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PO Box 553
Richmond
VIC 3121
Australia

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Tel +61 3 9427 7311
Fax +61 3 9428 4450
Eureka@eurekastreet.com.au

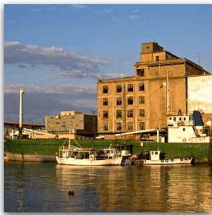
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A great leap year for reconciliation

AUSTRALIA

Gillian Bouras



As a child I was confused by the concept of a leap year. In my mind it was muddled with the 'Twelve Days of Christmas' and the ten energetic Lords a-leaping. In my infantile imagination, leap year took off in a great bound. But where to, I had no idea. People did not bother to explain the arithmetical point.

My grandmothers added to the muddle by explaining that the leap year was very important for women. As it was unthinkable that women should propose marriage to men, this was women's only opportunity: every four years, on 29 February, they could broach the subject with the man of their choice.

But what happened if the man did not want to marry? 'Ah,' intoned the grannies from the height of their infinite wisdom, 'of course, any gentleman had to behave with the utmost courtesy and not hurt any lady's feelings. And so it was mandatory to present the rejected person with a pair of white gloves.'

I imagined serried ranks of desperate females, and hoped that shopkeepers bore a possible glove shortage in mind, and that confirmed bachelors were well-equipped.

And now I think that in many places around the world, women propose to men on St Valentine's Day or whenever they like, and that white gloves are never a consideration.

Proposals involving human hearts and the making of a very necessary apology were made to John Howard by indigenous and white Australians over many years, and were always rejected. Howard saw no need to issue white gloves, either. Black mourning gloves would have been more appropriate, anyway.

Howard's own gloves seemed to be well and truly off. They still are: he was the only living PM to stay away on Sorry Day. But perhaps the resultant earthquake of astonishment would have been off the Richter scale if he had attended.

I eventually got my head around the concept of leap year, but it continues to exert a fascination. The Ethiopian ecclesiastical calendar, for example, assigns each of the four years to one of the Apostles, so that a leap year belongs to St Luke.

I eventually learned about the Chinese Great Leap Forward. Like many of my contemporaries, I often used the phrase as a metaphor for various decisive and usually unscheduled steps in my own life. And then came Neil Armstrong ...

I was in Kalamata, Greece, when Australia made its Great Leap Forward in this leap year. But I had the ecstatic emails of relief from my friends, and thanks to the wondrous invention of the internet I was able to tune in. By then it was St Valentine's Day here, and it seemed to me that Kevin Rudd's speech came straight from the heart. He was also apologising for the multitude of broken hearts that White Australia has been responsible for.

I regret that in my prolonged absence from Australia, I have had to observe the flowering of consciousness regarding Aboriginal Australians and the steady drive towards reconciliation from afar. But I have observed both, and my friends have helped me do it. One commented on the great swell of complicated feelings on Sorry Day: regret, shame, loss, compassion, hope and solidarity.

It seems to me, looking through expatriate rose-coloured glasses, that Australian society has been in a state of euphoria since the last elections. And that the euphoria reached a peak on Sorry Day. Yes, there has been a Great Leap Forward for reconciliation in 2008. Elder Herb Patten actually said so, but he also added that nothing could compensate for the pain that has been suffered: a truth we must never forget.

But now, with the leap having been taken, it is time for steady steps, perhaps slow and measured ones, but ones that must always continue forward.

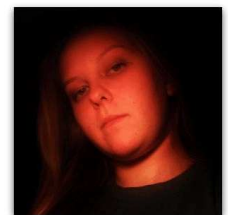
There has been criticism of Sorry Day as being, among other things, an empty spectacle. I don't think it is. My other thought on St Valentine's Day was that sometimes we need gestures; sometimes humans need ceremony.

Feeling good about feeling guilty

THEOLOGY

Andrew Hamilton

Guilt is an explosive word. In a recent conversation with my friend and fellow theologian, Scott Stephens, I found myself agreeing with him that public conversation is impoverished if we cannot speak of guilt. But I also argued that because of two cultural barriers it is almost impossible to be heard when you speak of guilt.



The first barrier is that many people identify bearing guilt with feeling guilty. They further identify feeling guilty with beating up on yourself and having a poor self image. So to ask people to reflect on their guilt is to send them on a guilt trip whose destination is worthlessness. Unsurprisingly, they resist such travel advice.

The concept of guilt is resisted also at a deeper level. Guilt implies continuity. The great classical tragedies that centred on guilt emphasised that the older man bears the guilt of what the younger man did. The son, too, carries the guilt of his father's wrongdoing. Our identity is anchored in our history.

In contemporary western culture our sense of personal and communal continuity is less strongly marked. We regard the self and its history as more pliable. We are told that we can make ourselves over and that we can walk away from our past. Because I am substantially a different person from the one who acted badly, I am no longer responsible for what I did nor for its consequences. So it is impertinent to suggest we should acknowledge guilt.

I shall ask in a later article whether we can still speak of bearing guilt for past actions. Here I would like simply to explore whether it is appropriate to feel guilty. At one level, of course, it makes little sense whether particular feelings are appropriate or not. Feelings arise in us whether they are appropriate or not, and we need to deal with them. Still, we instinctively judge that it is natural and helpful to feel in this way, but not in that.

Feeling guilty includes many different kinds of feelings. So I shall outline those we may have after we recognise that we have acted wrongly — driven negligently and wrapped a cyclist around our bullbar, for example. Then we can ask whether these feelings are appropriate or out of place.

When we know we have done wrong we often feel remorse. We regret what we have done

and its consequences. Remorse can be self-centered, concerned only with the looming court case. But it can also focus on the harm we have done to the cyclist. We may then feel sorrow for the cyclist, her husband and children.

It seems natural and appropriate to feel both remorse and sorrow. Remorse reflects our recognition that it was wrong to drive negligently and that we would not want to do it again. To feel sorrow for the injured cyclist and her family is also a natural and generous response.

After injuring the cyclist, we might also feel shame. We find it hard to face our friends, workmates and the relatives of those we have hurt. We feel we have not respected the claims that our shared humanity makes on us.

Shame is often accompanied by a feeling of responsibility. We feel the cyclist's welfare to be our business. It seems right to feel shame and responsibility. Both feelings encourage us to reflect on our relationships and to remedy the consequences of what we have done.

Finally we might feel worthless and beat up on ourselves when we remember what we have done. However difficult it might be to move away from, this feeling is not helpful. It inhibits us from responding to the people whom we have hurt and to the hurt we have caused them.

So although feeling guilty is commonly associated only with worthlessness, it comprises many feelings. Many of them are appropriate and helpful after we have acted wrongly. They may lead us to remedy in some measure what we have done.

Some of these feelings may also be appropriate in circumstances where we have benefited from the consequences of others' wrongdoing. If our parents defrauded another family of their property, for example, it does not seem inappropriate for us to feel shame, sorrow and a sense of responsibility when considering their impoverished children.

That leaves to another article the larger question whether we bear guilt for what we or our parents have done in the past.

After apology, it's back to the future

AUSTRALIA

Brian McCoy



Thirty-five years ago, March 1973, I first went to live in a remote Aboriginal community. I was accompanied by another Jesuit, Pat Mullins. We had been asked by the local Bishop to work at Balgo, an Aboriginal Mission south of Halls Creek. Our task was to look after the boys dormitory (pictured), where around 50 boys aged from five to 15 lived.

