for the Dutch U, which, like the upright sociable ego of the English language, manages to transform the quality of being other into a _sign_.

Dogs gnaw at a long educational tradition which represents language as being at the service of thought rather than thought as a slave to language.
**NOTES FOR A DOG PHILOSOPHY**

**DOG LANGUAGE.** A disabused materialist toughie, which is how the German poet Durs Grünbein presents himself in his poem-sequence *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Border Dog*, wonders what is left of our devotion—"where Pavlov stands for what is left of psyche". One thing we can be sure about is that language is not a Pavlovism, by means of which we merely have to agree on some fixed public set of correlations between ideas and verbal symbols in order to have an apparatus for motivating individual appetites. Our very attempts to understand language are, as every good border dog knows, at the mercy of words. Language is being that makes itself understood.

R, the rhotic letter, was once called the dog’s letter, presumably because it growls. R, in fact, is a kind of shibboleth all over the world: the Scots pronounce it as a brief apico-alveolar trill with the tongue, and it serves to separate them from the largely non-rhotic English. They, in turn, are still wont to show their bare pink *arse* to the American behind, once considered so vulgar it got dubbed a donkey. The French *r* is described by phonologists as dorso-velar, which is like gargling with an oyster in your throat; more lubricant than rattle. On the other hand, my children used to love listening to the comic-sinister trill given to the dog’s letter in the gangster ballads of Brecht and Weill’s version of *The Threepenny Opera*, as sung by Wolfgang Neuss on the classic Lotte Lenya version from fifty years ago: “Und der Haifisch, der hat Zähne ...”

I once heard an old Bavarian peasant halt his dray-horses by uttering a peculiar labial *r*, which sounded like a cold-weather *brrrr* minus the initial plosive. The visceral lingering *r* of Bahasa flaps like a fish in silt, but only on the 17,000 islands of the Indonesian part of the Malay archipelago; the Malaysian form of the same language is strictly non-rhotic. It may only be this one sound dogs learn but, according to Octave Mirbeau, they can master all languages: “French, English, German, Russian, Greenlandic and Hindustani, Telugu, low Breton and low Norman, all the dialects and all the patois, without ever having learned them.”

“I without [the gates of the city] are the dogs”: a chill little phrase, in the last chapter of the New Testament.

**HUNDSFÖTTISCH:** the most obscene word in the German language raises its genitals to us, like a bitch in heat. It is the word Thomas Mann uses in *The Magic Mountain* to describe the lung operation on the only minimally anaesthetised Anton Karlovitsch Ferge in which his pleura is palpated by the surgeon. This is how he describes “pleural shock” to his listeners in the sanatorium:

Gentlemen, I would never have thought that such a sevenfold horrible and ruttily feeling could exist at all on earth outside of hell! I fell into unconsciousness—into three unconsciousnesses at once, one green, one brown and one violet. In addition to all that, it stank in this unconsciousness. The pleural shock impinged on my sense of smell, gentlemen. It smelled to high heaven of hydrogen sulphide as it must smell in hell, and in all this, I heard myself laughing, while I was kicking the bucket, but not like a human being laughs, but rather, that was the most disgraceful and nauseating laughter I have heard in all my life...

“We don’t have a dog in this fight,” said the American secretary of state about the Bosnian conflict.

“For I believe that even the greatest works of literature have a little tail of human frailty which, if one is on the lookout for it, begins to wag slightly and disturbs the sublime, godlike quality of the whole.” That was Kafka, writing to his fiancée Felice in February 1913. Nine years later, he returned to the nature of communal life and the *principium individuationis* in his story “Investigations of a Dog”: the investigating dog wonders whether food comes from the earth, hence the dog rule: “Water the ground as much as you can”, or, as he increasingly suspects, from above: “indeed customarily we snap up most of our food ... before it had reached the ground at all”.

What appear to be gifts from heaven are actually titbits dangled to the dogs by humans, who are invisible in the story. That is also why his lapdogs seem to float in the air, a witty analogue for Marx’s dismissive term *Lufmenschen*—those who play no obvious role in the social economy. Individualism is obliged to crave a resolution which cannot be satisfied in the individualised world. And why the investigating dog warns us: “the marrow I am discussing here is no food; on the contrary, it is poison”.

“Like a dog!” he said: it was as if the shame of it must outlive him.” So ends Kafka’s *The Trial*, as its protagonist Joseph K recoils with the fatal knife already planted in his heart. He passes judgment on his own death, though his verdict comes after his punishment. His shame isn’t social shame (*die Schande*): it isn’t just that his death has brought dishonour to the family name. As Erich Heller points out, the startling word *die Scham* stands alone in the original German, as a grammatical absolute. It outs his inwardness, and becomes a kind of
Hippocratic facies. It is the shame of a man come face to face with the dying animal in his nature.

The ending of Kafka’s novel reminds me of the savage fate reserved by Hogarth for his pauper boy Tom Nero in his sequence *Four Stages of Cruelty*. After his execution for murder, Tom, in a parody of the title-page to Vesalius’ *De Humani Fabricis Corpora*, lies on the anatomist’s table in Surgeons’ Hall with his eyes being excavated and his innards emptied into a vat. The verse appended to the image points the moral of his disgrace, which like Joseph K’s, outlasts his death. “But dreadful! From his Bones shall rise / His Monument of Shame.”

And a cur (one of the animals mistreated by Tom in one of the earlier engravings) gnaws at his heart, a bit of Aztec offal on the floor.

Half automaton, half *enfant perdu*.

L

**LOVE ME, LOVE MY DOG.** Servants are contractually engaged to be the instruments of their master’s will. Masters all too readily tend to forget that their servants have natures of their own. Where would theatre be without that education in the fundamental instability of the social life? Shakespeare’s *Two Gentlemen of Verona* is dominated by servants who know their masters better than they know themselves, and actually (as Hegel argued) bring them to self-knowledge. But while humans can reciprocate in a loving relationship, there is comedy in the spectacle of Lance, servant to Proteus, loving his dog Crab so much he endures a whipping for him after the “cur” urinates in gentlemanly company. He knows the dog won’t return his affection: “I am the dog. No, the dog is himself, as I am the dog. O the dog is me, and I am myself.” Crab knew just how hard it is to be forgiven.

Ernst Toller thought, once a glacial universal cynicism had settled on Europe after the volcanic years of the First World War, that the “ice dogs” still had enough vitality to keep barking. It is the “stone dogs”, on the other hand, which have been guarding, immemorially, the entrances to Shinto temples in Japan.

Delhi’s dogs run the streets in packs and, mindless of the hordes of shoppers in Kahn Market, slump down in the midday heat and sleep wherever they find themselves. One or two even have a bowl of water put out for them.

Unflattering dog names are among the commonest Mandarin soubriquets for the search engine Google (slogan: “Don’t be evil”), which has become exceedingly unpopular among dissident Chinese for its brazen kowtowing to the Beijing censors: these include Gougou (dog dog), Gugou (ancient dog) and Good Gou (good dog).

For if bourgeois society began with the taming of the *innerem Schweinehund* by reason and morality, it was an animal shadow that peeked out from beneath its lower parts. The unconscious is first glimpsed in the antics of animal magnetism which made Anton Mesmer’s method a household word in Europe only a few years after Kant’s *Critique of Reason*.

Some dogs learn to play possum.

In *The Philosopher’s Dog*, a meditation on human creatureliness, Raimond Gaita argues that we abuse dogs if we fail to train them, and that training requires display of the entire gamut of the emotions, anger and punishment as much as fondness and reward. Logic would demand, though he shrinks from saying so, that we abuse ourselves if we treat animals anthropomorphically.

Freud’s last dog, a chow called Lün, came with him to his final home in north London. Lün refused to go near her master, terrified by the putrescent smell arising from his rapidly advancing oral cancer. Freud interpreted this, with the sad resignation that characterised him in his role as Moses, as an indication from his chow that he had already passed over to the other side.

A single olfactory sniff suffices to tell a dog when we last ate, where we’ve just been, the very mood we’re in: smell is the brotherhood individualism has to deny. Chesterton’s dog Quoddle pities humans for not having noses, but it would seem our perpetually renewable civilisation has decided to dispense with them entirely: in the circuits of urban America body odour is a term so offensive it has long since been “odorised” to a mere abbreviation. People without noses, however, have no flair.

The dog it was that didn’t bark.

In 1953, already more than a decade in exile in Argentina, the Polish writer Witold Gombrowicz reminds his diary—“faithful dog of my soul”—that supper is waiting for him in his boarding house Las Delicias. “Don’t howl,” he writes, “your master is leaving, it is true, but I’ll be back.”
ANCHOR WALK

The foremost tunnels into the white
  wall of fog, radar our only eye—
        a thousand green pixels ornament
  the screen: gill-netters, tenders,
        and processing platforms so dense
  they echo like a strip of land.

The unseen
  tug in tow idles abeam, seeking anchorage;
  bowers taut, cables bitted and boused to.
  The almanac warns mariners:
      permit a generous scope of chain,
  anchors are sure to walk Kvichak Bay.

The night watch monitors with unease
  as an unpropulsioned rig
  drags anchor, then holds, then drags
  again in the confluence,
        contrasting current and flood:
  speed: 5 knots, range: 400 yards.
  The night mate hails the rogue barge,
  the engine room crew musters
  (spilled coffee and poker cards).
  “Start the mains! We gotta move, now!”
  Great o-rings recoil, eight thousand horsepower
  shudders at full, rudder hard a starboard,
  cavitation astern, hawse pipe
  and anchor windlass grind
  as the vessel pivots
        too slow.

Off port quarter, a masthead light looming.
  Range: one tenth of a mile. Speed: 8 knots.
  Foghorns call.
  Darkness bearing down.
  Portholes. Bulging eyes.
  A sudden jolt, bracing arms.
  The ship heels over as the barge
  plies the bulkhead just above the waterline.
  Half-inch steel opens like a can,
  Main Deck stove in at cabin 109.
  Two shipmates shake from their sleep,
  but a third, overwhelmed by fatigue,
  snores on and fails to rise,
  the bull nose nudging his bed sheets.

E.M. Test
Oro Bay is a cove in Papua New Guinea, where I, and a mixture of experienced soldiers, many from the Middle East, together with a crowd of greenhorns just nineteen years old, were disembarked. Fighting was going on further up the coast, but our part had been cleared of Japanese, and there was a working port, into which we sailed. There were five merchant ships in the harbour at the time. We were told that the Japanese were expected to bomb that night. So, we must best dig in, on a hillside, looking down on the harbour.

The experienced chaps had been sent to other parts of the area, to set up, among other things, our wireless equipment. So a group of us young ones were left, together with the sergeant, to dig in and pitch our tents.

I don’t know why they picked that place—at least where we were—for very soon we struck rock, and with only picks, shovels and crowbars it was slow work. We were all very excited—first day in New Guinea, a rite of passage—but also, the chance of being attacked from the air! And we hadn’t dug the slit-trench yet.

A raid started. We couldn’t see any Japanese planes, or any Americans. But the anti-aircraft opened up; obviously there was something up there. This was light ack-ack, manned by the Americans, but with a range of only 10,000 feet. Nevertheless it blazed away. Where the resulting shrapnel fell, I know not—we were just glad it wasn’t on us. But where were these dangerous Nips?

Then, we could just hear a very faint sound of a plane. It was a Jap, up above 20,000 feet. None of our planes turned up to take it out, so they must have known something. The Nip wasn’t the precursor of a big wave to follow—there was just him, right up there, to be safe, with a load of bombs to drop—somewhere. Later, the rumour went that one of the ships, American, had a cargo of mustard gas, and it was that which he was looking for. Who knows? More likely, it was ice-cream, tinned ham and aftershave lotion: Uncle Sam’s sinews of war. Incidentally, in earlier savage fighting at Buna, Gona and Santander, 1300 Australians had been killed, but also 1000 Americans.

