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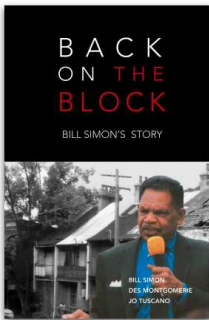
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Surviving institutional abuse

BOOKS

Andrena Jamieson

Bill Simon, Des Montgomerie, Jo Tuscano: *Back on the Block: Bill Simon's Story*. [Aboriginal Studies Press](#) , 2009, ISBN 978 0 85575 677 2



Bill Simon is a pastor working in the heart of Redfern. *Back on the Block* is the story of his life, simply told.

It begins with a happy childhood on an uncongenial mission, and some years spent with his family evading the attention of the Aborigines Welfare Board.

The heart of the book, which for him explains all else, began when he was seized with his brothers and consigned to Kinchela Boys Home. He was then ten years old, and spent the next seven years in the home subject to the daily regime of assault and contempt that Kinchela provided for its clients.

He then moved to Sydney, where he had to deal with his anger. He learned to work, drink, gamble, take drugs and beat those he cared for. He lost partners and children. At his lowest, he had a strong religious experience that brought him into a church. After many ups and downs he found his life's work in the Block, the Indigenous area of Redfern. There he is at home with the territory both of the suburb and of the human heart.

At one level this is an inspiring story of a good man rising from inner depths. At another level it is an appalling and saddening story of how every instance of Government intervention diminished Indigenous men. And this is a story of men, who have had their manhood systematically stripped from them.

Reading this in a week when the horrors of Irish orphanages were exposed, when the horrors of asylum seeker detention in Australia are still fresh, one can only ask helplessly how people entrusted with the duty of care can so unerringly detect the points from which they can drain a man's humanity.

Simon's story began on a mission. He recalls the sadness of Aboriginal men who were forbidden to leave the mission or to provide for their families. If they caught fish or kangaroos, their rations of flour were deducted from them. Their male role was taken from them.

The agents of the Aboriginal Welfare Board were all male. The only woman Simon mentions is the frightened wife of the punitive and repressive man who took the children away.

In ten years at Kinchela he mentions not even a fleeting moment of kindness from a member of the staff, most of whom had worked in the prison system. At

best they were harsh, at worst sadistic.

If you wished to break a man's spirit, you could not devise a better system. Snatch young boys from their families. Deprive them of female care. Make them work bare-foot in frost. Refer to them by numbers. Call them out for often unexplained punishment. Make them take down their trousers and cane them brutally and publicly. Separate brothers so that the older brother has the torment and guilt of not being able to protect or care for his younger siblings. Tell them at every opportunity that they are lazy, dirty and good for nothing.

Most cruelly, separate them from the culture which might help them understand their experiences, withhold from them letters sent by parents, and turn their anger against their mothers for allowing them to be taken away.

You will produce boys who are terrified into politeness, but who nurture a volcano of grief, anger and self-hatred that will later erupt and burn all it touches.

Apologists will argue that the policies were well-meant and that not all who administered them were bad. But as in Ireland and in detention centres, the lesson taught by this book is simple.

It says that if you put in place an immoral policy that puts large goals above the simple humanity of those who are affected by the policy, you take away the moral compass from those who administer it. And you corrupt everyone whom the policy touches, particularly its apologists.

The policy of assimilation was immoral because it made an inhumane idea more important than human beings. It encouraged the removal of children from their parents, and saw their culture as something to be despised and replaced.

It is no wonder that in the administration of this policy people would try to beat the blackness out of people. They transmuted the darkness into despair and buried it in the heart.

By some miracle Bill Simon uncovered it and lived with it. But it is shameful when a miracle is required if people are to recover from the effects of Government policies.

The 'bad eggs' of Ireland's abuse scandal

RELIGION

Frank O'Shea

It's long since I began

To call up to the eyes

This wise and simple man

—W. B. Yeats, 'The Fisherman'

He was the saintliest man I ever knew. He was a teaching brother and a success in the classroom, though less so at the sports coaching which was expected of every member of staff — anyone who trains a football team with an open and well-thumbed book of the rules in one hand is not likely to produce a winning combination.

He spent much of the second half of his working life in houses of formation, preparing the young brothers for their lives as religious. Those he trained told me that his own life was his greatest lesson.

Later, in the community in which I got to know him, he would annoy his confreres by clearing the table before anyone had a chance for seconds. His view was that we should always get up from a meal feeling that we could have eaten more. In hospital on one occasion, his superior had to call on the vow of obedience to persuade him to drink the certain black alcoholic beverage which a kindly nun had suggested to build up his fragile frame.

A biblical scholar, in his final years he was involved in a Christian-Jewish fellowship group and led small local prayer groups.

All of this is by way of saying that Brendan (not his real name) was a humble, saintly man. He is one I 'call up to the eyes' as counter to the members of religious orders involved in the awful things perpetrated on children in institutions in Ireland in the early and middle years of last century, as [revealed](#) in the recent Ryan Report.

Brendan thought orders of teaching brothers and nuns had long ago served their purpose and should be encouraged to fade quietly away. This opinion did not win favour among his confreres any more than his other belief that the Church should promote temporary vocations. His view was that teaching orders should have closed their books when the welfare state began taking seriously the responsibility to educate all children for free.

If we were to take a frame of European history bounded by the French Revolution and the 1829 granting of Catholic Emancipation in Britain and Ireland, we would be in the era of the foundation of many teaching orders. The Christian Brothers, Marists, Presentations and Patricians all come from those years; so do



the sisters of Mercy, Presentation, Holy Faith, Brigidine, Loreto and Irish Sisters of Charity.

In Australia, the Good Samaritans and the Josephites were a little later. The De La Salle Brothers, the model for all of these non-clerical teaching orders, were founded a century earlier.

In Ireland, the teaching orders played a crucial role in producing the first generation of civil administration after independence. While the emerging professional classes tended to come from elite private schools — Jesuit, Holy Ghost, Cistercian, Benedictine, Carmelite, Church of Ireland — the Brothers' schools, operating on a shoestring, provided the backbone of 'the excise', a catch-all term for the different branches of the public service.

During the first quarter century away from the colonial umbrella, that public service had to cope with the Great Depression, a world war, and internal problems caused by dissidents keen to prolong old conflicts. That the country reached the second half of the century, albeit on wobbly feet, was no trivial outcome.

In all schools in those times, the practice of corporal punishment was taken for granted. If it was more vigorously applied in schools run by members of religious orders, that is a shame with which they now live and in all cases, a betrayal of the often expressed wish of their founders.

In those years too, the brothers and sisters took over special schools or other semi-punitive institutions set up by unenlightened state and church authorities. The Ryan Report shows how disastrous those ventures were for the unfortunate inmates, and also for the orders involved.

Which brings me back to Brendan. After a lifetime as a student and teacher in schools run by different orders of brothers, I am inclined to take the view that abuse was perpetrated by 'bad eggs', in which case the word 'endemic' when referring to abuse is an appalling dysphemism. In a kind of perverse algebra, I try to persuade myself that Brendan can be used to cancel out the bad egg.

The alternative, that the abuse was indeed as endemic in some institutions as Ryan concludes, is too awful to contemplate.

Intimacy in same-sex friendships

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***I Love You, Man*: 105 minutes. Rated: M. Director: John Hamburg. Starring: Paul Rudd, Jason Segel, Rashida Jones.**



Talk show host Rove McManus famously asks his guests, 'Who would you turn gay for?' (Or '...turn straight for?' as the case may be.)

This gimmick is in fact a popularisation of a party game, best played late at night, after a few drinks, with a circle of close friends. The idea is, each person in turn nominates a celebrity, of opposite gender to that of their sexual preference, with whom they'd fancy a hypothetical rendezvous.

It's about feeling comfortable among your friends and with your sexual identity. It's also about having a laugh, and perhaps trying to surprise each other.

All of which is relevant for two reasons. The first is that this week's film, *I Love You, Man*, has a lot to say about intimacy in platonic relationships. The other is that the film's star, Paul Rudd, is my 'person I would turn gay for'.

Readers who, like myself, were teenagers during the 1990s, may know Rudd best as Josh from *Clueless*. Of late he's a staple of those crass, but strangely deep, Judd Apatow-brand rom-coms — think *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*, *Knocked Up* and *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*.

I Love You, Man is not as polished as those gems (and Apatow is not involved), but it does follow in a similar vein of lowbrow relationship comedy for grown-ups.

