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St Mary's a metaphor for blogger power

MEDIA

John Cokley



The latest report from the [Committee to Protect Journalists](#) makes depressing, if anticipated reading: [bloggers](#) are being hunted down and jailed in many countries, most numerous in Burma, Iran, Syria, Cuba, Saudi Arabia, Vietnam, Tunisia, China, Turkmenistan, and Egypt.

The practice of blogging has become so widespread now that academics are researching it, policymakers are deliberating about it, businesses are salivating at its [revenue potential](#), and even cops are being assigned to hunt down its practitioners. And as the net tightens in Burma, Iran and Syria and those others, it also tightens closer to home, especially in Fiji but also in apparently benign democracies such as Malaysia.

University of Queensland PhD student Abdul Latiff Ahmad has been monitoring the blogosphere in his home country of Malaysia and he says there have been controversial cases involving bloggers there over the years.

'Prominent political bloggers have been charged under the Sedition Act and their cases are still being trialed in court. Religious issues are also debated in blogs, as is sexual content.'

But it's not all bad news. Mr Ahmad says the number of blogs in Malaysia has been growing and more bloggers have been gaining prominence.

'There has been a strong shift of attitude towards bloggers especially with the general election in March last year. The government found the need to establish good relations with bloggers, and ministers in the government have also established their own blogs to get closer to the people.'

'There is a television show on the public broadcasting channel, RTM1, called *Blog@1*, which invites bloggers to talk about current issues and share their blogging experience. At the same time, ex-journalists have started their own blogs. 'The latest and most prominent person to join the blogosphere is Malaysia's ex-Prime Minister, Tun Mahathir Muhammad, whose [blog](#) currently has more than 18 million visitors.'

Researcher and author Stuart Allan, in his book [Online News](#) notes that bloggers and their ilk have the potential to 'alter the dynamics of public debate', firstly by removing the established role of news gatekeeper and secondly by becoming so influential that 'reporters are beginning every day by reading the blogs'.

Perhaps because of this, there is another aspect to the issue which deserves a look: bloggers haven't been popular among journalists either.

Many journalists — especially the rightfully disgruntled ones among the thousands laid off from newspapers here and in the UK and US in the past year — regard blogging by ‘non-professionals’ as a threat to their position as ‘professionals’ and, more acutely, to their income.

They are right to be concerned. We hear daily of print journalism businesses either going out of business or converting to smaller online productions requiring fewer reporters and editors. And you only have to read the annual [Technorati report](#) to witness the growth of blogging’s influence and power, displacing old-fashioned journalists’ position as ‘professional reporters and commentators’.

But while these supposed threats might explain mainstream journalism’s lack of support for bloggers, it can’t excuse it. By saying that blogging is fine as long as it’s published by ‘professional journalists’, but not if published by the commentator down the street, you’re attempting to dilute freedom of speech. And the freedom of speech which establishment journalists and their audiences enjoy cannot be diluted without being destroyed.

Dare I say, the Catholic Church’s recent dealings with the parish of St Mary’s in South Brisbane is a useful and pertinent metaphor. My informed understanding of that debate — which spilled into the [blogosphere](#) very early on — is that only ‘professional clergy’ are allowed to have a say on important matters of faith and that everyone else may be denigrated (and relegated) as ‘the commentator down the street’, and legitimately ignored.

Many commentators and bloggers have tried to make the point that Fr Peter Kennedy and his followers are ‘in a club which has rules and should abide by those rules or get out’. Fr Kennedy, not unreasonably, maintains that he and his followers are loyal members of that club and want to make legitimate change happen from within.

The metaphor goes further: now that Fr Kennedy and his parishioners have actually moved ‘down the street’ to premises donated by the local Trades and Labour Council, and a new ‘official clergyman’, Fr Ken Howell, has been installed on the parish steps, does the church really think the problem can be ignored and might ‘go away’?

Let’s bring the discussion back: do the governments of Burma, Iran, Syria, Cuba, Saudi Arabia, Vietnam, Tunisia, China, Turkmenistan, Egypt and Fiji — or indeed mainstream journalism establishments in Australia, the US and the UK — think criticising, punishing or ignoring bloggers is going to make the issues they raise go away?

For that matter, does the Federal Labor Government think that by filtering the entire internet within Australia they can make those ‘bad men’ (paedophiles, pornographers, people they disagree with) go away?

There’s not much evidence to support either hypothesis, as scientists might say.

When feminism goes green

BOOKS

Jen Vuk

Ariel Salleh (ed.): *Eco-Sufficiency & Global Justice: Women Write Political Ecology*. Spinifex Press , 2009. ISBN: 978-0-7453-2863-8

In the age of equal opportunity and unisex underwear the once-great feminist movement seems about as incendiary as a lukewarm cup of tea.

That's not to say that the 'f' word went the way of dinosaurs completely. While we weren't looking (nor, perhaps, paying much attention) feminism managed to claw its way back into the wings — if not under the spotlight — by morphing into something at once profound and problematical.

Welcome to the hot topic (or hot potato, depending on your viewpoint) of ecofeminism: a 21st-century reaction to a 21-century 'crisis of democracy and sustainability'.

According to www.thegreenfuse.org , an environmental philosophy site based in the United Kingdom, ecofeminism centres on the belief that 'the domination of women and the domination of nature are fundamentally connected, and that environmental efforts are therefore integral to work to overcome the oppression of women'.

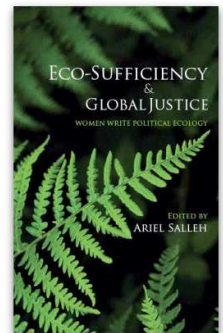
Although the movement has been criticised for being reactionary and for valuing inclusivity and difference, ecofeminists argue that their thinking is designed to establish a new balance by exposing the 'limits of current scholarship in political economy, ecological economics and sustainability science'.

The United States author and academic, Peter Dickens, writes: 'Marginalised groupings must be recognised as a source of new theoretical understandings, critical for social and environmental justice to be achieved.'

And so it was with a combination of thrill and trepidation that I approached the collection of essays, *Eco-Sufficiency & Global Justice: Women Write Political Ecology*, compiled and edited by Sydney researcher and author Ariel Salleh,

A few pages in, however, I found myself both on familiar ground but completely out of my comfort zone.

When I wasn't grappling with concepts such as 'energetics' or 'Marx's labour theory of value' in Ewa Charkiewicz's essay 'Who Is the 'He' of He Who Decides in Economic Discourse?', I was stumbling over the comprehensive European Union emission figures provided in Meike Spitzner's essay, 'How Global Warming Is Gendered'.



Of course, since I am neither the community leader nor the 'student of political studies, movement politics or critical geography' of whom Salleh writes in her introduction, I am clearly outside the book's primary audience.

'These essays are a call to people who care,' she writes, and though I understand that Salleh means to care in a professional sense, it rubs me up the wrong way.

I almost put the book down there and then. But there's enough veracity and purpose in Salleh's introduction to warrant further investigation. 'As I write this, sunlight glistens through morning rain and casuarinas bow to a soft north east breeze,' she muses.

'Whoever would guess that life on earth is falling into precarity — threatened by global free trade, militarism, climate change, sexual violence, genetic and nano technologies.'

It's difficult to remain impassive in face of the evidence. Several essays later, I'm more than rewarded for my persistence. How else would I have learnt of the terrible legacies left to the people of Marshall Islands after the United States detonated nuclear weapons there in 1946?

In Zohl d'Ishtar's shattering essay, 'Nuclearised Bodies and Militarised Space', I read that not only are the islands' women several times more likely to have abnormal births than western women, but that the destabilisation caused by the US militarisation 'undermined women's status; and young women and girls are particularly at risk of sexual violence'.

Mary Mellor's 'Ecofeminist Political Economy and the Politics of Money' provides further illumination. Ecofeminism, she writes, 'brings together the insights of feminism and ecology ... [It] seeks to expand the notion of the economy from narrow neoclassical focus on market determination ... to a much wider conception of human activities in meeting needs.'

Mellor airs her penultimate argument under the subhead: 'The precarity of global capitalism'. As she writes, despite the power of the dominant ME (masculine-experience) economy, 'it is a system in which people do not feel economically secure or happy, even in the richest countries'.

Although we can wave away the subjugation of women and nature as something that happens 'over there', our own happiness is a topic much closer to home and to our hearts.

Hits a nerve, doesn't it? Mellor's essay marries urgency with accessibility and so takes the air out of the rhetoric. This is where *Eco-Sufficiency & Global Justice* proves to be most incendiary. But it does beg the question: Why preach almost exclusively to the converted when ready disciples are but a demystified paragraph away?

Rehabilitation of a failed state

POLITICS

Ben Fraser



Perhaps it was an omen. The first voter in the Ifo camp block leader elections strode to the polling station in an oversized Obama t-shirt, thrust his ration card forward, daubed his thumb in indelible ink, and deposited his token in a jerry can emblazoned with the candidate's photograph.

