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## **PNG needs Channel 7 publicity machine**

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins



Channel 7's recent action in sending its current affairs host, Naomi Robson, to Papua to try to save a young boy from ritual killing, was nothing if it was not bizarre. But it achieved what many believe was its real intention, which was to secure publicity for Robson and her program *Today Tonight*.

If the station really cared about the plight of young people in our neighbourhood, it would have given priority to coverage of Papua New Guinea's AIDS crisis. Peter Cronau, of ABC TV's *Four Corners*, writes in this issue of *Eureka Street* that recent estimates put the number infected by the virus to be as high as 100,000. He says AusAID research points to a collapse of the country's economy, and consequent suffering at a catastrophic level. There has been little coverage of the impact of AIDS in Papua New Guinea, which needs Australia's attention much more urgently than the Papuan boy Wa-Wa.

That's not to say that the reality of children exploited by adults is not a serious and significant problem. In this issue of *Eureka Street*, we report that it continues to occur in large numbers in Uganda, despite a peace agreement between the Government and the LRA rebels. Many Ugandan children, living in fear that they will be kidnapped and used as child soldiers or sex slaves, face the likely closure of the Government shelters that offer them safety, and the ability to live at least some of their childhood.

In another article, titled "Boys need not be boys forever", Tim Martyn writes that the childhood of men in western countries is extended by their refusal to face adversity head on. Tim, who has just left Jesuit Social Services in Melbourne to study at the London School of Economics, recently witnessed tribal initiation rituals in western Kenya. While not supporting their brutality, he does believe the young men of the Bukusu tribe are better equipped to face life challenges than their counterparts in the West.

## **Culture warriors have no place in Catholic life (full version)**

### **COLUMNS**

Summa theologiae

Andrew Hamilton



*Crisis, Catharsis and Contemplation*, the title of an exhibition at St. Patrick's Cathedral, was a mouthful. In his review of the exhibition (*Quadrant*, September 2006), Tim Pemble-Smith adds to these ingredients alchemy, the occult and Catholic Culture Wars. His review provokes reflection on the concept of Culture Wars, and the weaponry used in them.

After describing the exhibition and the controversies associated with it, Mr Pemble-Smith asks a question which he will later answer affirmatively. Could it be that Catholic pagan and Gnostic groups like Earthsong managed to get their art into St Patrick's?

He claims that although it gathered the artworks under four themes—sacrifice, suffering, mental illness and grief—the exhibition was all but incomprehensible to people of mainstream orientation. Obscurity offers receptive ground for hiding and finding hidden meanings. When he analyses six of the twenty two works shown, he finds themes such as sexual identity confusion, androgyny, genitalia, occult spirituality, magical spirits as Creator God and alchemy. He finds these same themes coded in a conversation between the artists, claiming that although the allusions are not immediately obvious to mainstream people, they are a staple of artistic sub groups.

On the basis of this analysis, he is able to conclude: The exhibition was laced with disguised meanings and insider references to pagan and Gnostic spirituality. This does, it seems, appear to have been the point: a wicked joke at the expense of those naive believers who worship at St. Patrick's. He adds that the advertised themes of the exhibition have been used in a Catholic cathedral as a masking device for mockery of Christ and the Virgin Mary, and covert promotion of the Goddess and the 'sacred feminine'. He concludes by reminding his readers that a bishop and a religious sister have not accounted for their support of the exhibition, and that its curator remains an employee of the Archdiocese.

If true, this account is damning. It implies deception and perversity in the artists and curator. After setting the exhibition in context, and reflecting on how we might fairly evaluate such claims, I shall return to the evidence that Mr Pemble-Smith offered in its support.

The display of artworks in St. Patrick's Cathedral was part of a wider outreach to those who visit. In addition to those who come to it expressly to pray, it also attracts tourists from many religious backgrounds. Through events like concerts and exhibitions, it reaches out to this wider public.



In this exhibition, the cathedral was to mediate a dialogue between contemporary art and Christian faith. The exhibiting artists were not necessarily religious, but expressed in their work a deep searching that could be described as spiritual. It was hoped that in the space of the cathedral that was shaped to Christian faith, people might see new possibilities both in the artworks and in their faith. The exhibition might help deepen prayer and appreciation of art.

By these standards, I found the exhibition successful. The large majority of those who commented on it did so favourably. A typical comment was, It is good to use media, which is otherwise ‘pagan’ and ‘evil’, and use it for the glory of God. Those who disapproved of it generally believed that it is inappropriate for a church to be used for such a non-religious exhibition.

The exhibition raised interesting questions, that call for leisurely and open discussion: about the relationship between Christian spirituality and other spiritualities, about the possibility of mutual learning and illumination, about the appropriate use of Church space, about the wellsprings of artistic creativity and prayer, and about the relationship between the forms of faith and the forms of contemporary art. I have raised these questions elsewhere.

Mr Pemble-Smith’s criticism of the exhibition is based, in part, on his interpretation of the exhibits. To evaluate such criticism is a complex task, particularly when most of the works are non-representational. Even more than in the case of representational art, viewers here contribute to the interpretation of the work. They do not simply recognise what is clearly to be seen by all. After looking receptively and attentively at the work, they will find meaning in it. The meaning they find may say something about the work; it may say something about what they are disposed to see.

Because the individual’s interpretation is subjective, it cannot of itself claim to be true and authoritative, particularly if it is used as a basis for condemnation. If we wish to claim authority for it, we would need to show that most viewers see the artwork this way, and so it is a natural interpretation. Or we would need to show that it is consistent with what the artist intended.



I shall now turn to Mr Pemble-Smith’s analysis of the works and, where possible, reproduce images of the artworks. In two works, he finds androgynous figures; in another four, evidence of the occult, and particularly of alchemy, in another magical spirits. One exhibit, where I shall compare Mr Pemble-Smith’s interpretation with the artist’s, is said to be occult and to mock the Virgin Mary.

I was surprised to find the images of *Crucifix Chair* and *Shrouds* identified as androgynous. It was not supported by those who commented on the exhibition, nor by those whose opinion I sought. The carver of the *Crucifix Chair*, unfortunately, is deceased, and cannot speak for himself, but his devout Catholic practice and the focus on suffering in the gashed sides of the image make this an unlikely interpretation. In the absence of evidence, Mr Pemble-Smith’s remark that the androgynous aspect of this and other works has a spiritual significance beyond the usual sexual identity crisis: Gnostic groups have long presented their Gods as androgynous,• is irrelevant to the work.

Mr Pemble-Smith says of *Shrouds* that rather than Christ, here was Christa, an androgynous but predominantly female figure• . Robert Klein Boonschatte, who painted the figures, says that as he portrayed Christ, he intended to represent a male figure. Nor, contrary to the critic’s judgment, did he have the Shroud of Turin in mind.

The lack of support from those who view the works, and from the artists, for Mr Pemble-Smith’s reading lead inevitably to the conclusion that the androgyny which he has seen in these works was what he was disposed to see. It does not lie in the works themselves.

I might add in passing that Mr Pemble-Smith is not alone in wishing to find in Christian art males represented androgynously or as females. This identification is much in vogue today, and is popularised in *The Da Vinci Code*. There are simple, as well as complex, reasons for minimising sexual differentiation in religious art. Within churches, obvious signs of sexual identity are often thought inappropriate. Furthermore, in much Christian theology, Christ and the saints are taken to represent and to be models for all human beings, not simply for those of their own sex. Both these factors influence the representation of the human body in Christian art.



Mr Pemble-Smith finds evidence of the occult in four pieces of art—in the torso represented in *Pillar of Paper*, in the elements of *Fire, Water, Sky and Earth* and in the letters scratched on the Hebrew opening to the Book of Genesis in *Hope*, and in the symbolism of *Icon Chamber*.



He says of *Pillar of Paper*, that the torso represents “an athletic male figure, leaning slightly and clearly very relaxed| The torso is languid and just a little erotic| It does not have to be a torso. It serves equally well as the face of an animal or perhaps a demon, with the nipples as eyes and the navel as a nasal opening.” Neither I, nor other viewers whom I consulted, would have described the torso as erotic or languid. Despite our best efforts, we could not see a demon or an animal in it. The artist himself, Godwin Bradbeer, intended to represent a human form, marked by suffering, within the constraints of the chosen form. No element in Mr Pemble-Smith’s interpretation was included in his intention.

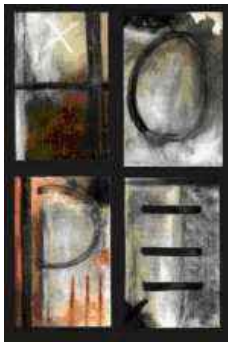
The title of Claudia Terstappen’s *Fire, Water, Sky and Earth* suggests to Mr Pemble-Smith evidence of the occult. It represents the four elements that “are central not to the Christian worldview but to the worldview of occultists everywhere”. We must ask, therefore, whether this artwork evokes the occult either in its intention or its obvious interpretation.

While the four elements may occur in modern, as in ancient, Gnostic texts, Christian texts and poetry have long used them as a symbol of the natural world. Given that the artist includes, not air, but sky in her title, and her images represent the four aspects of the title, there is no evidence in the work for occult reference. The critic’s remark that “alchemy the ‘black art’ is the reverse of what Christians refer to as sanctification, the transformation to holiness” may be true, but it again has no relevance to this work.



