Learningguild Letter

1.2005

Dear members and friends of Learningguild,

In the 2.2003 issue of this *Letter*, I discussed a graduation address at Boston University by Dr John Silber, then Chancellor and now President Emeritus. It is a privilege for Learningguild to have his support in the leaflet that describes our twice-yearly examination in reasoning and expression, and for me to correspond with him and read his work. In this letter I shall begin with some striking sentences in his book of 1989, *Straight Shooting*, and then show how well they fit the kinds of attitudes portrayed in an utterly different American book, Tom Wolfe's novel (2004) *I am Charlotte Simmons*, mostly set in an imagined university of high prestige called Dupont. What I now quote from Silber was written mainly with reference to the widespread weakness of secondary education, but two paragraphs later came a warning that if high quality was forfeited at primary and secondary levels it would eventually be lost in higher education too.

> An incompetent educational system leads many of our young people today to believe that their lives are not worth the effort of trying to make them better. They see themselves as flotsam and jetsam to which things *happen*. They accept the idea that they are driven by passions over which they have no control. …
>
> To become active and not passive, to make decisions about our lives, we all need the help of moral principles and values, not because they sound good, but because they are as real as any laws of science.
>
> (p.207f)

Wolfe's book is greatly weakened by his readiness to wallow in descriptions of the vulgarities of speech, alcoholic excesses and sexual licence of so many of his characters. The conclusion is inescapable that he intended to write a bestseller to whose sales such descriptions would contribute. Much of the style, force and ultimate tedium of the book is conveyed by these sentences on p.127 expressing the mainly envious thoughts of a "dorky" but intelligent student, Adam Gellin, about a campus whose students are portrayed by Wolfe as, in Silber's words, "driven by passions over which they have no control", but also by conformist pressures that militate against or are not met by any attempts at the autonomy that depends on self-discipline.

> Sex! Sex! It was in the air along with the nitrogen and the oxygen! The whole campus was humid with it! tumid with it! lubricated with it! gorged with it! tingling with it! in a state of around-the-clock arousal with it! *Rutrutrutrutrutrutrutrut* ─

Charlotte Simmons, a freshman of high intellectual achievement from the hills of North Carolina, is taken aback, as many a student has been in Australia as well as in the US, by the life of the "dorm" (college, hall of residence) she has joined. Rather than just laugh off Wolfe's depiction as the sustained exaggeration it is, we might note the unease expressed in the chapter (12) on college housing in Ernest L. Boyer's book *College* (1987), which summarizes the results of a survey of US universities. With reference to noise, alcohol abuse, noisy parties and "sexual freedom" (one might better say "pressure to engage in loveless sexual activity"), he writes of "what is too often a casual and sometimes chaotic part of campus life" (p.199).

Wolfe's title derives from the propensity of the central character to use its words to herself for reassurance. The inadequacy of that kind of preoccupation with oneself comes out in the best part of the book, the end. In the chaotic first semester, Charlotte's morale (and grades) have deteriorated because of an anxiety to be accepted, whereby she has allowed Hoyt, a flashy member of the "innermost ring" fraternity (p.11), and a careerist, to get her drunk and seduce her. Her old-fashioned mother, whom she has not told about Hoyt, says to her on the telephone: "Sounds to me like what you need right now is a talk with your own soul, an honest talk" (p.661). In the next chapter, the last, Charlotte is sitting in the crowd at one of the basketball matches, now famous and admired as the friend and stabilizer of Jojo, one of the team, who respects her because she is different and has encouraged him (pp.180-2) to be a serious student in a university where the basketballers can get others like Adam to write their essays. However, that superficially not-too-bad stage in her time at Dupont leaves her unsatisfied. The chapter has the title "The Ghost in the Machine", the description given by the philosopher Gilbert Ryle, in *The Concept of Mind*, to the view of body and soul put by Descartes, and used again by Steven Pinker in his recent book *The Blank Slate*. The paragraph I am about to quote from p.674f is perhaps the most perceptive in the book. None of Wolfe's characters displays the joyful and disinterested love of active and cooperative learning, the aim-setting autonomy, the moderation and self-discipline, the courage and perseverance, that are fostered by a good education, one that is, as Silber would insist, both moral and intellectual. The developing of those qualities would alone satisfy Charlotte, or any student, and alone makes, in the fullest sense of the words, for a happy student.

> So why do you keep waiting deep in the back of my head, Momma, during my every conscious moment ─ waiting for me to have that conversation? Even if I were to pretend it were real, my "soul," the way you think it is, what could I possibly say? All right, I'll say, "I am Charlotte Simmons." That should satisfy the "soul," since it's not there in the first place. So why do I keep hearing the ghost asking the same tired questions over and over, "Yes, but what does that mean? Who *is* she?" You can't *define* a person who is unique, said Charlotte Simmons. It, the little ghost who wasn't there, said, "Well, then, why don't you mention some of the attributes that set her apart from every other girl at Dupont, some of the dreams, the ambitions? Wasn't it Charlotte Simmons who wanted a life of the mind? Or was what she wanted all along to be considered special and to be admired for that in itself, no matter how she achieved it?

It is relatively easy, though not unimportant, for me to write as I have done about the qualities that a student needs. It is much harder to work out in theory and in practice how such qualities are made accessible and attractive to students, who must even then overcome the temptations to neglect or downplay them. I stressed the importance of example when responding in my earlier letter to John Silber (see its p.7). Let me here say more about the kind of example I have in mind. Moral and intellectual virtue is caught (but must still be developed) rather than simply taught. Good examples of it invite, and thinking about them can engender, that **respect** for the moral and intellectual potential of human beings, the potential to control one's own inclinations and pursue cooperative ends, which was so central in Immanuel Kant's thought.