He was followed by a snaking line of similarly excited voters, all anxious to find their names on the polling manifest. For thousands of Somalis, most of them engaging with the democratic vote for the first time, it was an auspicious occasion. It was made poignant by the fact that they voted on the border of their troubled homeland.

Elections, and the act of voting, are a powerful affirmation of one's ability to stand and be counted. For refugees especially, it is all the more significant. In one morning the block leader elections held in Dadaab in the far east of Kenya, a sparse desert township harbouring the largest refugee settlement in the world, grasped what since 1991 has eluded transitional leaderships, clan warLords and foreign interlocutors in Somalia.

Across the porous border in Somalia, where more than 60,000 Somalis took flight to Kenya last year alone, legitimacy remains an elusive prize. Since the fall in 1991 of the military tyrant Siad 'Big Mouth' Barre, the country has tumbled in violent freefall, its history pockmarked by unrelenting violence and poverty. Many thousands have died in the conflict since and millions more are displaced and dependent on aid.

The leadership vacuum inside Somalia has led to many conflicts between rival clans and to the intermittent rise and fall of warLords who have both caused alarm and been courted at home and abroad.

Mohamed Farah Aidid, chief protagonist in the infamous 'black hawk down' episode is a case in point. Once demonised as the architect of the slaughter of American troops, he was later courted as a key agent in peace talks which have continued, failingly, into the new century.

In 2000 a transitional government was appointed. After laborious deliberations a new President was installed in 2004. It marked the 14th attempt to set up a functioning government since the fall of 'Big Mouth'.

The Union of Islamic Courts (UIC), a hardline Islamist group, seized power from a deeply factionalised Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in 2006. The impact was immediate. Law and order in the capital were restored and the economy rejuvenated.

Despite the UIC's regressive social ideology, the country enjoyed peace, temporarily. In a bid to reinstate the TFG and quell potential insurgency on its border, Ethiopia, backed by the USA, invaded and occupied Mogadishu. This triggered a further exodus of civilians and another round of political maneuvering by the opposing parties.

In January this year, after the rapid loss of territory to the militant Al Shabaab insurgent group and simmering anti-Ethiopian sentiment, the Ethiopian forces withdrew fully from the country. Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, a well respected and moderate Islamist leader, was then given power.

Although many, including policy makers in the West, welcomed this move, it was rejected by hardliners, including Al Shabaab. They continue to attack this newest incarnation of the TFG. With only a meagre African peacekeeping force in place to support the interim government, security remains fragile.

The total lack of political and ideological cohesion inside Somalia has prevented its leaders from building the institutions and freedoms Somalis need.

The imposition of a moderate form of Sharia law in April has not bridged these rifts. Having extended its control over most of southern Somalia, Al Shabaab has sought to impose the extreme 'Wahhabist' line of Islamic rule. As the Taliban demonstrated, whatever peace is achieved through this repressive doctrine is tainted by subjugation and fear.

Sheikh Sharif, a former rebel himself, must bring harmony to a government divided by contending platforms and agendas. He must also restore the public's belief in the rule of law and constitutional rights that have been routinely deferred through an age of military rule.

Above all else, he must help create the conditions for his people to return from their havens of 'safety'. This will be difficult. People must be convinced they will be secure and supported and that the government is legitimate.

For five days in Dadaab's three burgeoning camps, thousands of Somalis marched to voting stations, just as Australians converge at primary schools and municipal halls on election morning. They did so without fear under the watchful eye of observers and for the most part complied with the poll rules. Men and women, young and old, the refugees voted with pink voting tokens and purple tinged fingers.

Winning candidates, the majority female, were roundly cheered. They returned to their blocks brimming with pride. They were officially installed as block leaders, so linking their 'block' community in the camp to the functioning humanitarian framework of the United Nations and non-government agencies.

They stand proudly between the camp authorities and the general population, a civic space yet to evolve in Somalia's fledgling new leadership.

The camp elections were a success because the Somali voters were determined to be recognised as advocates for their people and their country. Though their desire remains unfulfilled in their homeland, even this small brick in building Somalia's future democracy is welcome.

Agnostic on a mission from God

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***Angels and Demons*: 138 minutes. Rated: M. Director: Ron Howard. Starring: Tom Hanks, Ewan McGregor, Stellan Skarsgård, Ayelet Zurer**

I'm a Dan Brown novice. I avoided his novels and the film version of *The Da Vinci Code*. I suspected that they were overhyped trash. And that the controversy over their Catholic Church bashing was simply more rubber for the popularity tyre fire.



So I viewed *Angels and Demons*, the movie sequel based on Brown's prequel novel, with low expectations. I was surprised. I spent the next two hours thoroughly entertained by this thriller. *Angels and Demons* is a live-action cartoon, offering a few laughs, a few thrills, and nary a demand to use one's brain. It *is* trash, but boy, what fun!

Symbologist Robert Langdon (Hanks), having, in *The Da Vinci Code*, attempted to uncover a conspiracy at the foundations of the Church, is now called to the Church's aid. It seems the Illuminati, an ancient brotherhood of scientists and artists with a beef against the hierarchy, has reemerged to execute their counterpunch. This consists of a methodical act of terrorism designed to hobble the Church at its hub.

The Church is, meanwhile, in a state of stasis; the Pope has died, and the Cardinals are in Conclave, enacting the rituals that will lead to the election of a new Pope. The threat has arrived while they are at their most vulnerable. Now they depend upon Langdon, previously their nemesis, to be their saviour.

Langdon, an Illuminati expert, is also a hero from the same mold as Indiana Jones (sans wise-cracks and whip). He's an academic with a dash of derring-do. He scoots around the streets of Vatican City, an agnostic on a mission from God, ever in physical danger as he follows the clues and tries to solve the puzzle laid before him.

Just as the camera devours the authentic scenery, so too does the script dip and taste from Church history and religious art — the origins of the Illuminati, its fractious relationship with the Church and, pertinently, the works of the sculptor Bernini. Obscure references and the minutiae of Catholic ceremony are laid bare for the layman.

If you had to pick a word to describe Hanks, 'likeable' might be it. In that respect, his casting as Langdon is perfect. Even those who thought *The Da Vinci Code* was sacrilege of a deadly variety surely couldn't maintain their disdain with Forrest Gump in the lead role.

While Hanks cruises on his natural affability, McGregor has a ball as the gentle but vaguely off-kilter Camerlengo McKenna, the man responsible for keeping the papal seat warm while the Cardinals are in Conclave. Whether McKenna is a hero or a villain is not always clear, but he is responsible for delivering a key monologue, which extrapolates the film's science vs religion theme. It's heavy-handed, but McGregor, enjoying himself, pulls it off.

Other characters, such as exotic scientist and Langdon's de facto sidekick, Vittoria Vetra (Zurer), and the sneering Commander Richter (Skarsgård), leader of the Vatican's elite Swiss Guard soldiers, play perfunctory roles without any attempt at character development. Two-dimensional? Sure, but this is a cartoon after all. Most viewers will be able to enjoy it with their mind functioning at only 15 per cent.

But ... (Warning: plot spoilers ahead.)

I'll try not to give too much away. Suffice it to say that the film has two endings. The first is a cracker. It involves an act of individual self-sacrifice; the ultimate gesture of common humanity, which transcends ideological battles between science and religion. It's neat, and justifies much of the silliness that has preceded it.

Then comes the twist. It's flagged by the sight of a parachute tumbling from the sky. With it tumbles credibility. Brown (and the filmmakers) can't resist a good Church conspiracy, and the twist ending directs the finger-pointing back inside the walls of the Church. This will not just annoy religious folk. As an ending, it's plain dumb.

Bud Tingwell and I

EULOGY

Andrew Hamilton



Charles 'Bud' Tingwell, 3 January 1923—15 May 2009

I only met Bud Tingwell once. Like so many others, I went away the better for the brief encounter. But the meeting also led me to ask questions about what matters, and how we should nurture it in Australian society.

I had not planned to see him. I was cycling through rural Victoria enjoying myself and also learning a lot about life in the country as I went. One Sunday I arrived at Yarram, a Gippsland town. I discovered that I had arrived in time for the Yarram Film Festival. So I decided to go along.

The whole town was involved in staging and attending the Festival. For a hungry cyclist the afternoon tea alone justified the modest price of admission. The film was a retrospective — the 1957 British film, [The Shiralee](#), in which Tingwell had a minor role.

The film wore its age surprisingly well. But the highlight came at the end of the film, when Tingwell himself came on to the stage, talked about the movie and reminisced about his life as an actor.

I was struck particularly by the generous way in which he spoke of other actors. He mentioned their foibles but always in the context of their professional skills and personal qualities. To him they were part of a guild who practised their skills as a gift for their audiences.

In particular I remember his stories about Margaret Rutherford whose films with Alastair Sim had given me great delight as a child. Tingwell spoke of her as a genial and hard-working actor whose passion was a project to turn around the lives of troubled young people by involving them in theatre.