Of *Hope*, Pemble-Smith says that it “presents hope as emerging from a defaced copy of Genesis and being found in the healing power of ritual creative actions and works of art—persistent themes among modern Gnostics who, rejecting the biblical fall from grace, embrace a range of occult, indeed alchemical approaches to ‘healing’.”





Neither I nor others whom I consulted could see any reference in the work to the healing power of ritual creative actions. The painting seemed to represent a journey in which there is pain and defacement, but out of which can come healing. The beginning is rewritten in hope. The author's notes support this interpretation. If art was indeed part of the healing process, that would have been compatible with Christian experience and theology.

Mr Pemble-Smith's discovery of magical spirits in the exhibition appears to be tied to his interpretation of Queenie McKenzie's *Pentecost*. He claims that it "equates the Creator Christian God with mythical Aboriginal ancestral spirit", and that it "is more than possible that a painting by Queenie McKenzie was prepared in a ritual manner, with the spirit power of the being 'sung' into the work".

Those with whom I spoke saw in this painting, prepared for a Church community, a straightforward representation of the events of Pentecost. God the Father sends the Spirit on the apostles who are gathered around Mary. Queenie McKenzie is now dead. She was a devout Catholic who, as an artist, tried to preserve both the style of Kimberley art and the traditional stories. Neither interest equates the spirits of such stories with the Creator God. It is unclear both how Mr Pemble-Smith could know what is "more than possible" and what significance of what he does or do not know may have. It would seem quite as possible, although equally unverifiable, to assume that she prayed to the Holy Spirit in preparing this particular work.



The most serious charge levelled against the exhibition is based on Mr Pemble-Smith's interpretation of *Icon Chamber (The Visitation)*. In his view, it mocks the Virgin. I have found no one else who shares this view. It may be helpful to set his interpretation against that offered by James Waller, the artist.

On the basis of the subtitle of the work—*The Visitation*—Mr Pemble-Smith claims it represents the visit of the pregnant Virgin Mary to Elizabeth. "The womb of the Virgin is presented in the form of a tabernacle covered in soft black cloth parted in front as a lighted vertical slit. This serves as a mocking reference to the Virgin. Around the icon chamber on the floor are placed four gold squares. Four feathers can be seen inside the chamber. Numerologically, this is four squared by four squared. Four cubed is a reference to the goddess and particularly to her genitals." The cockatoo feather lying in front of *Icon Chamber* is said to add an Australian touch "a simple, common and uniquely Australian wordplay—'cock or two'—the cock or two being a clear reference to one or two males: the Child Jesus and whoever impregnated the Virgin."



This interpretation is again idiosyncratic. The item itself is not easily described as a black cloth parted in front as a lighted vertical slit. The opening extends from top to bottom and is more like a window, allowing the viewer to see a blue light at the top of the chamber, what is on the floor of the chamber and a clutch of white feathers. It does not naturally suggest a womb.

Certainly, such an interpretation was foreign to the artist's intention. He conceived the work as a meditation on the nature of the Icon, and on the divine visitations that the icon evokes. It does not represent Mary or her Visitation to Elizabeth. It has rather to do with the play of light in icons, and the parallel that the iconographers and theorists of the Eastern Church have long seen with the relationship between the Uncreated Light of God and the created lights of the world. The divine visitation is represented by the blue light and the blue

feather in the chamber. The latter is also a tribute to Rublev, who used blue so powerfully in his icons. The tradition of God's visitation through angels is hinted at in the clutch of white feathers in the chamber, and the single feather outside. White is associated with purity, with closeness to God. The gold squares exemplify one of the key features of icons—the capacity of gold to appear as a source of light, and not simply as reflecting it. The arrangement in four squares is dictated by aesthetic considerations, and is without symbolic importance.

Given the lack of support that Mr Pemble-Smith's interpretation enjoys from other viewers and from the artist himself, but it has no authority beyond that. What an artist might feel about the attribution to his work of such vile intentions, may be imagined.

From this analysis, it appears that Mr Pemble-Smith's reading of androgynous figures, the occult, of alchemy, of magical spirits, and of mockery of the Virgin into the exhibition, is based on his unsupported interpretation. This individual interpretation has then been projected on to the exhibition.

Mr Pemble-Smith complements his interpretation of artworks with an account of the conversation between artists, printed in the Catalogue for the exhibition. He uses the image of the "dog-whistle", claiming that irony and metaphor lurk beneath the surface of this conversation in a way that mainstream people will not understand, but that will be clear to those from "artistic and spiritual subcultures". From this conversation he picks out the words, alchemy, artifice, transformation, which confirm his view of the exhibition as pagan and Gnostic in its content and inspiration.

The best that can be said for this theory is there is a more simple and benign explanation why the speakers used these words. They were invited to discuss the relationship between art and faith. As artists, they began with the experience of making art. The paradox of art is that what is made is much more than its parts. Its raw elements, often themselves already processed and therefore artificial, are shaped into something new that surprises and delights the artist. Metaphors like transformation, alchemy and artifice come naturally to hand in giving an account of this process. To postulate a coded meaning open only to an enclosed sub-group of artists is unnecessary, and is plausible only to those convinced beforehand about the nature of such conversations.

The conclusion is inescapable: Mr Pemble-Smith finds the themes of "sexual identity confusion, androgyny, genitalia, occult spirituality, magical spirits as Creator God and alchemy" in the exhibition because he is disposed to find them there. His interpretation is supported neither by viewers nor by the artists themselves. There are, therefore, no grounds to accept his projection of what he finds in the exhibition onto the artists and organisers of the exhibition. The themes of the exhibition are not a "masking device for mockery of Christ and the Virgin Mary".

Does all this matter, and is it worth taking pains to rebut such a weakly supported argument? The significance of Mr Pemble-Smith's article is larger than its merits, and lies in his reference to the Catholic Culture Wars. I would like finally to look at the concept of culture wars and the way in which writing such as Mr Pemble-Smith's review functions in it, independently of the writer's intentions.

I find Culture Wars a profoundly unhelpful and inappropriate phrase to use. The image of War suggests that there are two sides implacably opposed to one another, and that their goal is total victory by whatever means. To speak of culture wars, too, ennoble the warrior, and suggests parity between the representatives of different positions. Culture, however, suggests a pattern of relationships that include sharp differences about goals and about ways to live. These differences are best resolved in conversation, based on reasoned and appropriately complex argument about the issues at stake. This conversation has its standards, and you are entitled to a hearing only if you meet those standards. The conversation is

ideally about truth, and not about power and victory.

When set in the image of warfare, Mr Pemble-Smith's image of the "dogwhistle" can have another resonance. The dogwhistle rustles up the pit bulls that can intimidate and maul your enemies. My concern is that articles like Mr Pemble-Smith's, regardless of the intentions of their authors, can be used in this way. They invite people to use what power they have through position, money, connections or passion, to crush good enterprises, and offer an ideological cover for doing so. By suggesting that an exhibition is pagan, Gnostic and sexually subversive, one can put pressure on Church leaders for whom, after all, the promotion of Christian art is a worthy goal, but not a priority. Although they may not be persuaded by the argument, they will realise that to support an enterprise and a group of people tainted by the frisson of such accusations will demand time and energy.

At the conclusion of his review, Mr Pemble-Smith reminds his readers that a bishop and religious sister have not explained themselves, and that the curator is still an employee of the Church. The bishop and the religious sister surely have better things to do, than to reply to charges as groundless as these. But for those named, the effect of this challenge has nothing to do with being invited to conversation. It threatens marginalisation and intimidation. This is cultural mugging, not cultural warfare.

Culture wars are about power, and not about truth, whether truth is understood as a personal value, or as coherence with reality. This controversy about a past exhibition may seem insignificant, and the stakes to be low. But the Catholic Church in particular bears its history. When people became obsessed with witchcraft, accusations of Satanic cult, sexual ambiguity, coded and secret communications, and black magic were freely made. They found a ready hearing, generated a science to justify them, gathered zealots, mobilised powerful men, and destroyed innocent lives. That was Catholic cultural warfare. It is best remembered with shame.



## Simple pleasures in Melbourne's North African heart

### COLUMNS

#### Simple Pleasures

James Massola

It's the fourth night of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Muslim calendar. It is a time of contemplation, of family, of fasting during the day and eating small meals at night. In Australia, as the days begin to get longer, there are an extra set of challenges. Many young men, low on energy during the day, and emboldened by full bellies in the evening, find themselves at a loose end.



In Melbourne's northern suburbs, where the majority of the Muslim population lives, Ramadan can be a frustrating time. Many recent migrants live in this area, having come over from such places as Eritrea, Somalia, Ethiopia, and other parts of North Africa with their parents when young.

Torn between familial duties and religious observance on the one hand, and the tempting opportunities of a more affluent society on the other—and hemmed in by a lack of education, access to services, and a sense of being outsiders in their new communities—these young men often end up feeling frustrated, alienated, and at a loose end within their own new homes.

It's a phenomenon by no means unique to Melbourne. In fact, the underlying reasons for this marginalisation are repeated over and over. Just as my family came to Australia in the '20s, and naturally gravitated towards other Italians in the community; just as the Vietnamese who came over during the '70s gravitated towards a burgeoning Vietnamese community. It's natural. On the other hand, it can contribute to an us and them sense of disquiet within local communities.