There is an excellent account of John Buchan in Violet Markham's book about her brother and her friends, *Friendship's Harvest*. It has this perceptive sentence (p.118) about a man who exemplified breadth of interest and endeavour:

> Love of home, love of nature, love of books, such were the simple pieties that kept guard over John Buchan's childhood and gave him moral sinew and muscle for the struggles of his adolescence and early manhood.

I would add, to make an ideal five, that love of friends which is so evident in his splendid autobiography, *Memory Hold-the-Door*, in which so many are described, and the love of persistent enquiry. These kinds of love are characterized by wonder and devotion, just as the best motive for pursuing a sport is not to beat others but to be caught up in delight and wonder at the developing endeavour, fitness and cooperation it affords. Buchan, writing mainly about his three years as a student at Glasgow in the 1890s, says:

> I found my first real intellectual interest in the Latin and Greek classics. … The classics enjoined humility. The spectacle of such magnificence was a corrective to youthful immodesty, and, like Dr Johnson, I lived "entirely without my own approbation."
>
> (pp.31, 34f)

Violet Markham says that he was "a fine classical scholar with all the mental discipline familiarity with the classics implies" (p.121). I should rather say "with the mental discipline required and fostered by serious, critical, and cooperative study".

I have written of the joyful and disinterested love of active and cooperative learning. How far that is from the ambition to stand out from the pack that characterizes not only Hoyt but both Adam (pp.255-60) and Charlotte (p.285). A university or a college or hall of residence may now have within it many students who have not developed a strong love of any of the five kinds mentioned above: indeed some of them will be alienated from one or both parents. The first requirement is that they should be both taught and befriended by people who do indeed engage in original research but are also teachers and friends: men and women who have and by their lives commend the kinds of love, and the virtues, that are so lacking at Dupont, and are central to intellectual as well as moral development, whether in a school, a university, or a new educational and social movement such as Learningguild.

Yours,

John Howes

Compliance with Regulations in the Pharmaceutical Industry

This article by **VIGA ROGINSKI***, a member of Learningguild, is based on a talk she gave to our Friday-evening group on February 4th about her work at Broadmeadows in the pharmaceutical company CSL (Commonwealth Serum Laboratories).*

Those who work in the Regulatory Affairs sections of pharmaceutical companies are responsible for liaison between their company and health authorities. They see that the company's policies are such as to ensure compliance with regulations that concern not only permission to market but also the post-marketing stage. They have some input into drug development, so that acceptable data is generated for use in applications to make a drug available. They compile and review all submissions to health authorities, and must analyse and interpret new regulatory requirements.

In Australia there is the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA), in New Zealand Medsafe, and in the USA the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The objective of the Therapeutic Goods Act 1989 is to ensure that therapeutic goods supplied in Australia meet the requirements of safety, efficacy, quality and timely availability. Its accompanying regulations, those of customs dealing with prohibited imports, and various state legislation concerning poisons must all be taken into account.

Therapeutic goods are used in preventing, diagnosing, curing or alleviating a disease, ailment, defect or injury, and to modify or inhibit a physiological process. They are divided into medicines, such as antibiotics, vaccines, vitamins and minerals, and devices, such as medical gloves, bandages, syringes, dental products, needles and pacemakers. Listed goods (identified by an AUST L number on a product label) are evaluated in terms of safety and quality only, but registered goods (with an AUST R number) in terms of safety, quality and efficacy.

It takes 10-15 years to develop and register a new pharmaceutical product. Scientists may start with 8000 to 10,000 new chemical substances and at the end only one of them will be registered. This table sets out the timelines:

	Research concept	Preclinical testing (1st & 2nd stages)	Clinical testing	Registration, launch and distribution	Post-marketing research
Time in years	2-3	3-5	3-5	2-3	Ongoing
Number of potential substances	8-10,000	12-20	4-5	One product	

Regulatory Affairs is the safeguard of the pharmaceutical industry and involves much more than just crossing the *t*'s and dotting the *i*'s. Given the large amounts of legislation to make sure that any new treatment is as effective and free of

risk as possible, Regulatory Affairs staff help to drive the development process forward, so that a medicine reaches the market without delay. They can also offer advice that can minimize misuse and dangerous side-effects.

Their involvement begins as soon as a new drug is discovered, and it continues long after the finished product reaches the shelves of the local chemist or hospital pharmacy. There are stringent testing requirements set by governments worldwide at every stage of this process, and they must be met by comprehensive and accurate information on top of convincing analysis and results. So before the documentation required by the regulatory bodies (sometimes up to 50,000 pages) can be submitted, it's down to the people in Regulatory Affairs to make sure that the right tests have been done, at the right times, with the right interpretation of results.

Even when a licence to sell a new treatment has been granted, the work does not end there. It is a huge responsibility to make sure that the medicine's packaging is accurate and tells recipients about potential drawbacks as well as the benefits they can expect. Once it is on sale, the potential to gather more feedback from users increases massively. If the licence is to be renewed after its five-year limit, that information must be gathered and studied.

Those who work in Regulatory Affairs get a holistic view of a drug's life span. By liaising with so many different people, from drug development teams through to people in marketing and legal affairs, as well as external health authorities, they serve as a lynch pin. It's important, then, to be comfortable with a host of different issues concerning pharmaceutical data and basic drug design, and be able to interpret chemical and clinical trial data and communicate with all the different groups encountered. It is vital to understand both scientific and legal arguments. There are plenty of challenges of various kinds, as staff need to anticipate occasions when criticisms of an application may arise and be in a position to put to regulators a strong case.

A person interested in science but not necessarily wanting to work in a lab may find attractive a career in Regulatory Affairs. There is the great satisfaction of knowing that, partly because of one's own work, the quality, safety and efficacy of therapeutic goods are at a very high level.

