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Setbacks in the War for Simple Pleasures

EDITORIAL

Published 07-Aug-2006



In this issue, we present a feature in our occasional Simple Pleasures series. Paul Daffey writes about Croatian immigrant Andy Utri, whose particular joy is checking the rain gauge every morning. The Simple Pleasures articles are not intended as light relief from the gravitas of many of the articles in *Eureka Street*. Instead, they ground our more serious commentaries, providing an insight into exactly what constitutes a better world for the human beings who live in it.

George W. Bush and John Howard are on the right track when they talk about the preservation and propagation of freedom as the goal of the War on Terror. But so far, military action has proved spectacularly unsuccessful as a means towards the goal, which is more or less the right of every human being on the planet to enjoy their own simple pleasures.

Despite their best efforts, the people of Iraq are now less able to enjoy such simple pleasures. This past month, the citizens of Lebanon and Israel have lost much of their freedom to enjoy simple pleasures. Australian aid agencies have petitioned the Prime Minister to support an immediate ceasefire, and Caritas Australia has designated this Sunday 13 August as Middle East Peace Sunday. In the meantime, the United States holds fast to its position that an immediate ceasefire is not in the interests of the safety and security of the people of Lebanon and Israel. There are echoes of Vietnam, and the oft-quoted US army officer who infamously asserted: 'We had to destroy this village to save it.'

Vietnam is on our minds this fortnight as we mark the 40th anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan. In this issue of *Eureka Street*, we present Christine Gillespe's personal perspective on this period of misadventure, tragedy and misguided intentions.



Other articles that take up the theme of simplicity include David Sutherland's report on simple food, and the need to look beyond the ...œnatural...• labels to what's really inside the ...œhealthy choice...• foods in our supermarkets.

Katharina Weiss also takes up the Lebanon question, and asks whether there might not be a better way to resolve the issues at hand in the Middle East, in order that further bloodshed can be avoided.

We also have a piece from an aid worker in Darfur, in the western region of the Sudan,

where a precarious ceasefire crumbles by the day, leaving the civilian population homeless and with little hope.

Alongside some of the more confronting realities presented in this issue, there is also the usual excellent collection of poetry, film and book reviews. These are three simple pleasures that many of us enjoy. Long may it remain so for our 'lucky' country.

Checking the rain gauge

COLUMNS

Published 07-Aug-2006



Andy Utri grew up on a small farm—about 24 hectares—in what was then a part of Austria but is now in Croatia. In 1954, when he was 29 years of age, he and his wife Ilse immigrated to Australia to seek a better life.

‘I wanted a roof over my head and a shower when I got home from work,’ says Andy, who was a builder.

Andy and Ilse lived in St Albans, in Melbourne’s western suburbs, for 20 years before moving to central Victoria because they wanted a bit of land. They lived on 35 hectares off Spring Flat Road near Heathcote. Wild Duck Creek ran alongside their property. Andy built fences around the property and ran a few cows. As soon as he had finished building a home in which he and Ilse could live, his back went.

Andy smiles ruefully at the sudden onset of his back injury. ‘I was a builder for many years and never missed a day of work because of a bad back,’ he says.

Not that it gets him down. At 81, with a tough upbringing that included having his left pointer finger amputated after a doctor’s mistake when he was ten years of age, his air of quiet wisdom suggests he’s seen life’s good and bad. His response to the back injury was to sell the land and head back to the city. In 1988, he and Ilse moved into a retirement village in Keilor, on Melbourne’s north-west fringe, where Andy resumed a habit from his rural property. Every morning, like farmers throughout Australia, it was his ritual to check the rain gauge.

In early 1990, a summer thunderstorm left 70 millimetres of rain—almost three inches—in his gauge in the backyard of his retirement villa. George Herbert, a nearby resident, who had been accustomed to keeping a lookout for the weather when he was working at Melbourne Airport, began asking every morning whether there had been any rain.

Further questions from residents prompted Andy to begin noting the rainfall on a chart that he put up in the retirement village’s mailroom. In 1999, after a decade of noting rainfall figures for his fellow retirees, a Bureau of Meteorology representative asked whether he would be interested in joining the hundreds of volunteers around Australia who record official rainfall figures for the national weather bureau.



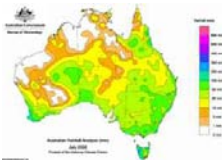
Every morning at nine o'clock, Andy pokes his head out of his back door to see whether there's any rain in the old plastic gauge, which hangs alongside the pegs on the clothesline. He then walks 200 metres from his front door to check the bureau's gauge, which sits in a 40-centimetre stainless steel cylinder.

On the mid-July morning that Andy checked his gauge under the watchful eye of *Eureka Street*, the weather was mild and the sky was beginning to cloud. Over the previous weekend, Keilor had received 20 millimetres of rain—more than had been seen for months. On this morning, however, there was no rain to be recorded.

'Nothing,' says Andy, holding the gauge up to eye level. He explains that the film of water at the base of the plastic tube is the result of dew.

On the mornings on which rain is found in the gauge, Andy notes the amount in one of the bureau's sheets entitled 'rainfall and river height observations'. At the end of every month, he sends the sheet into the bureau, which records the figures.

When asked whether he might get a kick out of hearing Keilor's rainfall on the ABC news, Andy looks blank. Keilor is a place of unexceptional rainfall, being on the plains that sprawl out from Melbourne's western fringe rather than on the hills that rise up from the city's east. Andy admits with a shrug that he has never heard the word 'Keilor' on the ABC weather report or any other weather report.



His motivation for recording the rainfall is more philanthropic. 'It's helpful to the bureau—and I like to know exactly what's going on,' he says.

There is pride on his face when he points to the framed Certificate of Recognition, signed by John Howard, that is on a wall of his neatly appointed villa. The certificate was sent in 2001, the International Year of Volunteers. Andy was invited to receive it at a function in the city, but declined the invitation because he had been helping out the weather bureau for only a few years. 'Others had been doing things for many years,' he says.

In his garage, Andy pulls out a croquet mallet. A handful of residents from the retirement village play croquet every fortnight in Brunswick. Several years ago, when it was suggested that money should be raised to buy mallets, Andy turned his building skills to crafting mallets himself. When it was suggested that he could turn a handy profit from creations, he said his business days were over. He would rather make mallets for friends on a voluntary basis.

On a tour of the retirement village's central building, Andy points out the long bench seats he has made for his fellow residents. After showing the rainfall chart on the wall in the mailroom, he excuses himself. It's ten o'clock. He's on the roster for a voluntary shift in the retirement village kiosk. Even at his advanced age, Andy sees no reason to slow down his voluntary service. 'You keep yourself busy,' he says.

Angels dance before our eyes

COLUMNS

Summa theologiae

Published 07-Aug-2006

Every schoolboy knows that medieval theologians were isolated from the real world. They spent hours discussing how many angels could fit on the head of a pin.

Like most things that every schoolboy knows, this detail is not as straightforward as it seems. Benjamin D'Israeli, an English writer of the late eighteenth century, seems to have been the first to pin theologians to angels in this way.

But D'Israeli's version of the tale was sharper. He had mediaeval theologians, notably Thomas Aquinas, ask how many angels could dance on the point of a needle. A man of the Enlightenment, he suggested that theologians had missed the point. They wove cloudy theories on topics that no-one could ever know anything about. Real thinkers focused on the real, substantial world before their eyes.

Earlier on, Renaissance schoolboys also knew that the theologians had missed the point. But they would have seen the theologians not as too ethereal, but as too earthbound. They pedantically burrowed into their books to pursue questions that had little contact with the central and powerful reality of the Gospel.

That two groups of people should agree that the theologians were detached from reality, but should differ on what reality they had missed, makes one pause. Perhaps the connections between speculation and the reality of our tangible world are more complex than we assume, and certainly much more complex than polemic allows.



The story of the angels suggests that important connections run through the imagination—the way we give stability and focus to the cloudy flux of our world. Thomas Aquinas never worried about needles, but he spelled out in great detail the differences between angels and human beings. This focus on the distinctive qualities of pure spirits did not necessarily blunt theologians' perspective on the world or on the Gospel. It may have sharpened their intuition that the universe is more mysterious and rich than we can ever understand. It may also have encouraged them to treat the world with respect, and not simply with proprietorial interest.

That would represent a fairly straightforward connection between recondite speculation



and reality. But ideas also feed the imagination in less organised ways. They are strings in a network of culture in which no part is ever totally disconnected. The attention paid to angels by medieval theologians certainly inspired Isaac D'Israeli to satirise it with the image of dancing angels. But D'Israeli also wrote novels. One of them, *Despotism; or, the fall of the Jesuits*, was as ungallant—the Jesuits had been suppressed at the time—as it was premature—they rose again soon afterwards.

D'Israeli was the father of the future Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli, and passed on to him through his novel his association of Jesuits with despotism. The novel is mainly remembered through Mary Shelley's bare diary entry for 6 March, 1815, the day her child Clare died: 'Find my baby dead—send for Hogg—talk—a miserable day—in the evening read *fall of the Jesuits*'. She herself is remembered both through her own writing, particularly the novel *Doctor Frankenstein*, and through her marriage to the poet, Percy Bysshe Shelley. These events form together a needlework of contingency in which speculation and intractable human predicaments form ever changing and illuminating patterns.

D'Israeli's image of angels dancing on the points of needles also discloses other points of connection. Although it is linked unforgettably to fatuous theology, it also forms a lovely image in its own right. It can be drawn upon to illuminate aspects of reality that are too exigent to be represented by empirical description. The Salvadorean revolutionary poet Roque Dalton, for example, wrote a haunting collection of poems. He had been imprisoned under a regime in which disappearance and torture were common. His short poem *Fear* seems to reflect this experience:



*A solitary angel on the point of a needle
 hears how someone is urinating.*

The image catches exactly the isolated, wasting condition of prison experience, the heightened perception that fear gives, and the contrast between spirit and the predicament of the life of caged human animals. Even Renaissance schoolboys would have to concede that here we are drawn close to the crucifixion, the central reality of the Christian Gospel.