In years gone by, during Ramadan, the young men of this community would congregate after sundown, and another day of fasting, and do what came naturally, and what everyone could do equally, and freely. They would play football.



Until 1am, 2am, 3am, they would mill about under the bright lights of the commission housing buildings, talk, play, laugh and relax. Of course, at 3am, with footballs flying about everywhere, and laughter ringing out in front of many, many bedrooms windows, other people, other microcosmic communities within these towers, who had not been fasting all day, would ring the police and complain.

The gatherings would be broken up, the men would disperse; the alienation and the sense of outsider-ness would be confirmed.

This went on until 1999, when the Carlton YMCA, the Victorian police, and St Jude's church put their heads together to try and provide a solution. The solution was the Ramadan soccer program that has been running ever since.

The focus of the program is providing a community space for these young men. From small beginnings, the program has grown every year. Last year, an average of 39 young men played every night, with more watching from the stand in the YMCA building's stadium.

In conversation with Mia Bromley, the co-coordinator of the program, some interesting things come to light. The program has averaged around 70 young men a night in its first week this year. I ask her if it is something worth expanding, to which she replies, Well, obviously you need a significant Muslim population to do it. We have boys coming from Kensington, Braybrook, Sunshine, and North Melbourne. Other organisations have (run the program) out there, but I don't know that they are this year. There is certainly a need.

Funding is a big issue. As Mia says, We rely on volunteers. We have just applied to the Victorian police for funding! it's a really important partnership. They aim to send two to three people a night! It's an opportunity for them to build relationships with the young people here.

Meanwhile, out on the court, it's 11pm and time for the games to get under way. The first game for the night is Carlton Blues versus Eritrea. The games are fast and hotly contested. Tonight is finals night, with the last game scheduled late. The uniforms of the players represent a wonderful cross-section of (mostly) European teams, with a predilection for the French national team shirt, and other French sides such as Arsenal apparent. Brightly coloured wrist bands denote who is playing with and against whom.



I stop to chat to Bill and Phil, two of the three officers present for the night. They are over from the St Kilda Road station for the night, helping out Carlton. They think it's a great program, can't comment about the funding application, of course, and are otherwise happy to be here. As we chat, Bill is grabbed for the next game, Jaba Jaba versus Da Gunners. A goalie is needed.

Mia introduces me to Abdul Rashid. He has been playing here since the program began, she says, and knows more about this program than anyone. Abdul and I have a conversation that ranges over the World Cup final, which teams we follow in Europe, how long he has been here in Australia—he came over from Eritrea when he was 12—and what he thinks of the program.



All the boys like to play soccer especially this week, when it's school holidays. Most of the boys are 17, 18, they love to play soccer. They love to come here. It's good, it's good. I ask him how observant of Ramadan the boys here are, and it's a simple, very observant, very observant.

He heads off to chat with friends who've just arrived, and I settle in to watch for a while. Mia comes out to announce that the sausages, donated by Medina meats, will not be free tonight, but will cost \$1, because of damage to the toilets on Monday night. She is greeted by some light jeers, and disinterest. It is between games, and people are chatting. I find myself wondering whether they will sell any sausages at all tonight.

I wander over to the office after the announcement and the next game has begun. I ask her if \$50 will cover the cost of sausages for tonight, so they can be free, like they usually are. She is surprised; I have been inspired by the work being done here. She smiles, but says no.

It's not really about the money; it's about the bathroom on Monday night, and about consequences. The money from sausages will not cover the damage to the bathroom. But the guys who come here have to understand that there are consequences to their actions. She goes on to explain that, just as the program aims to bring these new Australians into the fold, so it must also make clear that participating in society involves responsibilities, and not just privileges.



The work the community centre does is not just focused on providing a space for football one month a

year. There are outreach programs, homework programs, excursions—a wide range of activities designed to bring people “into the fold”. The challenges can be immense. Sometimes they have to be addressed, looked squarely in the face. Sometimes it is good to forget it all, play some football, and feel at home.

## As other people see us...

### COLUMNS

In Transit

Morag Fraser



Americans are just SOooo arrogant!

This isn't Baghdad. It's a suburban Melbourne post office and the young woman with the vehement opinion is about 20—she would have been a schoolgirl on September 11, 2001. What riles her as she weighs my *New Yorker* re-subscription envelope is the pre-printed address: it doesn't include a country, just the street, state and zip code.

How am I expected to know it's America? They just think they run the world. I'll show them!• She brandishes a black texta and scrawls “USA” across the envelope, sabotaging the urbane decorum of the *New Yorker's* form letter.

*Let the Hero born of woman*

*Crush the serpent!*

I'm so distracted by the morning's news about President Bush's proposed detainee legislation—torture by another name, *habeas corpus* traduced etc.—and the Australian government's winking at it, that I mumble a cowardly ‘mmm, uhuh,’ and retreat home to pack for Providence, Rhode Island. Lost opportunity.

In the *Providence Journal* (founded 1829) chief political columnist M. Charles Bakst notes that in the Democratic state of Rhode Island, “Bush” is just short of a swear word. The *New York Times* condemns the detainee legislation in an editorial headed Rushing Off a Cliff.

It doesn't spare the Democrats either, from any state, concluding that Americans of the future won't accept their pragmatic cave-in—so they can't be branded as soft on terrorism (sound familiar?). Rather, trumpets the *Times*, the American people will know that in 2006, Congress passed a tyrannical law that will be ranked with the low points in American democracy”.

*I can read his righteous sentence*

*By the dim and flaring lamps*

On the leafy campus of Providence's Brown University, you can hear, as I did last week, *Newsweek's* senior editor Jonathan Alter in a public lecture on democracy and leadership under Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Comparison with the Bush administration is implicit and unavoidable. Alter is a careful journalist, hard-nosed, scrupulous in his assembling of facts, of evidence—not much red stuff bleeding from his liberal heart.



He lists FDR's many faults first, then praises the Depression and World War II-era President's bold, persistent experimentation, his flexibility, his practical ability to get things done in a time of crisis. Alter isn't shy of rhetoric, invoking phrases like the winds of chance, the hurricanes of disaster.

The audience immediately conjures Katrina and manifest government inaction—Bush not getting things done. Almost as an aside, Alter says: I think the American people finally get it: this guy doesn't care about them. Heads, many of them young heads, nod all round the room. These are not downtrodden youth: a year at Brown costs about US\$40,000.



*He is sifting out the hearts of men*

*Before His judgment seat*

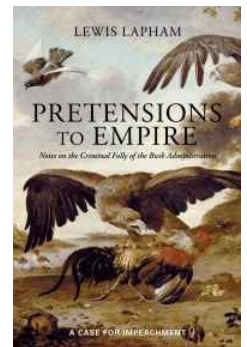
But what about Fox News? How many Americans read the kind of books and journalism you write?" I ask as he signs my copy of *The Defining Moment: FDR's Hundred Days and the Triumph of Hope*. Not enough," he grants, more angry than deterred. As he moves to the next signing I hear words about reasserting constitutional rights, democratic entitlement and responsibility. Alter wants to change America's present course.

*With a glory in His bosom*

*That transfigures you and me*

Next day I stand up in the Brown U Bookstore and scan the latest table of new releases. Alter's book is there. So is Lewis Lapham's *Pretensions to Empire, Notes on the Criminal Folly of the Bush Administration*. Its subtitle is A Case for Impeachment. I lived in upstate New York during the Watergate hearings, so a ghost walks—and it's not the Phantom—when I read, in the *Times*, that Bob Woodward has a new book out, called *State of Denial*, detailing, from official but not always named sources (remember Deep Throat?), radical dissension in the Bush ranks.

But weigh that against the next book I turn to: *Godless, The Church of Liberalism*, by Ann Coulter, recent *Time* magazine cover girl and warrior queen of the right. She has her own website. You can sample her quotable quotes: Whether they are defending the Soviet Union or bleating for Saddam Hussein, liberals are always against America. They are either traitors or idiots. Or, There are a lot of bad Republicans; there are no good Democrats. Coulter says (whether she believes it is moot) that the US should "nuke" the North Koreans. Let them die to make men free.



I'm staying just down the street from the John Brown House. Not the abolitionist John Brown, whose body lies a-mouldering and who prompted *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*, but John Brown, slave trader, privateer, merchant, patriot, member of the US House of Representatives and supporter of George Washington. John's younger brother, Moses Brown, became a Quaker, social reformer and ardent abolitionist, and saw his brother John in court over slave trading.

Paradox? Ambiguity and contradiction in the very stones that underpin American democracy? Yes. But the resolution, if there is to be one, is to be found here too. Over and over again. My young friend from the Post Office should visit America. Meet the people. See some of the glory.

## Renewed esteem for a former marine enemy

### COLUMNS

Archimedes

Tim Thwaites



Recently the NSW Department of Primary Industries put out a press release, proudly announcing the development at its Cronulla Fisheries Centre of artificial wombs to assist with breeding larger numbers of grey nurse sharks.

Archimedes was fascinated that this \$600,000 project was duly reported and discussed in the media with a minimum of public outcry. He can remember the days when grey nurse sharks were cast as villains who preyed on unsuspecting swimmers. As such they were to be shunned, feared and killed.