Typical positions are Regulatory Affairs Officer/Scientist/Executive, in an area of clinical research (with permission to carry out clinical trials), manufacturing, or sales and marketing. Occasionally people join a pharmaceutical company straight from school and work their way up from an administrative role, but the vast majority of new recruits come from university, often with the Ph.D. degree in one of a great range of sciences. They may have studied some form or forms of chemistry, biology, microbiology, medicine, pharmacology, toxicology or veterinary science.

When we speak of drug **safety**, we have in mind the need to prove that a drug is not toxic. A drug's **quality** is a matter of its being consistently the same and compliant with the standards. Its **efficacy** is its achieving what it claims to achieve, and that is determined during clinical studies conducted in three stages: first on animals, then in healthy people, and finally in patients with a disease or disorder.

Why study the history of environmental change?

HILARY HOWES *is engaged in research in environmental salinity, studying the history of salinity management in the Shepparton irrigation district, with a view to a thesis for a Master's degree at the University of Melbourne. In the past six years she has taken degrees there in Arts and Science and the Diploma in Modern Languages. She is a resident tutor at Queen's College, teaching history and German. On May 6th she spoke to the Friday-evening group on the subject of her Honours thesis in history last year: attitudes to the pollution of Merri Creek and other Melbourne waterways in the 19th century.*

I have become inured, though not yet resigned, to the response of others when I name environmental history as my area of interest. "Oh! … What's that?" More than forty years since its inception, a discipline with so much of value to contribute to discussions of major environmental issues at all levels ought to enjoy more public attention, and especially in those areas where the benefit would be greatest.

The continuing failure of environmentalists to explore past environmental damage and change results, I believe, at least partly from the largely artificial distinction still drawn between the arts and the sciences. Environmental studies continue to be regarded as belonging primarily to science, and as such remain subject to the common fallacy that the sciences are self-sufficient and have little need of history. No field of study, I suggest, can be considered complete which does not include an understanding of its own past. History has been traditionally human-centred; environmental history, by contrast, seeks to redress the balance in favour of a more holistic approach, which regards people and place as both interdependent and reciprocally influential, and puts human relationships with nature into a cultural framework.

What, then, are the specific benefits of environmental history to environmentalists? First, a better understanding of history can help correct common and unhelpful preconceptions. It is still commonly assumed, for example, that modern western societies have been the only ones to cause large-scale and long-term change to the natural environment; and many environmentalists continue to argue that non-European societies have invariably had a more harmonious, less interventionist relationship with their environment than their western counterparts. Such generalisations are not only patronising, often portraying indigenous cultures as "primitive", unchanged and unchanging in their relationship to their environment; they are simply incorrect. Study after study has demonstrated the range and diversity of relationships between people and environment, and the surprisingly heavy environmental impacts of many societies other than our own. Depictions of indigenous Australians as custodians of a timeless, unchanging land have been overturned by recent palynological (fossil pollen) studies showing that Aboriginal people used fire as a tool for extensive management of the Australian landscape, to promote and retain an open environment suitable for food species such as kangaroos and wallabies; it is suggested that this 'firestick farming' further favoured particular vegetation types and fire-

adapted species already advantaged by earlier climatic change. Tim Flannery's *The Future Eaters* chronicled the role of the Maori in the extinction of the New Zealand megafauna, particularly the moa, long before European settlement. It has even been proposed that the famous moors of Yorkshire, England, immortalised in novels such as Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, were in fact covered by extensive tracts of deciduous forest before the advent of the Neanderthals' stone axes. I would by no means wish to suggest that non-western traditions have no contribution to make to our understandings of the natural world. A better knowledge of Aboriginal fire regimes before European settlement, for example, would have important implications for current vegetation management in many of Australia's national parks. However, the incorporation of non-western understandings and practices into existing and future environmental management strategies must be based on accurate and detailed knowledge of these practices, not on blurred generalisations and romanticised projections onto other societies of attitudes we consider desirable in our own.

Studies of the impacts of past societies on the natural world offer environmentalists an understanding not only of how humans shape their environment, but of how it shapes them. Environmental determinists such as Jared Diamond (*Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fate of Human Societies*) have perhaps overstated the influence of environment on human societies, but certainly there are very clear examples of civilisations whose decline is attributable primarily to environmental factors. The once-mysterious fate of the inhabitants of Rapa Nui (Easter Island) has largely been explained by an overuse of biological resources, particularly shellfish, birds, and timber, which led to a chain of disasters – deforestation, famine, warfare, collapse of civilisation and population decline – the end-results of which were a grassland steppe denuded of the giant palms which once covered it, and a remnant population torn by constant warfare over the island's remaining resources. Some three millennia earlier and half a world away, the once-thriving ancient civilisation of Sumer in southern Mesopotamia broke down around 1700 BC as a result of progressive siltation and salinisation caused by extensive irrigation without sufficient drainage. The effects of this damage were long-lasting; soil instability and salinity continue to marginalise agriculture in an area whose fertility was once legendary throughout the ancient world. The experiences of such societies offer important insights into environmental challenges confronting us today. John Flenley and Paul Bahn suggest in the appropriately-named *Easter Island: Earth Island* that the disastrous effects of unsustainable resource use observed on Easter Island represent in microcosm the fate threatening our own resource-hungry global community; and the decline of Sumerian civilisation has grave implications for Australia's mushrooming salinity crisis. The claim that history has little to offer the sciences appears entirely untenable in the face of such examples.

