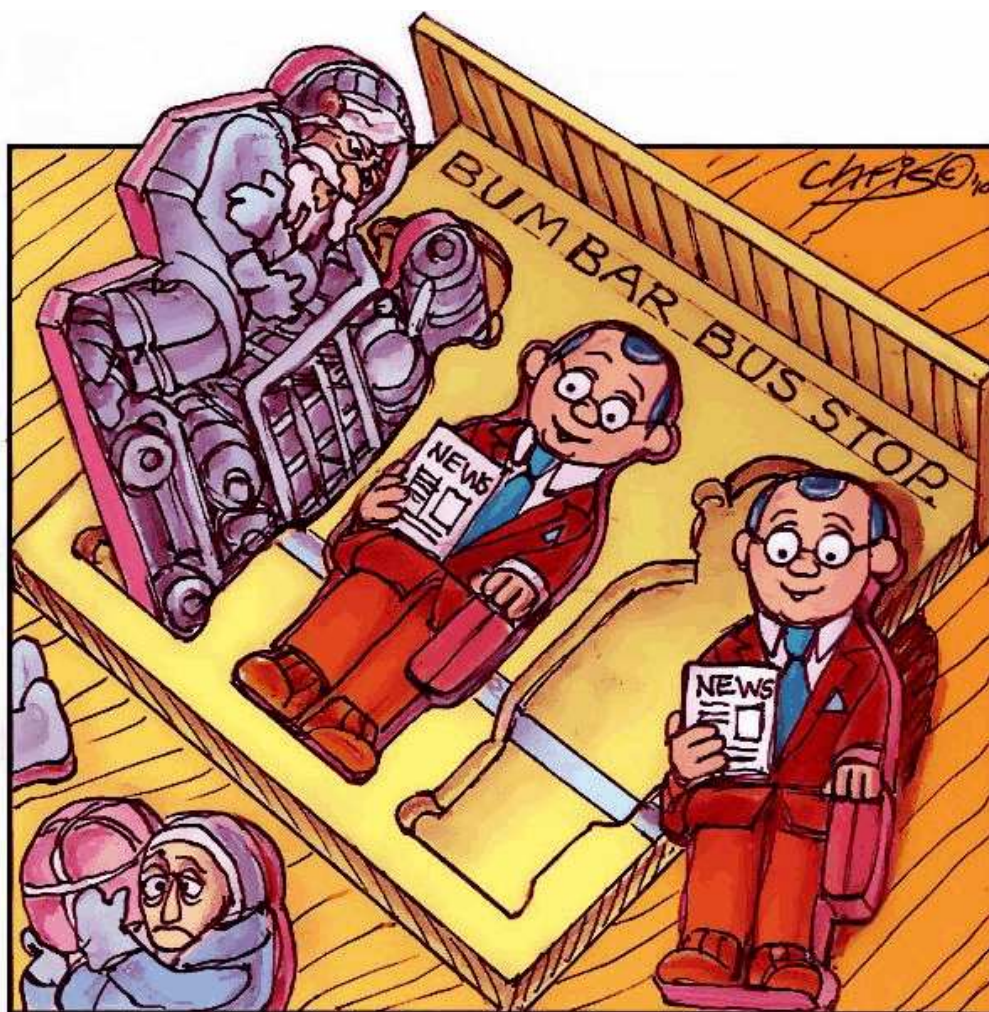


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Eureka Street is published fortnightly online, a minimum of 24 times per year by Eureka Street Magazine Pty Ltd

Requests for permission to reprint material from the website and this edition should be addressed to the Editor.

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Responsibility for editorial content is accepted by the publisher.

Unsolicited manuscripts will not be returned.

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Light pollution with a slight chance of stars

COMMUNITY

Sarah McKenzie



You see the Southern Cross everywhere lately — on T-shirts, tattoos and train stations. It's a pity then that pretty soon we won't be able to see it in the actual sky.

Who did not, as a child, lie on their backs and wonder at the night sky? Searching for the familiar shape of the Saucepan or the red glow of Mars, gasping at the heart-skipping sight of a shooting star and marvelling at what Byron called, 'the poetry of heaven'. Today when I look out from our inner-city backyard, I am lucky if I can count 50 individual stars. And most of those are probably aeroplanes.

When was it decided that the replacement of our night sky with a near-blank canvas was acceptable? Bit by bit, every year, a few more of Shakespeare's 'blessed candles of the night' are extinguished by the ever-brightening domes that hang over our cities.

According to the International Astronomical Union, two billion people — almost 30 per cent of the world's population — cannot see the Milky Way. And as the view is obscured, so too is that powerful reminder that we are part of something much grander, an insignificant dot in a vast and expanding universe.

Our love of all things light and bright has killed our access to true darkness. From households that love the 'security' of a well-lit backyard to advertising execs who think we really need neon reminders of our banking options at 4.00 am, a large proportion of lighting is probably unnecessary.

Even lighting regarded as essential, such as street lights and flood lighting on public buildings, can be shamefully inefficient, with an estimated 30 per cent of the glow being pointlessly directed skyward where it lights up water and dust particles, contributing to that sickly orange halo.

Our desperate need for something like perpetual daylight can in part be attributed to a childlike fear of the bogeyman and the unfounded assumption that more and brighter lighting will make us safe.

Certainly public lighting has a positive effect on people's sense of security but studies of its actual effect on crime rates are inconclusive at best. In fact in a 2008 experiment in Essex where all street lights were turned out between midnight and 5.30 am, a marked decrease in crime was observed. A similar trend has also been measured in cities that have experienced long-term power outages.

Earlier this month there was a fortnight-long worldwide program to measure the brightness of the night sky, [GLOBE at Night](#). And tomorrow night, we will see the return of [Earth Hour](#), where homes and businesses are encouraged to turn out the lights for one hour.

As well as urging us to think about the resources and money wasted in over-lighting our cities, both campaigns encourage us to think about darkness differently — not as something to be feared and conquered, but as something precious, a link between us and all time and space.

Unlike other forms of pollution, light pollution is a relatively simple one to combat. By getting rid of all unnecessary lighting, using lower wattage lamps and installing shields to prevent light spillage, we would instantly start to repaint the night sky. Do nothing and soon the only place we'll see starlight is when it's projected on to the ceiling of a planetarium.

Back at my house, it's not only us humans who lack a good night's sleep because of the ever-present glow. The Indian Mynahs start their song at 3.00 am, fooled into thinking that day is breaking. A nocturnal trip to the bathroom no longer requires a blind fumble through the dark. And if it's too bright to get back to sleep afterwards, there's enough light breaking through the curtains to read a few chapters of Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated* without even turning on the bedside lamp.

If you travel away from the city lights, it's hard not to be awe-struck by the scale and vastness of the twinkling lights in the sky. On a moonless night they shine so brightly that it seems impossible we could have ever wiped them from our city skies, let alone wiped them from our minds and our children's imaginations.

Vincent Van Gogh said 'the sight of the stars make me dream'. When we insist on over-lighting our cities, it's not just sleep we're losing — we're also losing the chance to dream.

Thoughts of a Buddhist Christian theologian

VIDEO

Peter Kirkwood

This interview with Christian theologian, Paul Knitter, continues the series recorded for *Eureka Street* at the Parliament of the World's Religions in Melbourne in December 2009. It is sponsored by the [Asia-Pacific Centre for Inter-Religious Dialogue](#) at the Australian Catholic University.

He speaks about the importance of forums like the Parliament that promote inter-religious understanding, the increasingly common experience of dual religious belonging where believers follow more than one religious tradition, and the need for practical collaboration among people of different faiths.

Paul Knitter is one of the world's leading theologians of inter-religious dialogue and religious pluralism. Perhaps more than any other prominent scholar working in this field, he has laid himself bare in his writing. In a clear and forthright way, through a series of books he has outlined his personal journey towards openness and fruitful engagement with other faiths.

Born in 1939 in Chicago into a devout Catholic family, from an early age he wanted to become a missionary priest and to convert people to Christianity. He joined the Divine Word Missionaries, studied for the priesthood in Rome at the time of Second Vatican Council, and was ordained there in 1966. (Continues below)

So he experienced at close quarters the excitement and optimism of Vatican II, and was inspired by the Church's increasing openness to other faiths brought about by the Council. This was expressed in its document on other religions called *Nostra Aetate*. While upholding Christianity as the height of revelation, it acknowledged for the first time that other faiths 'often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men.'

After completing doctoral studies in Germany he returned to the US in 1972 to teach at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. In the mid-1970s he left the priesthood, married, and moved to lecture at the Jesuits' Xavier University in Cincinnati.

In the late 1970s and 1980s Knitter and his wife became involved in the Christian struggle for liberation in Central America. They travelled a number of times to El Salvador and Nicaragua, and became activists on this issue in the United States. But this brought unexpected notoriety. They were investigated by the FBI for alleged links to terrorists, and this made the headlines in the local papers. Though there was no substance to the claims, they caused a scandal in the mid-west community of Cincinnati.

Alongside this interest in liberation theology and social justice, Knitter kept up with his study of other religions, and contact with other faith communities. This led him to question

Christianity's exclusive claims on truth and salvation. He first expressed this publicly in his 1985 book, *No Other Name?* It caused a furore. (Its title was inspired by Acts of the Apostles 4:12 'There is no other name by which human beings can be saved outside the name of Jesus').

