

Romance, if you can call it that, returns to the gay world

By IAN WARDEN

A RARE glimpse of what things are like in the homosexual community was given in an interview published in last Tuesday's edition of this paper with a Mr John Westlund, a spokesman for the AIDS Action Committee.

Mr Westlund said that "dating and romance have made a comeback" in homosexual relationships and that discussion of the health history of the prospective partner has replaced "immediate sexual contact".

Heterosexuals, while they will be glad that romance has come back to homosexual relationships and while they will be sorry that it

ever went away, will note that homosexuals and heterosexuals appear to have different notions of what constitutes romance.

I must say, that as a heterosexual, I would not find it particularly romantic to discuss my date's and my own history of diseases, even if we discussed them while dancing cheek to cheek or while staring into one another's eyes in an intimate, candlelit corner of McDonalds.

If anything I think that such a discussion (especially since I would have nothing to contribute to it and would have to interrogate my date rather like Huw Evans browbeating the contestants of 'Mastermind') would be a lot less romantic than immediate sexual contact itself.

But then I lead a sheltered and atypical life and it may be that questions such as "How many kinds of syphilis have you had?" are on the lips of each and every one of the characters of Barbara Cartland's glutinous romantic novellas.

Meanwhile, on a related subject, I find it hard to suppress the suspicion that it is only the fact that famous poofter-bashers like Dean Shilton (the well-known "Christian" commentator), Mr Ian Sinclair, Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen and locally our own Bjelke-Petersen substitute, Mrs Bev Cains, were born into the heterosexual persuasion that prevents them from being powerful advocates of gaydom as God's preferred lifestyle.

It is as narcissistic to be smug about one's heterosexuality and to be disparaging about another's homosexuality as it would be for me to be smug about the fact that I am taller than Mr Hawke and have nicer legs. I owe these attributes (and the several million others) to fate and to certain happy permutations of my parents' genes. My parents made me a heterosexual but, if ever I begin to feel at all smug about that fact, I only have to remember that I share this carnal persuasion with Dean Shilton and with Mr Ian Sinclair to be reminded that this does not render me particularly special.



Barbara Cartland: What are the romantic words on the lips of every character in her glutinous novellas?



Mr Peacock doing one of his Strong Leader impersonations.

But where's the coonskin hat?

MR PEACOCK is fond of saying, in his deepest possible voice, that he won't "have a bar" of this or that Labor proposal. This is an expression that he uses when he is doing his Strong Leader impersonations, which are based, if am not mistaken, upon John Wayne's memorable portrayal of Davy Crockett in 'The Alamo'. Mr Peacock is not quite so convincing, although this may be because he declines to wear a coonskin hat.

I had expected to find an explanation of it in the wombat-sized Macquarie Dictionary of Australian English but all that the Macquarie does is offer the perfectly obvious meaning of the expression as a failure to tolerate something.

When one declines to have a bar of something one is plainly declining to have even a small part of it. Is Mr Peacock characterising the Government and its policies as an enormous semi-trailer load of useless soap or of inedible chocolate?

Is he, perhaps, characterising the Government and its policies as an atonal symphony (or perhaps, given Mr Hawke's self-deification, an oratorio) in which not a bar of music is worth listening to?

Is there anyone out there who, in the few short weeks before Mr Peacock quits politics and ceases to be a household name, can explain the derivation of what appears to be Mr Peacock's favourite saying?

Peculiar rage maintained

Mrs BETTY HOCKING is maintaining her peculiar rage against the portrait of Yuri Andropov that hangs near the office of the Minister for Education, Senator Susan Ryan.

The explanation that this is not a work executed in praise of the late, cold-prone supremo but is the work of an art student apparently bent on saying something uncomplimentary about him appears to have glanced off Mrs Hocking's heavily fortified brain.