In the process of learning about the past, students of environmental history also frequently find themselves refining and adjusting assumptions and stereotypes of which they may not previously have been aware. It is easy and tempting to assume that earlier societies were simply ignorant of the environmental consequences of their actions. To a certain extent they were; and we should not judge the errors of the past too harshly, since our own record would hardly stand such pitiless scrutiny. Yet it is unhelpful and oversimplistic to assume that our predecessors never noticed the damage they were causing. Rather, pre-existing philosophies informed individuals' understandings of the natural world, and were often used to justify behaviours which

today would be considered irresponsible and exploitative. My own research into industrial and domestic pollution of the Merri Creek during the nineteenth century uncovered a range of attitudes to pollution and resource use, conditioned by both dominant belief systems and individual agendas. Suburban councils, particularly those dominated by powerful industrialists for whom the creek represented a cheap and convenient conduit for waste disposal, vehemently opposed attempts to curb their polluting activities, claiming that "rivers are Nature's outlets" (*Collingwood Mercury*, 1887) and that their opponents were simply too fastidious. Even parties lacking such evident vested interests were prepared to accept appalling water pollution as an inevitable consequence of urban progress; in his self-congratulatory *Victoria and Its Metropolis* (1888), the essayist Andrew Sutherland dismissed the "black current of the Yarra … the foul decay at its filthy bed" with the airy question "Are not all great cities so environed?" Local residents, on the other hand, daily exposed to the stench arising from the Merri, were equally vehement in their demands for comprehensive reform. The state authorities to whom these concerns were chiefly addressed, attempting to balance health and sanitation concerns with imperatives of economic progress, resorted to existing utilitarian and anthropocentric ideologies to assess options for anti-pollution action. E.G.Fitzgibbon, the town clerk of Melbourne for many years and highly respected, supported the installation of a mains sewerage system, but declared in 1889 that he could see "no objection" to using the Saltwater (Maribyrnong) River as a drain: "Seeing that the river is of salt water, and not potable, I do not look upon [it] at all with the same consideration as I should if it were a fresh-water river, the water of which was capable of being drunk." These and similar attitudes still resonate within Australian society. To change or modify them requires that we first acknowledge their existence, and have some awareness of their past and ongoing influence on our own society's relationship with the environment.

It is also important to recognise that attitudes to the environment were by no means universal within a given society, nor did they always fit predicted patterns. While nineteenth-century opponents of the pollution of Melbourne's waterways were predominantly motivated by sanitary concerns, some individuals also deplored the damage to the waterways themselves. Alderman Thomas O'Grady's 1881 report on the condition of the Yarra displayed remarkable ecological vision. He declared that the river "in lieu of being treated as a common sewer … should be recognised as nature's most valuable boon to the district – a possession to be lovingly cared for and conserved". Andrea Gaynor's studies of salinity in the West Australian wheatbelt have contradicted the common assumption that farming and rural communities are generally characterised by exploitative and proprietorial attitudes to the environment. Her findings demonstrate that unsustainable agricultural and settlement practices in this area were in fact driven primarily by state and federal governing bodies. Their desire for increased economic productivity and excessive faith in the ability of science to overcome environmental restrictions led them to ignore or trivialise the concerns expressed by settlers observing at first hand the ravages of increasing salinity on their land. A detailed knowledge of history can help to counteract the temptation to make unjustified assumptions about the attitudes of past societies to their environment.

Studies of past conflicts concerning the environment can offer campaigners valuable insights into factors that might hamper or undermine responsible environmental management. Attempts to curb the pollution of the Merri were largely hindered by urban fragmentation: local councils, lacking both the finances and the

motivation to address the problem themselves, but unwilling, because of their fear of losing their control of works and finances, to resign responsibility to a central administrative body, bickered unproductively throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century and on into the twentieth. Such difficulties in reaching a holistic solution through a number of small governing bodies continue to confront Australian governments today. One instance is the ongoing attempt in three States to improve the health of the Murray-Darling Basin. An awareness of the difficulties and failings of previous management strategies can assist environmentalists in modifying and improving their own techniques to achieve better outcomes. The recent publication of Geoff Mosley's *Let the Whales Swim Free! History of the Efforts of the Australian Whale Protection Groups 1973 to 2003*, which explicitly states the importance of 'having a record from which we might learn from the successes and failures so that we are better prepared for the ongoing campaign', suggests that today's environmentalists are becoming increasingly aware of the many benefits associated with studying the history of damage to and change in environments.

A foundation for AIDS patients and a women's movement in Karnataka

The writer is **MARGARET HOWES***, who is the coordinator of SASH (Support for Asylum Seekers at Hearings) and Learningguild's Subscriptions Secretary.*

In February 2005, John and I were in South India for five days, benefiting from our son Stephen's frequent flyer points on Air India. The itinerary he had arranged included visits to two memorable non-government organisations in Karnataka, both working to help the underprivileged.

The first, in Bangalore, was the Freedom Foundation established in 1991 by Dr Ashok Rau. For the first three years it assisted those suffering from alcoholism and addiction dependency, but in 1996 expanded its care to HIV-positive people in Bangalore, the first organisation to do so in India. Now it has expanded its work and operates in six other centres, such as Hyderabad.

We were fortunate to meet Dr Rau. He started the Foundation as a result of working in the USA in the 1980s, where he witnessed the problems caused by HIV and AIDS, as well as losing some close friends to AIDS. With his friend Dr Karl Sequeira, who died in 2004, the Freedom Foundation Centre for the care and support of AIDS- and HIV-affected persons was set up at Hennur Village, on the outskirts of Bangalore. It was funded by the sale of Ashok Rau's sound system, even though his mother did not really approve of this venture. She had other ideas for her brilliant son

and suggested that he put his project on hold until he had established himself as a leading psychotherapist.

The Foundation adopts a holistic approach to those who seek its help and has expanded its services as new needs become evident. For example, it soon became obvious that it was not enough to assist the men who tested positive. There were their wives to consider. They, in turn, required particular help when their husbands died, for they needed not only medication but also help in managing the affairs of the family, something they had not previously had to deal with. Then there were the children. They too needed support as well as medication, particularly when they became orphans. The Foundation, wherever possible, placed the orphaned children within their extended family and provided whatever extra assistance was required. When ill, the children could come to the Centre knowing that they would be cared for and not sent back until and unless they felt ready to go. There were, of course, regular medical check-ups and continuing medication. Sometimes their family rejected them and then the Centre would make them welcome.

