Perhaps the title Crimes of Violence is telling. After all, can we really define rape and incest in terms of a crime of violence and leave out sex? Is it any more useful to define rape in this way than it was in the 70s to define rape as sex and leave out power? Given the nature of patriarchy as eroticised power, can rape be measured in terms of the level of violence acceptable in 'normal' sex acts? And, given the connection between power and sex, can a definition which recognises both be accommodated within 20th century liberal discourse which is based on the myth of 'gender-neutral' equality? Both Breckenridge and Carmody acknowledge these problems in various ways but slide away from confronting them full on.

Crimes of Violence is not just about men's rapacious sexual violence, it seems to me—although this is central to the content—but about feminism in the 90s. Perhaps the importance of this text is that it highlights the necessity for more feminist debate—between feminists in service provision, policy making, academia, and, most importantly, between states. Feminists need to undertake a thorough reappraisal of 'rape culture', male sexuality and feminist interventions. And there is a clear need to acknowledge and locate 'welfare feminism' somewhere within the political grid of feminism. Some of the writers in this collection depict welfare feminism as somehow different and more radical than liberal feminism, but at the same time as offering a more useful negotiating position than radical feminism. Is welfare feminism the only way to go? And is radical feminism really such an anachronism as this collection seems to suggest?

ROS MILLS works in the Women's Health Policy Unit of the Queensland Department of Health.
suburbs, paint peeling and trees bent on the winds...'. The demand to read on came from McKemmish's way of dealing with 80s greed, corruption, yuppies, and the fascination with the fast lane. This isn't a thriller where the bad guys get theirs, but a superb unfolding dance where crimes and lawyers and all those weaving among them move in patterned symbiosis where the 'facts' of plot and subplot are persistently overwhelmed by film noir fictions.

**Biography/letters/memoirs:** Simone de Beauvoir's *Letters to Sartre* (Radius) and Sartre's newly-translated *Witness to My Life* (Hamish Hamilton). For a commissioned article I wrote about weeks among her letters to him, his to her, her memoirs, his, and the Deirde Bar biography of her. From that welter of intertextuality I'd say: grab the lot while you can, and play around again in the fictions and histories of these moirres sacres; they still have much to give us, from lives lived as from writings written. Their own compact received or failed—judge as you will. De Beauvoir put survival ahead of the principles of resistance during the Occupation; as an intellectual Sartre faced intrepidly into absurdity and 'nothingness' while, as a man, he never did grow up. But the recent debunkings, from feminist and misogynist directions alike, have been sour and mean-spirited. From the self-involved feminisms of difference, de Beauvoir invites a return to a timely and courageous, if unfashionable, feminism of equality. The whole legendary milieu suits recession lifestyles, and rebukes the consumerist obsession.

**High Journalism:** For weeks now I've run round reading this piece of ferociously sustained, incandescent invective to anybody who'll listen. It's Christopher Hitchens' *Review-essay 'Touch of Evil',* on Walter Isaacson's *Kissinger* (*London Review of Books*, 22 October). Hitchens uses the occasion to build his case for considering Kissinger a serial mass murderer. He arranges the evidence in order and at length: Bangladesh, Chile, Cyprus, Kurdistan, East Timor; then, more briefly, Angola, Portugal, the Iran-Iraq conflict; then the man's drop-dead comments on tiananmen Square. 'Since leaving active politics, Kissinger had been looking bored an ill, as if cut off from his death-support machine... Will anyone say what Kissinger's achievement was? Will anyone point to a country, not excluding his own, which is in the slightest degree ameliorated by his attention?... There have been other war criminals, law-breakers, phoney and pathological liars during the long decline of empire and the Cold War, but they haven't... been met at every airport lounge with an orgy of sycophancy and a chorus of toadying, complicit mirth at every callous, mendacious jest.' In these days of endless, boggling equivocation, there's nothing like a shot of straight-black, uncontaminated hatred.

**Sylvia Lawson** is a freelance writer.

---

**UNCONTAMINATED HATRED**

**Late night fiction:** I often want someone to tell me a story before I go to sleep. Jan McKemmish's *Only Lawyers Dancing* (HarperCollins) was one of the few recent novels to pass the first-page test: lively and living prose, an ear for 80s argot, a sense of media bombardment and of a certain Sydney: 'the old heartbeat of the ocean fearful. So does everyone else. That's why anyone purveying such a restrictive definition of human understanding is either a clot or a reactionary.