Rudd plays Peter, an LA real estate agent, recently engaged to Zooey (Jones). The problem is, while Peter's always been a sweetie with the ladies, he never got his head around the whole male bonding thing. He is sans best friend and, subsequently, sans best man.

And so Peter sets out on a series of platonic man-dates, with the aim of meeting and making a male friend upon whom he can bestow the best man honour. The first attempts are spectacular failures — cue the projectile vomiting and misjudged, unreciprocated gay kiss.

Peter has all but given up. Perhaps his mum can be his best man?

And then chance, or fate, brings Sydney (Segel) into Peter's orbit. Chronic SNAG Peter is drawn to laidback Sydney's wisdom and wit on the subject of blokedom. They hit it off. But Zooey is not quite as enamoured with her fiancÃ©'s overbearing and time-intensive new buddy.

Like Apatow's films, *I Love You, Man* gains currency from its appreciation of the nuances of adult relationships. Hamburg, in subverting the rom-com formula, has nailed the neediness, the emotional give-and-take and the distinct brand of intimacy that personifies close platonic friendships, just as it does romantic partnerships.

And Rudd and Segel nail the necessary chemistry, whether they be bonding over beer and the 'best fish tacos in the world', or playing at garage rock stars by jamming — badly, but enthusiastically — to old charts by cheesy Canadian band Rush.

But the film has to work harder than Apatow's films to milk the laughs out of its crass humour, and has less success. The projectile vomiting works better than you might expect (characters' reactions can make or break this kind of sight gag). But jokes about dog poo and geriatric porn just don't cut it.

And then there's Rudd himself. This is his movie. He doesn't have the charisma to make it as a bona fide leading man, but as a comedic character actor, he's underrated. He portrays with boyish charm and humour Peter's social ineptitude among men, contrasted with his easy and effeminate manner among women.

The film's funniest moments come when Peter, out of his depth but desperate to fit in, tries to mix it with the 'man's man' husband (John Favreau) of one of Zoey's friends, and when he proffers a furious and heartfelt face-slap to a particularly obnoxious foe (Rob Huebel).

Rudd has every facial tic, awkward mumble and miscued, desperate attempt at coolness down pat, and still manages to come off as a loveable hero. I stand by my choice.

Dialogue with Rowan Williams

RELIGION

James McEvoy

Falling into a good conversation is one of life's great joys. When a chance meeting conspires with an inviting atmosphere, we can find ourselves caught up in the back-and-forth of conversation. In retrospect we may acknowledge that we have gained insight from the encounter as well as a deeper love for the other person.

It's not the ambience alone that makes conversation rich. We often gain insight when, with someone we trust, we face up to life's hard edges, think our way around the difficulty, and learn from the other's approach.

Yet this rich experience of dialogue is often lost in modern consumer society. When the values of efficiency and production are as dominant as they are today, dialogue can be seen as no more than the trading of opinions. But that doesn't do it justice.

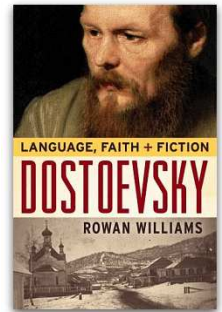
A recent book by Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams explores the experience of dialogue. *Dostoevsky: Language, Faith, and Fiction* is primarily a book of literary criticism, a study of Dostoevsky's major novels. It has received fine, appreciative reviews [in Eureka Street](#) and other literary magazines. But my interest here is less in Williams' reading of Dostoevsky than in his view of the meaning and function of dialogue in human life.

For Williams, dialogue is more than a fulfilment to which we aspire, although it is certainly that. It is far more, too, than a moment or even a series of moments in a person's life. Williams sees human identity as fundamentally dialogical. Through the exchange of dialogue we become ourselves. In dialogue, insights emerge that shape our lives in a way that is new not only for the hearer but also for the speaker.

So a view of dialogue that sees it simply as a means of revealing something previously hidden from the hearer, yet known to the speaker, does not do it full justice.

Central to dialogue is the response of the other, of recognition or failure to recognise. When someone mishears a statement I make, I have the opportunity to express my understanding in new words. At that moment, I can make clear what I have not said and may also be led to articulate dimensions of which I was previously unaware.

With this dynamic in mind, Williams says: 'dialogue and interaction bring to light, not to say bring into being, hidden dimensions in a speaker. To engage in this venture is to accept at the outset that no speaker has the last word ... that at



the outset no one possesses the simple truth about their own identity or interest’.

Openness in dialogue implies we are open about ourselves and open to the other. Williams calls it ‘responsibility for the other’. By responsibility he does not mean we have a resigned acceptance of the other’s burden. Rather, the opposite. We are so open to others that they find it possible to take responsibility.

Responsibility for the other is ‘a matter ... of discovering what the other can say in one’s own voice, and what one can say in the other’s voice. In that mutual displacement, something new enters the moral situation, and both speakers are given more room to be who they are, to learn or grow by means of this discovery of “themselves outside themselves”.’

If we were to use the ordinary categories of Christian faith, this understanding of dialogue would be expressed in terms of love. But this view of love takes us beyond the sentimental, benevolent take on love adopted in much contemporary popular culture.

For Williams, love is difficult: both speaker and hearer must empty or deny themselves in order to enter the world of the other. Love also requires the ‘labour of self-restoration’, the willingness to rethink one’s self-understanding in the light of one’s encounters.

Such a practice mirrors the self-giving love of God in Christ: it is love for ‘God’s view of the self’. If lived in this way, love has the potential to be ‘the foundation of a renewed human community’.

Of course, neither Dostoevsky nor Williams thinks this perspective proves the existence of God to a detached, speculative observer. They both believe, however, that the language of love discloses a moral economy far more liberating and life-giving than that which entraps many characters in Dostoevsky’s world — and in our own.

Make sport, not war

NON-FICTION

Brian Doyle



Allow me the temerity of paraphrasing the late tart-tongued Mother Teresa: there are no great stories, only small stories told with great attentiveness.

So I tell you a war story that has nothing to do with arrogance or fear or cash, the usual reasons we foment war. It has to do with a really lovely left-handed jump shot, the parabolic poem at the heart of the sweet, quicksilver, tumultuous, graceful, gracious sport of basketball.

It's about a boy I'll call Jimmy Ward. He was the shooting guard for our basketball team when we were boys just starting to be halting men. Point guards came and went on that team, forwards shuffled in and out, centers lumbered and plodded and were replaced by other massive slabs of meat, but Jimmy was eternal.

Jimmy played every minute, year after year, because Jimmy had the quickest, deadliest, loveliest jump shot anyone had ever seen, and even the most martinettish of coaches knew enough to leave him alone and let him happily terrorise defenses with his sharp-shooting.

He had divine range, and could drill that shot from anywhere. He was cat-quick, and could get his shot off against the grimmest of defenders. He had exquisite judgment and timing — he never took a bad shot, was liable to stunning hot streaks, and had the killer instinct granted to a few great players who understand exactly when a crucial score utterly deflates an opponent.

College scholarship offers piled up on the dining room table of his house. I remember Jimmy's father grinning as he riffled through the pile, reading the names of the colleges aloud in wonder. But Jimmy declined the glories of collegiate sport; he wanted to be a United States Marine, one of the few and the proud.

He joined the Marines the day after we graduated from high school. Several months later he was in a war. Two months after he joined the war both his hands were blown off by a mine.

Two years later he entered college, this time on an academic scholarship. Eventually he became a teacher, a profession he enjoys today, a few miles from where we were boys playing basketball. He coaches, too — the littlest kids, on the theory that if he can get them to run and pass and savor the looping geometry of the game, they'll have good hoop DNA when their bodies begin to rise.

He can't shoot, of course, can't handle the ball, not having any fingers, and while watching him coach the other day, smiling at the way he barked at the

minnows, I wondered where his jump shot went. Is it in the steaming soil far away where his hands are buried? Is it only in the memories of aging men?

What else is lost when we go to war? What trillions of other small wondrous gifts vanish when hands hold rifles instead of basketballs? What ways to war have we not even imagined yet? Are we ever going to grow up as a species and figure out how to get to the country behind violence? Are we ever going to stop saying one thing about violence and doing another? Are we ever going to really live like joy is glory and blood is a crime?

Jimmy says we should have sports tournaments to solve international disputes — sport is stylised war anyway, so why not take it to the logical conclusion, and have an epic Israeli-Palestinian soccer match, or a chess match between India and Pakistan for Kashmir?

