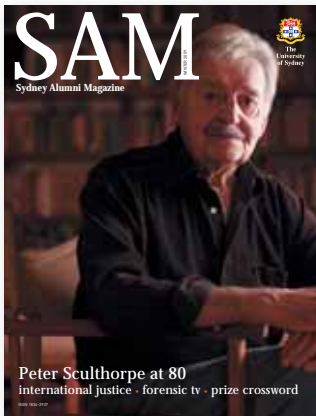


letters



NOTHING LIKE A DAME

I think Claire Sellwood over-emphasises forensic violence on TV and has missed an important point in her article "Good Gore" (SAM Winter '09). As she says, CGI (computer generated imagery) and make-up (graphic) artistry have "heightened the reality of on-screen violence". But in forensic terms is it really violent or just old-fashioned make-up tarted up by means of new technology? Are forensic experts now to be accused of violence? Surely not?

In addition, I believe her numerous quotes from university scholars also overemphasise the violent nature of forensic drama programs. Dr Natalya Lusty is quoted as saying that our attraction to "screen violence and cruelty" is due partly to the removal of and obsession with "violence and death" in our lives. Could it not be that we, as an audience, are simply amazed by the cleverness of the computer-generated images – as we were with the special effects in *King Kong* generations ago? Lusty goes on to say that screen violence allows us to "explore the conflict that we know exists in the world" and that characters like Gil Grisson (*CSI*) and Tony Hill (*Wire in the Blood*) represent the "complexity of individuals". I agree with the words "conflict" (the basis of all good drama) and "complexity" not because I agree with Lusty's arguments but because now we finally have good drama between the sexes. The so-called forensic violence is the subplot; the conflict between males

and females is what carries the story. Women are now equal to their male counterparts, who previously dominated crime/cop shows. To me the introduction of women into forensic TV drama/literature over recent years is due to women writers realising we have been sorely underrepresented in the world of forensic crime drama. Whatever one thinks of Patricia Cornwell's novels she has created a heroine/role model in Kay Scarpetta. The same too can be said of Lynda La Plante's character, Jane Tennison, in *Prime Suspect*.

These are women we can admire – despite the so-called violence – and in some cases identify with. They are strong, complex, vulnerable, and sexy. They make us feel good as women. However, despite Sellwood's opening comment that the forensic crime genre has "raised eyebrows" because of the contributions of women, she fails to identify the reason why women are so highly represented. They make good drama; pure and simple.

Denise Hunter (BA '93).
Artarmon NSW

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters to the editor should include: full name, address (not for publication), degree(s) and year(s) of graduation where applicable, daytime phone number and/or email address.

Please address your letters to:

The Editor
SAM
K6.05 Quadrangle A14
University of Sydney NSW 2006

Letters may also be sent electronically (with full contact details) to:

d.simmonds@usyd.edu.au

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Space permits only a selection of letters to be published here. Letters may be edited by the editor for space or other reasons.