The heavenly image of angels dancing on the point of needles is not that far from common earthly reality, in which human beings are made pincushions. That is certainly a privileged field for human study.

When human life is not really human life

COLUMNS

Archimedes

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The problem with science for many religious people is that it is all about doubt. In that sense, science is almost the opposite of faith.

For those of us who are both scientists and Christians this can make life difficult. It is not, as many seem to think, because approaching issues from a scientific or a religious standpoint can lead to different conclusions. We reconcile such different outcomes from different viewpoints and philosophies all the time, throughout our lives—left wing and right wing, adult and teenager, Lions and Blues, Bulldogs and Sharks.

Rather it is because, as a person of faith, many things are held to be certain, not open to question. But as a scientist everything is open to question. Nothing is sacred.

Take one of the great questions of the moment, the morality of research involving embryonic stem cells. Though rarely explicitly stated by either side, the debate really centres around determining or deciding at what point human life begins.

For many people the answer to this question seems simple, evident, and obvious. They believe that human life begins at conception—a distinct, clear, explicit point—end of story. That is what made it easy for President George Bush recently—in vetoing a bill passed by Congress which would have allowed Federal funds to be used for embryonic stem cell research—to equate the destruction of any fertilised human egg with homicide. When asked about the reason for the veto, his press secretary said: ‘The simple answer is, he thinks murder is wrong.’

A similar statement accompanied a call by the head of the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for the Family, Cardinal Alfonso Lopez Trujillo, for Catholic stem cell researchers to be excommunicated. ‘Destroying human embryos is equivalent to abortion,’ he said.

But for many biologists and doctors who are also people of faith, life is not that easy. For starters, if human life begins at conception, what does that make the germ cells that give rise to the fertilised egg? And if every fertilised egg is a human being, why does God allow more than 50 per cent of them to abort spontaneously?

To biologists, conception is only the beginning of a long process which leads to the birth of a baby, but just when that bundle of living cells becomes 'human' is not a question scientists find easy to determine. Is it at conception, after implantation in the mother's womb, when it develops a nervous system, when it begins to feel pain, when it can survive independently, when it becomes conscious?

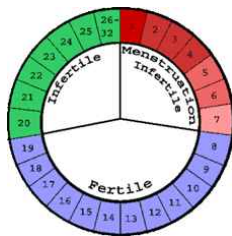


One thing is clear. Just as a seed needs water, soil, and the right temperature and nutrients to grow into a plant, so a fertilised egg will only develop into a human being if it has the right genetic and biochemical constitution, and finds itself in the right place at the right time.

These are not idle observations. They affect the morality not just of stem cell research and abortion, but also of some methods of contraception and many kinds of medical procedures during pregnancy.

Embryonic stem cell research may provide some of the best chances we have of coming up with effective treatments for degenerative diseases, such as Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis and possibly even the world's number one killer, heart disease. But is it moral?

One of the most difficult concepts to grasp seems to be the idea of so-called therapeutic cloning—the initiation of the development of an egg in order to produce embryonic stem cells to be used in research or therapy. The name is an unfortunate one, in that therapeutic cloning has absolutely nothing to do with replicating humans.



Researchers undertaking therapeutic cloning would say that the circumstances under which they stimulate human eggs to develop ensure there is no way the result could ever become a human baby. If that is so, they argue, then the embryonic tissue they produce is not a human life, but the equivalent of laboratory-cultured heart tissue or liver tissue. For those who believe that any developing human egg constitutes a human being, however, the procedure is morally wrong.

A recent analysis published in the *Journal of Medical Ethics* by philosopher Luc Bovens from the London School of Economics suggests the Rhythm Method of birth control significantly increases the chances of spontaneous abortion. If this is so, he argues, and if human life is deemed to begin at conception, then such a method for birth control could lead to more human deaths than would the use of condoms.

Much depends on the point at which human life begins.

Compassion requires more courage than war

INTERNATIONAL

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Israeli Defence Force commander General Dan Halutz was asked about his feelings when he was pilot of a plane dropping bombs on people in Gaza in 2002. His reply that he felt 'a light bump to the plane...and that's all' sounds incredible and yet it may be true—how else can any human being bear bombing a family sitting peacefully in their house, or killing innocent people sitting on a bus? To fight wars we have to deny our own and others' humanity. In fact, compassion takes more courage than war: it means respecting, and acting according to, the basic human rights that form the foundation of our civilisation.



Acknowledging the preciousness of human life is something that all authentic spiritual traditions have in common. Similarly, love, compassion and non-violence are at the heart of religions such as Christianity, Islam and Judaism. And yet, for centuries wars have been fought in the name of God/Allah and 'goodness'. However, it's not in rhetoric that a true spiritual person is revealed, but through their actions and their motivation. The truth is that if government and religious leaders were really interested in supporting 'goodness' or 'God', they would seek out means of reconciliation and be willing to compromise narrow short-term gains for world-wide long-term benefits.

Hezbollah captures two Israeli soldiers and more than 400 Lebanese civilians die as a result. Where is the 'good' in either of these actions? Even their motivation is highly questionable. The Israeli government itself doesn't seem to believe in the efficacy of its response: its own military analysts question whether the bombing is actually having an impact on Hezbollah's capabilities. How can organisations such as Hezbollah and the US and Israeli governments (and they are by no means the only ones), still claim to represent, or fight for, God in defense of actions that involve the killing and displacement of hundreds of people, and the destruction of their social infrastructure?

George Bush's reference to an 'axis of evil', implying his own 'goodness' by comparison, and his claim to defend 'Christian values', seems ludicrous in the face of his blocking United Nations and European efforts to promote a ceasefire in Lebanon in order to protect innocent people's lives. When a government protects the 'interests' (access to cheap petrol for example) of its own people by letting civilians in another country die, its claim on 'goodness' rings hollow. The division of nations into 'good vs evil' is not a useful concept in a world of complex

societies.

Michael Gawenda wrote recently in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age* that the Bush Administration is not interested in 'diplomatic compromises' that have never 'achieved long-term peace in the region'. Is destroying Beirut really going to achieve long-term peace? A deep transformation would be required for this peace to be possible; a complete and utter change in perception that would take enormous courage—a courage that I can't envisage George Bush, Ehud Olmert, Hezbollah leaders, or for that matter John Howard, finding in the near future: to see the world through the eyes of compassion, rather than those of fear and economic greed.



The Dalai Lama has said 'my religion is kindness'. This may sound a little vague or insipid, but true compassion and non-violence take a lot of courage. People might need to sacrifice some comfort (such as cheap petrol) and see the reality of other people's humanity and suffering. As Nobel Peace Prize-winner Aung San Suu Kyi says, 'it is not power that corrupts, but fear'.

For all their supposedly 'religious' rhetoric, Hezbollah and George Bush alike lack the courage and dignity of someone like Aung San Suu Kyi or the Dalai Lama, whose fight and whose people have been conveniently forgotten by the world. Is it that war makes for a better spectacle? 'Give them bread and circuses': are we really so easily satisfied?

The path of non-violence may not be as overtly spectacular, but who can forget the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, when masses of people left the DDR, and others peacefully congregated at the internal border checkpoints until the East German government had no choice but to open the borders? If political and religious leaders would honestly reflect on recent attempts to create peace through war, or terrorism, they would have to acknowledge their failure—as events in Iraq, Afghanistan and Iran are demonstrating.

On the other hand, an attitude of compassion, based on a genuine desire to understand each other's needs, would encourage dialogue. This could build the foundation for genuine long-term peace—and would certainly have more convincing claims on 'goodness'. What is 'evil' is the ignorance underlying acts of war and terror, leading to fear and anger, leading to endless cycles of retribution.

Who will have the courage to break this cycle?

Why so little moral outrage at the destruction of Lebanon?

INTERNATIONAL

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Out of the passion of Lebanon, one hopeful image remains. It is the barely restrained rage of Jan Egeland, the United Nations Coordinator for Humanitarian Aid, at such unnecessary devastation. It put into proper context the other images of dead and maimed civilians, ruined homes, destroyed industries, ambulances rocketed precisely at the centre of the Red Cross, and the hypocrisy of the call by the United States Government to Arab nations to stop supporting the conflict.



Egeland's response also made evident the general absence of moral passion, or even reflection, on the destruction in Palestine and Lebanon. Commentators have rightly condemned the Hezbollah attacks on Israeli civilians and their homes. But the general silence from some quarters on Israel's unmeasured response implies that it is a moral necessity.

What arguments underlie this presumption? The first is the unspoken claim that a unique identity guarantees moral integrity. On the United States side, it is summed up in the catchcry, 'Hey, we are the good guys'. Because we are good guys, all the adventures we engage in and support are by definition good. Because we are good, too, you can rely on our judgment of what is necessary. When something goes wrong, like Abu Ghraib or Guantanamo Bay, a gap-toothed smile and an 'aw shucks' will be enough to have our naughtiness forgiven and our goodness vindicated. If you criticise the morality of what we do and support, you are no longer one of the good guys, and so can no longer claim moral standing or insight.

A unique identity can also be claimed by victims of wrongdoing. From the Israeli side, we hear, 'We are victims, we are deprived of due security. When we are redressing wrong done to us, everything that we do will be right. In our response there may be mistakes, but our status as innocent victims guarantees our moral virtue and insight.'