And why not have sporting punishments for criminals, like a competition between Osama bin Laden and Radovan Karadzic to see who can clean the most toilets of the families whose children they murdered? I mean, says Jimmy, why not have some fun instead of the usual murder, you know? Because wars are murders, he says. No one ever admits that in public, except the guys who used to be in wars.

I'll stop here, with Jimmy smiling at us, a lot of nothing where his hands used to be. A small story, one guy, one war. But, you know, where did his jump shot go? And why?

No welcome stranger in racist Australia

HUMAN RIGHTS

Cara Munro

At Rawalpindi bus terminal, the light is violet from the rising moon, and gray from the perpetual smog. I am held in the mystery and danger of twilight in a new city. Fresh off the long haul bus, I weave my way through loading and unloading vehicles towards the indigo glow of gas burners and promising smells of an outdoor cafe.



There is no menu, just tall pots of rich burgundy curry and people sitting at tables solemnly picking apart joints of meat atop flat plates of rice. Tired bus drivers, rickshaw wallas, families consisting entirely of men.

I am vegetarian, I am tired and I am hungry. I am also a stranger, a foreign woman alone in a creased salwar kames and slippery head scarf that constantly fails to sit quite right. I bite my lip and contemplate the Urdu required to order a meal of something less meaty than what I can see the other diners eating.

Twilight is becoming night and the headlights of buses at the nearby terminal and the oil-specked lantern from the restaurant's kitchen do their best against the growing dark. Camouflage helicopters begin their nightly hover above the city.

A fellow diner in white cotton salwar and gray woollen vest approaches my lopsided table.

'Excuse me Madam?'

I look up wearily, expecting a curious 'Which Country do you come from?' or a leading 'Do you have boyfriend?'

But no. He dips his head respectfully. 'We would like to pay for your meal.' He indicates another lopsided table on which his Uncle and teenaged son are eating. 'You are a guest in our country. It is our hospitality to you.'

He does not invite me to join their masculine trio. To do so would harm my honour and leave me vulnerable to unwelcome advances from other diners. Instead he calls over the senior waiter and quietly orders a vegetarian meal with soft bread and 'anything else she wants'. Then he leaves me to eat.

Later a pot of sweet mint tea arrives at my table. Later still, his son is deployed and a taxi sourced and paid for.

Before bidding farewell, the man gives me a tattered business card with several phone numbers of friends and family, should I run into any trouble during my travels through his country. He assures me that his second uncle is a lawyer and that, should I visit their house, his wife and sister will be there to keep me company.

I warmly thank them for their hospitality.

Now at Flinders Street Station.

The light is clear. A smog-free day for an intersection that is usually crowded by cars and trams. The traffic has come to a standstill. Over 2000 Subcontinental students with hand-etched signs and worn-out winter clothes are staging a sit in. I am sitting with them.

Three kilometers away in the Intensive Care Unit of the Royal Melbourne Hospital, Sravan Kumar Theerthala remains unconscious after being stabbed in the head with a screwdriver last weekend. In Australia in the past year there have been an estimated 60 violent attacks against Subcontinental students.

They are protesting a lack of action by the Australian Government. I am protesting because I am ashamed that a white Christian woman is safer in the military capital of Rawalpindi than these students are on a train in Melbourne.

The students have issued a list of demands. They touch not only on the immediate issue of safety from violence, especially on public transport, but on housing, economic vulnerability and access to health care and ambulance cover while living as guests in our country.

With my hand-painted sandwich board, my white skin and tear-streaked face, I look ridiculous. The sandwich board reads 'Hospitality not Hurt' and on the back 'Australia Welcomes Indian Students'. An Australian and a Christian, I feel deeply the absence of the Australian Christian communities.

One of the students thanks me for my support and asks why I am there. I clumsily mumble something about racism and hospitality and solidarity.

This is what I want to say:

Because on the train in Kolkatta I was included a dozen times at the makeshift dinner tables of travelling families and afforded the same protection as their womenfolk.

Because in his one room house in Hayrana, Rajpal cooked for me parathas full of potato and coriander that he paid for out of his driver's wage.

Because of the transgendered woman working the streets in Old Delhi who shouted me an ice cream in summer, and the college student in Lahore who gave up her seat for me on the bus.

Because of the kindness of the toilet cleaner in the airport bathroom in Mumbai, who corrected my clumsy attempts at wearing a sari and gave me all her safety pins.

Because on a nightmarish day in dreamy Kashmir I was sheltered from crossfire by a stranger who shepherded me out of the bus, into a coffee shop, and distracted me from the soldiers by feeding me jam on toast.

Because I have lived as a stranger in your country. I have been vulnerable and alone in your lands. When I was hungry, you gave me food, when I was thirsty you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me.

We give each other the thumbs-up.

I look around at the gaunt faces and angry fists. I wonder how many of these students have experienced an Australian home-cooked meal or have been shouted a latte in a laneway cafe. How many have had their bus fare paid for, or offered a seat on a busy train? In how many Aussie homes have they enjoyed warmth?

How are we going to respond to the protests of Indian students and welcome the stranger in our midst today?

Two poems about women

POETRY

Medbh McGuckian

The character of the dug explained

Philosophy I say and call it he, my throat hurts
From all the j's and h's: a woman and a melon
Are both alike, nobody knows what is in them
Until they are broke up. It is as impossible
To dive into the heart of a woman as to run
Your head, body and all into her fundament.
You have taught the curious sight to press
Into the privatest recess of her littleness,
Her sweet-bread, piss-bladder, arse-gut,
Flank-bone, the parts which in women serve
For generation, the descendant trunk
Of Vera Cava with its branchings,
The trumpets of the womb or blind passage
Of the seeds, resembling the wings of bats
Or flittermice, the greatest and middlemost kernel.
A thing so sealike, so investigable, that no chart
Can direct us — men use to look for wine where
There is a bush, and a good inn hath very seldom
A bad sign-post. But some women are nothing less
Than what they most appear, as if they were
Created for no other end than to dedicate
The first-fruits of their morning to their looking-glass
And the remainder thereof to the playhouse.
As it is no imperfection in the hare to be fearful
Or the tiger to be cruel, they have a whole arsenal
Of aspects and idle looks, gaudiness and ceremonies.

They will wanton with their gloves and handkerchiefs,
Thrust out their breech or bite their lips
Like a nimble frigate before a fresh gale.
Who knows whether a merry humour
Be a testimony of looseness or freedom
Between a strange woman and a woman that fears the Lord?
A clean-limbed wench that has neither spavin, splinter,
Nor wind-gall, may have little hard breasts
And a round chin that denotes envy, her small mouth a sign
Of weakness and lying, her long neck a timorous disposition
And a person inclined to loquacity. She could not possibly
Carry herself in a worse way than she does,
Discovering all her cunning knacks and facts.
How wittily she doth bestow her cheats, so to manage
Her wit, as if she were at a prize.
These are absolute symptoms, whose seeming purity
Is made strict by the power of drugs: women who use fard
Are trifling and full of tattle, they would obtrude
On the underwits, whereas the wise sort of people
Know this almost for a maxim, Poeta Nascitur, Non Fit.
No, they should go to their black velvet caps
And chains and ruffs, as it was in my time.

Her everyday comportment

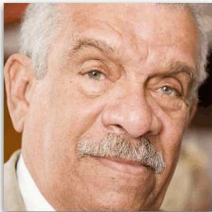
There were days a few weeks ago when she was impossible
To reach: today she is findable, although she is transparent,
She looks too Juliet.
What roads are open to her, crouching deeply,
Gradually repositioning, suddenly motioning with white
Knuckles to sky or earth? She appears to be not
Watching, her back flexed to the street

Which was my religion.
No amount of suspicion was too much,
Knotted into the shift from one half-year
To the other, as if God was in a sense
Changing nest, tilted over in that humid shadow,
Snowy hands soft as grapes.
She learns to lean leadenly, careen as if drunk,
Her ear guiding her rotating head whose cramped
Neck swivels and makes it swim
As if she is using her head as a limb.
She learns to fall well from her despised waist,
Refusing to be stationary, her late-deafened
Widowed voice tuning her disconnected speech.
She takes a Saint Christopher medal from her necklace
Into her mouth, kissing the tip of her thumb.
A mourning cross between my eyebrows
Returns to those gestures, and freezes that last
Close-up of her lips, as night lies flat on her
And rain grows on the sea ...

Football, sex and poetry

SPORT

Sarah Kanowski



The British newspapers have suddenly become interested in poetry. It's not a passion for scansion that's occupying them, however, but the much more reliable subject of sex and celebrity. It proves that sex scandals can make celebrities out of the most unlikely figures, even poets.