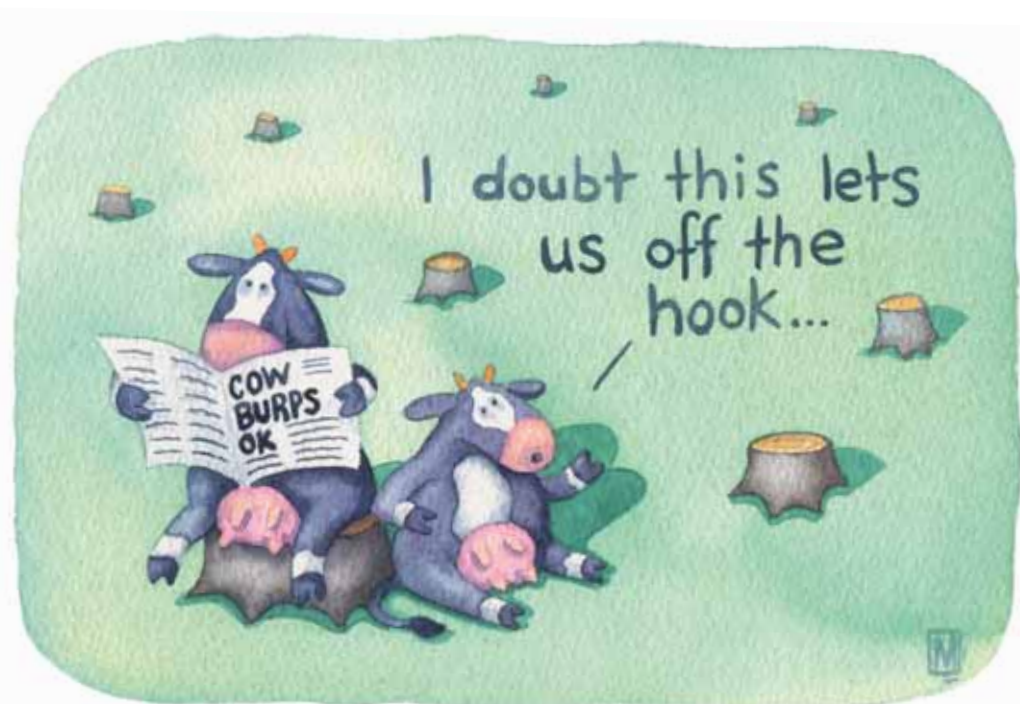
AGRICULTURAL SLANT

I wish to present my slant on two phrases in the letters pages (SAM Autumn '09).

First, the definition of faith "as an illogical belief in the occurrence of the improbable". This well defines the evolutionist but I would describe my faith as "confidence that God will do what He says He will do because history has demonstrated His power, wisdom, good character and faithfulness". The "ancient texts" are not necessarily wrong because they are old. Rather, they are the most studied writings on earth and urge us to use our minds. Moses was a scholar who carefully recorded selected events up to his time using common knowledge (800 years is not long after the flood) and patriarchal records. Later writers confirmed those who had written earlier, as they extended the story to their own time. Even after 2000 years, we have strong historical data to confirm the reality and influence of Jesus Christ.

My career has been in experimental agricultural science. All genetic improvement I have seen has been by design of breeding programs to exploit existing genetic





Illustrations by Maggie Renvoize

variation. On the other hand, we have witnessed rapid extinction rates but no new species have evolved. We are setting up gene banks to delay the decay. I know of no evidence for any evolution ("goo to you" gain in genetic information) although there is plenty of disintegration of systems. I know of no evidence for an "old earth" that is not better explained by "young earth" theories.

Some have illogically assumed that if the universe is large enough and time long enough, then evolution *must* happen (that 0 times infinity equals 1). But the eternity of matter in an infinitely old boundless universe is just an illogical assumption. While there have not been enough creationist scientists to address every issue, many key issues have been addressed by intelligent men who accept the ancient texts as historical. There is a huge literature albeit not in the "scientific peer reviewed journals" of the Darwinian era. If God is, then to require "science" deny Him by definition is illogical. Rather, Jesus always taught spiritual truth by analogy (parable) with "nature".

Arthur Gilmour (BScAg '69)
Cargo NSW

CLIMES ARE A'CHANGING

My work these days is in preparing landowners to cope with climate change. While the debate on carbon trading is mired in political brinkmanship the critical issue of adaptation has been pushed into the shadows. I would like to remind readers and the University

that regardless of any action on carbon our climate will continue to change for at least 20 years.

The implications of climate change will reach into every part of our society. Because climate is the sum of episodic weather this means that extreme events can occur at any time, though their probability is cumulative. Consequently, very long forward planning is required to avoid major consequences and expenses.

There are teaching spaces in the University that on some days will be lethal, especially if air conditioning fails, as will be increasingly likely. Water for the grounds will be less available unless plans are made in redevelopment for underground storm water storages. Toilets flushed with potable water are likely to become a target of taxation. Storm damage will be more severe and perhaps uninsurable.