When I met him I mentioned how much I had enjoyed his acting in *Tulip*, a short film based on a story much told in our family. His immediate response was to talk generously of the people with whom he had been involved in the film. He spoke of them as actors, but first as persons.

As I reflected on the event afterwards, I was struck by the fact that Tingwell, by then an elderly man, should give so fully of his time and energy to contribute to a country festival. He instinctively saw the importance of community events, and had put himself out to encourage people to make connections.

For him acting was about making connections: the actor's connection with an audience, but also the connections between the members of an audience, and

between the audience and their wider world. What was done on the stage at Yarram was as important to him as what was done in Melbourne. In this he represented the best of the repertory tradition in Britain.

I was also struck by his dedication to acting as a life's work. For him it was a craft to be respected, and he saw himself as a modest, painstaking craftsman. He measured his fellow actors, not by the celebrity that they had achieved, but by their commitment to acting and the generosity with which they gave themselves to acting and to the community. He enjoyed others' gifts and also their success.



Tingwell's values give us pause to think about what matters to us as Australians. They suggest that Australia might be a better place if we valued what he valued. People with skills in performance — in music, drama, film, even in sports — are often measured publicly by their celebrity. Although their peers may recognise them for their skills, in public representation their skills are defined by their recognition.

In itself this is not problematic, but the cult of celebrity means government funds follow celebrity. Governments favour the organisations at the top of the tree that produce celebrities. They get the parkland and subsidies, direct and indirect. If nurturing the craft matters, as Bud Tingwell's life suggests, governments would benefit Australia more by offering small grants to local theatres, concert halls and ovals where people learn to perform.

Tingwell's visit to Yarram also suggests the importance of making connections and of encouraging the activities that connect people. He saw acting as a way of making connection, and valued both the craft and those engaged in it. He saw the importance of things that gather people together: country film festivals, small theatre companies, projects to help young offenders make connections. He encouraged the local and the small as the embryo of connection.

If he was right in this, it suggests that in encouraging social inclusion, economic efficiency is an ineffective master. Economy of scale, the preference for profit making organisations can deliver services. But small community groups connected organically to local communities are much more likely to touch human lives and offer invitations that people will accept.

If, as Bud Tingwell believed, it is people who matter, then nurturing and healing begin at the roots and not at the flower.

The case for publishing poetry

POETRY

Gillian Bouras

The chattering classes of Great Britain are, well, chattering. Not to mention buzzing apoplectically. The reason? After Andrew Motion came to the end of his seven-year tenure, Carol Ann Duffy was named the new Poet Laureate.



But many people, including some poets themselves, thought that the post should be scrapped altogether. These same people think that the Laureate, whose salary is a butt of sack, automatically becomes tethered to the Establishment and its demands: the job, after all, is to write poems of celebration for State occasions.

Such prescription is often irksome: Motion's first collection in seven years will appear next month, and he confesses to being 'rattled' by what was almost writer's block.

The accepted wisdom is that people do not read poetry any more, that they no longer listen to it, and that publishers everywhere have axed their poetry lists. But in big cities you can go to a poetry reading every night of the week if you feel inclined, while heroic small presses and prominent literary journals still give shelf-room and online space to poetry.

As well, in this literate age, you may not have read a poem in a decade or more, but some poetry will always be part of you.

Then again, Australian poetry sells very well when the small population is taken into account, and Les Murray is up there with international giants like Seamus Heaney and Derek Walcott.

Poetry is as ancient an art form as dancing: one has only to think of the compelling rhythms of *Hiawatha* and the repetition of 'We'll all be rooned, said Hanrahan' to understand that this is so.

Yet even poets are hard put to it to say what a poem is exactly. Wordsworth (pictured) famously opined that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity. The word itself takes its origin from the Latin and Greek to make, and as tranquillity is vital, so is craftsmanship.

Yet although one can learn the techniques, mere obedience to rules does not necessarily produce a poem, for there is an essential magic to poetry that makes it quite different from prose. As Sylvia Plath remarked, poetry is a tyranny in which the poet has 'to burn away the peripherals'.

Thomas Mann believed the artist's highest joy is thought that can merge wholly

into feeling, feeling that can merge wholly into thought. To achieve their own particular joy, poets have to add stringent discipline and mastery of form.

In this increasingly secular age, poetry can be said to have a new function as an alternative or complement to religion. Les Murray, for example, describes himself as a poet who is religious rather than a religious poet, and celebrates a sense of wonder and mystery.

I am, alas, not a poet, but my own case is one in point: raised in childhood and adolescence by Nonconformists of various stripes, and long the mother of three Greek Orthodox sons, I now style myself, when asked, as a Wordsworthian Pantheist.

Wordsworth's claim that 'the meanest flower that blows can give/Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears' certainly holds good for me, especially in the Greek spring, when, as it happens, very few flowers can actually be described as mean.

A good poem lingers in the mind, and the best ones mark the soul and memory indelibly. But as well as words, poems provide gaps, spaces and silences in an increasingly complicated and cacophonous world. Poems invite meditation and contemplation, while fusing the sensual with the spiritual, as in the truly marvellous work of John Donne; they are an integral part of civilisation.

Supremely talented British journalist A. A. Gill says that words are obviously his tools of trade, but that, despite attempts, he is not a poet. He professes himself horrified by the notion of abolishing the post of Poet Laureate, for, he maintains, we carry scraps of poetry with us until the very end.

He does not actually say so, but he seems to argue that the Poet Laureate can be considered an emblematic or iconic figure. What he does say is that poetry 'maintains a connection with the lyrical beat at the heart of the tribe'.

Which is the reason so many readers look forward to Tuesdays on *Eureka Street*.

An end to rugby's unethical code

SPORT

Tony Smith



News of the latest [scandal](#) among rugby league players has been received in some quarters as surprising. Some Catholic schools in Sydney are even contemplating ending an association that goes back decades. There are however, broader forces at play which no initiative by schools has sufficient power to affect.

In some respects, it would be a shame were this particular code of football to make itself too outrageous to be invited into schools. In the early post-war years, many students at schools run by orders of religious brothers were initiated into the game and some nostalgic attachment will linger. Baby-boomer blokes will have some memories — not always fond — of being thrown a football or two among a class of 60 and being told to enjoy themselves as they might.

At the working class school I attended, the teaching staff seemed to regret not being a few miles east along the main road at the prestigious 'college' where rugby union was played. Our buildings were crumbling, the methods of instruction barbaric and student creativity and initiative regarded with suspicion.

However, the school's football teams were extremely successful and in a period where sectarianism was still fairly common, successes in rugby league, along with swimming and cadet bands, were important for prestige and self-respect.

The school was near a major sporting ground, the home of a rugby league team, and stars of first grade, especially state and national representatives, appeared at presentation ceremonies and team training. These blokes did become role models of sorts, especially for boys who had none in other fields.

Of course the strong rugby league tradition was not all positive. Boys from migrant families would have made spectacular soccer players, but the sport was regarded as unmanly. And inevitably, anyone who was not good at the game or who participated unenthusiastically was not valued greatly.

Yet we were never scandalised by the behaviour of the stars and had a healthy degree of scepticism about footballers. Many had other occupations while others had sacrificed a career in order to work in day jobs provided by sponsors, supporters or even the registered clubs themselves.

Ironically, while these stars did not have unqualified adulation, they displayed far greater skills than are exhibited today. They tackled around the ankles, passed with style, slipped through gaps with silken ease, swerved and sidestepped past opponents, kicked accurately and gave credit to opponents where it was due. Most importantly they wore the colours of a club that was based in a district or even a single suburb.

The game today is played by boys who have no other qualifications. This is not necessarily their fault, as clubs demand total commitment. The clubs' intention may be to provide the best football by complete professionals, but the outcome is different. Today's players are dressed as salesmen for various companies, and they belong to the brands they serve

Individuals have been forced out and the culture of the game is flat and monotonous. These brand name billboards play like robots and the matches lack spectacle. Some observers have speculated that with the move to professional rugby union, rugby league will wither and be reabsorbed into rugby, from which it seceded.

No-one should be surprised to find antisocial behaviour in this culture. Because the game is sensitive to the demands of the sources of its revenue, stands on principle are foreign to the administration. Whether through incompetence or lack of resolve, rugby league as a code has not eliminated foul play. A body that tolerates assaults on the field can hardly be expected to be willing or able to control the players' off-field behaviour with alcohol, cars or women.

Spectators have the last say. Most who watch rugby league do so as part of a television audience. Many stopped watching long ago, realising the game was little more than a Trojan horse to introduce products through advertising. Unfortunately, the game has also been introducing distasteful ethics. Viewers need to stop inviting this mess into their lounge rooms.

Whatever noises the administrators make about reform, their main roles are to protect the product. When the code appoints sex discrimination experts and ethicists to make reforms, it is meant to keep the issues in house. They try to ensure that scandals do not erupt and when they do, these are made part of the spectacle.

Broader society should not expect the game to clean itself up. The league should long ago have adopted a hands-off policy and let people who make mistakes wear the consequences. It is high time that the rest of us stop allowing football administrators, advertisers and television stations to set the standards for ethical behaviour.