While remaining Christian and Catholic, he found himself increasingly drawn to the insights and truths of other religions, particularly Buddhism. He now practices Zen Buddhist meditation, and his latest book, published in 2009, outlines his path towards Buddhism, and the crucial role it has played in his spiritual life. Called *Without Buddha I Could Not Be a Christian*, it's become a bestseller in America.

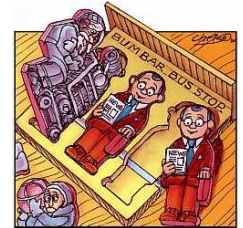
Another of his books, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* is widely used as a textbook, and is regarded as an authoritative, clear and concise summary of different Christian approaches to other religions. He now lives in New York City, and is Paul Tillich Professor of Theology, World Religions and Culture at the prestigious [Union Theological Seminary](#) .

'Bumbars' evict homeless from shared spaces

COMMUNITY

Joshua Anderson

Recently I was waiting for a bus at Southern Cross Station in Melbourne. Normally Southern Cross is a hive of activity, with business people and well-dressed tourists everywhere. This time, however, it was early morning, and the place was deserted.



Well, almost deserted. A motley collection of people was sleeping in the waiting room while a few more had scattered themselves on some nearby seats. One young man was asleep sitting up, with his head on his knees. Someone else clutched a backpack. A young Vietnamese couple had laid out a bedroll underneath some benches.

At first I thought these people might have been backpackers, but then I realised that they were homeless. They are largely hidden during the day, but when mainstream Melbourne retreats to apartments and homes in the suburbs, the underclass emerges. The 'space' of inner Melbourne changes.

I caught my bus to the airport and several hours later was browsing a newspaper in Brisbane. One article caught my attention. It described how a local council was investigating ways to keep homeless people out of bus shelters. It was replacing the conventional seating in shelters with 'bumbars' — horizontal lengths of pipe that people can sit on or lean against, but which are impossible to lie down on.

This project had drawn criticism and praise. The council predictably said that pole seating would sweep southeast Queensland, while a spokesman from the Salvation Army was concerned about how it would affect homeless people. This discussion was largely practical. It did not consider how the construction and use of space reveals society's attitudes towards different groups of people.

The space that Southern Cross covers is designed to be used by the mainstream public. Its use by homeless people after hours is, for most people, irrelevant. Bus shelters are also a form of space intended for the majority. But they still provide shelter for homeless people — even if the people who designed and built them didn't intend this.

This shows that a social space can have different uses for a variety of social groups. So we must ask critical questions when a space is altered so that it excludes certain groups. In northern Brisbane, the council has redesigned bus shelters so that they can be used only for public transport. Although this action may seem logical, it sends a distinct message to people who are homeless: you are excluded.

Why is the council sending this message? Maybe it assumes that homeless people should not be part of society. But homelessness is far more complex than this.

Tony Abbott recently suggested that some people choose to be homeless. This comment offers support for the belief that homeless people should be excluded. In reality, however, homelessness is rarely, if ever, a choice. People often become homeless because they are vulnerable to mental illness, drug abuse, alcoholism and family breakdown.

That is why our social and governmental reaction to homelessness should not be one of exclusion. Instead, we should try to include homeless people when we construct our social spaces. As trivial as it seems, the exclusion of homeless people through the use of 'bumbars' is the small face of a larger social problem.

Cate Blanchett, Peter Garrett and other endangered creatures

BY THE WAY

Brian Matthews



Fans of the Greater Bilby (*macrotis lagotis*) were probably surprised to find that their normally reclusive hero bobbed up in the news recently despite vigorous competition from roof insulation, maternity leave, Michael Clarke, Lara Bingle and the Fev.

Macrotis lagotis — Mac for short — is an endearing character. Long-eared, silky-furred, wide-eyed, an indefatigable burrower, this largest member of the marsupial Bandicoot family is quintessentially the diffident, unassuming good citizen of the animal world.

As omnivores, Mac and Mrs Mac make no gourmet demands on the food chain but eat just about anything and, as dedicated nocturnals, they are thoroughly unobtrusive — out in the pitch black, back home before dawn.

Mac's close relative, the Lesser Bilby — let's call him Les — hasn't been seen since 1931 and grave fears are held for his and his family's welfare. As far as is known, Les went out one night, as was his wont, perhaps to put the rubbish bin out, perhaps to burrow and forage, and was never seen again.

It looks like Les is extinct, but Mac's not out of the woods either, as the Prime Minister might put it. Habitat loss and unequal competition with introduced predators have led to Mac's being listed as a vulnerable species in all states except Queensland where, like so much else, he is officially endangered. The pressures have also forced Mac inland, into deserts and arid scrub.

How did this inoffensive, by and large un-newsworthy bandicoot surface in the maelstrom of public affairs, gossip and parliamentary punch and counter punch? Well, like this.

In a conversation on 26 February with Dennis Shanahan, political editor of *The Australian*, the ABC's Sonia Feldhoff remarked of Peter Garrett's crisis that 'the axe had fallen'. Then, altering her image — because Garrett had not actually been chopped he'd been demoted — she changed 'axe' to 'knife'. Shanahan, with great gusto, amended the image further. Garrett, he said, had been 'gutted'.

Hitting his straps, Shanahan characterised Garrett as 'the Minister for Bilbies, Arts and Heritage'. Maybe this line came to him there and then but more likely he'd been working on that one, giving it an off-Broadway run among his press gallery colleagues before rolling it out the moment the unsuspecting Feldhoff pressed his buttons.

Perhaps he is of that school of quirky patriotism that insists Mac should replace the Easter Bunny. With Easter imminent, Shanahan could have had such weighty matters in mind.

Whatever the explanation, he was unstoppable. Before you could say 'National Bilby Recovery Project', he went on to elaborate how Garrett would henceforth have almost nothing to do — with the clear implication that the Arts and Heritage were about equal to Bilbies in importance, that none of them mattered much anyway and wouldn't keep an honest-to-God backbencher away from his tweeting, texting, covert photography or catching up on Proust and Dostoevsky.

All this was pretty rough on Mac but it was also a worry for Arts and Heritage which, like the Bilby, have survival problems. Only days before Garrett's gutting, Cate Blanchett gave the keynote speech to the Australian Performing Arts Market on the Arts, Culture and Heritage. 'The arts operate at the core of human identity and existence,' she said. 'After gravity, culture is the thing that holds humanity in place ...'

An edited version of her speech on the *Sydney Morning Herald* website attracted more than [70 responses](#), most of them astonishingly hostile. Here are some: '... elitist claptrap'; '[the Arts are] a charity kept afloat by the taxpayer'; '[the speech was] a sickening display of ego and self-importance'; '... look at us, we're so bohemian, special and important! Not like those philistines the great unwashed. Apparently Cate and her posse of luvvies change history, government, and humanity itself. Pass me a bucket please'; '[you must understand] how pretentious and unimportant you and your industry really are'. And so on. Talk about 'endangered'.

Peter Garrett made some grievous mistakes during his insulation saga, but he was also at the mercy of some people who were unscrupulous and others who were thoroughly incompetent. Now he's been dropped in it again. As Minister for the Environment (read Bilbies), the Arts (read bleeding the taxpayer) and Heritage (read pretentious and unimportant) he is not on the sinecure Dennis Shanahan described, he is on a hiding to nothing.

In our economy-obsessed society few give a toss about Bilbies, the Arts or Heritage, but the moment someone rediscovers them (and someone will, Oscar, someone will) and deems them indispensable, only to find that Bilbies are disappearing and Arts and Heritage are in palliative care, Garrett's a goner — again.

Now's the time for him to learn from Mac the Bilby: burrow down hard and deep, come out only at night and, above all, abandon a predator-riddled habitat and relocate to the Tanami Desert.

Discerning Obamacare's rough beast

POLITICS

Jim McDermott

It was a strange experience Sunday night watching the lead-up and vote on HR-3590, the US House of Representatives name for the health care bill.

At this point, there have been so many twists and turns to the story, so many months of arguments and counterarguments and analyses and revisions, so many worst case scenarios promoted as truth — if we don't do something now, health care costs will bankrupt us all; if we pass this bill, the government will throw us out of the plans we love, and saddle our grandchildren with untenable debt — that it's hard to know what exactly what rough beast this might be that slouches toward our Bethlehem.



And I have to say, during the three hours I caught of 45-second, one- and two-minute speeches back and forth from Republicans and Democrats, I longed for the visceral dynamism and interaction of Question Time. The same themes, same stories rehearsed ad nauseam, this was death by a thousand sound bites.

The Democrats had the better story, returning again and again to the idea that this bill was not about politics, but about sick kids and Grandma Alice and the poor folks down the street and your son that brave self-employed entrepreneur.

They praised the bill for ending insurance discrimination against those with preexisting conditions, for providing insurance for 32 million citizens who cannot currently afford it, and for its value to women, whose medical insurance tends to cost more. Said House Speaker Nancy Pelosi: 'After passing this bill, being a woman will no longer be a pre-existing condition.'

The Republicans, on the other hand, bemoaned the bill for not having listened to the people's concerns and, stealing a page from the Liberal Party's playbook, for the huge burden that it will place on future generations. (The struggles of the tens of millions Americans in the current generation who have little or no health care went unnoted.)

Republican opposition leader John Boehner began his comments, 'I arise with a sad and heavy heart', as though at a funeral, and spoke of how the Democrats had broken trust and strong-armed the deal, claims that seem unjustifiable from the facts, and yet certainly speak to the fears of a large segment of the US population.