We know better now. The modern image of the shark is of a top predator and endangered species, whose potential disappearance from the marine ecosystem could lead to nasty imbalances further down the food chain. And, as it turns out, grey nurses are supposedly not particularly aggressive.

In nature, things are often not as they seem superficially. If there's one thing the development of the biological sciences—ecology, biochemistry, genetics—has taught us over the past 50 years, it's how bewildering complex organisms and their interactions are.

At the level of the shark and the snake, we seem to have absorbed that lesson. They are not necessarily evil animals, and are an important, functional part of the environment. We now also know that simple solutions, such as the blanket use of broad spectrum insecticides and antibiotics, can have a negative impact and that introducing exotic creatures, such as rabbits, foxes and cane toads to the Australian environment, is a mistake.

But we still have great difficulty coming to terms with biological complexity. We don't handle it at all well. We seem to hunger and thirst for a simpler world. Take our attitude to diet, for instance.



It seems that every second week the advice as to what is good for you and what is bad for you changes. And often the same dietary ingredient is labelled both good and bad at the same time on the basis of different studies.

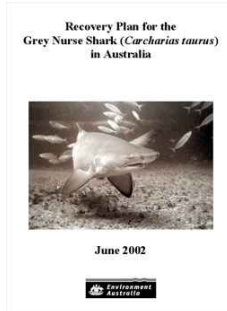
If we stop to think about it, this is not surprising. Most foods and drinks consist not just of one ingredient, but of hundreds of different compounds, many of which can interact in different ways with the hundreds of thousands of different molecules which make up our bodies. So, the stimulant caffeine is only one compound in coffee, which also includes a range of cancer-preventing antioxidants, and many other biologically-active substances besides. Further, whether the balance of ingredients in any one food or drink does you good or ill may well depend on your own genetic make-up.

A blatant example of this dietary complexity was outlined in a recent editorial in the *Sunday Age* on the push by the Salvation Army to have cancer warning labels pasted on bottles of alcohol. The editorial writer pointed out that while alcohol did indeed raise the risk of cancer, for the moderate drinker the cancer risk from alcohol was still low, far lower than smoking, sun exposure or lack of exercise. On the other hand, recent studies suggest that a low level of consumption actually has a benefit in protecting



against heart disease.

At another level, we all know that in moderation alcohol can play a useful role as a social lubricant, but in excess it leads to social disruption. It all depends on who you are, and how much you drink.



In the face of these kinds of contradictions, all we can do is learn more about the complex interaction between diet and disease, and play the percentages. The most recent research suggests that exercise is almost universally good, smoking is almost universally bad, and most other things we take into our bodies are somewhere in between.

That's typical of almost all biological systems, including human societies. They're a good deal more complex than we take them for—and it's rare that a simple, black and white solution will solve a problem. Often, the failure to acknowledge the complex links in natural systems just makes matters worse.

Many would argue, for instance, that the lasting legacy of imposing the simple solution of Prohibition of alcohol in the US was a boost in endemic organised crime, and that the War on Drugs seems to be proceeding down much the same path.

The crude application of brute force doesn't necessarily solve political and economic problems either—as the Soviets found in Afghanistan, and the Coalition of the Willing is finding in Iraq. Antibiotics did not turn out to be a magic bullet to treat infectious diseases forever. Nor are we likely to find a simple solution to climate change, be it a wholesale swing into renewable energy, or nuclear energy.

Maybe the greatest long-term spin-off of research in the biological and medical sciences will be learning about how to work with the complex structures exemplified by biological systems.



## Boys need not be boys forever

### CORRESPONDENCE

Tim Martyn

A small mud-covered child stands naked and trembling in the dim light of dawn. Encircling him, family and friends wait in silent anticipation for the ceremony to begin. The time has come for the boy to become a man, but first he must withstand the knife.



Every second winter, in the month of August, adolescent boys of the Bukusu tribe in Western Kenya face this test. Before acceptance into adulthood, they must endure all without exhibiting pain.

In the West, teenagers scale railway gantries to emblazon their fame in spray paint letters. They make names for themselves at parties by always throwing the first punch or downing the last beer. On the sporting field, they aggressively imitate their “role models” in the quest to become admired as “real” men. With few legitimate avenues available to express their prowess, some young men resort to risk-taking behaviour through sex, drugs, petty vandalism and theft. Through these *de facto* tests, boys push the boundaries of their adolescence, straining for acceptance by adult male family and peers. Often, it ends in tragedy. More often still, it never ends.

Age milestones have never been an effective method of separating the men from the boys. At 18, you may gain legal access to drink and promiscuity, but little else changes. The infantilisation of adults imposed by omnipresent advertising, the commercial worship of youthful irresponsibility and whimsical consumerism has helped to perpetuate the cult of “adulthood”.

“Thirty is the new 20,” comes the catchcry. “Growing old is a state of mind!” How true this is. It seems that the fountain of youth lies in avoiding responsibility. Thus boys have babies and so give birth to the next fatherless generation. Attempting to fill the void, male “adulthoods” purchase great totems of masculinity: big houses, fast cars—but no family to fill them with; and so aged bodies conceal puerile minds. In the absence of any true rite of passage, they impotently flaunt their virility, leaving others to bear the costs.



In generations past, our forefathers faced up to adversity head on; they had no choice. Through struggle, they learned to value that which was most dear: family, community and fraternity. They had responsibility thrust upon them but never shirked the load. Yet what comparable tests of courage are available to contemporary males?

There is a great silence regarding what it is to be a man in today’s society. The positive has been replaced by the normative. We ought to be better SNAGs, more metrosexual; we are to be more loving, more understanding. These are all ideals to strive for. But too many men, it seems, get lost on the way there for want of knowing where to begin.

As we’ve progressed from a “traditional” to “modern” society, we seem to have forgotten that one can be rich in a multitude of ways. Too many men have climbed the corporate ladder to find they didn’t like

the view. Others have amassed great wealth only to find the more you have, the more you have to lose. Thus our greatest triumphs often lead to our greatest setbacks.

Where does this leave the next generation of boys? To what should our current teenagers aspire? How can they both be proud of who they are, and become the men their community wants them to be? Perhaps masculinity has always been measured by how many or how much: how many killed; how many conceived and how much in the bank.

What we are sorely lacking are constructive methods by which boys can transform and emotionally re-emerge, ready to carry the burden of male responsibility. For there are two kinds of freedoms: *freedom to* and *freedom from*. By recklessly pursuing the former, we have denied ourselves the latter.

I am certainly not advocating the introduction and imposition of initiation rituals of comparable brutality, as those practiced by the Bukusus (or university fraternities!). However, the certainty that such rites offer, and the transformation they entail (even if only symbolic), seems to beg the question: why have we abandoned our own initiation rituals?



The trials of pregnancy and motherhood seem to represent, for many women, some clear demarcation between their “current” and “former” lives. Yet too many fathers seem not to share this same transformation.

Male society needs to reinvent the formal and informal rites of passage. We can't expect teachers, psychiatrists, social workers and the law to succeed where we have failed.

There is an age-old aphorism, often attributed to the Jesuits; “Give me the boy until he is seven and I will show you the man.” If only this statement were taken more seriously—we would be well on our way to harvesting a rich crop of future leaders.

## **Catastrophe on Australia's doorstep (essay)**

INTERNATIONAL

Peter Cronau



Whilst Papua New Guinea is a melanesian nation of welcoming and open-hearted people, generous and family oriented, in a spectacular and beautiful tropical setting, the nation itself is exhibiting many of the symptoms of decay of a small developing country.

A small manufacturing base, employment-light resource extraction projects, and a neo-liberal small government approach have not helped. PNG suffers from high unemployment, a low skills base, poor government services, and seriously under-developed infrastructure, due in part to low company taxation, a culture of political favours, corruption, and foreign exploitation.

PNG is a nation-state facing numerous serious problems—many basic public services are run into the ground, and the health system is decrepit and the worst in the region. With this background, it is the spread of HIV/AIDS that has developed into perhaps the country's biggest test, with the potential to kill thousands and wreak havoc with its economy.

The statistics are truly shocking, and the stream of stories becoming known is alarming. The Australian government's latest research into the impact of HIV/AIDS on PNG reveals it may be leading to the possible collapse of the PNG economy. Based on current trends, AusAID forecasts a potential decline in the PNG labour force of 37.5 per cent by 2020—a devastating effect on the country.

Already the number of confirmed HIV cases in PNG far exceeds that of here, despite its population being just one-quarter of Australia's. The breadth of this unfolding catastrophe has been barely reported in the Australian media.

### **The numbers:**

Official statistics state more than 16,000 people in PNG have been diagnosed with HIV/AIDS, since the first case was reported in 1987. Australia, with four times the population of PNG, has 12,000 HIV-positive people. The increase in infection rates, at up to 60 per cent a year, is the highest in the Pacific

The estimates of HIV infection vary: 22,000 says AusAID; 50,000 says World Bank; 67,000 says Caritas Australia; possibly 100,000 says the National AIDS Council.

The *Medical Journal of Australia* says it is now the major cause of death at Port Moresby Hospital—greater than tuberculosis and malaria. Each month the hospital sees over 100 new HIV/AIDS cases.