Regrettably, the record of recent years suggests the only way that the current unethical rugby league culture can be removed is for the code itself to disappear.

Danger: avoid death

POETRY

Shane McCauley

Fears

'Danger: Avoid Death'

(Warning on a tractor in the US)

You will look left and right

so many times

the road will never be crossed.

Keep feet firmly

on the earth,

ration your breath, and

give lightning a wide berth.

Swim in nothing deeper

than a basin, let others

tell you what the view is

from a height,

leave one light on

and say a prayer

before you sleep at night.

Compromise between confined

and open spaces,

avoid outsiders and crowds,

be alert for cracks of doom,

never harbour rats or spiders,

and for total safety

just never leave your room.

Cirque de Soleil

The bamboo forest extends

into us

as we perceive human shape
emerging from such weird
planets of imagination
and applaud gyrating leap
fevered flight
of weightless spirits
happy to embrace
ecstatic choreography
of exertion such lithely
practised exhilaration
happy to soar with them
companions in illusion
gasp at marriage
of risk and beauty
seductive thrill
while beyond the tent
the world grimaces
and behaves
as it always will.

Horoscope

The moon has fallen
into your romantic
sector. Delay action.
Be less frantic.
Avoid business deals
and cross roads
with more sangfroid.
Don't compromise
but invest yourself
with gentleness. Rise

early. Confront the day.
Be alert for augury.
Hear what people
say. Don't be a skater
on thin ice. Receive
your rewards
later. Here ends
coverage of a day
without rage or joy.
It is in fact no more
than average.

Walking with Port Kembla's ghosts

NON-FICTION

Eleanor Massey

The box Brownie immortalises the school girls on Mount Keira lookout, and catches a glimpse of Wollongong, and the Port Kembla steel works far below. It's 1962, and we are over from Auckland to see Australia, whipping up and down the coast in aeroplanes and steam trains, to admire all that wealth for toil.



We are the baby boomers, and the world is our oyster.

Nearly 50 years on, from a second floor window of Wollongong's Ibis hotel, the world looks less for the taking. The hotel is a serviceable box of a place, its concrete legs straddling the top of Market Street, above the ramshackle town, which still looks, as D. H. Lawrence described it in 1922 'as if it had tumbled haphazard off the pantechnicon of civilisation as it dragged round the edges of this wild land, and there lay busy but not rooted in'.

And up behind this tumbled-off town looms the black, anvil-shaped Illawarra escarpment, with the lookout on top. To the 1962 buttoned-up school girls, Lawrence meant the Lady Chatterley trial. We didn't know or care that he had visited the Illawarra, or written a book called *Kangaroo*.

The reception area carries brochures about the Anglican Cathedral which occupies the land round the back. The brochures fold out like a triptych, and encourage a visit to the cathedral, via steps built up from under the hotel's legs. But, as is often the case these days, no matter how much I rattle the doors, they refuse to budge, and the woman in charge, witnessing this attempted break-in, pats her pockets and says she doesn't know what she's done with the key, but that I'm welcome to last week's Easter pew notes if I like.

So we hit the town. Market Street tips into Keira Street. Most of the buildings are dilapidated and jerry-built. Legal firms elbow one another upstairs, while too many shops at street level are To Let, For Sale or plastered in newspapers and promising no cash on the premises.

It's early Saturday morning, and the Mall is forlorn. A girl on a poster says she doesn't want to be a slave to heroin any more while a mum tells her nagging kid to quit bugging her, because she doesn't get paid till Tuesday.

The rest of the dispossessed just pile up listlessly in a place that is warm and dry.

We drive to Port Kembla, which, in 1962, was stoked with the dispossessed of the Old World, pouring steel back into the reconstruction of their war-ravaged homelands. Now it's virtually a ghost town. They're putting together an industrial museum, and that has an ominous ring to it.

No trucks, no people, just dead grass blowing against concrete constructions bearing hopeful brand names like BlueScope and Otis. The great, greasy conveyor belts, the wheels, the cogs and the buckets are frozen, like a backdrop for a Japanese manga comic, against a sea empty of ships.

The traditional green and ochre-tiled pubs welcome you into the main street, which then runs up past papered over, boarded up and caged shops, to the stunned, lifeless little houses being sold off at the top. In the coming week, ABC's *Four Corners* is to pan the [same route](#), interviewing an under-employed wharfie who is fossicking for change and struggling to save his home, his family and his dignity.

However, all is not lost. The restaurants are holding out, and after a meal worthy of Sydney and a bill to match, we are sleeping the sleep of the righteous.

But towards midnight, the addicts, the drunks, the hoons and the hookers exact their revenge. Only a latter-day William Hogarth could record his Gin Lane meeting Smack Alley as the police shovel the jobless youth into the paddy wagons, and from there, on Monday morning, into the police station and law courts, beside the cathedral whose notice board still reassures them that Christ is Risen.

By this stage, we're beating a retreat, stopping off at Mount Keira for an obligatory 50-years-down-the-track photo. Then it's into the gentle, seaside resort of Thirroul, where we climb the headland, to catch a glimpse of 'Wyewurk', the bungalow that Lawrence and his wife, Frieda, rented in 1922. Here, D H sat on the grass round the back, leaning against the warm red bricks, and writing *Kangaroo* up in five nondescript exercise books.

At the end of the week, he swung down to the station and caught the little train to Sydney. The coal trucks trundling by would have been familiar to the collier's son who had managed to escape the mines in the English midlands. Like us, he was passing through. There weren't many years left to him. Just enough to write *Lady Chatterley* and to experience The Great Crash.

Matthew Johns is his own best judge

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins



Channel 9 stood down rugby league star Matthew Johns last week, not because his behaviour was immoral or illegal, but for commercial reasons. That is the view of Harold Mitchell, Australia's best known buyer of television advertising time.

He told ABC Radio: 'Advertisers in my experience are very sensitive to public opinion because it lands on their doorstep very quickly in the form of sales.'

New Zealand police did not charge Johns over his involvement in a 2002 group sex incident in Christchurch, as they could not see that he'd broken any law. It was commentary after last week's ABC *Four Corners* investigation that was labelling it 'rape'. Significantly the public appears to have followed the leadership of opinion and judged it as such.

While Channel 9's decision looks self-serving, the commercial logic that governs it can at least be seen to be democratic. That is, it ensures the community's standards of common decency are reflected in what is shown on commercial TV. However the court of public opinion is heavily influenced by the dominant media commentary, and its power must not be allowed to eclipse that of the more traditional forms of arbitration, the civil courts and private conscience.

Last week the British were preoccupied with media revelations of obscene — though not necessarily illegal — expense claims by government MPs. Financial regulation expert Joe Egerton wrote in *Eureka Street's* sister publication *Thinking Faith* that the court of public opinion has a place, and of course a vital say in the fate of the MPs under scrutiny:

'[If an MP] takes a public stance that some well publicised and controversial claim was in order, we are also entitled to ask whether we are going to vote for a person who thinks that that sort of claim is proper to make on the public purse.'

But Egerton stresses this point: 'Most claims will have been entirely proper. Not all of the reporting is fair and proper.'

That is why popular judgments must be tested by civil law and, most importantly, one's own personal law — conscience. As Egerton says: 'This is not a matter of our judging an MP's actions. This is a matter of each MP judging his or her own actions.'

The MP may well be confined to electoral oblivion by what the people think when they come to vote, just as commercial reality has ended Matthew Johns' career, at least for now. But it's the final judgment — and its anticipation — that

really matters. Egerton quotes St Ignatius of Loyola: 'Imagine I am on my deathbed and then ask, 'what would I like to have done?'

Confronting economic monsters

APPLICATION

Andrew Hamilton

The budget has come and gone. The public's interest in the budget has been mild, and its disengagement notable. One reason is that we still live in the shadow of the economic crisis and the revelations it brought about the lack of wisdom among bankers and the economic clerisy.

Many people still remember clearly their moment of illumination as they watched the economic order totter, and saw the play of ideologies, greed, stupidity and self-interest that had brought it to this point. They find it hard to take seriously prognostications about economic reconstruction by authorities who had earlier talked up investment in Gadarene swine right up to the moment they toppled over the cliff.

Talk about the economy needs to be set in a broader conversation about the values that underlie its workings. There is a space for deeper reflection on the human condition, which will help us understand why greed and fear so dominate in human affairs, and what hopes we may reasonably entertain for the betterment of humanity.

An interesting recent reflection on these sombre themes is found in a book by Richard Holloway, *Between the Monster and the Saint*. Holloway, once Archbishop of Edinburgh, and now a writer and broadcaster much in demand in Britain, structures his reflections as a redemption song. He begins by exploring what is wrong with the world, points out some of the reasons why things go wrong, and concludes with intimations of healing.