These claims to a uniquely privileged moral insight and moral purity have a spiritual core. The religious roots of United States identity and its sense of a unique calling in the world have often been pointed out. It is easy to move from believing that the United States is called to act for the good of the world, to believe that whatever the United States chooses to do in the world will in fact be virtuous.

The Scriptures shared by Jews and Christians speak of the unique status of the people of Israel. That uniqueness is heightened by the terrible sufferings of the Jews under Christian

regimes, and particularly by the Holocaust. It is natural to assume that Israel has both the right and the duty to survive at whatever cost. Secular forms of the doctrine of national election, however, forget that its Scriptural correlative is not the assumption of national virtue but the regular conviction, confession and repentance of sin. When you are chosen as a people, you expect that your moral blindness and vicious behaviour will be revealed.



Those who justify the violent Israeli attack on the conditions for civilian life as necessary, and so as morally right, claim that it is necessary for peace in the region. They argue this case by analysing the complex factors involved in the Middle East: the ancient hatreds, the interests of governments of surrounding nations, the tension between Shiite and Suni Muslims, the relative power of the different forces, and the likely effect of military action.

They conclude that for lasting peace, the destruction of much of Palestine and Lebanon is necessary. Stripped of its analytical and political cover, this is a relatively simple moral argument based on consequences. Provided you pursue a good goal, namely peace, whatever you do will be justifiable if the good consequences outweigh the harm done.

This line of argument can also be deployed to justify torture, selective assassination and any kind of war. The mystery is that it is found persuasive. Part of the reason may be that in military operations, moral argument is set within the drama of power. When moral conclusions come accompanied by the panoply of arms, bombs, generals and suits, shock and awe make them seem respectable. Australian political commentators seem to be particularly susceptible to seduction by power. Once we are brought into the counsels of the great and privileged, whose furrowed brows and serious mien we see as they go about their military business, we readily believe that they are morally clothed.

The clothing that emperors and their courtiers assume is the language of abstraction. It allows people and their predicaments to be put out of the way behind nations, nations behind regional blocks, and regional blocks behind global policy imperatives. When we analyse human realities in these terms, and elaborate a science to relate our abstractions to one another, we can distance ourselves from the reality of people being bombed in Lebanon, sent mad on Nauru, and left to starve in Palestine. At such a distance, the human barbarities we endorse can be consigned to public relations, and humanitarian protest will be seen as a perverse obstacle to intelligent policy. We can even reassure ourselves that our insensitivity to abused human dignity is the mark of a strong mind.



To base a political morality on power and to develop it through abstractions is like building a house of cards, with only the faces of kings, queens and knaves showing. It has colour, but it collapses because it lacks in solidarity. The invasion of Iraq has poisoned much in our public life. Perhaps its saddest corruption is that such a threadbare morality is now taken for granted.

Darfur's tenuous peace deal penned in blood

INTERNATIONAL

Politics

Published 07-Aug-2006



As both signatories to peace and devotees to conflict, the Sudanese government has mastered the art of juggling the pen and the sword. The Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) was ratified in May of this year. It set out an agreement in principle for the deployment of a UN-mandated peacekeeping force. Since then, the Sudanese government, led by the inscrutable President Omar Hassan Ahmad Al Bashir, has variously courted, confused and harangued the international community in an apparent effort to create discord in the peace process. To this end, Bashir and his cronies have been largely successful.

In January 2005, Bashir's ruling National Congress Party inked the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) with the southern Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement (SPLM), ending what had been Africa's most protracted civil conflict. Since the signing, progress towards implementation of the CPA has been laboured, though agreement on an interim constitution—looking towards a referendum on autonomy for the south in 2011—and the establishment of a Government of National Unity has given some cause for optimism.

Issues of border demarcation and more precisely, the division of oil reserves continue to dominate negotiations though, and threaten to undermine what was proposed as an equitable wealth sharing agreement. With the DPA now ratified, albeit without unanimous support, the Government of National Unity stands poised over two tenuous agreements; one which has taken stuttering first steps, the other remaining in delicate infancy.

The Darfur conflict is difficult to abridge or situate in a potted history. Many an editorial has been devoted to the subjugated rebel militias, the tensions between Arabs against black Africans, the predatory *janjaweed* proxy army, and attendant government forces. Less reported but equally compelling are historical tensions over land and natural resource entitlements, essential to the security of livelihood. Nomadic pastoralists and sedentary farmers, often divided along ethnic lines, have clashed frequently, particularly over livestock routes and access to water resources.

Devastating periods of drought have exacerbated these tensions, as have inter-tribal skirmishes and perceptions of neglect between the Darfur periphery and the Khartoum centre.

The publication of 'The Black Book' in 2002, a statistics-based diatribe on the dominance of Arab tribes in all facets of Sudanese rule since independence fueled these ethnic fires further. All of these issues are conflated and relevant, making the notions of 'livelihoods' and 'security' equally current and connected to the current crisis in Darfur.

The ambitions of the Darfur rebel movements, initially unified under the banner of the Sudanese Liberation Army/Movement (SLA/M), and later the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), are borne out of years of perceived neglect by successive Khartoum governments. The rebels' offensive in El Fasher, the capital of North Darfur in April 2003 was testament to their hatred of the Khartoum government. The government's response was swift and merciless, marked by large-scale civilian massacres targeting ethnic African tribes. Certainly in scale and strategy, the government offensive recognised the wider threat of a unified non-Arab alliance in the west of Sudan, and the necessity of an absolute military victory.



A number of ceasefire agreements and humanitarian protocols between the warring parties have been negotiated in the intervening years; they have subsequently been violated almost without exception. At present, the cause for peace is couched within the terms of the DPA, brokered in Abuja by the African Union and a bevy of frantic international delegates. The DPA, while not endorsed wholeheartedly even by the signatory parties, does provide a range of guarantees for peace and development. Notably the agreement provides targeted deadlines for disarmament and demobilisation of the warring parties, establishes buffer zones for the containment of troops and heavy weapons and a provision for the reintegration of the rebel militias into the Sudanese Defence Forces.

The agreement also proposes more representation for Darfur in the transitional government, a timetable for elections on a vote for autonomy, the establishment of a compensation commission, funding for a reconstruction effort and a development program in Darfur. A number of the deadlines set in the DPA have passed without consequence, and there remains a number of contentious issues, including verifiable disarmament of the *janjaweed*, expanded Darfurian representation in the transitional government in Khartoum, and meaningful compensation for the refugees from the conflict now gathered in squalid camps around provincial Darfur cities and Khartoum. The Coalition for International Justice documented an estimated 400,000 deaths from the conflict in an April 2005 report, which gives some idea of the scale of the humanitarian tragedy that has occurred.



Security, or lack thereof, is one of the major sticking points in the implementation of the DPA. The beleaguered AU monitoring force, the African Mission in Sudan, is currently charged with maintaining the Humanitarian Ceasefire Agreement established in April 2004 and has

assumed further 'peacekeeping' responsibilities under the terms of the DPA. However, the AU protection force, even under a revised mandate, has largely failed to protect civilians or win the hearts and minds of the affected population.

Criticism has emanated from all quarters, with international donors and human rights bodies, the UN Security Council, non-government organisations and the displaced communities all taking issue with the security situation on the ground. Only the Sudanese government, comfortable with the AU's relatively passive mandate, and mindful of the UN peacekeeping alternative seems content with the status quo. Compared with the noises being made about war crime prosecutions, and with a more rigorous enforcement under a chapter VII agreement mooted through the Security Council, the relatively toothless AU force is a preferred option.

The security situation in the Darfur states has declined markedly since the signing of the DPA, an ominous portent given the hope it offered at the Abuja signing. While there are now fewer incidences of *janjaweed* attacks of rebel-held villages, there has been a dramatic increase in attacks between factions of the rebel forces after a splintering of the rebel militia along political and tribal lines.

These bloody vendettas, eerily similar to the wanton slaughter and pillage of previous engagements between the *janjaweed* and rebel militias, have again engulfed ordinary Darfurian civilians, causing further population displacements and severely compromising humanitarian operations in the wider Darfur area. This rekindled bloodshed has also demonstrated that without a platform for consensus within the rebel groups, and a potent protection force to circumvent the cycle of violence, the DPA remains a disappointingly false dawn.

A failing peace in Darfur has widespread consequences within Sudan, and in the countries on its borders. It is therefore critical for all parties, both implicated and engaged, to address issues of 'peace' and 'security' through the instruments of the DPA, and the mandated protection forces. However contentious the current agreement, for the displaced and conflict-affected population of Darfur, it is at this point in time the only hope the cycle of violence can be ended, and this fact alone marks the DPA worthy of a chance to take hold.

Discourse without dialogue in Australian politics

ESSAYS

Published 07-Aug-2006

John Button, a federal Labor minister from 1983 to 1996, was an astute politician. He accused one parliamentary opponent of citing statistics as Oscar Wilde's inebriated man used a lamp-post—for support rather than illumination. Button's wit anticipated the gloom of Australian public discourse in the early 21st century, as defenders and critics of government policy express incompatible opinions rather than engaging in dialogue. Particularly noticeable by its emptiness is the field of public morality.



Amorality

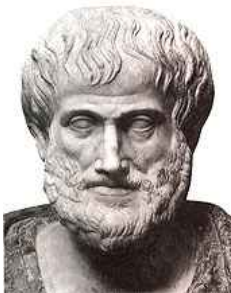
While there might never have been a golden age in which ethical considerations dominated the pragmatic pursuit of politics, critics of the Howard Government accuse the Coalition of elevating populism over principle to act unethically on mandatory detention of asylum seekers, invasion of Iraq, civil liberties, social welfare and industrial relations. While such assessments can be subjective, the government seldom defends the morality of its decisions, preferring to argue that its policies suit the circumstances, denigrating critics and waiting for ethical arguments to dissipate. Ministers dismiss church criticisms by telling the religious not to meddle in affairs beyond their expertise. The Prime Minister's claim that he governs for all Australians invites majority opinion—or lowest common denominator opinion—to resent possible church influence in secular affairs. Other critics such as moral philosophers are dismissed as ivory tower elitists, and whistleblowers with inside information have their characters impugned.