We were students at the time. Moving from Melbourne and the university of the early 1970s to a very remote part of the Kimberley proved a great shock. The weather always seemed to be hot, the facilities were basic (no air-conditioning or phones), the resources were few (only a small number of staff, mainly religious) and the roads were unsealed, rough and poorly maintained. What I particularly remember was a vast social and communication gap between the Mission staff and the 250 desert people who lived there. My ability to communicate with the people in Kukatja was as severely limited as their ability to communicate with me in English.

The few notes I took at that time remind me how much I felt out of place. The sounds, smells and isolation took time to accept. I recorded my initial confusion about the dormitories, and why 'we' needed to place nearly 100 children in them. At that time, the young men would stay in the boys dormitory until their late teens when they found jobs as stockmen on neighbouring cattle stations or in work around the Mission. The young women often stayed in the dormitories until they married.

While there were opportunities for oral communication between the children and their families, contact was strictly controlled and limited. Children could meet their parents and younger siblings in the 'playground', a large recreational space that lay between the two dormitories. However, the children always returned to the dormitories to sleep at night. It was from there that they went to school and it was here where they lived. They were not allowed to visit 'the camp' where their families lived, 200 metres away.

The girls experienced more family separation than the boys. They were only allowed to go down to visit their families on Christmas day. For the rest of the year both boys and girls remained under the care of those who ran the dormitories, removed from the daily care and affection of their parents and extended relations.

In April 1973, a process to close the dormitories began. The children whose families lived at Balgo Mission were returned to their parents. Those children whose families came from neighbouring cattle stations remained in the dormitories for a few more years.

When the Prime Minister recently apologised to the Stolen Generations I wondered if he intended to include those dormitory children who were not taken away from their communities, but who spent large parts of their young lives separated from their families. Adults now, they remember their parents being forced to give them up when they were young. They continue to feel the hurt of that separation.

As I recall those days of change when children were returned to those who earlier had been considered unfit to raise them, I also remember the different conversations of the missionaries at that time. The arguments always returned to what the missionaries thought was best. For some, the removal of children 'for education' was both the good and only thing to do. They didn't believe they needed to communicate with or consult the parents. It was as if the missionaries did not know or could not consider any other way.

I continue to wonder how modern attitudes reflect old ones, especially when people enter Aboriginal communities with a set of ready-made answers around employment, health and education. I am reminded of a mind-set that seeks to change people's lives for the better, always 'for their own good'.

At the same time, I also hear that we do not know how to acknowledge the social and cultural gap that still exists between us. We forget our history and the lack of trust that has developed. We are not comfortable to sit, listen and develop long-term relationships. We struggle with the use of the word 'partnership'. We prefer 'outcomes' instead.

Recollections of a reluctant kids sports coach

STORY

Brian Doyle

Three years ago I volunteered to coach my sons' team in the local basketball league, for the usual reason men coach — because none of the other fathers would do it. I begged and snivelled and pleaded, but they all backed away slowly, their mouths filled with creative excuses. One guy told me it was my moral responsibility to coach the boys because not one but two of the boys were my sons, so there.



So I coached that first year, and then again the following year because none of the other fathers would do it and I had a year's experience anyway. I coached again last year because, heck, I have always been the coach for as long as anyone can remember. Partly as a way to try to stay sane I have kept notes about certain adventures and misadventures.

There was the time I started practice by making them run laps and then got into an interesting discussion with a dad about grilling fish and forgot about the boys until one of them threw up after running 30 laps. There was the time my point guard used such foul and reprehensible language to the referee that we had to call two time-outs in a row we were laughing so hard. And the time our centre told me he couldn't play because a girl he had a crush on was in the gym and she was making him all nervous and, could I maybe ask her to leave? And the time we only had four players but won anyway — I thought I was going to have to carry all four boys home after that.

And there was the game we played one time that was as close to perfect as I think I will ever see on this wild sweet holy earth, my boys sprinting and cutting and whipping passes and driving to the hole and not taking wild shots and actually playing defence and hitting the boards in such exuberant fashion that sometime during the second half I leaned back in my rickety folding chair in the echoing elementary-school gym and wanted to cry for reasons that remain murky to me.

There were other reasons to cry. There was a boy with a black eye and bruises who told me he fell down the stairs but when I asked him if his dad was coming to the game he winced. There was a boy whose mum and her new husband sat on one side of the gym and his dad and his new wife sat on the other and the son, a terrific ballplayer, never looked at either his mum or his dad but stared at me with fearsome eyes during time-outs. I could never bear to

take him out of the game because it seemed to me that the game was the one place he was happy.

But mostly it's been hilarious and poignant. I have seen some of these boys grow more than a foot taller. I have spent hundreds of hours with them in all the school gyms in our town. I have given speeches at the end of the season about their diligence and grace as I handed out tinny trophies that they love and will probably have all their lives. I have made them run and laugh, which are good things to do.

They have made me listen to their horrendous thumping music which isn't as bad as I thought it would be. We have talked about politics and books and girls and burgers. They have brought me back into the bright redolent funk of gymnasiums and the cheerful tedium of practice and the quivering tension of games. They have brought me back to the sinuous quicksilver geometry of basketball, with its energy and violence and grace and joy and competitive drive, its swing and rhythm and music. They have trusted me and confided in me and wept as I knelt down and looked into their faces and did my best to calm them.

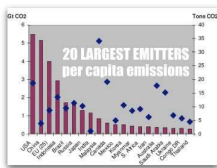
For a while they gave me the extraordinary gift of their company as they went from being goofy boys to lanky young men, and here at the end of the last season I'll ever coach, I find myself savouring every shred and shard of the thing I didn't want to do three years ago. I sit back on my rickety chair and watch them, and the curious thing is that while occasionally now there is a flash of real creativity and grace, the very thing that you watch games for, those moments when brains and bodies flow, it's the egregious mistakes that I will miss the most — the ludicrous shot, the hopeless pass, the hilariously bad defence, the brain-lock moments.

There was one last Saturday, when a kid got the ball, a new kid, a gentle sweet soul who had never played the game before in his life, and he was so excited to actually have the ball and a clear lane to the basket that he ran delightedly to the wrong basket and scored. Everyone cheered and laughed and shook his hand and he blushed and the game flew on ancient and relentless but I sat there shivering with joy.

Garnaut shows climate change bigger than politics

ENVIRONMENT

Charles Rue



In April 2007 Australian States and Territories commissioned Ross Garnaut to do an economic analysis of climate change scenarios for Australia, something like the Stern Review in the UK. An interim report was published last week. The serious risks outlined have shocked many.

The report provides a platform for a range of immediate actions based on logical methods of analysis and rational argument. It sets out objectives, stabilisation plans, ways of dealing with interim carbon increases until 2012, and principles to fairly allocate new emission limits.

Garnaut has limited the scope of his review to the economics of climate change. He has little to say on the environmental or social value of Australia's ecological assets. The review draws strong links between local economic decisions and international responses to climate change, particularly those that set binding reduction targets to establish a base line for carbon trading.

However, this view seems to exaggerate both Australian dependence on international forces and the benefits of carbon trading. It underplays Australia's independent economic base as a wealthy and resource rich nation that can take immediate actions to safeguard its own future, like several European nations are doing.

Some analysts of the interim report are still trotting out the old neo-con arguments about Australia having to wait because it has to act in concert with China, USA and other major emitters of greenhouse gases. It is the same line used in the past as a delaying tactic, based on ideology, not on reason.

In fact, China and the USA are making great strides in carbon reduction at the local level. China is installing more solar hot water tanks per year than the rest of the world combined. Federal USA political backing for the fossil fuel lobby, which is restricting excellent state initiatives, will hopefully end this year.

In a sign of hope Garnaut's interim report says we should 'play to Australian strengths' — high awareness about the causes and consequences of climate change, an innovative skills base, and established management and financial service sectors. It is of note that these strengths are largely socially based, not economically based.