The time to start these preparations is now.

Greg Reid (MSc '78)
Murwillumbah NSW

RUMINATING ON HOT AIR

Why is it that scientists, particularly biological scientists, appear not to be asking why biogenic methane emissions, such as those from ruminant livestock, have been given the same global warming potential (GWP) as fossil methane? Livestock methane emissions are carbon neutral as they do not add carbon to the atmosphere. They involve the removal of CO₂ from the atmosphere by plants, emission of methane

during digestion of the plants eaten by the animals and its return to atmospheric CO₂ as it is oxidised. By contrast, fossil methane adds to the atmosphere carbon that has not been there for many millions of years.

In 1992, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reported that the direct GWP of methane was 11 times that of CO₂, the factor that should apply to livestock, and added to it the indirect effect of its breakdown products, mainly CO₂, to give a total GWP of 21, the factor that applies to fossil methane. However, the GWP of 21 has been applied to all methane. This means that, when agriculture is included in the carbon trading scheme proposed by the Government, farmers will be required to buy twice as many emissions permits as would otherwise be necessary. It is odd that, to date, scientists have allowed this situation to pass unchallenged.

Dr Graham Faichney
(MScAgr '63) Mosman NSW

RIPOSTE TO THE RODNEYS

Letters (SAM Autumn '09) brought some criticism of my letter published in the Summer issue. I would like to answer some of the points raised. Rodney Enderby gives an opinion that is based on assuming far too much about what I assume. I thought at first that my poor construction may have misled him but a re-reading of my letter convinced me that it gave no grounds for the types of assumptions (at least seven) that were the basis of his contribution.

I agree wholeheartedly with him that we should criticise "all established orthodoxy that is not open minded", that we can't "rate all theories and arguments equally" and that we should not discard established ideas unless "new evidence better supports an alternative theory or model". I think that in "unpacking" just one sentence of my letter, Rodney has inadvertently built several straw men.

Rodney Crute argues that intelligent design or creationism cannot be tested and that my beliefs "fly in the face of science". A lot depends on what we mean by "science". If Crute means a system where objective phenomena are observed, measured and subjected to controlled experiments, then how can such a "science" have anything to say about events that supposedly happened billions of years ago and have never been repeated? Such things cannot be subjected to the experimental method of inquiry. If however, he means a system where speculations are drawn about past, never-to-be repeated events, in order to construct intellectual models to explain them, using objective data as support (Ockham's Razor), then creationism is on exactly the same playing field as the "big bang". Supporters of the various "big bang" models dismiss creationist alternatives out-of-hand not by weighing up the evidence but on the basis of non-scientific presuppositions.

The second Rodney should tell the first Rodney about the history of the rejection of the "steady state" cosmological model in favour of the "big bang" and the way that the old orthodoxies were dealt with by the new boys. It might cure him of his belief that powerful elites do not act in self-interest in anti-intellectual ways.

Remember what my original letter was about – a plea to rid SAM of smart-aleck dismissiveness in

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letters

dealing with legitimate viewpoints that are very likely held by a good number of its readership. I won't comment on the letters by Moir (at least it displayed some wit) and Daffy except to say that they rather prove my original point.

Colin Maynard (BAppSc '87, MPH '94)
Ashfield NSW

THE DOG DID IT

I was rather amused by the cartoon "we walk by faith not by sight". Obviously the dog has failed to realise that the blind man *is* walking by faith: faith in the dog's ability to guide him! Faith is an action word, when we believe in a fact our actions show that we believe it to be true; that is what faith is.

As an atheist I chose to read the Bible and pray to any god that might be "out there" to reveal himself to me. I wanted to prove to all who believed in a god that it was a load of rubbish. God has had the last laugh; I have given up a career in science to teach the Bible. I walk in faith (that the Bible account is true) not by sight (the sight of Jesus in the flesh).