She continues to see its presence in the corridor as evidence that the Minister has communist sympathies even though it is not easy to see why a closet communist would have the mediocre Andropov as a hero when the USSR has spawned such great statesmen as Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, Bulganin, Krushchev, Nureyev, Brezhnev and Gromyko.

Mrs Hocking's latest ploy, contained in one of her eagerly-anticipated press statements (how one looks forward to her bringing out a book of her best ones!) invokes a memo from the bywano of the Public Service Board, Dr Peter Wilenski, which was written in May last year when Mr Andropov was still with us, when Dr Wilenski was head of the Department of Education and when for all we know the controversial portrait was still only a gleam in the artist's eye.

Dr Wilenski's memo has it that while members of staff may "brighten up" their dingy workplaces with cartoons, calendars or posters these must not be materials "which can be seen as racist or sexist and which as



Dr Wilenski

such give offence to work colleagues, clients or visitors to the department".

Mrs Hocking says that since the Andropov portrait "gives considerable offence" Dr Wilenski should encourage the Minister to remove it.

This is all very well but Mrs Hocking does not say in what ways the portrait is racist or sexist. As I understand it, Mr Andropov is not portrayed while uttering an Irish joke or while saying something disparaging about tawny peoples, nor is he shown drooling over a Pirelli calendar or uttering wolf whistles at some becoming Russian female stevedore or discus thrower.

The erotic aroma of bacon and chips

A FEW DAYS ago a Civic department store was promoting a new perfume by offering passing shoppers a short, sharp burst of it from a spray container, promising that it would make the wearer smell of boronias. Not wishing to smell of boronias (I am more of a parabees person myself) I passed by on the other side, wondering, as I did so, why the repertoires of the perfume manufacturers are so small and so unimaginative.

Perfumes all seem to cleave to some floral notion of what constitutes an attractive aroma whereas I find most aromatic flowers, designed to penetrate and beguile the dull minds of insects, crass and sickly. In my garden, still awaiting the inevitable axe, I have a *Phladelphus* shrub which, in flower, smells rather as the cosmetics counter at Woolworths might smell if a madman ran amok and smashed open all its bottles and jars. No doubt someone, somewhere, is trying to synthesise this brutal fragrance so that the misguided women of the world may dab it behind their ears.

There are grand smells that the manufactur-

ers never attempt to make. For example I would find quite irresistible a woman who gave off an aroma of frying bacon or of freshly mown grass or of fried potato chips.

Maidens smelling of freshly ground coffee would have an ineffable appeal while men who play tennis would be driven crazy by a duplication of the bouquet given off by a hot clay court in summer when the first drops of rain fall upon it.

Proust is famous for the assertion that the remembrance of things past is best triggered by a taste or by a smell. I would pay as much as I pay for a hoghead of malt whisky for a bottle of a perfume that captured for me the smell of my first kitten coming in out of the rain with its wet fur, the intoxicating stench of the seaweed gently decaying in autumn on the beaches of the village where I grew up, the smell of our school dinners which somehow penetrated our school clothes so that our shirts, even after a million washes, smelt of stews, and the hair-raising but aphrodisiacal aroma of the hair lacquer worn by the jeezbel who was my first sweetheart and embossed on my memory by our sordid clutches in the backs of charabancs.

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PECULIARLY ETHNIC PIE

AUSTRALIANS have become increasingly enthusiastic about the variety of exotic foods available from master chefs, cooks and friends and neighbours who have brought a host of recipes from other countries. But within every country — and Australia is no exception — there is that curious phenomenon of regional cuisine, which sometimes is adopted nationally or even internationally. The humble Yorkshire pudding, for instance, is no longer confined to the moors and dales or Yorkshire but can be found in various guises in many countries. On the other hand the Adelaide floater — meat pie adrift in a sea of pea soup — seems anchored to South Australia's capital.

