



A Law for Women

10 radio programs providing information to women about the law; 5 audio tapes produced by Jackie Randles; 2SER FM Radio Sydney, tel 02 9330 3000; \$45 for the set or \$12 each.

2SER's series of programs, *A Law For Women* is an innovative example of a project designed to increase women's access to and understanding of the law. The series consists of ten radio programs focusing on some of the diverse circumstances in which women come into contact with the law. Family law and domestic violence are two of the more obvious topics but the series also tackles issues that are not as frequently highlighted such as women and small business and women as mothers of young offenders.

Individual programs follow a format in which a general overview of the area of law is interspersed with commentary by those working in the field and, perhaps most importantly, with women's discussions of their real life experiences. Contact phone numbers for agencies working in the area are provided to enable listeners to follow up issues if they wish.

The series aims to empower women by ensuring they know where they can access information on legal issues. Women have historically had a poor record when it comes to utilising the legal system and much of this can be attributed to a lack of knowledge, not only of the law but of avenues for assistance.

An important part of the programs is that in presenting real women talking about their experiences, 2SER is informing listeners that they are not alone and that there are ways of getting help.

A Law for Women is an invaluable resource in providing women with confidence to take the first step and approach others for assistance. In a down to earth way, the programs provide useful information in a non-threatening and interesting manner. They will form an excellent resource not only for radio stations but also for schools, universities, libraries and community centres. The updating and perhaps even expansion of the series (in that it could cover

other topics and be produced in languages other than English) should be seriously considered. As radio programs, the series has a capacity to reach large numbers of women who might otherwise have little contact with community organisations. ● AM

Woman with Altitude

by Judy Horacek; Hyland House 1997; 96 pp; \$16.96 softcover.

Woman with Altitude is Judy Horacek's third collection of cartoons. Her drawings combine whimsy with feminist politics beautifully. Themes include those old favourites PMS, post-modernism and career advice (sometimes all at once). I particularly love her takes on sex discrimination: 'Not because you're a woman of course...but because you can't urinate standing up'.

Horacek's work has been appearing in the *Alternative Law Journal* for years. See the Sit Down Girlie and Sticky Beak logos in this issue.

A treasure. Buy it for all the chicks and babes you know who are feeling a little battered by the horrors emanating from Canberra. ● FW

Uniform Evidence Act

by Stephen Odgers; The Federation Press 1997; 2nd edn; 372pp; \$50.00.

Stephen Odgers has become the authoritative voice on the *Evidence Act 1995* (Cth) (NSW) (the Act). The first edition of *Uniform Evidence Law* has been relied on by judges, lawyers and students alike as an aid to understanding a logical, at times revolutionary, and even quite graceful piece of legislation. Two years on, Odgers' evidence bible continues to be an advocate's constant companion in court.

The commentary is well set out and easy to use. It offers clear, detailed explanations of the mechanics and purpose of all 197 sections. It also includes other legislation that affects the Act. Additionally, Odgers, who worked at the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) on the evidence reference,

provides valuable insights into the common law principles that the ALRC intended to reflect, reform or abolish when the uniform legislation was first proposed.

The second edition of *Uniform Evidence Law* has been made more user friendly by the introduction of section references at the bottom of each page. It also includes some helpful references to recent judicial decisions, such as those in *Milat*, although these are generally those of a single judge. The significant decisions will be those heard in the future at appellate levels. Perhaps the publication of a second edition was slightly premature and fuelled by the need for the shelves to be filled rather than to report on developments in the Act's interpretation. The Act is everchanging and an injection of recent judgments may be better suited to a looseleaf format. But for now, Odgers has his finger on the pulse of the Act and his book is by far the best commentary on its operation. ● MK

The Laws of Our Fathers

by Scott Turow; Viking (Penguin) 1996; 554 pp; \$19.95 trade paperback.

Turow wrote a simple and telling account of his first year at Harvard Law School, *One L*, but fame has given him an overblown sense of his talent if this book is any guide.

Buried deep beneath a grossly over-written, excessively detailed, self-important, indulgent and largely irrelevant text, is an interesting plot. But even that is unresolved at the end when, after 500 pages of good forensic drama heavily burdened by extraneous characterisations and sub-plots, the plot takes a twist and leaves the characters and the reader forever unsure of what happened and why.

The court scenes could only have been written by a lawyer familiar with practice and the Chicago slant to dialogue and geography seem authentic. A hefty edit in search of a tight story would have reduced *The Law of Our Fathers* by more than half. Beware the inevitable film. ● SR



Hornet's Nest

by Patricia Cornwell; Little, Brown (Penguin) 1997; 375 pp; \$35.00 hardcover.