In the last few months Derek Walcott and Ruth Padel had been vying for the position of professor of poetry at Oxford University. It is a role second only to the laureateship in terms of status, and much less onerous. The professor gives a series of public lectures on poetry, is treated to a round of port and beef from the colleges, and escapes having to write the kind of commemorative verse which blights those poets anointed by the Crown.

Previous holders of the Oxford professorship include Matthew Arnold, [W. H. Auden](#) and [Seamus Heaney](#), but in its 300-year history the post has never been held by a black man or a woman of any hue. But, like the American Presidency, this latest election seemed destined to make history with one of those choices.

Walcott, a 1992 Nobel Prize Laureate from St Lucia in the Caribbean, had been the frontrunner. But last month, as university members were preparing to cast their ballots, accusations emerged that he had sexually harassed two students in the USA.

In 1982 a student at Harvard alleged that after she rejected a sexual advance from Walcott he gave her a low grade. She complained to university officials, who ordered Walcott to apologise.

A second instance was cited from Boston University, where in 1996 Walcott was sued for sexual harassment. The claim was later resolved out of court.

Walcott withdrew his name from the race, refusing to comment on the allegations but condemning the 'low and degrading attempt at character assassination'. On 16 May Padel was elected the new Oxford professor of poetry.

But, much to the delight of the tabloids, the scandal was not yet over. It was revealed that Padel had emailed journalists alerting them to the accusations made against Walcott.

Last Monday Padel resigned with an apology and the obligatory *media mea culpa* via a press conference, albeit with something of a politician's disingenuousness in claiming, 'Nothing I have done caused Derek Walcott to pull out of the election and I wish he had not'. The prestigious position now stands vacant.

Besides the grim comedy that sex scandals in the UK involve Nobel poets while ours feature footy players, does comparison between what happened to Walcott and what happened to Matthew Johns offer any insight?

One of Walcott's most prominent supporters, both before and after the accusations became public, is Professor Hermione Lee. Formerly Goldsmiths' Chair of English Literature at Oxford and currently President of its Wolfson College, Lee is a renowned critic and biographer, notably of Virginia Woolf and Edith Wharton.

Lee asked the Oxford student newspaper, 'Should great poets who behave badly be locked away from social interaction? ... You might ask yourself as a student body whether you wanted Byron or Shelley as a professor of poetry, neither of whom had personal lives free from criticism.'

Is this so different from the argument that it is unreasonable to require young men who are champion football players to be 'warriors' on the field and 'gentlemen' off it? Does great work excuse bad behaviour?

Bad behaviour comes in many different degrees, and there is a great difference between what Johns has admitted happened in a Christchurch hotel room and what Walcott still refuses to comment on. But you would never sense that from Walcott's critics. It seems that sexual sanctimoniousness reigns in academia.

Modern sexual harassment laws were developed largely in the context of the university: theoretically, in the schools of gender politics, and practically, in the resulting Codes of Conduct. This is not surprising, for once women began to be admitted into the hallowed halls from which they were so-long excluded, there needed to be recourse from the instances of sexual intimidation and even violence to which they were subjected.

But as Helen Garner explored at length in *The First Stone*, a fantasy of ideological purity now often accompanies attitudes to sexual behaviour in what are claimed to be bastions of intellectual freedom.

Consider the anonymous dossiers (for which Padel denies responsibility), sent to more than 100 academics in the week before the election, urging them not to vote for Walcott. These included pages from a 1990 study on sexual harassment with the Rothian title of *The Lecherous Professor*.

This kind of campaign seems fuelled by the righteous certainties of youth. Take these blog [comments](#) posted by 'a group of women students at Oxford University':

'Quite the opposite of Professor Lee's assertion, we feel that electing a proven campus sexual predator... would shame not honour Oxford. We find it scandalous, almost unbelievable, that it is a woman educator who is Walcott's chief supporter in Oxford and in public.'

A 'sexual predator'? To show support for whom is 'scandalous, almost unbelievable'? This is strong language, both to describe a 79-year-old man who

has been accused of making two passes over his teaching career, but also for dictating what views a 'woman educator' is permitted to hold.

I know I shall be accused of sexual harassment snobbery, of holding that there is one standard for footy players and another for poets. Actually, I think there are many standards for good behaviour, which none of us meets all of the time. And I am certain that Soviet-style show trials, which remove a person's every act and statement from its time and context, recognise nothing of our human complexity.

What does, in contrast, remind that life is more than a ledger book of acceptable and villainous behaviour? What will endure beyond the judgements of the tabloids and anonymous bloggers? Let's leave that to a poem written by the professor Oxford might have had:

*You ever look up from some lonely beach
and see a far schooner? Well, when I write
this poem, each phrase go be soaked in salt;
I go draw and knot every line as tight
as ropes in this rigging; in simple speech
my common language go be the wind,
my pages the sails of the schooner Flight.*

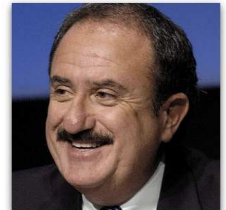
Why ethnic jokes are not funny

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

Sol Trujillo's words to a BBC reporter last month were a not-so-gentle reminder that multiculturalism in Australia is still a work in progress.

'My point is that [racism] does exist and it's got to change,' he said. 'If there is a belief that only certain people are acceptable versus others, that is a sad state.'



The former Telstra chief executive was responding in part to constant references to his Mexican background that culminated in the Prime Minister's 'Adios' parting shot.

He was not slow to point out what he thought was wrong with Australia and our ways.

He was fond of saying that our system of strong corporate regulation was outmoded. This is debatable. We can in fact be proud of the fact that our strict regulation has helped to insulate us from the worst effects of the global economic recession. We can even say that it is one of the characteristics that defines and unites us as a nation.

However it is more difficult to argue against his assertion that racism remains in our society, and the implication that racism is one of our national traits.

Because we lived so long with a policy of assimilation, our ingrained racism takes more than a few decades to shake. Indeed we returned to it during the Howard years. We need to see more public policy that definitively reasserts the principles of multiculturalism. Instead our Prime Minister is caught out making an ethnic jibe.

Australia's 'father of multiculturalism' Jerzy Zubrzycki died last month. After the Cronulla riots in 2006, he [wrote](#) a paper for the Centre for Policy Development in which he said the event was evidence that 'not all Australians have been touched by the ideology of multiculturalism'.

He defined multiculturalism as 'a voluntary bond of dissimilar people sharing a political and institutional structure'.

To make a joke about one of us is to weaken the bond that joins us. Such jokes make one of us into an 'other'. Jokes disparage the difference that multiculturalism celebrates.

It's not hard to tell if the ethnic joke is racist. We just need to look to see if the person is spontaneously laughing. If this is the case, they are sharing the joke, and their sense of being one of us — and not other — is enhanced. The mockery is

affectionate rather than dismissive. Sometimes they will even tell a joke against their own ethnic group. They know that this can help them to make connection and become one with us.

Sol Trujillo wasn't laughing.

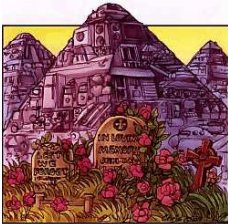
With multiculturalism, there is no 'other'. In the words of the song that is sometimes unfairly criticised as trite, 'We are one, but we are many ... I am, you are, we are Australian.'

We may affirm multiculturalism, but continue to laugh dismissively at Irish and other ethnic jokes. 'But they are funny,' we tell ourselves. The truth is that they are funny to the extent that we are racist.

Aged care in purgatory

COMMUNITY

Scott Stephens



Sigmund Freud once wrote that the only feeling that doesn't lie is anxiety. This is a hard thing for us to hear, because few feelings terrify us more than anxiety. Anxiety is the way we are affected by the things that we can't change. We might try hard to suppress it, deny it or ignore it, but deep down, it never goes away.

As Freud explained, anxiety is immutable because, ultimately, it is the chill of death's own inevitability. So what happens when we try to do to death what we do to other, more contingent sources of anxiety? How do we try to forget our own mortality? The answer is devastatingly simple: nursing homes.

While there are, no doubt, wonderful aged care facilities that provide community and dignity for those who have entered their twilight years and need additional care, this is not the experience of the majority of our elderly.

Increasingly, the elderly have become ritual sacrifices that we as a society offer to the most implacable of our modern gods: what Hervé Juvin described in his mordant masterpiece, *L'avènement du corps*, as a kind of provisional immortality, a death-less existence realised in unlimited consumption.