This week has seen the reintroduction of the NSW Railways pie. The famous pie, noted for its high meat content, disappeared four years ago when it was decided to revamp the kitchens at Central Railway Station, Sydney. It was so popular in the 1960s that chefs were making 600 a day. In 1964 the recipe won the award for Best Meat Pie in the State, and Australian soldiers in Vietnam had dozens of them sent to them each week. Another Sydney pie which enjoyed great popularity in its day was produced by Sargent's restaurants, which disappeared years ago. But the pie which has lingered in the memory is the Central Railway pie. For travellers setting out or returning from a long country train journey, a railway pie, tomato sauce and a cup of tea must have been one of the most frequent orders.

There seems to be general approval for the meat and pastry of the new pie but some disappointment that there is no kidney in it. But whether its flavour is going to win favour remains to be seen. One food writer has suggested that it is still indistinguishable from that of most mass-produced pies. But railways, it seems, do have a peculiar way of adapting normal foods to their own standards. For years, even before the advent of British Rail, train travellers in Britain were familiar with railway fruit cake. I sat forlornly under glass domes in station restaurants looking like a cross between a museum curiosity and a lump off a railway sleeper, and it was never honoured the way the NSW Railways pie has been.

Medicare unfairness

Sir, — I am writing to say how unfair Medicare is, especially to those of us who have paid over the years for a health service, then just when they need to take advantage of it, find it's been taken away.

My husband, a retired Army officer, paid for his pension and top rates in army health benefits, which covered all dental, medical, hospital, including nursing-home care.

After being healthy all his life, he had several strokes, and had to be admitted to a nursing home this year. Army health benefits paid the full cost of the nursing home and would have continued to do so.

Since Medicare, Medicare pays half and we must pay half, letting the health benefits out of paying anything. This half is our entire

army pension after tax, Medicare, and a lower army health benefit.

To add insult to injury, my husband had another stroke recently, and was admitted to hospital for three weeks.

While he is in hospital, the nursing home bed must go on "hold", as he isn't in the bed. Medicare does not pay anything, and we had to pay the full cost of \$65 per day — \$1,365 for the three weeks he was hospitalised.

I am on the side of the doctors who are on strike because they have had their salaries cut back. I am sure they can see the writing on the wall of things to come. They will be working for, and being dictated to, by this Government. (Mrs) M. ROWE

Osmond Street, Wannassa.

Psepholitic enthymeme conceals how half a Senate cake can be better than a whole

GARETH EVANS comes a very close second to Bob Hawke for being the worst guest on talk-back radio in Australia.

If Black and Decker had invented an electric rasp, it would inevitably sound like Bob Hawke's voice, and like a rasp, Bob Hawke's voice chews through the subject wood very slowly. Bob can rasp on the subject of the integrity of his Government for hours and hours and still seem to touch only the side of the wood.

Not so Gareth. He consumes his subject matter as a circular saw deals with thin pine logs. In answering a simple question about a Senate election, he will canvass the effect of three High Court cases, the history of the coalition's policy statements, the untenable nature of his opponents' arguments on half a dozen related issues, the effect a constitutional change will have on the States, the legislative process, the Federal Parliament and the Public Service, and follow it with 19 other arguments to support his view.

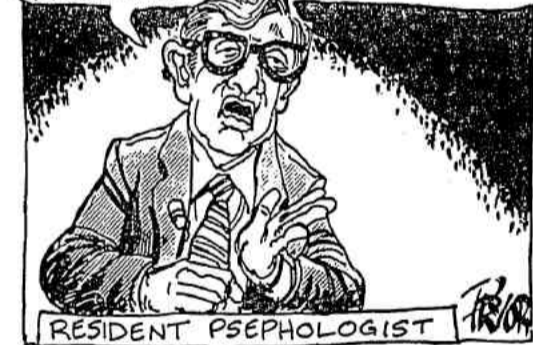
Meanwhile, the innocent listener is left quite bemused. This happened on Thursday morning on the Clare Martin Show when listeners were invited to telephone questions on the two referendums. (What referendums? — the ones on December 1.) The dialogue was quite Socratic: one-line questions and 80-line answers, and the Evans circular saw chewed up the air time as the clock edged towards nine o'clock. Would Clare be able to stop him from talking right through the news?