Along with other citizens, church people have an important role in demanding immediate and across-the-board action on climate change to make Australian awareness and skills count. The Rudd Government has opened public debate to a moral view of politics. The detail in Garnaut's judgments expands the mind to search for detailed and specific moral responses.

Past are the days of generalised moralising about future generations or our Pacific neighbours 'out there'. The moral questions are now specific and personal: about our homes, transport, education, super fund, investments, business, unions, farming practices etc. These areas raise concrete moral choices about a personal stance in the face of human-induced and rapid climate change.

Concrete moral choices are for the young as well as the old. Young people are challenged to purposely choose an education and career path that will better equip the nation to face climate change. Similar concrete choices face government departments to make ethical decisions about preferential procurements, future fund investments etc.

Hopefully the Garnaut review will convince voters that the climate challenge is bigger than any political party. Effective action would benefit from a multi-party pact offering long-term policies that provide national direction, a predictable business context and personal economic security, and which, most of all, would engender justified national pride.

In his recent book on climate change, *High and Dry*, Liberal insider Guy Pearce said all parties need a face-saving way forward. We have the recent and wonderful example of all political parties coming together for the apology to Aboriginal people. A multi-party agreement on the climate crisis is next.

Citizens can demand this pact with united and focused action. Send a letter to every politician — at all three levels of government, union heads, banks, superannuation investment managers, framers of laws and the like, demanding that pressure be brought to bear to form a multi-party agreement on national action to face climate change, now.

Beyond the picket fence

AUSTRALIA

Clare Coburn

In the past dozen years, we have come to value our houses more highly than in our nation's history. House prices in Melbourne, for example, have risen 18 per cent in the past year and the cost of entering the market is beyond the budget of many first home buyers. Investors have muscled in as a dwindling rental market ensures high demand and elevated prices and the bizarre notion of negative gearing continues to attract investors.



Yet as interest rate hikes quash dreams and eat up disposable income for mortgage holders, it's timely to ask why we have come to value our houses beyond what seems their true worth.

The 11-year stint of the previous government was characterised by great diligence about the boundaries of our nation, at least as far as excluding undesirable entrants was concerned. We considered ourselves a gated community, allowing in only those who knew the password or had the cash. It remains to be seen whether this government relinquishes 'me-tooism' on that front.

We certainly continued to welcome a stream of refugees provided they passed through the proper channels and could prove familiarity with mid-20th century cricket. If not, we refused them entry or shifted them offshore. We also found it impossible to apologise to Australia's original inhabitants for the misguided policies of our antecedents. This was despite the urgings of the 'Bringing them Home' report. (It was our home after all and you can never be too careful about who you bring home.)

We have laughed about Howard's apparent desire to return the nation to a pristine '50s version complete with white picket fences. Yet many of us have spent the past dozen years erecting picket fences and painting feature walls in shades of aubergine and taupe. We frequently describe our renovations in the context of 'adding value' to our investment rather than creating an environment in which we enjoy living. Many renovate not for their own enjoyment, but to increase the price at auction.

Hugh Mackay recently saw a shift away from the blinkered and introspective vision of the 'dreamy' period which seemed to entrance many of us during the Howard years. Although there was much talk of 'values' the only values which seemed to increase regularly during

those times were house prices. The promulgation of a culture of fear saw us closeted within our houses. We seemed reluctant to engage with a community grown somehow more threatening. It may be that we were intoxicated by the fumes of too much fresh paint to consider the world beyond.

Maybe now that Kevin Rudd has apologised to our fellow inhabitants for the ill-considered behaviour of our great-great aunts and uncles and reached across the dispatch boxes to include his opponent, then things can change. These symbolic events may have shattered a few boundaries and walls, collapsed a few fences or at least left a few palings loose so that messages can pass back and forth.

Maybe they will open up new paths for us to tread. Now that we have felt the impact of this recent ritual and the move towards more collaborative practice has begun, our houses may become the places where we live and welcome our friends and neighbours. In this new decade we may see a return to our houses having a more modest and enjoyable role in our lives.

Let us hope we may truly enter the 'new chapter' to which Rudd referred in his apology speech. We may then give ourselves permission to start caring beyond our own four walls, beyond our national boundaries, beyond party lines and past mistakes. It might be time to drop the picket fence or loosen the palings and discover what we truly value.

Mutating conflict in Kenya

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins



This month Australia's nationhood has been bolstered by Federal Parliament's apology to the Stolen Generations. As a result it appears that indigenous members of the population now feel more comfortable identifying themselves as Australians, than they did just a few weeks ago.

Kenya is moving in the opposite direction. Local Jesuit conflict analyst Fr Elias Omondi believes ethnic identity is eclipsing national identity, with people being forced into ethnic 'cages'.

He says: 'Time is running out and in the next one month I don't know whether I will be talking of a country named Kenya or a country that was once Kenya.'

Omondi is director of Jesuit Hakimani Centre, a social justice policy and advocacy institute based in Nairobi. He offers his analysis of the country's predicament in the current issue of the Centre's [newsletter](#), under the heading 'Save this country from falling apart'.

Tensions broke out in December after incumbent President Mwai Kibaki was declared the winner of the 27 December election, and sworn in three days later, despite opposition leader Raila Odinga's claims of victory. The violent ethnic tension that ensued suggests Kenya's nationhood could be little more than an illusion.

Omondi speaks about the break-up of the country in terms that might be familiar to those who have experienced the break-up of a marriage or other significant relationship. A small disagreement opens, or reveals, a huge chasm.

Conflict mutates. The more the conflict degenerates the more factors come into play, and the original objective is distorted.

Omondi says: 'I have worked in close to six African countries in conflict and it is evident that most conflicts mutate into various levels and as time advances the primary reason of the conflict takes a completely different turn. If you ask a person from Somalia what the current conflict is about you will never get a comprehensive answer.'

The mediation process led by Kofi Annan, former UN Secretary General goes on. But now it will not be enough to get the two leaders to agree on who won the election. Kenya's future as a nation will require a full-scale reconciliation process.

Reinado a product of Timorese trauma

INTERNATIONAL

Sara Niner

Like many in East Timor, Major Alfredo Reinado, who died attacking the house of President Jose Ramos Horta on 11 February, had a history of violence that was doomed to be repeated. The effects of torture and trauma as a child, combined with a personality that grew ever more desirous of notoriety, propelled him to increasingly dangerous acts.



Post-traumatic stress syndrome affects one third of the population of East Timor — someone in every family — and half have witnessed acts of serious violence. It does not affect everybody in the same way, and some survive as empathetic and generous people capable of forgiveness. However, not everyone has this capacity. Reinado is an example of this.

Born in 1966 Reinado and his family followed the resistance army southward in the wake of the Indonesian invasion of Dili in 1975. He became separated from his mother and was forced to travel with strangers, witnessing death and murder along the way. Made to work as a porter by an Indonesian sergeant he was treated cruelly and witnessed rape and execution. When the sergeant left Timor he hid Reinado in a box and transported him by ship to Sulawesi.

When he was 18 Reinado escaped, and lived on his wits. He finally made it back to East Timor and worked with the resistance.

In July 1995 Reinado escaped again, captaining a fishing boat to Australia with 18 other Timorese. He created a media stir and was seen as a hero by many. With his wife and children, Reinado stayed in Perth, for the next four years working in the masculine environment of the Western Australian shipyards.

Returning to East Timor after the 1999 referendum he was given a position commanding two patrol-boats of F-FDTL, the new army of East Timor, but was dismissed for his cowboy-style management. After some time back at HQ he was appointed Commander of the Military Police.