As well as creating moral vacuums around issues, this approach impoverishes the culture of public discourse. The venality of the current political paradigm has three non-negotiable elements—power, ego and prosperity. The leaders of the Anglophone Coalition of the Willing remain unrepentant despite their arguments for the invasion of Iraq proving to be deceptions or errors. While the power to act unilaterally should incur grave responsibilities, the governments of the US, Britain and Australia have ignored the constraints of constitutions and international law. Their arbitrary actions threaten the spirit of moderation, consensus and compromise that is essential to democracy and which guards against tyranny. This fosters an international and domestic order which says that might is right. When the government claims a mandate to implement its program unrestrained by criticism, the moral question of what we ought to do is overwhelmed by what we can do.

The 2004 election campaign showed that most Australians now give greater priority to finance than to morality. This is understandable given that they have been encouraged to associate security with prosperity. During the campaign the Opposition, assuming that people would dismiss a government that had deceived them and failed to keep its promises, tried to make trustworthiness an issue. But the government knew that the public understood trust differently and argued that they, and not Labor, could be trusted to manage the economy successfully. The return of the Howard Government suggests that 'trust' can no longer be assumed to have moral content. Indeed, the lexicon of public morality is constantly diminishing.

Lack of justice

In many areas of life, choice has been reduced to a consumer decision. Social values such as the right to basic standards of health and education have been redefined as commodities available for purchase on an open market. Offering tax cuts as an alternative to social spending undermines the idea that we are all responsible for one another. Individuals now believe that it is perfectly decent to form attitudes according to how policies affect them personally. Why not, when competition is regarded as the best means to achieve social outcomes?



This political culture might seem fair if pluralist competition maximised outcomes. Unfortunately for the powerless, apparently fair processes do not produce justice. Thousands of years ago, Aristotle noted that the strong do not need justice because they routinely get what they want. Perhaps this is why critics of the Howard way are alarmed when the government uses regulations, budgets, appointments or public denigration to undermine the balancing power of the institutions of justice.

Despite Aristotle's observation, millions of Australians care for justice either for its intrinsic value or because they believe that a just society is a stronger one. They base decisions on a desire to maintain our integrity, help others to live in dignity or enhance our international reputation. This is why they want to show compassion to refugees, the disabled, or those with fewer economic resources. Current policies tempt people to decide what they ought to do according to selfish priorities, but without a balancing selflessness, society drifts into compassion fatigue and is beset by issue overload.

While many people form their attitudes with integrity and a regard for ethics, it has become very difficult for them to influence government. As the individual is paramount in the political paradigm, groups that might coalesce around issues become fragmented. Mobilising a groundswell of support on any issue is very difficult. Some critics charge that the government has understood the importance of this process and exploits and aggravates the problem by a tactic known as 'wedging', which sets some categories of people against others. So baby boomers are held to be responsible for debts and prices and younger people are warned that providing care for ageing generations will be a great burden.

Silencing critics

When a parliamentary opposition is in disarray following successive election losses, the media attain greater critical importance. Occasionally media outlets might flex their muscles, as when engaging in self-fulfilling prophecies about leadership, but such threatening campaigns serve the interests of media rather than the public. The government has been treated kindly by both Packer and Murdoch conglomerates. It holds out the possibility of changing the laws on cross media and international ownership and has spent more on advertising than any predecessor. Commercial media are natural allies of a pro-business government and criticisms raised in supposedly analytical programs and columns are undermined by the background of advertising within which they are situated.

Simultaneously, the government's avoidance of serious public debates creates the impression that critics receive favouritism. The government uses this impression to represent critical institutions as biased. It has made some 1000 complaints about bias in the ABC, but finding that these are rarely upheld, it has changed the Board by abolishing the position of staff-elected representative and appointing conservative commentators favourable to government policies.



Critics recognise these moves as part of a broader 'culture war'. In 1996, the Coalition campaigned against an alleged political correctness that supposedly stifled debate. PC became rhetorical shorthand for policies designed to end discrimination against women and indigenous peoples, guarantee a minimum living standard, proudly embrace multiculturalism and care for the environment. This campaign validated complaints of the kind that typify racism, ignorance and envy. The culture warriors remain anxious to end the so-called guilt industry and to dismiss the black armband view of Australia's past, so that our consciences can be relaxed and comfortable.

The latest indication that dissent is undesirable is the decision to weaken Senate committees. With the parliamentary opposition in the House of Representatives rendered ineffective by the government's strategies, Senate committees have provided detailed investigation of issues by welcoming submissions from a broad range of stakeholders. These inquiries have resulted in the publication of many valuable reports. Some inquiries, such as that into the so-called 'children overboard' affair, have embarrassed the government. Mandatory government majorities on committees will lessen the likelihood of adverse findings.

While the government appears to be astute, the chaos over changes to industrial relations laws suggests that it does not control the administrative consequences of its actions. Perhaps its moves to bend the bureaucracy to its will have weakened the quality of advice from the public service. Honest MPs admit in hindsight that most Bills are improved by delays in the Senate. The bills to introduce the GST were lauded by the Treasurer as perfect, but when the Senate referred the legislation to committees, the government used the opportunity to introduce

dozens of amendments that enabled it to avoid embarrassing complications. Perhaps, by weakening Senate committees, the government might remove yet another source of constructive criticism. If so, then excesses and arrogance will quickly produce electoral unpopularity.



Success and excess

Perhaps fear of voter backlash explains recent amendments to electoral laws. Enrolment has been made more difficult while the making of large anonymous donations to candidates has been made easier. Should the Coalition win another election, abolition of compulsory voting might be on its agenda. One argument for voluntary voting is that people lack interest in politics. However, it would be a tragedy were that apathy to be deliberately fostered by government because disengagement favours the incumbent. An electorate switched off from political discourse cannot be persuaded to swing to the Opposition, and without genuine debate, there is no reference point for evaluating the relative claims of the alternative governments.

Governments generally have an interest in deterring people from listening to them. While people should not be forced to take a close interest in politics, those who are deprived of a political life are clearly impoverished. Aristotle even advised that community involvement is the only way to a fully ethical life. That is why it is worth persevering in engagement with political issues, even while the dominant political paradigm discourages ethical arguments. Hopefully, in time the lamp-post will again be used for both support and illumination.

When kindness takes over from love

ESSAYS

Reflective

Published *07-Aug-2006*

On the day I went to visit my mother in the facility that was to become her home, I found her standing in the corridor alone. She was holding a tea cup half filled with cold water. She looked at me for a moment, and then smiled as she registered who I was. 'I've just found out Harold's left me for another woman,' she said, still smiling.



Harold is my father. Over the last few years, he had gradually transformed from husband to carer. He tended to my mother's ever increasing physical needs 24 hours a day until, at 78, he was worn out and could cope no longer. It was not just the physical demands, but the emotional assault. My mother was oblivious to this.

'Has he?' I said, trying to stay neutral and assessing her mood. 'Yes,' she said, 'but I'm OK because he's coming to take me to church on Sunday.'

My mother's memory, as she said herself in one of her more lucid moments, is like Swiss cheese. But the synapses that hold God in place are still firing on all fours. God remains hardwired, in ways I could never have imagined, and I am, at last, sincerely grateful. Her religion has become her salvation. She has been going to church every Sunday for as long as I can remember. After many years of refusal, my father has started to go with her.

'At his age,' she says, 'and for a younger woman.'

'How do you know?' I ask, aware that I'm straying into dangerous territory.

'She rang him at home once, crying, and asked to speak to him. I wouldn't have thought he'd want to come to church.'

She turns and raises her eyebrows: 'But he does.'

The philandering husband is not entirely lost, it seems. He may yet repent, see the error of his ways, and return like the Prodigal Son. It is my ardent hope for her and for my father that this outlandish fantasy becomes a factual narrative in my mother's mind. Better for my father to be wrongly condemned but forgiven, instead of merely wrongly condemned as he has been, in one way or another, for these last few years.



Every day we must negotiate the twists and turns of reality, fantasy, truth, as well as falsity, hope and despair. Some days you want to weep, on others your stomach lurches with anxiety and on some days you can switch off, just like she does.

I once read a book about the mind, in which the author described Alzheimer's as a diagnosis of exclusion. When every other possibility has been ruled out, the condition of failing memory is called Alzheimer's Disease. My sister likes to point out that my mother has vascular dementia, a condition that seems to offer my sister some obscure comfort, even though it seems the effects are exactly the same. In the book, the author makes the observation that memory is not some added extra, but who we are. Without memories we are no-one, and it is into this abyss of being no-one that it is our duty to helplessly witness our mother slide.

When I came to visit my mother a week ago, she was sitting on her bed sobbing for the same reason. Harold had left her for another woman. 'No one takes my side,' she said. 'Don't you think he's terrible?'

She demands an answer from me, and only one answer will do. I feel paralysed, like a child unfairly carrying the burden of their parents' emotional needs, but I am nearly 50 and have children of my own.

'Yes, he is,' I say, putting my arm around her, astonished that this black lie, although told for the best of intentions, should feel so disloyal and painful. And it occurs to me with a kind of horror how vulnerable she is, how anyone could tell her anything and she would have no way of assessing the veracity of it. She could be tortured by lies and untruths in the same way she is being tortured by the lies of her own mind's making. She refuses to be persuaded that they are lies of her own mind's making, for then she would be truly mad. So she screams at you, if you say nothing when she tells you of your father's infidelity.