AusAID's latest research by Dr Jenny Gordon, predicts the crippling economic impact the epidemic will have on PNG. Dr Gordon estimates that based on present trends, by 2020 the labour force could decline by 37.5 per cent, GDP could be reduced by 7.5 per cent, and the budget could increase by 21 per

cent. Subsistence agriculture could decline by 24 per cent.

The AusAID report states that in 10 years time, at present rates of increase, PNG could have over one million people infected with HIV/AIDS; that is 20 per cent of the population. AusAID states PNG faces a potential HIV/AIDS disaster on the scale of sub-Saharan Africa.

### **The poverty trap:**

As a percentage of GNP, PNG has the lowest spending on health services in the Pacific region and the lowest levels of doctors and nurses. Many rural health centres have no drugs or staff. The public hospital system is stretched to breaking.

The number of people living in poverty in PNG doubled in the 90s rising to 30 per cent of the population, according to ANU research. The World Bank estimates that 76 per cent do not have access to safe drinking water. Life expectancy is already the lowest in the Pacific region.

Most Papua New Guineans cannot afford the price of retro-viral drugs—despite a recent drop in the price of drugs to \$190 per month. Many rural households have a cash income below \$20 per year. The PNG National Health Plan states that if HIV/AIDS continues to rise at the current rate, 70 per cent of the hospital beds in the country would be occupied by AIDS patients in 2010.”

AusAID predictions show that HIV has the potential to worsen poverty in PNG, with measures of economic welfare falling between 12 and 48 per cent by the year 2020.

### **Who’s transmitting:**

In PNG the disease is mainly in the heterosexual population, which implies a rapid onset and growth of the epidemic. A quarter of people infected in PNG are wives. Of prostitutes tested in Port Moresby, 17 per cent were found to be HIV-positive, according to the Institute of Medical Research.

It is estimated by health authorities that 20 per cent of serving soldiers in the PNG Defence Force may be HIV-positive. The PNGDF has recently had its first overseas deployment in many years, sending a contingent of soldiers as peacekeepers to the Solomons, thereby potentially helping export AIDS to the Pacific region.

A survey of HIV-positive males in Goroka found that most had had as many as 40 partners over the previous two years. Illustrative of the tasks that AIDS educators face was the finding that, after diagnosis, one in 20 men admit to going on sexual sprees.

Many of the partners are aged as young as 13, being procured for sex in return for food money in local bars and discos. According to National AIDS Council statistics, there are 371 children aged under 10 years confirmed with HIV/AIDS.

### **Stigma and faith:**

PNG has one of the highest rates of sexually transmitted diseases in the world at 106 per 10,000 population. So the issue of condoms has become crucial—and controversial.

Some members of the Catholic Church are fighting a running internal battle over this with the conservative elements of the church. This has implications because the Catholic Church is one of the largest overseas aid donors to PNG. Australia’s Cardinal, George Pell, opposes the church supporting condom use, saying When the main emphasis is on condoms, irresponsible sexual activity is encouraged|

No such human crisis can be solved by a rubber contraption.

The PNG Council of Churches strongly opposed a recent proposal to decriminalise prostitution that had been intended to facilitate measures for preventing the spread of HIV. Instead the Council advocated giving training and education to women.

The stigma associated with HIV/AIDS in PNG is often deadly—sorcery is often blamed for the illness, with several women reportedly having been murdered as a result. Reports have been heard of several instances of villagers burying alive people believed to be infected, and the use of infected people to introduce the disease into rival villages.

**The way out:**

The PNG government in July 2006 launched its new National Strategic Plan for HIV/AIDS. After some 15 years of NGOs, UN agencies, churches and overseas aid bodies taking the lead—and making many mistakes—the PNG government has announced it is taking ownership of dealing with HIV/AIDS.

PNG has set for itself a very high target. The overall goal of the Strategic Plan is to reduce the HIV/AIDS prevalence rate in the general population to below 1 per cent, and by at least 1 per cent by 2008, to improve care for those infected, and to minimize the social and economic impact of the epidemic on individuals, families and communities.

Australia's present main response to HIV/AIDS in PNG is the \$65 million "National HIV/AIDS Support Project" in conjunction with the National AIDS Council. This project provides funds for education and awareness raising; counselling and care; policy development; surveillance systems; clinical services; and strengthening capacity within the National AIDS Council.

Australia also provides a \$25 million contribution over three years to the Global Fund to fight HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria.

The World Health Organisation's Global Fund is subsidising the usage of some anti-retroviral drugs. But PNG has fallen way behind the initial target numbers. With a target of 3,000, only about 600 people have been put on the program to date. Lack of staffing and training, as well as serious supply-line problems, have been the causes of this lethal delay.

Health Minister Sir Peter Barter, during an August field visit, found the HIV prevalence rate among 15-29 year-olds in one town in the Southern Highlands was 40 per cent—much greater than the official figures of the national prevalence rate. Barter said: I had tears in my eyes when I addressed students at a school there. I've realised we have lost a generation to HIV and AIDS.

## Onus now on those who supported Thai coup

INTERNATIONAL

Published 02-Oct-2006

A former army commander who once declared “the army should never be involved in politics”, Surayud Chulanot, was appointed Thailand’s interim prime minister at the weekend. But the irony of this appointment matters little in a coup marked by paradoxes.

From day one, the coup against a democratically-elected government and the subsequent crackdown on the media and political activities were branded by the generals as an attempt to salvage Thai democracy.

Coup leader General Sondhi Boonyaratkalin had accused the telecommunication tycoon and former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra of corruption, nepotism and “undermining the democratic norms”.

Admittedly, the complaints against Thaksin are not far off the mark. Thaksin’s wealth and power, which once satisfied Thailand’s need for political stability, also enabled him to undermine institutions designed to preserve political checks and balances.

This style of bullyboy governance would explain another paradox of the recent events in Thailand: the casual reaction from the locals towards the coup. Perhaps they saw no difference between a slow or speedy death for Thai democracy.

The memorable images of people offering flowers to troops suggest that many Thais are relieved, if not glad, to see the self-made billionaire go, even if the means were less than ideal. However, minor incidences of vandalism are a reminder that there are also losers under the new regime.

The issue would not have been so complicated but for Thaksin’s popular support among the nation’s poor. He was seen as a political innovator who introduced policies and programs which fostered entrepreneurship and helped the poor. His government gave the rural poor government-subsidised health care and introduced a debt moratorium.



They paid the incumbent government in kind by giving Thaksin’s Thai Rak Thai party an overwhelming victory at last year’s general election and again in April this year.

However, several months have passed since the last election and, in rural Thailand, the impact of the king’s tacit endorsement of the coup remains unclear. The few political protests against the coup indicate that there may have been a mood swing outside the nation’s capital.

This notion is supported by results of a survey of 2000 people, conducted by the *Bangkok Post* on the first day of Thailand’s new military rule, which found nearly 84 per cent of those surveyed were in favour of the regime change.

This highlights a final paradox of what Colum Murphy of the *Far Eastern Economic Review* calls “Thai-style democracy”, which fuses the popular will with the unquestioned authority of the king. This is





the only system that will work for Thailand, the king's right-hand man, General Prem Tinsulanonda, was quoted as saying on the day of the coup.

The idea that the Thais love their democracy as much as their king is hinted at in an upcoming report on Asia Pacific non-governmental organisations' (NGOs) perceptions of Australia, conducted by Uniya Jesuit Social Justice Centre.

In the survey, Thai NGOs were asked how they rate the importance of a series of foreign policy goals. Promoting democracy in the region was rated fourth among eleven policy goals, with eight out of ten NGOs claiming that it is very or fairly important.

The survey found that for at least one group of Thais, a group most likely to have supported the coup, democratic values themselves are not questioned.

While democratic institutions in Thailand may have taken a step backward this month, it would be a mistake to think that the Thais' casual approach to the eighteenth coup in 74 years reveals a national disposition towards authoritarianism, as some cynics have suggested.

The fact that so many Thais were conscious and concerned about Thaksin's electoral rigging and cronyism, is hardly a sign of democratic complacency.

To make a comparison, perhaps Australian politics would be in a different place today if the public showed the same level of consciousness and concern over issues of democracy and public accountability as they do over interest rates and petrol prices.

With the announcement of an interim prime minister, the onus is now on those who applauded the coup to ensure that the democratic institutions they had previously enjoyed are not just returned, but strengthened.

The responsibility for Australia is not to quietly continue its support of the military as it appears to be doing, but to loudly rally behind those groups pushing for genuine reform.

It is hopeful to know that there are already signs of democratic agitation, despite a ban on political activities. NGOs and civic groups from across the nation are planning a massive "Thai Social Forum" gathering to discuss political and constitutional reforms.

Ahead of this meeting, the organisers have released a petition which called on the junta to lift martial law, revoke its ban on political gatherings and end media interference. This is a positive sign and a reminder to the West not to brush off democracy—Thai-style—just yet.



## Catastrophe on Australia's doorstep

INTERNATIONAL

Published 02-Oct-2006

*This photo essay is by Peter Cronau, a producer on the ABC's 4 Corners program. For the accompanying text essay, click [here](#), or on the link at the end of this page.*

Papua New Guinea is a nation-state facing many of the problems of a developing nation. However, it is the spread of HIV/AIDS that may be the country's biggest test. The epidemic has the potential to kill thousands, and wreak havoc with the fragile economy.