In *Hornet's Nest* Patricia Cornwell has temporarily abandoned Dr Kay Scarpetta and cohort for a new group of characters at the Charlotte Law Enforcement Center [sic] and the *Charlotte Observer*.

The plot centres on attempts to catch a serial killer preying on out of town businessmen. The main players are Deputy Chief Virginia West, Chief of Police Judy Hammer and young journalist Andy Brazil. There all just as irascible as you'd expect. The women are attractive because they're so mentally and physically tough but, of course, their emotional lives are a shambles. I'm beginning to wonder about this kind of women-can't-have-it-all realism.

The book contains the requisite number of hip references to gay people and culture. This would be positive were it not for the highly dodgy transgender sub-plot. Political credibility is not Cornwell's only problem. Significant chunks of the book, including vital clues, are narrated through the inner voice of a cat. Puke.

My final gripe is that *Hornet's Nest* is only available in hardback at the moment. \$35.00 for a crime novel? That's Morrison money, or Ondaatje, or Angelou but Cornwell? Call me a snob — just don't call me catlover.

Of course I read the whole thing in a couple of sittings — but that's due more to my addiction to Scarpetta novels than to the quality of *Hornet's Nest*. ● FW

Dead Heart

Nicholas Parsons (writer/director)

It's only now that I come to write a review of this movie that I'm asking myself the obvious questions. Why is it called *Dead Heart*? Admittedly I'm a bit slow about these things. Whose heart? If it's referring to the heart of the country, why is dead the appropriate

adjective? Is this movie trying to suggest that nothing is as it seems? Subverting popular Australian myths about the interior of the continent? These myths, to state the obvious, create the Centre as part of the imagination of Australian culture and erase this part of the world as a real place. This mythology allows the Centre to be a proposed dumping ground for nuclear waste and Alice Springs to have one of the highest sexual assault rates in the world without too much angst on the part of the governments and those parts of the population unaffected by such violence. Is Nick Parsons pointing to the fallacy of the myth or am I crediting him with more irony than he intended?

The movie was initially a flop in other parts of Australia, prompting Bryan Brown to shame southerners into going by stating that the public didn't want to see a film about Aboriginal people. *Dead Heart* is now in its fourth month at the Chauvel in Sydney, the second longest run for that cinema after *Trainspotting*.

To my mind *Dead Heart* is about whitefellas, expatriates, strangers in a world they don't really understand, trying to find their place in that world, but ultimately moving on to another strange country. It's a classic Graham Greene theme, reminding us of our ongoing participation in the colonial/post-colonial process. Is it possible for a non-Aboriginal person to make a film about Aboriginal people?

Does the film contain too many stereotypes? Most of the classic Central Australian characters are there. The cop trying to cope with life in remote Australia by sneaking the odd beer (only he wouldn't be drinking Fosters, it'd be green cans), the anthropologist with the daggy 70s haircut who couldn't keep a secret, the inane TV journalist, the thoroughly decent white missionary (oh I'm sorry, he was a teacher wasn't he?), the ubiquitous Ernie Dingo (I know, he's not really a Centralian). But hang on, where was the legal aid lawyer? ● FC

Administrative Law: Commentary and Materials

by Roger Douglas and Melinda Jones, Federation Press, 1996, 2nd edn; 674pp; \$80.00 soft-cover.

The first edition of *Administrative Law: Commentary and Materials* was very good. The second edition is better. The book takes an expansive approach to the subject matter of administrative law. It includes material on corruption and whistleblowing, Ombudsmen, tribunals and access to information as well as giving significant treatment to the more commonly considered areas of standing and judicial review.

The second edition is up to date as at November 1995. In addition to including new material, the authors have restructured the book, bringing forward the material on standing, justiciability and the ADJR requirements which is a real improvement as far as teaching the material is concerned. There are now separate chapters (containing some new material) on delegated legislation and on reasons, discovery and evidence. The treatment of errors of fact and law is much improved on the first edition.

I have found the book to be an excellent teaching text. I am also aware of practitioners who find it extremely useful. The commentary, which is considerable in some chapters, is well written and to the point. The cases extracted have been well chosen. They include the leading cases and are predominantly Australian. Importantly, the cases cover a range of subject matter, for example, land rights for Indigenous people, commerce, the environment, social security, employment, civil liberties and human rights. This enables an appreciation of the ambit and significance of administrative law. ● JA

BITS was compiled by Jill Anderson, Freia Carlton, Miiko Kumar, Annemaree McDonough, Simon Rice, and Frith Way.