Precisely because they are painful reminders of our mortality, many of our elderly are consigned to substandard, often degrading care as a way of classifying them as not really alive, but 'not yet dead'. Institutionalisation has become a mechanism of our desire to forget death and to go on living unperturbed in our capitalist nirvana.

Our failure to care for and honour our elderly degrades us all. The systemic forgetting of the elderly is one of the great causes of weakness and moral impoverishment in our culture. Lives tempered by age and shaped by hard-earned virtue are gifts from God. It is to our detriment that we ignore them.

Perhaps it is time to revive the long Christian tradition that regarded old age as a theatre of virtue and courage. Ageing was imagined as a kind of final transaction, whereby the elderly show what the good life looks like, having reached the point where they can drop all pretence and start telling the story of their lives honestly.

But the elderly also bear witness to what good death looks like: how to face the completion of one's life with courage and faith. Those gathered around in loving community express their humble gratitude for these lives well lived, and urge the dying not to waver in their faith as they sprint toward their final prize.

There is a surprising fictional counterpart to this Christian tradition in the final

volume of Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy. The children, Lyra and Will, have made their perilous journey to the world of the dead on the pretence that Lyra must apologise to a friend she betrayed, and for whose death she was responsible.

Once there, it becomes clear that their destiny is much grander than that: it is to defeat death itself by, quite literally, cutting a hole in the other side of this cavernous Sheol and thereby allowing the atoms of the ghosts of the dead to disperse into the benign indifference of the universe.

When one of the harpies — whose role is to torment the dead by hissing and spitting venomous reminders of failed lives — objects that releasing the dead would negate their very reason for being, one of the children's travelling companions makes a remarkable suggestion:

'Let's make a bargain with you. Instead of seeing only the wickedness and cruelty and greed of the ghosts that come down here, from now on you will have the right to ask every ghost to tell you the story of their lives, and they will have to tell the truth about what they've seen and touched and heard and loved and known in the world. Every one of these ghosts has a story; every single one that comes down in the future will have true things to tell you about the world. And you'll have the right to hear them, and they will have to tell you.'

Could not this purgatorial vocation be a model of the community's care of the elderly? To listen with humble gratitude to lives that have finally learned to tell the truth about themselves, that have stripped themselves of every last shred of pretence, and that now simply need a loving community to hear.

However much our death-defined culture may wish to deny it, there is life before death. It may be weak and frail, but so are the other gifts that God has given us in order to demonstrate his grace and confound our supposed strength. As the apostle Paul put it, 'the weakness of God is stronger than human strength'.

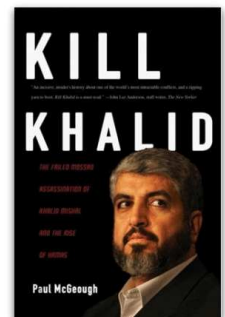
Beginners guide to Middle East politics

BOOKS

Kerry Murphy

Paul McGeough: *Kill Khalid*. Allen & Unwin, 2009. ISBN: 9781741756005. [Online](#)

Paul McGeough is known to readers of the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age* for his detailed articles about events in Afghanistan and Iraq. His book is a thoroughly researched account of Mossad's assassination attempt in 1997 on Khalid Mishal, the prominent member of Hamas. McGeough uses this event to take the reader through the complex and evolving politics of the Palestinians and their neighbours in Israel and Jordan.



McGeough has interviewed many people involved in those events as well as researched the history and politics of this troubled area. The book is quite long (417 pages). It is sometimes demanding, but McGeough's journalist background ensures that the writing is not too dense.

In 1997, Hamas was relatively new and Khalid largely unknown outside the region. Since then, Hamas has grown to become the political opposition to Fatah, the Palestinian party of Yasser Arafat. Hamas is the main protagonist against Israel and Khalid one of its leaders.

This book shows how the then new Israeli prime minister, Netanyahu, agreed to Mossad's plan to kill Khalid and to remove his influence Hamas. The attack failed spectacularly and the consequences were incalculable.

Middle East politics is complex and changing. But since the creation of Israel in 1948, a constant factor has been the situation of the Palestinians. An old joke goes that if you understand Middle East politics, then it has not been explained properly. McGeough places events in their historical and political context and thereby gives the reader a grasp of the complexities and subtleties of regional politics.

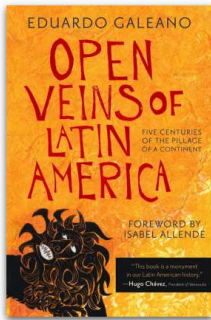
He also describes the growing influence of Islam in politics. This has led to conflict between Arab countries and leaders independent of their perceptions of Israel. The book illustrates just why the conflict, with its religious and political dimensions, is so difficult to resolve to the satisfaction of all players.

McGeough offers a valuable list of characters at the start of his work. This helps readers unfamiliar with names and the historical detail. Parts of the story read like an episode of *Spooks*, but this story is factual. The book is very topical in the light of Netanyahu's return to power in Israel, the rise of Hamas in Gaza and the recent conflict there.

Toxic economies in history

ECONOMICS

Thomas Sullivan



Lately I've been reading Eduardo Galeano's book, [*Open Veins Of Latin America*](#). The early portion of the book discusses what happened to Spain in the 16th century following its conquest of Latin America. The Spanish created mines and drained the area of its gold and silver, so receiving a huge infusion of unearned money.

One might suspect that this windfall turned Spain into an economic powerhouse. But some funny things happened when the easy money arrived. The Spanish king proceeded to spend a huge amount of the nation's reserves on wars against the 'enemies of Christianity'.

The nobility and upper-classes poured vast sums into new estates, palatial homes, and luxury goods imported from other countries. Many in the lower classes, attempting to emulate the gilded, ostentatious lifestyle of those above them, abandoned productive jobs and rushed into speculative pursuits.

Little of the new money was invested in domestic industries, and tariffs were dropped to meet consumer demand. In the end the new money flowed out of Spain, the local industries crumbled, and the nation ended up bankrupt.

Sound familiar? Replace the words 'gold' and 'silver' with 'credit' and 'leverage' and you have a pretty accurate description of the United States over the last decade. And, to a lesser extent, of other 'advanced' nations like England.

The parallel experiences of 16th century Spain and of the United States and England 500 years later suggest that it is perilous for a nation to put the interests of finance and speculation over real investment and production. In a global economy, the peril extends to the other nations it conducts business with, which is pretty well the whole world.

The parallel also suggests there's a big difference between creating wealth (as real industries do) and making money (as stock market players and bubble speculators do). You can make a ton of money and not create any wealth. Making \$100,000 flipping a house or trading stocks creates the same amount of real wealth for a country — zero.

So what could nations do to get real investment in real industries flowing again?

An enticing idea, floating around for some time, has not received the attention it deserves. The idea is simple and straightforward: it would place a small transaction tax of one penny on every stock market trade and use the proceeds to invest in real industries that create real wealth.

In this way you tap speculation (money making) and use it to create real, long-term wealth.

At a very small cost to speculators nations could give themselves the means to launch real programs for building the industries of tomorrow that they desperately need. It could also re-fund essential public programs, like public health centers that must deal with the threat of swine flu during a time of budget cut-backs.

Getting that penny out of the speculators will be a fight. But if the American tea-partiers are any indication, working people won't be ponying up investment money anytime soon. And they shouldn't have to. They've been surrendering their pennies for long enough while they work at (and are fired by) companies that create real wealth.

Predicting Black Saturday

TELEVISION

Tim Kroenert

'You can't trust the weather.' So, according to my nanna, went the cry of one particular Australian bird. Wise words from a native inhabitant of the Victorian bush. Melbourne is notorious for its 'four seasons in one day', and the margin for error in predicting weather patterns has made weather forecasters the butt of many a joke.



Of course, weather forecasts are not always wrong. In retrospect, one of the most frightening aspects of the Black Saturday bushfires was how precisely meteorologists and other experts predicted the behaviour of the weather on the day, and how it would impact upon the fires, which, by Friday 6 February, seemed nearly certain to occur.

The Weather Channel documentary [Forecast For Disaster](#) utilises footage of its own pre-fire forecasts, and interviews with key meteorologists and survivors, to examine the weather patterns during the months and days preceding, and on the day of, the fire. To recreate the nightmare, so to speak.

Heavy December rainfall, followed by a hot, dry January, had caused undergrowth to first burgeon, then wither. This increased fuel load and record high temperatures in early February made for prime bushfire conditions. Strong winds, predicted to swing 90 degrees in the afternoon, had the potential to turn the narrowest, most predictable corridor of fire into a deadly smear.