'Don't you believe me?' She sobs again in disbelief that her own daughter could be so cruel and heartless. It is of no comfort to me to know that it is the illness that makes her think of me in this way. I still want her to love me, like the child that I still am, but more than this I want her to know that she is still loved—not just by me but by us all, and especially by my father, who at this moment stands damned to hell for a crime he has not committed.

My husband told me that a psychologist he used to admire once said that there's no room for honesty in relationships, but only kindness. I think that the wisdom of this is that it is mostly easier to be honest and harder to be kind. Kindness requires tact and empathy, which are qualities harder to muster than simple honesty. To be honest is to say 'I don't think I love you anymore'. To be kind is to stay, even when love has passed.

The hardest thing of all about kindness is that it is mostly invisible, like my father's devotion to my mother. It is for this unseen work that God was invented, to witness the daily acts of

kindness that go unheralded and unnoticed, so that kindness is not in vain and so that people can persevere with kindness beyond all reason and sense without losing heart. The Dalai Lama has said: 'My religion is kindness.' Surely there is something irreducibly holy about kindness.

It is in the kindness of the staff who look after my mother that we must now put our faith. I wish I believed in God, so that I could pray to him for all these things, and I wish that all the staff belonged to the Dalai Lama's religion.



The prospect of visiting my mother fills me with dread. When I'm cornered in the contest between fight and flight, flight always wins. I fear the intensity, and regret my inability to give her what she needs. It is this failure to be able to comfort that is almost unbearable.

So I am delighted, on this occasion, to buoy her with hope that Harold will return from his philandering ways. And I can say with my hand on my heart that this faithless, faithful husband will come and take her to church on Sunday.

We walk down the hall to her room. Though once quite tall and elegant, my mother is now stooped, and shuffles as if she were a hundred years old. A man wearing a lumberjack shirt, and the same faraway look as my mother, says hello. After taking two more paces, and he still in earshot, she says in a clear and loud voice, 'He likes me. Silly old fool.' And I am momentarily thirteen again, shamed by my parent's directness. I have to persuade myself that the social glue here is made of different stuff.

You can't know which memories are going to last, and for how long, and which are going to fade. You can't rely on her to know who you are when you come to visit or to call you by your name. It may be your sister's or her sister's. And she may tell you when you visit, as she does on this occasion, that she has seen no-one at all since she's been here, except for her sister, who lives interstate in her own facility crocheting rugs for their long dead mother. I like to think that she has seen her sister so I ask my mother how she was. 'Not good really,' she says. 'She didn't recognise me. She has a memory problem you know.' I will tell my sister this story and we won't be sure whether to laugh or cry because my mother still speaks a piercing truth every now and then.

One day, my sister, my mother and I were sitting down to lunch. It was not long before she moved into the facility. 'Am I the mother of you and you?' She pointed first to my sister, and then to me. Yes, we said. 'That's good,' she nodded. Her face was blank, but she seemed to be in some contented place. Then she said again, 'That's good.'

Different rememberings of the Battle of Long Tan

ESSAYS

Historical

Published 07-Aug-2006



Every few years something comes up about my brother, John, and the other five MIAs who didn't come back from Vietnam. A Veteran contacts us or there's an article in the press. Now, there's an invitation to go to Perth in August where they're naming streets after the six, in a new housing development. 18 August 2006 is the 40th anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan, in which 18 Australian and more than 245 Viet Cong soldiers were killed. There will be different rememberings. It's hard to put the dead to rest.

The first Vet, Barry, rang me in Melbourne 14 years ago with an invitation to Canberra for the dedication of the Vietnam Veterans War Memorial in October. I tried not to be hostile on the phone:

'Listen Barry,' I said, 'it's not my scene. Military salutes. Tough talk.'

'It won't be like that. I promise you.'

'How many gooks you killed a day.'

'Shit, Christine,' he said gently, 'we're not a bunch of Rambos.'

'Glorifying the whole thing.'

'Glory? Not much of that.' He was still calm.

'Look, I marched in the moratoriums. I was a teacher. Took my students along.'

He wasn't going to be drawn on that. 'John was part of a great team. We were doing a dangerous job,' he said.

Yes, he was a patient man. He wasn't going to get off the phone until he'd had a good try at getting me to Canberra.

He told me how they were the ones who went out on the dust off. If one of ours was bleeding under the vines in the jungle, among the leeches, the medics would fly out and bring him in. When a bloke came in from a dust off, like Pete, he wouldn't waste any time. Pete, yes, he'd swagger in to the mess, still in his battledress, jumping the queue, straight to the bar.

'...•Give us a beer,...• he'd say and expect to be served. We were the ones that brought them in if they went down. And he'd get served.' I had to laugh.

'Barry, I've already told you. I was on the other side.'

'So? That's old stuff.'

'I've got a friend who was a conscientious objector. Maybe they were the heroes.'

'Maybe,' said Barry. 'Look mate, I was nineteen when I went. I didn't even know where bloody Vietnam was.'

'Well, you were a pack of bloody idiots going,' I said and started to cry.

'I know, love,' he said. 'Sometimes I think that the lucky blokes came back in body bags.'

'John and I didn't even get on. He was a bastard, but he was my bloody brother. What if I can't stop crying and spoil your reunion?'

'It's yours too, darl', he said. 'You're one of us.'

I told him no way. He said it was the last hurrah for 'Nam. A chance to bury ghosts. Just do it, he told me and said he'd shout me a beer.

We didn't get on, John and me. I found an old photo of him. Beautiful blue eyes. Long black lashes that I should have had. He was a real lair who left school early, went to pie nights at the YCW footy club, raged with mates, smashed up his hotted-up Holden now and then. A broken rib here, a gash there. He was a hard worker though, delivering frozen chooks, thumping dead poultry around the freezer truck all day.

John glared out at me from the photo, a can of Foster's in his hand, leaning against the Holden. His wife, Carmel, must have taken the snap on his 23rd birthday, not long before he went away.

'I'm going to Vietnam,' he told me. 'You never get anywhere if you don't take a few risks.'

'What does Carmel think?' I knew she was pregnant.

He shrugged. 'I'll have a War Service Loan when I come back and we can get a house. I've worked it all out; one chance in 5,000 that I'll get killed.'

We were a punting family.

'You're bloody mad,' I said. 'It's a crazy war.'



His mouth went into a hard line. 'Don't give me that university commo crap,' he said and swaggered out.

He joined the medics and was at Vung Tau, Nui Dat, one of those names. We knew he was quite safe. He told us that he operated the radio at the base. Thank God he wasn't running around among the Vietnamese people with Armalite rifles amid the napalm and the bombs.

The Vietnam War. Crazy stuff. Make love not war. I marched down Swanston Street among the banners at the moratoriums. Troops out! Troops out! Troops out!

THE BATTLE OF
LONG TAN



I walked into the reunion on the Friday night and smoothed a sticky name tag on my chest. 'Christine Gillespie', next to the poppy that you wore if you were a relative of the 503 who didn't come back. Next-or-kin, the little label said. I looked around at the Eighth Field Ambulance survivors.

'So, you came.' Barry smiled at me and put a beer in my hand. It was mainly couples, so I was glad there was someone to talk to. They were showing slides, all depressing in black and white. 'That's the veranda of the hospital,' Barry said. 'The chopper was always parked out to the right.' There was another slide of them all having a barbeque, in shorts, laughing. Another bloke came up to us and stood near Barry. 'They were the best prawns,' he said. He pointed at the image with his pot. 'Wasn't that the day Gillespie didn't come in? Twenty past five, it was.' He wandered away and I cried. Barry and his friends hugged me and said that that was alright.

They didn't tell me until the next day that the rest of the crew got out of the chopper. How John's legs were trapped underneath when it crashed. That one of the crew tried to drag him out. How it exploded into flames and he burned.

One of the blokes drove me back to the motel that night. The music on the radio was turned up high.

'And welcome to beautiful Canberra, all you Vietnam Vets. We've got another golden oldie for you from our sixties and seventies special. Remember this one, guys, it's the fabulous Animals...'

We gotta get out of this place,

If it's the last thing we ever do.

We gotta get out of this place.

Girl there's a better life

For me and you.

—

I clung onto John's flag—the army gave it to us when he didn't come back—and we stood around in the freezing Canberra morning after the Dawn Service. The Brigadier had said it all then: our boys left home and went to war, he said, and in a few hours they were old men. There was a beating of rotor blades. We all looked up. A lone Iroquois came out of the horizon and flew over us, thud-thud-thud, as the red sun slid up, making pink marks on men's faces.



The blokes stood around afterwards on the oval, 20,000 of them. A few came up to me, asked me if I wanted anything as I waited for Carmel and her daughter, John's daughter. There was tea and fruit cake served by the Salvos. Did I want a cuppa? Another hour until the march past the Prime Minister. The band was warming up with 'Waltzing Matilda' over near the goal posts. So, I stood like a koala hanging onto a sapling and watched. There were reunions, vets who hadn't seen each other since Vietnam.

'Ray, mate, I'd never have recognised you, except for the voice.' Two Harley Davidson riders threw their arms around each other, so close I could hear their leather squeaking.

'Shit, mate, you look so *old*,' said Ray.

'Thanks pal, you haven't exactly been preserved in a time capsule yourself.' They hugged and laughed like kids and offered me rides on their bikes.

'This is my first ...œback to Vietnam... •, mate,' said Ray. 'It blows me right out. I'll see you at the lunch.' He punched his friend on the shoulder and limped away on a gammy leg.

I yawned and waited and thought back.

—

It was mid-April 1971. I called in to Dad's that Sunday night. I was late. They all sat around, my Dad, two sisters and two brothers, with the light dimmed, just staring at me. 'O.K. So I'm always late. I'll be late for my own funeral.' I laughed. They looked away.