He and his colleagues also attempted to position themselves as friends of the insurgent small-government, throw-the-incumbent-bastards-out Tea Party movement which has swept the country, cheering on the Tea Party protesters earlier in the day and repeatedly referring to

the House of Representatives as 'The People's House'. (How pleased Mao Tse-Tung would have been to hear American Republicans using such a term.)

Listening to these alternatively utopian and apocalyptic visions of the post-bill future, I felt as though I was in a J. J. Abrams TV show, standing at the fissure between alternate universes with almost nothing in common. What does the Republican me look like, I wondered? (Probably thinner, damn him.) And how does he justify denying the kind of health care that he himself likely receives?

What little common ground remains at this point between Democrats and Republicans lies in the belief that this bill, for better or worse, represents one of the most consequential decisions in recent US history. Long time health care advocate Senator Ted Kennedy wrote in a brief letter before he died that 'health care is the great unfinished work of our society'. Pelosi quoted Kennedy, adding 'Until today'.

Whether that is true or not remains to be seen. After the bill passed Obama himself was more careful, saying this was a step in the right direction rather than the end of the line. His rhetorical attacks against insurance companies, while certainly speaking to the experience of many Americans, have been evaluated by some nonpartisan groups as less than the full picture. And the abiding law of unintended consequences has, if anything, more relevance to a bill of this size and complexity.

Still, for the moment our country's aspirations are clear — to be a place more giving to the sick and the needy, more welcoming to the stranger, more flexible for the creative and the entrepreneur — and to do so at the expense of those who can afford it. Of those who have been given much, much will be required.

Unlike the night of Obama's election, there was no cheering to be heard in the streets after the bill passed, no roars of joy, no celebrations. If there were any exclamations, they were probably sighs of relief.

But perhaps, as Obama said in his speech, 'This is what change (really) looks like.' Not elated but exhausted; not flashy but a grind; spin and arm-wrestling and point making and political compromise, yes, but in the end still a policy bespeaking what Lincoln called 'our better angels'.

We live in hope.

Romero: faith and power in hard places

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton



Thirty years ago today Archbishop Oscar Romero was shot as he celebrated Mass. His blood and the chalice were spilled together on the altar. His anniversary will be remembered around the world, for he provides one of the universal images of what living faithfully as a Christian might look like today.

For all its universal appeal, Romero's inner journey was Salvadorean. Just how much so, I began to appreciate only when I was in El Salvador as the civil war was drawing to a close.

I was in the back of a ute travelling to celebrate the 15th anniversary of the murder of Rutilio Grande, a Jesuit priest and a close friend of Romero. Also bumping around in the ute was Grande's brother and some of his relatives. They were simply devout, and spoke in the warm Spanish of rural villages.

As we walked along the dusty road, retracing Grande's last journey to the village of Paisnal, passing the place where he was shot, I saw how big a step the pious and scrupulous Grande had taken to live in solidarity with the oppressed of his parish.

Like Romero, he had grown up in a country where at the corners of each main square were located the town hall, the police station, and the church. The administrative, coercive, commercial and Catholic life of the country were intertwined; the town arrangement conveyed powerfully the image of the divine and the human order harmoniously united.

The image was in the blood. Grande necessarily came by a long and painful road to see that the human order was broken and brutal, and that the image of its harmony with the divine order was consequently blasphemous.

I also began to see what Grande's death may have meant for Romero. They were both men of a traditional faith taken into hard places. The murder near Paisnal persuaded Romero that the heart of this faith was under attack. It was the decisive step in his conversion that enabled him to imagine a new way of being an archbishop in a fractured society.

The next day Archbishop Romero went without government authorisation to celebrate a Mass at Paisnal, spent the day listening to the *campesinos* in the area, and next day announced that he would take no part in government official events until the death was investigated. He also cancelled all masses in the archdiocese in favour of a single mass in the Cathedral.

These were all events of rupture. Seeing that the political order was based on the violation

of human dignity of the many for the profit of the few, Romero built his ministry as Archbishop on the assertion of the human dignity of each human being, beginning with the least resourceful. The Church had to proclaim God's love for each human being, and so to call the systematic abuse of human dignity for what it was. This inevitably led him to be joined with other simple Christians in being murdered for their faith.

In this divided society some Catholics described Romero as leftist, communist, liberationist and atheist, and projected onto him their own view of a church at war with itself. It was a pity that this view fell on well-prepared ground outside El Salvador.

But that kind of labelling did not do justice to Romero. He remained a devout Catholic, committed to regular prayer, and with an instinctive view of the Church and its authority that were grounded in Catholic tradition. What had changed in him since taking office as Archbishop was not his understanding of Catholic faith, but his understanding of society in El Salvador and of the way in which the Church was used to validate the oppression of human beings.

Archbishop Romero's statue, together with those of Martin Luther King, Elizabeth Romanovna of Russia and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, now stands on Westminster Cathedral. All were killed. Each death pointed to the fracture lines and the brutality of a society that procured the killing. Each death also pointed to the different ways in which Christians could be called to be faithful in hard places, under governments of any persuasion.

The ant's prayer

POETRY

Vinay Verma

Watermark

I was an empty riverbed uncut stone and haphazard rock
I was paper crumpled and creased
A tree with hunched shoulders and anemic roots.
Coursing through my veins angry wars and confused seahorses
Rusting shipwrecks and unclaimed treasure.
You were the water chilled and distilled
Channeled
Stolen when the yeti slept,
Polishing pliant stone and directing the rocks
To territory chartered and boundaries defined.
I have known the childish excitement of a wakened river
I have tasted nirvana papered apricots
And grown taller in your shadow.
Where, once, I was a guardian of wasps,
I have become a farmer of butterflies.
You are the watermark on my ricepaper soul
The dateline of my wayward mind
And the sextant
Charting proximity
To my monocled God.

New migrant

It was not escape and it was not freedom
the pouch of stemcells unnoticed at customs

my currency of negotiation
I was oppressed and an oppressor
tetrapack crumpled emotions
dustbinned and years later
recycled I no longer bartered
my expertise for reward
my morality was not tax deductible and
my love had no caveats
undirected and scattered on soil that was not mapped
unexpected and receiving
more than I deserved I finally
learnt to measure in sensations.

The ant's prayer

Ants firewalking over breathless stones
Burntcherry blur scurrying into labyrinths
As Angels of innocence cast
Imperfect shadows
God idioms are intoned
Perfunctory
As morning ablutions
Disciples invoking pacts of compromise
Offering souls and solutions
Silent in their conspiracy
A shortcut to Nirvana
In dredged tantric mud.

Tasmanian Greens and the terror of coalitions

POLITICS

Binoy Kampmark

'If my friend cannot ride two horses — what's he doing in the bloody circus?'

Jimmy Maxton, Independent Labour Party

Australian politics is known to have an inbuilt sensitivity to power sharing arrangements from parties across the spectrum. Independents are loathed as ineffectual, seen as mere electoral props. Small parties are considered nuisances who are wooed only because they have to be, and stifled by electoral regulations that limit their influence. Multiparty coalitions (with the exception of the conservative Federal Coalition) are seen as enterprises that are doomed to fail. Diversity is danger.



The delivery by voters of a hung parliament in Tasmania on Saturday jars the sensibility of the political establishment. The political cognoscenti are relieved the same result was not replicated in South Australia, where the Rann government looks likely to hold on to the barest of leads.

In the scrapping Tasmanian state election, Labor and the Liberals have secured ten seats apiece. The resurgent Greens, deemed the true winners in the contest with five, are looked upon with a degree of trepidation.

While it would be normal in a European constituency, or even a New Zealand one, to cast one's hand across the aisle as a helping hand to make pluralist government work, the situation here has been presented as dramatic, radical and disturbing.

The last state elections in Tasmania were blueprints of fear and loathing for the very idea that either major party could work with a minor one. Instability and chaos was bound to be the only electoral product such an alliance might produce. The same political nonsense prevails in the stubborn insistence by both the Liberals and Labor to avoid a power sharing agreement with the Greens, even though this position will be unsustainable.

The Greens leader Nick McKim has so far proven sensible, keen to form an alliance with either party, given the appropriate circumstances.

Analysts and political pundits are gradually warming to the idea that power sharing arrangements between established large parties and emerging smaller ones may become a reality in Australian politics. Consider the view of Norman Abjorensen (*Inside Story*, 9 November 2009), who considers the scenario after analysing the Labor-Green relationship in the ACT, current since 2008.

‘Labor is looking increasingly vulnerable in its inner-seats,’ he surmises, pointing to advances by the Greens in the primary vote in Melbourne (23 per cent in 2007), Sydney (21 per cent) and Grayndler in Sydney’s inner west (near 19 per cent). On paper, the ACT example may be seen as singular to that territory, with its distinctive, progressive demographic. That is no reason to assume it can’t be repeated elsewhere.

Tactics used by the established parties towards their smaller challengers vary, though they all share the common strain of bullying. Allegations of illegality have been mooted against the Green power structure in Tasmania by a Labor Party staffer, suggesting that received donations have not been declared.

Labor election flyers also portrayed the Tasmanian Greens as ‘extremists’ whose intention to legalise heroin was bound to ‘backfire’. Labor officials may have been taking counsel from Queensland Liberal Senator George Brandis, who described the green movement in 2003 as having ‘frightening similarities’ with ‘the methods and values of the Nazis.’