At any rate, our visitor dropped his bombs as quickly as he could: some fell in the water in the port, missing everything, and the rest landed in the bush. He then buzzed off—home to Mother, I assume. Don’t blame him. There were no other planes around, and the ack-ack was falling far too short.

After all that excitement we sat around our half-finished trench, too elated to bed down for the night, so we chatted for hours. We had passed through our baptism of fire on our first day. Must tell Mum and Dad about this. (We didn’t. It was a secret.)

One chap kept us up for ages, telling one joke after another—his way of release, I suppose. The jokes were very funny, and he must have had a memory like an elephant. He should have gone into show business. He was an ordinary-looking youth, whom we called Skull. Not because he shaved his head, although he did, but because earlier he had been in the tragic event which occurred when we were still in Australia.

On Saturdays, at Bonegilla, most of the soldiers would go into Albury for a day’s leave, and would cram into the little buses which ran between camp and town. One Saturday, a train collected one of these buses at a level crossing, scattering soldiers and bits of bus right along the line. Twenty-five men were killed and many others injured—some badly. Skull had been on that bus.

The town hospital was crowded with dead and injured soldiers. Those pronounced dead were taken to a large room, where they lay while the staff worked to deal with the injured. The room was dark and silent. Skull, lying on the floor—he had been adjudged dead—woke up, with a splitting headache. His last memory was of talking to a mate (who was to lose a kidney in the smash). Skull had taken a mighty whack on the head. He sat up, and saw all those silent figures lying around.
“They’re dead,” he thought. “Am I dead? I don’t think so. What am I doing here?” The door was ajar, and there was a light outside, so he started yelling for help. After a few minutes, someone came in, to find a live soldier. Skull suffered no great harm, and was never seen to have the shakes, bad dreams, or the rest. So he became known as Skull—for it must have been pretty thick.

![Image of toilet seats, bits of wood and a cloud of paper went into the air. The paper blew over the camp like Irish confetti.](image)

Suddenly there was a terrible bang. An empty forty-four-gallon drum, lying a few yards away, had been hit. It was split in two, and smelt of burning metal. My mate took off—“We’ll get blown up staying here. I’m going to bed down in another tent. We’ll have to do it properly tomorrow.”

I stayed with the ship—but I didn’t get much sleep. The place was swarming with bush rats—great, greedy things, and like most rats, cheeky and fearless. One of those we caught was nineteen inches from tip to toe.

Well, I started to hear a munching noise near the corner of the tent. A rat was chewing one of my books. It was protruding from a kitbag of books, which I always carried with me, along with the normal kitbag of personal effects. These books were my self-reminder that there was another world, which I had just discovered, and to which I was just as determined to return.

But the bush rat didn’t care about any of this; he just kept chewing G.D.H. Cole’s *Practical Economics*. He took no notice of my shooing, so I chased him out with my bayonet, then tried to sleep. But no—he, or one of his mates, came back, walking on the rope holding the tent, then jumped onto the tent, which he proceeded to climb to get to the tent-pole holding the business up.

We had pitched the tent rather badly, so that after a short downpour it was already sagging. It was in fact just an inch or two from my nose as I lay on my stretcher. So this stupid bugger would start happily climbing, then slide down to his starting point, and try again, and again, and again. And where he would squat was directly over my face, with just the tent and a fly between us.

This all started to get me down … and an element of fear began to creep in. So I drove my bayonet upwards, through the tent and through the fly, to where the fat one was sitting. I made a hole in the tent, but Reinhold Rat had skipped aside. “Good. He’s gone.” But, like Madame Melba, he hadn’t—just knocked off for a gargle. He resumed his tobogganing, finishing over my face once more. Really fed up, I took more care next time: how to get him before he could skip. So I drove my bayonet where I thought he’d skipped to. I must have nicked him, for there was a squeal, and he was gone. His last performance.

There was a second hole in the tent, but who cared? I didn’t. Then it started to pour, and two little torrents started to come down on me. I had to move the bed.

Next day, we pitched a proper tent, while the other boys watched, smoking and giggling. I’d worried about some sergeant asking, “Why the holes? Why do you need another tent and fly?” So I racked my brains for a
story. Yes … I’d had a dream that the Japs had come out of the jungle, and were attacking us. One was on top of the tent. But no one asked. We were still settling in.

AFTER A LOT of to-ing and fro-ing along the coast, doing the usual signals stuff—Morse radio, laying lines, working switchboards—some of us were sent down to Port Moresby. I can’t even remember what I did there.

It was a big base. We were just one of many little units. But we had our own camp. For most purposes it was run by a company sergeant-major called Heeps. Heepsie, or Happy Heeps, as we called him, seemed somewhat handicapped. When the psychologists put us through aptitude tests, they found that the company sergeant-major was suitable only for general duties. Well … he was never happier than when he had an arm up some drain, or was staring affectionately at a stream of effluent escaping from somewhere or other.

For all that, Heeps was a musician, and a man of vision. He carried an old trumpet around with him, and after we’d knocked off, he would sit in his tent playing this wretched thing. Shouts would soon be heard: “Give up, Happy! Give us a break! Why don’t you use your mouth?” He, like any true musician, ignored the critics in the peanut gallery.

Heepsie also designed, and largely built, a very fine open-air toilet block, halfway up a hill, at the foot of which lay our camp. This was an open-air row of thunderboxes, with a marvellous view of the bay, and you could watch your comrades working down below. Others might smoke, others would read, others would just take in nature, or talk to the chap on the next seat. A very popular venue.

We took turns throwing a strong disinfectant into each toilet. The toilet tins were replaced regularly; and the main villains were not the germs, but the creepy-crawlies who seemed to want to take over the world. This morning, it was my turn to throw around the disinfectant. So, grabbing a drum, I went up the hill, and, lifting each toilet seat, I threw in some disinfectant.

Once finished, I returned down to the camp, to put the disinfectant where the next chap could get it. Only then did I realise that I’d taken a drum of petrol—the disinfectant still stood there.

“Petrol!” I thought. “It will stink!” But no, the breeze would blow it away, and petrol was a good disinfectant—people put it on cuts and bruises. (I didn’t yet know that you could also sniff it.) The cans would be changed in a couple of days, so not to worry.

It didn’t work out that way. I was engaged in some collective labour about an hour later, when there was a tremendous bang, and then another, up the hill. Toilet seats, bits of wood and a cloud of paper went into the air. The paper blew over the camp like Irish confetti.

What had happened was that a chap sitting on Thunderbox Five (say) finished his fag, then, lifting the lid of Thunderbox Six, threw in his unstubbed fag. He then started back down the hill. Just as well.

Heepsie then appeared from nowhere, screeching curses like a wounded banshee. “My dunny’s been blown up! Who’s done this? Who’s blown it up?” I’d retired to the rear of the camp—out of sight, out of mind. “Maybe it was a Nip,” said one of my mates. “You know how they infiltrate behind the lines.” Heepsie stopped for a moment, then shouted: “Rubbish. What kind of Jap would blow up a toilet?” “Maybe,” said one of the clever ones, “maybe there’s a gas—a gas from those places—which can catch alight.”

Heepsie was not convinced, but somehow he was blinded with science, and everyone promised to help repair the damage. But spurred on by this experience, I realised that I should grow up, and start to take things seriously. Turning work into play might please Siggy Freud, but he couldn’t have meant my Dada antics. So, from that time on, I soldiered on, more or less grew up, and shattered my mother’s enduring dream of producing a highly decorated Garry McDonald.

THE REST OF MY TIME was more or less rational. When I came out of the army in late 1946, I arrived home in my new free suit, with some mementoes of my martial experiences—some new army singlets which never wore out, an army overcoat which I dyed black (and which also lasted forever), plus some light bulbs (my crowd could always use a few).

When I got home, only my dad was there—resting between the lunch and dinner periods at his restaurant (he didn’t own it, or anything. Ever).

“Welcome home,” he said. “At last it’s over. You’re a free man again, and still in one piece.” “If you say so,” I said. “Well, I can’t talk about that, but we’ll have a drink to celebrate.” And it was beer—not plonk. A special occasion.

We drank to a new era—poor sods that we were—and then my dad said: “You know, there’s been something I’ve been meaning to tell you for some time; but it wasn’t appropriate before.” I waited. “You and your mates have been wasting your time. You should have let the Japs have this place. They’d make something of it.” He then gloomily swallowed the rest of his drink.

“You’re probably right,” I replied. “But I couldn’t see myself pulling rickshaws down Bourke Street. Nor you.”

Max Teichmann’s previous piece of unofficial Second World War history appeared in the March issue.

SCHWEIK IN NEW GUINEA
THE PHILOSOPHER William James is said to have awoken hazily one night after a drug-induced dream and scribbled down what he believed to be the answer to the great mystery. In the morning he read what he had written:

hogamus higamous
man is polygamous
higamus hogamous
woman monogamous

Although James dismissed the thought as nonsense, he did record the dream in his notes. Certainly, monogamy and lifelong relationship have been a difficult and elusive condition for ordinary human beings. One cannot help but wonder if we all would prefer a polygamous society if it were not for the children and the practicalities of dealing with ordinary human frailty.

Modern Western society seems to be falling more and more into a kind of unwritten polygamy or serial monogamy where a lifelong relationship with one partner is now quite unusual.

Love, sex, sexuality and the various related gender issues are difficult and dangerous topics to discuss anywhere the three sexes might be represented. Consequently, there is little open discussion about them, yet they contain the most fundamental concerns and questions around which all our lives turn. The fact that this discussion has become politically aligned has reduced what discussion there is even further into an adversarial entrenchment. The recent amendments to the Family Law Act attempting to enhance the rights of children to fatherhood, for example, could never have happened under the current attitudes within the ALP. This is unfortunate, as issues such as this one, which has been painfully obvious for some time, should be able to be approached on a bipartisan basis.

Perhaps love is a garden, vulnerable to everything from soil to sun—but first of all, it must be vulnerable and it must know its vulnerability—its borders, its boundaries—and do it anyway. I was a fearful and nervous, yet serious boy by the time I reached an age when it was expected that boys should take an interest in girls. Apart from my mother, the only knowledge I had of girls came from the brief appearances of my sister and her occasional friends when they emerged, ever so briefly, from her room.

The Jesuits dominated my life from the age of first memory until the age at which my body seemed to begin to emerge from a long sleep. It had been a sleep disturbed by fear and abuse. One time it was seeking God in the church of the Immaculate Conception clothed in a red sertan and a white starched linen surplice, the next fearing the courage of the saints being skinned alive by the Mohicans in Canada, then chanting Latin in a grey suit or being strapped on a platform in front of a class of forty boys for one thing or another, on a daily basis. Then it was the tall novice Jesuit putting his hand down my short pants behind the teacher’s desk in Grade Four, again in front of a class of forty boys working “silently”.

Finally it was the Hungarian Olympic hurdler, the gymnastics coach, who I thought recognised my existence as an individual human being. He took me away camping at Wilson’s Promontory. He showed me my first pornographic pictures, gave me my first drink of alcohol and masturbated me to a sensation I could not recognise. I was not then at an age mature enough, physically, to ejaculate. However, I knew I had entered an area of small evils, and after a period of weeks or months, I withdrew from his touches and “driving lessons”. When he showed interest in my younger brother, I told my father and I heard no more of him or “it”. Nevertheless, the soil of my garden had turned and I had become closed off, invulnerable, self-obsessed and angry—later, I would learn violence.