It happened almost exactly as predicted. Many who went to bed on Saturday night harbouring images of large but benign bushfires awoke on Sunday to learn that the fires had swung abruptly and turned deadly. Towns such as [Kinglake and Marysville](#), along with many of their residents, had been destroyed by the roaring onslaught.

Carefully paced and constructed, *Forecast For Disaster* plays out like a Hollywood thriller. It is horrifying, but compelling viewing. It stands as an important document of this charred chapter of Australian history.

It also stands as a reminder of the need for [ongoing support](#) for the survivors as they rebuild — their needs don't dissipate as the events fade into memory. And it raises questions regarding the adequacy of individual, communal and government responses to the impending disaster, given the veracity of the warning signs.

The answers to such questions are for the Royal Commission to determine. More challenging is the question of whether in fact there is such a thing as an adequate response when nature conspires to let loose an event of such magnitude.

If there are lessons to be learnt from Black Saturday, we should learn them

well. The evidence, as highlighted by *Forecast For Disaster*, is that with the advancement of climate change and its impact on environment and weather patterns, the Black Saturday mega-fires are not the last we will see.

Patients lost at the health care checkout

COMMUNITY

Frank O'Shea



I first heard the term when I was a student. 'Client-centred therapy' was a fashionable US approach to psychotherapy and even then, when my bulldust receptors were still primitive, I found the word annoying.

'Client' was used sparingly in Australia in a medical context until the incipient managerialism of the 1980s allowed it to creep into more common use. From the outset, its adoption has been largely divided along professional lines: from surgeons and physicians — who never use it; to psychiatrists and nurses — who sometimes use it; to allied health practitioners — who favour it.

I was once, alas, fortunate enough to be invited to a 'workshop' to help write my hospital's mission statement. In this medical Tower of Babel, the doctors talked about their patients, the managers counted their clients and the community representatives defended themselves as consumers.

Promoters of the terms 'client' and 'consumer' want to change the way the sick person is considered by the health system. And how could this not be a good thing? The consumer movement, beginning in the 1970s, forced medical institutions and professions to take stock of the way they dealt with human beings.

But it came at a cost: if you call sick people 'clients' you risk turning healing into a commodity to be purchased (or rationed). Customers buy 'things' and so doctors compete to sell them: if you employ the words of the marketplace, you set the tone for the behaviour of the stallholders.

If medicine is constructed principally as a business activity, then the ethics of the healing hand that have driven the profession for millennia may be replaced by the workings of the invisible hand of Dr Smith.

The word 'patient' comes from the Latin *patiens*: 'one who suffers or endures'. If you have ever been one, then you get it. 'Client' on the other hand, is derived from *cliens*— a 'follower' or 'retainer' and was originally used in ancient Rome to describe the relationship between a plebeian and a noble.

I am intrigued that those seeking to change the perceived power balance between doctors and the people they treat, should abandon a term which describes the state of being sick, in favour of one that, from an etymological basis at least, actually highlights the inequality.

And what of the egregious term 'customer'? Although its origins are Middle English, a person of my vintage may recall the 1960s television program *Pick a*

Box where Bob Dyer greeted us in his American accent with the words 'Howdy customers'.

Perhaps that's how we should welcome the sick at the doors of the emergency department: flashing lights and a word from our sponsor. Why not go the whole way and put up a sign saying 'the customer is always right'?

Well, for one thing, because they're not. The rule exists for shopkeepers so they can maintain their patronage. Placating a few grumpy and/or ignorant people each day is the price of good 'word of mouth'.

But a professional encounter is something different. If a patient believes the swelling in his groin is caused by the bubonic plague then he is almost certainly wrong. If he demands that you prescribe mega-doses of vitamin C for his HIV infection instead of antivirals then he needs better advice. If the voices from the microwave say Martians have landed then this is a call for help, not an opportunity for the sale of a laser gun.

The task of the salesperson is to find out what people want; the duty of the doctor is to find out what they need. And when you are sick you usually have no idea what you want, except to be better. To ensure that you do get better, the society has to guarantee the integrity of the training and the behaviour of the people who are looking after you. Some would call this a performance indicator — I call it a professional obligation.

Boosters see clients as autonomous agents who carefully choose the services they desire. They argue that if we call them patients, they will be suborned by a patriarchal profession and have less choice and autonomy. This is often true: that's the point. There is no time to google local cardiologists when you wake in fright with crushing chest pain; no scope for auditioning obstetricians when your waters break on the bus home ...

It is ironic that the person who is most often referred to as a client is the one who uses psychiatric services. Calling those who are depressed 'clients' will not make it easier for them to find a doctor equipped to treat their condition, nor will it improve government funding. Indeed, the language is an inhibitor of reform as it suggests there is a group out there ready to effect change and all we need to do is respond to the market forces.

The crisis in mental health services is a failure of our whole society — we have ignored the human rights of those who are least able, while they are sick, to be their own advocates. It is only when we recognise that the problem is an anticipatable responsibility of government and of the professions that we see action.

I recently heard a doctor talking on Radio National. 'I don't like the word patient,' he said. 'It creates a barrier between the doctor and the person who is suffering.' Etymological nit-picking aside, I believe he is simply wrong. The

thousands of people I have seen in a professional capacity have always referred to themselves as 'patients'.

To be a patient is to place yourself, sometimes literally, in the hands of another person, to give them your trust and to expect it to be honoured. To become a patient is an intimate, self-revelatory and necessarily conscious act. What happens between a doctor and a customer sounds more like a financial transaction.

Machiavelli and the jam-makers

NON-FICTION

Anna Griffiths

Niccolo Machiavelli might have been happier in the community garden than in exile at his family estate in Tuscany. The politics are complex, the emotions many and the personalities as diverse as in the community from which it draws its members. Even he could find it difficult to steer a course through the prevailing forms of governments: benign dictatorship, alternating every few minutes with bureaucracy and popular democracy.



We would have welcomed him on the evening we turned up to strip the apricot tree and conduct a community jam session, one of the non-music-making variety.

We had a bumper crop of apricots — fat, golden, by now blushing towards pink. The crop was intact, because before early summer rain and prolonged heat had worked their magic, the tree was netted to keep both cockatoos and plastic-trough-toting locals at bay.

Jam, the ladies decided, would be a golden gift to all the gardeners. Machiavelli's persuasive skills would have been welcome here because not all the gardeners agreed, but in the absence of other suggestions, we arrived with our big pots, wooden spoons, knives and cutting boards as arranged.

The two designated fruit pickers and ladder failed to arrive, so we could have used Macca then too; his Florentine manners would not have allowed him to see the damsels becoming distressed, and he might have scaled the ladder like a figure in one of those books of hours which depict seasonal tasks.

As it turned out, he could keep his hose clean and unladdered because a cheerful fellow gardener turned up and landed 18 kg of fruit on the long table.

How do you make apricot jam? No-one was sure, but it seemed to be about fruit, water, sugar, pectin and heat.

There was discussion about the water — various probably deceased aunts and mothers never used water. Suddenly everyone was an expert. One of the younger ladies was despatched to the supermarket to find pectin and sugar, but by the time we had done the very complicated maths (if x cups of fruit needs y ounces of sugar and one teaspoon of pectin, how many kilos of fruit need how much of the same?) another trip was necessary.

Further complications arose because the pots were all different sizes and we had no scales. The sugar shopper is also a computer engineer, so her quick calculations passed unchallenged. Our Florentine friend would have found this task easy, simply calling on one of his amici from the scale-makers guild.

Small mountains of halved apricots rose up on the table, and a bowl of kernels was laboriously extracted from the stones to enhance flavour. Wash the fruit? Of course. You cannot have jam laced with bird poo. Remove the ugly bits like bruises and possible resident insects? No, no. You don't wash, that will make the jam runny, and you always use the worst fruit for jam, the best for preserving and the rest for the table.

As this wisdom came from an orchardist's daughter who also worked in the cannery as a girl, again the majority deferred.

After a frustrating hunt for matches, we lit the barbecues and soon four pots of golden goo were bubbling away.

Jars were the next problem. We had brought a load of jars sterilised at home, but it soon became clear that there were not nearly enough. Some people went home to forage, and one of the gardeners helpfully brought some from the shed, though he was not sure what had been in them. Kero, perhaps, or Roundup.

The youngest jammer had read a story once in which a woman made jam and caused people to die of botulism. So she busied herself with detergent, hot water and the microwave, removing three or four bacteria-free jars every however many minutes it takes.