Sita Matthews (BscAgr '86)
Oxley ACT

THE F WORD AGAIN

I found it very interesting to note the style of the letters in your last edition supporting the intellectually fatuous concepts of creationism.

There is a psychological construct called "cognitive dissonance" whereby people believe what serves them best, no matter the amount or quality of contrary evidence. You see it all the time with people defending their children (very often boys) when they have been shown to have transgressed the law or social norms; eg footballers, sexual offenders.

What is a bit sad is to see all intellectual rigour and honesty pushed aside when the "f" word (faith) is invoked. There is no argument that can be made with people who are so willing to stop asking questions and exploring possibilities. They replace enquiry and curiosity with blind certainty and terminal acceptance.

You can expect the psychologists and religionists to respond by saying this is a simplification

(which it is) but in the end there is nothing simpler than blind faith.

Laurie Milner
(BVSc (Hons) '87 MA CVSc '04)
Richmond NSW

YET MORE DISAPPOINTMENT

I was disappointed to see that hoary old question about the existence of God rear its ugly head (*SAM* Winter '09), with all the consequent silliness invoking ancient mythology and primitive superstition.

It seems that both sides forget one basic rule in this debate: that the onus of proof lies with the affirmative side. In the absence of such proof, the negative side doesn't have to prove anything, it carries the debate and, perhaps, when this is more widely accepted we can have a rational discussion about our existence without invoking hypothetical beings and supernatural acts.

Dmitri Perno (BArch '60)
Buderim QLD

THE WINNING LETTER

This issue's copy of *Museum – the Macleays, their collections and the search for order goes to Denise Hunter (BA '93) of Artarmon NSW, for her interesting contribution to women in TV drama. Congratulations!*

Please keep the letters coming: another beautiful gift for the best letter will again be given in the Summer issue of *SAM*.



Dipping a madeleine

Pondering the question of how things change – or not – an item by Professor of Anthropology AP Elkin in the yellowed pages of *The Gazette*, October 1954, seems apposite. He began:

"A month's conference for the scholarly examination of the subject of Race Relations in World Perspective was held in Honolulu in June-July last ... the scholars were British, American (white and Negro), Australian Dutch, French, Africaner [sic] and Lebanese, Bantu, Zulu, West-Indian, Indian, Japanese and Chinese by 'race', and authorities on the regions of their special researches and experiences."

While the idea of spending a month at a conference, scholarly or otherwise, is unimaginable nowadays, the major topic is not. It was "the Negro problem" as experienced not only in the United States but also the "mixed racial problems of Central and South America, in parts of which the Negro looms large; after this, still following the Negro trail, it passed to Africa, west and east, and above all to the south, where the problems are especially tense."

Professor Elkin went on to describe how discussion moved to the Middle East, to "Russia's Asian empire, to South-East Asia and Indonesia and the Pacific" where he noted, "nations, new and old, developing pride of race, symbolised in resurgent tradition and political ambition as well as in genealogical continuity ... they experience economic perplexities and ideological pressure, even as we all do."

Plus ça change, as my Africaner grandmother never said. There are a couple of changes in *SAM*, however, and



I hope you will enjoy them. Sara Donald (BA '93 DipEd '95) (above) contributes the first of what will be a regular feature: Family Matters. Sara is a journalist, mother of two boys and lives in Newcastle; she knows first-hand about the work-life balance and will be exploring the things that matter to families because, of course, families matter.

Also, you'll find Alumni Adventures. As many readers go off on expeditions and come back with fabulous stories, we thought that sharing them – and the inspiration to do something different – would be A Good Thing. In this issue: Rome, Lake Eyre and Tanzania – not all on the same trip.

Felicitously, the cover story, by distinguished alumna Anne Summers, is on luck; and as luck would have it, her latest book is reviewed in Books – where you'll find a strong and wide selection of contenders for your attention; and the Prize Crossword is guaranteed to exercise your remaining grey cells. The rest of the mix is as eclectic as usual; the common link being that the stories and people featured here are fascinating and illuminating, as only Sydney people can be. – The Editor