Support for the Foundation comes not only from the local government but also from around the world. We saw at one centre a multicoloured new playground, recently donated by Rotary Clubs from the US. It certainly brightened the rather drab surroundings. Over the years the Foundation has received various honours. In June 2001 it was recognised by UNAIDS for best practice in comprehensive care and support and as a centre of excellence. Then in April 2002 Ashok Rau was awarded a fellowship by the Ashoka Foundation, a global organisation based in the US which recognises innovative ideas and their successful implementation.

Despite the recognition and associated grants that the Foundation and its founder have received, it was clear from the two properties we visited that it does not have extensive financial support. The facilities were all clean, the staff friendly and caring, but resources clearly limited. Despite the lack of any luxuries Dr Rau told us that if a child requires one of the recent but expensive drugs then he or she is given it regardless of the cost and whether or not the Foundation can afford it at that moment. Their policy is to give the drug to the child and find the money afterwards.

It was certainly enlightening and inspiring to meet Dr Rau, who devotes so much of his life to relieving the sufferings of others.

The following day we and our driver made an early start. We travelled north-east for two hours on a main road. At a designated intersection a guide met us and piloted us into the small village of Honnsetthalli and to the headquarters of Grama Vikas and Grameena Mahila Okkutaa (GMO). The latter is a rural women's organisation comprising 325 rural women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in 170 villages in Karnataka.

These enterprises were started by Dr N.K.A. Iyer, who spent most of his working life in Assam as a wood technologist. Then he spent fifteen years as an administrator at a school in Rishi Valley. There he read about the malnutrition in many village schools and realised that he was working in a privileged school. So, in

1980, aged 60, he left his comfortable existence and went to live in the village that had the highest rate of malnutrition, Honnsetthalli.

He soon realised that the many problems in the village would be best tackled by focusing on the women. He called his new organisation Grama Vikas (Village Development), sought support from some major NGOs such as Oxfam, and then advertised new jobs in social work for which only women were invited to apply. Given the attitudes in India to women and their place in society, it is surprising that he had numerous responses to this advertisement. Eleven girls were selected and sent to a course in rural development.

Once trained, they were sent in pairs to seven villages with instructions to concentrate on the women. The girls stayed in the villages and ran crèches, fed the children with nutritionally balanced meals, and instructed women in child care. They also surveyed the villages, concentrating on problems, opportunities and resources.

After a year Iyer instituted Friday evening pujas (worship ceremonies) at the crèches, after which there was group singing. Then slowly discussion was introduced. In the meantime the men could only sit at a distance and watch. Eventually the women asked if Grama Vikas could offer them any kind of help. A small loan of 150 rupees was offered and the women were instructed to buy sheep and rear them with a view to selling their wool and breeding. Thus began the first self-help groups that now constitute GMO.

When the women received the first profits from the wool of their sheep they were instructed to buy themselves a new saree, and a truck load of sarees arrived at the village for them to choose from. The current organiser of GMO described their joy: “The women were incredulous. For many of them it was the first ‘new’ saree of their lives. They were shrill with delight and close to tears”.

From then on the news of this original group spread far and wide. Between 1984 and 1992 women from the original seven villages fanned out, dressed in bright sarees and singing specially created songs, to persuade women to start SHGs to better themselves. They told them of available loans, opportunities and rights, and the importance of child care, environment, education and health. Friday-evening women’s clubs or SHGs sprang up everywhere. The membership swelled from the original 76 to over 5000 organised into 200 SHGs.

Grama Vikas began to inform the SHGs of the schemes and resources the government had announced for their benefit. It urged them to rise and demand these as a right. They were taken to banks and government departments and taught their ways. They were shown how to apply, how to follow up and what responsibilities would be involved. The world of the women began to “widen and grow”.

Now Iyer realised that it was important for the development of the women’s movement that Grama Vikas should withdraw and move on to other issues. He organised a conference of all SHGs at which they formed Grameena Mahila Okkuta. A rough translation is ‘Federation of the People’s Self-Help Banks’. Its total membership is about 6,000, with clusters formed by several neighbouring groups Most of the women are Dalits (untouchables) or from other “backward castes”, but

increasingly the social and economic needs that these SHGs try to meet relate to the whole village.

GMO has put together a variety of examples of the power of women to get problems resolved and projects completed. (This is available on the web using Google and putting in either Grameena Mahila Okkuta or Gender at Work, and then opening 'Women of Substance'.)

Here is one example. The women of Kavarananhalli, a small village of 145 families, battled the problems caused by the men's alcoholism. The problem was that while the village was very peaceful in the daytime when the men worked in the stone quarries and the women sold vegetables in a nearby township, in the evening it was a different story. The men would start drinking, use up most of their earnings and, when drunk, abuse their wives and children. The women were in despair.

Then one day a group of confident women, dressed in bright sarees, came from Grama Vikas, and offered to help them organise an SHG. At one of their meetings the problems caused by alcoholism were discussed and the women were advised to write to the Excise Department and ask them to stop the supply of liquor. The Department said it would do so, but nothing happened.

The women were so angry that, armed with sticks and brooms, they blocked the path of the delivery vehicle, which was forced to turn back. The men were furious and took to smuggling liquor, but became enraged by its cost. So they disrupted one of the meetings and abused the women who, in turn, complained to the elders, who convened a meeting to discuss the matter. The men involved were fined 1,000 rupees each and had to apologize to the SHG members. The money from the fines was used to repair the local temple. From that success the women have gone from strength to strength and even managed to get a road built from their village to a nearby town.

