Lessons for pollies in White’s tale of hubris

I DIDN’T understand the novel Voss when I read it at school, but for some reason I knew it was a key book about Australia. Finally, here at Oxford in England for a few months, I have had a chance to read it again, and I now understand a lot about its power and importance.

At a simple level, the book paints a stark picture of the journey of Voss and his team.

The White family has owned Belltrees continuously since 1833 when they bought it from W. C. Wentworth, one of the early colony’s largest land-holders. The White family’s Edinglassie property near Muswellbrook was acquired properties in Mudgee and Muswellbrook to the Queensland border and sleep every night on a sandstone ranges – for White based Rhine Towers into Queensland’s channel. Voss is a German explorer keen to travel to Newcastle, stop a night at a local inn, and are led by horsemen of the frontier. Binney records that Voss sets out from Sydney with the sort of motley companions that you’d guess would be up to the exploring caper in the colony in the 1840s. They sail to Newcastle, stop a night at a local inn, and are led by horsemen of the frontier.

White’s description of the arrival of the travelers at Rhine Towers is exact in detail and diction: a fertile valley with vast high natural pastures surrounded by stunning sandstone ranges – for White based Rhine Towers into Queensland’s channel. Voss sets out from Sydney with a motley crew of men, horses, and equipment. The White family has owned Belltrees continuously since 1833 when they bought it from W. C. Wentworth, one of the early colony’s largest land-holders. The White family’s Edinglassie property near Muswellbrook was acquired properties in Mudgee and Muswellbrook to the Queensland border and sleep every night on a sandstone ranges – for White based Rhine Towers into Queensland’s channel.

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First Frontier W. C. Wentworth, one of the early centuries of European occupation. The White family has owned Belltrees continuously since 1833 when they bought it from W. C. Wentworth, one of the early colony’s largest land-holders. Under James’s leadership, the Whites also acquired properties in Mudgee and northwards through the New England plateau. The Whites became leading breeders of sheep, cattle and horses.

Whites became leading breeders of sheep, cattle and horses. Judith White, today’s seventh-generation custodian of Belltrees, says that for much of the second half of the 19th century, a White family member could ride from Muswellbrook to the Queensland border and sleep every night on a family property. Which is pretty much the journey that Patrick White sets out for as he steers him north from Rhine Towers into Queensland’s channel country and then westward to a less than noble death.

Patrick White obviously came from a privileged background, but he retained the power to look and see, and observe and tell. His descriptions of our land capture its glories and frustrations, its delicacy and its power, and he lays these out for us to read and understand.

He uses Voss to show what happens in our land when a leader is gripped by conceit and self-importance, a combination captured by a very special word: hubris.

There is always hubris among people of wealth and power. But it seems there is a plague of it lately, especially among political leaders.

Our leaders should read Patrick White’s great novel, and see what he determines as an appropriate penalty for Voss, a warning to those gripped by self-importance and ignoring a duty to show the way wisely and humbly. In my copy, should a reader be pressed for time, the moral to the Voss story, let’s call it the severed head incident, starts at page 394.

Encouraging dads are worth some praise

Say what you need to say, writes Bruce Robertson.

WHY do we need fathers, really? Let’s face it, there is something very different about dads. Anyone who finds great joy in the repetition of the phrase “pull my finger” is obviously seriously affected by the incest of children.

Just think about the things that fathers say: “Who moved the remote?!” “A stick.” And the inevitable “ask your mother.” Of course the most important words that dads often say are: “You can do it!” I am the proud father of five children. Over the past 22 years I have had the opportunity to witness first-hand the future and wonderful experience of fathering.

Fathers and fatherhood are often maligned as though we can somehow do without them. However there is far more to praise in most fathers than to criticize.

Each week I watch the incredible dads who do the sport thing, or community volunteer roles after work, to make life better for kids around them, often for kids who don’t have their own dad available.

The interesting thing is that if you speak to these dads they always feel that they have never done enough, never given enough, never said the right thing often enough, and they are never quite sure that their kids will be OK.

As Homer Simpson said “Remember, as far as anyone knows we’re a nice, normal family.”

As author Kent Nerburn said “It is much easier to become a father than to be one.” So how do fathers learn how to be a great dad? After all, there is no higher calling. It is much easier to become a father than to be one. So how do fathers learn how to be a great dad? After all, there is no higher calling.

Here are some things that fathers should say:

“I am proud of you.” “There is nothing to be afraid of.” “I love you.” “Thank you.”

In return, there is one thing kids also ought to say wherever it is possible: “Thank you.” And let’s not write on tombstones what should have been said face to face. Let’s hope all said what we needed to say this Father’s Day.

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