During the enduring glimpses of love that have opened me throughout my life, I have become entranced in the “otherness” of the other. It has been an experience which, once entered, can never stop and continues to slowly emerge over the years even after significant
absence. Love brings out all the good things—it encourages and nurtures humility and gratitude. It builds courage and self-esteem. Ego, selfishness, self-centredness, self-pity and self-obsession seem to disappear. The world blooms and has meaning—has memory. Suddenly one finds access to the courage needed to move forward—to remember the future. Fear, anger and hatred seem impossible in such an environment as love grows.

It has been said that forgiveness is an act of love—love forgives almost everything. But it is a delicate flower blooming briefly in season and must be able to endure hibernation and absence in winter. Love can be easily damaged by fear and faithlessness. Without faith it will rot in the ground over the winter of its absence and it will no longer flower in the following spring, even with good rains and sunny days. I was panicked by even a brief absence and claustrophobic in its presence. I could not shelter easily in small spaces surrounded and confined by ceremony.

Though I was hungry for love I lived in fear of the story it demanded. I dared not live in a house run by women even as I built it. Yet the laws had now been written which would banish me to the outlands of my children if I did not agree to suffer the domestic matriarchy. There was only alcohol, drugs and the life of an artist to seek—one could only hope that the “art” would follow—would come with the geography.

In his book Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception Raimond Gaita argues that human beings are owed unconditional respect as an expression of absolute value. That is, even human beings who have involved themselves in acts of evil are still owed unconditional respect. Gaita discusses the love a woman may feel for her unborn child as opposed to what she may feel for a foetus growing in a glass jar:

It is important that the child grows in its mother’s body, that her body changes with its growth, and that these changes can appear to us as beautiful, for this provides a focus for love’s tenderness without which there could be no love. A foetus growing in a glass jar on her mantelpiece, with many of its “morally relevant empirical properties” in plain view, could not be the object of her love, for her love could find no tender expression.

That there is an important connection between biology and love may be self-evident. However, that fathers may also be part of this love troubles feminism. The Melbourne University bioethicist Dr Leslie Cannold in recent articles in Eureka Street and the Age is not only unable to show any respect for fathers, but in relation to paternity fraud she suggests that “only when the relationship broke down and the question of support payments arose did men question the child’s biological paternity”. She also suggests that women would “prefer to terminate a wanted pregnancy rather than continue one to a man who wants to parent, but with whom they cannot bear the thought of an ongoing relationship”. In both articles Cannold arrives at the idea that fatherhood should be a matter of “paternal commitment and behaviour” rather than biology.

The feminine infidelity that Cannold seeks to excuse strikes at the very heart of love, that is, the trust upon which it is built. Cannold refers to a study by Dr Lyn Turney which involves interviews with fifteen women who were involved in “one off” or “overlapping relationships” when they were either “unattached” or “minimally attached” or in “dying, old or embryonic” relationships. She then claims that the men were not defrauded or deceived because they knew that there was a likelihood that the child was not theirs.

The bigotry behind this hardly suppressed anger and misandry has become standard in the self-obsessive, adversarial assumptions of the feminist meta-narrative. There is disrespect for men, who are referred to as “partners” or “male” and fathers as “fathers’ rights groups” or “male role models”. These terms indicate an undervaluing of their condition as human beings and their right to what Gaita refers to as “unconditional respect”. These men, and fathers in particular, have not been involved in evil or even acts of bad behaviour. They are simply men who are seeking to parent their own children.

I suspect the misandry so often displayed in feminist dialogue is simply a nervousness resulting from a lack of confidence in a world that has been dominated by two thousand years of patriarchal philosophy. Nevertheless, it is essential that it be challenged fairly and consistently, particularly in the face of the massive disintegration of the family which has developed so quickly over the past thirty years or so. Father-hunger and misandry have become unintended and ugly by-products of the emancipation of women.

The breakdown of lifelong marriage has been another of those by-products. This is such a contentious statement that it can hardly be said or written in the current climate of secret and silent censorship within, particularly left-wing, literature. However, the statistics unmistakably indicate that marriage has disintegrated in inverse proportion to the rise of the domestic matriarchy. There can be no doubt that for women to achieve “emancipation” they had to be emancipated from marriage. The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines the word emancipate as “release (child wife) from power of ‘pater familias’; free from legal, social, political, intellectual or moral restraint”.

This was the true intent of Justice Alastair Nicholson’s administration of the Family Law Act—the
emancipation of women. Even above and beyond the welfare of children who were, in over 90 per cent of cases over a period of about twenty years, deprived of any meaningful access to their fathers. Nicholson admits in several of his media essays that he considered the emancipation of women as a major priority. In order for women to achieve full emancipation from “pater familias”, it became necessary for men to become emasculated in “mater familias”. Whilst women retained the power to marry or divorce without loss of children, income support, and in most cases, their home, fathers were condemned to banishment from their children and home, whilst retaining full legal responsibility for their financial support.

There were other by-products from the emancipation of women. Children were denied any real access to their fathers other than contact visits every second weekend. Children were required to witness their fathers being disempowered and demeaned by their mothers and by the state for the crime of marriage failure. Fathers were effectively disempowered from any real say in the upbringing of their children. Even fathers and men who managed to stay married were disempowered in their relationships with their wives and children as the extent of the power of women under Nicholson’s administration of the Family Law Act became clear. Even model husbands and fathers could be easily divorced, and often were for the financial incentives that were on offer.

Although it is difficult to gain statistical evidence, the sexual revolution that developed along with the emancipation of women and significant scientific advances in contraception, greatly enhanced the value of sex as a currency. The commodification of sex throughout the media and Hollywood narratives reached addictive proportions, and the willingness and openness with which sex was used as currency became widespread and acceptable. Sexual harassment laws and various other laws, including laws against rape within marriage, more clearly placed sex as a feminine currency.

Children have also now entered the market as a commodity through IVF programs and the administration of the Family Law Act. They are bargained and bartered over—even their gender and eye colour can now be selected through new technologies initially developed to identify deformed and disabled foetuses before birth.

The “brand” of man women have been purchasing with their exclusive currency over the centuries has also changed. Whereas the cave woman might have purchased the most violent and aggressive model available, the modern woman no longer needs the same protection. You could say that man has outsmarted himself. The modern woman seeks a man with pretty well all his masculine qualities well hidden and sublimated. She wants a man who is able to be successful and wealthy in a modern world. The modern woman is actually seeking a woman with a male body—she is seeking a male lesbian, and has used her currency to socially and emotionally, if not physically, develop such a model. Leslie Cannold now even wishes to denigrate fathers who complain of being cuckolded by the infidelity of their wives, by requiring them to accept responsibility for the upbringing of the progeny of their wives’ lovers.

There has been such an outpouring of anti-male sentiment over such a long period that the curriculums in our schools have also turned feminine. Schools have become re-education camps for boys where any attempts at manliness, physicality, or competitive behaviour are met with punishment. Primary school environments in particular are almost exclusively feminine and quite often anti-male. Many boys become lost and have no real idea of themselves under these conditions, particularly if they happen to come from a home where they have no real access to their fathers. Over 90 per cent of the children who are prescribed Ritalin for attention deficit disorder are boys. In 2005 Australian boys managed to fill only about 40 per cent of the enrolments at Melbourne University. There are many other statistical indicators, from drug addiction to suicide rates, all pointing towards the demise of maleness and the rise of the feminine.

The new-age man spurns manliness, leans toward androgyny in thought and appearance, is a strong feminist, pacifist, socialist, and submits to a domestic matriarchy. Interestingly, many women now complain and voice dissatisfaction with the SNAG male that feminism almost singlehandedly created, and flock to remakes of Godzilla and King Kong.

Towards the end of 2005, the Pope and the hierarchy in Rome indicated that Catholic priests would continue to be celibate men only. The Catholic Church in Australia then stated that it would continue to ordain homosexual priests who are prepared to take the vow of chastity. After almost thirty years of revelations of sexual abuse and cover-ups of sexual abuse amongst its clergy, and significant pressure
by the Catholic Women’s Movement for women priests, this amounts to an astounding maintenance of conservative dogma, even by Catholic standards. Rome, and the Catholic Church in Australia, have decided to change nothing with regard to the fundamental issues relating to the sexual abuse of young boys. Yet presumably, the Catholic Church is expecting a different outcome. It is said that doing the same thing over and over again, yet expecting a different outcome, is one of the definitions of madness.

Celibacy for heterosexual priests has a high failure rate, but is of little real concern because these priests can leave the priesthood and settle down to a family life. However, if we are to continue to expect a similar high failure rate in the celibacy of homosexual priests this will almost certainly continue to lead to the sexual abuse of young boys. The idea that homosexuality and paedophilia are completely different conditions frees predatory and frustrated homosexuals for young, almost legal, and just legal sexual encounters.

Homosexual priests practising chastity may well be considered to be under even greater pressure than celibate heterosexual priests. Heterosexuality involves a relationship with the “otherness” of the other, which requires a much greater abandonment of the self. It also provides the possibility of marriage and children, which requires even further entry into “otherness”. Homosexuality remains essentially narcissistic—in love with the sameness of self and therefore masturbatory and childless.

There could be a similar biology at work between heterosexual lovers as Gaita claims is at work between mother and child as the baby grows within the mother’s body. Lifelong unconditional love can often develop between a man and a woman as a kind of emotional and physical biology takes hold through lovemaking. This biology does not seem to be as easily available to homosexual couples whose relationship is far more dependent on physical sex and struggles to develop beyond a kind of simulated love. Homosexual relationships find great difficulty in sustaining the unconditionality of real love, as they can have little focus on an absolute “otherness” for their tenderness.

SELFISHNESS, self-centredness, self-pity and self-obsession are all barriers between man and God. Access to the interiority of the spiritual life is not available to those who cannot overcome the self. Homosexuality is a psychology rooted in the self, and homosexual priests may have much greater difficulty finding passage into the spiritual realm than heterosexual priests. The reasons for a homosexual vocation may have more to do with the “outsiderness” of their sexuality than with the spiritual life. The term “homosexual priest” is almost an oxymoron—an anathema.

This is the wrong way to go. The Catholic Church has chosen to leave the possibility of sexual abuse and paedophilia open to its innocent children by continuing to demand celibacy from its priesthood. It has passed over a perfect opportunity to gain access to the massive problems its community faces with the breakdown of marriage, and it has also passed up the perfect opportunity to introduce women into the priesthood. Married priests with families would have at last been able to speak with some authority on the issues of sexuality, relationship, marriage, parenthood and children. Their wives or husbands would have been necessarily involved in the spiritual life, as would their children, thereby providing a significant new perspective and foundation for a modern Catholic community. There could still have remained a choice for a celibate men-only priesthood to maintain a spiritual life in monasteries or communities. One can only wonder at the reasoning behind this insistence on a patriarchal celibate community of priests. I suspect the reasoning may have more to do with the maintenance of property by the church than with any spiritual motive.

There is a femininity associated with male homosexuality which may be one of the reasons why the women’s movement has been so tenacious in seeking its acceptance by mainstream society. The Left in general, and the Labor Party in particular, has been so consumed by the nuances of feminist politics in its fervour to champion the rights of the underprivileged, that some may claim it has lost sight of its base—working-class families.

Whilst the Left maintains that legalisation of homosexuality and the legitimisation of homosexual marriage is progressive modern liberal thinking, there is much more evidence of it being a significant indicator of a society in decline if not already decadent. Decadence is neither progressive nor liberal—it shows a society in which individual self-obsession has overtaken the common good. The “Left” and “Right” delineation within politics has become extremely cloudy if not useless. It would be more useful to think of the two poles of the body politic in terms of “masculine” and “feminine”, and there are no prizes for those able to work out where each pole lies in the current political landscape.