In Port Moresby General Hospital's unofficial AIDS ward, nurse-in-charge Sister Elizabeth Waken works with dozens of dying patients a month. A nurse for 29 years, Sr Elizabeth struggles to keep up with the increasing numbers being admitted. The ward regularly runs out of bed-sheets, masks, diapers, and even soap and some penicillin medications—patients' families must provide food to their sick loved ones. Papua New Guinea's health system can't cope at current levels of the AIDS epidemic—and will be under greater strain as the epidemic relentlessly expands.

Ward 4B in Port Moresby's General Hospital has become the hospital's defacto AIDS ward. Many AIDS sufferers in Papua New Guinea become ill with opportunistic diseases such as tuberculosis. Each month the hospital sees 115 new HIV/AIDS cases. The National Health Plan states that if HIV/AIDS continues to rise at the current rate, 70 per cent of the hospital beds in the country would be occupied by AIDS patients in 2010."





Louis Paling spent 25 years in the army. But, admitted to hospital two weeks earlier, so far he hadn't had a visitor from the services. As well as his illness, he suffers the stigma that many with HIV/AIDS face. On the day of this visit Louis said he was feeling marvellous. Much to the sadness of his family, Louis passed away last month.

Cross infection is a serious risk in the under-staffed and under-resourced Port Moresby General Hospital. Here, a mobile drugs cabinet shared by all presents a clear risk. The impact of this on patients with weak immune systems is obvious. Sister-in-charge of the ward, Sister Elizabeth Waken, says soap is in short supply in the hospital. "I don't have enough bed-sheets, I don't have enough masks. I don't even have enough drugs. Sometimes we run out of crystalline penicillin. Those main common medicines we are always running out."



The opposite ends of the debate—two posters in the AIDS ward, Port Moresby General Hospital. The attitude of some churches is slowing education efforts. The PNG Council of Churches strongly opposed a recent government proposal to decriminalise prostitution that had been intended to facilitate measures for preventing the spread of HIV. Instead the Council advocated giving training and education to women. All agree though that a combination of ABC—Abstinence, Be faithful (to one partner) and Condom use—is what is required; it's finding the balance between these that has become so controversial.



Community education and grass roots networking has seen Maura Mea become a shining example to her community of Gorobe, a poor suburb in the outskirts of Port Moresby. Her Hope for Living HIV/AIDS project has brought the 3,000 residents of Gorobe information, resources and assistance in reducing violence, sexual assault, and unsafe sexual practices.



Maura decided to come out five years ago as an HIV-positive person, following the deaths of her two babies from the illness. She and her husband Max became the best-known faces of the epidemic in the country. Max died in June and Maura continues her battle, staying healthy with the aid of anti-retroviral medication, which is only now becoming slowly available in PNG.

Children of Gorobe, a poor suburb in Port Moresby, which is retaining hope in the face of the looming AIDS crisis.



“Mary” and “Angelique” ply their sexual trade along what has become known as “the AIDS highway”. Stretching 700kms from Lae to deep in the resource-rich interior beyond Mt Hagen, the Highlands Highway provides a fast route for the virus to spread throughout the country. Prostitution along this road is a source of income for hundreds of young women seeking a living, as ties to traditional village life weaken. I’m scared of the dangers of HIV... two of my colleagues have died of AIDS and that has scared me, says Mary. But this work is my lifeline.

The Wagi Valley Transport company is the first trucking company in the Western Highlands to have an AIDS education program. With two of their 22 drivers already dying from the disease, and another presently ill, it’s fast becoming an economic necessity. Apollas Yimbak of the Western Highlands Provincial AIDS Council provides education about AIDS and distributes condoms to the drivers.



Some in traditional warrior dress, tribes-people prepare for a reconciliation ceremony near Mt Hagen. Social events like this bring many together and so are high risk settings for the transmission of the AIDS virus. The ceremony ran for a week and 180 pigs were exchanged in settlement of a 30-year conflict with a neighbouring tribe. A splendid time was had by all.

Faces in the crowd. Practice for the reconciliation “sing-sing” is almost as much fun as the real event.



Faces in the crowd.





Traditional life is changing rapidly, not least for men in the highlands. Polygamy is now not just the privilege of “big men”. In the early days it was just the people who were considered really big leaders would take a second or third wife,• says Sr Rose Bernard, an AIDS worker from nearby Banz. But now it seems like many men, educated and even uneducated, are taking a second and third wife...

On her long trips around the remote highlands region of Banz, Sister Rose Bernard, of the Sisters of Notre Dame, counsels individual patients and holds educational community discussions. Here she talks with AIDS sufferer Patrick in Banz in the Western Highlands.



This AIDS education sign on the Highlands AIDS• Highway in Mt Hagen was funded by AusAID, and is the most visible of the efforts to stem the AIDS epidemic. But with more than 80 per cent of the rural population unable to read or write, such campaigns have not been effective. The Western Highlands province has the highest HIV infection rate by province of origin in the whole country.

Tessie Soi was one of the first AIDS activists in Papua New Guinea. As the senior social worker at Port Moresby’s General Hospital, Tessie saw a need for ongoing support for children orphaned by AIDS. She established the Friends Foundation, and runs groups supporting orphans and their adoptive families. Says Tessie, If we don’t do anything about orphans of HIV/AIDS, this is going to be our next lot of rascals in Papua New Guinea.



At Nine Mile Cemetery outside Port Moresby, the unclaimed bodies of 16 babies lie buried (front row) in a mass grave. Organised recently by Tessie’s Friends Foundation, these mass burials must await fundraising to cover the \$70 cost of a coffin and \$55 for the ground fee. Whilst not all are AIDS victims, the bodies are often left unclaimed at the city morgue, as families cannot raise the costs, or fear the stigma of claiming an AIDS victim.

Each stunted bougainvillea plant marks the grave of a baby buried in another large mass burial earlier this year at Port Moresby’s Nine Mile Cemetery. This mass burial was also organised by Friends Foundation to dispose of the bodies of 48 babies that had piled up unclaimed at the hospital morgue.



Downtown Port Moresby on the surface shows all the signs of modest economic growth, but the AIDS crisis is predicted to kill many thousands and to decimate the economy.



Click [here](#) to read the essay that accompanies this piece. All photos are © Peter Cronau 2006. The payment for this photo essay, and the accompanying article, will be donated to the people depicted in this piece working in Papua New Guinea with AIDS sufferers.

**The AIDS Angels depicted in the photo essay can be contacted at:**

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Sr Rose Bernard  
Sisters of Notre Dame  
Banz (via Mt Hagen)  
Western Highlands  
Papua New Guinea



## Shelters protect childhood of Ugandan children

INTERNATIONAL

Matthew Smeal

The scene is surreal: a small hospital stands on one side of a dirt road; timber dwellings and storefronts align the other. Three roads meet nearby and out of the darkness children emerge, hundreds of them, walking in long processions converging in the light at the gate of the hospital. Welcome to Gulu, northern Uganda.



The “Night Commuters”, as they are known, walk in from surrounding villages and urban centres to stay at shelters like the one established by Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) in the grounds of Lacore Hospital in 2004.

Many children walk distances of up to 10 kilometres every night to get to the shelters and the reason is simply safety. It is estimated that over 20,000 children have been abducted during the 20 year civil war between the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) and Uganda People’s Defence Force (UPDF).

Boys are easy targets for the LRA to bolster its military ranks. They are also easy to psychologically manipulate, indicated by the fact that many current high-ranking LRA officers were themselves abducted as boys.



While some are used for military purposes, most girls are abducted for use as sex slaves and some are given in marriage to officers.

It doesn’t take much to see that the shelters have become not just a safe refuge for the children, but somewhere where they can actually *be* children. “It’s a great paradox,” said MSF’s resident psychologist in Gulu, Tine Meyer-Thomsen. “If you look around Gulu you see all these children, yet there are no children in Gulu. They’re not allowed to be children.”

One of the biggest problems Meyer-Thomsen sees is an increasing amount of parental responsibility falling on the shoulders of elder siblings. In many cases they are taking on more of a parenting role as the parents are either killed, wounded or succumb to any one of the social problems like alcoholism, or HIV, affecting northern Uganda. “From such a young age, 12, 13, they have no life anymore,” she said.

The children also know many others who have been abducted, killed or have simply disappeared, and have to live with that constant fear themselves. “It’s insecurity about the present moment and about the future,” Meyer-Thomsen said. “They are completely lost and feel deflated because they have no future perspective.”

An average of 1,200 children now sleep at the MSF shelter in Gulu every night. However, that number has risen to over 10,000 during times of regular LRA activity. A survey of all shelters around Gulu in April 2004 found 20,000 children were sleeping in the shelters at that time.



Meyer-Thomsen runs individual and group counselling sessions to help the children cope with their constant fear and anxiety and has found that many children

go to the shelter because they see it as a “stress-free zone” and a place to “relax their mind”. Her concern now is the rumoured closure of the shelters.

With recent peace talks between the LRA and UPDF held in Juba, Sudan, ending in a cease-fire agreement, it is believed that the government will push for the closure of the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps (1.5 million people, roughly 80% of the Acholi population—Gulu, Kitgum and Pader districts—live within IDP camps). If the camps close and the people are returned to their homes and land, it is most likely that the shelters will also be closed.