Such attitudes, indicative of a condition that political scientists diagnose as ‘cartel behaviour’, only enhances the appeal of minor parties. As political scientist Paul Williams explained to the *Sydney Morning Herald* (16 March), ‘The more the major parties do it the more it disenfranchises ordinary voters who are then more likely to go to alternatives out of sheer bloody mindedness because they don’t like the tactics.’

Indeed, there is a note of negativity even in some Green circles, with a piece by Tim Burton in the *Green Left Online* gloomy over ‘overseas’ examples where the Greens stumbled when in office. ‘The Irish and Czech Greens became props for right-wing governments implementing anti-social and anti-environmental policies.’

The example in Germany was even more shocking to the progressive sensibility, when the German Greens decided to sell ‘out its support base by agreeing to the continuation of nuclear power’. Power might corrupt, but to have none corrupts even more.

The polls are moving at a rate that will worry the Rudd Government. An arrangement with the Greens may be unavoidable, should Labor wish to retain power at various levels of government. A federal equivalent to Tasmania is unlikely to eventuate for several elections, but it is a distinct possibility. Politics is, after all, the art of the possible.

Forcing people to do the right thing

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins



Welfare recipients should spend their payments on food and clothing, and not on drugs and alcohol.

Indeed few welfare recipients with drug and alcohol addictions would themselves argue against this. The question is how the government should go about persuading them to make the most appropriate use of their payments.

It can focus its efforts on either force or reason.

Forced income management is the easy option. It is effective in ensuring the payments are used for the daily necessities of life.

A Senate report released earlier this month endorsed plans to expand income management from Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory to selected welfare recipients across the country.

But the cost to human dignity makes income management counter-productive. Any disadvantaged person robbed of their dignity will find it almost impossible to flourish as a member of society.

Compulsory income management is supported by government bureaucrats, who have no contact with the recipients themselves. They can see that it makes economic sense, at least in the short term.

Such draconian measures are strongly opposed by charities and welfare groups, which have regular face to face dealings with the recipients and can see most clearly what allows welfare recipients to overcome their difficulties.

St Vincent de Paul National CEO John Falzon [said](#) : 'This Inquiry heard evidence from all over Australia. The evidence overwhelmingly showed that income management can be a useful tool when it is voluntary and backed up with supports and services. It also showed that compulsory income management is degrading and stigmatising.'

St Vincent de Paul and similar organisations reject the view that people who are doing it tough need to be set apart and treated as though they are dysfunctional. People who are treated as dysfunctional for a sustained period of time invariably become dysfunctional.

It is much better if the government can show them how to beat drug and alcohol addiction and not remove their ability to take responsible decisions towards this end.

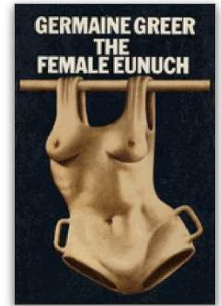
Compulsory income management assumes that some welfare recipients are unable to make rational decisions that take into account the long-term consequences of their actions. The same might be said for some governments.

Germaine Greer's utopia

BOOKS

Jasmine-Kim Westendorf

This year marks the 40th anniversary of the publication of Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch*, an impassioned call to arms written by a woman who became the pin-up girl of feminism, loved and hated with equal passion by women and men alike. Of the many feminist manifestos published over the years, this has been one of the most influential. The very fact that it continues to incite such vociferous debate today attests to this.



In marking the book's anniversary, a debate has broken out in the Australian media around the impact and relevance of the ideas articulated in *The Female Eunuch* to women and society at large. This debate is not a new one. In many ways it rehashes critiques of Greer and her book that have flourished since its publication in 1970.

A recurring criticism is that the book's impact on women has been negligible, and that the feminism it propounds is of little relevance in today's world, with some going so far as to argue that it was never really relevant. These arguments are often based more on attacks on Greer personally, and feminism generally, than considered critiques of the value of the feminist agenda set out in *The Female Eunuch*.

By focusing their arguments on demonstrating how Greer has failed to convert all women to feminism, pointing out for instance that women love to shop, wear make-up and high-heels, get 'brazilians', and be stay-at-home-mums, critics (notably, and most recently, Louis Nowra, writing in *The Monthly*) miss her point entirely.

Greer's work is not a directive to women, it is a call to arms: a polemic designed to mobilise women to recognise and shake off the myriad shackles that prevent them from realising their full potential as free and equal members of human society.

Critically, it places the responsibility for women's situations squarely on women themselves: women must decide for themselves to fight for their freedom, and they must decide for themselves how they're going to go about it.

By picking out incendiary and highly contextual phrases from *The Female Eunuch* and taking them literally, as many do, Greer's critics are liable to draw conclusions that are divorced from the reality of the book.

For instance, some commentators take Greer's criticism of women spending their money on clothes, make-up and cosmetic surgery as a condemnation of women who do such things, and as an attack on the legitimacy of women seeking self-fulfilment through these activities.

Although there are obvious problems with suggesting that cosmetic surgery is a legitimate way for women to pursue self-fulfilment, Greer does not call on women to abandon their interest in clothes and cosmetics. Quite the opposite: she recognises that 'it is possible to use even cooking, clothes, cosmetics and housekeeping for fun'.

For Greer, the issue is whether women are acting out of compulsion, or because they are genuinely seeking their own pleasure. The key here is that women should consciously decide how to present themselves and spend their time. They should not be forced by social norms to act, dress and live in ways that sustain existing gendered power structures, but should have the real freedom to be self-determining individuals in a society that accepts that there is more than one way to live. This is as relevant and as legitimate today as ever.

Many of Greer's critics also overlook the hopeful and utopian bent of *The Female Eunuch*. Greer's book is underpinned by a faith that women can and will rouse themselves to fight for equality and freedom. Its admirable goal is to inspire women to claim a meaningful place for themselves within society, where they don't measure themselves merely by the impact they have on men.

As a young woman reading the book, one phrase always stayed with me. After exploring the ways in which the desire for 'security' can influence women (and men) to settle for less than ideal home situations, Greer wrote that 'a lover who comes to your bed of his own accord is more likely to sleep with his arms around you all night than a lover who has nowhere else to sleep'.

What better or more empowering advice could a woman be given than this? More than anything else, it highlights the importance of holding your own in relationships, being yourself rather than what society or your partner wants you to be — and promises that honest, fulfilling relationships will follow.

One of the major and enduring strengths of Greer's work is its inclusiveness: she does not envision a world where women no longer need men or who struggle simply against men. A fundamental pillar of her argument is that the current gendered balance of power is bad for men as well as women.

Further, she calls on women to recognise, not just how the patriarchy oppresses them, but also how they oppress themselves and each other. Thus, the struggle for women's freedom is actually a struggle for freedom for all.

Unfortunately, Greer's seminal work continues to be misrepresented and attacked on many fronts, often by men who speak on behalf of women, but also by women, telling us that feminism is no longer relevant to our society.

It's true that we've come a long way since the 1970s, but feminism is as relevant now as ever: Australian women earn, on average, 17 per cent less than men; domestic violence

remains the leading contributor to death, disability and illness for Australian women; women make up less than 11 per cent of board members in Australia's top 200 companies; the sexualisation of women, and particularly young women, in the media is rife and increasingly regarded as acceptable by men and women alike.

We still have a long way to go. Feminists still have work to do.

And importantly, feminists don't all speak with the same voice. Feminism isn't about all women believing the same thing, it's about women standing up for what they believe in and having the freedom to make their own choices. That said, the belief that women and men are inherently equal and offer equally valuable contributions to society is a uniting principle among feminists, as is the conviction that the struggle for gender equality is continually evolving.

Greer doesn't claim to have all the answers: she saw *The Female Eunuch* as just one contribution to the ongoing feminist dialogue. It's our responsibility, women and men alike, to keep that dialogue alive in the pursuit of equality and freedom, and not to be discouraged by critics that would neuter the women's movement and silence outspoken activists like Greer.

As Greer asked at the end of her book 40 years ago, 'What will you do?'

Vote One Zero Zero against climate inaction

ENVIRONMENT

Tony Kevin



In Australia's next federal election, I'll vote One, Zero, Zero — Greens 1, Labor 0, Coalition 0. This is the only way I can fulfil my voter duty, while recording protest at the failure of our major parties to offer real policies on the planet's climate crisis. I'm too old to get arrested in direct citizen protests against coalburning — the issue that counts most now.

If enough voters around Australia voted One, Zero, Zero, politicians would get the message. Because such a vote is legally informal, I don't advocate it in electorates where Greens candidates might actually win, as it would be wrong to waste these votes.

Unless Labor and the Greens unexpectedly pull off a compromise emissions trading scheme (ETS) or carbon tax system in the Senate in the next few weeks, Australia will go to the next election with no ETS laws passed. Rudd will blame opposition obstructionism, and fight the election on his preferred ground of health. He will downplay climate policy, while promising that a re-elected Labor government with Senate control would pass an ETS. Don't hold your breath — Labor's record doesn't inspire confidence.

Abbott will promise his brand of 'practical environmentalism': rural soil carbonisation gimmicks, climate voluntarism, no new taxes, no effective regulation of greenhouse emissions. As an avowed climate science denier, he is stroking concerned voters with empty promises.