Could William James’ dream have been closer to the truth than he believed? Though sex may have become a commodity, you can’t buy love. Marriage, it seems, will no longer tolerate the Purgatorio nor the Inferno, but dissolves after only a small, sex-soaked Paradiso. The journey to love, and love itself, remain largely an invisible and silent experience, as individual as we are all unique, yet its narrative is told over and over again in art and literature and film. It would seem that love is fading now that we have learned never to abandon ourselves.
LUKE STEGEMANN

Grief, Mass and Symmetry

His latest relationship collapse involved the mad pursuit of a Greyhound bus to a roadhouse on the outskirts of Dubbo; Quender was panting with the effort of that summer chase as he related spare details to the Slovak who listened, head down over a plate of meat, giving no intelligible response other than a muttering directed, perhaps, at the dozen sausages. When he reached a point where the narrative gave way to a kind of pointless exhaustion, Quender ran out of words, happily, and stopped.

The two of them were preparing the basic elements of a barbecue behind the townhouse the university had rented for the visiting academic, Mr Svatopluk Fotr. As a physical figure, Svatopluk was largely irrelevant: short under his small head with its orange scrub of hair, his chest mottled as a sickly tree, in blue shorts and squat pinkish legs—he might have been an object discarded by a gardener. Quender himself was a bent stick, and indecisive—a greenish insect, its head nodding at passing thoughts and the prospect of food. He stood somewhat askew amidst the tightly plotted squares of the garden.

It might have been that neither had anything further to say, until the Slovak spoke: “The shine on the surface of a winner, yes. I can see that vanishing dog, the hideous gleam of the highway bus.” His reddish whiskers were on fire. “Your face in the hot pursuant windscreen. Yes. Sour weeds grow up around the loser, and before too long …”

He was stopped mid-sentence by a ringing telephone.

Quender remained with a fork in one hand, beer in the other, sectioned off by the very precisely proportioned segment of paradise that was the townhouse garden; measurement itself the measure of all things. Design attempted to cover up the cracks in the earth with smoothness and charm; what once might have been a back-yard—path, shrub, cricket pitch, an object lesson in the obscure geography of suburbia and the flowing infinity of a new continent, the base upon which the milk-white goodness of the land itself was built—had become a rigid thing: bark chips, a regiment of ferns, pale brick and jacaranda shade. The townhouse was the site and archive of prosperity, of sequence, tabula and juncture; of method, frame and chronos; the triumph of the rational creeping ever deeper into the psyche. Here the hindered imagination slinks away, unwelcome, into layered vegetation and silenced growth.

By the time Svatopluk returned from his phone call Quender had replaced the beers and was unloading half a dozen sausages onto the outdoor grill.

“Thought I’d get them going.”

“Yes. Difficult to get plain sausages these days. Every flavour imaginable—the triumph of choice over taste or discretion.”

“You were saying …? About sour weeds?”

QUADRANT MAY 2007
It was as good a place as any to start with the Slovak, leaning himself against treated pine, propped up on his own pair of raw sausages that stuck out, hairless, from his shorts. He seemed about to speak, then stopped. Breathed. For Quender those legs were suddenly obscene: too shiny, too smooth.

“You tell of this, this vanishing woman. You tell of loss. Women. Partners. Children. Parents. We all live with loss, with the inevitability of it. But some of us are more prepared to deal with it, to locate it, as it were, than others.”

Rather than analysis, Quender was hoping for an anecdote. Lengths of meat began to hiss in gingery anger, or sympathy.

“What sort of loss do you mean exactly?”

“Loss of family. The only loss that really matters.” He was holding his stubby as an appendage to story-telling; a hand shot up. “I have a parallel family, for example. No wait, that’s nonsense. Because I have no family here, so there can be no parallel. Yes. Better to say, there exists a family—in Slovakia of course, in Bratislava—which to all intents and purposes should have been mine. But was not. And yet, I sometimes imagine them as if they were my family and we were merely separated by distance and work commitments, rather than by reality. Yes, and the oceans.”

The stubby was tracing all points of the compass. Quender had no comment to make, so he turned the spitting meat. Threw on some chops. It was best, he had found, to let the Slovak run his course once he began to reminisce. Or fantasise.

Svatopluk lived constantly with the memory of loss. His second life was always missing something; completion was forever out of reach. The life that never was grew always in that parallel place and time, sometimes looming in close to his present life—a brief electric rub—or at other times called up from distant ether to sidle and taunt suggestively: the dark yellow tones of a cobbled lane—church tower running through to Dunaj vista—mocking the broad sun-blasted zone of bitumen and wattle where he had finally been beached. His personal flight to the West twenty years before—applying for political asylum while on a conference trip to Munich—had been successful enough yet he carried with him, always, a clustering guilt for the way he had left her behind, expectant in the dark apartment they had briefly shared: the shadows thickening on the evening of his anticipated return, the empty, empty night, the damp embroidered cotton of the pillow slips, the porter shovelling coal into the cellar, the smell of beer on the wooden stairway, the chrome skies of autumn, the daily hunger, the powdery blue paintwork of the building opposite. And as a constant, the null ambience of his vanishing.

The escape had been planned well in advance, yet he kept it from his then fiancée. Cowardice or a measure of safety? He was the expert on Risk, wrestling with its early formulations. And yes, if he thought enough about it, his silence was cowardice rather than any desire to guarantee the security of the venture. That he feared she might turn down the suggestion, turn him in to the blue-grey suited party faithful urgent to stamp out his ilk, was not necessarily testament to the effectiveness of the controlling state; it might just as easily have been the proof he was looking for—this to justify his cowardly flight—that he did not love her deeply enough. If he had seriously suspected her capable of turning him over to the police then surely he did not love her at all. When they parted on a Tuesday morning, he knew it would be for the last time; meanwhile, she had no idea that he would not be back the following week with a gift of Swiss chocolates, perhaps even a rare second-hand LP.
Once relocated to the blinding island, he preferred not to remember her; he certainly could not recall the name of the station where they had said goodbye—she with the umber stub of a ticket in her hands, he with his base and shameful knowledge. He remembered her damp fingers, the last contact with her flesh. It was just another Tuesday: there were no smiles or tears of farewell, or even promises spoken into the fug and stench of the mid-winter underground station. On her face was everyday anxiety, the ordinary pain of parting such as they had known many times before: the lines of an otherwise cherubic, freckled white screwed up in a teatowel grimace. Too soon she was turning, or was turned against her will, carried away by the surging movement of the commuter crowd. He may have been gesturing something, but numb legs had anchored him as she floated distantly, angelic, sliding up into the air and suddenly beyond his reach on a moving walkway that rose towards a ceiling dripping with electrical wiring and rubber tubing. The heads-down crowd lifted her up and carried her like a celebratory Virgin Mary, released from the dark piety and scented gloom of a cathedral and now triumphant, bobbing along a crest of devoted, upraised hands; then suddenly the Immaculate She was gone, borne away down one of many blind arms of the public transport warren.

It was to be forever.

In his mind’s eye, when the revenants of memory came to torment him, he could see that small face disappearing into a chaos of crowd, swallowed up by their urgency of purpose, and the backdrop of Soviet-inspired civil engineering, always both celebratory tale and melancholy narrative of grief, mass, and symmetry.

“Bloody hell,” Quender was appalled, for he had been on the receiving end of similar treatment, his partner melting away into a haze of western heat and bus exhaust. “Didn’t you ever contact her again?”

“Oh, of course I wrote. From Munich. Yes, I begged her to come away,” he insisted, without convincing anyone. An arm was flung out as some kind of explanation, or in self-defence. “Easy for me to say that once I was safe, but it was much harder for her. Tabs were kept after I failed to return. I was absent, yet all too present. Once I applied for asylum she was persona non grata. Risk, yes, risk. Another, fatter file would have grown. No doubt she would have been accused of helping me escape. The letters I sent from abroad would have been read, censored, burnt I imagine. She was thrown out of her apartment. So I was told.”

They both stared at an orderly row of agapanthus.

“Now she could freely come but has been married many a year, with children. When the wall came down her life took a marked turn for the better, yes.”

Quender recalled the summer days of his last relationship: days of cigarette ash and sex and pizza; the endless suffocation of daytime television. “That was the moment, surely, to go back for her?” He had a sudden image of himself in the same situation, supposing some dashing, old-fashioned romanticism, a hectic ride to liberation with a swooning bride-to-be, lovers laced together against an infinity sunset. In reality, the most he had done was drive, full up with headache and sour coffee, in the slipstream of her Greyhound bus, one mad dog in pursuit of another, all the way to Dubbo. And even then he had been fooled.

Svatopluk swallowed. “Shallows and miseries.” He spat out these two words, a ball of sand and salty phlegm. “That’s all nonsense. As it turns out, the first of her two children had already arrived before the revolution. And then the second. It was a logical response to the New World Order. That is Old already, yes.”

The two high school students in question went rattling by on a Bratislava tram.
Backs turned to the ochre walls of passing churches on Spitalska, ghosts who might have been the academic’s offspring, but who occupied nothing more than his imaginings. They were citizens of that parallel world that kept on living after Svatopluk’s escape; the features on their faces belonged to another man; they immersed themselves now in a hedonistic culture far removed from the pragmatic brown starch of their mother’s long-forgotten boyfriend.

“Why don’t you go back?”

“For what? There is nothing for me there.”

Quender almost asked: “What about your parents?”—then remembered he had heard that tale of suspected murder at war’s end, the faces turned down under browning, lumpy pillows.

“And what is there for you here?”

“Nothing.”

He was quite adamant, and prepared to accept that fate. The material trappings that came with what had become a successful lecturing and writing career in Australia, his occasional conference appearances in Germany and the Netherlands and Britain, meant little to him. It was never compensation enough for he was condemned—he suspected, or knew, that was the right word—to die here now, and to lie out eternity in some parched suburban plot. For as much as he could easily afford to return to Slovakia and live out the rest of his days, the fact was that the country he had left behind, albeit willingly, had been lost, and his national spirit burnt out of his soul by sunlight, erased rather than confirmed by years of the subtle undercurrent, the backdrop flow, the jabber and purl of racial intolerance. None, he had found, were quite so vicious in their derision of newcomers as those recently arrived themselves, as if, eternally selfish, they wished to deny others the good fortune they had enjoyed, rather like survivors on a desperate raft pushing away any others who would try, arms flailing in the muddy blue, to cling to the crowded vessel. One more was not a risk that could be taken, and Svatopluk knew Risk—it was the frame upon which he had built his theory on all those fog-thick afternoons in Bratislava. Since he left the taxi driving days behind, it was the field wherein he had carved out his career.

Finally, he more or less belonged. For all the cubist atonalities of his speech and his status as eternal refugee, for all the attempts to push him away—and he encountered just as many of these jealous thrusts of anger in academia as in the world of taxi driving—he was now an Australian.

So he stayed where he was.

“Australia’s alright,” he admitted rather dreamily, “as long as you don’t wake up.”

Quender began to serve the sausages and an ugly brace of chops which had charred during the conversation.

“It’s that process of being scarred by loneliness,” Svatopluk had changed the subject and was sweeping his stubby through the air again, point to point. “In the early days there, in Sydney, there were sometimes months on end when I didn’t speak to a soul. Not a word, apart from the transactions of the cab. ‘Right here’, ‘left here’, ‘straight on’, ‘this’ll do’, ‘there’s your change’. Beyond that, not a word.”

“I know that sense. But I chose it, which makes a difference.”

“That sort of loneliness is profound. It changes the way you perceive things. It doesn’t so much embed itself as, as …” he was searching for the right word from the catalogues of accumulated vocabulary in his mind, “… as entomb itself. It then
never leaves, not fully. No. Yes. It’s as if loneliness were now tattooed six layers deep into the skin.”

There was more. With the Slovak, there was always more.