Like most preachers Holloway is more compelling when he treats human discontents than when he deals with human happiness. He draws on the insights of philosophical, religious and creative writers to describe a precarious world. The natural urge to survive and to propagate all too often expresses itself in sexual exploitation and violence. These drives are only lightly checked by social, religious and cultural inhibitions.

In developing this theme Holloway offers arresting accounts of the implications of the human maltreatment of animals. He also shows how the recurring campaign of the tabloids to punish wrongdoers appeals to the pleasure human beings take in inflicting pain. Newspapers inherit a long tradition of flogging seats at public executions.

In exploring the reasons why unreconstructed nature so often prevails in human affairs, Holloway points to the defects of theories designed to account for human behaviour. The appeal to a human soul in order to explain what is distinctive about



human beings, for example, encourages people to disregard the importance of the body and also to dissociate themselves from the world.

The appeal to God to explain the world, too, soon confronts the reality of human suffering. All too often people emerge from this confrontation believing in a punitive God who then licenses cruelty within the world. Strong religious believers in the United States were among strong proponents of the use of torture.

In asking where healing and hope may be sought, Holloway dwells on the power of myth, of art and of sanctity. All these probe beneath the comfortable surface of life that most people are content to accept, and discover monsters there. But they are not mastered by them. He finds, particularly in the example of individuals who refuse to be complicit in the drive to treat others brutally, a source of hope for humanity.

From this perspective, earnest discussion of the budget would seem to be a waste of energy. At best it would fail to notice, and at worst would cover up, the human world of which economic relationships are part. It neglects the way in which human greed perverts apparently neutral economic settings. Monsters are not neutral players.

In Holloway's perspective, however, something is lacking, which also bears on management of the economy. The deficiency makes his signs of hope a little ethereal almost despairing.

He poises human beings between members of the mob, which is dominated by natural drives and controlled by power, and reasoning, sensitive individuals. What is missing is the importance to human life of relationships.

Human beings are shaped by their relationships to one another and to the world. Through these relationships they transcend their individuality and their brutishness. The health of society and the resistance to monstrous behaviour lie in the quality of everyday relationships in family, workplace and social groups. To develop this reflection might lead us to explore concepts such as selflessness, fidelity, solidarity, and their opposites.

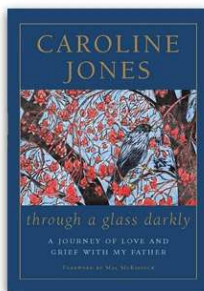
Discussion of the budget rarely touches on what kinds of relationship it encourages and handicaps. But on these things the effectiveness and seriousness of the budget finally depend.

Caroline Jones' manual for love and loss

BOOKS

Cassandra Golds

Caroline Jones: *Through a Glass Darkly*. ABC Books, 2009. ISBN: 9780733323980. [Online](#)



'I consider that the honest telling of my life experience is the most authentic gift I have to offer.' Caroline Jones

Caroline Jones' working life has been devoted to stories. Initially these stories were the ones we call 'news' — the large impersonal events of history as it happens.

Then her career matured into the much-loved and highly original Radio National program *The Search for Meaning*, and the ABC TV series *Australian Story*. There the stories she told, or made space for others to tell, concerned the life histories, and interior landscapes, of individual people.

She has made a vocation out of giving voice to something that would otherwise be almost mute in the cacophony of opinions, events and arguments that usually demand our attention. It is as if, in her programs, not the face but the heart of society is speaking, and it tells a completely different kind of story to the ones we are accustomed to hearing.

In two of her books, *An Authentic Life* (1998) and now, *Through A Glass Darkly*, Jones tells something of the story of her own life, though characteristically this is deeply entwined with the stories of others. *Through a Glass Darkly* concerns the quietly heroic life of her beloved father, and her own profound grief over his death.

Brian Newman James was born in 1907 and lived the first 11 years of his life on a property called Grattai, outside Mudgee in New South Wales, which for the rest of his life remained his spiritual home. At seven he faced many months away from his family in Sydney Children's Hospital, being treated for osteomyelitis in his right leg. Then, at 11, there was the sadness of having to leave Grattai forever, when his parents were forced to sell most of it.

A talented amateur artist and writer, he spent his working life as a reluctant accountant, volunteering to serve his country in the AIF during World War II, although, to his chagrin, he was never posted overseas.

He lived a long life with many challenges, including the suicide of his first wife, Caroline's mother, in 1969. But his final eight weeks, which began with open-heart surgery at the age of 93, and which were spent in an onerous and ultimately unsuccessful attempt to recover from it, must have been some of the most difficult

of his life.

Jones raises many heartfelt questions over the experiences behind the modern miracles of medical science. So often we hear of the achievement of the seemingly impossible; more rarely do we hear of the suffering a patient may endure as a result, let alone the psychological consequences of being treated as not much more than a faulty machine. This aspect of modern life is insufficiently discussed, and Jones does us a service by raising it.

But, heart-rending as these experiences are, *Through A Glass Darkly* is ultimately about something more profound: the unavoidable fact of suffering in human life.

Suffering is the inevitable consequence of many aspects of our existence. But there is nothing more poignant in life than the inextricable link between suffering and love. No one who reads Jones' book could fail to be reminded that love is the greatest gift we have as human beings.

Equally, it is impossible to embark on this journey with her and be unaffected by the inevitability of how vulnerable love makes us. To love is to sign up to many possibilities of suffering, the ultimate of which is mortality: one day, whether it is soon, or distant, we will lose the loved one.

The greatest challenge, and most pressing need, in our lives is not only to endure, but to somehow make sense of, or come to terms with, suffering. And yet modern life seems to devote itself to avoiding it.

Jones' journey is not really towards healing or 'closure'. It is rather a difficult, perilous, protracted and ongoing process of pain, questioning, growth, change and transformation at a profound level, the kind of level that perhaps only love and suffering can reach.

Through A Glass Darkly is truly a book about the heart of things. But it is also a great testament to the value of ordinary life from an author whose simplicity — which runs alongside her at times startling penetration — is one of her most appealing and impressive gifts.

During her speech at the launch of this book, Jones said she wished there was a manual to advise us how to care for elderly parents and relatives. I think she has written it.

New York's God of rot

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***Synecdoche, New York*: 118 minutes. Rated: M. Director: Charlie Kaufman. Starring: Philip Seymour Hoffman, Catherine Keener, Samantha Morton, Michelle Williams**

Recently I have been practising my pronunciation of the word *synecdoche* (si-neck-duh-kee), and trying to come up with an easy working definition. That task is itself *synecdochic* of trying to explain what *Synecdoche, New York* is all about.



A thumbnail synopsis might read as follows: Caden Cotard (Hoffman) is a theatre director. Awarded a grant and artistic *carte blanche*, he sets about producing the most ambitious play in history, building an immense New York set within a vast warehouse and hiring thousands of actors to populate it with the everyday lives of its citizens.

His cast of characters includes himself and those nearest to him, play-acting the events of his domestic life while the director looks on. Is it all part of his grand ambition and the integrity of his art? Or an overblown exercise in self-indulgent self-examination? Probably a bit of both. Inevitably, sooner or later reality and fiction start to blur.

Thematically, fans of screenwriter Charlie Kaufman will find this familiar territory. The cannibalistic tendencies of self-obsessed artists are a staple of the Kaufman diet. In *Being John Malkovich* a puppeteer finds a portal into the mind of a famous actor, and takes over the controls. In *Adaptation*, a screenwriter named Charlie Kaufman, suffering from writers block, writes himself into the screenplay he's been commissioned to write.

Familiar, too, will be Kaufman's playful approach to 'reality'. Aware that films are, by their nature, already at a remove from reality, Kaufman, with seeming reverence for David Lynch, adds additional layers of 'unreality' between audience and characters. *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* physicalises the memories of the film's protagonist. In *Adaptation*, you are watching a movie about the process of writing the movie you are watching.

In *Synecdoche, New York* Kaufman, as first-time director, takes his conceptual aspirations to fuggy new depths. The film is thick with symbols and dense with ideas. There is an internal logic to Kaufman's convoluted opus, but not much in the way of lineal, literal meaning.

The title is a clue. Linguists and logophiles might know that a *synecdoche* is a figure of speech where a part is used to describe the whole, or the whole to describe a part. So, 'per head' is 'per person', while to 'use your head' to solve a

problem is to 'use your brain'.

Fair to assume then, that just as Caden's corrupted created world is 'synecdochic' of his real world, what we are watching is the reduction of a whole life into two hours, which also represents something vaster than what can be literally portrayed on screen. What exactly does it all mean? Theories will abound. Maybe Caden thinks he's God. Maybe he *is* God. Whatever the truth, fear of death, sickness, decay and meaninglessness are central motifs.

Kaufman has been criticised for coldness; that in bottling empathetic characters with mind-boggling ideas, he emphasises the latter, to the detriment of the former. That can be said of *Synecdoche, New York*.

Although Caden's successful artist wife, Adele (Keener) augments his own self-loathing; although the infatuated box office girl Hazel (Morton) and Caden's doe-eyed leading lady Claire (Williams) are objects of emotional and physical desire; and although his estranged daughter, Olive, embodies all his love and longing and regret, the niggling sense that all are merely symbols in Kaufman's design makes it hard to empathise with any of them.