One major advance by GMO has been the training of women to stand for local Panchyats (councils). There are also moves to put up candidates for the State elections. I met some of these young women who had either been on panchyats or assisted candidates in their campaign. They told me that word had gone around among the men of the State that these women were to be watched because "they asked awkward questions".

There was not time during our visit to go into the expansion of Grama Vikas from the emphasis on child development and the empowerment of women to its current projects on natural resource and development management. These projects are in soil and water conservation, the desilting of tanks (dams), and the application of silt on dry lands, protection of ancient trees, and promotion of non-conventional energy. One example is that in the past each village had its own dam with specific members of the village in charge of its upkeep. They undertook regular desilting and kept the tanks in good condition. Then the State government decided to form a department to take over the running of these tanks. Consequently they fell into disrepair. Now, with the aid of a grant from the World Bank, the responsibility for them has been returned to the villages and some of those who were responsible and so had the expert knowledge are now returning.

There are now about six young women on the staff, all very dedicated and, as yet, unmarried. The organisation itself is now headed by Mr M.V.N. Rao, who was recruited by Dr Iyer at the beginning of the project.

We certainly are fortunate to have been enabled to meet such fine people who battle against odds that we can hardly imagine to assist those most disadvantaged in India: Dalit women and those suffering from AIDS. Learningguild and we as individuals have made contributions to this work, and we hope to hear more about its progress.

Donations to support the help Learningguild gives to these institutions, to two Indian schools and to philosophy teachers in Cambodia may be made at our end-of-year party at 82 McCracken Street, Essendon, on the evening of Saturday December 10th, or by contacting Margaret.

Recent book design in Italy and its roots in *humanitas*

EDWARD CARUSO, *a member of Learningguild and of our philosophy seminar, is a book editor. At the Friday-evening group on February 18th he showed and talked about some beautifully produced books he had obtained in Bologna last year. This article is adapted (in Edward's absence overseas) from the more general part of the text of his talk.*

Design has always been associated with architecture, whether external or interior. It is an important part of fashion, furniture and the technological gadgets that we use, whether for communication (for example, the Macintosh iMac or the latest hi-fi valve amplifier or mobile phone) or in the latest type of food blender. Design also plays a striking part in books and other forms of publishing such as magazines or web pages. Here I concentrate on books, many of which are works of art not only because of their content but also because of their presentation. The aesthetics of a book's cover and layout should not only employ images that attract a potential reader to the content, but also provide an idea that takes him or her into the imagined world believed to have been created by the author. The book is scaled down to an image, one that if well conceived goes beyond a simple marketing ploy.

I have found in Italy some of the best book designs I know. It is very easy to spend hours in bookshops captivated by book covers alone. Italian design has always been at the cutting edge: Ducatti, Ferrari and Versace are just three of the companies that come to mind. A similar approach to design to that taken by those companies in their respective sectors is also apparent in Italian books, magazines and newspapers. For some of the reasons, we can look back to the Renaissance, even though the Romans and Etruscans were noted for their design sense as well. Some of the design

characteristics that stand out in many recently published books are a direct result of a creativity that can be linked to the Italian Renaissance. All my exhibits, many from the 2004 Artelibro Festival in Bologna, exemplify the strengths of a culture where literature, art, philosophy, history and the natural sciences have long been given much of the space they deserve now.

The Renaissance was a rediscovery and reflowering of some of the themes of the classical writers of Greece and Rome, and particularly philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle and Cicero. As one leafs through these exhibits, the philosophical debates about the "art of living" typical of these earlier times come to mind. In antiquity, the art of living was connected to an examination of the human condition and human interdependence. Virtue involved knowledge and reason – and current Italian publishing adds to that tradition a large dose of creativity.

The Latin noun '*humanitas*' is linked to the Renaissance, and to the spirit of these publications. The poet Petrarca came across the term in Cicero's *De Oratore*, and the Roman philosopher associated it with the Greeks. The term has, to begin with, suggestions of human feeling, pleasantness and geniality. It was linked to the mercifulness that tempers anger and self-interest. But it also had connotations of urbanity, civilisation and gentleness, and of intellectual accomplishment, since knowledge was necessary to understand nature and human kind. To Cicero, '*humanitas*' denoted the pursuit of wisdom by which the rational soul would know itself and discover its fellowship with God above and men below. The appreciation of fine art was also seen as a mark of humanity. Much more has been written that examines other sides of *humanitas*. Petrarca, for whom the term had Stoic connections, also wrote that suffering enabled men to feel compassion. The classical scholars and philosophers in fifteenth-century Italy came to be called humanists because they studied humanity. Gellius defined "humanity" as the education befitting the free man or the "noble spirit".

To summarise, the theme of *humanitas* that the Renaissance drew from antiquity could be said to comprise an understanding of human society and of the nature and merits of a liberal education, along with a recognition both of human feeling and of the intimate relations between virtue, knowledge, understanding and wisdom. (See John Stephens's *The Italian Renaissance*, p. 21.*) Human compassion can be merged with the civilising effects of education and a concern for society.

We should note the link of patronage between ruler and artist that was common in Florence during the Renaissance. The greatest achievements came from the artists' desire to please their patrons and the patrons' willingness to understand the creative needs of the artist. In this period the arts became fields in which the educated could perceive intellectual and moral worth. The governing classes in the Renaissance aided classical studies and the visual arts out of a desire to attain moral and intellectual fitness. Artists were seen as visionaries with a public function, and it was the mark of moral and intellectual excellence to understand them.

* As well as this book, whose full title is *The Italian Renaissance: The Origins of Intellectual and Artistic Change before the Reformation* (Longman, London and New York, 1990), Italo Calvino's *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* (Vintage, New York, 1993) may be recommended.