'John's dead,' said Dad.

'That's ridiculous,' I said. 'He works at the radio base. He doesn't even go out with a gun. They couldn't kill him there. He's home on leave in a week.'

'He went out in helicopters to pick up the wounded. It was part of his job. He got shot down.' Dad began to cry. 'They couldn't recover the body. The major came and told us today.'

'Well, how do they know he's dead if there was no body. You're all being stupid,' I yelled.

'Well, he died for his country,' said Dad, not looking at me.

Barry took me around. So did some of the other blokes. He picked me up to visit the War Memorial. It was beautiful. Slabs of concrete, a huge image of a bunch of men being air-lifted out of some village by a chopper. There were 35 inscriptions on the northern wall, quotations, the language of the troops:

The RAAF dust-off pilots had no light and showed great skill in coming down.

What we did on the battlefield in the morning was on our living room TV screens that night.

Nobody's got 365 days and a wakey to go.

An extreme effort was demanded from nursing staff on those occasions

- over 24 hours on duty was done on most of the days mentioned.

Contact - stand by dust off.

The decision to send an Australian battalion to Vietnam is a grave one. These are inescapable obligations which fall on us because of our position, treaties and friendship. There was no alternative but to respond as we have.

Australia's last combat forces left South Vietnam yesterday on board HMAS Sydney, ending 10 years of Australian involvement in the war.

I don't seem to have many friends since i came home. If you weren't there, you can't understand.

More than 750,000 men turned twenty during the years of the war - a ballot, with marbles spun in a barrel, was used to help select those for conscription.

Throw smoke! - i see green - affirmative!

Our family found itself divided over Vietnam.

At vampire pad our own doctors and nurses took over - we knew we had made it.

On 3 October 1987, 25,000 Vietnam veterans marched in a welcome home parade through Sydney, to the cheers of hundreds of thousands. It was the greatest emotional outpouring witnessed in decades.

I walked with Barry around the three concrete memorial seats. At each end of these memorials is the name of one of the six Australians recorded as Missing In Action.

On the way back to the next event, I flicked on the car radio. 'And another golden oldie for you boys. Remember this one fellahs?'

I'm leaving on a jet plane

Don't know when I'll be back again...

Surface reality only in DIY TV

MEDIA

Television

Published 07-Aug-2006



Self-help programs: the friendly face of reality TV. But scratch the surface, and even a friendly face can turn ugly on you. While it's merely ironic that *The Biggest Loser* promotes healthy living but keeps you glued to your TV, there's another, stealthier adversary being beamed into our homes that we'd be wise to note more carefully.

From *Burke's Backyard* to *Backyard Blitz*, DIY programs simply bulge with all manner of handy hints, as gaggles of happy hosts clamour to offer their free-to-air advice. But in reality these programs are a veritable thorn in the side of real-life contractors—not quite bad for business, but certainly unhelpful to customer relations.

This is something Shane Campbell, a landscaper and small business owner from Melbourne's eastern suburbs, is all too aware of. Of particular concern to Campbell is that these shows cite material prices that are exclusive of labour costs, which can lead viewers to react with embarrassment (at best) or hostility (at worst) when they call a contractor out and receive a quote that's far higher than they anticipated.

'Clients think they are more informed,' he says, 'but they're actually misinformed. The shows give a false sense of what goes into a job in terms of costing. People might watch and say, "I want to get this done", but then when they get their quote they get a bit of a shock. And it reflects badly on us contractors.'

Theresa Elliot, secretariat for the Queensland Association of Landscape Industries (the state's peak body representing landscapers), couldn't agree more. As well as the suppression of labour costs, she points out that in the stylised world of TV DIY, many niggly problems that can cause the price to swell incrementally are simply edited out, leaving viewers all but ignorant. 'Those little things really add up,' she says.

But it's not just cost that's misrepresented. *Backyard Blitz* fans may find themselves scratching their heads when a job finished in a matter of days by a handful of TV tradies takes the contractor they've hired much longer to complete.

'There's no way the amount of people shown can do that type of work in that short amount

of time,' says Elliot. There is, in fact, a lot more going on than meets the eye...or should I say, the camera lens.

'I went to trade school with guys who've worked on these shows,' says Campbell, 'and what happens is, [insert celebrity DIY guru here] does their bit in front of the camera and then walks off set, and contractors take over. Jobs that the shows say take three days—you couldn't possibly do a quality job in that time. It's a little bit of make-believe.'



Make-believe it may be, but it's not all deceit and detriment either. Both Campbell and Elliot state unequivocally that DIY shows do an invaluable job of promoting landscaping as a concept—Campbell even admits to being a fan.

'You can get great ideas,' he enthuses. 'Guys like Jamie Durie are not all for show, they're qualified, they know what they're talking about. I also watch to keep informed of what materials can be used, and where they're available.'

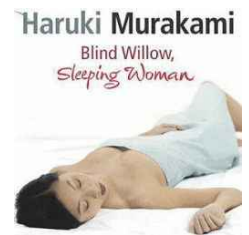
But at the end of the day, he says, 'I don't think the shows take into account the impact it has on the trade.' And there's the rub. TV programs eschewing concern for the 'little guy' in favour of entertainment (read: commercial) value—it's a familiar, yet unsettling refrain. It'd be naive to expect major commercial networks to change their tune, but at least for the viewer, education is the perfect foil to misinformation.

Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman

BOOK REVIEW

Published 07-Aug-2006

Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman is the 12th book by Haruki Murakami in English translation, and his second collection of short fiction. The release follows the excellent *Kafka on the Shore* (2005), for which avid Murakami fans had to wait three years before it was translated into English. *Blind Willow* has not taken quite so long to appear in English, though some of the stories have only been available in other, Japanese-only collections for up to two decades.



In the introductory notes to this English language edition of his latest work, Murakami himself declares, 'I find writing novels a challenge, writing stories a joy. If writing novels is like planting a forest, then writing short stories is more like planting a garden.' This elegant analogy serves to give the reader some idea of what awaits.

This collection of short stories spans Murakami's career, from 1978 when he sold the jazz club he ran with his wife, through to 2005, when he was compelled by an inner demon (or angel) to write his first collection of (fiction) stories in years. The stories in the collection are replete with the sort of epiphanies and moments of clarity that Murakami thrives on — if there is a 'theme' or unifying thread it is one of momentary revelation. As anyone familiar with the works of Murakami would know, this seems to be something of a break from form. Murakami, while not 'literary' in the same way that Ishiguro or Oe are, is a master of the obscure, the oblique, and the sometimes maddening.

The contradiction, with some decrying him as a 'pop' novelist, and others according him the ever-trite 'spokesman for his generation' tag, is alive and well in this collection. These are stories that will delight and intrigue the reader. From *A Perfect Day for Kangaroos*, an inconsequential nothing about a boy and a girl, to 'A ...æPoor Aunt... • Story', a story about a man who has, literally, a 'Poor Aunt' appear on his shoulders one day, Murakami's stories are full of whimsy and intrigue.

Given the amount of time these stories span, one might wonder about how the tone and timbre of Murakami's voice changes over time. The truth is, simply, they don't change much. Murakami is possessed of a unique literary voice among his contemporaries, and there is something unique to this voice which makes the stories identifiably his own. On the other hand, his style of story-telling does change. He seems to flit between two distinct styles, both in this collection, and more broadly through his career.

There is the engaging, narrative driven Murakami, in which tight plotting and likeable, often sad, disconnected characters play out their roles — the ‘pop’ Murakami. Then there is the ‘literary’ Murakami — heavy with allusion and inference, dense, at times difficult to persevere with and decipher. Of his novels, *Norwegian Wood* and *South of the Border, West of the Sun* fit firmly into the former category, and *Hard Boiled Wonderland* and *the End of the World*, and *Kafka on the Shore* clearly into the latter (his masterwork, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicles*, manages both.) Within this collection, there is an eclectic mix of the accessible and the illusory.



Tony Takitani, for example, is a beautiful vignette, which has been made into a short film. It traces the sad life of a solitary man, an illustrator, who one day wakes from his slumber of loneliness. *New York Mining Disaster*, on the other hand, is a curious piece which seems to be misnamed until the last moment, when an eerily confusing, near throw-away paragraph shows, but does not explain, where the title comes from.

Some have criticized Murakami for his aloofness, and his disconnected characters, for a lack of human-ness in some of his characters. Others, as mentioned, feel he could never belong to the pantheon of ‘literary’ greats, as he is far too plugged into contemporary culture. Surely though, the mark of a great writer is the ability to precipitate strong opinions, and further, to be seen as both accessible, and complex.

Murakami, in my opinion, is simply a master of his craft. His attention to detail is always a delight. What is particularly pleasing about this collection is some of the small things that come out of the reading of these stories. For example, I now know why, in so many of his novels, characters are described cooking pasta. The undoubtedly autobiographical *The Year of Spaghetti* leaves one with little doubt about the origin of so many spaghetti-eating characters down the years.

Much like F. Scott Fitzgerald, Murakami mines his story ideas again and again. Threads, ideas, and fragments of novels appear in these short stories, in a pared back form. Fitzgerald, along with Raymond Carver, is one of Murakami’s literary idols. Both of them are also now available in Japanese, due to Murakami’s hobby of translation work.

This is a collection of fiction that I could not recommend highly enough to both the initiated and the un-initiated — though I am hardly an unbiased reviewer. For people really wanting a sense of why this man is such a great writer, I would recommend *Norwegian Wood* as a starting point — it is more of a human story — and for people who want something to really sink their teeth into, start with *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicles*. Otherwise, go out and buy *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman*.