By 2006 the national reconstruction of East Timor was shattered by bitter internal conflict that rested on a bed of endemic poverty and disillusionment. Thirty-seven people were killed and more than 100,000 internally displaced. Poor, uneducated, disenfranchised gangs of

young men filled the vacuum with chaotic violence, looting and burning.

These boys had witnessed the terrible violence of 1999 as 10 to 15-year-olds. On the other hand most of the male leadership involved in the political machinations have been part of a brutal war for most of their lives — their mothers, wives and daughters have often been victims of sexual abuse at the hands of the Indonesian military or its militias.

The central conflict was between factions in the 1500-strong F-FDTL. A group of around 600 soldiers, mostly from western East Timor, had complained about discrimination from senior 'eastern' military personnel. The 'petitioners' were unceremoniously dismissed and they demonstrated, attracting 2000 supporters. Violence erupted. The UN establishment of both police and army led to further politicisation. Crudely put, some supported the Fretilin government and some supported then-President Gusmao, who had been historically at odds.

Reinado was ordered to 'contain' the petitioners but instead he joined them. He and his men fled to the hills. Reinado was seen to have lined up behind the 'Xanana camp' against the government. He clashed with senior F-FDTL officers and five were killed. Captured in July he was charged with eight counts of murder and possessing weapons. In August he led more than 50 prisoners to escape from prison. He warmed to his public notoriety. For many disenfranchised citizens he became a hero. Some even compared him with Che Guevara.

After Reinado raided police posts for weapons in March 2007 Gusmao lost patience and ordered Australian-led forces to capture him. They failed, and Horta and Gusmao left Reinado in the hills while they ran and won their presidential and parliamentary elections. To kill or capture Reinado would at best alienate voters or at worst lead to massive violence.

A week before he died Reinado was confronted by Australian Forces. Reinado and his partner fired warning shots and made phone calls demanding the troops be withdrawn. It certainly created a feeling of unease amongst the rebels.

With some of the original petitioners soon to be reinstated in the army Reinado must have felt he was losing his grip. Desperately attempting to assert himself at the highest levels of national political leadership, he believed he could force negotiations with the President and Prime Minister at gunpoint. One military expert who knew Reinado described the subsequent attacks, during which Horta was injured and Reinado was killed, as a 'scramble' as things 'came unstuck'.

Reinado's uncle Vitor Alves organised his funeral in Dili, reportedly attended by 2000 people. On 12 February he commented, 'With the help of God with the fall of my nephew ... The situation of instability will finish once and for all and we can find peace. The boy is dead ... It is finished.'

However it is not finished. Stories like Reinado's are not over, and neither are the traumatised reactions of so many to the brutal past and poverty-stricken present.

Most have received little help to overcome the past. The Commission for Truth, Reception and Reconciliation Report (2006) suggests significant work needs to be done. Assistance programs are under-resourced. Meanwhile, the cycle of violence continues and the pain and trauma remains unaddressed and unacknowledged, even among the leadership.

Fidel's unfinished business with the Church

INTERNATIONAL

Chris McGillion



Prior to the historic papal visit to Cuba in 1998, the then US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright travelled to the Vatican for a meeting with John Paul II at which Cuba was one of the major topics of discussion. After the meeting, Albright reported to President Bill Clinton that the Pope's visit could be a 'point of departure' for unleashing regime-challenging forces on the island just as his visit to Poland had done in 1979.

Like the greater part of official US thinking about Cuba for the past 50 years, Albright's comments betrayed more wishful thinking than informed calculation.

In contrast to Poland, the Catholic Church in Cuba has always been a marginal institution with little historical identification with the forces of Cuban nationalism and a core constituency of middle and upper class white Cubans, many of whom fled the island for the United States in the early 1960s.

Also, the local Catholic hierarchy had its own agenda of outcomes it desired from the Pope's visit, and regime change was certainly not high on it.

Lastly, Fidel Castro was no Wojciech Jaruzelski. Instead he was a genuinely popular leader and a wily politician — a point he proved by ruling Cuba for the best part of another ten years after Pope John Paul's visit, stepping down this week into a graceful retirement without any hint of civil unrest or political upheaval on the island.

The same day Castro announced his retirement, the Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, prepared to leave Rome for Havana on a trip suggested by the Cubans to commemorate the tenth anniversary of John Paul's visit. Bertone did so by holding a press conference at which he described relations between Cuba and the Holy See as 'relatively good' and said Pope Benedict XVI himself might visit the island in the future.

No one talks any more about the Catholic Church as a kind of Trojan horse for bringing about the collapse of the Cuban Revolution.

Bertone, like the rest of us, will find Cuba little changed by Fidel Castro's retirement. This is an event the Cuban leadership has been preparing for even before Fidel became gravely ill.

Most obviously, Fidel made a seamless — and it seems widely popular — temporary transfer of power to his brother, Raul, in 2006. More generally Fidel, one of the last remaining communist disciples of any significance, had actually been moving Cuba away from orthodox Marxism at home and revolutionary adventurism abroad for much of the last 20 years.

Indeed, unless wishful thinking overtakes President Bush and he tries to take the opportunity of Fidel's retirement to meddle more directly in the island's affairs, post-Castro Cuba will probably evolve into a social democracy — one of the few genuine social democracies in Latin America — intent on preserving its national independence and little more. It will, in other words, become for the first time in 50 years a non-issue in regional if not global affairs.

What would this mean for the Church in Cuba?

On the one hand, it will probably mean slow progress will continue on resolving outstanding issues such as Church access to State-controlled media outlets, more freedom to run Church schools, and fewer restrictions on foreign clergy and religious work on the island.

Key to progress on these issues will be the Church continuing to assiduously avoid too close an identification with the US and its scarcely disguised agenda of rolling back the revolution and bringing Cuba firmly back into the American sphere of influence.

Beyond that, Cuba's leadership will have to come to terms with the fact that the revolution cannot answer all of life's questions and that religion in general — and the Catholic Church in particular — has a legitimate role in supplying its answers without interference from the State.

For its part, what the Church will have to come to terms with is the fact that in many respects — including on issues of global development, debt relief, population control, environmental protection, access to affordable medicines and technology — revolutionary Cuba remains a more vocal advocate of the interests of the world's poor than is the Vatican.

Australia's rank river embodies land-use dilemma

ES CLASSIC

Margaret Simons

Think of the landscape and you think of its smell. In South Australia, the Murray winds through dry, flat land on its last dawdle to the sea. In summer the air smells spicy – of baked eucalypt, and of river water.

Last summer, the smell changed. You could say that it turned rank, except that the Murray is always a bit rank, in the fashion of big brown rivers. Kerouac described the Mississippi as 'the great, rank river', and Huckleberry Finn smelt its earthiness: 'It was kind of solemn, drifting down the big still river, laying on our backs looking up at the stars, and we didn't ever feel like talking loud, and it wasn't often that we laughed, only a little kind of low chuckle.'



But the Murray is half a world away from this and, to most Australians, more foreign. We feel more at home with Kerouac and Huck's river than we do with our own. When the smell of our river changed, it was the difference between rank and fetid. The new smell was musty; sinister. It rose to meet you in the evening, when the overhead sprinklers were switched on in the fruit orchards. It rose out of the sink when you washed your dishes. The smell covered you when you were in the shower.

The Murray water, pumped straight from the river, was poisoned by an overgrowth of blue-green algae. Outbreaks of the algae are nothing new; they have happened every hot summer for some years. Blue-green algae grow in still, warm water with high nutrient levels. The Murray, once an unreliable and faster-moving beast, has been tamed and slowed by locks and weirs so as to provide a reliable source of irrigation water. Irrigation run off, fertilisers, cattle droppings and human sewage draining to the river have enormously increased nutrient levels ...