So it would be good to end this year's roundup with three books celebrating the other side of the picture (the same picture, mind you)—the artistic one. This year I very much enjoyed *The World of Islam,* edited by Bernard Lewis and *The World of Buddhism,* edited by Gombrich (both Thames & Hudson). Like so many of the volumes produced by this house they combine prose with illustration in a way that creates a delightful experience of schizophrenia in the family. It's a compelling read and a revelation for us in ways we'd never seen before.

One final thought. One cannot mention books of 1992 without mentioning Anne Deveson's superb *Tell Me I'm Here* (Penguin) about her experience of schizophrenia in the family. It's a compelling read and a wonderful achievement.

**Robyn Williams** is producer of ABC Radio National's *Science Unit.*

---

**Savage Summer**

I have admired Jon Savage's work on and off the paddock for years and with *England's Dreaming—The Sex Pistols and Punk Rock*—the big man has thrown open the doors of the garage and roared out of the shed with the punk abaze up front of the ute. Innocent bystanders find the 'new wave' a confusing and difficult period in the history of rock. There have been plenty of confusing twists and turns since Elvis drove the first cab off the rank into Sun Records with the meter running, but the punk era of the mid-70s provided the last red hot go. Put simply, there were two great back-to-back summers way back then, the Long Hot summer of '76 and the Silver Jubilee summer the following year. They were summers of great torment in English youth and the music business. What livened the Old Dart up was a bunch of youngsters with courageous hairdressing, dolled up in bondage trousers, bin liners and razor

---

**DEC/JAN 1993 ALR 45**
VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY

It has been a year of belated discovery. Chance brought me to Maurice Gee's The Burning Boy, a book of understanding. Not since I happened upon Herman Hesse and Chaim Potok, at various ages, has any writer struck such a chord. I've since read several of his earlier books, all set in New Zealand, and found them hardly less profound. Perhaps I fell upon him at the right time.

Allan Massie has been around for years, too, writing studies in fiction of powerful characters. I can't vouch for the accuracy of The Caesars and Augustus, but it is raw, compelling and appealing, and led me towards Massie's other fine books. Peter Ackroyd is another favourite English writer; his Chatterton is worth reading even if it does not match his marvellous The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde.

A trip to South Africa to cover the cricket tour there prompted widespread reading. Two histories commended themselves: Marq De Villiers White Tribe Dreaming (the story of Afrikaners told through the story of one of its oldest and most liberal families) and Allister Sparks' essential The Mind of South Africa. I also enjoyed biographies of President Kruger and General Smuts (who published a critique of Walt Whitman at 24 and first propounded holography). To add the novels of Christopher Hope and Andre Brink is to gesture to a literature still merely sampled.

So far as Australian writing goes, my reading has been narrow. David Malouf's The Great World was marvellous, as was The Treatment and the Cure by Peter Kocan; both have been around for years. Apart from these I've concentrated on reminiscences such as The Innocent by John Kingsmill, a book about his days growing up in Bondi. Bernard Hesling's Dinkum Pommie captured the Australia of 30 years ago while Richard Twopeny's fascinating Town Life in Australia, written in 1883, spares no class of society and, as the blurb says, describes "the insanitary, tasteless mansions of the wealthy" as well as telling of the "roughs of the worst description whose favourite sport is to kick every Chinaman they come across". It was written in 1883, not 1993.

Last, but not least, a cricket book. (Why have I left sport for last, as if it were an index? It's hard to say which is worse—those who think only of sport or those who only sneer upon it.) Greg Growden's biography of Chuck Fleetwood-Smith, A Wayward Genius, is a study of a flawed, even failed man. Sport is just an activity and players are as much a mixture of hot and cold, sweet and sour as anyone else. Growden's book reminds us of this forgotten fact.

PETER ROEBUCK is a cricket columnist for the Age and the Sydney Morning Herald.

NAPOLEON SOLO

The most highly acclaimed work of fiction produced in Australia this year, Simon Leys' The Death of Napoleon, is a book that, typically, has gathered comparatively little attention within Australia itself. That is partly because it is only 105 pages long, and is therefore assumed by liberalists to be lightweight. Its subject is not Australia, nor is it even about what anti-grammarians call 'the Asia-Pacific'. Again, while full of verbal inventiveness and lateral thoughts, it is ultimately a moral, not a postmodern tale. Finally, and most significantly, it is written by a man who prefers the company of his family, books, paintings and little yacht to that of literati or glitterati.