But don't think for a second that this is inaccessible muck. Another thing Kaufman has in common with Lynch is his humour, which is dark and absurd but always surprising. Witness Caden reduce Olive to terrified hysterics, by explaining the meaning of the word 'plumbing' with a biological analogy. Or Hazel buying and moving into a house that is literally, slowly burning. Such brilliant comic touches play a role in winning the audience over.

Those with a working knowledge of American geography will realise the film's title is a play on Schenectady, New York, where part of the film is set. But geography isn't really important. Disjointed time sequences, the surreal goings-on and logical contradictions are enough to indicate that there's something here beyond the physical reality. Think you can get it in a single viewing? Good luck. But have fun trying.

In honour of Indigenous agitators

THE MEDDLING PRIEST

Frank Brennan



Saturday 9 May was a magnificent autumn day in Canberra. I stood outside the old Parliament House, just in front of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy. Bob Hawke stood up on those historic white steps, as had David Smith when he read the proclamation dismissing the Whitlam Government at the behest of Sir John Kerr on 11 November 1975.

This time the crowd was benign, delighted to hear Hawke, the only person to have been Prime Minister in the old and new Parliament Houses, open the Museum of Australian Democracy — with his distinctive larrikin touch and a call for an Australian republic to take effect at the end of Queen Elizabeth's reign.

John Williamson sang, espousing 'Waltzing Matilda' as the true national anthem against the backdrop of his preferred Australian flag featuring the kangaroo and the Southern Cross.

The day was reminiscent of 9 May 1988, when Queen Elizabeth, further up the hill, opened the new Parliament House. The big difference was the place of Aboriginal Australia in the proceedings.

Back then, four years prior to the Mabo decision, Aboriginal Australians were still protesting for land rights. While Michael Nelson Tjakamarra escorted Queen Elizabeth down to his mural in the forecourt, Aboriginal Australians and their supporters were chanting, 'What do we want? Land Rights. When do we want it? Now.'

Church leaders had asked our parliamentarians to acknowledge the need for reconciliation during the bicentenary year. After the disrupted opening of the new Parliament House, the Coalition parties in opposition withdrew their support for the first resolution in the new Parliament House that acknowledged the need for reconciliation.

Twenty-one years on, traditional owner Paul House made a speech on the steps of the old Parliament House welcoming everyone to his country.

He spoke about his ancestors including those who were marginal to the opening of that building in 1927. Jimmy Clements was the only Aboriginal person there and he definitely had no speaking role. House insisted that reconciliation entailed recognition of the distinctive place of Aboriginal Australians in the life of the nation.

For me it was a week of Aboriginal reminiscences, and not all evoked hope of progress.

Earlier in the week, I had accompanied Aboriginal lawyer Tammy Williams to Yarrabah, an Aboriginal community outside Cairns. We met with the mayor Percy Neal (pictured with Williams and Frank Brennan), who spoke of his people's need for housing, training and employment. His community is threatened with loss of the CDEP scheme which allows Aboriginal employment for a range of community projects from council work to the running of the local museum.



Neal had been chairman of his community back in the early 80s. I had heard him making the same pleas for jobs and houses back then.

In 1982, Neal came to national prominence when he appealed his sentence of six months imprisonment for an assault on the white manager of the Yarrabah reserve.

When originally sentenced, the Queensland magistrate had observed that Aborigines living on reserves had been quite happy with their lot until the likes of Neal came as political agitators and upset them. The magistrate's dim view of Percy's political activity had informed his decision to impose imprisonment on Percy. The Queensland Supreme Court then decided to increase the term of imprisonment.

When Percy appealed to the High Court, Justice Lionel Murphy observed:

'That Mr. Neal was an 'agitator' or stirrer in the magistrate's view obviously contributed to the severe penalty. If he is an agitator, he is in good company. Many of the great religious and political figures of history have been agitators ...

'As Wilde aptly pointed out in *The Soul of Man under Socialism*, "Agitators are a set of interfering, meddling people, who come down to some perfectly contented class of the community and sow the seeds of discontent amongst them. That is the reason why agitators are so absolutely necessary. Without them, in our incomplete state, there would be no advance towards civilisation."

'Mr. Neal is entitled to be an agitator.'

As the elected leader of his community, Neal is still agitating for justice. Almost 30 years ago he told the visiting Commonwealth minister Fred Chaney that land rights could change the plight of his people. Chaney had begged to differ, as he had just come from Manangrida in the Northern Territory where land rights had been granted and the social indicators were just as grim.

The Yarrabah community was granted secure land title in 1986 but still the social problems are endemic.

Our community consultation at Yarrabah focused on community concerns about training, employment, housing and the Queensland Government's discriminatory alcohol management plan. No doubt there are Yarrabah residents delighted that

alcohol is less readily available. But prohibition encourages dangerous practices such a sly grogging and takes away the freedom of responsible Aboriginal residents to be self-determining.

The lesson of the Northern Territory intervention is that good government intentions are not enough. Special laws applied to Aboriginal communities should be enacted only at the request of those communities, and restrictive government measures should always be applied in a racially non-discriminatory way.

Gone should be the days when Aboriginal Australians are marginal to the corridors of power as decisions are being made about them, even when the lawmakers think they are acting in their best interests.

Perhaps it will not be until the Museum of Australian Democracy features the memorabilia of the first Aboriginal Australian Prime Minister that the descendants of agitators like House and Neal will be guaranteed a fair go in the Republic of Australia — whatever the anthem or the flag.

Budget stumbles on social inclusion

POLITICS

Frank Quinlan



I was excited about the [Budget](#) . I had developed a theory that all of the budget 'leaks' (now better described as 'pre-release'), focusing as they did on getting the many negative messages out of the way, were a political strategy to 'clear the books' for a really big positive announcement or two on budget night itself.

I was also invited by the Prime Minister's Office to attend the 'Treasury Lock Up'. We have sought admission to this without luck in previous budget years, so I was excited about the prospect of attending for the first time.

In the past this has been considered a premier Canberra venue for early budget information. Participants from various organisations are literally locked in a basement in the Treasury at 3:30 pm with the full set of budget papers at their disposal. While mobile phones must be checked in at the door, a Treasury official wanders about the room with a strange antenna that can detect electronic transmissions — just in case someone has secreted away a phone. No one may leave until the Treasurer rises in the Parliament at 7:30 pm.

So I began the trawl through a mountain of papers about 30 centimetres high, on a quest for something big. There were a few candidates: \$437 million over four years to assist the disadvantaged to enter university. Increased education and training supplement of \$41 per fortnight for some unemployed. Paid parental leave. A modest increase in aged pensions and payments to carers. An increase in the allowable work benefit for pensioners earning private income. An extension of drought relief funding. Better targeting in the Private Health Insurance Rebate and Medicare surcharge. Better targeting of tax deductions for superannuation contributions.

But along with these welcome initiatives, there were some more negative stories. Amid the billions spent on infrastructure: No direct investment in community sector organisations. No social dividend — no guarantee of employment on these infrastructure projects for the unemployed or disadvantaged. A change in indexation for family tax benefit that will see its real value decline considerably over time. No increase in pensions for single parents. No increase in Newstart allowance for the unemployed.

Then, in the 'Budget Overview' document, I found the section on social inclusion and my heart sank. I quote it directly:

'Downturn or not, there will always be people in our society who suffer disadvantage. Through National Partnerships, the government is working to improve the social inclusion of the disadvantaged on a range of fronts, including

homelessness, disability services, low socio economic status schools and Indigenous outcomes.'

Later, the detailed document indicated that the government has 'sought further advice' from the Social Inclusion Board.

After all that we have heard about the social inclusion agenda, after all we have heard about a new way of working with the community sector, after all the evidence we have presented that the community services sector will face unprecedented demand over the next two years ... No comprehensive strategies to lift people out their immediate poverty. No coherent strategy to strengthen and support the community services sector.

While the government is prepared to spend only cautiously on a politically acceptable selection of the people that use our services, and while government is prepared to pump hundreds of millions of dollars into industries as globally uncompetitive as the car industry or as patently unproductive as the banking and finance 'industry' or on ventures as speculative and risky as carbon sequestration, we have not been able to convince government to invest directly and strategically in an industry as essential and as effective as the community service sector.

I wrote in response to the first Rudd Labor Budget that we may have [turned a corner](#) , towards a fairer Australia and a more sustainable community sector, but that only time would tell. After all the scripted theatre of pre-budget leaks, secure lock-ups and dazzling announcements are stripped away, the 2009—10 Budget seems to indicate that we may well be waiting for a long time yet.

Shakespeare and the F word

BY THE WAY

Brian Matthews

Simmering liquids, temperamental chefs, grim-faced judges looking silly trying to frown while they chew, and other devilled, curried, basted, larded, whipped, whisked, casseroled, sautéed and scalloped oddities are collectively a 21st century television phenomenon. From a few amiable, skillet-wielding artists of bygone kitchens the genre has spawned, as its interim *pièce de résistance*, the hilarious bathos of *Iron Chef America*.