The senior secondary and tertiary English courses we need

ANDREW THORNTON, *who wrote about an encyclopedia of mythology in the last* Learningguild Letter *(2.'04), explains his dissatisfaction with what schools and universities at present offer to a native speaker who wants to understand the structures of English and use the language well. In late 2005 and 2006 he will be studying English within Learningguild, attending, among other books, to the two that are not prescribed but recommended for our examination (see the green leaflet), which he will continue to take.*

Suppose that a person, upon finishing Year 12, reached one or both of these conclusions:

[1] I want to develop my skills in English to the highest extent.

[2] I want my career to be in reading and writing English in some capacity, whether as a journalist, English teacher, editor of books, copywriter or something else.

This person might well ask two more questions. Has the educational curriculum been helpful up to Year 12? What opportunities exist beyond that year for working towards the fulfilment of the two desires set out above? I shall discuss what, in my opinion, are the answers to these two questions, and make many criticisms of both secondary and tertiary curriculum. My critique of education is intended to be constructive and carefully considered, based mainly on my thirteen years of primary and secondary education and my experience as a university student, and related to the fact that I have both the desires.

At secondary school level there is an annual competition called the Westpac Mathematics Test. Excellent in its challenge, enjoyability and educative value, the Westpac Test has certificates for both participation and achievement. To my knowledge no comparable test of literary abilities occurs at either primary or secondary level; that is a conspicuous and regrettable gap in the English curriculum. The interest in literacy held in common, one would presume, by both schools and business makes this absence of a commercially sponsored English test almost inexplicable to me. Like the Westpac mathematics test, an English test could have a multiple-choice format for both comprehension and technical elements, making it amenable to computer processing. Such a format would also be cheap for the participant, who would pay only a few dollars to cover processing. A criticism of the multiple-choice format for English could be made: it is more suitable for mathematics. That being said, I think that the multiple-choice sections of many scholarship exams, in their English sections, have provided some tests of real understanding by asking which of several words is the closest synonym for a word used in a paragraph, which of several words best describes a character, which of a series of sentences is correct, or to which grammatical category a word in its context belongs.

My more general criticism of English teaching is at the senior years of secondary schooling. The range of subjects offered in years 11 and 12 is, in my view, inadequate: generic English with attention to texts and to presentation of argument, English Literature, and in recent years "English Language". Having looked at the exams for this final subject, I find that it is a mixture of linguistics and language analysis. While that is a step towards meeting the urgent need for a greater sensitivity among students to the English they hear and read, it does not overcome that emphasis upon imagination, rather than clear, grammatical and apt expression, which has been the bane of English education since the 1960s.

Thus what kind of subject would I introduce to fulfil the two desires I put at the head of this article? An English subject is sorely needed that introduces the secondary school student to future career paths in English, and the knowledge, qualifications and experience needed for them. The only course that offers anything like this is the Certificate in Professional Writing and Editing at TAFE colleges. I once considered doing that course but chose a university degree instead. The certificate TAFE offers contains some technical learning including some grammar, a broad range of activities in both factual and fictional writing, and some optional practical application of literary skills through work experience and listening to various speakers from industry who describe their work as editors, journalists and the like. A VCE subject of the kind I have described would be a boon for the student with our second desire, and its absence is a blatant, even scandalous, neglect of this student's needs.

My third criticism is at the tertiary level of education. It is difficult for the student to find a course leading to the fulfilment of our two desires. There are few or no courses that provide an excellent education in sentence structure, including such devices as parallelism, and in the apt use of a wide vocabulary; the ones that claim to teach communication seldom attend very closely to the principles and details of that structure and the specific dangers to bear in mind. An Arts course is too general, and even in linguistics and literature there is rarely any focus on the kinds of skills and sensitivities in English tested by the Learningguild exam. There are some correspondence courses such as are offered by the Writing School in Queensland. I have little respect for their standard of teaching after looking up their website: for a school that claims to teach computerized publishing in one of its units, it is of shallow content and careless layout! There is the Certificate of Professional Writing and Editing offered by TAFE colleges. That is probably the best option available for anyone seeking to fulfil the two desires. It contains some grammatical teaching but not to the standard of an A in the Learningguild exam. I am tempted to say that a tertiary qualification leading to a thorough fulfilment of the desires does not, to my knowledge, exist in Australia. The only reason why I cannot draw this conclusion is that there is a professional writing course taught by Baden Eunson at Monash University. I am unsure if this course would satisfy the two desires; I learnt about it only recently.

A new tertiary course is needed, in any case, to fill this gaping hole in the educational landscape. The standards of admission should be high and the coursework should include all aspects of grammar, sentence structure and editing, and some elements of clear thinking. The student would be assisted to acquire considerable skill in the use of English. Anyone who prepares for and takes the

Learningguild exam has the opportunity to develop such skill by working to achieve an A grade. That process of learning, fostered by individual assistance related to both materials and annotation, may be contrasted with the watered-down education discernible at all levels.

WHAT'S A GOOD INTRODUCTION TO …

HUMAN RIGHTS?

MILAN RADOS, *who came to Australia from Croatia in 1974, has been a builder and now conducts a brick-cutting business. He is an Arts graduate of La Trobe, where he studied politics and philosophy, and a member of Learningguild's philosophy seminar. Here he recommends Professor Peter Bailey's book of 1993,* **Bringing Human Rights to Life**. *(It was published by the Federation Press of Annandale, NSW.) Peter Bailey continues to teach in the Law Faculty of the Australian National University.*

This book has accurate and eloquent discussion of a broad spectrum of different kinds of human rights, and is an excellent introduction to them. Very interesting cases from all over the world are presented clearly and vividly, so that what might otherwise seem dry and abstract legal concepts are grounded in the dynamics of actual situations well described.