Rudd's climate crisis denialism is more subtle. He claims to accept the science. But on every practical policy front, Labor betrays our hopes. It shelters coal export and power industries. Industry-scale infrastructure alternatives to carbon-burning are quietly kneecapped (in the case of renewables-based energy) or ideologically condemned (nuclear energy).

Australia white-anted effective international action at Copenhagen, with the 5 per cent ETS target, shameful even before it was corrupted by overseas 'green credits' and special deals for affected industries. There is no progress towards compulsory motor vehicle fuel consumption or emission standards.

Labor throws token conscience-savers to concerned voters, with its subsidised home solar energy and insulation programs (from which any emissions savings would be swallowed up by a 5 per cent ETS law). Meanwhile we are told by government and industry leaders that Australia 'must' increase its population to 35 million, to take care of our elderly and provide labour for the resources boom.

Under these policies, Australian greenhouse emissions — already the highest in the world per capita — will go on rising in total. Beneath all the greenwash, Australia will remain the

most carbon-dependent economy in the world. More and more voters understand this, but major parties don't care. Risk-averse politicians listen to big corporate and trade union stakeholders more than to citizens.

Noisy climate crisis deniers provide a political figleaf for defenders of the profitable energy status quo, creating through intimidation and ersatz-scientific advocacy the illusion of real scientific debate. The media (including the ABC, recently reminded by their climate-sceptic chairman Maurice Newman of their duty to represent all sides of this 'debate') dutifully represent all viewpoints in 'balanced' opinion and correspondence sites. Thus the intellectually bad drowns and drives out the good, further confusing a worried public.

The climate crisis makes me wonder whether democracy can or should survive. Authoritarian China is adopting (within its scale and means) rational and resolute decarbonisation policies, accepting the inescapable policy lessons of climate science. Western democracies seem paralysed into inaction by powerful pro-status quo forces and outdated ideologies on all sides.

On Sunday 14 March, Science Minister Kim Carr jointly released with the chief executives of CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology an eight-page climate data 'snapshot' to debunk climate sceptics. It showed that Australia's manmade climate crisis is happening now, and that mitigation and adaptation are 'important research priorities'. Greg Combet — not the Prime Minister — took a low-key Dorothy Dixer in the House on it. Nobody mentioned decarbonisation. The *Fin Review* covered the story in a ten-line sidebar story buried on page nine.

Australia's environmental movement is confused, demoralised, divided, and infiltrated by compromised thinking on the importance of staying close to big business and government. Policy agendas are overloaded and weakened by competing second-order issues. The Greens — who know more about climate crisis policy than any other organised group in Australia — are distracted by the business of managing a multiple political party agenda. The overriding decarbonisation objective is blunted.

Australia has nothing useful to contribute now to the world's decarbonisation policy-making. The best thing we can do is stand aside and hope major world powers, led by China (and, I still hope, Obama's USA) set global decarbonisation policy directions that we will perforce have to follow.

Citizens who care — there are many of us — should educate ourselves and our children on the science of the climate crisis, which is not so complicated. Within the boundaries set by the large infrastructural systems on which we depend as workers and consumers, we should try to lead as sustainable lives as we can, while we wait for the penny to drop from climate disasters that must come. It may be too late by then.

Meanwhile, for those of us too old or unfit to paint coal-power station chimneys or lie

across coal-train tracks — send a message, vote One, Zero, Zero!

New ways of talking about God

BOOKS

Philip Harvey

Dowrick, Stephanie: *In the company of Rilke*. Allen & Unwin, 2009. ISBN 978-1-74237-180-1

The mesmerising, magniloquent poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke continues to exert its almost religious influence over readers. Rilke makes an entire world of meaning out of a personal vision, using religious language and images.

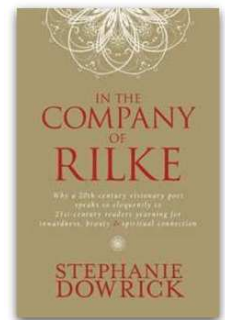
The valuable and main achievement of this book (subtitled 'Why a 20th-century visionary poet speaks so eloquently to 21st-century readers yearning for inwardness, beauty and spiritual connection') is its description and commendation of the reading of poetry as a satisfying and necessary practice, available to anyone.

Dowrick identifies Rilke as gifted with 'negative capability'. I know of several interpretations of what Keats meant by 'negative capability', and Dowrick herself definitely fits one of them: the ability to objectify in words her own experiences. In this case, Dowrick's experience of reading poetry. Poetry, its intimacy, its immediacy and intensity, its 'irrational truths', are encountered, examined and praised.

Dowrick is also good on translation and what languages owe to one another. She sees translation as a serious reciprocal arrangement. This takes on special force in her discussion of Rilke's use of the concept *das Offene*, where she argues persuasively for the English word *open*. *Das Offene* can mean the spaciousness of landscapes, but also the space or inner-world, the silent communal space that courses through all beings. Rilke's poems dwell on the inwardness of the soul, the inwardness that narrative and psychology cannot categorise.

In 'Archaic Torso of Apollo' Rilke famously exclaims. 'You must change your life'. This is a fundamental challenge of the spiritual life and Dowrick, who has made a career of teaching spiritual lessons, sees that 'to change one's life (one's vision of life and therefore one's living of it) is not a choice; it has become inevitable'.

She shows how 'Rilke achieves a re-arrangement of our usual concepts and limitations using a writing register that is far more often sensual and emotional than it is abstract.' Granted, Dowrick does not use his poetry as 'scripture', but her sustained seriousness can sometimes be too reverent. Though she acknowledges that the poet was himself open to irreverent treatment, when she quotes Auden's brilliant depiction of Rilke as 'The Santa Claus of Solitude', we are left with the sense that Dowrick is not amused.



Rilke demands primarily an intuitive response: our responses force consciousness of our own inner world.

You darkness that I come from,
I love you more than the fire
that rings the world,
because it shines
only for a single orbit,
and of this creature knows nothing at all.

But the darkness holds everything together:
forms and flames, animals and myself,
all thrown together,
humans and powers —
and it could be that a great strength
moves all about me where I am.

I believe in nights.

Rilke is concentrated on God; Dowrick is fascinated with Rilke's God. Like Meister Eckhart and other mystical writers before and since, Rilke finds new ways of talking about God.

You, Neighbour God, whom I often
rouse with loud knocks in the long nights,
I do this because I rarely hear you breathing,
and know: You are in the great room, alone.
And when you need something, no one's there,
no one to bring drink to your outstretched hand.

The surprise of finding that God is your next-door neighbour, and that he needs you as much as you need him, is one reason why we go back to Rilke. Dowrick proceeds:

'Rilke's 'God' is ... a vulnerable neighbour one moment, like a "clump of a hundred roots" the next; "an ancient work of art", then a much-needed "hand", a cathedral, a dreamer. Absent here, breath-close there; as often in darkness as in light.'

There is a need for popular conversations about God, however there is something frustratingly safe and certain in Dowrick's theology that cannot go unmentioned. She

persistently glosses over the problem of evil and suffering. And during discussion of Rilke's idea that an artist's 'responsibility' is to create God, she makes the alarming assertion that 'non-artists need religion; 'God' needs artists'. This exclusive view of God in relation to humans needs to be tested further by Dowrick, being an open invitation to all sorts of delusory behaviour. I would begin with the simple claim that artists and non-artists all need God, without distinction.

All said, this is a generous, purposive book that inspires as well as informs, showing how Rilke can 'shift one's boundaries and expectations about what writing can achieve' and even open 'the exhilarating prospect of what reading, as much as writing, may be for'.

Peter Steele said somewhere that, 'the ancient monastic practice of *lectio divina* is precious indeed. There is also such a thing as *lectio humana* — a steeping of the soul in another soul, mediated by means of words in all their fragility and vitality.' This book is an example of *lectio humana*, where Stephanie Dowrick shows how poetry can be read, and how a poet like Rilke can be interpreted, with a resultant deepening of our lived experience and understanding.

Reading Nigeria's Christian-Muslim violence

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton



Recently over 500 Catholics died at the hands of a Muslim mob in Northern Nigeria. It would be easy to understand the killings simply as an expression of a wider Muslim intolerance of Christians. But comment by local Catholic bishops suggested a broader context.

The Bishop of Jos, where the massacre took place, situated it in a struggle between Muslims and Christians over which religion was more powerful. The Archbishop of Abuja spoke of wider social, economic and tribal roots. In communal fighting in January, too, many people had been killed, the majority Muslim. The present violence may have been planned as a revenge attack, both tribal and religious in character.

Such complex tensions and conflicts are often better understood through literary representation than through analysis. One of the stories in Uwem Akpan's *Say You're One of Them* (Abacus, 2008) represents the subtle interplay of religious faith, tribal loyalties, traditional religion and group identity in Nigerian society. Akpan is a Jesuit priest, and his confronting stories describe dire situations through the eyes of children.

'Luxurious Hearses' describes a bus trip on which people are fleeing from a massacre of Christians by Muslims in the north of Nigeria. The central character is Jubal, a 16-year-old boy baptised Catholic in the South, but raised a devout Muslim in the North. He had bravely, almost proudly, endured the amputation of his hand for stealing a goat, and had stood by silently as his brother Yusuf, an outspoken Pentecostal Christian, was stoned to death.