“I would loiter around the markets of a weekend morning. Yes, loiter, like a pervert or criminal. As I bought oranges, melons, grapefruit, cabbage, I would try to make sure that in handing back my change the stall keeper’s hand and mine would rub together. Just that fleeting electricity of skin would be enough to remind me of the pleasures of the flesh. To feel that dry paper, that oil, that warm blood. Yes, and the extent of my solitude.”

Quender merely stared. Then chewed. Still insect-like, he was sat now at an awkward angle and in any case could think of no appropriate response to such a confession.

“Mind you,” the Slovak went on again, “I could have had sex with any number of women who rode the cabs. Or men.” He spat into the garden. “Weekends were the worst, you can imagine. The whole frustrated, tortured self comes bursting out. Yes, or tries to. People look into a mirror on weekend binges; generally they don’t like what they see. Who possibly could? And so they just get blinder to forget. Blinder by the hour. Then they come home, unshod and smeared, offering me a quick root or blow job in exchange for the cab fare. They had that stench about them, of nightclub and stale, cheap perfume. On some the vomit still lingered around their mouths, the coke still rimmed their nostrils. On many the sacrilege of menthol cigarettes.”

He spat again, casting an entire lifestyle from his mouth.

“Their patina of despair, their forlorn ugliness, was no worse than my own. You know David, I sometimes felt, yes, had I taken one of those stinking slags up on her offer and gone for it”—here speculation had his words slowing down into dense gravy—“the worthless fuck, you know, it might have led to something. We may have lain down together and both felt a rare happiness. Some union! The Sunday morning silence, that march of death across suburbia. The two of us: prone, marbled, still, coiled, oblivious. Happy. Yes.”

“Are you serious?” Quender was momentarily overwhelmed, as much by adjectives as anything else.

“Never more so.” The Slovak hummed, looking into that abstracted foredis-tance, finding the two wasted citizens exhausted amongst an ocean of dirty sheets, Sunday morning washing them with ease. “I could have stayed on as a taxi driver to be honest, but the offer of the lecturing position came up at roughly the same time I was mugged. A felicitous symmetry in things.” He paused. “Well, assaulted might be a better word. In my own cab. Pulled in for a moment to the service station to fill the LPG cylinders. Otherwise an absolutely ordinary Saturday evening. Some retard assaulted me with a wrench. Yes. I woke up two hours later in the back of my cab, blood-stained. Without my uniform. The strangest thing was”—and here he was running a hand down the back of his head, smoothing the orange mulga of his hair—“my wallet, cash, all my takings were untouched.”

After a long pause Quender felt he had no option but to provoke the narrative. “And …?”

“It seems someone had assaulted me just to get my cab driver’s clothes. Some moron. No one was ever apprehended but I took the assault as a signal to get back into academia. Away from risk. Back to Risk. And safety.” He smiled. “At least, no one’s tried to mug me for my clothes since then.”
Which were today, as often, a series of sun-dried rags, oversized, a selection taken from some charity store, patterns of pineapples, sun umbrellas and beach balls; here a cavorting dog, there a rearing horse.

“One thing has always troubled me,” he was going on, “about the assault. I have this vision, or memory … hard to reconcile, yes.” His head was down in concentration, or mist. “I keep seeing this rather small religious painting in my mind. What has this to do with my being assaulted?”

“You’re not confusing memories?”

“And I do remember, you see, the man. Not his face, the light was too … irregular at that moment, but his arms, his wildly tattooed arms. If I try to piece it all together, it is as if someone who already had the loot—so to speak—assaulted me. Perhaps it’s true he wanted nothing other than my uniform, but then why … why show me the little Renaissance painting?”

“This is all mixed up. No, no, you’ve lost me now.” Blades of lamb between Quender’s teeth.

“No!” There was an edge of hissing in the denial; the eyes were hugely at the paving bricks. “The memory is too persistent, the image of … the Holy Mother, the blue-winged angels, the throng …”

“The cherubim?”

But Svatopluk was no longer listening. “It was her, it was her. An Annunciation indeed,” he said, though only to himself. “She was coming back. Closing the circle, yes. It was the end of grief. I was to abandon my abandonment. She stood above me in the sky. Yes. Winged, perfect.” He went on: “All the sense impressions are there, all part of the memory of that night. The beer gut of a colleague wedged into the one available urinal. That criminal who came to me. The moron, there under the fluoro lights, the tap on the passenger window. The gas cylinders, the racks of tyres for sale, the coiled tubing. All the grease and petrol and then … yes, this angelic thing …”

He trailed off. His wife in that parallel reality floated again, back from treachery and now as light as air, carrying on without him and the endless hours he had dedicated to theory; she levitates away, cold-blue-and-merging-into-warmer-aqua-heavenward; becomes a diminishing point, a fragile instant in the larger epoch of the splendid curve.

Meanwhile, in the rigid order of the garden plot, the two men fell into their silence of abandonment once more, chewing on their various offerings of meat.
Hospital Visit

My dad was in hospital having one of his operations. I went to visit him. I took along a shirt. So there’s the whole story right there, me, my dad, and this shirt.

Which I had bought, let me make clear from the outset, with my own money. You’re familiar with the concept, I’m sure. This is where you live at home, eat your fill and more of the food amply provided, get your room cleaned, your clothes washed (and ironed, I’ll say that for my mother, a top ironer), listen to the wireless, watch television, sit around, complain about the standard of your mum’s so-called chocolate cake compared to what other people have at their place, contribute, goes without saying, not so much as a tea leaf to the household table, pay, naturally, not a penny of rent, and if and when you do happen to earn some money, then that’s exactly what it is.

Sacrosanct.
Yours.

With which, on this particular occasion, I bought a shirt.
Of the gayest carnival colours.
In flowing alternating stripe.
Housed in a box with a perspex lid so you could admire it undisturbed inside.
A sample, the salesman had confided.
Utterly unique.
Not another like it for love or money in the land.
But some particulars.
My age at the time?
A sophisticated eighteen.
My dad’s ailment?
Excruciating gall stones.
Where was he?

Side-stepping the spectre of crushing loneliness in a ward of fellow sufferers of assorted maim and malady, beds aplenty, left and right.

I might intrude here, on a personal note, that I had once been a patron of these particular premises myself, this on the occasion when my tonsils grew back, a second removal required, heard myself summoned on a school sports day by an announcement from the office, my mum already there and waiting, as clear as my hand before me now inscribing these words the stains of rust and water and who knows what other decrepitude on the passing ceilings where they wheeled me in, to awaken sick and stricken in a bed on a wooden verandah protected from the passing public only by a screen of chicken wire and the night-time arrangement of cumbersome leather-buckled pull-down canvas blinds, all made new now, demolished, rethought, rebuilt, a model of medical accomplishment including even an emergency helicopter landing pad, people dying to get in, that’s how smart and nice, but it was still the old dump when I went to visit my dad.
Shall we go in?

With, dependent from my swollen-fingered and palm-sweating hand, the right, the left, the right again, bumping into me and cruelly bruising me with every step, as they do, as they did, as though they were no doubt designed by some demented hater of mankind to do, was that monstrosity of this particular time and era under present discussion, swinging empty or sagging laden same story, my obligatory scuffed-leather metal-cornered sturdy school gladstone bag.

Try running with one.
Clambering onto a crowded tram.
Finding somewhere to put it down on the floor where it doesn’t break someone’s neck fighting to squeeze past.
Who, if it’s the conductor, which it invariably is, will unleash upon you a torrent of the most scorching vile abuse.

If you’re lucky.
And he doesn’t just turf the damn thing out the open door.
Kids today don’t know how lucky they are.
Visiting a sick father in hospital or not.
Which I was.
As I’ve explained.
Here we are.

Sneaking surreptitious looks to left and right as I made my jaunty albeit cautious progress past the passing beds, respectful of invading privacy, certainly not staring or trying not to, never mind some shocking sights, old geezers everywhere, cowed expressions, pleading eyes, a sudden horror seizing me that I’d somehow missed him, passed him, imagine! failed to recognise my very own dad.

Because he was, my dad, a quiet man, unobtrusive in the extreme, respectful of authority, knew his place, the last person you’d notice in a room if you even noticed him at all, a veritable mouse.

Dad, I said.
I’d found him.
There he was.
Here he was.
And took out, at once, without further preamble, to show him, the shirt.
Wait.
Let’s not rush things.
Let’s do it properly.
Let’s show it exactly.
Let’s get it right.
The unhooking of the end catches.
The squeezing of the release mechanism.
The wresting apart of the always dangerous snapping steel jaws.
Until they clicked.

Ah!
The satisfying sound of symbolic stick in upright wedge between crocodile’s deadly dentures.
Safe!
To reach now in.
To take carefully out.
To hold clearly up.
To proudly to my dear dad display.
Who blinked.
Naturally.
Stunned no doubt by its simple statement of splendour and magnificence.
As who could not be?
And blinked again.
My eyes on his eyes in adjusting aperture of appreciative absorption.
As whose would not be?
Except also, in concert, his mouth.
Pyjamas! he hooted. He’s bought pyjamas!
Dad, I said.
Take a look at this! He summoned the sufferer opposite. He’s bought pyjamas!
Dad, I smiled.
What do you think? he invited next the invalid to his left. It’s a beautiful pyjamas?
Dad, I explained.
Pyjamas! he engaged now the inmate to his right. Good money he’s paid for pyjamas!
It seemed inappropriate to intrude the information that it was my own money, so I didn’t.
Give him a bed! my dad addressed now the entire ward. He’s brought his pyjamas with him! Show him a bed!
I slipped the shirt in its deluxe box carefully back into my gladstone bag, carefully closed its crocodile jaws, carefully clipped up the end catches, quietly tiptoed out.
It was good to see that he wasn’t in pain.
A nice visit.

**FIVE HAIKU**

thin snowfall—
footprints left
near ours

early light—
snowflakes sharing
the same gravity

spring morning—
a crowded elevator
on the way to the top

one shadow separates from the others—
nothing wild
in her garden

cold room—
books I read years ago
in boxes

*Gary Hotham*
I was sittin’ on a hard bench
   Listenin’ to Professor Ryle
I was sittin’ on a hard bench
   Gettin’ nouns and verbs from Ryle
And the thought came flashin’ through my mind
   “John’s got him beat by a mile”.
O those Sydney blues.

—“Sydney Blues”, composed by John Anderson, about Oxford philosophers

ONE OF MY MOST insistent memories of John Anderson’s lectures on Metaphysics in 1949 has a dash of the Cold War in it. The course was on Samuel Alexander’s Space, Time and Deity, philosophic Realism and the categories of the real.

It was a long way from the political dramas of that year—Mao’s occupation of Peking or Stalin’s blockade of Berlin. But the national Coal Strike came closer to home—or the university. It cut off coal supplies and so drastically reduced the electricity available for daily life that the government banned everything from trams to electric jugs. The strike also disrupted university life, not least by making evening lectures in Trinity term almost impossible.

(Although a day student, I sometimes attended evening lectures to catch up. They repeated the day lectures. Like several of my friends, I used to take a casual day job from time to time, as scullery man, cleaner, gardener or whatever, to make ends meet. This was before the era of student pensions and loans.)

John Anderson—former communist, now some sort of radical conservative—was not going to let the Communist Party, the organiser of the Coal Strike, stop him professing philosophy. Candles were distributed and by their light we took our notes on Plato, Kant and Alexander in a shadowy philosophy room. It was a sort of variation on Plato’s Cave.

Nor would Anderson let the moment pass without noting the Stalinists’ encroachments on independent institutions, including the university—before returning to his table of the categories.

I thought of Archimedes—the philosopher who refused to let the Roman conquerors of Syracuse interfere with his mathematical speculations. (He paid with his life. Anderson only suffered defamation.)