Beyond the clichés of US colonisation of Australia

BOOK REVIEW

Published 07-Aug-2006

The 51st State

Dennis Altman. Scribe, 2006. ISBN: 1920769986. RRP \$22

In my field of medicine it always seemed that Australian doctors arranging overseas postings for further experience, or hospitals establishing linkages, tended to look either to the UK or the US in roughly equal numbers, depending on reputation, past connection, personal inclination and history. The cynic might also say that sentiment and history favoured the UK, and resources the US. Anyway, they seemed to take the best from both countries, not to feel beholden to either, and the relative influences tended to balance each other in Australia.



51st State is a long essay, in the style of the highly successful *Quarterly Essay* series, on the relationship between Australia and the USA. Dennis Altman is a political scientist from La Trobe University, the home of a number of this country's most influential public intellectuals. He has extensive experience in the US, where he has held a number of senior academic appointments.

The thesis set up for analysis by Altman is that Australians, particularly on the left, tend to blame the US for many of the contemporary economic, social and political trends that they dislike in their own country. The all-pervasive presence of American fast food chains, music and films, the war in Iraq, the coalition of the willing—all these are mobilised at dinner party tables as evidence of a remorseless destruction of Australian identity, and a creeping destruction of political and business life, as well as many local norms and icons.

This book aims to undermine that cliché, without underestimating the influence. It is most of all a clarion call to Australians to move away from an over-emphasis on American (or British) influence and adopt a more diverse 'global' view, with more engagement in foreign aid and other middle-sized countries all over the world. Altman pushes for a retreat from nationalist worldviews, and a move towards a more genuinely internationalist role in world affairs.

The text that it is apparently intended to rebut is 'Rabbit Syndrome', by Don Watson, which was published in *Quarterly Essay* in 2001. In this piece Watson points to the limitations of both American and Australian imaginations, but is pessimistic about Australia; he argues the latter

has submitted to being ‘engulfed by this great and powerful friend because the mental process is already so advanced’.

Whilst Altman also does not trumpet the US cause, neither does he share Watson’s rather gloomy view of Australian identity—instead, he shows that an American influence has been operating in Australia from the earliest days. He notes that in many areas where US influence is suspected of being the main force for modern change, there are in fact distinctly Australian institutions and traditions in play. Since 1996, for example, the federal coalition government has emphasised the need for both the voluntary and church sectors to increase their roles in social service delivery. They have also favoured privatisation of many core services. All of this would seem to point to US Republican Party influence—yet despite a desire for the US model of limited government intervention, neither the Liberal nor National Parties have been willing to go any further than that with which the Australian public is comfortable. Furthermore, Australians have consistently shown that they want a social security safety net, public services that work and most importantly, a publicly funded health service to fall back on.

Whilst John Howard and members of his government and party have flirted more with religion and religious groups than their predecessors, they are acutely aware of the dangers and limitations of this in the eyes of the Australian public. Despite the undoubted influence of churches in Australia, they do not (yet) appear to have the same power and influence as the religious right in the US.

A measure of any country’s role and status in the world is how much influence it has on the rest of the world. Manifestly America has a ‘trade imbalance’ with nearly everywhere else in this respect, including all the countries of ‘old’ Europe—particularly in the areas of TV, media and music. The notion that Australia is particularly vulnerable due to its youth and fragile identity does not look so persuasive when you consider that both Canada and France have frequent debates about stemming the inwards flow of US culture, business and politics—Canada for geographical reasons, and France for cultural reasons. Interestingly, the French left often refers to most neo-conservative or ultra-liberal ideas, particularly in economics and social affairs, as ‘idEes anglosaxones’, thus blaming all the English-speaking countries collectively for these perceived evils, although the main targets are the US and the UK.

Altman points out that despite the Howard government’s enthusiastic adherence to the ‘coalition of the willing’, and wearing accusations of being the US deputy sheriff in its own region, the Prime Minister has also worked hard at maintaining relationships within the Asia-Pacific region. Humanitarian military interventions in East Timor and the Solomon Islands, better relations with China, and Indonesia (in trying times)—these are efforts on the part of the Howard government that show a willingness to act with some independence.

Prime Minister Howard would be likely to argue that the alliance with America is well-defined—a choice that every Australian government has made since the fall of Singapore.

In a dangerous world you are safest with the dominant super-power. Surely the good news is that Australia really can cherry-pick the world for influence, alliance and engagement. Most of all, it could check out of the 'war' on terror and work for world peace by bridge-building and mediation instead; it could aspire to be the Switzerland of the Asia-pacific region, rather than US deputy sheriff.

Altman surely rightly suggests that Australia should be broader in its frame of reference, and needs to cast the net of influence to many more countries around the world whose cultures and approaches to common issues may be useful to study. Altman contrasts the French and Australian responses to industrial relations reform; whilst both countries took to the streets, in France the size and sustained nature of the public protests led to a retreat by the government. He muses that perhaps the French have a healthier understanding of the balance between state and citizen than the 'Anglo-Saxon' countries, but perhaps they just understand the need for quality of life, and the importance of reducing economic and social pressure on people.

I recall seeing a senior member of the French medical profession, who remarked that he felt very at home because Australia understood the importance of quality of life, much like the French. This was in contrast with the US, he said, which he had recently visited, where the food was awful and nobody got any holidays.

This is a thoughtful essay by Denis Altman which poses many questions, provides some answers, and gives food for thought to the reader, as any good essayist should.

Strong characters outlast cheesy moments

FILM REVIEW

Comedy

Published 07-Aug-2006

Footy Legends: 89 minutes, Rating: M

Director: Khoa Do, Starring: Anh Do, Claudia Karvan, Angus Sampson



First, a confession: this reviewer showed up to see *Footy Legends* thinking he'd seen enough underdog sports films to last a lifetime. This is surely the most predictable of film genres: highs and lows on the sports field reflect highs and lows in the characters' lives; ultimately, victories will be achieved both on and off the field, no doubt accompanied by soaring, inspirational music and just a dash of slow-mo. From *Rocky II* to *The Mighty Ducks*, we've seen this scenario countless times.

But preconceptions can be misleading. The unemployed lead characters in *Footy Legends* are a step removed from the street kids featured in writer/director Khoa Do's previous film, *The Finished People*, but equally reflect Do's interest in and empathy for the world's downtrodden. In short, despite never straying from the all-too-familiar formula, Do directs this comedy/drama with such warmth it's nearly impossible not to be charmed by it.

Khoa Do's brother, Anh (*Pizza*), gives a convincing turn as Luc—a big-hearted but shy suburban Sydney local who needs to find work or risk losing custody of his 11-year-old sister Anne (Lisa Saggars). But finding work is easier said than done. In the midst of this rocky period of his life, and in desperate need of a shot of self-esteem, Luc decides to rally a bunch of his mates, former members of their formidable high school rugby league team, to try their luck in a prestigious local tournament.

Cue the rocky road to victory, inspirational music, slow-mo etc. But it works, thanks in no small part to its beautifully realised characters. The assembled cast represents a wide range of experience, from first-timers such as Saggars, to screen veteran Claudia Karvan—the epitome of graceful control in her role as the compassionate but pragmatic welfare officer assigned to Luc and Anne's case.



While Anh Do struggles occasionally as a leading man (although he does have good

range—the awkward Luc is a far cry from the sinister crim he played recently in *Solo*, Sampson brings a touch of comic sweetness as Luc’s buffoonish friend Lloyd, and an assortment of ‘unknowns’ from *The Finished People* add a layer of loose naturalism.



Sure, *Footy Legends* has its share of cheesy moments. It also suffers somewhat for the stilted choreography of the film’s rugby matches. Nonetheless, as a tribute to working-class Australian suburbia, and a good-natured reflection on the iconic ‘little Aussie battler’, it’s a film that will move and amuse in equal parts.

More challenges than resolutions in *Jindabyne*

FILM REVIEW

Drama

Published 07-Aug-2006

Jindabyne. Running Time: 123 minutes.

Director: Ray Lawrence. Starring: Gabriel Byrne, John Howard, Stelios Yiakmis, Laura Linney, Deborra-Lee Furness.

There would be few unfamiliar with the music of Paul Kelly—nor his song *Everything's Turning to White*. The inspiration for this Kelly song comes from the Raymond Carver short story *So Much Water So Close to Home*. Like much of Kelly's music, the song explores human interactions and complexities.

Australian director Raymond Lawrence also found fertile ground in this rich source material, and his interpretations come to us in the form of the movie *Jindabyne*. Lawrence has transported Carver's American tale into the N.S.W. Snowy River town, where we are introduced to four men, played by Gabriel Byrne, John Howard, Stelios Yiakmis and Simon Stone, of varying age as they set off on a weekend fishing trip.

The four men travel to the secluded river on foot, and upon arrival discover the dead body of a young Aboriginal woman who in all likelihood has been raped. After brief discussion, the men agree to leave her in the river and tether her to a tree while they continue their fishing trip, resolving to notify authorities when they return. On arrival home the men encounter mixed receptions from their partners, indifference from townsfolk, and anger from the local Aboriginal community.

Throughout the film, Lawrence skilfully explores the roles, perceptions and experiences of men and especially women within various relationships. Central character and wife Claire, (portrayed skilfully by Laura Linney) is the last to find out about the dead woman, and illustrates a woman constrained by past misdeeds and marital powerlessness. Her often-misguided attempts to build a relationship between her family and that of the dead girl serve to highlight great cultural divisions and misunderstandings within our country.

Claire offers a challenge and counterpoint to her husband's unwillingness to confront such problems. Masculinity, morality, grief, love and family are the often-crowded subject matter



with which Lawrence carves out his story. White and indigenous Australia's different processes of mourning throughout the film identify areas in which white Australia has much to learn from our land's original inhabitants. The dead woman's relatives demand, 'would a white woman—or man—have been left tied by the ankles to a tree for two nights?'