During the riot Jubal was falsely denounced as a traitor to Islam by friends who owed him money. He was beaten, but rescued and protected by a Muslim teacher and by Pentecostal Christians whom the teacher was also harbouring. The latter bought a bus ticket for him, advising him to conceal his amputated hand and his religion.

The bus trip was confusing for Jubal. It is interminable for the reader, because it represents a series of desultory conversations, often prompted by scenes of violence shown on the television set. Each exchange is a potential threat to Jubal's life. Different passengers appeal to traditional charms, rosaries, holy water, speaking in tongues, and to democratic process.

Each speaker momentarily wins favour, only to be supplanted by another. The power of Islam is recognised by the pact made not even to mention it.

Each of these interventions calls into question Jubal's certainties as he warms to claims on behalf of religious and political settlements by a traditional tribal chief, a charismatic

Christian, a devout Catholic woman and a soldier who had fought and been crazed by service in Liberia. But their behaviour inevitably betrays their rhetoric.

Finally, moved by the destruction of mosques in reprisal attacks in the south of the country, Jubal forgets himself and points to the screen with his damaged arm. He then becomes the centre of attention and unites all the passengers in murderous hatred except the crazed soldier. Both Jubal and the soldier are beaten and killed.

In this climactic scene Akpan's level prose becomes lyrical as he describes Jubal's passage from confusion to certainty about his identity:

'They told him to lift up his cut wrist so that Muhammad would come to his help. He did not argue. He obliged them, raising he stump as straight and as high as he could.'

Knowing full well that these people were not going to spare him, he returned to his God of Islam, the one he truly knew, although this journey had permanently altered his fanatic worldview. He flushed the desire to be a Christian from his soul.

With all he had seen and experienced, he could not forget the sources of Allah's help during his flight. He raised his stump for Mallam Abdullahi and his family, for showing him another way. He raised it to celebrate the Christians who had held a Muslim's prayer mats for him. He raised it for those northerners who had lived their whole lives in the south, who were struggling, like him, with the unsettling prospects of going home for the first time.

He raised his arm for Yusuf, who refused, when the crucial moment came, to abandon his faith; he felt one with him though they belonged to different faiths and worlds now. He saw the stump as the testimony of his desire to follow Allah wherever he led him, of his yearning for oneness with him.

In his extremity Jubal is drawn beyond the level of group identity, where religious and political ideas were located on the bus, to a deeper personal level of a compassionate faith. It suggests that to see the recent killings in Nigeria as simply the expression of the character of Islam or of Christianity would be as dangerously superficial as were the conversations on the bus.

Jubal's story points both to the causes of communal violence and to the level at which it might be resolved. For Christians there is no adequate response other than the heroic call to love one's enemies.

Mixing news and comedy

TELEVISION

Tim Kroenert

The audience cheers as if in adulation of a pop star — it's not the reaction you'd expect for a television segment on finance. But as the title card fades, the reaction suddenly makes more sense: the man on screen is stylish, boyish and blonde; the pitch of the hollering suggests he has more than a few female admirers in the audience.



This is Scott Pape, host of *The 7pm Project's* finance segment 'The Money Shot'. Pape probably knows his stuff, but during the segment he yarns with grinning affability about prenuptial agreements, with reference to the week's celebrity voyeur-fest, 'Binglegate'. The line between finance and tabloid is efficiently blurred.

Sadly this is characteristic of the program. *The 7pm Project* purports to combine news and commentary with comedy, but it definitely favours style over substance. Wedged between *Neighbours* and *The Biggest Loser* on Channel Ten's evening programming schedule, it is presumably not designed to over-stimulate the brain cells.

Consider the inclusion of acerbic but predictable comic Dave Hughes in the core line-up. It's likely his presence is justified more by ratings potential than by any incisive insights he might offer to the news coverage. That said, his co-hosts, anchor Charlie Pickering and news presenter Carrie Bickmore, present as intelligent and funny.

7pm's rundown of news is shallow, although guests such as George Negus, who fronts *Dateline* on SBS, arguably Australian television's most incisive current affairs program, lend a keener edge to the analysis. It is not as sharp, for example, as *Good News Week*, which has mastered the mixture of news and comedy to which *7pm* aspires. *GNW* excels because the comedy is pinned to the news it covers. *7pm* is yet to attain this balance.

Still, it does at times find a distinctive entry point to an issue. This week the hosts chatted to comedian Dave Callan about ASIO's much publicised recruitment drive. Callan, as it happens, is a former ASIO agent. So he was able to give an insider's insight, peppered with gags. That seems to be a suitable approach for a show like this.

The goodwill inherent to *The 7pm Project's* presentation at least makes it a more positive alternative to the lecherous, leechlike approach taken by other commercial current affairs programs. But, inoffensive and mentally undemanding, it's fair to say that it's more interested in ratings than in getting to the bottom of an issue.

By way of comparison, it is worth checking out the ABC's *Hungry Beast*. Like *7pm*, it targets 20- and 30-somethings with a format that exploits the news for entertainment purposes. But

the substance and the tone of its presentation is decidedly smarter.

In part an inheritor of the satirical torch passed by *The Chaser's War on Everything*, it contains sketch comedy alongside documentary-style current affairs segments and animations that take an alternative, edgy approach to recent events.

The latest episode lampooned public apologies (by Kevin Rudd, Tiger Woods and even The Chaser) as insincere 'bullshit', and parodied the paranoid media response to the tacky internet phenomenon of Chatroulette. It also offered more sombre reflections on the implications of voluntary DNA testing and Australia's frightening supermarket duopoly.

Produced by Andrew Denton's production company Zapruder's Other Films, and with a more thoughtful and leisurely pace than *The 7pm Project*, it does not underestimate the intelligence of the viewer.

Empathy for Irish priests

RELIGION

Frank O'Shea



On a brief winter visit to Ireland, I paid close attention to the attitude of locals to the Murphy and Ryan reports into the abuse of children. The common thread was anger at the apparent arrogance of the Church leaders, the dodging and weaving and obfuscation.

They pointed in particular to the use by the previous Archbishop of Dublin, Cardinal Desmond Connell, of the concept of 'mental reservation' after he was found out in a public lie, and to the attitude of the papal nuncio who stood on his diplomatic dignity by refusing to answer correspondence from the Murphy tribunal because it did not come through the Department of Foreign Affairs.

For the older generation among whom I spent most of my time, the revelations did not appear to have affected their core religious belief or practice. In two separate households where I stayed, I accompanied a member to a weekday morning Mass and was surprised to find the church car park almost one third full, very much what I might have expected 30 years ago if you could imagine the cars replaced by bicycles.

There were no young people in the pews, and it would appear that their generation is lost to the Church.

Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, the current leader in Dublin, is a minor hero to the ordinary people. He has faced up to the wrongs of the past and his reaction is accepted as sincere. 'Efforts made to "protect the Church" and to "avoid scandal" have had the ironic result of bringing this horrendous scandal on the Church today ... As Archbishop of Dublin and as Diarmuid Martin I offer to each and every survivor, my apology, my sorrow and my shame for what happened to them.'

In May last year after the publication of the Ryan report into abuse in institutions run by religious orders, Martin condemned the way those groups were dealing with their responsibilities. After the release of the Murphy report in November, he supported demands in the media for the resignation of those who were auxiliary bishops of Dublin at the time the abuses were occurring. Four of those have now resigned, but their tardiness in doing so has suggested that their action was a result of public pressure rather than personal conviction.

Martin, born and educated in Dublin — De La Salle and Marist Brothers — was a Vatican diplomat for more than 30 years before his appointment to his native city in 2004. So he had no direct knowledge of the matters investigated by the various reports. Some of his priests have been publicly critical of the way he has handled the current situation and the whispers you

hear vary from 'very unpopular' to 'his priests are not talking to him'.

Catholic journals such as *The Furrow* and *The Irish Catholic* have published articles critical of Martin and it seems that many priests of the diocese feel they have not been supported by their leader. The hundreds of priests who have devoted blameless lives to their ministry and now find themselves bracketed with abusers feel uncomfortable and may well feel abandoned.

At least part of the problem arises because the agenda is set by the media. Any modern journalist worth her salt must be able to get readers outraged, and the abuse of children by adults is so obviously wrong that fish in barrels come to mind. But not only do the media set the agenda, they also set the pace and this may lead to accusations that are not properly investigated, or to allegations that are presented as facts.

An adult who sexually abuses a minor is a criminal; he or she is not necessarily a certifiable paedophile, a word in today's media lexicon that suggests an offence in which there are no gradations. You may find an excuse for drugs or murder or rape or mugging of a pensioner, but only the child abuser is automatically condemned to the deepest hole in hell.

'When a long abuse of power is corrected, it is generally replaced by an opposite violence,' novelist John McGahern writes in a posthumous collection of essays published late last year. He was comparing what happened during the wave of early 20th century French anti-clericalism with what is happening in Ireland today. 'In the new dispensations, all that was good in what went before is tarred indiscriminately with the bad.'

Spare a thought then for the ordinary priest in modern Dublin. He is no longer a man of power or perhaps even of much authority; instead he is a pastor, a shepherd, the humble representative of a humble master. And he would be happy with that except that he wonders whether his flock — or his archbishop — trusts him.

“‘What then?’ sang Plato’s ghost. ‘What then?’”

Thank God for McDonald's

NON-FICTION

Eleanor Massey

The sulphur-crested cockatoo screeched above us, hurling himself against the sealed windows of a Pitt Street high-rise.