Algae, of course, are only the most visible and topical symptoms of damage to the river system. Salinity is old news. It is caused by rising groundwater dissolving the salts locked in the soils and bringing them to the surface. Since Europeans cleared native trees and replaced them with shallow-rooted perennial crops, the groundwater has been rising fast.

Drive north from Melbourne on the Calder highway and you will see, as you approach Mildura, the frighteningly acne-like scars in the Mallee, where the soil looks greasy and nothing will grow but salt bush. Water tables in areas such as Shepparton are rising so fast that up to half the land now used to grow fruit will be unusable-poisoned by salt-within 25 years ...

Near Kerang, in Victoria, large areas of land are already 'retired', for the simple reason that they are so saline that nothing will grow. The bureaucrats do not admit in plain terms that these lands are unfarmable. They talk about them being suitable for 'salt-tolerant agriculture'. The scientists at the CSIRO and state agriculture departments are still working on what that might mean, with research concentrating on breeding salt-tolerant grasses that can be used for cattle fodder.

But although it is easy to talk about 'retiring' land and changing land use, for the communities along the river and the landowners whose way of life depends on farming, it can be an impossibly hard option. Such adjustment, even over 30 years, would be traumatic to the local communities and the national economy ...

Fruit growers and dairy farmers could, theoretically, become foresters. Our region is heading for a wood-fibre shortage into the next century, so timber will become a high-income earner. And, as well as making money, trees can benefit the soil. They act as solar powered pumps, lowering the water table and combating salinity.

But the problem is that it takes 10 years for a tree to grow to the point at which it will earn the farmer an income, and in the present economic climate there is no way Australia could either give up the export income from fruit growing, or support the farmers while we waited for the trees to grow. As one dairy farmer put it to me: 'Show me a way to live in the meantime, and I'd plant trees. You don't have to get out to milk trees twice a day.'

In fact, even small changes in land use are almost impossible to achieve, and at present, in spite of the rhetoric and in spite of the blue-green algal threat, there is little hope that governments will be able to summon up the necessary political will.

In his [recent] environmental statement, Paul Keating called the Murray-Darling a 'real and symbolic artery'. The metaphor is a cliché when applied to rivers, yet it is right for the Murray. It is our lifeline and our drain, a great vessel, with capillaries of pipes running to and from it, carrying water to our gardens, our crops and our cities, and discharging our wastes so they can be carried sluggishly out of the interior to the sea.

Although sentiment is growing, the bonds that tie most Australians to the inland are still mainly economic.

Halting the damage to the Murray-Darling basin is essential to our financial survival; yet it may be that it is impossible to stop the damage without also causing critical economic damage. The Murray-Darling is the symbol of the conundrums Europeans created when they first moved from the coast to settle the inland, and a symbol of Australia's fragile sense of nationhood. Clinging to the fringes of the continent, we still act like foreigners. We are not yet at home in the interior.

History of prejudice ignites modern Indonesian conflict

INTERNATIONAL

Caz Coleman



The United Nations observes that half of all countries that emerge from violent conflict relapse within five years. Violent conflict doesn't arise without a history. In countries where conflict has engaged the average citizen along religious or ethnic lines, it is a history of prejudice that has been ignited. While long-term peace strategies must involve a range of government and non-government players, the role of civil society in overcoming prejudice cannot be ignored.

This is certainly true of the conflict that began just over seven years ago in the Maluku Islands, Indonesia. While ultimately emerging along religious lines, its origins were fueled by a combination of economic, political and religious factors.

This became increasingly apparent during my conversations with locals. Fatima has no idea why the conflict started. Living in a Muslim village surrounded by Christian villages, she cannot articulate what provoked a conflict where the estimation of deaths is up to 10,000 people over three years. In her village, there were two deaths and a number of injuries but they were lucky to escape the burnings and wide-scale killings that occurred in other villages.

For Fatima, knowing the 'why' of the conflict doesn't matter. What matters is not having to flee the village again. 'We don't want the conflict to return, we just want to be safe. If there are issues, gossips that scare us, we will be afraid.'

Unfortunately for Fatima, 'issues and gossips' can be commonplace in a multi-ethnic or multi-religious setting. Sunit explains how, in his village, rumours created panic in what was previously a stable community. 'The rumours spread rapidly saying there was a big conflict. Actually there was no big conflict, just one incident where one person was killed.' Yet as a result, most of the village fled to the jungle for months before daring to return.



In contrast, when the rumours started in Josa's village, the leadership got together to address how they would dispel the rising level of panic. Josa's village had a strong relationship with its Christian neighbours that prevented conflict occurring among them, even though it raged around them. In an agreement between four villages, three Christian and one a mix of Christian and Muslim, regular meetings between the village heads, the Imam and

Christian leadership, maintained peace.

As the conflict in the region heightened, the local Muslims in Josa's village inhabited the churches and the Christians inhabited the mosque to prevent the buildings from being bombed and to send a clear message to protagonists that violence and provocation would not be tolerated. It was a bold move in a conflict where others had been slain as 'traitors' for supporting their religious brothers and sisters.



Not wanting conflict to re-occur is not enough to prevent it. In conflicts such as the one in Maluku — where ordinary people bombed, burnt, threatened and killed each other, with no subsequent criminal proceedings — building a peaceful society is a challenge.

For sustainable peace, political and economic strategies must sit alongside understanding and healing. To prevent conflict relapse, village leaders need to foster a relationship that enables clear communication to dispel rumours and address early signs of conflict, as occurred in Josa's village. In 2004, when conflict in Ambon was in danger of recurring, one local peace-building network used SMS to inform Muslim and Christian youth of conflict hotspots and safe passages to travel. Such networks seem an effective method of dispelling myths of violence and updating communities on action being taken to address the conflict.

Still, prejudice is difficult to overcome. Seven years after conflict hit her village, forcing her to live in the jungle for weeks without access to safe supplies of food and water, Tamika admits she remains prejudiced against her Muslim neighbours. Despite having regular contact with other Muslims, including a few close friends, she is not sure about Muslims beyond her immediate circle. Tamika's suspicion is a common representation of how prejudice can linger in communities and create fuel for future conflicts.

Yet, interestingly, of the 30 individuals interviewed for this story, most indicated that their national identity was more important than any division in religion. Despite the suspicion that might still exist seven years after the beginning of the conflict, the superordinate identity of nationalism may well be the hope for building relationships and overcoming perceived divisions of faith in this post-conflict environment. For in the end 'I am Muslim, you are Christian, but we are all Indonesians'.

Refugee refusal echoes 'Tampa election' rhetoric

POLITICS

Kerry Murphy

The Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Chris Evans (pictured) has refused a protection visa to an Iraqi because of his convictions for people smuggling, even though the Iraqi in question, 'Mr A', was assessed as a refugee by Immigration.



Mr A helped with people smuggling as a way of getting his family away from Saddam Hussein. He arranged for his mother, three sisters and three brothers to come to Australia. Mr A was extradited to Australia in 2003, convicted of people smuggling.

He applied for a protection visa in July 2006. The Migration Act requires decisions in protection visa cases be made within 90 days when possible, however in this case they delayed because of Mr A's conviction. It took an order from the Federal Court for the Minister to comply with the requirement. Minister Evans finally refused Mr A's application on 8 February 2008. Mr A was in detention the whole time.