Lawrence's films present more challenges than resolutions. For the questions asked in this film there are no simple answers. The setting of this film in a community situated on top of a town submerged years ago by water, for the generation of electricity, serves as an appropriate metaphor through which to expand the film's explorations of an older, pre-first settlers Australia that has been consumed by the actions of more recent arrivals. Power, connectedness and repression are recurring themes in this film.

As in his previous film *Lantana*, Lawrence has gathered together a fantastic ensemble cast; the characters in this movie are refreshing and bold, not quite conforming to (stereo)type. This is a film which cautiously reveals a grace in the honesty, pain and acceptance that can come in life, and partnership. It also intimates that there is still a darkness at the heart of this town, and of this nation, which remains unchecked. An exceptional local release and a fitting follow-up film for Lawrence.

Saint Sophie of the German resistance movement

FILM REVIEW

Drama

Published 07-Aug-2006

Sophie Scholl - The Final Days: 116 minutes, Rating: M

Director: Marc Rothemund; Starring: Julia Jentsch, Alexander Held and Fabian Hinrichs.



German resistance to National Socialism has often been overlooked or downplayed outside Germany, and maybe inside it too. The exceptions are the high level plot to kill Hitler in August 1944, and the lesser known, but no less courageous White Rose student group in Munich in 1942-3, the subject of this moving, gripping and tragic film.

Those who have grown up in the slipstream of the Third Reich, World War II and the Holocaust (which is all of us really) never cease to ask how it could happen and why Germans were so complicit and accepting of this most cruel, misguided and catastrophic political project. This film reminds us graphically that such opposition exacted terrible retribution. It is so easy to sit in a modern western democracy, have opinions and demonstrate with what we disagree: our political courage comes at a relatively cheap price by comparison. For Sophie Scholl and her fellow protestors, politics, living out one's religious convictions, and following one's conscience were deadly pursuits.

The film tells the story of a brother and sister, Hans and Sophie Scholl, who with a close friend Christoph Probst, are at the heart of an underground student protest movement centred around Munich University after the defeat at Stalingrad. They are arrested after distributing anti-war leaflets on campus that are highly critical of Hitler and his government. They almost get away with it, but it does not take long for the Gestapo to uncover the whole operation. They are rapidly tried under wartime emergency powers in the notorious Volksgericht by the vicious and fanatical Nazi judge Roland Freisler, found guilty of high treason and sentenced to death. The sentence is carried out immediately, in violation of the law.

The film is a faithful reconstruction of the process of the arrest, investigation and trial of the group. It centres on Sophie and her interrogation by a Gestapo officer, and is based on the actual transcripts. There is therefore very little attempt to use artistic techniques to enliven, or even deepen the characters. As far as one can tell there is relatively little artistic licence taken with the actual events, and the filmgoer looking for entertainment, special effects, flashbacks and character embellishments will be disappointed. Frankly if you are looking for a good night

out this film is probably not for you. It is tense and gruelling, dominated by the terror of the process, and knowledge of the outcome.

One might question why Sophie herself is chosen as the focus for the film, over and above the others who are all appealing and brave beyond belief (see for instance [this site](#)). It is tempting to invoke a Joan of Arc-like image of the beautiful martyred heroine. The seemingly fragile woman with the steel will, moral courage and faith to overcome adversity. Certainly her responses to her interrogator, and those in the so-called court that convicted her are steadfast, principled and even witty, when all along she is walking towards death, and knows it. Julia Jentsch plays the role with dignity and style. She manages to capture the essence of this very seductive figure, her simple young beauty, her intelligence, full of young hope and idealism, but above all courageous in a way that seems impossible.

Sophie's religious faith is moving. It is not intrusive, her prayers are restrained and do not ask much for herself. There is an air of resignation to her fate, although a prison window prayer before drifting clouds in a blue sky is reminiscent of ...*why has thou forsaken me?...*, but with no anger. Temporarily the world is a bad place and baddies have the upper hand, but soon the tables will be turned, as Sophie tells Freisler when she points out that soon he will be in the dock as they are.



It does seem however seem that Sophie and her brother were reckless or even naïve, and had an opportunity to leave the scene before arrest, and that they also left a great deal of evidence lying around that made the construction of the case against them relatively easy.

So for anybody who thinks that Germans were all willing of silent co-conspirators during these dreadful years, here is powerful and apparently accurate narrative of youthful martyrdom to contradict such thoughts—a story that is redemptive for Germans, and salutary for the rest of us. If Sophie had been Catholic she would surely be a saint by now!

How to eat simply and well at the same time FOOD

Published 07-Aug-2006



It's a well-worn truism in the First World that wealthy people tend to be slim, while many of the poor are obese. This is in stark contrast to poorer countries, where body fat can be seen as a sign of prosperity and good health, and is often considered attractive. The reasons for this paradox are complex, but diet—combined with exercise, or lack of it—remains the chief cause. A diet, that is, of cheap but unhealthy food.

But it does not necessarily need to be difficult to eat well, even if you're on a tight budget. Clare Barnes, of [Insight Nutrition](#), says that it doesn't need to be expensive to cover the five main food groups, and ensure that you get a range of different nutrients. She suggests preparing as much of your own food as possible, and shopping sensibly for produce and other ingredients. Stock up on foods that you can store when they're cheaper or on sale, whether that's dry non-perishables like flour, rice and pasta or canned food like beans, legumes, canned vegies and soups. 'Tinned soups are a great healthy base for a larger meal if you add more vegetables or beans or legumes,' she says. 'Combine pasta and rice with other groups as well, like cheese or eggs or vegetables, and make your own bread and scones. Good quality bread can be very expensive.'

Look out for cheap vegetables when they're plentiful and in season, and chop and prepare yourself before freezing for later use. Contrary to folklore, freezing doesn't make vegetables lose their nutritional value; in fact frozen vegetables often have as many nutrients as fresh vegetables since they're packed and frozen relatively soon after being picked, whereas so-called 'fresh' vegetables may have been picked long before they eventually hit the supermarket and grocery shelves. Remember not to cook vegetables for too long, as lengthy cooking and high temperatures leach them of much of their nutritional value.



For children, pre-packaged snacks to take to school tend to be expensive, and they're often full of fats or sugars. Make your own muffins and low-fat snacks for them to take, or encourage them to eat fruit (especially fruit in season, which is cheaper).

And meat? You don't need to eat much of it—in particular, red meat only needs to be eaten occasionally, if at all. You get similar nutritional value from eggs, nuts, legumes, seafood and chicken, and if you're going to eat red meat you certainly don't need to buy that \$25 per kilo eye fillet. Cheaper cuts of meat, such as stewing steak, can be just as healthy as more expensive

ones, particularly if you trim off as much fat as you can. There are the same levels of protein and iron in both.



Eating home-cooked food will always be cheaper, but eating out can be a real pleasure. Take away food tends to be relatively cheap, but it can often be high in fat and salt, especially the deep fried stuff. It's often better to try and find a restaurant that has a lunch or dinner special.

Many larger chain restaurants are able to keep prices down; more often they are promoting 'healthy choice' meals. But don't be fooled. A [recent survey](#) in *Choice* magazine suggested that several of these so-called healthy options contain similar levels of fats and sodium. Some of them are relatively good, but it's hard to tell from the labelling and promotional material which can be deliberately obfuscatory.

Clare Hughes, Senior Food Policy Officer with the Australian Consumers' Association suggests that just because it's a roll, baguette, sandwich or salad doesn't necessarily mean it's any healthier than a Big Mac or a Whopper. 'And the fact that some chain outlets have some products which feature in *Choice's* best list, and others which feature in their worst list means you can't just blindly assume that products from one chain or another are automatically healthy,' she says.

Independent sandwich bars are not a bad choice. Food is made on the spot, so you know what goes into your sandwich or roll or wrap. Some larger chains are now appearing that promote themselves as healthy options. Beware, because a place that has 'Healthy' or 'Choice' or 'Natural' in its name doesn't always guarantee low-fat, low-salt dining options.



In a nutshell, do a bit of research, and if you're willing to go further then talk to a qualified dietician or doctor. There's a great deal of information around about the food we eat available today, as people become more conscious of what they eat and how they live. The problem is that some of the 'information' available in food advertising is deliberately misleading, at worst, and at best, can omit less pleasing facts and include only the 'good news' about a certain food or food type.

Three poems from the Centre

POETS

Published 07-Aug-2006

Juan Garrido-Salgado; the second and third poems are anonymous.

1.

Please let him be a bird in this land
To Daggie Sheltens, detainee in Baxter for seven years
The sea is a boat on his dream
The darkness at the shore embraces
Its journey to a new land
His visa is only a wave without a name.
Baxter, desert of long sentences
Locked up his youth
Now his eyes are broken wings
Now his heart is a cloud in a cage at the detention centre.
He knew where he was in that white room
He crashed his dream with a native tree in Glenside's hospital
His mind is a wounded hope for all within the wire desert
Within the white room
His mind is a bird without air or sky to fly
Please let him be a bird in this land

2.

Woomera burns

Exultant,
in the flames
he sees the ribs of the long ships
that bear the names
of all the seas he crossed.
He hears the horns
that laud his deeds.
Men come
with hose and batons.

3.

Woomera
Around the fence
they're burning off.
A robin,
dusty tail and crimson breast,
picks at the ashes.
Entranced,
a child looks on.
Over the wire
flies the robin,
alights upon a soft, green bush.
Towards the bush
rushes the child
and, thwarted by the wire,
howls
as if her life were ending.
Her mother also screams,

running forward,
followed by a guard.
With arms stretched out,
the child runs
towards her mother,
past her mother,
to the turnkey
who alone
can let her fly
beyond the wire.