Clare, as usual, managed her guest and the telephoning listeners like Herbert von Karajan conducting the unruly Berlin Philharmonic. One of the callers was psephologist Malcolm Mackerras. ("Psephologist", incidentally, does not describe his voice, but his occupation. He studies elections. The word comes from the Greek word for pebble, because the Greeks voted with pebbles. But really it is a made-up academic wank word, and did not appear in English dictionaries until the 1960s.)

Malcolm — as an ordinary inquiring 2CN listener who had presented the official "No" case on television the night before and who has been enlisted by the Opposition to plug "No" — spontaneously telephoned Clare to put some curly questions to Senator Evans.

Malcolm must have been itching to put his questions, but Clare would not let the psepholitic Australian terrier off the leash until the very last. She knew that to put him on early would have changed her talk-back show into an Evans-Mackerras brawl, denying ordinary citizens the opportunity to be verbally clubbed by the loquacious Attorney.

...IN MY OPINION THE REFERENDUMS WILL BE WON & LOST / BOTH WON / BOTH LOST ... AND THE LABOR GOVERNMENT WILL / WON'T BE RETURNED WITH AN INCREASED / DECREASED MAJORITY...



Mackerras did not so much ask questions as make statements. The Government was lying on simulta-

neous elections, he said. Every Government that had put up the proposal had been dishonest, presumably including the Fraser and Whitlam Governments. He thought senators should continue to have fixed terms rather than be tied to the House of Reps.

Actually, Mackerras put up the only remotely reasonable argument for the "No" case that I have heard, but he did it so enthymematically that only those who have wasted half their lives studying law or politics could understand him.

"Enthymematically" means leaving out half an argument because it is so simple that it need not be explained. A good example of an enthymeme is: "If Mackerras is a psephologist, I'm a Dutchman." The part left out is the fact that I am not a Dutchman.

Now, this would not matter in ordinary parlance (unless one happened to be in Holland), because everyone would know I am not Dutch. But in talking about simultaneous elections, the missing premises are not so obvious. (Incidentally, unlike

LAW AND LORE

By CRISPIN HULL

"psephology", the word "enthymeme" was taken from Greece, carried through Roman times, hidden in monasteries in the Dark Ages, discussed by Renaissance scholars at Oxford, and then placed in the earliest of English dictionaries.)

When Mackerras came on, Evans repeated the convenience and money-saving arguments about having simultaneous House and Senate elections, and then said the Government of the day would not get any extra control of the Senate by being able to call early elections, because a Government could always force the Senate to the polls by engineering a double dissolution. To which Mackerras enthymematically replied that simultaneous elections would be evil because the Government of the day would get the greater power to take half the Senate to the polls, and virtually left it at that.

A non-psepholitic listener might reasonably ask: "Surely, the power to force the whole Senate to the polls is greater than the power to take a mere half of it?"

No; this is a case of the half being greater than the whole. If a Government threatens the whole Senate with an election, 12 senators from each State would face election. To get elected, a candidate would need a mere 7.7 per cent of the vote, enabling all sorts of interfering Democrats, Nuclear Disarmers, Harradine clones, and others to get seats quite easily, thereby destroying the Government's chance of getting a majority. But if the Government could force only half the Senate to an election, only six senators from

each State would face election, each needing a more difficult 14.3 per cent of the vote.

Such a task would consign the minor parties to electoral oblivion. It is only because we have had so many double dissolutions recently that the Democrats have so many Senate seats. A couple of snap half-Senate elections could see the Democrats' demise.

