

cultural diversity. In short, what we should be talking about — and what we are (at least implicitly) really taking about when we talk about lesbian and gay rights; [sic] women's rights or the rights of the transgendered (awful word) — is human rights.

Well, yes. But then, this:

... a high price will be extracted from those whose Pyrrhic sense of progress leads them out of the closet and into the ghetto. The 'I am not one of them' response will never raise the debate above the level of a primitive and self-indulgent tribalism.

I suspect that we are more likely to find a small but culturally significant group of gay bashers around the next corner rather than Mountbatten's 'new order'. In addition, it is capricious to imply that lesbian and gay law reform achievements to date constitute an empty victory when so many have benefited from the hard work of a committed few. And isn't the 'I am not one of them' response in the broader heterosexual community the reason that lesbian and gay activists exist in the first place? If the culture at large was ready to be warm, fuzzy and totally inclusive, there wouldn't need to be a Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby.

As for the level of debate about transgender issues, it is, I wager, much more informed within groups such as the Lobby than without. Where else are transgender (or pansexual, for that matter) issues being considered quite so seriously? The list of places would be small indeed, and would probably not include either the hallowed halls of the Parliaments or the University Club at Flinders University, where Mountbatten teaches.

Mountbatten's material on transgender issues and the law is truly fabulous and well worth the read. But if he's serious about law reform and transgender issues, and more broadly, about working towards a dissolving of categories and divisions, he should start building bridges, not burning them.

Finally the volume also includes a meaty review of *Homosexuality: A European Community Issue — Essays on Lesbian and Gay Rights in European Law and Policy* (edited by Kees Waaldijk and Andrew Clapham) by Phillip Tähmindjis.

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A Grain of Truth

by Nicholas Hasluck; Penguin Books; 273 pp; \$14.95.

The kindest thing that can be said about argument is that it is a motivated exploration of a subject... the unkindest thing that can be said about argument is that it occupies a great deal of time and gives to moderately intelligent people a sense of useful activity. Argument seems an attractive intellectual exercise because it is almost always possible to say something.

Edward De Bono doesn't hate lawyers, he just knows the game. The game of 'I am right. You are wrong.' Of black and white. Guilty. Not guilty. It's a game that we all know. Where the process becomes more important than the question.

Nicholas Hasluck's eighth novel returns us to the West Coast of Australia, the location of his two previous novels 'Country Without Music' and 'The Blossville File.' A stone's throw from reality, the inhabitants of Revenant's Beach are living through the aftermath of the late 1980s. Entrepreneurs are no longer the saviours of the free world, cabinet ministers and premiers are appearing daily before Royal Commissions and law enforcement agencies serve themselves before all others.

The firm of Jeffcott, Carrick and Cheyne finds itself being drawn into the midst of the fight by a recent recruitment, their very own legal entrepreneur, John Reece.

Sworn statements by police informers at the heart of the west coast drug scene indicate that certain members of DAT (the Drug Abuse Team) are putting drugs back onto the streets and falsifying court evidence. The firm's major client, *The Sunday Mail*, has been charged with criminal defamation over stories it has run on the affair. No one is telling the whole truth and the case has become a pawn in a much bigger game.

A Grain of Truth follows Michael Cheyne, the firm's conveyancer, as he attempts to unravel 'the truth' from the conflicting claims. Internal politics within the firm sees Michael forced to return to advocacy after a break of more than a decade. Badly burnt by a previous experience, Michael is at once, exhilarated and disturbed by the power of argument and the distance between process and justice.

The book leaves the taste of a spy novel firmly on the palette, although any

story concerned with truth, conspiracy and investigation would be hard pressed to do otherwise. However, the writing sometimes bears a closer resemblance to a police statement than a Le Carre novel.

The book has an annoying habit of occasionally describing dialogue between characters rather than merely representing it. This can be particularly frustrating when it appears amongst otherwise complete conversations.

It also weakens an intriguing theme created by Hasluck, where he has included some of the key statements made by witnesses in their entirety. Introduced as separate chapters, the statements have the appearance of exhibits or evidence that the following chapters submit to analysis and cross-examination. This theme is diminished by the replacement of the actual arguments with, what can feel like, hearsay.

Perhaps a more perverse discomfort that I feel with this book is its focus on the recent past. The early 1990s provides an interesting backdrop to an examination of how the legal system feeds itself, setting up goals that reflect needs that are more than external. This was a time when Australia was conducting a post-mortem into the late 1980s and the economic obsession with process, sometimes known as economic rationalism. A time when greed was good and when we were happy to follow the economy where it led us, rather than leading the economy where we wanted it to go.

My uneasiness stems from the feeling that this book has arrived at just the wrong time. Like a week old newspaper, thought lost, that turns up hidden under a bush in the front garden. The news it brings is neither fresh enough to be of use nor old enough to re-spark interest.

A Grain of Truth has a comfortable flow and some interesting themes, but unfortunately, it fails to inspire. It's a book, that for me, misses its mark more through timing than content. I suspect this book may make more satisfying reading in years to come.

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