The Minister had the option of exercising his discretion in favour of Mr A because Mr A met the refugee criteria but he declined to do so. Instead he reverted to the language of the 'Tampa election' of 2001:

'The Rudd Government deplores people smuggling. It is a heinous crime that puts lives at risk, undermines Australia's border security and weakens our immigration system ... [Mr A's] conduct in repeatedly bringing boatloads of illegal immigrants into Australia, the expectations of the Australian community that a person who commits crimes of this nature not be rewarded with a visa, and the general deterrence factor in discouraging others from engaging in similar conduct weigh heavily against Mr A.'

The Minister's language and tone are all typical of the hostility found under the former government towards asylum seekers. The Minister did not mention that these people who were 'smuggled' in were asylum seekers, who were probably found to be refugees from Saddam or the Taliban — regimes so bad our military were sent against them. Sadly the ALP supported the 2001 Tampa amendments and are yet to repeal the harsher aspects.

So what about the fact the Department accepted that Mr A was a refugee and that his conduct, while serious, should not prevent him from getting protection? It is not as if we can

send him anywhere. UNHCR recommended against returning Iraqis as recently as December 2007. The 'surge' has reduced the violence in Baghdad, but Iraq is now just a very dangerous country, as distinct from an extremely dangerous one.

The day before the Minister's decision, the International Crisis Group published a report entitled '[Iraq's Civil War, the Sadrists and the Surge](#)'. The report notes that the reduced killings in Baghdad could represent a temporary trend. Much depends on the motivations of key players such as the Shi'a Al Sadr and their mainly Sunni opponents. Any progress in Iraq is going to be very slow. Meanwhile Mr A must wait until the Australian government is able to send him back. It is likely he will be waiting a long time.

This case presented the new Minister with the chance of showing how this government is different to the last. He could have maintained his rhetoric, yet granted a temporary protection visa given the situation in Iraq. Such cases are rare and this would not set any precedent.

Sadly we instead have a return to the 'Ruddock rhetoric', which creates future problems for both Mr A and for the government. Such a decision does not bode well for immigration reform.

Essential ingredient for nation building

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins



Last week represented a great leap forward for Australia, with the Parliamentary Apology to the Stolen Generations finally taking place. The hope flowing from the momentum generated by this one event is immense, even though public attention will quickly be absorbed by other issues.

For East Timor, it was a different story, with the attempted assassinations of President Jose Ramos-Horta and Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao. These demonstrated that, while the country may have been in good hands, this did not necessarily translate into a secure future for its young population.

What distinguished the lead-up to Australia's apology was determination on the part of political leaders to listen to the stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples. By contrast, the Howard Government had got it wrong when it decided to pump an unprecedented level of resources into the Northern Territory intervention, without first listening to hear Aboriginal people articulate what they believe the priorities are.

At the end of the week, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and Foreign Minister Stephen Smith went to Dili for what was essentially a visit to listen and to reassure East Timor of Australia's availability if help were required. Rudd promised Gusmao that an enlarged contingent of Australian troops would stay in the country *as long as they are welcome*. On Saturday, Fr Frank Brennan commended them for recognising that an acknowledgement of the East Timorese people's need for self-determination must underlie all attempts to help them build their nation.

Fr Brennan, a former director of Jesuit Refugee Service in East Timor, was speaking with Geraldine Doogue on ABC Radio National. He pointed out that the UN's attempts at nation-building came to nothing because it was 'very good at publishing documents that come off computers written by people who were well intentioned', but not as skilled in listening to the people's own perspective on their needs.

He said: 'Australia's intervention will work if whenever we do anything, we do it with the humility where we continue to say, you are the Timorese, you are self-determining. No matter what the problems you're facing, we're here to work with you.'

The outbreak of violence in East Timor April 2006 suggested that the UN had not reached first base in its efforts to lay the foundation for a small but robust nation. Now with its listening to the Stolen Generations as the basis for the apology and subsequent action, the Rudd Government has provided a template that may be of significant use in East Timor.

Pulling back from the nuclear precipice

INTERNATIONAL

John Langmore

‘On 29 and 30 August 2007 six cruise missiles armed with nuclear warheads were loaded on a US Air Force plane, flown across the country and unloaded. For 36 hours no-one knew where the warheads were or even that they were missing.’

So reported a bipartisan US panel of American international relations celebrities including George Shultz and Henry Kissinger. The panel used this diabolical faux pas in the handling of nuclear weapons by their country as part of their case for a nuclear weapons free world.

The eminent Americans wrote in the *Wall Street Journal* on 15 January 2008 of ‘the importance of the vision of a world free of nuclear weapons as a guide to our thinking about nuclear policies, and about the importance of a series of steps that will pull us back from the nuclear precipice’.

I couldn’t agree more.

Most Australians no longer think about the nuclear threat. Yet the editors of *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* said in January 2007 that the minute hand of the ‘Doomsday Clock’ had moved from seven to five minutes to midnight.

‘We stand at the brink of a second nuclear age,’ they said. ‘North Korea’s recent test of a nuclear weapon, Iran’s nuclear ambitions, a renewed US emphasis on the military utility of nuclear weapons, the failure to adequately secure nuclear materials, and the continued presence of some 26,000 nuclear weapons in the United States and Russia are symptomatic of a larger failure to solve the problems posed by the most destructive technology on Earth.’

That list of reasons alone is long enough to generate profound concern. Yet there are more. The Bush Administration has abandoned commitment to the international rule of law and encouraged allies such as the former Howard Government to do the same. Only two of the nuclear weapons states — China and India — have declared a no-first-use policy.

Many of the 12,000 deployed nuclear weapons are on high alert status. Nuclear weapons are still being included in active military strategic doctrine. The bargain at the heart of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) is being broken. The five nuclear powers that are party to the Treaty, who pledged ‘the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals’ under the NPT, are instead upgrading their nuclear weapons.

Not only do India and Pakistan possess nuclear weapons but so does Israel. Iran and North Korea have apparently tried or are trying to acquire these weapons. Keeping the weapons out of the hands of terrorists is vital. There is a stalemate in multilateral disarmament negotiations. The 2005 Review Conference of the NPT failed to even agree on an agenda.

Many authoritative forums and people have called for complete nuclear disarmament. The International Court of Justice concluded in 1996 that 'There exists an obligation to pursue in good faith, and bring to a conclusion, negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control.'

The Canberra Commission established at former Foreign Minister Gareth Evans' initiative wrote that 'The proposition that nuclear weapons can be retained and never used — accidentally or by decision — defies credibility ... Nuclear weapons have long been understood to be too destructive and non-discriminatory to secure discrete objectives on the battlefield.'

At the 2000 NPT review conference the five nuclear states party to the Treaty gave an 'unequivocal undertaking ... to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals leading to nuclear disarmament.' The Bush Administration's backing away from this commitment was a major cause of the deadlock at the 2005 NPT review conference.

Incremental steps towards outlawing nuclear weapons could begin with taking all nuclear weapons off high alert status and making large reductions in numbers. Prohibiting the production of fissile material and urging all nuclear states to make no-first-use pledges are vital steps.

Australia's role in this global survival strategy must include active policies relating to the alliance with the US, the export of uranium, joining with the strongest advocates of a nuclear weapons convention, continuing to sustain the obligations of the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty, and insisting upon rigorous scrutiny of the uses of uranium exports.

Prime Minister Rudd has undertaken to re-form the Canberra Commission. Robert McClelland, then Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs, announced on 14 August 2007 that Labor supports negotiation of a Nuclear Weapons Convention and that if the party was elected (which, of course, it subsequently was) it would seek and support steps towards that goal.