After a short time, according to perceived wisdom, the frothy jam should perform a satisfactory gel-test in which a spoonful dropped on a cold plate should develop a skin on its firming surface. Interestingly, the sample from a heavy cast-iron pan fresh from the op-shop gelled in half the time as those from various aluminium relics and more recent stainless steel numbers.

Cooks please note: this unplanned controlled experiment proved conclusively that big amounts of money spent on those heavy French pans is indeed well spent. Machiavelli would not have been surprised, as he had never seen flimsy-looking aluminium or steel and had no doubt eaten much delicious fare from the iron pot hanging over the fireplace.

By dusk, it seemed as if we would be there all night, doling blobs into sparkling clean jars. This is no doubt women's work, for Macca was nowhere to be seen.

Soon, though, it was all done, the mess cleaned up, sticky carbonised toffee scraped off the barbecue plates and rows of shining potted miracles lined up on the table — sun-warmed fruit from tree to stove to jar to the home table in the space of three hours, produced by a bunch of mostly happy amateurs.

Much of it was more like sauce, we had to admit, and, though it runs through the air holes in toast, it is marvellous poured over pancakes and ice cream.

This year, we captured our crop for a good cause, and the cockatoos will have to be satisfied with tearing apart the old PVC pipes on the roof. Macca would have had something more to say about learning from history, perhaps that we learn

from and make little bits of it every day.

Exploding pig flu

HUMAN RIGHTS

Bronwyn Lay



Last week swine flu virus got through Australia's famously tight customs and went off to school. But a month ago, in Geneva, the first days of swine flu literally sent the World Health Organisation (WHO) to their panic stations.

For a while everything felt precarious, as images of Mexicans in masks appeared in the media. It was as if the 'fiction' in science fiction had been annihilated. The possibilities were nightmarish.

Swine flu is an unknown quantity. The language surrounding it is highly specialised. Globalisation makes it hit home faster, and sections of the media work hard to transform fear into cold hard cash. It's easy to start thinking survivalist kind of thoughts.

On 27 April, when the panic was at its height, a strange thing happened near the headquarters of WHO. Vials of swine flu, travelling on a domestic train from Lausanne to Geneva, first rattled, then exploded. Sixty domestic passengers were checked for swine flu. Two, caught in the crossfire of the exploding vials, were slightly injured.

The explosion wasn't caused by swine flu, but by the inept packing of the dry ice surrounding the vials. The incident provided light relief but, seen from a global level, it raised greater questions about who is navigating the unknown waters of swine flu and how.

In Geneva, member states are debating questions of equity surrounding the manufacture of a swine flu vaccine. In the race to produce a vaccine, developing countries are being asked to hand over strains of the flu to WHO, who will give them to pharmaceutical companies for the purpose of manufacturing a vaccine.

It has been acknowledged that, in the event of a pandemic, there is currently no capacity for everyone to receive the vaccine. So who decides who will be left out? And will the price be affordable?

Indonesia is one of the countries refusing to hand over their bacteria because, as they point out, in the event of a global pandemic, they will be forced to purchase the vaccines they helped create, at a price they cannot afford, benefiting the pharmaceutical companies and the economy of the United States.

They have a point. What's in it for them except a fuzzy feeling?

This raises questions about international intellectual property rights and highlights that the issues that surround swine flu are far from purely scientific. They are riddled with age old questions of equity, and that annoying human

suspicion that someone, somewhere is on the take.

It's undeniable that life in the developing world is precarious at the best of times. Many have been left to rely upon international organisations and their own families, leaving out the second ring of protection: the nation state and its infrastructure.

Increased global interdependence means that these developing nations need extra assistance, not just to tackle this virus but beyond — after all, the appearance of new diseases doesn't mean the old ones disappear.

As scientists, pharmaceutical companies and nations scramble to understand swine flu, people are dying. A report by WHO on the burden of global disease in late 2008 estimated malaria had [infected](#) 247 million people and killed 881,000 in 2006, with 91 per cent of the deaths in Africa, and 85 per cent children under five.

At the moment the overwhelming majority of people with swine flu recover and although it's important this new microbe is understood, it is equally important to remember that out there, beyond the relatively well-funded and stable health systems of those living in the West, people still die from a preventable disease.

For most of us swine flu induces a mild panic. Our minds may entertain apocalyptic scenarios, but our bodies remain firmly rooted in an unchanged environment. News about the virus changes every hour, but for many who are removed from immediate threat, and who cultivate healthy scepticism of governments, international bodies and pharmaceutical companies, this new virus puts that scepticism to the test.

When the Spanish flu ripped through Europe in 1918 there were no antibiotics or vaccines; people were raw before the microbes. How these new medicines are distributed, what the long-term effects will be and who profits are already hot questions.

WHO has a mandate to assist those governments who are unable to care for their own people. Let's hope this mandate is fulfilled. But it is vital that funding for malaria and other diseases that affect the third world is not tampered with in order to allay the fears of the Western citizen.

As the exploding vials of swine flu reveal, this virus is in human hands, and humans easily make mistakes.

Neither God nor good

POETRY

Anne Elvey

consummations

blood and green
hallow the verdigris
touch of air and
age the sulphate
blue and old
rings copper
bands for arthritis
the clasps of a book
and dark alleys
wet cobbles
stone the shade of
charcoal something
to burn like a page
torn from a life
censorial the thurible
swung over the editorial
i a sound bite
ripped for a pod
at night a thin
plume of smoke
and yet a feeling
of having made it
your child's latest
lego or a pile
of ashes at the turn
of a lane where

the breathing animal you are

nestles close to

good a fragile

kindness to the ground

with some small thing

given back at last

gd: being neither god, nor ground, nor good

The i of complexity is more than the real that saturates the line.

This could be mathematics, where an e and a pi exceed our capacity to write them, like a life, like this universe that for all its betweens — coordinates stretched across cartesian undulations — seems calculable. Yet this line, ancestral with infinity i could dive into, stretches to fold on fold of surd and sine like an insoluble problem, or the elegance of a moment, when our congress turns to this continuity with things that bends us round, moulded to the string of time. And all our curves and angles intersect with gd.

désistance

... a subject in *désistance* is one that is in withdrawal, in the sense either of withdrawing itself or of *being withdrawn* — or, better still, in the sense of remaining nicely balanced between these alternatives.

—John Martis, *Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe: Representation and the Loss of the Subject*

The pluck of ions
exhales a chord of

blue that softens,

as the street

bends toward home.

There, at the far

corner — where the notice

says they'll film next week —

the houses and street gums
step aside for sky
almost pixelate,
as these white spots
play before my eyes,
like the scatter of
rising too quickly.
Here, where world is
more and less
than tree and tar,
words hold back like night
the sun, neither
a mother to us all (nor not).

Sri Lanka's war of propaganda

POLITICS

Paul Farrell

'It is the soldier, not the reporter, who has given us freedom of press.

'It is the soldier, not the poet, who has given us freedom of speech.

'It is the soldier, not the politician, that ensures our rights to life, freedom and the pursuit of happiness.'



This statement can be found on a military map in a media briefing room in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The words taunt the news crews that wish to penetrate deeper into the heart of what is becoming one of the most censored humanitarian crises ever reported, and reminds them all who holds the power in Sri Lanka.

As the dust begins to clear from the scorched battlefields after the Sri Lankan Government's final push against the Tamil Tigers, accusations and counter accusations of human rights abuses remain as vociferous as ever.

The Sri Lankan Government has been accused of endangering and killing civilians by using heavy weaponry in the conflict area. The Tamil Tigers have also been accused of using civilians as human shields.

But while the fog of war may be dissipating, the fog of propaganda and distortion continues to wreak havoc. Independent journalists who attempt to balance contrasting claims are continually denied access to the conflict area by the Sri Lankan military.

Most recently Nick Paton Walsh, the Channel 4 correspondent to Asia, was [deported](#) from the country on 9 May, following a [report](#) he released into military run Tamil internment camps.

The report was the first independently filmed video from a camp in Vavuniya, and contained claims from aid workers that there was a dramatic shortage of food and water and women were being sexually abused and abducted.

Mr Walsh, in his account of the expulsion, said: 'The Defence Secretary, Mr Gotabaya Rajapaksa, expressed his upset at the piece we ran. He was angry and said we would be deported as a result of that piece.

'He said we could say what we liked about what's happening in this country, but we would have to do it in our own country.'

The Sri Lankan Defence Ministry has also condemned media organisations that have remained sceptical of the Government's conduct in the war. The Human Rights Watch released a report on May 8 containing claims of over 30 [hospital](#)

[shellings](#) since December by the Sri Lankan Military.