So much of MSF’s success is achieved through building trust and relationships with the community. “It’s impossible to work with children without having some kind of connection to their community,” Meyer-Thomsen said. “We have made this commitment and it’s very hard to get out without having any responsible partner who can take over in a good way,” she added, concerned that a hasty decision regarding the closure of the shelters could leave the children of Gulu high and dry.

It’s still early days since the peace talks and the lasting result is yet to be seen. “What they will show, we don’t know. Things could get worse; things could get better. We’ve seen it before: peace talks have gone on and everything just turns around and it’s worse and more children come to the shelter,” Meyer-Thomsen said. “They have a saying up here: you don’t know anything about the day until the sun has gone down.”

## Sentencing laws will further alienate indigenous Australians

AUSTRALIA

Frank Quinlan



Just last week, the coroner's report into the death in custody of a Palm Island man, Mulrunji, called for a major overhaul of how the justice system deals with indigenous Australians.

Yet in the same week, hearings commenced for an inquiry by the Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, into the Crime Amendment (Bail and Sentencing) Bill 2006, a bill that will increase the potential for injustice in sentencing decisions affecting indigenous people and other cultural minorities.

The purported aim of the legislation is to amend the sentencing and bail provisions in the Crimes Act 1914, in line with the decision made by the Council of Australian Governments (CoAG) on 14 July this year, following the Intergovernmental Summit on Violence and Child Abuse in Indigenous Communities in June.

But far from addressing the problem of violence in indigenous communities, the bill risks further discrimination against cultural minorities, and should not be passed in its current form.

Under the proposed changes, judges passing sentence on federal offences will no longer be required to consider a person's "cultural background", even where this might be considered relevant. Moreover, sentencing judges will not be allowed to take account of customary practices and customary law.

The current reference to "cultural background" guides courts to consider this as one factor, among many others, in the balancing process that is an essential part of sentencing. We do not agree with the suggestion contained in the supporting material, that the current law contains an unnecessary emphasis on "cultural background".

While there is a serious need to address the incidence of violent crime in indigenous communities, this bill will not address the problem.

We agree with CoAG that the law's response to family and community violence and sexual abuse must reflect the seriousness of such crimes. CoAG agreed that no customary law or cultural practice excuses, justifies, authorises, requires, or lessens the seriousness of violence or sexual abuse.

However, sentencing judges must be free to take account of cultural background, customary law and cultural practices and background, when determining appropriate penalties. In fact, the law ought to encourage them to do so.

Significantly, of the ten publicly available submissions to the Senate Inquiry, not one supports the passage of the bill.

The bill is at odds with the findings of several major reports, including the 1991 report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody; the 1986 report of the Australian Law Reform Commission, *The Recognition of Aboriginal Customary Laws*; the Law Reform Commission of Western Australia's *Aboriginal Customary Laws* and the NSW Law Reform Commission's *The Recognition of*



## Aboriginal Customary Laws.

The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in 1991 stressed the importance of reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal people in custody.



It recommended “that governments and Aboriginal organisations recognise that the problems affecting Aboriginal juveniles are so widespread, and have such potentially disastrous repercussions for the future, that there is an urgent need for governments and Aboriginal organisations to negotiate together to devise strategies designed to reduce the rate at which Aboriginal juveniles are involved in the welfare and criminal justice systems and, in particular, to reduce the rate at which Aboriginal juveniles are separated from their families and communities, whether by being declared to be in need of care, detained, imprisoned or otherwise”.

However, indigenous people, and those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are increasingly and disproportionately represented in the prison population. The proportion of indigenous people in the total prison population increased from 14 per cent in 1991 to 22 per cent in 2005.

Criminal justice is inextricably linked to social justice. The overrepresentation of indigenous people in the criminal justice system is among the factors leading to indigenous disadvantage. We know for example, that time in prison reduces employment prospects.

It’s concerning that the motivations underlying the bill, no matter how well-intentioned, may be grounded in the very misconceptions of Aboriginal customary law, against which the NSW Law Reform Commission warned.

In particular, there appears to be an operating assumption that judges and magistrates may take account of Aboriginal customary law, in such a way as to “excuse” or lessen the seriousness of offences involving violence against women.

Even apart from grave doubts about whether this assumption accurately reflects Aboriginal customary law, the appeals process is the most effective means of redressing any individual inappropriate sentencing decision.

The senate committee’s report on this inquiry must stress the urgent need for action to address underlying causes of violence in indigenous communities, especially poverty, social exclusion and inadequate support for families in crisis.

The Commonwealth Government must ensure that any legislative action it develops in response to the July 2006 CoAG Communique, is measured and just. It must also ensure that any such action will not have unintended consequences which might further disadvantage some of the most vulnerable people in the Australian community.

An inquiry of just four weeks, with limited opportunity for public input and debate, does not achieve this, and does a disservice to the importance of the issues under consideration.



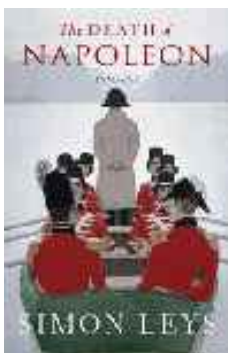
## Deft turns pepper Napoleon's final lap

BOOK REVIEW

Fiction

Clive O'Connell

***The Death of Napoleon*, by Simon Leys, translated by Patricia Clancy and the author. Published by Black Inc., 2006. ISBN 1 86395 334 5. RRP \$19.95.**



First published in 1991, Belgian-born Australian-resident Simon Leys' novella has enjoyed the dual distinction of being set as a senior secondary school English text, as well as being made into an almost forgotten, unsuccessful film with the eponymous hero played by everyone's favourite Bilbo, Ian Holm. In this re-issue, the author has provided an afterword at the request of his publisher: two brief pages that emphatically avoid explaining anything about the book or its processes, but which engage you through their common sense and a sharp, vitriolic dig at those responsible for that unfortunate film.

The concept around which Leys builds his flimsy plot involves an imaginative flight for author and reader. Napoleon escapes from St. Helena, his place taken by "a humble and loyal sergeant" while the emperor works his anonymous passage on a ship sailing back to Europe. The conspiracy to restore his monarchy falls to pieces when the ship misses its landing at Bordeaux and sails on to Antwerp. Napoleon finally arrives in Paris to find his linkman dead, the conspirators aged and useless, and his occupation gone completely when the news breaks that the false Napoleon has died.

What comes across as the most impressively wielded element in this plot's improbable, if not impossible progress, is its circling around the topic of death. Of course, the expected conclusion comes with Napoleon's obscure and ludicrously commonplace fatal illness. But the initial drive behind the emperor's escape comes from an unknown mathematician who sets in train a vast conspiracy in which, according to best underground movement practice, nobody knows anybody else. This prime mover has actually died two years before Napoleon takes up his supernumerary status on the Bordeaux-bound Hermann-Augustus Stoeffer. Although the escapee eventually (and again, improbably) returns to his capital, the almost-resuscitated restoration plan founders on the death of Napoleon's contact. Then, the final nail is pounded into the coffin of his ambitions with the apparent death of the faux-emperor.

What leaps out from *The Death of Napoleon* is the author's humour, illustrated by the deft turns that pepper this final lap of Napoleon's life, which lurches from one unfortunate hurdle to a final, insurmountable impasse. Marooned in Paris as the live-in lover of a greengrocer's widow, Napoleon is taken by the one man who has recognised him to an asylum populated by inmates who believe, all twenty of them, that they are the emperor. In a tersely accomplished turn-around, the author teases us as well as his hero, with a ludicrous and implacable identity crisis: you say you are the emperor, but so do these men—and there is no proof that you are telling the truth. In the end, all that Napoleon has for consolation is the sadly comic death-rattle delusion that another successful day of battle is dawning.



Leys follows an elliptical path, allowing his readers enough latitude to bring their own experience to bear on the novella, desisting from spelling out details that can be taken as common knowledge, are capable of quick Google-assisted verification, or which border on the fantastic without quite spilling over the edge. When he lands back in Europe, Napoleon takes the opportunity to revisit Waterloo, which he finds transformed into a latter-day theme park, complete with fake memorabilia and a pseudo-veteran who saps at the emperor's world by his distortions and lies about the momentous battle.

Unlike Joyce's Stephen—standing back from his creation, indifferent, paring his fingernails—Leys maintains his ironic position, both amused by his hero's progress and sympathetic to him. For all that authorial kindness, Napoleon remains a remote figure, probably because at only one point does he launch into action: organising with the immense military skill of another Wagram the sale of a consignment of over-ripe melons. For the most part, he remains a curiously passive figure, a fortuitous historical oddment.

At certain points in the book's progress, Leys takes time out to explore those moments when Napoleon is faced with psychological quandaries as well as physical situations that border on the insoluble. But there are two moments of descriptive stasis that themselves border on the over-ripe. The first comes early when a fellow sailor rouses Napoleon to watch an extravagantly coloured dawn. The memory of this same sunrise is the final sight that comes to him on his deathbed. A neat enough device but in the context of this work's spare style, the implementation of such circular symbolism seems contrived. Still, it serves as a momentary distraction from deft, lightly accomplished entertainment.