Not only is a nuclear weapons abolition treaty essential but there are many practical reasons for considering that it is possible. Biological and chemical weapons abolition treaties have been negotiated successfully, and negotiation of a nuclear weapons convention is already supported by 125 countries at the UN.

The support of responsible and perceptive people is essential to growth of the political will to make it happen.

World War II refugee's light touch

BOOK REVIEW

Brenda Niall

Sibley, Irina. *Self-Portrait of the Artist's Wife*. Lytlewode Press, UK, 2007. RRP \$60



It was not a good time or place to be born: Lithuania in 1944. The sounds of Russian bombs and German artillery contended with one another while a young woman gave birth. Yet the first two sentences of Irina Sibley's memoir are not weighed down with fear or foreboding, nor is there a sense of an uncertain self. 'A girl-child is born,' she announces. 'It is me.'

In her first five years Irina experienced hunger, displacement, bewilderment. She describes the transit camps in Germany and Italy and the family's struggle to find a new home in Australia, to resist fragmentation, to begin again. All these elements are there in her memoir, and she does not deny the pain. And yet the buoyant tone of 'it is me' tells the reader that this story will be one of courage and achievement, and the capacity to enjoy good fortune, hard won.

In choosing her title, *Self-Portrait of the Artist's Wife*, Sibley gives her memoir a double focus. Aware of their contradictions, she invokes two familiar artistic traditions. The steady gaze in the mirror produces the self-portrait. Paintings of the artist's wife are sometimes celebrations of a marriage, sometimes homage to a muse. Often they have a more casual origin: when a painter is in the mood for portraiture, his wife is the nearest available sitter.

Irina Sibley evokes her childhood in Bathurst, schooldays in rural New South Wales, art school in Sydney. Her close family relationships (brilliantly captured in the evocative sepia photographs of three generations) worked for and against Irena's wish to be an artist, but on the whole this is a story of support, not conflict.

Well before her marriage to the celebrated painter Andrew Sibley, Irina found a place in Sydney's art world. She gives a lively account of meeting the reclusive Ian Fairweather at his Bribie Island hideout. The equally reclusive Godfrey Miller gave her lessons without letting her know his name. Other encounters with the famous make this a valuable record of the Australian art scene from the 1960s to the present day.

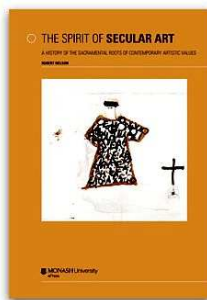
As wife and mother, painter, teacher, writer and illustrator, Sibley herself has used her gifts in a remarkable career, which this memoir describes with a light touch, and no regrets.

Sibley's book is an exquisite production, an example of what the designer's art can create by working in harmony with the text. For the reader, double pleasure.

The material stretched by the spiritual

BOOK REVIEW

Peter Steele



Nelson, Robert . *The Spirit of Secular Art: A History of the Sacramental Roots of Contemporary Artistic Values*. Monash University Press, Melbourne. RRP \$37.95

Pious or superstitious, whichever it was, the practice once obtained of opening either *The Aeneid* or the Bible at random and taking to heart the first words upon which the eyes lighted. An exercise of that kind would be a good way to come to terms initially with Robert Nelson's *The Spirit of Secular Art: A History of the Sacramental Roots of Contemporary Artistic Values*.

Here is a brief yield from my own thumbing and peeping. 'Hence there is a kind of inbuilt duplicity in secular art, a kind of pretension in arrogating spiritual status to itself while disavowing the premises which, to a large extent, it relies upon for its prestige. In many ways, therefore, this is a story which suits no one. It is melancholy for the pious and confronting for the nonreligious.' 'Somewhere deep within the secular appropriation of the sacred there is a slight but new sacramental function.' 'As technically brilliant as they are, the Gothic cathedrals stand as a monument to the material stretched by the spiritual.' 'Venetian painters used glazes on all flesh: bony old men and beauties alike are kissed, as it were, with the radiant blessing of Venetian luminosity.'

Samuel Johnson expressed astonishment at the notion of reading books through, but even he might be given second thoughts by a book like Nelson's. As I hope may be clear already, *The Spirit of Secular Art* abounds in quasi-aphoristic dicta, happy formulations which might, taken in isolation, illuminate much: it could seem greedy to ask for more.

But in fact the whole book is driven by a thesis which, even when its expressions may be contentious, remains powerfully illuminating. Early in the piece, Nelson remarks that 'This text is an attempt to explain the development of secular art in its continuing dependence on the prestige of the sacramental order which it has historically overtaken.' It is an ambitious enough task, but in Nelson's hands not a hubristic one.

'This author', as Johnson would have called him, can scarcely be equally at home in every phase of art, because nobody could be, the thing being both too various and too mysterious for that. But Nelson is enviably and admirably close to that ideal, a dexterous rover from the archaic to the postmodern.

Nor, for all the vigour and confidence of his formulation, is he one to scant complexities or to evade surprises. A couple of pages from the end of the book, he remarks that ‘sometimes the art of greatest merit is produced when artists sympathetically appreciate the archaic spiritual order which centuries of secular progress have obscured from contemporary view’. Even if one is disposed to cock an ironic eyebrow at that unalloyed ‘secular progress’, one may salute Nelson’s alertness to the imagination’s paradoxes.

One of the benefits of this book is that, while its brief is for the visual arts, Nelson is steadily aware of the fact that they are attended by ‘sister arts’, including poetry. Engaged as I am in the latter affair, I should count myself fortunate if I were able to write as tellingly of painting as he does when he says, for example, of poetry:

‘The numbers in poetry are for a hallowed undertaking. The language of divinity is measured; the stresses do not fall randomly but have a cosmic order about them ... Metred speech is a rhythmic symbol of destiny; and the poet is a kind of priest whose inspired vocation is to listen to the spiritual pregnancy of received stories and to find the measured language to express their rightness. Prosody is the sacramental stewardship of language.’

If you can do this kind of thing in the margins, the central text is more than adorned.

‘The Enlightenment’, Nelson writes, ‘can be described as a polemic against the mystical’, and anyone who thinks that that polemic was essentially benign has reckoned without the Terror, among other things.

The Spirit of Secular Art, for all its rigour of attention to the work of human hands when they are largely devoted to festivity, often has a clear eye on the surge and jumble of human affairs at large. When Nelson says, for example, that ‘Art is a peculiarly bad system in which to interrogate for its whole social predication is celebratory’, this is suggestive well beyond the danse macabre of postmodernism: it can function as a challenge to many of the central themes of contemporary political life in Australia. But that, as Kipling used to say, is another story.

Young men damaged by a war they don't understand

FILM REVIEW

Rochelle Siemienowicz

***In the Valley of Elah*: 121 minutes. Rated: MA. Director: Paul Haggis. Starring: Tommy Lee Jones, Charlize Theron, Susan Sarandon, Jason Patric, James Franco, Josh Brolin, Frances Fisher, Jonathan Tucker.**

In the Old Testament story, the Valley of Elah is the place where the boy David slew the giant Goliath with a mere slingshot and stone. It's a story of courage against the odds; the triumph of God's anointed man over an evil, and seemingly insurmountable enemy. But in Paul Haggis' film, it is almost impossible to find a simple enemy or an easy hero, because this is a tale about the murky fallout of America's war in Iraq.



Hank Deerfield (Tommy Lee Jones) is a Vietnam veteran and retired army policeman. He has his own gravel-hauling business in Tennessee, where he lives with his wife Joan (Susan Sarandon). When Hank gets a call from the army, telling him that his son Mike, recently returned from Iraq, has gone AWOL from Fort Rudd in New Mexico, he decides to drive down and investigate the disappearance himself. What he finds there is an army bureaucracy that shuts him down at every point, while the young soldiers in his son's unit are unwilling, or unable, to shed any light on the mystery.