In response to these claims, on 15 May the Defence Ministry [said](#) 'the media sympathetic to the terrorists once again have misinformed the international community with another fabricated story'.

These attacks on dissenting publications have raised the concern of many free press groups. In 2009 Reporters Without Borders [ranked](#) Sri Lanka 165 out of 173 countries in terms of press freedom.

'Murders, physical assaults, kidnappings, threats and censorship are the lot of Sri Lanka's journalists. Top government officials, including the defence minister, are directly implicated in the serious press freedom violations,' said the report.

The Sri Lankan military reports on the conflict have repeatedly had their credibility thrown into doubt. Satellite images [leaked](#) from the United Nations indicates that the Sri Lankan Government may have bombed the civilian safe zone, a claim the Government has adamantly refuted.

'Within the northern and southern sections of the civilian safe zone, there are new indications of building destruction and damages resulting from shelling and possible air strikes,' said the UNOSAT report.

In what has now become a war of propaganda, the Sri Lankan Ministry of Defence has also inaccurately criticised many peaceful protests in other countries.

Following a protest in London, a statue of Jawaharlal Nehru was damaged. While local press reported that no arrests had been made and that police could only speculate who the perpetrators were, the Sri Lankan Government [responded](#) with its own report, and wrote: 'Violent LTTE protesters behead Jawaharlal Nehru Statue'.

A similar report emerged following a protest in Melbourne when a conflict occurred between Singalese and Tamil protesters. Video footage of the event posted on YouTube clearly [shows](#) a car of Tamil protesters having their windows and car smashed.

The Sri Lankan government's [statement](#) about the protest used the headline: 'LTTE supporters attack Lankan student in Melbourne'. There was no specific reference to the initial attack on the Tamil vehicle.

This war of propaganda is having widespread impacts on communities abroad. The clash between Singalese and Tamil protesters in Melbourne highlights the growing unrest of these groups. More recently in Westmead, Sydney, attacks and counter attacks led to two men being subjected to harmful acid burns. YouTube videos and reports on the conflict are being [inundated](#) with comments that foster racial hatred.

In light of this, it's becoming increasingly difficult to deny that something sinister has happened in the north of Sri Lanka. Not only has there been untold

suffering in Sri Lanka, but also in Tamil and Singalese communities throughout the world.

And if the soldier is indeed more important than the press, then the situation is unlikely to change.

Lessons from Ireland's sex abuse shock

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins



The Irish child abuse [report](#) released last week attached secondary blame to government school inspectors. It [said](#) the system of inspection by the Department of Education was 'fundamentally flawed and incapable of being effective'. The report cited inspectors' reluctance to challenge the authority of the religious congregations running the institutions, and the lack of a state regulatory authority with the power to insist on changes being made.

'The deferential and submissive attitude of the Department of Education towards the congregations compromised its ability to carry out its statutory duty of inspection and monitoring of the schools,' the report said. 'The Reformatory and Industrial Schools Section of the Department was accorded a low status within the Department and generally saw itself as facilitating the congregations and the resident managers.'

When news of the Irish report broke in Australia, commentary pointed to the need to scrutinise Irish priests and religious who were reassigned to Australia, to check that they did not leave Ireland because they were sex offenders. But a more far-reaching implication for Australia is the urgent need to look at the state of regulations governing care in our entire not-for-profit sector.

Professor Mark Lyons of the Centre for Social Impact at the University of New South Wales [told](#) ABC Radio National's Stephen Crittenden that Australia is a long way behind its international peers.

'There were some quite significant transformations and adjustments made in the UK after the election of the Blair government in 1997, [including] important recognitions of the diverse role of the not-for-profit sector, and levels of support within government, and not just financial support, but actually policy understanding.'

Research [data](#) reveals that Australia has 40,000 staffed not-for-profit organisations. The sector employs almost 900,000 people. Its huge turnover makes it larger than the Australian communications sector and roughly equivalent to agriculture. But regulation is either lacking, or riddled with inconsistencies. Most significantly, there is little discussion of what kind of regulation should prevail — economic or human.

In Australia, the Rudd Government says it is determined to improve regulation of the sector. It has [asked](#) the Productivity Commission to look into how to measure the sector's contribution to society, and eliminate obstacles that are holding it back. Initial submissions are due this Friday.

[Previous studies](#) have focused on the sector's contribution to the economy as the key to its sustainability. But giving priority to a business case would surely undermine the mission of organisations that are supposedly dedicated to care. Elizabeth Cham of Philanthropy Australia [criticises](#) the neo-liberal philosophy of the past 25 years that does not even attempt to measure human endeavour.

She admits it is quite a challenge to work out how to do it, and that it 'takes much longer than anything that happens in business'. But she stresses its crucial importance. Economic regulation can be done without too much difficulty. But who knows how to construct a regime of 'human regulation', or whatever you might want to call it?

Not to attempt the challenge would be to risk the mistakes of the Irish inspection regime, which allowed itself to lose sight of the challenge of care, in the face of intimidation from Ireland's prevailing ecclesiastical culture. Giving priority to economic imperatives over human need, in shaping the regulation of our not-for-profits could prove just as insidious.

The Pope vs Holocaust deniers

POLITICS

Nigel Mitchell

This month the Pope visited the Middle East. His 'pilgrimage of peace' was prompted, in part, by the controversy surrounding his revoking of the excommunication of a Bishop who has publicly denied the Holocaust.



Neither the original excommunication nor its revocation were directly related to Bishop Richard Williamson's (pictured) views on the Holocaust, but the Vatican's action in welcoming the Bishop back into the fold nevertheless caused controversy around the world.

It led to the publication of a pastoral letter, the content of which is about as close to an apology as you can possibly get without actually being an apology. This was followed up with a very public and clear [denunciation](#) in *L'Osservatore Romano* of 'Holocaust denial and all other forms of anti-Semitism'.

In the same week, in Australia, 'revisionist' historian Frederick Toben was sentenced to three months in jail for contempt of court, after repeatedly publishing statements which denied the Holocaust and implied that Jewish people were of limited intelligence, despite federal court orders prohibiting him from doing so.

Toben was freed pending an appeal of his case, and the website of his 'Adelaide Institute' carries a banner asking 'will he be fit for work, or will he be gassed immediately upon arrival' at Adelaide's Yatala prison.

What happened to freedom of speech? Since when do we jail people in Australia for publishing an idea, even an unpopular one? Why should the church go into damage control over the eccentric political and historical views of an obscure bishop? Has the world gone mad, or is there something in those conspiracy theories after all?

Anti-Semitism is an historical phenomenon which has been well documented from the ancient world, through the Middle Ages to the present day.

Repressive laws of both church and state in the Middle Ages and the pogroms of the 19th and early 20th centuries reached their climax in the Nazi-led attempt to exterminate the Jews of Europe during the Second World War. The true number of those who died will never be known, but six million is considered by most historians to be an accurate estimation of the number who were murdered.

After the war, when the camps were 'liberated', the world vowed that never again would humanity stand silent while such an outrage was perpetrated. Humanity has not kept that vow, as the citizens of Sarajevo and Darfur know too well. That is a source of great shame.

But what must be a source of no less outrage is those who would deny that the Holocaust took place at all. They desecrate the memory of those who died, pour salt into the wounds of those who still grieve, and most dangerously they pave the way for those who would do it all over again.

Toben and Williamson are small beer, when compared to the president of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinajad, who is probably the leading denier of the Holocaust in the world today, and who was recently given a platform by the United Nations, no less, to spout his hatred against Israel and the Jewish people.

Ahmadinajad has publicly trivialised the Holocaust, lent the weight of his support to Toben and other Holocaust deniers, and called for Israel to be expelled from the United Nations.

This from a man who heads a nation with the strongest military force in the Middle East, which openly supports Hamas and Hezbollah with arms, funds and political muscle, and which has a controversial nuclear program which is not subject to any form of international oversight or accountability.

Holocaust denial needs to be seen from a global and historical perspective. It is not merely the advancement of a harmless, eccentric set of ideas. It is the deliberate denial of verifiable historical evidence.

And its purpose is far from benign. By denying what evil has worked in the hearts of human beings in the past, deniers of the Holocaust give aid and comfort to those who would do it all over again.

The courts are right to demand that Frederick Toben cease publishing his hateful words. The Pope was right to denounce the views of Bishop Williamson, and to pledge on behalf of the Church 'full and indispensable solidarity with Jews against any Holocaust denial'.

It is only by being vigilant in these matters that the world can keep its pledge: Never again.