I was twenty years of age but this Archimedean moment has stayed with me. The politics of the incident were entirely subsidiary. The basic idea was anti-political: the spirit of enquiry, philosophy, science, poetry, the life of the mind—none will ever be, can ever be, subordinate to the demands of politics.

The lectures themselves—on space, time and the logical, mathematical and physical categories—belong to a different mode of experience. On page 95 of the new collection of the lectures, Anderson gives his tabular presentation of the thirteen categories. It is one of the more extraordinary sketches in the history of philosophy.

In his Introduction (itself an important essay), David Armstrong writes:

With this scheme, John Anderson joins a very distinguished line of philosophers who have presented us with a set of categories. We have first Plato (the doctrine of the Highest kinds in his dialogue The Sophist), then Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, and Samuel Alexander.

The table of categories is a measure of the man’s ambition and his self-image. (“John’s got him beat by a mile.”)

They were tough lectures, plainly not for beginners,
but for senior students already grounded in Realism, with some familiarity with G.E. Moore, early Bertrand Russell, and the American Realists, not to mention Plato’s *Theaetetus* or Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*. Everyone had at least read Anderson’s papers “The Knower and the Known”, “Realism and Some of its Critics”, or “Mind as Feeling”. It also helped to be a mathematician.

For the students who were true philosophers, the forty-five lectures were the high point of their undergraduate years. David Armstrong, who was one of them, writes: “They inspired me with a passionate interest in the great questions of metaphysics.” A couple of years ago he said the lectures opened his mind to the possibility of a systematic realist and empiricist metaphysics, an idea that never left him and which he stands by today.

A second group doing the course were not philosophers by inescapable vocation. They were fascinated by the ease with which Anderson appeared to converse with Parmenides, Anaximander, Kant or Hegel. To listen to his lectures was itself an initiation into Western civilisation. Most of these students never accepted Anderson’s philosophic teaching. But they had taken a seat with him at Plato’s Banquet and would not forget it.

There was also a third group taking the copious notes that Anderson expected of all his students. (He lectured at dictation speed.) They were more literary or quasi-religious. They were lost souls living in a sort of nihilist no-man’s-land, driven there by Anderson’s corrosive assault on conventions and idealism. They came to the lectures hoping that immersion in advanced ontology might help them find their bearings in what Samuel Alexander called “the whirlpool of space and time”. They did not find what they were seeking. In time, some turned back to the faith of their fathers. Some espoused a dogmatic anarchism. Others pursued careers in the professions. You cannot live your whole time, some turned back to the faith of their fathers. Some espoused a dogmatic anarchism. Others pursued careers in the professions. You cannot live your whole time, some turned back to the faith of their fathers. Some espoused a dogmatic anarchism. Others pursued careers in the professions. You cannot live your whole time, some turned back to the faith of their fathers. Some espoused a dogmatic anarchism. Others pursued careers in the professions. You cannot live your whole time, some turned back to the faith of their fathers. Some espoused a dogmatic anarchism. Others pursued careers in the professions. You cannot live your whole

The basic idea was anti-political: the spirit of enquiry, philosophy, science, poetry, the life of the mind—none will ever be, can ever be, subordinate to the demands of politics.

| I believe: in the Proposition |
| Wholly and indivisible trinity |
| Three in one, one in three |
| Subject, predicate, and copula! |
| Especially the copula. |

Union is strength
Strength thru’ joy
A thing of beauty is a joy forever
Porphyry, Aristotle, Socrates!

(See also *The First Boke of Fowle Ayres*, 1944.)

**SPACE, TIME AND THE CATEGORIES** is basically the lectures of 1949-50 as taken down by Eric Dowling and David Armstrong. Dowling typed his notes up, and Armstrong rewrote his in the evening. Creagh Cole, the John Anderson Research Fellow, has edited these transcripts and added useful appendices including additional notes and lectures by Anderson—and one marvellous trouvaille, a letter by Anderson to the London magazine the *New Age* in 1921 defending Alexander against an anti-Semitic attack.

The re-established Sydney University Press has published the book as part of its John Anderson Series. Forthcoming publications will include the Greek Philosophy course of 1928 and some later lectures on Logic. They all draw on Sydney University’s huge Anderson archive which, Cole says, begs comparison with, if it does not surpass, the Wittgenstein archive in Norway. This is as good as we are going to get of the 1949-50 lectures. It appears that no recordings of any of Anderson’s lectures or addresses exist.

The only recording of Anderson’s voice is of his singing his own composition, “Sydney Blues”, quoted above. It tells of the nostalgia, even homesickness, of Sydney philosophy students in Oxford who wish they were back in Sydney with Anderson! He had a soft folk-singer’s or balladist’s voice, a touch country-and-western. There is barely a hint of his legendary Scottish burr.

*Space, Time and the Categories* is philosophy, not biography. But readers of Brian Kennedy’s fine biography, *A Passion to Oppose*, will note that Anderson delivered and refined these lectures at a time of enormous personal turmoil. His relations with his wife and his son were at their lowest points. So were his relations with his lover, the philosopher Ruth Walker, who was soon to have a nervous collapse and submit to shock therapy.

One of his friends and lecturers, the late Tom Rose, recalled that at this time a dispirited Anderson seemed no longer interested in philosophy and even wondered whether it was a genuine subject at all.

Were these lectures—his last attempt to work through the problems that had preoccupied him since he

**QUADRANT MAY 2007**

87
met Alexander in Glasgow over thirty years earlier—the refuge in which to recover from a sense of collapse and failure? Perhaps Mark Weblin’s forthcoming biography will shed more light on this chapter of Anderson’s life.

Some reservations are called for. The lectures, however verbatim, do not and cannot capture the atmosphere of their delivery. Anderson sometimes spoke from notes but they did not stop him thinking on his feet. The printed text of the lectures will not convey that often exciting sense of listening to a major thinker refining his thought as you listened.

They are not polished essays. But they are far more finished than the 1944 lectures published in the 2005 book in this series, *Space-Time and the Proposition*. That version was based on Anderson’s own notes. In some of those 1944 lectures there is a less than Heraclitean scrappiness. Sentences begin “I haven’t thought the matter out …” or “I don’t profess to have given …” or “I might remark here …” Those lectures may be seen as notebooks. Mark Weblin, adapting Anderson’s comment on Alexander, generously called them “a mighty fragment”. The 1949 lectures as now published may still be considered “mighty” but they are far less fragmentary.

John Passmore summed up the intellectual and poetic impact of these lectures: “Alexander profoundly stirred Anderson’s philosophical imagination; those who heard his lectures on Alexander felt that they were being led into the very heart of Anderson’s philosophy.” I was one of those who heard them, and although I did not penetrate far into that “very heart”, I know that Passmore captures that mood perfectly.

They give us the *summa* of Anderson’s metaphysics. They will endure far longer than his better known and sometimes “exhibitionistic” (his word) polemics on the ephemeral controversies of the day.

*This review is an expanded version of Peter Coleman’s speech launching* *Space, Time and the Categories* *at Sydney University in April.*

---

**WRITING LIVES**

by Peter Ryan

*Life Class: The Education of a Biographer,*

by Brenda Niall; MUP, 2007, $32.95.

Brenda Niall’s books established her over many years as one of Australia’s most successful biographers. Each title sold widely, enjoying successive reprints, and one the accolade of a re-issue by Penguin. Many won literary awards. She achieved as well an academic career of distinction, in both Australian and overseas universities.

She gave us *Seven Little Billabongs*—lives of Ethel Turner and Mary Grant Bruce; a study of Martin Boyd (of whom A.D. Hope said that his novels would continue to be read long after Patrick White’s had been forgotten); a wonderfully revealing re-creation of Victorian pioneer Georgiana McCrae; the intricate (but not obscure) story of the whole creative family of Boyd; the eventful life of Archibald Prize-winning portraitist Judy Cassab. Nothing stereotyped about that list: on the contrary, a wide and varied revelation of Australian life and experience over 150 years.

Her new *Life Class* makes the risky leap from biography to autobiography—a very different territory. I found it an altogether engaging little book—fewer than 300 pages, and small pages at that. (Alas for those neat and well-made true pocket editions which publishers used to produce before the Second World War.)

Niall begins with a sketch of her own early life as a strictly-raised Catholic girl, educated by the nuns at Genazzano Convent. Her family lived on Kew Hill, that airy eminence which, by way of Studley Park Road, rises up from the Yarra River above less salubrious Collingwood. The locality was home to many Irish-Catholic professional families—doctors, surgeons, lawyers, judges—mostly with a solid reputation for probity and generous community concern. They formed an interesting “demographic” (as we now seem to say). The “Hill”, however, was spiced with a certain variety, for it supported the towering red-brick mansion “Raheen”, home of Archbishop Mannix; nearby stood the white colonnaded palazzo of John Wren, whom Niall calls a gambling “entrepreneur of some notoriety”; and not far away, in a dwelling rather more modest, lived the ever-rising figure of R.G. Menzies.

Brenda Niall worked for a time in the office of the redoubtable B.A. Santamaria, occupied partly in interviews with Archbishop Mannix, preparatory for the biography which Santamaria would later write. The interviews, she tells us, were not a great success. Indeed, I can imagine that the aloof and majestic Mannix gave her a terrifying time. There follows a brief and modest account of what was in fact a distinguished academic career, with graceful acknowledgments to older scholars who helped her along the way, such as historian Geoffrey Serle and poet A.D. Hope.

Niall handles two particular aspects of biographical writing with cogency and clarity. *First,* how may an author go about the task of locating all the archival sources—the documents, diaries, letters? What living persons should be consulted, and
how, and in what order? How to deal fairly with families, relations, friends, and negotiate the sometimes twisting paths of access, permissions, copyright and defamation? In a word, that largely “managerial” aspect which Gibbon was pleased to call “assembling his materials” for his book.

Second, how much to reveal? Should a decent tact and discretion—basic good manners—govern the recreation of the life of another human being? Or should it “all hang out” as a matter of course, and an obligation to readers? Genuine questions of doubt, difference and difficulty arise in the “philosophy” of biography; it is not within reason to expect that they can ever be settled once and for all, but only an unwise biographer would fail to ponder them from the outset.

Niall gives many examples from her own experience at the stage of “assembling materials”. We read of the discovery of perplexingly variant texts; of uncovering old and forgotten records; the mechanical difficulties of obtaining legible copies to work on; the reconciling (or not) of opinions between different members of descendant families; evaluating the veracity and significance of “well-remembered” oral traditions. Indeed, a daunting program of hard work may precede the writing of even the first line of a manuscript.

The second question probes deeper: to tell absolutely everything? Or to observe some reticence, some discretion?

Niall has reflected (as who should not?) on the observations of Doctor Johnson. In his own Life of Addison, Johnson points out that, with the lately dead, a biographer is not dealing with old, forgotten things, but is “walking upon ashes under which the fire is not extinguished”, and so should say “nothing that is false rather than all that is true”. No pang should be inflicted on a “widow, a daughter, a brother or a friend”. Such was the opinion of that great and generous soul.

Niall faces a number of such questions, and meets them judiciously. With Georgiana she discovered, what was sedulously concealed by the McCrae family, that this great and spirited woman was descended from the Dukes of Gordon—illegitimately. No one now could be embarrassed by that, and she tells it.

Martin Boyd was more complex. The skeleton in that family’s tightly locked cupboard was that their Australian beginnings stemmed back to a criminal gang in England, one of whom was hanged there and another transported to Australia. He reformed, did well in the liquor trade, and founded the very solid fortune which supported the cultured life of leisure led by Martin and his brothers. This so shaped the Boyd ambience that it was essential to the story; Brenda Niall told it, as she should.

I have heard Niall criticised for her “failure to grapple with Martin Boyd’s sexuality”, some saying that the story is incomplete without it; others seem moved more by a ruthless modern prurience.