Hank's only ally is the civilian detective Emily Sanders (a fresh-scrubbed Charlize Theron). She's a single mother trying to get on in her job while ignoring the rampant sexism within the force. She's a good cop, but not nearly as good as Hank, who shows her, on numerous occasions, how real investigative police-work should be done — with style, ingenuity and a dogged intelligence that is truly impressive. What they find together is horrifying and almost incomprehensible. A parent's worst nightmare.

This film belongs to Tommy Lee Jones who totally inhabits the role of the searching father and stoic ex-military man. He looks deathly grey — still strong, but with lines so deep around injured-looking eyes, that you can't help thinking he's not long for this world. Maybe it's just his type, the truly honorable soldier, that is fading and becoming extinct.

In the Valley of Elah is a sombre, unhurried film. Shot by Roger Deakins in a style that takes in the wide flat expanses of the desolate army town, we see the chicken factories, fast food

joints and girly bars, and the streets lined with jeeps full of young men damaged by a war they don't understand. The message here is, for the most part, restrained — in sharp contrast to Haggis's didactic *Crash*. Yet he can't resist a final flag-waving scene that feels like an unnecessary sermon.

In the eye of the protagonist

FILM REVIEW

Tim Kroenert



***The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*: 112 minutes. Rated: M. Director: Julian Schnabel. Starring: Mathieu Amalric, Emmanuelle Seigner, Marie-José Croze, Anne Consigny, Max von Sydow. [Website](#).**

A viewer's engagement with film is largely passive. This makes a cinema seat the perfect place from which to experience the 'locked in' world of Jean-Dominique Bauby (Amalric) — a former fashion magazine editor paralysed by a severe stroke. The common metaphor to describe feeling empathy is to 'put yourself in someone else's shoes'. Director Schnabel goes further and places his audience inside Jean-Do's eye.

Unable to move or speak, Jean-Do becomes a spectator to the world around him. For much of the film we see what he sees and, as a result, feel what he feels. Extensive point-of-view cinematography replicates the imprecision of Jean-Do's wandering eye. It's unsettling. Early in the film, you'll discover what it looks like to have the lid of one dysfunctional eye sutured shut while you are fully conscious.

The vicarious physical discomfort of this scene finds emotional equivalents later on, when friends or family members drift frustratingly in and out of Jean-Do's field of vision as they speak to him, lean close in overwrought sympathy, or gaze upon him with piercing compassion.

Diving Bell provides relief and character development through flashbacks to Jean-Do's previous, glamorous life. His philosophical reappraisal of life and his personal achievements lend lyricism to the film. He also comes again to appreciate of the power of imagination, and shares with us his romantic flights of fancy.

To meet the people who populate Jean-Do's static existence is touching. There's Henriette (Croze), the speech therapist who teaches him to communicate by blinking his remaining eye. Claude (Consigny), the heroically patient book editor to whom Jean-Do 'dictates' his memoir (an excruciating, letter-by-letter process guided by Jean-Do's blinking eye) reaffirms him professionally and artistically. Celine (Seigner), a former lover and the mother of Jean-Do's children, offers him personal affection.

It's a poignant irony that so many of the people who so support Jean-Do during his

disability are beautiful women. The iconic 'beautiful woman' was the plaything of his professional life as editor of *Elle*. The fact he is now reliant on such women to survive underlines the inversion of his world.

Contrasts between past and present life are central to the character study. Another is seen in Jean-Do's relationship with his elderly father (Sydow). A flashback portrays him lovingly shaving the old man, who later weeps at the similarity between his own shut-in state and the mentally locked-in state of his son.

Diving Bell suffers from its lack of narrative structure. Some of the characterisation remains half-baked. When, early in his rehabilitation, Jean-Do tells Henriette that he'd prefer to just die, she responds in an overly emotional manner that suggests a story in itself. But later in the film, after she has served to teach Jean-Do his method of blink-speaking, her character almost disappears.

This is a film to experience more than a story to be told. Schnabel is less interested in constructing a narrative than he is in juxtaposing images and sounds like freeform poetry to evoke thought and emotional engagement. This he certainly achieves.

Attentive to rumours of healing

POETRY

Lorraine McGuigan

Uncoupled

Her skin bears witness
to his absence, peeling
peeling, shedding flakes
as fragile as ash.

The rooms, ambivalent
about space, contract
expand at will. Day by
day she is shrinking.

Memories everywhere:
escaping a locked cabinet
shoeboxes of cards, letters.
Abundant with the familiar
looping script, the flourish
of his name, they demand
one last reading before
the burning.

Pulled nightly from
sleep by the undertow
of randomness,
uncertainty,

she lies becalmed
in morning light,
attentive to rumours
of healing.

Pathways

After a sunset of ravishing
pinks, crimsons — a night as
black as a conjuror's cloth.
She steps outside, her eyes
fixed on the Southern Cross,
her feet following the path
he'd flagged six months ago.
Now the moon, full of itself,

illuminating cathedral spires,
exotic palms. She sees his face
imprinted on the moon
(as he'd once fancied), hears him
declare the constellations
to be wondrous, profound.
And remembers him standing
in dream's doorway, smiling,
reassuring: I am here. Always
here.
Guided inside by a pathway
of light, she throws open
the shutters and sleeps,

moon lapping at her skin.

Light

At the window candlelight trembles,
is stretched then returned by the breeze
to a teardrop glow.

Overhead, defying curfew, plane
after plane, their insistent drone near
yet distant; strangely comforting.

She wonders, is space a something
or a nothing, the sky a confused mass
of stars, incandescent meeting points.

And now this news flash: a helicopter
on a mountain, blades turning, spinning
silver in the wind. No survivors.

At her window, the candle still burns.

Pulped promises and draining tidal waters

Gillian Telford

Published

the boardwalk

Tamar Island Wetlands Reserve, 2007

(i)

a bleak waterway

when I first crossed to the island

many years ago

weeds and silt choked the estuary

water birds flew on

and barely skimmed the surface

broken reeds

struggled for footing in remnant pasture

a solitary bird-hide

with cut-out walls to scan the empty sky —

was this where visionaries came to dream?

low tide exposed stark new timbers —

one and a half kilometres reaching out

over old levee banks and rivulets —

a walkway still alien

to its landscape

(ii)

this year I return

stepping with care

over stained and seasoned boards —
 wire-covered in parts
against the treachery of slime and frost
 now I enter a shifting world of reeds
that almost form an arch above my head —
 I hear tiny birds
chatter and scold as they dart in and out
 setting the seed-heads swinging
 look into the depths
 and here is chaos —
vertical/diagonal/horizontal shafts
of reeds — *Phragmites australis* —
 like a festival of box kites
 disassembled
 (iii)
 on the island
traces of European settlement
 are folded in time
 like the leaning plough
you find embalmed within an oak
move on to the far side and here
 throughout its length
the main channel of the Tamar
ebbs and flows in tidal sweeps
 near its mouth
the wood-chip mills with gaping jaws
 strip chew and spit out forests —

while I walk
protestors gather in city parks
to march with banners —
promises are processed — pulped
(iv)
as the tidal waters drain
all is witch-talk ooze and suck
when there is a lull in the wind —
a break from endless gossip with the reeds —
every sound is liquid
now the water birds swoop low to feed —
chestnut teal sieve the shallows
like teams of weekend lawn mowers bent to the task —
a white-faced heron repeats its image in reflected sky
while beneath the bridge
a black swan spins against the current
in a taffeta flare