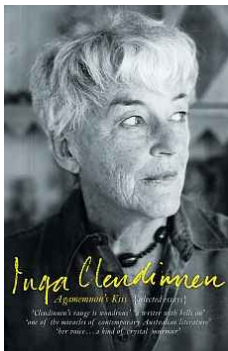
## Models for a good life and an honest death

### BOOK REVIEW

Essays

Clive O'Connell

***Agamemnon's Kiss*, by Inga Clendinnen. Published by Text Publishing, Melbourne, 2006. ISBN 1 920885 67 6. RRP \$32.95. [website](#)**



In the essay that gives this collection its title, Melbourne historian Inga Clendinnen proposes an engrossing archaeological tableau. A tireless if ethically questionable excavator, Heinrich Schliemann, unearthed five skeletons with gold masks near the Lion Gate at Mycenae. The skeletons crumbled in Schliemann's hands, but he said of the masks, "Today I kissed the lips of Agamemnon." Well, he didn't—none of the masks came from the Greek king's tomb—and Clendinnen points out in her final words that in any case such a kiss is not a physical matter, but comes about through words and thoughts; this embrace is given only to "we happy breed who practise the magical arts of History".

That is a splendid, moving boast and one which many of us would admire, but does it hold water? It does if you accept a statement proposed in an earlier essay, "Backstage at the Republic of Letters", which began life as a lecture and is, despite the author's wry disclaimer, all the better for having that format. Here, the author proposes that "history is a democratic discipline" because it is the means by which ordinary people manage the world—another proposal that is instantly attractive, and also persuasive because it sets up *l'homme moyen sensuel* as a conscientious deliberator, an evaluator of the past striving to find a path through this troubling, misleading present.

In the light of these professions of faith, Clendinnen shows herself to be an optimist, and her 20 essays show various facets of this positive approach, which is expounded in the collection's introductory essay, "Big Louis". Both point to the massive life-altering position she found herself in 16 years ago, when she was told that she needed a liver transplant; she was lucky enough to get one after a four-year wait, and the medical and hospital experiences took her into the close-knit community of transplant recipients. But the physical changes to her lifestyle meant that she could no longer follow her academic career, nor could she travel to carry out fieldwork in her field of expertise: the Mayan and Aztec civilisations, and the coming of the conquistadors. As compensation, a new door opened and she became a writer of high calibre, the recipient of awards in several states and the Boyer Lecturer for 1999.

*Agamemnon's Kiss* is divided somewhat loosely into three sections, each of them holding one substantial piece surrounded by satellites that cover some of Clendinnen's enthusiasms, and several topics on which she has a singular outlook. Her major essays comprise wry observations on dying and funerary customs, an incisive commentary on white Australia's incomprehension about Aborigines, and an appreciation of British writer Hilary Mantel that seems to have sprung from the authors' shared experiences of severe illness, and their rejection of central aspects to organised religion.



As you would expect, the main thread running through this collection has to do with history, but Clendinnen sees her discipline as a broad church, one that can take in reviews, recollections of her own childhood, multi-coloured reminiscences of her working career, informed discourse on simple events or complex ideas. She moves with ease from a report on Norman Mailer's findings about the killing of Lee Harvey Oswald, through a review of a brace of Anne Frank biographies, to a moving description of contributors to the Holocaust Museum at Elsternwick. She adds a personal strain to the current History Wars involving Windschuttle, Manne and others, thanks to her insights as a one-time tutor at the University of Melbourne.

Along with breadth of subject matter and an eye for topicality, Clendinnen also reveals a tempered tolerance that seems to have been inherited from her favourite essayist, Montaigne. Several of that urbane Frenchman's more famous epigrams and mots are cited with approval, held up as models for conducting the good life or playing out an honest death. But at the core of her observations, Clendinnen shows an honesty and awareness of her own fallibility that brings you back to extend that rarest of compliments to an author—a re-reading.

Her "Postcard from Townsville" is as fair-minded a description of the Queensland town's troubling racial problems as I've come across. In "Breaking the Mirror", given as a talk to a psychoanalysts' conference on narcissism in 2001, she holds two central loops—the Aztec sacrifice ritual and her own illness—juxtaposing and bringing them together with unexpected subtlety. Her memories of seaside holidays in "At the Beach" encourage nostalgia in those of us who come from Clendinnen's generation, but even her harking-back to simpler times shows practicality and common sense—the sharp edge and eye of an observer-participant who has the gift of combining emotional sympathy with even-handed evaluation.

## 9/11 movie more glossy heroism than gritty realism

### FILM REVIEW

Drama

Tim Kroenert

***World Trade Center*, 125 minutes, Rating: M**

**Director: Oliver Stone, Starring: Nicolas Cage, Michael Pena, Maria Belo, Maggie Gyllenhaal**



Among recent documentaries commemorating the fifth anniversary of September 11, one stood out as particularly harrowing. *9/11—The Falling Man* took as its subject one of the most shocking aspects of that dark day—the so-called jumpers• , who made the impossible choice of leaping more than a hundred storeys to their death, rather than burn alive inside the Twin Towers.

I mention *The Falling Man* because it makes a fascinating counterpoint to *World Trade Center*, the first mainstream feature film to turn its eye to that fateful day.

In many ways, *The Falling Man* is a more manipulative film. During the first 25 minutes, producer/director Henry Singer uses news footage, as well as eyewitness testimony, to reconstruct, in excruciating detail, the sequence of events, from the moment of the first plane's impact through to the collapse of the buildings.

Stone, on the other hand, takes a subtler approach. He briefly recalls certain iconic images from the media—the blazing towers; bystanders gaping in horror; weary fire-fighters striding undaunted down the road; survivors covered in ash and blood; the decimated shell of the collapsed towers—to prompt viewers to fill in the gaps for themselves, as he limits the film's perspective to that of its central characters.

Said characters are John McLoughlin (Cage) and Will Jimeno (Pena), part of a police search and rescue contingent who become trapped beneath the rubble when the towers collapse. The real McLoughlin and Jimeno were among 20 survivors ultimately pulled free. Stone's picture is the inspirational account of their fight for survival, a deserved celebration of the heroism shown by police and emergency services workers on that day, and a portrait of McLoughlin's and Jimeno's wives (Belo and Gyllenhaal) and their own emotional ordeal as they await news of their husbands' fate.

Stone is no slouch, utilising painstakingly re-created sets, masterful special and digital effects, and a script (by Andrea Berloff) based on survivors' testimony to lend the weight of authenticity. Yet there's an inescapable feeling that, coming off the back of a commercial flop (*Alexander*), Stone has made the least confronting, uncontroversial film about 9/11 humanly possible; a flag-waving, heartstring-yanking film that holds the truly horrific at arm's length, all but ignores the bigger-picture ramifications of 9/11, with the result being that the events are portrayed as a mere disaster movie.

And that is perhaps where the wide dichotomy between *World Trade Center* and *The Falling Man* is most obvious. While *The Falling Man* is at least brave enough to confront the horror of 9/11 with eyes wide open, *World Trade Center* does little more than glance at it, before searching for a palliative in the form of inspirational heroism. This is a decidedly gutless, safe approach that suggests Stone is no longer the uncompromising visionary who gave us *Platoon*, *JFK* and *Natural Born Killers*.



## **Sermon on the Institution**

### POETRY

Paul Mitchell

I came to bring you church  
and church in abundance.

Come to me all who are  
heavy laden and I will give you church.

I am the way, the truth  
and the church. No-one comes  
to the father but through those doors.

Even the very tiles on your  
cathedral roofs are numbered.

Why then do you worry  
over budgets? Is not your church  
worth more than many NGOs  
and sporting clubs?

And when you church  
don't be like heathens  
who seek me in sunlight and scrubland,  
go into your plain-walled buildings  
and close the door. Your heavenly father  
knows what you do in secret  
and will reward you. With a good church  
so you can fold your hands in your laps.

Blessed are you who minister  
for you will be called makers of church.

But woe to you who love  
for you throw evangelistic tracts  
into the wind and watch them flutter...

What is the kingdom of church like,  
to what shall I compare it?  
It is like a Moreton Bay Fig  
that a man chopped to the ground  
then used the wood to construct  
a row of dog kennels. Somewhere  
for sleeping while the wind howls.



## **Not a religion, poem.Key?**

POETRY

Paul Mitchell

This is consciously a poem and so must try  
to outstare itself. It knows itself by its  
line breaks. And clever self-referencing.  
Its lack of narrative is clear—  
we're waiting.

And again. "Here" lies, an opportunity. Your eyes can speak  
of symbols, signs of things that haven't come  
in a visual age: an end to war, despite a War  
to end them all. And suffering, despite a fat man's  
sculpted illusion. You have your peace.

I prefer my conflicted version.

But this is consciously a poem, not  
a religion. It's a chance to speak  
without dogmatism, without a voice  
if you choose. And to read without one, too.

Chance forewords drop from the air  
or out of your mind's eye, whetted and appetised

...

No pictures anywhere! So is reality nowhere?

Yes, we can be happy at last. Reality freed.

Costing nothing, giving nothing. All  
consuming, a self-conscious //

—mean "not mean". Or try this ~

Art? Always "not art". Its one  
great purpose. Don't blame the // or the ~  
or even the \_\_\_ for their re-theenking.

When you're in a dark cell, ancient

ring pulls from Coke cans feel like keys.