Without ever having deeply considered the point, I must say that I always took it more or less for granted that Martin Boyd was queer. So did some of my older friends who knew him very well, but we made nothing of it.

A biography of some homosexuals—say Oscar Wilde—would be unthinkable without some reference to their sexual nature, but Martin Boyd’s is a wholly different case. Apart from speculation, there is no evidence—no diaries, no love letters and (especially) no record of cases in the police court. Brenda Niall reports and quotes sufficiently for anyone with eyes to see (if they think it important) to allow the question to arise in their mind.

Now we look forward to her forthcoming life of Melbourne priest Fr William Hackett, SJ.

Afterthought: I would be amused to see Brenda Niall deal with another of Johnson’s aphorisms on biography: “Nobody can write the life of a man, but those who have eat and drunk and lived in social intercourse with him.” I doubt that the great man intended it seriously; indeed, it bears all the marks of emanating from his “throne of earthly felicity”—a chair in a tavern. But what a parched and narrow field would be biography if we could write only lives of our friends and relations!

Peter Ryan’s books include a biography of Sir Redmond Barry and Brief Lives, a collection of memoirs of fifteen Australians of his acquaintance.
ONE MAN’S CONTRIBUTION
by Ross Garnaut

Arndt’s Story: The Life of an Australian Economist, by Peter Coleman, Selwyn Cornish and Peter Drake; Asia Pacific Press, 2007, $45.

HEINZ ARNDT’S was a full, rich, productive and good life. It was worth a good biography, and I know a lot about Heinz, from forty years of professional association in one way or another; from several decades as a close colleague and friend; and also because Heinz wrote quite a lot about his own life. And yet I learned important new things from this book.

There are only three names on the cover, so why do I mention four?

Because Tina Arndt’s first and last chapters are important for a rounded view of Heinz the man. Heinz Arndt the warm and charming man that many of us knew, embedded in a warm family, and watched over by a loving wife, ever ready quickly to deflate any sign of pride or pomposity. Tina tells us that the reason why Heinz never received an Australian gong, alongside his Bintang from the Indonesian President, was that Ruth would never let him accept one.

I know a lot about Heinz, from forty years of professional association in one way or another; from several decades as a close colleague and friend; and also because Heinz wrote quite a lot about his own life. And yet I learned important new things from this book. Coleman’s account of childhood and family in Breslau and Istanbul helps us to understand more about how Heinz came to be the man he was. The role of a secular military leader of a Muslim country, Ataturk, in building a fine university by creating opportunities for Jewish victims of Nazism, amongst them Heinz’s father, the Professor of Chemistry, raises intriguing questions about Heinz’s views on a military leader of a secular government in the world’s largest Muslim country three, four and five decades later.

Coleman tells us that Arndt is the German form of the Jewish Aaron. As Aarons, it is an old Australian name. Levi and Bergman’s recent book tells us that eight convicts called Aarons were sent to New South Wales at various times between the first British settlement in 1788 and the end of transportation in 1850. But the Arndts were something else altogether—children of the highly educated European middle class in the decades of its highest achievement and self-confidence, before it all fell apart in the 1930s.

Selwyn Cornish’s story of Heinz in the Canberra University College tells us a great deal about the history of Australia’s world-class university. What remarkable men they were—the leaders of the four departments of the undergraduate teaching offshoot of Melbourne University, at first living in the shadow of the National University with its exclusive focus on graduate education and research: Fin Crisp; A.D. Hope; Manning Clark; and Heinz Arndt—each one of them already or to become a national figure. It now seems natural that the Canberra College should have become part of the Australian National University. But it only seems natural because of the exceptional qualities of the four men who were appointed young to chairs in the early fifties of last century.

Cornish’s account brings back memories of Heinz’s qualities as a civilised man of intellect, following ideas to their logical and extreme conclusions in his writings and political disputation, and always treating with respect an adversary who was making a good case for his position. Nothing makes these points better than the vignette on Heinz’s interaction with B.A. Santamaria—Heinz engaging Santamaria in the most challenging discussion of the role of the Catholic Church in Australian political life from a residual Marxist position, and still being invited to share spaghetti with the intense Melburnian. Santamaria as well as Heinz, maybe even better, comes out of the description in good shape.

The presentation on the exchange with Santamaria brought back memories of another notable feature of Heinz’s intellectual positions—his straightforward and conscientious atheism, making the non-theistic Christianity that Amartya Sen later taught me was my own position seem at once pale, and sound. Heinz late in his life recognised that his views on religion were old-fashioned; but views like his are reappearing through the international community in response to the rise of assertive religious fundamentalism in the early twenty-first century. The exchange also reminded me of early discussions with Heinz about Chinese Marxism. Heinz, who did not know China well and impressively never visited the country, would ask about Marxism. Heinz, who did not know China well and impressively never visited the country, would ask about the scientific content of Chinese Marxist thought. It had never occurred to me that Chinese or any other Marxism was anything but a social phenomenon, to be understood through sociological analysis rather than through analysis of its scientific logic.

For contemporary Australians, Heinz’s most important enduring contributions to national life came after his shift to the Research School of Pacific Studies, and his leadership of research and graduate education on development in Asia and the Pacific, first of all on Indonesia. His pioneering work has left a legacy of world-class scholarship, and also of productive institutional and interpersonal interaction between scholars and officials in Australia and South-East Asia in particular. Peter Drake tells this story, drawing intensively on Heinz’s own diaries and recollection of places and people through Asia.
Drake tells with sensitivity the challenge of Heinz’s adjustment to retirement—his Chairmanship of the Australian Steering Committee of the Australia–ASEAN Joint Research Project; his establishment of the journal *Asian-Pacific Economic Literature* as its first editor; and writings on the history of thought about development and growth. Drake documents a remarkably productive so-called retirement; and also Heinz’s recurring concerns that he was not doing enough.

What does the book tell us about Heinz the man? What made him tick?

The book gives us the raw material, but leaves us to draw our own conclusions—an approach encouraged and perhaps made inevitable by the multiple authorship. He was first of all a conscientious, gifted, influential teacher. This came from his family, class and place of origin. He put endless care into explaining ideas and sharing texts with bright young people who valued learning. He is remembered with thanks by uncountable numbers of undergraduates in Sydney and Canberra, graduate students who passed through the ANU, and diplomats from Asian countries receiving short courses in economics on their way to other things. This is documented in the Cornish as well as the Drake chapters.

When I accompanied Heinz on a visit to all ASEAN countries to establish the Australia–ASEAN Joint Research Project in 1980, well-established officials in every capital recalled with appreciation the benefits that they had received from Arndt the teacher.

Heinz Arndt was always passionately interested in politics, and in the politics of economic policy. The passion diminished not at all as Heinz moved famously across the political spectrum, from communist fellow traveller, to scion of the *Quadrant* group (and protector of *Quadrant* thought from corruption by soft, intervention opinion in the style of old Australia left and right). The common element was forthright statement of opinion, and preparedness to advocate publicly and to defend the logical extensions of a position to which his mind had come. He never shied away from a difference of opinion, and yet managed the resulting exchanges with civility.

He was sometimes the victim of ignorant intolerance from people who disagreed with his conclusions, but who lacked either the learning or the intellect to appreciate the firm foundations of Heinz’s own positions. As Cornish shows us, this was evident in young Billy McMahon’s use of parliamentary privilege to condemn the Canberra University College’s appointment of a young economics professor.

As Drake suggests, although too briefly, it was more vicious and widespread in reaction to Heinz’s prominent defence of the New Order Government of Indonesia, before and after the incorporation of East Timor, for all that it contributed to the living standards of Indonesian people, to eventual prospects for civilised life in Indonesia, and to stability and peace in Australia’s neighbourhood. Heinz maintained a position, at great personal cost, that had validity in dimensions far beyond those comprehended in the critique. This was a time when people who had the capacity and will to understand the realities of Indonesia were disqualified in the court of noisy public opinion by their presumed membership of an “Indonesian lobby”. Heinz’s democratic and intellectual integrity would cause him now to condemn the reappearance of this mindless element of Australian political culture, in the attacks on a so-called “China lobby” for insisting on analysis of Australia’s interests in the regional security situation.

We are all much richer for Heinz Arndt’s life and work. This book is a reminder to old friends and acquaintances, and an education for others, on the personal contribution that one person can make to the growth of a great university, to the maturity of a nation, and to productive relations amongst a diverse humanity.

Professor Ross Garnaut, a former Australian Ambassador to China, is a senior member of the academic staff of the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies at the Australian National University.
Prime Minister John Howard and his senior ministers have spoken frequently of the need for refugees and immigrants to be tested on their understanding of “Australian values” before they are granted residency and citizenship. The confidence with which politicians speak about these values implies they can be clearly articulated and are well known and universally acknowledged. But when asked for details, these pronouncements are often limited to vague assertions about the importance of mateship, giving someone a “fair go”, and respecting the rule of law. Does this triumvirate exhaust the list of Australian values? And are they free from controversy in any event?

Brian Howe, a former Deputy Prime Minister of Australia and Uniting Church minister, has turned his considerable experience of social policy development to consider what matters to Australians during difficult and demanding periods of life. Weighing Up Australian Values is a product of an ARC-funded research project on labour market transitions and future public and private responses to different patterns of work. Howe’s aim is to “set out an approach to framing a values-driven social policy that responds to the fundamental changes both in our economy and our society”. He argues that Australia needs to “rethink the foundations of social policy” in the wake of deregulating financial systems, privatising public utilities and enterprises, and liberalising attitudes towards many aspects of everyday life. The new challenge is “to work with people to anticipate and manage change more effectively”. This has implications for income security, educational opportunity and labour relations.

Howe argues for greater investment in people because “they are our society’s human capital and their realised potential can contribute to the community”. He believes that “the objective of new social policies should be to encourage people to realise their potential by supporting and managing risk”. Whereas this was previously deemed the responsibility of individuals, there is growing acceptance that the state has a crucial part to play in the flexible delivery of training and in the distribution of work. He is especially concerned about balancing life and work, contending that “the way we live our lives is not driven by some invisible hand or providence; it is driven by the choices people make. It is socially constructed, not an inevitable consequence of changes in work patterns.”

I must confess to being disappointed with this book. Although the prose is hard-going in places, this is not my main complaint. The title implies that the origin and expression of values would be discerned and discussed. The actual focus of the book, however, is on changing employment patterns and technical solutions to challenges and conflicts created by labour market transition. Howe does not attempt to explain the origin of specific values and how they can be preserved in social policy within a pluralistic society. Who decides what constitutes a “value” that ought to be promoted, especially when governments are involved? It was somewhat surprising given Howe’s background as a minister of religion (still in good standing) to find that religious perspectives were not credited with having any role in either what Australia was or what it might become.

There is no mention in his book of theological insights or religious convictions, the spiritual well-being of Australians, moral or ethical considerations in public policy, or a discussion of those things that contribute to human fulfilment. It was almost as if the delivery of goods and services would meet the expectations of Australians individually and collectively and provide at least an acceptable level of happiness as a result.