He didn't have a branch to sit on.

We Sydney-siders, jammed between tower blocks which cut out the sun, and pavements shutting off the earth, were in sympathy. Things were pretty desperate. A Danish town planner had given the old girl a once-over. She needed a refurb. Developers couldn't keep their mitts off, and graffiti artists were all over her Western Distributor, so she was a bit on the nose, and people didn't like to hang around. They might come back if she off-loaded some weight, and took on some clean, outdoor public space, among other things.



Central Station, Town hall and Circular Quay could just fit the bill, especially if called 'sustainable environments'. Cocky might even get his branch and Mr Curly (complete with trusty flagon) his bench.

I found my own bench inside McDonald's Strand, which lies in wait, half way up George Street. Alongside the public, outdoor space, I was thinking, Sydney also needs bountiful, unhassled indoor space that provides shelter from the stormy blasts, cheap fast food, and clean safe toilets. We should feel as if the space were ours.

An indoor space like McDonald's.

At the counter, an elderly woman was asking for an ice cream with a 'pensioner's coffee, and one of those cardboard things to keep them steady', because she shook. The lot came to 50c. I wondered if I had heard right because my long black came to \$2.40. She reminded me of my long dead Aunty Olive, in from the bush for the day and without much money to spend. McDonald's would have suited Aunty Olive's purse.

Who else was there? A dad and his kids, a Down-and-Out, an RSL, four German Backpacks, three Hard Hats, two Big Issues and a Sari, all with cheap food and drink, in a give-and-take atmosphere which allowed them to congregate, or simply to enjoy the peace and quiet alone, at a large table.

I can vouch for the table space because I measured it — surreptitiously because McDonald's is a bit touchy about such peculiar behaviour these days.

'Thank God for McDonald's', I said to my retro aunty Olive.

'You bet,' she said. 'Last time I was in town, the Wynyard toilets were shut. I needed to pass an intelligence test to find one in a department store.'

We had common ground.

Perhaps the buzz phrase is 'social sustainability', the rough-and-ready sharing of sought-after space, the kind of space McDonald's Strand shares with the older city churches and cathedrals, with their airy naves, roomy pews, tramps down the back and prime ministers up the front. On the debit side, of course, they also share the 'Give me a child until he is seven ...' mantra, vast wealth from global real estate, a sneaking cultural imperialism and an evangelical bent.

But on the secular, foodie side of things, in a town where the 'entice 'em, fleece 'em and eject 'em' philosophy is rampant, McDonald's still trumps.

And Sydney is not alone. Whether we are toppling out of Melbourne's Flinders Street Station, down and out in Paris and London, or lost in Rome, we can usually find a McDonald's where we can dump our goods, relieve our feet, write a postcard, scour the paper, lose an argument and drink excellent coffee along the way. The Great Cham himself never had it so good.

Nor did he have to contend with the food puritans, thundering, fulminating and sermonising about green-for-lean and red-for-spread tape measures, while claiming never to have brought their children here to sit among the unredeemed.

I said goodbye to Aunty Olive, shelved my tray and walked out of McDonald's Strand, into that part of George Street where the unredeemed once hung out. We're going back aunties and aunties ago now, of course, when the street was red dust, and home to convicts, marines, brick-luggers and ladies of the night. It was on the wrong side of the tracks, or, rather, the Tank Stream. Above, on the eastern side, ran Macquarie Street, 'a high place', as Ruth Park puts it in her book, *Sydney*, 'from which the posh could look down upon the rabble'.

The convicts wouldn't have said no to a bite of McDonald's, had it been offered them, especially if they had survived the Second Fleet.

Meanwhile, Cocky is looking forward to having his branch back, perhaps on Circular Quay, where, as family history would have it, an ancestor fell off her perch, potted by a colonising opportunist who crept ashore that fateful January day in 1788.

What is a soul

POETRY

Anne Elvey

A passenger from the childhood house

The sheen on things under blue
and the cool acreage of canary
light has not a hint of crimson
till you drive me home
with the idea of sky over the bay.
Save tomorrow, the poster says,
from things that eat organs, things
that multiply in vessels, cells
skimming the venous and arterial
roads. (The careful knife
under the skin prises, cleaving
the old idea and the good)

*Nanna can smell the rain
coming; she scents the hunger
of the soil. When my surfaces are raw
and ragged, like a tree shedding,
I wander in memory. The past
tastes bitter and lovely
(don't stitch me up too soon)
the flame tree blooms
blood in the childhood yard.
A mask slips. Forgiveness
is neither random nor chosen.*

New rain yaps on the roof,
the wipers scatter recollection,
intermittent with the light. Grace
throws itself into my lap
and licks my face. When it lands
on me, what can I do but laugh
at once wary and delighted.

What is a soul?

A soul quivers
in the palm of your
voice, is still when
a sparrow alights
outside. In the winter
sun a soul
twitches neck and
head, neck
buried in the pulse
of a round & thinking
flesh. Like any feathered
thing in its space
it does not try
to be noticed. A soul
pauses to witness
a magpie. Its body
is a lever, its
beak a chisel,
prising bark from the trunk
of a myrtle. On the sky

a soul writes
itself. Winter
tosses a gauze
across the single crescent
jewel that fades
into day, watermark
of the fingernail that
lifted a scab. Then
the soul is a prayer
*may a great
white egret
lance your skies.*

Blue

Blue fades last. A parting
turquoise flush on the leaves of paperbark.
Indigo strengthens and silhouettes resolve
where the lucid becomes the deep. A newsprint
hue folds the walker into dusk
but night fakes it — the stars are shy
above
the extraversion of the city.

It takes more than money to raise a child

PARENTING

Sarah Kanowski



Tony Abbott surprised almost everybody on International Women's Day by announcing a parental leave policy of six months at full pay, up to a cap of \$150,000 a year. The scheme would be funded by a 1.7 per cent tax on the 3200 Australian businesses that have a taxable income above \$5 million.

According to Marian Baird, Professor of Work and Organisational Studies at Sydney University, Abbott's plan would 'catapult Australia from having no scheme at all to probably being the best scheme in the world'. So why am I, a passionate believer in the necessity of paid parental leave, not rejoicing?

Partly because the political chicanery of Abbott's u-turn sticks in the throat. But even more dispiriting is what the last week has revealed about the limits of debate in this country.

Commentary on Abbott's proposal, from all sides of politics and the media, has circulated around its economic feasibility. Those against warn of the impact on business, on growth and investment. Those in favour counter that a generous package will lift female participation rates in the workforce.

It is a stark example of how political debate and the wider cultural conversation has been reduced to the basest economic element; a coarse winnowing which prizes financial profit and discards every other concern. The same shrinkage happened last year with climate change and the ETS. The economics of any issue are assumed as its fundamental truth, and the only real question is whether it gives us more money in our wallets or less.

The attitude that children are only of concern and benefit to their parents permeates the reaction to Abbott's proposal. Take these comments from Chamber of Commerce and Industry spokesman Peter Anderson: 'The major beneficiaries of a paid maternity leave scheme, the employees, get off scot-free. They pay nothing, but the employers who are far less beneficially rewarded through this scheme end up carrying the full cost.'

This calls to mind Margaret Thatcher's notorious 'there is no such thing as society' remark. The *employees* are the major beneficiaries? Shouldn't that be babies, the children and adults they become, and the society they create?

Parental leave is first and foremost about babies being cared for, and allowing parents the time and money to properly do this caring. Secondly it is about allowing parents to maintain links with the work force, for their own financial and professional benefit, and for the benefit of the economy as a whole. In the discussion about paid leave, these priorities are routinely reversed.

If we dislodge financial profit from its presumed pre-eminence, what are we to make of Abbott's scheme? His call to extend the length of paid leave is positive, but let's not get too excited. A six-month-old cannot walk, cannot talk. They may be able to sit up if supported, but they are not exactly independent beings. So don't be seduced by promises of six months as though after that period baby-care is done and parents can get back to turning the wheels of the economy.

It makes no sense to advance parental leave in isolation as Abbott has done. For children and parents to really benefit from paid leave a suite of connected policies is needed, including job guarantees and flexible work practices. Equally significant is reform of the childcare sector so that carers are paid properly, and the ratio of carers to babies adequately reflects the needs of young children.

The proposed payment of full salary up to \$150,000 is insupportable. No one needs that amount to live on in Australia, and it is unconscionable that a woman wealthy enough to be earning that wage would continue to do so while a woman making much less will be further marginalised. Is the wealthy mother better, is her mothering worth more?

A flat rate is both more feasible and fairer. The developed countries with the most successful parental leave schemes balance a universal wage with longer paid leave time, such as Sweden and Norway which both grant 16 months of paid parental leave (significantly, with a minimum of two months to be taken by the father).

What no politician is talking about, and what is certainly harder to legislate for, is a social transformation that sees individual success in broader terms than linear career advancement, and counts national achievement in terms other than money-making.

This is a change starting to be seen in individual families. Fathers who say no to their dream job because of the hours it would consume and stress it would generate. Families who down-scale their budgets so that it is possible to live on two part-time or one full-time wage. Mothers who put professional satisfaction on hold while their children are young, reimagining the traditional model of career trajectory to one that it is more harmonious with child-rearing. The shared acceptance that parenting young children necessitates a different, slower rhythm of life.