Imagine if Shakespeare had dabbled in cuisine as a sideline. Dishes such as 'eye of newt', 'fillet of fenny snake', 'toe of frog' would have been a sensation. He could have embellished a lurid gastronomic reputation with his TV show — had technology permitted — called *The G Word: G for Gadzooks* which, like 'zounds' and 'sblood', was a particularly offensive reference to the crucifixion, though of course, Shakespeare-chef could have claimed it as standing simply for garlic, then as now a potent ingredient.

'I had rather live/With cheese and garlic in a windmill,' says his Henry IV, announcing a derisive preference, while Bottom, instructing his rude mechanicals in *A Midsummer's Night's Dream*, entreats: 'And, most dear actors, eat no onions nor garlic, for we are to utter sweet breath,' and Lucio, in *Measure for Measure*, ambiguously commends the Duke as one who 'would eat mutton on Fridays ... and ... mouth with a beggar, though she smelt of brown bread and garlic'.

For all Shakespeare's polymathic capacities, his prodigious range of reference, his oeuvre is not big on food in the way that it is replete with just about every other reference you can imagine. Food, however, preoccupied the minds and fancies of many of his contemporaries — pervasively and powerfully. One chronicler noted that 'beef, mutton, veal, lamb, kid, pork, cony, capon [and] pig' adorned the tables of the nobility and that their kitchens were presided over by 'cooks [who] are for the most part musical-headed Frenchmen'.

If Shakespeare, on the strength of this shamefully thin evidence, might be seen as the first 'foody' to emerge from the obscurity of Stratford-upon-Avon, then it is fascinating to look to his successor, who was much more celebrated, immediately more notorious and infinitely less gentle. Enter: Gordon Ramsay — born in Scotland, like Macbeth, but brought up from the age of five in Stratford.

In London the 35-year-old Shakespeare built a theatre in 1599. Barely 400 years later, Ramsay, aged 31, established his first London restaurant. The Globe theatre on Bankside was a stunning success while Ramsay's restaurant in Chelsea was soon anointed by some musical-headed, Michelin-star-gazing Frenchmen.

Ramsay, in so many ways 'British to the boot straps' — his first career was as a

very promising soccer player till injury cut him down — sets out to reinstate French cuisine as a model and to refresh and revolutionise traditional British dishes. In both these campaigns he is working against some sturdy Francophobia that is threaded through his island's story. Take the influential figure of George Orwell.

Orwell, whose tobacco-prejudiced, take-it-or-leave-it attitude to cuisine would have appalled Ramsay and reduced him to profanity — though that reduction typically would happen at ten times the speed of a bubbling roux — saw the French culinary world up close as a lowly Parisian plongeur and, characteristically, was not impressed by any of it.

In the kitchen of the Auberge de Jehan Cottard, on the morning of its grand opening, Orwell sees 'two large rats sitting on the kitchen table, eating from a ham that stood there'. 'It seemed a bad omen ...' he adds with stiff-upper-lip understatement.

His catastrophic and scarifying stint at the Auberge had one rewarding compensation. The experience, he says, 'destroyed one of my illusions, namely, the idea that Frenchmen know good food when they see it. Or perhaps we were a fairly good restaurant by Paris standards; in which case the bad ones must be past imagining.'

Ramsay swears his way through a succession of 'past imagining restaurants' — *Kitchen Nightmares*— in which, metaphoric scalpel in one hand, figurative mallet in the other, he tries to shock some of the slackest, dumbest or least imaginative culinary characters in Britain out of their kitchen trances and into his world of frenetic hyperactivity, fierce commitment and unshakeable passion.

I'm all for Ramsay. His confronting vernacular doesn't bother me: on the contrary, he is as often affectionate and compassionate as he is lurid and bruising. He has an ironic awareness of how basically ludicrous it is to be serious about cooking on television, yet he mitigates this irony through his uncompromising engagement with his craft and his brilliant gifts.

Nowhere is this delicate balance so evident as on his show *The F Word*— a marvellous, often zany mix of genuine cuisine, mad missions, noble campaigns, hopeful amateurs, satiric attacks on the food industry's more egregious excesses, and great scatological wit.

The F stands for Food, by the way.

Everything I know

POETRY

Les Wicks

SECRET SAIDS (everything I know)

1. Wize

My **next** book will guide you to Wisdom.

You are what you wear — a flimsy beige.
Certainty is fickle.

Your dreams will wake you up.

It doesn't matter if you missed life,

it will be on TV eventually.

One can find truth in a bottle, but the light's a bit distorted.

Don't know why you're here? This doesn't matter

because the question is specious.

Books are worth their weight in wood.

The only self-help book I ever read was *Sex Manners for Men* (1969).

I therefore speak with a boorish authority.

Poets work their ten minute day, feverishly.

Novelists grow their crop over months

and it's harvested in minutes.

Painters expend colour.

Nothing belongs to us all.

I am my hero.

Vary your menu choices

so we all can share.

Investigate within reason. Be nice.

Amuse yourself, then flip about —

be a tough audience.

Money isn't everyone.

People in glass castles enjoy the view.

2. Correct Management of the Teenager

Teenagers can and should be sedated.

Britney's sister is Gluttony.

Women should be warned —

by the time you know how simple men are,
you've already acquired the habit.

Say no to mugs.

... bra cups and an appalling thirst.

Pretend to listen to your mother.

... alone with a bone.

Hair is the window of the brain.

3. Love, the Truth

Love hurts, but it can be cured.

You can't over-floss,

your dental hygiene is foreplay for marriage.

Marriage is a short-term commitment.

She had a warm laugh and cold calculation.

Touch is the frontier of pain.

You are the apple of my worm.

Love is a carriage,

we ride on the boulevard of roads.

Take a chance, it sometimes works out.

Take a chance,
but don't get caught in the taking.

4. All Grown Up

The adult is a difficult career choice.

Courting — dates are dried, sticky things
that are best shipped away
for foreign breakfasts.

Sex would never reach minimum Occupational Health & Safety standards.

Fat is a necklace of chocolate.
I like black panties — you can't go wrong.
All sizes, all skins — just marvellous!
Show me your panties.
Some people can't dumb down. Fish and wigs.
Thrift is treason.
Position is an unconsciously sexy word,
that almost throwaway provocation
we all seek to copy.
Impossible is best avoided.
I know so very little ... we're all the same,
our holy difference.
I am a desert strawberry.

5. Raisin Family

Childbirth is best forgotten by all involved.
Children are our future, be afraid.
Shut the door.
The challenge is not worth it.
I've met a lot of people and you're all retards.
There is nothing wrong with me.
We can all do better.

6. The Future

Death is overstated.
Age is failure.
Intelligence can be lost with exercise and diet.
Green is the new dead.
The future can be expected.
Travel is a crutch
for those who can't be still.
War is obsolete and functional.

Invest in bricks and water.

Watch where you're going, intently.

7. Transcendence

Go home, pilgrim.

I have no story, nothing to add.

Solitude is noisy.
God is a distraction.

Space is unmarketable

thereby valueless.

'Lay down. Stay. Walk. Sit.'

— any dog can understand the secret of a full life.

Closing Prayer

The Lord forgives everything
except wilful ignorance.

As such we aim to bathe in light,
please pass the soap. Amen.

Ethical keys to a just budget

POLITICS

John Warhurst



The governments of the States and Territories have introduced their Budgets for the coming year. Now comes the big one, the Federal Budget.

A government budget is the time when all the chickens come home to roost. As American political scientist Aaron Wildavsky said in his classic study, *The Politics of the Budget Process*, the budget is necessarily a political thing, and it lies at the heart of the political process. If politics is about 'who gets what, when and how' then the budget is a public record of outcomes and intended outcomes. Any budget must be considered in this light.

Wildavsky goes on to explain at some length what he means by the centrality of politics:

'Taken as a whole the federal budget is a representation in monetary terms of government activity. If politics is regarded in part as conflict over whose preferences shall prevail in the determination of national policy, then the budget records the outcome of this struggle.'

'If one asks, "Who gets what the government has to give?" then the answers for a moment in time are recorded in the budget. If one looks at politics as a process by which the government mobilises resources to meet pressing problems, then the budget is a focus of these efforts.'

At this time last year I wrote [Tips for a more discerning Budget night](#) . It still stands as a general guide to approaching any budget. Among the ten points made in that article are several that are of special relevance to the Rudd Government's second budget.

I made a point then about the three-year budget cycle, commenting that in the first year a government can produce a mean, tough budget full of cuts to spending and rebuffs to sectional interests while in the second and third years a government can hand out goodies and election bribes.

Unfortunately for the Rudd Government, that no longer applies. The global financial and economic crises mean that the Government cannot afford to be generous now. All of its generosity has gone in stimulus packages.