I would have thought that the churches had something worthwhile to say about fertility and human reproduction in the context of the social and political function of the family; the place of work in human dignity, balancing work and domestic responsibilities and the necessity of job security; the well-being of children in welfare-dependent families; the responsibility of the community for the disadvantaged and helpless and the necessity of job security; the well-being of children in welfare-dependent families; the responsibility of the community for the disadvantaged and helpless; the nature of collective responsibility for individual misfortune; the necessary balance between economic growth and social equity and between capital accumulation and wealth distribution; the debate between maintaining high minimum wages against targeted fiscal payments for families and emphasis on eradicating unemployment and job creation through labour market assistance; the understanding of “poverty” as an economic, social, political and spiritual reality and the calculation of its existence and extent; the status and standing of national boundaries and local needs in the movement towards economic globalisation; the tension between promotion of opportunity and encouragement of excellence in the distribution of educational resources; the extent of resources that should be made available to the care of the aged and infirm; whether Australians expect too much and invest too heavily in health outcomes not shared by their nearest neighbours; the existence of a crumbling universal health care system alongside a growing private health insurance sector; the effects of
managed competition in the health care sector; the
effects of economic competition on collective altruism
and the expression of human compassion; the difficulty
of achieving a range of desired social outcomes when so
much activity has been shifted from the public to the
private realm; the relationship that ought to exist
between the individual and the state and the proper allo-
cation of rights and responsibilities; how we establish
the allocation of an equitable share of the taxation
burden without encouraging tax avoidance or unethical
minimisation strategies; and, how the consumption pat-
terns of a society could and should be challenged and
corrected in terms of environmental sustainability.

Howe calls for more socially-aware political leader-
ship and more creatively-engaged public policy. He
wants governments to show leadership and provide
better management, and hopes this will “help make
Australia a better and fairer society”. The quality of life
enjoyed by Australians is determined by both the condi-
tions in which they live and what happens within their
own hearts, minds and spirits.

It is possible for legislators and administrators to
create the conditions in which human beings can flour-
ish. But they are likely to remain in squalor if the things
for which individuals strive and in which they find sig-
nificance are not also the focus of critical attention. A
former Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple,
commented in the 1920s that it was important to both
take the man out of the slum and the slum out of the
man: to renew social systems and transform human
lives. While some might think this is purely a task for
religion, it has significant public policy implications.

Brian Howe has written with great expertise on
helping Australians achieve their goals. I look forward
to hearing more from him on what those goals ought to
be.

---

**Out of our depth**

Children float in the wide stream
as if they are debris of a far-off disaster
gravel sliding golden over their bodies
gilding hair slicked down to heads

It’s safe in the shallows
a gentle force pulls at limbs
swirls them round so they drift
feet following not seeing where this
all might end eyes closed in bliss

all the time that persistent tug
eats into the bank under willows
making holes brown and cold

walking with a child, his trust flows
through his hand the river narrows
into a fast-moving eddy pulls the boy
ahead of me almost from my grasp
our feet sucked down we flounder
out of our depth just for a moment
all that is needed to suck a small body under
snagging in willow roots, a wide-eyed barrier
against which other small dead will build

pushing across the current I throw him
to the bank and we scramble up the mud
startling a long legged crane that rises up
as if it were the spirit of the drowned.

Anna Buck
NOT LONG TURNED EIGHTEEN, I set off for the wars in New Guinea with a square, mysterious object poking its corners against the canvas at the bottom of my kitbag. (That’s the soldier’s capacious sausage-bag, not his back-pack.) Of all the improbable and impractical things to lug away campaigning, this awkward shape represented two fat books: a collection of the poems of John Masefield, and a gathering of the verses of Robert Service called Songs of a Sourdough.

Masefield, Poet Laureate for nearly forty years, lived long enough to write about Gallipoli in the Great War, and then about the Dunkirk evacuation in the Second World War. Though less widely esteemed today, he is by no means wholly forgotten. Service, on the other hand, gets not a single line in Oxford University Press’s Companion to English Literature, though a few brief excerpts appear in some editions of its Dictionary of Quotations. He was a sort of Banjo Paterson of the howling snows of the Yukon. Here is a sample for those who do not know him:

A bunch of the boys were whooping it up in the “Malamute” saloon;
The kid that handles the music box was hitting a jag-time tune,
When out of the night, that was thirty below…

Even if only as the creator of Dangerous Dan McGrew, Service ought not to be denied his crumb of literary immortality.

My priggish resolution to preserve for myself some sort of “culture” even among the brutal and licentious soldiery soon collapsed: in the damps and mildews of tropical Port Moresby, both volumes quickly fell to pieces. Although vagrant sheaves of loose pages were passed appreciatively from tent to tent, it was not many weeks before the tongues of Masefield and Service were effectively stilled in Port Moresby.

And then, assigned to fresh duties, I set out on the two-week trek to Wau, far away on the north side of the island. (Why not have flown? Answer: for months on end in the early stages of the Pacific war, our forces simply had no aircraft.) This taxing journey followed the Bulldog Track, longer, higher, colder, wetter and steeper than Kokoda. The heavy volumes of Masefield and Service, had they still existed, would certainly have been jettisoned the first day out.

The old peacetime gold town of Wau, inland among the mountains, was the base from which a tiny group of Australian guerrillas—“Kanga Force”—was harassing the Japanese in their powerful coastal bases in Lae and Salamaua. My orders were, from behind the Japanese lines, to report on enemy activity, and maintain loyalty to the Australian cause among the many native villages. I had the support of several superb native policemen.

I passed through a number of our scattered posts; hidden in the jungle, some held by only two or three men, they were strung out over a “front” of 100 miles. On two or three occasions I camped with them overnight, squeezed in hospitably under a corner of the thatching.

By a major exercise of understatement, it could be said that these Kanga Force men had it hard. Dependent for all their supplies on whatever the native carriers could bravely haul over the appalling Bulldog Track, they were short of boots and clothing, of weapons and ammunition, food and medical stores. Malaria was endemic, and quinine often short. I never heard a whinge from one of them, but the yearning most expressed was for “something to read”. One of them told me: “Whenever we get a fresh tin of jam—which isn’t too bloody often—we take it in turns to read the label.” The last post I visited actually possessed a book. It was called The Indiarubber Men, and was by then ace thriller writer Edgar Wallace, famous also as the author of Sanders of the River. The men were proud of this bibliographical rarity in the wilds, but added ruefully: “We’ve all read it five times now.”
Some five days further solo walking took me well inside enemy territory, but the village people were friendly, and helped me build a thatched camp well off the beaten track. Fresh food was plentiful, and the people always ready with general assistance. I usually felt safe—at least in the early days—in my little house among them; I think they were tickled that I flew the Australian flag in front of the door—albeit well shielded from Japanese spotting aircraft by the foliage of a tall, spreading tree.

Taken all round, and give or take a mosquito or two, it wasn’t a bad life. But I had nothing to read—not so much as a jam label. Pessimistic eyes might have seen the place simply as one of Conradian godforsakenness; even the grossest optimist could not have foreseen that it was to be the site of the greatest single literary enlightenment of my life. But it was so.

One morning my friendly neighbours, always with a sharp eye on the surrounding tracks, astonished me by saying that I should expect a visitor. They’d just had the talk from villagers over the hill that a white man was approaching—a big man and a strong walker, from their observation; he would certainly arrive before dark. I was startled.

“Are you sure he’s not a Japanese?”

They laughed. “Do you think we wouldn’t know the difference? This man speaks good Pidgin, and he has an absolutely genuine native constable with him.”

As predicted, about an hour before sunset, a powerfully-built Australian warrant officer with his attendant policeboy walked into camp, surrounded by a little throng of excited locals who had shown him the way. I recognised him at once. Like me, he was a cadet patrol officer learning on the job. I had met him in Port Moresby a couple of months before, and he had shared my purgatorial crossing of New Guinea over the Bulldog Track; in its rain-sodden wayside hovels at night we had talked in the dark about books and writing and poetry. He had just walked a risky several days through enemy-infested country, but his errand was purely personal, and had nothing to do with duty or operations.

“I’ve got a present for you,” he said. “I fluked a packet of mail from home last month, and there was a book in it—just a little paperback, really. But I thought it was marvellous, and I know it will be right up your alley.”

I waited for him to produce the book. “Ah, no!” he said. “You don’t get it till I’m leaving in the morning. We’ll discuss it some time in the future, but not until you’ve taken it all in.”

We made a fine dinner, and I proudly showed off the chickens, eggs and great range of fruits and vegetables, and the skill of my cookboy. We didn’t mention the couple of bottles of red which, elsewhere, might have crowned the feast. Travelling light, he and his policeman set off at first light next day. Only as we shook hands did he pass over a slender parcel wrapped in oil-cloth against the sweat and rain of the track. Then he was off.

The small book had been printed in England to the grim standards of “wartime austerity”. The title was Down and Out in Paris and London; the author was George Orwell. I had never heard of either of them. It was all a bit of a let-down.

By the smoky flicker of a tiny hurricane lamp I finished reading the book at about eleven o’clock that night. I wish I could fix precisely the date of that “Road to Damascus” event, but I know that that particular copy of Down and Out went west on May 15, 1943, when the Japanese jumped my camp and burnt it to the ground.

But I had learned what an honest writer ought to be doing, and how he should be going about it. In this case, Orwell was telling simple tales of the rough life he had led among the dishwashers and other menials in Paris restaurants, and among the tramps in English workhouses. In the phrase of Joseph Conrad, he wrote simply “to make you see”. Like Charles II’s old lord chancellor Clarendon, Orwell held that “the only justifiable end of eloquence is to be believed”.

To the end of his days Orwell remained a man of the Left, but an honest one. Unlike the sly H.G. Wells, the clown Bernard Shaw, the appalling Sidney and Beatrice Webb, he would neither excuse nor conceal Stalin’s crimes. With Bertrand Russell, Arthur Koestler, Malcolm Muggeridge and the remarkable American war correspondent George Seldes, he was eloquent in denunciation. While W.H. Auden simpered over Stalin’s “necessary” murders and ran off to America to safeguard his skin, Orwell served as a frontline soldier in the international forces fighting the Fascists in Spain. He was severely wounded by a bullet through his throat. When he wrote his book of controlled passion, Homage to Catalonia, the embarrassed English intellectual Left tried to prevent its publication.

Though Orwell is famous chiefly today for his late novels Animal Farm and Nineteen Eighty-Four, his true métier was never fiction. But the superb four-volume edition of his essays and journalism contains a model
for writing and a moral for politics which should endure as long as the English language.

It remains to me an abiding wonder that I should have made his acquaintance in a lonely wartime camp in Papua New Guinea’s fever-rotten Markham Valley.

Notes
1. In the vicissitudes of war, I lost all contact with my fellow warrant officer. But five years later, on a honeymoon-holiday in Sydney, my wife and I were enjoying ourselves in a smart but faintly dubious Kings Cross nightclub. Grinning ear-to-ear, my old friend—a handsome civilian hunk indeed—strode his way across the dance-floor. George Orwell was the last thing on his mind; he’d come to claim a dance with my wife. This they performed with such spectacular verve that the chefs themselves hung outside the kitchen doors to watch and applaud. We got around to Orwell later.

2. Anyone who seeks a quick and enjoyable refresher on Orwell should consult Richard Rees’ *George Orwell: Fugitive from the Camp of Victory.* Rees was Orwell’s close friend and sometime publisher. Although it appeared in 1961, it remains an engaging and perceptive memoir. And at 150 pages, you can read it in half a day.

---

**BAT TRANG ROAD**

Like a dragon’s back, the ridge glides across the plain: village after village on one side; on the other, fields that have dried to an infinity of clay.

Far off, freeway fragments float above the land. One fine day they will connect and after that the world can whiz upon its way. For now, this is the only road.

It separates endless fields from the abode of men and gods. Dragons on each temple roof grip heaven in their claws; eucalypts frame the darkened temple pools filled with drying lotus pods.

Out of their shadow, houses climb, one room on another until, on top, a final belvedere peers over the embankment rim at the setting sun. We are simply an out-of-focus car, quickly gone, filled with folk wondering who they are. In the dusk on this road we barely exist.

The headlight on each motor bike like a lantern in the mist winds its way along the dyke.

Cows, bulls and calves crop the grass. Herdsmen lie back, stretch and smoke and never think to count the stars.

*Leon Trainor*