And perhaps this is exactly what the economists, beavering away over their spreadsheets late into the night, don't want us to realise. Because it is likely that some parents will discover a world away from work, taking fresh enjoyment in their family, pleasure in their rest, and a new appreciation of everything else that had been lost in the frenetic pursuit of career goals. They simply might not want to buy so much stuff anymore.

We are still very far from resolving the complex relationship between children, parents and work. And in searching for new models, sometimes stumbling and other times succeeding, we desperately need more than dollar signs as our guideposts.

Spin and the art of democracy

POLITICS

Alex McDermott

Recent revelations that the Victorian Minister for Planning's media advisor, Peta Duke, set out to make a sham consultation process in order to block proposed development of the Heritage-listed Windsor Hotel in Melbourne has produced strong reaction about the nature of modern democracy.

Duke's email was miss-directed — if it had gone to its intended recipient within the government rather than the ABC it would never have come to public attention, and would have been just another missive in the daily functioning of government. As it was, the email, titled 'Minister for Planning Justin Madden's Media Plan', was inadvertently sent to the least desired recipient — the media — and a field day was had by all. Premier Brumby was forced to denounce it, and Madden had to perform the modern day politico's ordeal of brazening things out to righteously angry talkback radio hosts.

Connoisseurs of public deception will remember the notorious Blair spin doctor who, on the day of the 9/11 attacks in the US, sent out a group email to various departments in Blair's Labor government advising that if ever there was a good moment to get rid of bad news without people noticing, now was the time.

As with Duke, it was a smart tactic, which if it had remained confidential would doubtless have earned kudos. But alas the thing leaked. Whereupon the music stopped, and the poor spin doctor found herself without a chair to sit on. Simply for being caught out doing the job that she'd been hired to do: manipulate public perception.

These are democracy's naked lunch moments — those situations when, generally through sheer inadvertence, everyone, both inside and outside the power game, can see exactly how things work, and precisely what it is that lies at the end of our forks.

Our reaction to these sorts of things tends, quite naturally, to be outrage, to greater or lesser degrees. We feel the democratic process is made out to be, if not a complete mockery, at the very least a plaything.

There is an assumption that this is a particularly modern disease. In Melbourne's local tabloid Andrew Bolt complains that the Peta Duke debacle is typical of the modern world — 'stacking committees ... fudging surveys ... and launching sham inquiries' — and that our modern age, defined by the glut of informational noise, makes those who can control and shape its flow ever more important. This is a modern disease, Bolt complains, symptomatic of a decadent, no, a moronic era, 'these spin-spin days' before, perhaps, the fall.



But the dark art of spin, of misleading the public and voters in order to achieve a result, is an old practice. It is no accident that the first philosophy and teaching to devote itself exclusively to the art of spin, Sophistry, was born simultaneously with democratic practices in ancient Athens. The birth of active participatory democracy is the birth of public opinion, to be massaged, persuaded, manipulated in order to get what you want. Pericles knew it. Socrates despised it. Protagoras taught it. Peta Duke has venerable forbears.

In more recent history, and closer to home, Duke also shares good company. Two of the most radical and far reaching changes in Australian history — the post-war migration scheme and the abandonment of tariff walls and a ‘Fortress Australia’ economic mentality in the 1980s — wouldn’t have taken place if the political parties of the day (as it happens in both cases Labor) had levelled with the great voting public.

Without the first official decision, after World War II, to let in massive amounts of non-British migrants, we would still be almost entirely Anglo-British, to the detriment of our cuisine, culture and economic development. Work done by Jerzy Zubrzycki, the late professor of sociology at the Australian National University, has revealed that the demographic and cultural leap forward that began in 1945 was dependent on spin.

Research into the minutes of meetings and reports to inter-departmental committees on the migration scheme makes clear that gaining public acceptance of the plan was dependent on lying to the Australian people, who were reassured, completely falsely as it turned out, that the great migration wave would be overwhelmingly British.

Public announcements promised that there would be 10 Britons for every non British arrival. The architect of the migration scheme, Arthur Calwell, maintained this claim, despite the fact that papers classified ‘Confidential’ and ‘Secret’ were, and had been, circulating in the Department of the Interior and the Department of Post-War Reconstruction, clearly acknowledging the flat impossibility of such an aim.

It was, says Zubrzycki, a ‘smokescreen’. Or, less politely, a lie. There was no realistic chance of such proportions being achieved, not even remotely, and Calwell and his advisors knew that. But if this lie hadn’t been told, the Australian electorate would have — almost without a doubt — rejected the migration program out of hand. Spin.

Should we approve of lying to the public thus? Almost certainly not. But who could seriously say that the great post-war migration boom from Europe was anything other than one of the great transformative moments of Australian history? Demographically, culturally, socially, economically, an Australia without such a dramatic transformation would be unrecognisable today, and almost certainly for the worse.

Similarly, in the 1980s, came Hawke and Keating’s brutal reshaping of the Australian economy. Many of these changes involved a good deal of social trauma and hurt in the short term, and also involved junking much of the accumulated rhetoric, political platform and basic

assumptions of the Australian Labor Party as it had developed for much of the previous 90 years.

In a true functioning democracy, one would clearly take the bold new agenda to both the party and the Australian people before embarking on such radically uncharted waters.

So what was said, prior to Hawke taking government in 1983, about deregulating trade restrictions, privatising government monopolies, slashing tariff protection of previously babied manufacturing industries, about freeing up the banks, and perhaps even floating the Australian dollar on the public stock exchange? Effectively nothing.

Would Labor have taken power if they had levelled with the media, and the voting public, about these intentions? Not a chance. Yet was it not, like the post-WW2 migration scheme, one of the best and most significant revolutions in Australian political history? Nearly 30 years later, having emerged from not only the traumas of social dislocation and economic change of the '80s and early '90s, and having survived first the Asian then the Global Financial Crises of 1997 and 2008 respectively, you would have to give a resounding yes.

Here, then, are two examples of great moments in Australian political history when spin was the only thing to do in order to get the best result for a strong, open and egalitarian society. Yet purists would clearly shy from citing these as great moments in the application of pure democratic theory.

What conclusions do we draw? That the governing class should feel free to lie at will, and treat us as the dupes we deserve to be taken for? No. That if you are to lie to the people, make sure it's for a good reason, not simply a naked attempt to placate key constituencies or to shuffle out the back door to deposit a pile of bad news? That if you are to lie then don't simply lie well, but do it for a good cause? Here again, albeit with hesitation, no.

Perhaps the best conclusion is that there is no singular conclusion. Getting things done in an open society is often muddy work. Often, as Gough Whitlam was wont to remind us, 'only the impotent can remain pure'.

Perhaps also we should scale back our holier-than-thou attitude whenever one of the governing circle's paid sophists is caught out doing what they get paid to do, and show less tolerance for the great media game of 'gotcha' which seems automatically to ensue.

Marcus Clarke put it best in one of his 1860s newspaper articles where he railed with ferocious eloquence against the hypocrisy and cant in his Victorian age. Let's stop pretending to be so shocked, he advised — 'I am no angel. Neither are you, reader.'

Let's not pretend that we don't know the score. We're tougher than that, more phlegmatic, more realistic — certainly far more so than our public conscience keepers would have us be.

Australians have a long tradition of holding politicians, journalists and indeed

commentators in cynical contempt. This is an honorable tradition. We cherish and continue it every time we switch on our bullshit detectors at the approach of a politician, whenever they open their mouth or put out a press release; or whenever the television, newspapers and radio tell us our sweet democratic purity has been debased and compromised.

Let's enjoy the game of gotcha, but not pretend to be angels.

Clarke, Bingle and the prurience of celebrity media coverage

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins



Humans cannot resist celebrity culture. Many of us long to know all we can about the lives of the rich and famous.

For the past week we've been transfixed by the disintegrating relationship between a promising cricket vice captain and a famous model. By contrast, we didn't care much about what the Indonesian president had to say, despite the significance of his visit to Australia's most important bilateral relationship, and the fact that the Indonesian economy could eclipse ours within a decade.

On Friday, Sydney's *Daily Telegraph* disingenuously reported on its front page that 'the very public relationship troubles [between Lara Bingle and Michael Clarke] continued unabated in the Eastern Suburbs. There were car chases, media packs and even a bidding war.'

We ourselves are hypocritical when we point the finger at the media for such outrageous behaviour while continuing to consume the products of such behaviour. Indeed it's our appetite for such prurient content that puts them up to it.

An obvious response to the unsavoury and often humiliating nature of celebrity media coverage would be to establish that it is detrimental to our society and to push for legislation to control it.

But celebrity culture is not all bad. There are many examples of celebrity being used to improve the lives of the disadvantaged.

Former cricketer Glen McGrath co-founded the McGrath Foundation to raise money for breast care nurses in rural and regional Australia. The Shane Warne Foundation helps seriously ill and underprivileged children. Warne's celebrity is also being exploited to help heal the rift between Australians and Indians following the allegedly racist violence against Indian students in Australia.

It is an unpalatable truth that media reporting of Warne's infamous text messages undoubtedly contributed to the celebrity status that is now being used to improve the lives of others. However it is also true that the good that celebrities do receives scant media attention compared with exhaustive reporting of the details of their relationships and their wealth.

Media coverage of the Shane Warne Foundation serves to magnify the good that it is doing. Moreover the ABC TV program [Australian Story](#) has shown that covering the altruistic activities of celebrities can attract significant ratings. But sadly few other media organisations

appear to have the will to follow its lead.