In his Introduction Peter Bailey distinguishes between human rights and citizens' rights. The first apply to all humans irrespective of the country in which they live. Human rights are, he says, essentially "statements of the standards of behaviour we should be able to expect between individuals and groups" (p.viii). Such statements provide a very important way of bringing about justice and a fair go for everyone. They "provide a new way of looking at vexed problems" (p.xi), and means for obtaining agreements on the solutions to them without resorting to violence, bloodshed and abuse of power. Bailey aims in this book to identify the essential rights that people should enjoy in order to live in an environment that provides security and maximum opportunities for everyone. These rights are necessary if we are to live in a community that operates in accordance with principles of justice and equality.

Part I is solely devoted to group rights, which Bailey sees as essential if the members of such groups are to enjoy their individual rights. The claim that all human rights are the rights of individuals against the group, the community or the state shows, in his view, too narrow an understanding of both what it is to be a human and what are the rights that one is entitled to simply because of one's humanity. To see an individual as "only a free-standing, autonomous unit" is for Bailey an illusion, because so much that is significant for an individual is derived from being a member of a group (p.11). This chapter deals with three different kinds of group rights, and he gives examples in each case: the rights of indigenous people (Aborigines of Noonkanbah, the Penan of Sarawak and the Maori of Orakei), the right of people to

self-determination (in Bangladesh, East Timor and Lithuania), and the right of minorities within a nation state (the Amish of Wisconsin and the French-speakers in Belgium). It is good to see that Bailey did not accept the orthodox view of East Timor and Indonesia expressed in 1990 by our then Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator Evans, in the words Bailey quotes in a note on p.22: "there does come a time when the reality of an annexation or an absorption of this kind has to be accepted".

In the development of group rights Bailey recognises the "two-pronged" challenge to the traditional idea of sovereign, self-contained and autonomous states (p.47). One prong is the desire of different peoples for self-determination, and the other an increasing tendency of minorities to assert their rights. According to Bailey, the international community is progressively addressing these issues through different forums, such as the UN, with noticeable achievements.

Part II deals with "life problems", such as those concerning euthanasia, privacy and the environment. In his discussion of euthanasia, Bailey distinguishes a situation in which a person is unable to make choices, because of a severe disability or a comatose state, from one in which he or she is able to choose. He describes different approaches and attitudes from the perspectives of the individual and members of his or her family, the medical and legal profession, and religious and political authorities. The attempt is carefully made to balance different claims in order to identify the rights that would provide guidance in these vexed, traumatic and tragic situations, In his considerations of the right to privacy Bailey discusses the case of "Jane Doe" in Texas, and her struggle against the law that banned abortion in that state unless the life of the mother was in danger. There is also the case of James Malone in England, who claimed to have been unlawfully monitored by the policing authority. After an exhausting procedure in a British court, this case was brought to the European Court of Human Rights. Bailey examines different procedures, pronouncements and verdicts. In his consideration of the right to a sustainable environment, he examines the Chernobyl disaster and the plight of the forest dwellers in Brazil, describing different approaches of governments and the attempts of the international community to deal with these and similar problems.

Part III deals with ways of achieving equality and considers discrimination and affirmative action. Writing of Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King, Bailey claims that "at the heart of racial discrimination lie the pursuit of power, the exploitation of social dominance and the practice of oppression" (p.120). Specific cases of discrimination against women are discussed. Of affirmative action Bailey says that any form of it will harm someone (p.141). Part III also considers the rights of children in times of war, and discusses the case of the Gillick children in England, whose parents attempted to reverse the decision of the Department of Health and Social Security to allow doctors to provide advice about contraception to persons under sixteen, without the consent of their parents. Bailey strongly supports the idea that children should have rights and that their rights should increase along with their age.

Writing on liberty and security for individuals in Part IV, Bailey presents the case of Monica Mignone in Argentina, who, like so many of her compatriots, "disappeared" at the hands of the military junta that ruled that country during the seventies and eighties. Her fate never became known to her family. There is also the

case of a mental patient, Vera, in a Canberra hospital, who refused electroconvulsive treatment (ECT) for her illness. She was consequently urged by psychiatrists to receive it, and did so with the effect that her condition became much worse. In order to examine the right to work, Bailey presents the cases of Karen Green in Tasmania and Joseph Brodsky in Russia. The killing of so many protesters in Tiananmen Square, Beijing, in 1989 and the protest of some Austrian doctors against the practice of abortion are discussed in relation to the right to peaceful protest. The treatment of IRA suspects in Northern Ireland and the case of Jeffrey Cosans in Scotland, whose parents objected to corporal punishment, are used to examine the right not to be subjected to torture or degrading treatment.

Part V discusses different ways in which human rights can be advanced. Bailey emphasises the importance of limiting the organised legal force of the state to protection and enforcement of human rights. In addition, he recognises a positive role that courts can play, especially when the legal system embodies such rights. Local and international political action, as well as that of non-government agencies, can bring about very significant results. A very important role is ascribed to education as well as to law.

Concluding comments in Part VI deal briefly with the relationship between power and rights and the benefits that follow when power, and especially power vested in the State, is well used, as well as the dangers when it is not.

The book emphasises and illustrates the universality of human rights and the value of appeal to them as a way of bringing about justice and fairness in the world. After every chapter there is a short segment titled "For Further Reading", in which books that deal with specific issues are listed and briefly commented on. *Bringing Human Rights to Life* is an exceptionally good book for becoming acquainted with the far-reaching call for the recognition of human rights and the dynamics of achieving it.

Peter Bailey and his brother Vernon have accepted an invitation to speak about their life's work, in Peter's case in the field of human rights and in Vernon's in many countries with the World Health Organization, at a meeting to be held on Sunday afternoon October 29th 2006 at Queen's College in the University of Melbourne, organized by the Friends of the Library at that College.

JH