As a consequence there is a lot that already appears to be clear. This budget will record a deficit so large that it may take up to a decade for future governments to pay it off and to return the budget to surplus. This budget must cut hard to do something to rein in that deficit.

Nevertheless many promises have been made, such as tax cuts, and many aspirations have been raised, including increasing pensions and introducing paid maternity leave.

The legislated tax cuts will be honoured by the Government, though what is given with one hand to middle Australia will be taken back with the other. And if the Government is not to seriously damage its credibility with sections of the community money will be found for pension increases and maternity leave.

Beyond that, even in the most trying circumstances, there are ethical principles that should guide any budget. These should be intuitive for all humanists and the general principles are common to many faiths, but they have been spelled out in Catholic Social Teaching in a way that supplements what Wildavsky had to say. They guide where money should be raised and spent and where cuts should and should not be made.

The key ethical principles were embedded in the pre-budget [submission](#) of Catholic Social Services Australia. They include catering for the needs and aspirations of all members of the community (the 'common good'), ensuring any economic burdens imposed are proportionate to the person's capacity to pay (distributive justice) and always giving priority to enhancing the lives of the most disadvantaged (preferential option for the poor).

These principles should determine who gets what from the government in the budget. If might is right then the preferences of the strong will overpower those of the vulnerable, including single mothers and the unemployed.

The Budget must be judged according to these principles. It is not enough just to target high income earners if those forgotten by society suffer continued neglect.

Budget will test Labor's Indigenous commitment

INDIGENOUS ISSUES

Myrna Tonkinson

It is heartening to learn that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Tom Calma is more [hopeful](#) about Indigenous affairs.

When he launched this year's Social Justice and Native Title reports, he cited the Government's decision to recognise the UN declaration on the rights of Indigenous peoples, the establishment of a national healing body, and Kevin Rudd's apology as grounds to hope that the lives of Indigenous Australians will improve.

But Mr Calma also warned that the current dire economic climate could stall progress, especially in the unemployment of Indigenous people.

The Budget will show how determined the Government is to 'close the gap' between Indigenous Australians and the rest of the population. Although there have been many leaks about Budget items and warnings that some previous commitments may have to be cut or abandoned, I have seen none referring to Indigenous affairs.

Any budget cuts must exclude items aimed at improving conditions for Indigenous Australians. They live in extreme inequality and with a legion of needs, all of great urgency. Among them health, education, and housing require attention of heroic proportions.

The first Rudd Government Budget included increased funding of \$250 million, and a commitment to increases totalling more than \$1 billion over five years. New measures aim to improve areas where 'the gap' is wide. (The Greens and others have questioned the disproportionate allocation of funds to continuing the Intervention.)

Education is a priority because it falls within at least three of the Rudd Government's major foci: the Government is committed to 'close the gap', to tackle the educational disadvantage of Indigenous Australians as a key goal of its Education Revolution, and to promote social inclusion.

Funding was needed to meet these goals in education. Among other measures it was given to increase the number of teachers, to develop programs to improve literacy and numeracy, and to build three new Indigenous boarding facilities in the Northern Territory.

Although it is too soon to assess the effects of these measures, the task is immense. Government ministers and many others have named goals, there is much good will, but to close the gap will require innovation and hard work on many fronts simultaneously.



Many prominent Indigenous spokespeople are shining examples of educational achievement. Perhaps careful study of the trajectories of these high achievers may provide useful models for educational success.

Professor Mick Dodson has issued a challenge, that 'every Australian child next Australia Day be geared up for the start of the 2010 school year'. To reach this goal for disadvantaged pockets of our society, and especially the majority of the Indigenous population, will be a great challenge.

Will next week's Budget include funds to pursue Mick Dodson's goal? Even if funding is allocated, are the personnel, materials and structures available and ready? What would it entail to have all Indigenous children across the country ready for the start of school next year?

Some programs appear to be making a difference. Some have seen boarding schools in Queensland, and the boarding option for individual students in several states, as an avenue to educational success. Several leaders, such as Dodson himself, his brother, Patrick, and Noel Pearson, attended boarding schools.

Many want to extend boarding opportunities to more Indigenous students. That is why the 2008—9 Budget included \$28.9 million over four years to build three new Indigenous boarding facilities in the Northern Territory.

But this amount would need to be hugely increased if a significant number of Indigenous students could find a place in boarding schools. Is this a realistic and appropriate aim for the majority of Indigenous children?

Given the immensity of the challenge and the inevitable obstacles and setbacks, we must have the flexibility to try new approaches and to abandon programs that are not working. Both the needs, as well as the aspirations of Indigenous people vary considerably. So no single solution can be applied universally.

Among the people I know best, children will have lost many close family members by the time they are 16 years old. They will have attended umpteen funerals of people they know, witnessed many violent altercations, lived in several houses (almost always overcrowded and often in widely separated locations), attended school for a fraction of the time that most of their Australian peers have, have little or low literacy and been often hungry.

They may also have had one or more serious illnesses, been injured through accident or violence, and had one or more encounters with the police. They have had almost no models for educational success. School has had a low priority both for them and their parents. It is a major challenge to motivate such children and their parents.

It would be a mistake to assume that the kind of motivation found among educated, often affluent, Australians is inherent or that it can be switched on simply by telling people education is important. The desire for education is powerful among those who fully appreciate the difference it can make to their

children's lives.

This appreciation comes after generations of observation and experience. Funding is only the start of a complex process. The Budget must provide funding to allow issues to be tackled with creativity, flexibility and vision.

Australia's chance to lead climate change action

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins



The Australian community is divided over whether the Federal Government's proposed revised climate change [strategy](#) is a step in the right direction. The changes extend the upper limit of possible carbon reductions to 25 per cent, but delay its introduction for a year until 2011.

Carbon-emitting industry groups have welcomed delays and additional financial concessions to them, but the new package has failed to convince hard core conservationists. Three major climate advocacy groups — the Australian Conservation Foundation, the World Wildlife Fund, and the [Climate Institute](#) — have made the necessary compromises to support Labor's position, which is also backed by the ACTU and ACOSS. But more radical critics such as the Greens, Greenpeace and [GetUp](#) regard it as a sham. From the other side of politics, the Coalition has already condemned it. So it will have a difficult time getting through the Senate.

The government's ongoing systemic support for the Australian coal industry and coal-based electricity generation ensures that Australia will continue to have the highest per capita greenhouse emissions on the planet. On this, Tony Kevin in his forthcoming book [Crunch Time](#) — to be published by Scribe in September — argues that something much more radical is needed than the government's half-hearted energy policies. He suggests that as the world struggles with the twin crises of global recession and rapidly accelerating climate disruption, we have reached a crunch time in which Australia needs to apply the fundamental insights of John Maynard Keynes to help feed and employ us, while reinventing Australia as a renewable energy-based economy that will sustain our children's and grandchildren's climate security.

If there's one single factor that could push the government's latest climate change policy over the line in the Senate, it's the additional credibility it would give Australia at the [Copenhagen](#) climate change summit in December. Environment ministers and officials will meet there to thrash out a successor to the Kyoto protocol.

Australia's previous position of not going above 15 per cent would have rendered our voice basically irrelevant at Copenhagen. Even though the revised figure is highly conditional, a 25 per cent goal is enough to signify a serious commitment to reducing carbon emissions.

The devil may well be in the detail, but it's usually the headlines that make the greatest impact.

Whether we like it or not, Australia has been thrust into the climate change

limelight by a combination of government policy and easily visible evidence in this country of the consequences of climate change. These include record summer temperatures, the Murray-Darling Basin desertification, and more. Climate change sceptics are being confronted by the facts that the most visible evidence so far of global climate change is in Australia.

Australia's own situation makes it all the more urgent for us to attempt to provide leadership on the world stage.

There's no doubt that the Rudd Government made a good start. In March last year, the US-based ClimateChangeCorp website [noted](#) this with its headline 'Rudd turns carbon policy on its head Down Under'. It pointed out that, soon after his election, Rudd fast-tracked Australia's signing of the Kyoto Protocol.

It added that Australia's 50-strong official delegation to the UN climate change conference in Bali 'included a broad section of executives from clean-tech to carbon-intensive industries, sweeping away any fears that Australia would establish itself as an international haven for carbon polluters'.

14 months is a long time in politics, and there are many signs that the Government has wavered in its resolve to reverse its predecessor's decade of inaction.

On Thursday, the *Canberra Times* [led](#) with news of budget cuts that will lead to the loss of 200 agriculture and environment science jobs. The cuts prompted one of Australia's top ecologists, the ANU's Professor David Lindenmayer, to accuse the Government of being 'clueless about climate change' and the pivotal role of environmental science. Such decisions will slow the momentum established after the last election.

But more than anything else, it would be a failure to pass legislation, which headlines a 25 per cent carbon emissions cut, that would have Australia's delegates at Copenhagen hiding their heads in shame.

If we are to be recognised as serious players in the Copenhagen negotiations, in the battle to slow climate change, there's a much better chance that we will manage to fall into line with the details.