Those are the missing parts to the Mackerras enthymeme. I have filled them in because it is an attractive piece of logic, even if it verges on the paranoiac and assumes that a Prime Minister is going to deliberately risk a series of early elections just to wipe out a minor menace in the Senate.

As Mackerras got to the end of his argument on the Clare Martin Show, after accusing governments of lying and seeing political plots where probably none exist, I thought he should have rounded it all off by telling Clare: "And that's why we should keep the flag the same. Now clear off."

Alas, he did not oblige — probably because he hasn't the depth of a Bruce Rump.

It is hardly necessary to now balance all this with parts of the "Yes" case. The convenience and money-saving manifestly outweigh Bjelke-Petersen's yapping about the independence of a "States' House" that has always divided on party lines, and has never voted on State issues, and never will, I'd rather have three child-care centres, or Northbourne Avenue revealed than waste \$20 million on a silly, out-of-kilter half-Senate election.

What puzzled me, however, is why Gareth bothered to come to

the ACT. Our Senators are already elected at the same time as the House. And on the other referendum question, the interchange of powers, the ACT has no powers, and no-one with whom to interchange them even if we did. Moreover, the ACT vote is merely counted into the national total; it does not affect any State count. As there has never been a referendum that got a majority of States but failed because it did not get a national majority, our vote is quite irrelevant. Senator Evans would have better spent his time in Tasmania, shaking the six-fingered hands of the people of Zeehan and Launceston, or kissing both mounds of babies from Devonport and Burnie.

At a press conference on Thursday Senator Evans struggled to make our very first constitutional referendum vote "relevant" to the ACT — mainly on money and convenience grounds. But he was brutally undermined by Labor's second Senate candidate, Dr Hugh Saddler, who opined that it was a blessing for ACT residents to be able to vote in a completely disinterested way on the merits of a matter affecting their country.

Perhaps Dr Saddler was reading his (putative) ANU-infested, academically minded electorate much better than Senator Evans.

Indeed, his idea should be extended. Future referendum proposals to change the Constitution should not be submitted to voters in the six States, who would be tainted by greed for money and power, and improperly influenced by their parochial State politicians. Instead, each proposal should be submitted to the highly intelligent electors of the ACT, who, not influenced by the petty squabbles of the State-Federal power game, could dispassionately decide, in the national interest, whether the constitutional change should go ahead. I figure it should save about \$20 million on each referendum — though I think I've heard an argument something like that before.

Simultaneous elections

Sir, — The recent agreement between the major political parties on simultaneous elections is suspicious. Recent publicity sent to the electorate courtesy of the taxpayer omits one vital point. What effect will the new system have on small parties?

Simultaneous elections, although in many respects an excellent and much-needed change, will unfortunately discriminate

against the small parties, most of which depend on the political backlash at half-Senate elections when the swinging voter supports them rather than the broken promises of the Labor and Liberal parties.

The Senate needs, more than ever, an independent voice to make the "big-two" accountable. Discerning voters will therefore vote "no" on this issue at the next referendum.

G. SLATER

Astley Place, Garran.

LETTERS to the Editor

Out-of-area school buses

Sir, — I strongly support the views of R. J. and L. R. Ashton, who voiced their disapproval (Letters, November 13) of the intention of the ACT Schools Authority to phase out school buses for out-of-area children.

with unplanned enrolment increases.

I have exercised the option of having our children educated at the nearest "traditional" type (as compared with "open plan") preschool, at Lyncham Primary. If the threatened action of the authority comes about it will amount to a closing-off of a supposed choice in education for at least one of our children, the youngest, who is six years old and whom I don't wish to be subjected to the hazards of the (unsupervised) public buses.

The authority is acting in a high-

handed bureaucratic fashion and needs to be brought to account. JOHN GENDERS

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Times past
From The Canberra Times 25 years ago.
November 25, 1959:
Pakistan laid claim to Ladakh, a hilly and sparsely populated area of Jammu and Kashmir which was also claimed by India and China.