This wonderful novella-cum-fa-
ble is introduced by a quotation from Paul Valery—a quote which ‘Simon Leys’ (aka Pierre Ryckmans, Sydney University’s Professor of Chinese Studies) says he only unearthed after he had finished writing it: “What a pity to see a mind as great as Napoleon’s devoted to trivial things such as empires, historic events, the thundering of cannons and of men... How could he fail to see that what really mattered was something else entirely?”

In the story—Ryckmans’ first published fiction, astonishingly—Napoleon escapes from St Helena and returns, dishevelled and unrecognised, to haunt the scenes of his glorious triumphs and defeats. At the village of Waterloo l’Eglise he visits the Brasserie de l’Empereur, a converted farm, on which hangs a sign: “The Emperor spent the night here before the battle. Visit Napoleon’s bedroom.” He does so, accompanied by a dozen English tourists—and realises with horror that he has never been there before. Recoiling like a cannon from such traumatic scenes, Napoleon starts to lose his identity, even his name—and gains a true understanding, in mundane relationships of “what really matters”.

In my 20 years in journalism, I have interviewed far more people on the Christopher Skase end of the spectrum (including pre-Spanish spine Skase himself) than at the Mother Theresa end. Ryckmans, like Mother T, emanates goodness—but with a more appealing sense of humour.

He came to Sydney from Belgium via Taiwan, Peking, Hong Kong and Canberra. And he is a delight: modest, witty, remarkably widely read in French, Chinese and English (though he speaks the latter impeccably, this book was written first in French, then translated by Patricia Clancy and himself). He does not seek, but nor does he seek to escape, moral confrontations. It was he who first blew the whistle on the repressiveness of Mao’s China in The Chairman’s New Clothes. He must be unique among academics in Australia in refusing to recommend his own seminal works to his students. Indeed, the Chinese works are now mostly unavailable in Australia.

The Death of Napoleon rightly attracted overwhelming praise in Europe and the United States. But Ryckmans has been underwhelmed in Australia, which he has made his home with his Taiwanese wife and children. That’s OK. He, like Napoleon, ultimately likes it like that. ■

ROWAN CALLICK is a journalist with the Australian Financial Review.

---

1992 has not been an exciting year for Australian books. The recession has meant most publishers are taking less risks, investing heavily in their mass-market authors, deserting the costly hardback in preference to the more attractive paperback format, and minimising the output of low profit areas like literary fiction. Apart from such outstanding new books as Marion Halligan’s Lovers Knots and Thea Astley’s Vanishing Points, the year has been marked by a slide into spiritualism and nostalgia.

My own favourites? Patrimony from Phillip Roth is terrific. I’m not a fan of the tedious caricatures in his fiction, but Roth’s account of his father’s death is rich and astute in cultural detail, hilarious and deeply moving. My all-time favourite book is Eloise by Kay Thompson. The six year old heroine dominates life at the Plaza Hotel and... just loves room-service”. Side-splittingly funny for the eight to 38 age group, I also recommend Eloise because it is a novel that can be read in its entirety as a one-off bedtime gig. Happy reading! ■

LOUISE ADLER is the publisher for William Heinemann.

---

Outfit for Your Comfort

Recently, an Australian writer wrote me a very rude letter berating me about this, that and the other, and included for good measure the admonishment that if I didn’t name Australian books as my Best for the Year, I ought to be ashamed of myself. ‘Ought” is a lovely word, don’t you think?

Well, despite the fact that I have enjoyed a number of ripper Australian books in 1992, I ought to tell you that I can’t think of one that leaps out to be touted, not one that I want to shove under people’s noses and say, please read and enjoy. But Christopher Hope’s Serenity House I do want to wave about a bit, not because it’s a satisfying book in every respect, but because it’s such a controlled, angry book, with deeply felt and deeply thought-out responses to the late 20th century. It’s wickedly funny too.

Briefly, it’s about a man named Max, who appears to have been employed by the Nazis to experiment on Jews during the Holocaust. The interesting thing that Hope does is to take such an obviously negative character and confound our expectations, putting us in the position of moral arbiter. Everyone around Max is pretty horrible, in quite normal ways, and it’s hard not to be onside with the poor old man—but wait! you find yourself saying, this poor old man has been party to horror.

I was comparing it, for a while, with another novel—an Australian novel this time—David Foster’s Mates of Mars, but a clever friend of mine pointed out that while Mates of Mars doesn’t build any compassion within the nastiness, Serenity House makes these strangely empty, hopeless people matter. It’s a surprisingly humane book, but it’s written in a way that seems to want to fool you into believing otherwise. I like its complexities.

Rosemary Sorenson is the editor of Australian Book Review.